

## Group Facilitation in Language Teacher Education (GroupLead)

*Project description*

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*Coordinator:* **Margit Szesztay**, Centre for English Teacher Training, ELTE University, Hungary

*Project team:* **Rod Bolitho**, The College of St Mark and St John, UK  
**Meg Einhorn**, HTI Bienne, Switzerland

### 1. CONTEXT

With the coming of new approaches and methodologies in language teaching (e.g. communicative language teaching, student-centered education, teacher as reflective practitioner, intercultural learning) groupwork and group interaction has come to occupy a central place. In addition, the educational role of language educators has also highlighted the importance of learning in groups. For example, the educational aims set out in Project 2.1.2 of the ECML's first medium-term programme (*Language Educators Facing the Future*) such as helping learners become more effective communicators, developing critical thinking skills, and developing attitudes and skills required for conflict resolution can all best be worked on through groupwork activities.

However, in order to use groupwork successfully, teachers need a thorough understanding of group dynamics, as well as a number of key skills, in addition to personal qualities such as open-mindedness, tolerance, and respect for others. Based on our experiences, an understanding of group dynamics and the skills required for leading groups can best be acquired experientially. Teacher education has a key role in equipping future generations of teachers with the experiential knowledge and the skills required for group facilitation. If teachers-in-training get good models for e.g. encouraging contributions, dealing with conflict, or summarising the key points of a discussion, they are more likely to take on these roles themselves as future teachers. This is why it is crucial that teacher educators are given opportunities to develop as group facilitators.

### 2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The general aim of the project is to provide training in group facilitation for a number of key professionals working in language teacher education. These key professionals will also play a supporting role in the production of a training kit providing materials for reflection and development for teacher trainers in the area of group facilitation. By group facilitation we mean working with groups in ways which are empowering for each group member, and which enable the group to learn together in democratic ways.

**Specific objective 1:** To provide training in group facilitation to professionals involved in the training of language teachers

**Specific objective 2:** To put together a training kit to support the professional development of teacher trainers. This will come out in the form of a CD-Rom with an accompanying booklet, and will include checklists, descriptions of key concepts, descriptions of challenging situations (with alternative suggestions) and self-observation instruments. This will be an essential resource for the participants in our central workshop when they plan future workshops in their own contexts, and when they want to reflect on their own development as facilitators. It will also be useful to any trainer looking for an overview of group facilitation and wanting to develop in this area.

### **3. EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

#### **A. Workshop participants will:**

1. ... have understood the key principles of facilitation
2. ... have enhanced their understanding of terms and concepts connected with group facilitation
3. ... have experienced and tried out ways of supporting learning within groups
4. ... have experienced and tried out a range of group facilitation activities
5. ... have identified and worked on some key sub-skills of facilitation
6. ... have become aware of the significance of verbal and non-verbal signals from group participants
7. ... have observed and analysed examples of facilitator language
8. ... have developed their understanding of the dynamics and life of groups
9. ... recognise and understand how to work with the resources within a group they are facilitating
10. ... have developed an understanding of the importance of feedback and tried out a range of feedback procedures
11. ... have developed awareness of the cultural aspects of group facilitation
12. ... have developed strategies for dealing with challenging situations in groups
13. ... have formulated and started to carry out individualised action plans.
14. ... have contributed to the production of a training kit on group facilitation to be used as a resource by professionals who teach language teachers.

### **4. ACTION PLAN**

**2005**

28-29 January

**Meeting** of the project team to

- fine-tune project plans,
- clarify roles and responsibilities and to
- come up with a provisional outline for the training kit

11-12 November

**Meeting** of the project team to

- review version 1 of training kit and
- prepare central workshop.

**2006**

28 March – 1 April

5-day ECML **central workshop** to

- provide training in group facilitation to key professionals who teach teachers,
- pilot version 1 of the training kit,
- plan the cascading process of workshop participants running future workshops,
- set up a network of teacher trainers equipped to run workshops in group facilitation.

**Participant profile:**

This workshop is intended for professionals with practical experience of working with groups of teachers and/or trainees, and who are willing to participate actively in follow-up work leading to a final publication. This is likely to entail adapting and trying out tasks and sending feedback to the course team.

10-11 November

**Meeting** of the project team to

- evaluate feedback on cascading process and to
- finalise results for publication.

**2007**

June

**Publication** of results.

**5. LANGUAGES**

The working languages of the project are English and French. Simultaneous interpretation will only be provided for the central ECML workshop.

Participants are expected to have a very high level of competence in one of the two working languages.