Aptivate
International IT Development

Inquiry-led learning for leaders

A three-day experiential workshop in learning leadership for participants in MapKibera and associated projects
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For the DFID project: *Mediating voices and communicating realities: using information crowdsourcing tools, open data initiatives and digital media to support and protect the vulnerable and marginalised*

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Aptivate

Aptivate is a not-for-profit IT consultancy supporting the international development sector. We work with agencies, organisations and communities, employing participatory agile methodologies to help them use technology to improve people's lives. Our team have expertise in designing and facilitating participatory learning experiences and other social interventions with particular expertise in applying participatory techniques in the domain of information technology.

Introduction

ILLL (Inquiry-lead Learning for Leaders) was a workshop designed and facilitated by Aptivate for participants in three projects initiated by Ground Truth in Kibera in Nairobi. The projects, Map Kibera, VOK (Voice of Kibera) and KNN (Kibera News Network) enable residents of Africa's largest informal settlement to contribute to the creation of information commons in the form of: digital maps of the settlement (created as part of OpenStreetMap[1]), geo-tagged crowdsource SMS reporting (using Ushahidi[2]) and community news reporting (using geo-tagged YouTube videos[3]). Ground Truth intend to spread these activities to new projects in other areas including Mathari, another of Kenya's informal settlements. The participants in the Kibera projects are key to the success of this roll-out, as well as to the ongoing success of their respective local projects. While their participation in the Ground Truth projects has given them skills in the relevant technologies and experience in contributing to information commons, these young people might lack expertise in effective education, and they might not have fully understood what it means to participate in open information sharing projects. ILLL provided opportunity for the map-makers, community reporters and videographers to develop their skills and experience as leaders of effective learning, and also to explore issues around sharing information resources such as their own newly-acquired technical expertise and the resulting digital maps, reports and videos.

This report is part of a set of deliverables that also include the training itself and new media reporting on the project. This report is intended to inform the content of a forthcoming best practice or how-to guide. As such, one might expect the main value of this report to be the details of the workshop together with an evaluation of the event. Since our aim is to create participatory learning experiences, we do not consider that to be adequate value to be considered *best-practice*: good participative process, by necessity, emerges from moment to moment in response to the intention and will of the whole group of participants. We consider best practice, in this context, to be something more like TheoryU[4] than a static lesson plan for a three-day workshop together with some notes on how it might be done better in future. To this end, we intend that this report to be less like an authoritative guide on how to re-create ILLL, and more like a facilitative and thought-provoking invitation to create learning interventions that are open and participative, and which embrace and respond to emergent change.

The first part describes the planning tensions and forces that shaped the planning of ILLL: meeting the clients requirements, anticipating the needs of participants and planning for change and adaptability. The second part describes the processes undertaken in the workshop: our intention, what happened and observations from the review process built into the workshop. We consider that the main value of this report lies in this section which describes the relationship our intention for each session, and what actually emerged. Finally there are some brief concluding remarks drawn from feedback on the workshop.

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1 http://www.openstreetmap.org/
2 http://www.ushahidi.com/
3 http://kiberanewsnetwork.org/
4 http://www.presencing.com/docs/publications/execsums/Theory_U_Exec_Summary.pdf

Workshop design

Inquiry-led learning

Inquiry-lead learning is a highly effective way of helping people to understand any given domain, but it offers value beyond simply the acquisition of information. The most important aspect of inquiry-based learning is the skill (and habit) of inquiry. When we believe that we can make sense of the world for ourselves, in collaboration with our peers, our learning in every part of life accelerates. Whereas rote learning reinforces the belief that the learner is subordinate and unable to directly access "truth", inquiry-based learning develops a profound sense of one's capacity to create valid knowledge through exploration. Studies have also shown, however, that guidance and support are important in framing students' inquiry with useful challenging questions and in providing access to tools and information that students may need to confront those questions. "Pure discovery learning", in which students are essentially left to confront questions without guidance, has been shown to be less effective than rote learning.

At Aptivate, we have found inquiry-based learning to be effective in teaching IT-skills to groups of varying background in different parts of Africa, from young women living in rural Zambia who subsequently built the computers for the internet cafe they now operate, to IT professionals who were themselves developing the ability to provide inquiry-based training within their institutions. Aptivate is not original in using inquiry-based learning for adult education with students who have little formal education or who have had little success within a rote learning environment. Both adults and children in various contexts have been found to learn more rapidly when they are involved in a shared investigation rather than being told (based on a teacher or writer's authority) what to believe. Paulo Freire was able to support illiterate adult foreign-language learners in acquiring functional mastery several times more rapidly than widely believed possible. His primary technique was to initiate a dialogue in which participants explored the learning domain through examples that had direct relevance to their current daily lives. The approach depends on the equality of teacher and learner, in that both are able to judge the validity of truth-claims and sort through such claims by weighing evidence in conversation.

Designing to meet objectives

The three-day learning intervention was challenging to design as it had to meet a number of requirements, not all of which were strictly aligned with one another.

We wanted to give participants experience of inquiry led learning: following their own learning agendas, experiencing success and the ability to demonstrate new knowledge and skills so as to form reference experiences for their future work as trainers or learning leaders. Where student led learning is a new concept, however, it is sometimes beneficial to introduce and discuss the concept first, and contrast it with previous experience; this gives participants an intellectual framework that helps them make sense of their new learning experiences and helps them not to feel lost or confused during exploration. At Aptivate we prefer, where possible, to create a safe environment and immerse participants in the inquiry led process before offering an intellectual framework. We then facilitate processes that encourage participants to

make their own sense from their experiences. After participants have had a chance to process their learning experiences, we introduce vocabulary and conventional models to help them retain their learning through storytelling and sense-making. Our preferred approach works best with small groups (fewer than approximately ten participants, with small group dynamics) so for ILLL, where we would have up to thirty participants and only one trained facilitator, we adopted an approach that introduced a little foundational theory followed by some constrained experiential work. The foundation comprised an investigation into the conditions for, and qualities of good and poor learning; followed by an experiment that entailed changing the conditions of a simple learning experience.

We wanted to give participants the opportunity to learn from their own experiences as learning leaders. Our preferred way to achieve this is to allow them plenty of practice and to set up an effective and trusted feedback system. Practising might mean giving each participant multiple opportunities to be involved in designing, planning facilitating facilitating and assessing group learning for others. Our preferred feedback system is based on the retrospective process from the Agile approach to software development: a short process after each session that encourages participants to step outside their experience and identify what they learned from it. The idea here is to give participants the chance to experience a process of learning and improvement: they get to try something out, review the process, identify what they want to change and then repeat the whole cycle while enacting that change. Since not all changes necessarily lead to improvement, this works best when there is time to repeat the cycle at least three times. Once again, the group size and dynamics in the ILLL meant this approach was not the most appropriate choice. Instead we set up the feedback loop by using the retrospective review process after every session, and included an opportunity for all participants to be involved in planning and leading one learning process.

We also wanted, in response to suggestions from Ground Truth staff, to create space for the participants to explore their feelings and issues around becoming generous sharers of information (their own learning and the information commons they have been creating together). Part of the research value of the ILLL intervention as part of the research project into MapKibera and the related projects is that it might illuminate some of the issues held by the Kibera residents participating in the project, and reveal some of the social processes that might enable inhabitants of informal settlements to engage with the culture and practices of open information sharing. We anticipate that for inhabitants of an informal settlement where access to resources and other needs satisfiers is considered to be limited, there might be inhibitors to a culture of generous sharing which we understand to underpin some open-source and crowdsource community projects. We wanted to direct participants of ILLL to learn about themselves, and their relationship to the work of sharing their skills and knowledge, as part of the workshop. We achieved this by making such issues the subject-matter of an inquiry-led learning process that also served to introduce a model for the inquiry-led learning process.

Adapting to circumstances

Throughout the design, facilitation and evaluation of an inquiry-led learning intervention on this kind there is an underlying tension of which we should be

constantly mindful. This is the tension between authoritative and facilitative intervention[5], or "who is the leader"? As facilitator of such an intervention, one may perceive oneself as an authority on the subject matter and, in addition, one hold a plan or agenda for the learning. On the other hand, inquiry-led learning is, by definition, intended to enable learners to follow their own curiosity and passion. This tension constantly throws up questions that impact each stage of the process. For example, at the design stage, we find ourselves asking: how much planning is appropriate?, to what extend may we guide learners towards a particular domain on inquiry? to what extent may we guide them towards a given outcome or conclusion?, etc. During the event we find ourselves asking: are participants engaged in an activity that is relevant to the day's agenda? If not, is that a good or a bad thing? What kind of intervention might be appropriate? During evaluation we find ourselves asking: was the learning successful if participants have not demonstrated that they achieved our anticipated outcomes? Have they learned something else? If so, are we aware of what it is? This tension is always present when one attempts to 'lead' another in inquiry-led learning. It is all the more contentious with group interventions where the possibility of individuals or sub-groups following their own lead in different directions poses a risk of fragmenting the group with consequences for group dynamics and process cohesion.

A facilitator of inquiry-led learning must be able to internalise this tension and constantly ask themselves these questions with a willingness to adapt to emergent circumstances. It is necessary to hold in mind the goals of individual learning and group process and make choices that respond to, and steer the group without dominating or oppressing them.

In the following sections I present the planning process, observations from the workshop itself and some evaluative comments from each session. It may appear that a daily agenda was created for the whole workshop in advance, and that this agenda represents the core value of this report. This is not the case, on either count. For ILLL, we planned an outline in advance together with an agenda for the first day, and then adapted our plan and created an agenda for each day in the preceding evening. The success of ILLL is as much a product of this willingness to adapt and respond to emergent events as it is of careful planning. The core value of this report is not the details of the workshop plan but the intentions and techniques used in this planning process.

Day 1

Session one

Intentions for the first session included:

•to introduce facilitator, participants and other people present to one another and to enable participants to bring their attention into the workshop room and the present moment in order to participate fully;

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5   John Heron, *Helping the Client*, SAGE 1990

•to create a "first impression" of the workshop that it would be different from previous experiences of workshops that were purely didactic, or that had a strong authoritative leadership.

To achieve this I used a process of mutual introduction where participants worked in pairs, each creating a badge for the other. In addition, they each identified by appreciative inquiry[6] a positive quality (I asked them to identify a gift, talent or skill) of their partner. We did this sitting in a circle and then each participant introduced their partner by name and shared their talent or skill with the group. They also presented them with their badge as a gift at this moment. The blank badges for this process were prepared in advance from white card and double-sided sticky tape.

The badges had silhouettes of animals on them which I intended to use to create groups (e.g., by asking them to find two other people with the same animal, or to work in groups of five with everyone having a different animal). I used this for the initial pairing exercise: having collated the animals so that when given out in order everyone was sitting next to someone with a different animal, I asked them to form pairs with someone having the same animal as them. Anticipating that people would normally sit with their peer-groups, this encouraged some mixing during the introduction exercise.

In fact, the very first intervention in the workshop was that I, as facilitator, stood in the middle of the circle of chairs and made a loud, long vocal scream as a way of calling the attention of the participants and challenging their expectations of behaviour in workshops. I then invited everyone to join me in an exercise of deep breathing that ended with everyone invited to make a loud noise together. This creates sharing and focusses our senses into the current environment.

The penultimate activity in the first session was a game that got everyone physically involved, standing up, passing a large balloon between one another and shouting. The rules of the game are designed to create an escalating level of volume. The objective of of this is to create an active level of energy in the workshop and set a president for physical activity as well as the usual writing and talking.

The session ended with a retrospective review. The intention of the review is to demonstrate the potential of closed loop feedback to enhance learning. The review is a met-process, that is to say the ILLL workshop itself is the subject matter of the process. Meta-reflection processes are valuable in Training The Trainers workshops to learn from the learning process itself. The review consists simply of three brainstorms:

•**What did you see? What did you do?** The objective of this brainstorm is to draw out objective observation about process. It is sometimes difficult to remember exactly what happened in a workshop session, particularly if one has been engaged intellectually and/or emotionally in the experience. This brainstorm helps participants to observe and remember what actually happened.

•**What did you learn?** The objective of this brainstorm is to invite participants to reflect on their experience and synthesize their learning, at least to the level where it can be reported in a single phrase or word for a brainstorm. Although there may have been learning in a workshop session, participants may not be aware of it until

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6 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appreciative_inquiry

they consider the question directly. It is one thing to have learned something by from an experience[7] and another to know *that* you know it, and are able to articulate that learning[8].

•**What would you like to keep? What would you like to change?** The intention of this brainstorm is to invite participants to consider the processes and activities of the preceding session as tools for them to use in their own learning and facilitation. The questions implicitly draw out what parts of the session the participants consider valuable and which might have value if handled differently in future. The form of the questions is deliberately positive (we deliberately avoid "what did you dislike" in favour of appreciative inquiry learning to positive change).

What did you see? What did you do?

Some ILLL participants were keen to give answers to these questions that suggested deep understanding or high level synthesis of the experience. Answers like ""We knew each other" or "We generated team spirit", suggest the exercise was perceived as asking about the outcomes of the processes. After being encouraged to give objective observations, their answers were more along the lines of: "We laughed", "We wrote each others names down", "We found out our partners' skills", etc.

What did you learn?

Once again, there seemed to be a keenness to answers that sum up the experience as an aphorism like "Team work can win", "We need each other to progress", or "Active participation is exciting". Other answers were more objective: "Learned something about our partner's skills & gifts". These "clever" answers might reflect that our participants have prior exposure to a "workshop culture" where such aphorisms are valued. In facilitating this session, and several of those that followed, I tried to indicate that I held simple objective answers in higher value.

What would you keep? What would you change?

Without the practical experience of putting these changes into practice, the exercise can seem abstract. If participants don't envisage themselves ever running this kind of training themselves, then the exercise may seem pointless. Some participant's "keep" and "change" responses might have indicated what they enjoyed or did not enjoy in the session ("change screaming to singing", "keep jumping around"). The last part of the session was the balloon game and many of the change suggestions were, alterations to the rules of this game. This felt like a successful application of the process to a limited safe domain (a good outcome for a first session) and I made a point to refer back to, and to enact some of these suggestions later in the workshop.

Session two

The intention for this session was to investigate the topic of what makes the difference between good and bad learning and, in particularly, to challenge assumptions that learning is something that happens in workshops and school. The process had four phases: a small-group directed brainstorm directed towards expansive thinking; a plenary summation activity to condense ideas and draw

7 Experiential knowing, http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/epsitemology.htm
8 Propositional knowing, ibid

observations; an evaluative phase where participants expressed personal judgements about good and bad learning; and finally a structured discussion to draw out the qualities of and conditions for good and bad learning.

We used the animals on participants' badges to form the groups for the first phase, in this case asking them to form groups where everyone's badge had a different animal. Each group was given three cards (prepared in advance) each with a heading and a number of blank fields for them to fill in. The groups were given clear instructions to fill in at least four fields on each card with concepts under the card's heading; they were given a short time (ten minutes) to complete this so as to create a sense of urgency and work. The headings were:

•Places we learn

•People we learn from

•Experiences we learn from

The first four fields on each card were numbered (to reinforce the rubric of completing at least four fields per card), the remainder underlined spaces to write in to support the idea that the groups were encouraged to provide more than four answers.

The intention of this small-group process was to draw out diverse ideas under the three headings. All groups managed to provide more than four answers on most of their cards.

For the plenary phase we prepared three flip-chart pages with the same headings as the cards from the first phase, and stuck them separately on the walls. We then used these to gather and collate the group's ideas under each section, together with some facilitated discussion. A fourth flip-chart pad served to gather insights into the qualities of and conditions for good (or bad) learning.

The specific outputs of this phase of the process are not important and can be expected to vary from group to group. Some answers were expected: School, Church and Mosque as places where we learn; Parents, teachers and mentors as people we learn from; and mistakes and meeting new people as experiences. The objective of the process, however, was to go beyond these to participants personal experiences. Examples from ILLL included: "Kibera", "prison" and "swimming pool" (places), "drunkards", "rappers" and "kids" (people), and "walking in the slum barefoot when it's raining"(experience).

In the third phase of the process, participants made judgements about whether the the people, places and experiences on the flip-chart pads connoted good or bad learning. They indicated their judgements by sicking coloured dots on top of the words: green dots for good learning, red dots for bad. We had to take care to differentiate good and bad learning experiences from merely good and bad experiences and the subtlety of this distinction may be a potential weakness of this process, though the activities in the last phase are likely to give good results even if some participants have not internalised this distinction.

After this process some of the learning contexts on the flip-charts had a number of both green and red dots on them. We used these as the basis of the fourth process in this session. Voting with dots is a fun and mainly anonymous process that entails

movement and mingling, but the judgements are personal and internal. In order to externalise the thought processes behind these judgements we used a process of spacial voting as the basis for a structured discussion.

At ILLL, the two learning contexts that seemed to have attracted the most contentious mix of red and green dots were *job seeking* (experience) and *school* (place). Taking these in turn, we invited all participants to position themselves in the room according to their personal opinion of whether they entailed good or bad learning: one end of the room signifying good learning, the opposite bad and the middle for *both* or *I don't know*. From these positions we held a facilitated discussion inviting people from each position to explain why they had positioned themselves where they did. From this we gathered, on the fourth flip-chart, some conditions and qualities for good and bad learning.

The lists below indicate the results from this session from ILLL. Note that this is a directed process since I, as facilitator, decided what to pick from the discussion for inclusion in these lists.

Bad learning

•Waste of time
•Following things you have no interest in
•No skills based learning
•Punishment-fear
•Focusing on grades

Good learning

•Reward/Praise/Acknowledgement for doing well
•Understand basics first
•Relations/networks
•Working because you are inspired/interested
•Perseverance and dedication
•Stimulate and encourage to take on new challenges
•Encourage critical thinking
•Share and discuss
•Allow for different styles for learning

The final activity in this session was a retrospective review following the format outlined above. Results suggested that the group enjoyed the physical aspects of the processes in this session (mingling and voting by position), and a mixture of writing and speaking (anticipating that not all participants would necessarily feel confident in written English, we planned all processes that entailed writing in such a way that participants could choose who would write and support one another).

Session three

The intention for the third session was to ground our discussion about what makes for good and bad learning in some practical experience, and also to introduce an action learning model of making small changes in real situations and observing the results. The afternoon consisted of three contrived learning experiences, each with similar content but with small differences conditions that we introduced in the spirit of experimentation. Working in groups of three, each group was given a length of rope

and a set of pictorial instructions on how to tie a certain kind of knot (the subject matter). One participant was given role of learning and another teacher. The third participant had the role of observer: responsible for enforcing the *rules* that created the unique conditions for each experiment, and for evaluating the quality of the learning experience.

In the first experiment, the teacher was given both the instructions and the rope with which to demonstrate how to tie the knot. The learner was required only to observer and not even to ask questions. The teacher was also prohibited from showing the instructions to the learner. For each subsequent experiment the roles rotate among the participants. In the second experiment, the teacher was given the instructions and the learner given the rope. Teacher and learner were allowed to communicate but the only the teacher was able to see the instructions. In the third experiment the roles of teacher and learner were abandoned: both were learners, both were allowed to use either the rope or the instructions as they wished. After each experiment we invited the observer was comment on the quality of the learning that had taken place. We used this to draw out some ideas about how to judge good and bad learning.

Some results from this session are presented in the list below. The point about being able to demonstrate a new skill or ability came out after the first experiment and we asked if someone in the group could demonstrate the ability to tie the knot after each subsequent experiment.

How can you tell good learning from bad?
•(in good learning) there was understanding
•Student and teacher tie the knot correctly
•(in good learning) Both (teacher and learner) were involved
•The teacher was not prepared/did not have practice
•(in bad learning, there was) No clarity, communication
•These are not good instructions
•After a good learning experience someone (the teacher or the learner) can demonstrate a new ability or skill
•Everyone was able to understand and follow. You need to make this happen.
•(in good learning, one is) Inspired to try harder
•Facing a challenge is good for learning

The afternoon closed with a retrospective review following the format outlined above.

Day 2

The intention for the second day was to introduce the cyclic inquiry model for inquiry-led learning[9] and then to road-test the model during the rest of the day. Furthermore, it was our intention to lead the day as in inquiry into what it means for our participants to help others to learn what they themselves have been learning through MapKibera and the other Ground Truth projects. Having planned a set of processes to meet these intentions, the day started with a spontaneous deviation from plan, as described below.

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9 http://edutechwiki.unige.ch/en/Inquiry-based_learning

Session one

We wanted to demonstrate throughout ILLL the behaviours we wanted to share with participants. One of these is learning from and building upon previous work from the workshop. Participatory workshops in development often generate mountains of flip-chart paper which is sometimes transcribed into unread emails or wiki pages, and often discarded unread. While the process of sharing ideas through writing is sometimes useful in its own right, there is often real value in summary notes from a plenary session, especially those from the retrospective reviews where participants get to make constructive suggestions for improvement. These often have the additional benefit of being written in the participants' own words and, if presented from the original papers, conveying additional cues of group ownership and through the the familiar colours and layout of the pages. In other words, it's often a good idea to refer back to earlier flip-chart pads to show how their content is relevant and informs the rest of the workshop. I wanted to do this during the first session of the second day. Due to the room layout, the easiest way to do this was to abandon the traditional circle layout in the centre of the room and move the chairs near to one of the walls. This gave me the idea of recreating a school-like layout with chairs in rows with a centre aisle. Having made this intervention well before the start of the session, I withdrew and observed how participants reacted to the new layout. I expected that that the front row of seats would not be used at all. I was right.

Participants filled the seats starting from the back row in what I imagined was a re-creation of school-like behaviour. I began the session by moving to the front and behaving as much like a school-teacher as I could without laughing too much. I asked the the participants to list what they took to be the rules of school. The results suggested that the participants took this as a "setting the ground-rules" exercise for our actual session. I intervened to challenge this perception by questioning the rules. For example, when they suggested that "raise your hand when you want to speak" should be one of the rules, I asked if this applied equally to the teacher as well as the students. I observed that the front rows of seats were empty and suggested that this must be as the result of an implicit rule that we should make explicit by writing it down. We used the opportunity to explore together some more common assumptions about educational process in school.

During this session I took the opportunity to share my personal experiences of school education (being a bright kid with dyslexia, I fell outside the group that my schools were best prepared to help). The intention of this self-disclosure was two-fold. I wanted to use my story to illustrate the premise that formal school-based education might not be the best approach for all learners. I wanted to set an example of personal disclosure and trust. The processes planned for the day include role-play: a form of personal storytelling and I wanted to prepare the way for this to help the participants feel safe and supported when their own opportunity for storytelling came.

When I invited the group to move their chairs into an arrangement they felt comfortable with, they created a semi-circle around me and my flip-chart, though one lady moved her chair to the front — in the middle of the semi-circle — in apparent defiance of group-mind.

In this configuration I introduced the steps in the cyclic inquiry model. The five steps are typically presented in circular arrangement. There is no strict starting place, nor is it required to enact the phases in the given order, but explanations often begin with Ask:

•**Ask:** when the learner's curiosity is aroused, they may find a question to which they would like to seek an answer

•**Investigate:** seeking an answer, one begins by gathering information or raw data

•**Create**: having gathered data, one begins to synthesize meaning in the form of theories or stories

•**Discuss**: working as a group, learners share their stories or theories and learn from one another's evaluations

•**Reflect**: a personal review of the process during which learners may choose to evaluate whether their question has been answered, or whether, for example, its assumptions have been revealed, this is the time when questions are formed or rephrased, priming the cycle to repeat

I introduced these phases by writing them on large cards and placing them on the ground where I could walk between them to demonstrate typical alternation between the phases. This physical metaphor was well received by the group and a lively debate followed during which they proposed modifications and amendments to the process, creating and moving cards to illustrate their suggestions and press their points. The card based approach seems to be a good vehicle for structured discussion. A risk here was that the debate might turn into a power struggle among sub-groups. To prevent this I intervened.

In the discussion many issues arose. One interesting one had to do with where the question (in the Ask phase) came from and its presupposition that there was something that the student wanted to learn. Following a suggestion from one of the participants, we switched from a theoretical discussion about the learning model to concrete questions about the participants' own personal inquiry agendas. Everyone responded to the question: *What brought you here, what do you want to learn?* The answers given are listed below.

•How do I go about participatory learning?
•What skills do I need to engage different groups?
•What can we do best as a team?
•How do I become a good trainer who can allow my trainees to take part actively?
•How tools and materials do I need to become an effective trainer?
•How can I learn different techniques to apply with different groups?
•How to merge different opinions from different people to meet their interests?
•How to react to both positive and negative ideas
•Communication skills necessary for training
•How do we come to a conclusion?
•How to bring out a question in a participatory way?
•How to be a good listener
•What do I gain here that can help the community?
•How to make different groups work comfortably together?
•How do I plant an idea for it to grow?
•What is inquiry led learning?

•How can I support other people to become better learners?
•*How to tackle a question?*

The lively debate about the stages of the model — and how to handle it as a facilitator — is an example of the authoritative/facilitative tension described above. On one hand, some participants appeared to be demonstrating their own engagement with the process already: asking questions, gathering answers, creating alternatives (by writing new cards, or moving existing ones) and debating the results. This is just the sort of inquiry-led process we wanted to be able to facilitate. On the other hand, the discussion risked becoming an argument about the definition of words and whose suggestion was the best. This situation required an authoritative intervention to prevent the participants losing trust in the process and falling back on normal behaviour patterns which, if they serve the role of defending intellectual territory (who is right) almost certainly do not support effective learning.

The session closed with a retrospective review following the standard format. I asked volunteers from among the participants to lead this in order to hand over ownership of the, now familiar process. (I was careful to ask for volunteers who felt confident writing on the whiteboard to support the facilitator, rather than risking forcing a confident speaker automatically into the role of scribe).

Some feedback from the review suggested participants were aware of the group's tendency to slide into circular debate: "I learned that when we start talking politics we miss the point", "Different ideas can lead to endless discussions". Another point that arose from the review was the idea that while the group was debating and re-inventing the learning model, some of the active participants in that process appeared to be working towards a structure more suitable for project management. This might reflect prior learning from other NGO workshops with a slant towards community mobilisation and setting up projects. A clear distinction between project management and learning methodologies might be useful for similar interventions in future.

Session two

The rest of the day roughly follows the cyclic inquiry model beginning with with some directed investigation to focus on issues arising from knowledge sharing that are meaningful and relevant to the lives of the participants. The process for this directed investigation used prepared question cards in a similar way to the previous day's process but where the intention of the questions about learning was to encourage broad, creative thinking, the intention of this process is to encourage deep, reflective thought. The cards contained a number (about fifteen) of very similar questions. They were phrased to probe the same issue — *What does it mean for you to become a trainer?* — with different modes and presuppositions. Some examples follow, starting with the summary question:

•What does it mean for you to become a trainer?
•Why are you excited about sharing your skills with others?
•What are you afraid will happen if others learn what you have learned?
•What is the worst thing that could happen if you help someone else learn what you have learned?
•What will happen if others learn what we have learned?

As the issues around sharing skills and knowledge may be associated with group dynamics as well as personal qualities, it seems important that some of these questions should be phrased in *group language*, using words like *us, we* and *others* in place of *me, I* and *someone else*.

These questions were used as the script for an interview carried out as a partnered exercise. Taking turns, one partner asks the other each question, and allows the the other to answer. When all questions have been answered the process repeats, starting, again, with the first question, until a set time (five minutes) has elapsed. The intention of this process is to *drill down* beyond easily accessible answers to the deeper meaning for the interviewee. The benefit is less for the interviewer, who might learn something from the answers given, but more for the interviewee who may learn something about their own feelings. The process creates an apparent need for the interviewee to provide a satisfactory answer to the barrage of questions, as they listen to the subtleties of the questions — in order to divine how to answer them — they reach deeper into their unspoken subconscious awareness for the answers. Some questions have presuppositions (e.g. that the interviewee is excited or that they are afraid about becoming a trainer) that might be true or false for different participants. Responding to those that are true for themselves, an interviewee may make meaning of their own feelings and put them into words.

Asking, and answering, the same questions repeatedly for five minutes can feel uncomfortable and it might be hard for participants to trust an unfamiliar process like this. Furthermore the process has strict rules: the interviewer may not say anything that is not written on the card. To help them feel comfortable, I warned the group before the process began that this was likely and spent some time after the process giving them space to speak about their experience of the process. Some participants reported that they repetitively gave the same answers to the questions each time, others said they found new answers each time.

After the paired interview process, pairs joined with other pairs to re-form the groups based on the projects: MapKibera, KNN and VOK plus a group for Ground Truth staff. Working in these groups, they discussed the issues that arose from the interview and identified an issue with particular meaning or significance for their group. Naming the issue to explore corresponds roughly to the *Ask* phase in the cyclic inquiry model.

Having chosen an issue, the groups were tasked with preparing a two minute role play to illustrate their issue. This corresponds roughly to the *Create* phase in the cyclic inquiry model. The groups create a depiction of their issue together. Using role play in place of more traditional kinds of creation (written work or artwork) has some benefits for this type of workshop: the whole group can work together and contribute on the creation, resulting in a creation with joint ownership. The role play does not exist for scrutiny except when it is performed, avoiding issues of fear of being judged. The risk with role play is that is may exclude less confident or assertive group members. Cultural sensitivity is also important. Kenya has a history of using role play and community theatre to deal with sensitive issues so we felt it would be appropriate for ILLL and indeed it seemed to work well.

Session three

In this session we entered the *Discuss* phase of the cyclic inquiry model, using the role-play performances as a way to share ideas and stories and to stimulate discussion. Each group performed their role-play in turn without first introducing the issue. The audience was then invited to discuss what they thought the issue was. Then the performers were invited to describe the issue from their perspective. In this way, the performers got to hear their issue reflected through the eyes and minds of the audience. This feedback loop can, itself, provide a valuable learning opportunity for the actors. Unless the actors have a high degree of self awareness, however, the rest of the group are unlikely to benefit directly from this learning since it would require the actors, when it is their turn to speak, to describe both their original understanding of the issue and what they have learned from listening to the audience speak.

At the end of the session we held a retrospective review of everything since the start of session two (the session breaks didn't strictly line up with catering breaks and this is the logical place to review the process so far). Once again volunteers from among the participants led the session. The review process provides opportunity for participants to *reflect* and, thus, to complete one full iteration of the cyclic learning model.

Session four

In the final session of the day, we entered another, much quicker iteration of the cyclic inquiry model:

•**Ask**: how might things be different in the scenario you created in your role-play
•**Create**: an intervention or alternative version with a small change in the behaviour of one player
•**Investigate**: by enacting the role-play again with players improvising their response to the modified behaviour
•**Discuss**: the group discuss their observations
•**Reflect**: a final review enables participants to process their learning

The form of this session is inspired by Augusto Boal's theatre of the oppressed[10]. The audience and players are given the opportunity to co-create an emergent alternative scenario based on the original role play as a way to investigate alternative ways to make sense of the underlying issue. Each group were first invited back to perform a one minute summary of their role-play to remind the audience what happened. Then the whole group discussed possible interventions and I, as facilitator, tried to choose one that was a small change in the behaviour of one player.

The interventions suggested by the audience at ILLL generally tended to diffuse tension present in the original role-plays by, for example, suggesting that one player should ask for more information before making a judgement. The interesting exception was the suggestion that one group who had performed their role-play in silent pantomime should try speaking. Though not a single change to the behaviour of one player, this seemed a small change and its effects were difficult to predict. The result was a richer interaction and the action proceeded differently than in the silent version as the group responded to the requests and responses voiced by the players.

10 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre_of_the_Oppressed

The medium of drama and role-play appeared to enable the group to express and enact issues of importance to them. Ground Truth staff suggested that the scenarios we saw enacted were not fictions but, in fact, specific occurrences from the history of the group. Interestingly, the discussions that followed these presentations did not appear to engage with the content at the same level as the role-plays themselves. This suggests that role-play as a medium may be a useful tool for dealing with topics that might otherwise be hard to work with through the medium of debate.

Day 3

The intention for the third day of ILLL was to give the participants experience in leading a learning experience for their peers. In practice this would mean that the some or all of each group would plan and lead a short training for the other participants into some aspect of their work in the Ground Truth projects. With a large group and a short time, it is hard to create an environment where everyone in each group can be actively involved in preparing and leading the learning process. The tensions in planning the day was between lots of very short sessions with one-to-one or small group learning, or fewer, longer sessions in which, necessarily, fewer participants would be actively involved in the planning and leading tasks. We decided to engage the whole group in planning the day and chose to create three training sessions of one and a quarter hours each, being led collaboratively by the whole of the knowledgeable sub-group in each case. This might not be the most effective way to give participants experience of learning leadership, but it has the advantage that it was arrived at with the whole group's buy-in.

Before tasking the groups with a short planning phase to choose what they would share with their learners and how they would do so, we revisited the assets from the previous day's processes including a list, on a flip-chart pad, of the qualities of and conditions for effective learning. Anticipating that the groups might, in their excitement for the training, fall back on established educational process, we reiterated some of the key conditions and qualities. I invited participants to create two *tableaux vivants*, one depicting two learners sitting side-by-side collaborating with some material between them (reflecting the third experiment with knot tying from the afternoon of the first day), and another depicting a teacher, standing, pointing out something on a board to a student, seated, looking up (reflecting our mock school experience from the morning of the second day). I asked the group to consider which picture their learning would look like. I also drew a picture on the flip-chart of the video cameras used by KNN and enacted a sing-song school-lesson about the naming of parts[11] of such a camera and asked them to consider what skill or ability their learners would be able to demonstrate if their learning were successful.

The groups spent a short time making a plan for their sessions and the rest of the day comprised delivery of each session followed by a retrospective review, following the established form and led by volunteers from the groups.

We understand that this may have been the first occasion on which the three groups actively engaged in sharing their areas of expertise with one another. ILLL provided a safe environment with context of learning excellence in which this took place. It also

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11 http://www.solearabiantree.net/namingofparts/namingofparts.html

provided the closed feedback loop of peer review, giving all participants to state what they noticed, what they learned and how they might wish to improve on the sessions they experienced.

In the feedback from the review sessions at least some participants reported learning key skills from the other groups.

VOK:

•"Learned how to submit a report via SMS and demonstrated it - because it's on the site MapKibera."

•"Everyone tried as much as possible to understand about the map."

•"The (GPS) tracker was making a drawing of your movement, [in] the lift it didn't show anything (it didn't see that direction)."

KNN:

⌒"Give youths a way to tell their own story, want to go wide and give others a chance to tell their story, dream."

⌒"Want to burn videos on CDs so can give out to the people in Kibera, working on plan to sell to big media houses."

⌒"After recording news, it can take time to edit it and take some time to do that."

We also heard a number of sound-bite learning experiences, such as:

•"If you are willing to learn you can learn a lot of things, but if you aren't you won't get anything."

Two groups experienced difficulty arising from using unfamiliar computers for the training. The software needed was not installed. Though we might consider this to be a failing of ILLL, in so far as we, as organisers, might have anticipated this and ensured all technical requirements were met, in fact it also serves as a valuable learning experience for the participants. Technical failure is a common problem in any workshop and planning around it (making sure the technology is in place and working, as well as having a backup plan for what to do if it fails anyway) is an important thing for a learning leader to have experience of. ILLL offered a safe place for our participants to experience this difficulty and to gave one another feedback on how they might have improved their own learning sessions.

Some general observations on the trainings may prove useful in planning future workshops similar to ILLL. But it is important to bear in mind that the success of ILLL lies not necessarily in the quality of the learning experiences that the participants created for one another during the workshop, but in the learning they experienced themselves *as leaders*. If all the learning sessions passed perfectly, little learning would occur. Each stumbling block encountered by the participants in the safe environment of ILLL, and which was fed back to the groups during their reviews, was a learning opportunity. That being said, facilitators of future workshops might benefit by being aware of the following:

•All three groups did allow time for their learners to work in small groups and to work together interactively. This might not have been actively planned — it might have

followed as a result of the ratios of active leaders to learners involved, but it is an important and valuable part of the process that is worth drawing attention to where it occurs (whether by intent or accidentally);

•Some groups already had some experience in training and this was visible during these sessions. They led their sessions along the lines of the other training sessions they have been involved in in the past (effectively re-using the prior planning);

•Much of the learning was improvised and not actually planned in much detail in advance. This was particularly in evidence when one group split into two to work on two laptop computers. The two sub-groups proceeded along different scripts. Whether or not it had been the intention of the leaders to create equivalent learning experiences for the two sub-groups, the feedback reflected that this had not been the case;

•It's a good idea to check equipment (e.g.: to check the necessary software is installed, etc.) before starting. This being said, we recommend that participants learn this for themselves, by experience, rather than being instructed round the issue by more experienced leaders;

•There is a tendency for skilled practitioners to demonstrate their skill, for example, showing learners what to do with a computer program. It is valuable for a learner to have the opportunity to perform the required tasks themselves and the ability to balance demonstration with giving space for practice is an important skill for a learning leader to develop;

•Despite an emphasis throughout ILLL on student-led learning, none of the groups obviously created a space for their learners to express what they were keen to learn. Practically, with the large learner groups, it would have been difficult for them to tailor the experiences for individual needs, but there is value in both following and leading (facilitative vs. authoritative) when creating a learning experience.