



Facilitating in an Online World

3rd Thursday Assembly

“If we teach today as
we taught yesterday,
we rob our children
of tomorrow.”

John Dewey, Democracy and Education, 1916

Kitty Jackson: Hello all and welcome to the 3rd Thursday Assembly.

As some of you know this is my very last Assembly until I hand over the reigns to the new Community Manager for PYE. I wanted to honor the day by discussing a topic that has captivated me for the past year as we have developed this format: Facilitating in an Online World.

Below you will find: A Check-in Question (please answer!), Goals and Agreements for today's session and Questions on the topic.

Let's start by checking in. Here's today's check in question:

CHECK IN: What are three characteristics you'd like to bring to your online persona?

Danise Elijah: Welcoming persona, authenticity, and legitimacy

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Nilisha Mohapatra: This is such a great question to start with!

For me it would have to be connection, curiosity and generosity~

Arindita Gogoi: Honesty, courage and warmth

Virtually Ally: curiosity, creative & empathy

Madhu Shukla: curiosity, humor and making connections

Nilisha: Welcome EVERYONE Loving those qualities. I see common intentions and a desire to create a holistic, energetic and mindful space.

Kitty: I like to bring listening, enthusiasm and love for the digital world

Gina Salá: Depth, connection, inspiration

Marli Williams: Passion, energy and enthusiasm

Joanne Lauterjung Kelly: engaged, supportive, real

Kitty Jackson: Today, we will be discussing **FACILITATING IN AN ONLINE WORLD**. I can't wait to hear about your experiences.

Goals and Agreements

- 1. To explore and understand the space of online/digital/virtual facilitation.**
- 2. To build competencies of being an effective online facilitator.**
- 3. To learn about strategies of managing dynamics of an online group.**
- 4. To share experiences and ideas for creating an impactful virtual experience.**
- 5. To have fun, connect and rejoice new ways of learning.**

In order to achieve the goals, here are some suggestions for agreements to make our time together flow really well. We are still experimenting with this form, so be sure to add what you need or want **AT ANY TIME DURING THE PROCESS**.

AGREEMENTS

- 1) No put downs of self or others. Keep a positive, energetic vibe.
- 2) Share at your level. Everyone is welcome, no matter their level of experience. All questions are important, and all answers (or further questions) are valuable. It is also okay and important to respectfully disagree with each other.
- 3) Show your presence, by LIKING and by responding to keep the flow. Ask questions, make comments, connect. The technical trick for this format is to REFRESH your browser fairly often. LIKING IS MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN EVER SINCE FACEBOOK HAS CHANGED AND WE CAN NO LONGER SEE HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE READ A POST.
- 4) Answer any questions in the COMMENTS below the question to keep the conversation organized and readable. Only open NEW questions in new threads.
- 5) You can come and go as you please, take as long as you like to respond, and basically enjoy the text-format to make this work no matter whether you are just waking up, just going to bed, or on your lunch break (time zones unite!!). Feel free to add to the discussion even after our 90-minute session is over

Nilisha Mohapatra: Question 1:

From your experience, what are some key qualities/features of online facilitation?

Arindita Gogoi: Encouragement and acknowledgment of contribution.

Kitty Jackson: Well, from what I have learned working with PYE I would say that one key feature of online work is that it is fast moving.

You have to really adapt your facilitation style and think deeply about ways to keep best practice. For me, the online world is just an extension of the real world, so there is always a way to adapt your intentions and to keep the basic idea of your facilitation style

Cathy Wood: One thing I've learnt about online is the importance of being really clear and simple about what you are saying. It's easy to 'read' something the wrong way so to be mindful about language.

Nilisha: Thanks for getting us started Arindita and Kitty. To add to your insights, I feel online facilitation is a very even/level space, where the dynamics are different. I feel there are lesser hierarchical challenges. It is also a space which is more driven by the participants and their sharing, and the idea of 'holding space' is shared.

Kitty: One thing you have to be so careful of is the fact that your personality is much harder to pick up over the internet. Even if you use skype, little cues that we usually use to assess people's intention are lost, so you have to be very careful to make sure you are being absolutely clear, or people can misinterpret. Haha Cathy - we just made virtually the same point. Great minds!

Nilisha: Ah yes! Clarity of thought, intent and speech.

Arindita: Also, to pick up threads, redirecting to the original space and aligning conversations to the topic, I definitely felt, must be challenging and important.

Kitty: I like that idea Nilisha - for me, holding space while you are online is much more about creating the container and then letting people run with it.

Nilisha: Kitty YES! Participants make it their own and I believe that is where the uniqueness of this space is. There is ample opportunity of choice, which people really take up.

Virtually Ally: I'm inspired by online facilitators who encourage beginner's mind and also honor the collective wisdom in the space...a key quality: a space where every question/contribution is honored.

Kitty: I think it's so important to be mindful of language Cathy. In these 3rd Thursdays language is all we have, so we have to be absolutely clear and also I have found, quite generous, to avoid any possibility of being misread. Yes absolutely Virtually Ally - I love the like feature on these Facebook chats, as it's a quick and easy way to acknowledge someone's voice

Joanne Lauterjung Kelly: The ability to multi-task (between the different questions) and type quickly helps!

Cathy: I really like the idea of being generous Kitty I think being generous is really important in all online mediums...

Nilisha: Cathy That's something I love about this space. People readily share resources and experiences. No hindrance. I imagine it is also that way since they have the ownership to carve out their space because the online world is expansive. No one encroaches on anyone.

Kitty: That's so interesting Cathy and Nilisha. Do you know that the internet itself was nearly sold to AT&T, but they didn't see the value in it? Instead we have this incredible gift of a medium that is owned by us, the people, and it fails or succeeds as we do. As we set up Creative Communities we always put a lot of energy into generosity of spirit. I like to do that online too, because we the people have the ability to make it something beautiful if we all agree to set that example

Cathy: Thank you Kitty - excellent points and wonderful facilitation. PYE will miss you... I have to go now as I have mice to deal with...and not the type you move around your desk. Nice meeting everyone.

Nilisha: Cathy thank you for your sharing It was lovely to have you with us. See you around later!

Cathy: It was fascinating Nilisha, Kitty and very thought provoking. I'm struck, as I leave, by the need to be generous. I feel there's work to be done there...

Kitty Jackson: Question 2: What are the specific challenges of facilitating in an online environment? What are the benefits?

(these assemblies move quickly don't they? Don't worry about reading every comment or answering every question, just think of it like a networking event and enjoy dipping in and out of conversations)

Marli Williams: I personally enjoy connecting with people in person, seeing their reactions, interactions and facial expressions. That presents a challenge to me online where you can't see and witness each other's process. Benefits are that you can reach more people

Nilisha: I love that you asked this.

For me challenges would be with really making people feel seen and heard. If someone has a deep need for that, it is a challenge to address that in such an open environment. Especially a busy and fast one. Another challenge is consistency in participation. People may move in and out. We also wouldn't know who is disengaged.

Benefits: Ample choice in participation. Lesser obligations. People create their own safety. And share at their pace.

Kat Vello: Benefits: connecting with broader audiences, flexibility. Challenges: The impersonal-ness of and brevity built into the format.

Kitty: I agree Marli - person to person can be very rewarding in a way that online can never replace, but I also think that in this world, the ability to connect across oceans and mountains is a welcome addition

Arindita Gogoi: Challenges: Fast pace, possibility of digression. Benefits: The opportunity of contributing at any given point in time...the opportunity of communication doesn't close. Review of ideas is easier. It's like a

realtime minutes of meeting or report getting generated. Easy to share! And most importantly, there is never an 'ideal' group size as it can touch, connect and make a limitless number of people at a single moment.

Kitty: Also, when Nadia Chaney and I were developing this format we talked a lot about introverts in group work, and we have heard many times that these online format chats suit personalities that like to sit back and think before responding, so I find that they are inclusive in a way person to person sometimes cannot be

Marli: Kitty- I definitely agree that it's an important piece of the puzzle to be able to communicate your ideas and messages, and also create the space online for people to be seen and heard.

Madhu Shukla: benefits: meet anyone anywhere..access to relevant data links challenges: distraction/engagement/ a touch nod or an eye contact. interaction are spoken- experiential is challenging to recreate

Kitty: Yes Marli - that's it, a piece of the larger puzzle. I often hear people being really critical of the online world and complaining that it is taking away our social abilities, but when I work with teenagers I most often find that it is an absolute addition rather than a replacement

Kat: Totally agree with the comment about introverts. Online is more of an even playing-field-communication field.

Nilisha: So much wisdom here! I love Madhu's point about the experiential element. I am keen on exploring that!

Kitty: Yes, bringing the experiential experience online needs a lot of thought, but I don't think it's impossible.

Virtually Ally: Kitty can you expand on how when working with teenagers it is "absolute addition rather than a replacement". sorry for typos - thanks autocorrect!

Madhu: I agree not completely impossible- creating things/ images sending in snapshots etc can be possibilities

Joanne Lauterjung Kelly: Your reminder to dip in and out speaks to managing expectations. Which you modeled beautifully. :-)

Kitty: No problem Virtually Ally - what I mean is that I do not see them hanging out with friends online in place of face to face time with friends. More often than not it is an additional way to socialise and have conversations. They are often arranging meetings etc, but when people talk about social networking sometimes they slip into overreaction and accuse social media of trying to replace our social lives with screens

Nilisha: Yeah.. I think we surely will talk about this experiential bit further down in today's assembly, and gather ideas.

Kitty: Just like this Assembly, it is not in place of any of the work that PYE does on the ground, it is a useful addition

Joanne: Benefits: participants are in control of how much they participate, and can take time to flush out an answer before posting. The fast pace (for me) is fun, and encourages me to let go of perfectionism.

Challenges: something I'm experiencing now, which is very slow Internet. This is something I always took for granted living in the US, but now that I'm in Myanmar I'm so grateful when there's enough of a connection. So, that's a technical challenge. Also, working with non-native English speaks is hard in this format - they're not as comfortable typing quickly in English. Another challenge would be trying to do this on a mobile phone.

Nilisha: Ah! Joanne the language barrier bit is so pertinent. It also makes me realize that somewhere the number of people who engage with the internet for learning and creating communities, is still a small percentage of the population. And that is something I would love to see change.

Kitty: Great point Joanne - we must always remember that the internet only feels global. Not everyone is here with us in this big strange world of online.

Joanne: Yes, and a place like Myanmar is poised to add close to 40 million people to the Internet via mobile phone over the next 3-5 years without ever having had a laptop. So it will be interesting to see how interactions are shaped by a smaller screen and mobile technology.

Kitty Jackson: Question 3:

Keeping in line with what you all are sharing, what are some ways to build a powerful online space?

Kitty: So many of them are the same as creating a powerful space anywhere to me - set up clear goals for the meeting, agree to a set of shared values, welcome every person into the space, acknowledge everyone's opinion

Nilisha Mohapatra: Absolutely! I would add asking questions and clarifying, to your list. That way we get to understand exactly what the other person meant. I am also thinking using multi media tools - songs, quotes, art, presentations etc, to engage.

Madhu Shukla: doing some kind of a prework reflection or encouraging a creative post sharing could also keep the group connected to the space. post as in – later. having two people facilitate and hold the space as well as you both are right now. i see that different questions move at a different pace

Joanne Lauterjung Kelly: Consistency. It's so hard to get established quickly - seems like you need people to "show up" consistently, good content and questions, and to just keep doing it frequently enough to get some traction. I'd love to hear what the experience has been with this assembly.

Madhu: and threads could be running parallely- they have to seen and heard and kept alive.. so a minimal focussed format of 3 questions like in this assembly is useful

Kitty: Hi Joanne - this Assembly has been through a series of itterations. We tried using video format and then voice format, but we kept coming back to written word.

Nilisha: Madhu, yeah I realise in a space like this, it is a gift to have a co-facilitator, since each can focus on different aspects.

Kitty: As some of you will be able to confirm, some months there are just a handful of us and sometimes there are up to 30. There is really no way of knowing before we get started, so that is one big challenge.

When we did a few video assemblies it was quite funny, because people were trying to get ready for work in the West Coast US, and then people in India were trying to type from bed because it was 10pm, so we decided to give people the ability to be wherever and doing whatever else they needed to, because the time change means we catch people at all different times of the day

Nilisha: Thanks for bringing that up Kitty. I was going to add that when lesser people show up, we still need to create and share something of value, so that when they drop by later, they can have instant learning/ideas to take away. So, more of resources, case studies and examples.

Madhu: hahhahaha what fun Kitty. good point Nili.

Nick Kearney: New today, sorry if I go over old ground...seems to me key issue is presence, and face to face non verbal communication is central...online it is a challenge to recreate effect of non verbal attention... Maybe we need to be more deliberate, more explicit, forgive brevity, I am on mobile

Madhu: this is seriously such great work...!!!!

Kitty: It's actually funny Madhu because I am guessing that this same thing is happening now, we are all at different stages of the day, but the written format normalises that and makes it less apparent

Good point Nick! I love that idea. Non-verbal attention. This is quite an intense format. I always feel very exhausted by the end of it

Nick Kearney: Yes it is intense Kitty. I smiled as I read that. But rewarding too. Tweetchat is also a challenge, so fast you tend to leave out the niceties, which can be...interesting !

Kitty: Our co-facilitator Nadia Chaney describes it as 'wild and wonderful' Nick. I always like that. You have to allow yourself to get lost in it- which is a neat metaphor for the internet in general I think!

Vanessa Richards: Hi All, I've not done any online facilitation and it's been interesting to read your thoughts on the matter. Thanks for that. I'm popping out now to watch the live stream of TED Talks happening in Vancouver at my local library, 1 block away. Katie I wish you a most beautiful and fulfilling next chapter. Thanks for all the goodness you brought to PYE. L'Chiam!

Kitty Jackson: Question 4:

How can you establish your facilitator's presence, in an online space?

Nilisha Mohapatra: This is my favourite question

I would do it by really capturing what I 'see' and 'hear'. Reflect back needs and values. Celebrate the strengths I see people displaying. And maybe even really bring out common themes I see and tie the threads.

I think presence also would show when a facilitator knows intuitively what to exactly ask so that it furthers/deepens the discussion.

Virtually Ally: Setting clear expectations, contagious enthusiasm, individualized feedback, subject matter expertise, facilitating self-directed learning, using a variety of media

Kitty: I think there is a lot of support and underlying the conversation Nilisha Mohapatra. Also, the very idea of having a facilitator online is refreshing to me, as so much of the internet feels totally unpoliced and unwatched. It feels safe just to have a facilitated area of the internet

Nick Kearney: Yes. The right question or comment tends to go further in. Key issue maybe is how to develop that intuition. Is that possible?

Joanne Lauterjung Kelly: What I've observed from these assemblies is having a good intro, and then consistent commenting by the facilitator. You've got to be quick, but the benefit is that I always feel "heard" which is kind of funny in a format like this. And you've been clear about the expectations: the format is established, so we know what to expect.

Nilisha: Virtually Ally, I love the 'contagious enthusiasm' phrase. Thanks for that. Kitty, I am with you on that. Makes me feel that someone really cares to create a mindful container! Nick, great question! I believe it works the same way as with in-person groups. And I would love to open this question up to others, while I gather my thoughts around it.

Nick: Shepherds may work to keep the herd within a certain space, or lead them to another. Is the facilitator like either of these roles, or both. Is shepherd useful metaphor?

Kitty: I think you were right when you said consistency Joanne. We are always here at the appointed times and we spent a fair few months just turning up to a very small group. Eventually people realise this is happening constantly and start coming back again and again.

Interesting question Nick - I like the metaphor. I think online facilitators can do either, although in these assemblies we are often led in directions we could never have predicted. Virtually Ally I love your idea of using a variety of media. I would love to use more videos and images

Nick: Nilisha, I feel intuition develops in the spaces between people, when there is deep listening. Have found it online on threads with two or three. Interested therefore in online fishbowl as a potential for that.

Nilisha: Ah I love that metaphor Nick! What comes up for me when I imagine that is in an online space, everyone can be a shepherd by just sharing their experience and thoughts.

Kitty: Yes Nilisha - that really resonates with me

Nilisha: Nick, great point! There is a lot of potential. Sometimes what I have noticed is people are already talking about what I wanted to ask. Hence there place for me to understand what they may be needing at that point to take their learning deeper.

Nick: Yes, Kitty, can often be unpredictable, as participation here is self-directed. We aren't sheep, but useful to have a shepherd! The literature about herding cats, and flamingos, is apposite !!!! We are all shepherds. Love that. The intensity. Sometimes these discussions are like dropping a match in a box of fireworks!!

Kitty: I love that metaphor Nick

Nilisha Mohapatra: Question 5:

How would you gauge the impact of an online discussion?

Kitty Jackson: That can be tough! I always love it when the conversation is still rumbling on after we have 'officially' closed. That always makes me feel that we have sparked people's curiosity and that they are still thinking about all the things we discussed

Madhu Shukla: eeks that a question i always love to run from.. hahahaha

People showing up.. is impactful

Kitty: Also, as in real life, you can always ask for feedback, or carry out a feedback survey. I find this issue tough online and in person

Nilisha: Haha I love how you both are approaching it! It indeed is so vast to measure! But I find it impactful when participants move beyond answering facilitator's questions, and start responding to each other. And even when they ask a pertinent question to the group which has so much learning hinging on it, I feel a session has had immense impact. A question just like Nick Kearney asked

Madhu: also i feel the impact for me is to be in a space of this kind. what we discuss is a bonus

Kitty: Interesting point Madhu! Thank you for that

Nick Kearney: Maybe it is like the ultimate objective of the teacher, which is to make yourself unnecessary. If the conversation starts to flow, and then fork and grow into other conversations. Then you have facilitated and you can step back, knowing there is an impact

Virtually Ally: Perhaps a final question at the end of every online assembly that asks us to share one key learning that we will take with us and share with others...might that generated comment list help gauge the impact?

Kitty: What a great idea Virtually Ally!

Nilisha: Virtually Ally, absolutely. That is a great way to understand learnings. Would love to try that!

Nick: Definitely Virtually Ally and this could be repeated a week later.

Madhu: so simple Virtually Ally, score!

Kitty: Wow Virtually Ally - I see a new addition to these Assemblies. Would you mind if we used that technique?

Madhu: this is truly impactful:)

Kitty: Actually, that really reminds me, I think it's so important to keep adapting and changing with every session. I don't know anyone who is doing online facilitation that couldn't be improved. You are all inventing this field with us. I find that really exciting

Virtually Ally: Kitty Of course! p.s. It would be cool to add the same question when you distribute the transcript so we can get feedback from the amazing creatives who were unable to be here.

Gina Salá: I agree Virtually Ally. I'm actually having to sign off and was off and on. I'm so grateful for the good collective wisdom. And thanks again @Kitty for all, blessings on your next part of your journey!

Kitty Jackson: Case Study 1:

You have been invited to hold an online session with a group of young teenagers on the topic of cyber-bullying. How do you make people feel welcome and begin the conversation?

Nick Kearney: Hard. I have found that a useful way in is to ask them to give advice on a case. Before they open up.

Nilisha Mohapatra: Agreements are a good way to do so. Really inviting people to add to the list and say what they need. Sharing techniques to talking about something that might hurt them. Like saying 'Ouch'. I am also wondering if just before the assembly, we can share a song and get people to dance so that there is good energy flowing

Madhu Shukla: maybe a movie animation clip to spark off feelings and thoughts on what they see

Gina Salá: Nilisha Mohapatra I love this idea...am curious if you know if a way to avoid that "time gap"? Or are you using software that doesn't include the gap? And is there a way for all to hear each other at the same time?

Kitty: Great question Gina Salá. I think this Facebook format works for these assemblies because we all have an understanding of PYE and the culture and agreements that go with being at a PYE event. I am not sure how it would feel to bring a group of teenagers together in this same format

In a way, I like the freedom - it is all about wanting to participate rather than just being forced to be in the room

Nilisha: Gina Salá I haven't tried this before honestly! But I am keen on. I'd be happy to do some research on this and share it with you. I am sure there are ways out there.

Gina: Thanks so much Nilisha! That would be wonderful! I'll let you and folks know if I find a way, too.

Madhu: Thanks everyone... i gotta get going as well sadly:(Kitty all the very best.....may your boat sail far and wide! you will be missed here. Nili as always what a treat to be in spaces you hold. Ciao everyone until next month...

Nilisha: Madhu, loved having you share your experiences. So much insight Thank you!

Kitty: Thank you for sharing this space and for bringing your insights Madhu!

Nilisha Mohapatra: Case Study 2:

While facilitating a discussion on women's empowerment, one of the participants comments something which is taken to be offensive and derogatory. Some participants are attacking that response. How would you manage this situation?

Nilisha: Do feel free to share your thoughts about this case study. I feel your ideas will help address a lot of the challenged we have discussed today.

Joanne Lauterjung Kelly: I know the assembly is over, but this is a great case study. One thing that I've witnessed and experienced, is that dismissing it definitely does NOT help, and only serves to alienate the person who made the original comment. But putting them on the spot might not help either. I've seen it go both ways - taking the opportunity in the moment to model curiosity and support to let the original commenter clarify or further explore their thoughts, and encouraging other participants to stay curious and allow space for all experiences. And I've seen it where it was dealt with later, more privately, with those offended. Two things I think help: one, having an agreement from the beginning about agreeing to disagree, and to assume the best about each other. Then you can refer back to that and remind people that they agreed to this, is it still a valid agreement? And two, using a circle process at the beginning and end of the day with groups where there are wildly divergent opinions and attitudes to level the playing field and allow everyone's voice to be heard. I would love to know other thoughts!

Kitty Jackson: Ok good people, Assemblers from today and from all past Assemblies, it is time for me to say goodbye and to officially close this conversation. Please feel free to keep posting, but the facilitated part of the conversation is now coming to an end.

I want to offer my sincere thanks to each of you for taking this risk with us and helping to develop this format. Thanks to your faith and energy 3rd Thursday Assemblies have become a great addition to PYE's offering.



The Assemblies will continue as normal on the 3rd Thursday of every month right here on this page and I will introduce your new community manager very soon.

I will share a transcript and word cloud of this discussion right here soon. Thank you all for your wisdom, insight and sharing. It's been beautiful and I will long remember the many things I have learned from you.