Principles of Perfected Participation Practice
Barbara MacKay - October 27, 2020

This article was written as a way of looking at the interaction between process facilitation and the concept of democracy. It was written close to the North American celebration of Hallowe'en, thus the light-hearted choice of photos. Like this lovely spider with eight legs, here is a first draft list of 8 facilitation principles. If applied consistently, perhaps we can work step by step, bit by bit, nation by nation into an ideal state of being for people globally. When you facilitate, strive to practice these 8 principles with great diligence.

We encourage and appreciate *Truthfulness, Honesty and Authenticity*. We need to encourage each participant to speak from their own authentic experience of what is true for them. It may not be true for others, but it allows everyone to hear every perspective. Along with this truthfulness, comes the words honesty and authenticity. If we can each express our own honest authentic experiences with each other, it will lead us to a solution that honors each of these diverse perspectives. This inflatable dragon is speaking a fiery truth.

We invite *Experience, Diversity and Differences*. The facilitator must do their utmost to ensure that all of the diverse and different perspectives are actually in the room. It means inviting those who have a variety of life and work experiences pertaining to the issue at hand. It means ensuring that every voice in the room, virtual or F2F, is heard. Especially it means ensuring that the less-often heard, marginalized voices are given the upmost care and spaciousness to ensure their perspective finally gets to the table. This lovely creative panel of diverse Hallowe'en bodies was gathered together by a nearby neighbour.

We believe there is *Wisdom* in the room to make *Wise Decisions* that serve the common good. The facilitator must absolutely believe there is wisdom in the group. Trusting the group and trusting the process that we have created with others, is essential to good democratic process. We can trust that this ordinary group of extraordinary thinkers can come up with the best possible solution for the time that meets everyone's needs. They also ensure that they build in agility so that as the system changes, the solution can adapt with it. It is, in part, this trusting of the wisdom of the group, that enables the group to be wise. This skeleton shows we as facilitators and as policy-makers can sit back, and calmly offer guidance and good structure while trusting the wisdom of the group.

We ensure *Transparency* to build *Awareness*. Transparency is about sharing what information is available at the given moment. It doesn't mean holding back things in case people might be frightened by it or anxious about it. It means ensuring that the information is shared in the way that people can become aware of it, digest thoroughly, emotionally process what might be shocking or disturbing, and then reach new conclusions. This will build trust. That leads to the next quality of facilitation that I think is about democracy. This ghost is meant to symbolize transparency and being shocked.

We create the conditions for *Trust, Safety and Solidarity*. The facilitator also needs to monitor the way that they hold their body, facial gestures and posture to indicate an openness to everything that is shared. Facilitators need to not look shocked or have a judgment about anything. The facilitator doesn't offer his or her perspectives. No opinions or subject matter expertise are offered, and no influencing is done. This is often called the neutrality of the facilitator. A key reason we emphasize neutrality in facilitator competencies is to build trust and safety for all people in the room. This ghost may not be the best example! Everything the facilitator does models to the group what they could be together– cohesive, kind, open to feedback and honest reactions. This creates conditions for safety and solidarity.

We foster *Creativity and Consensus*. New solutions cannot be found from old ideas. But the combining of old ideas within the current context is essential and with that comes prototyping of new ideas. An excellent facilitator will ensure there are processes and opportunities to think beyond the normal boundaries to create these new normal. We invite the group to think about the bigger picture so that no unintended negative impact is created. This means again that you ensure that there's a lot of wisdom in the room. The wisdom is likely there if you've done the above two things of ensuring trust, safety, solidarity and transparency. It also means as you design new solutions, you gradually build consensus about what is this new practice or new normal for which to strive. This way, you avoid creating divisions. My neighbor co-designed this creative solution with his grandchildren to solve the need for Hallowe'en social distancing.

We honour the need for *Reflection*. People need to be given enough time to think about an important issue. After they have listened to a variety of perspectives or talked about it in the group, they need processing time, asynchronously (come back later with deeper thoughts) or in the room together. You won't come out with the best decisions unless you give people time to really process the implications of a solution to them as individuals and their communities. Gut responses are useful initially to test if one should go down a path, but not necessarily the greatest way to make informed decisions. Reflection ideally is done both at the individual, small and large group levels.