

Tutorial 7:

Facilitating Youth Group Discussions & Problem- Solving Challenges



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1. Aim / Learning Objectives

This tutorial equips youth workers and educators with strategies to foster participative and reflective learning environments. By the end of the session, participants will be able to design experiences and lead practices that deepen youth engagement, enhance critical thinking, and foster collaborative digital interaction.

Key Learning Objectives:

- Facilitate engaging and inclusive group discussions.
- Apply strategies to encourage youth-led problem-solving and critical thinking.
- Use storytelling to deepen emotional connection and learning.
- Integrate digital tools to enhance interactivity and collaboration.

2. Introduction

Facilitating group discussions and guiding problem-solving challenges are essential skills in youth education and engagement. These practices promote critical thinking, creativity, empathy, and teamwork. This tutorial introduces methods for creating inclusive environments, encourages active participation, and demonstrates how storytelling can be used to connect emotionally with learners. It also emphasises accessibility and the use of digital tools to enhance the learning experience.

The tutorial explores how to facilitate meaningful group discussions and promote collaborative problem-solving skills among young people. It introduces key concepts such as:

- participatory dialogue,
- group dynamics,
- emotional engagement through storytelling,
- integration of the digital tools to enhance interactivity and collaboration,
- creation of safe, inclusive activity spaces for young people.

3. Step-by-Step Guide

a) Understanding Group Dynamics

Assigning roles like **leader**, **observer**, **critic**, and others in group work creates structure and accountability. It helps participants engage meaningfully and prevents one person from dominating. This also encourages quieter members to participate responsibly.

For example, [Edutopia](#) outlines roles such as facilitator, timekeeper, notetaker, resource manager, process observer, and participation tracker - each intended to manage group process and ensure balanced interaction.

Supporting Quieter Voices & Managing Dominant Participants

Engage Quiet Participants

- **Pre-session surveys** can surface participant expectations or anxiety, enabling more intentional facilitation. They help facilitators tailor session goals to participant needs and experiences, reveal comfort levels and potential anxieties, allowing for more empathic and responsive facilitation and offer participants an opportunity to feel heard and valued before the session begins.
- **“Start Silent” activities** encourage participants to reflect or jot down ideas individually before sharing in pairs or small groups - lowering the pressure to jump in.
- Use **written input channels** - such as chat, virtual boards, or anonymous polls (like **Slido** or **Mentimeter**) - so those less comfortable speaking up can still contribute.
- Invite contributions tactfully, e.g., “I’d love to hear your thoughts if you’re comfortable” - especially after a period of silence.
- A gentle nod or eye contact can non-verbally encourage quieter participants to speak up.

Reining in Dominant Voices

- Set **clear ground rules** at the outset, such as respecting airtime and encouraging all voices. Revisit these as needed.
- Practice **active listening**, reflecting back contributions, and distributing attention - e.g., "Let's hear some new perspectives."
- Use small group or paired discussions to share power - this shifts the dynamic away from just one or two dominant speakers.

b) Setting the Stage for Discussion

Circle Seating. Arranging chairs in a circle symbolises equality - everyone faces one another directly, reinforcing that all voices matter. This approach is central to restorative practices, where circles foster safe, respectful, and emotionally meaningful dialogue.

Another option is a **Flexible Room Setup**: use small clusters or push desks into an open configuration, depending on group size and tasks. Shifting from large circles to smaller groups can help during different discussion phases.

Subdividing participants into pairs or small groups using virtual **Breakout Rooms** elevates comfort, participation quality, and a variety of voices. Before using breakout rooms, **orient participants** - show them where features like timers, help options, screen sharing, or whiteboards are located.

Establishing Discussion Norms

- Make expectations visible
- Foster fairness and accountability
- Support inclusion, particularly during challenging conversations
- Co-create norms with participants by asking guiding questions such as:
 - "What environment helps you feel safe to share?"
 - "What behaviours disrupt your participation?"
 - "What makes a discussion meaningful to you?"

Document agreed-upon norms visibly and revisit them regularly - for example, by having different participants read them aloud at session start.

c) Using Storytelling to Spark Dialogue

Stories are not just entertainment - they're catalysts for connection, memory, and engagement. When well-chosen, narratives immerse participants emotionally and intellectually. For educators, they act as frameworks that ground abstract themes in relatable, impactful contexts. The [narrative transportation theory](#) shows that participants fully immersed in a story - engaged emotionally and imaginatively - are more attentive, empathetic, and likely to remember and internalize its themes. Stories spark empathy by aligning readers with characters' experiences. This alignment opens up reflective space - when youth feel what characters feel, dialogue deepens and themes become personal and meaningful. Stories can also provide fertile ground for discussion and personal reflection.

Genially as a storytelling tool

- **Interactive narratives.** Genially empowers educators to create visually rich, clickable stories - "choose-your-own-adventure" style or linear - but always immersive. Templates are available, making them easy to customize with images, animations, audio, and branching paths.
- Lessons built in [Genially engage learners](#) with visuals, audio, and touch - for example, interactive maps, gamified challenges, and pop-up questions that drive exploration. This multisensory approach aids recall and keeps learners emotionally invested.
- **Pedagogical impact.** [Studies show](#) that Genially-driven storytelling enhances motivation, comprehension, and retention - especially in subjects like history, where interactive timelines and concept maps make abstract events tangible.

Practical storytelling example

EGLE Network shares a compelling scenario. In the "Caretta Caretta turtle" story, children guide characters through choices - sailing routes, beach clean-up loads, and more - while engaging mathematical reasoning within a narrative context. egle-network.eu

Such stories could easily be translated to youth group contexts, where emotional immersion and moral or civic themes bolster discussion.

How It All Comes Together:

Choose Purposeful Stories

- Identify a learning objective (e.g., environmental responsibility, empathy, teamwork).
- Select or create a narrative that encapsulates the theme. Examples: 'Local environmental issues affect us all', 'Cooling the heat in the city' and 'Low-carbon travel in our community'.

Design the Story with Emotional Anchors

- Build relatable characters and scenarios.
- Include emotional highs and lows - success, conflict, disappointment - to engage empathy.
- Use **Genially** to layer in interactivity: allow participants to make choices, reveal hidden details, or respond to moral questions.

Reflection after interactive storytelling

- Reflective pauses activate **retrieval**, **elaboration** and **generation**, thereby reinforcing knowledge and making learning more durable, thus **deepening learning and memory**.
- Educational theorist John Dewey articulated, that we learn not merely from experience but through mindful reflection on those experiences.
- Reflection helps learners process emotional content, connect it with personal context, and derive deeper understanding.
- When a story concludes - or after a significant interactive moment - **pause deliberately**. This gives space for learners to process emotionally and intellectually.
- **Prompts to invite reflection:** "How would you have felt at that moment?"; "What does this character's choice tell us about responsibility?". These open-ended questions invite learners to explore emotions and ethical dimensions, rather than just facts.

d) Problem-Solving Frameworks

Brainstorming in diverse teams helps to explore broader perspectives, spark more innovative ideas and identify blind spots. It breaks down homogeneity in thinking

styles, backgrounds, and approaches. Encourages richer dialogue - combining emotional insights, factual analysis, creative leaps, and critical evaluation.

To ensure a richer, more robust problem-solving process - where **every idea is considered thoughtfully**, iterated upon, and refined through diverse lenses proven methods to organise brainstorming sessions can be used:

- **Use Six Thinking Hats** collectively, guiding teams through balanced thinking phases.
- **Practice Design Thinking collaboratively**, involving users, stakeholders, and cross-disciplinary roles for better empathy and ownership.
- **Embed SCAMPER** during the ideation step of Design Thinking for systematic creativity.

By combining these frameworks with **collaborative, diverse teamwork**, you not only structure thinking - you empower more inclusive, creative, balanced, and effective problem-solving.

Six Thinking Hats (Edward de Bono)

A structured, role-based thinking framework that enables teams (and individuals) to explore ideas from multiple perspectives in a controlled, systematic way.

Hat Colour	Mode of Thinking
Blue	Oversees and manages the thinking process: sets agenda, structure, sequences of thinking
White	Focuses on data, facts, and objective information - what is known or missing
Red	Captures emotions, gut feelings, and intuitions - without needing justification
Black	Critical assessment - identifying risks, problems, downsides
Yellow	Optimistic perspective - exploring benefits, opportunities, value
Green	Creative and lateral thinking - generating fresh ideas and alternatives

How It Works

Teams metaphorically (or literally) “wear” one hat at a time, with all participants focusing on that mode of thought for a fixed duration. A typical session begins and ends with the **Blue Hat**, ensuring the process is well-framed and conclusions are drawn effectively. Switching hats helps ensure we consider multiple angles and avoid polarized thinking.

Benefits

- Encourages balanced discussion by giving every dimension of thinking a chance.
- Reduces cognitive biases and conflicts, as everyone explores the same hat simultaneously.
- Promotes inclusion - both emotional intuitions and hard data are valued.

Design Thinking

An iterative, human-centred methodology for tackling “wicked” problems - ill-defined issues with no single obvious solution.

Core Phases (often seen as five steps):

1. **Empathize** – Understand user needs through observation, interviews, and immersion,
2. **Define** – Synthesize insights into a clear problem statement or point-of-view,
3. **Ideate** – Brainstorm broadly, generating creative solutions without judgment,
4. **Prototype** – Build simple, tangible representations of ideas for testing,
5. **Test** – Gather feedback from real users and refine iteratively.

Design Thinking is **non-linear**, often cycling back through earlier phases to deepen understanding or improve solutions. It promotes collaboration and leverages diverse expertise and encourages experimentation, continuous learning, and more thoughtful, human-centred solutions.

SCAMPER

A creative brainstorming tool that prompts idea generation by asking seven specific questions to reimagine a problem or solution.

The SCAMPER is Acronym of:

- **Substitute** – What can be swapped or replaced?
- **Combine** – Can two ideas be merged?
- **Adapt** – Can it be reinterpreted from another context?
- **Modify (Magnify/Minify)** – Alter elements to change impact/scale
- **Put to Another Use** – Can it be repurposed?
- **Eliminate** – What can be removed?
- **Reverse** – Turn it around entirely, or invert the problem

SCAMPER helps teams break out of conventional mental frames, encouraging creative exploration to discover unconventional solutions.

e) Facilitation Techniques

Open-ended questions - those that demand more than a “yes” or “no” - invite richer, more thoughtful input and boost engagement. They spark discussion, reflection, and uncover diverse perspectives.

According to facilitation experts, there are several valuable question types:

- **Prediction questions** stimulate future-oriented thinking: “How might this evolve over time?”
- **Justifying questions** encourage reasoning and evidence: “Can you give me an example of when that happened?”
- **Storybook questions** draw out narratives: “And then what happened? What did it look like?”
- **Clarifying questions** ensure understanding: “Could you explain that another way?”
- **Comparative questions** generate connections: “How might different team members respond to this?”
- **Connective questions** link back to experience: “Does this resonate with your own work?”
- **Summary/Synthesis questions** reflect and affirm learning: “What are the one or two most important ideas that stood out?”

Managing Time & Keeping Focus

Follow the rules for the best time management and participants' focus:

- Define what the meeting is meant to achieve and communicate it upfront.
- Always set an agenda before the meeting.
- Share the agenda with time allocations per topic so participants know what to expect.
- Assign a **timekeeper** to monitor pacing or use visible timers to keep discussions concise.
- Prioritize agenda items so high-value topics get sufficient attention.
- **“Parking Lot” for tangents.** When discussions go off-topic, gently steer them into a “parking lot” for later follow-up.
- Recap decisions and next steps at the end. Clarify responsibilities, deadlines, and circulate meeting notes promptly.
- Consider limiting meetings to 45 - 60 minutes if possible. Assign only essential attendees to reduce fatigue and boost productivity. Make hygiene breaks for longer meetings.

Using Digital Whiteboards or Collaborative Docs

Tools like **Mural**, **Miro**, or **FigJam** let everyone post ideas in real time - no more dominance by the loudest voices. Ideas, templates, frameworks, or annotations appear visually, helping spark discussion and keep concepts organized, everything gets captured - notes, diagrams, decisions - then easily shared post-meeting.

Use **Miro** if you want a powerful, all-around collaboration platform ready for anything – from ideation to planning to execution.

Choose **FigJam** if you're focused on design-first sessions, quick brainstorming.

Opt for **Mural** when running structured workshops, teaching, or guided group activities where facilitation tools are key.

f) Reflection and Feedback. Closing Sessions with Self and Peer Reflection

Closing sessions with reflection help consolidate learning, deepen engagement, and bridge the session experience with future action. It aligns with the psychological concepts of **primacy–recency**, where participants remember the beginning and end

most clearly. By combining structured closing activities with reflective tools like audio, surveys, and peer processes, facilitators can create a powerful, multi-layered approach to reflection and feedback. This not only enhances session learning but also supports continuous individual and collective improvement.

4. Practical Activity Examples

Activity: Story Circle & Challenge Response

- Begin with a short, emotionally engaging story (digital or verbal) on a local environmental issue.
- Participants form small groups to discuss and identify key challenges in the story.
- Each group proposes a solution using a structured approach like **Design Thinking**.
- Present solutions through a digital tool (e.g., **Genially** presentation or poster).

Activity: Reflection and Feedback

a) **One-Word Checkout**

Invite participants to share **one word** that captures their experience or current feeling. It's simple, memorable, and emotionally insightful.

b) **"What? So What? Now What?" Framework**

A structured approach that moves participants through:

- **What?** – Reflect on what happened.
- **So What?** – Think about why it matters.
- **Now What?** – Identify next steps or takeaways.

This encourages deeper, actionable reflection.

c) **Interactive Close-Out Games**

- [Bus Trip](#) – A fun, energetic wrap-up session that invites light-hearted reflection and community bonding.
- **Thirty-Five** – Participants write a key lesson learned, then share in a brief, structured way.

- **Back-to-Back Pairs** – Facilitator asks a question; participants turn and share answers with a partner to encourage dialogue.

5. Inclusivity Considerations

- Use visual supports and icons for key concepts.
- Provide transcripts or captions for video/audio content.
- Allow multiple formats for participation (spoken, written, visual).
- Structure discussions to give space for all voices, using tools like talking sticks or digital timers.

6. Expected Outcomes / Conclusion

Youth workers, teachers, facilitators will gain:

- Skills to manage inclusive group discussions.
- Confidence in leading collaborative problem - solving tasks.
- Practical experience using storytelling as an educational tool.
- Familiarity with accessible digital platforms for group engagement.

As a result of participating in the facilitated group discussions and problem - solving challenges, young people will benefit by gaining:

- Improved communication and collaboration skills, enabling them to actively contribute to inclusive discussions.
- Greater confidence in expressing their ideas, proposing solutions, and engaging in team - based problem - solving tasks.
- Experience in using storytelling to explore social and environmental issues and connect with others emotionally and intellectually.
- Familiarity with accessible digital tools that support creative expression, teamwork, and feedback sharing across multiple formats.

7. Recommended Tools and Resources

- **Genially** – for interactive presentations.

- Audio recording apps (e.g., **Vocaroo, Voice Memos, or Anchor**) – for capturing storytelling and feedback.
- **Miro, Google Docs, FigJam** – for visual collaboration.
- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** resources: visual (e.g., posters and icons), auditory (e.g. recordings) and tactile (e.g. props and physical tasks); multiple output formats (e.g. speaking, drawing, writing and audio recording). Integrated tools include captioned videos, screen readers and symbol - supported visuals.
- **European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA)** - for policy alignment.

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