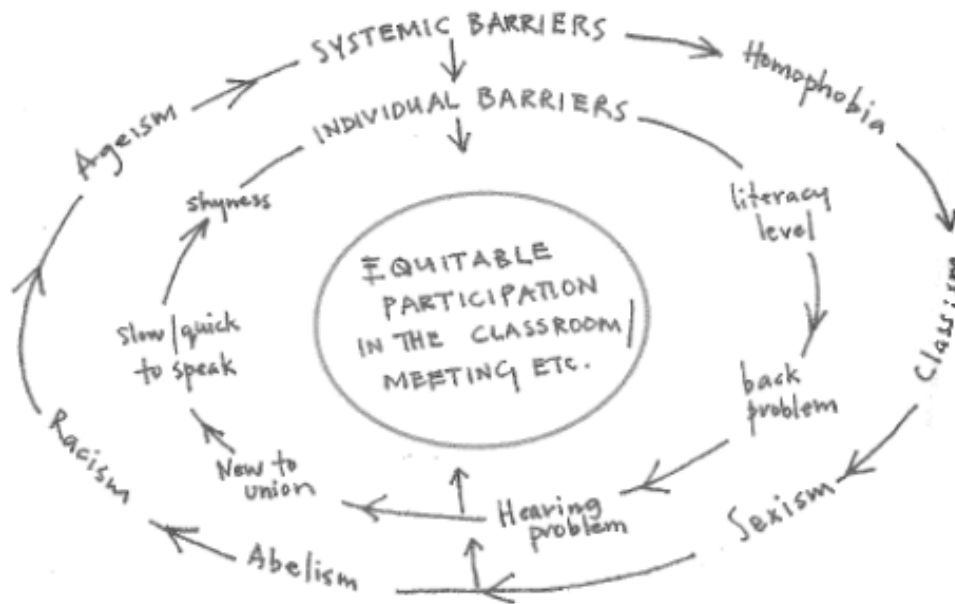


Trainer Essentials: Breaking Down Barriers to Participation

Barriers to Participation

Have you ever looked around a roomful of participants and asked not who is there, but who is not? At times, we unknowingly exclude participants because of the way we organize a workshop, the materials we choose to use, or the way we facilitate participation (Burke, Geronimo, Martin, Thomas, & Wall, 2002). By being conscious of the barriers that stop people from participating in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) education, we can take steps to ensure that our training is inviting and accessible for everyone.

Barriers to Participation



(Burke, Geronimo, Martin, Thomas, & Wall, 2002)

As shown in the above illustration, barriers to participation can be broken down into two broad categories: individual and systemic. The next sections discuss each of these categories in more detail.

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Individual Barriers

Individual barriers are about personal limitations. According to MacKeracher et al. (2006), there are different factors that contribute to individual barriers, including situational, dispositional (personality), academic and physical. Each of these factors are outlined below.

Situational factors include circumstances in a person's life that make it difficult for them to attend training. Situational factors can include:

- Multiple and competing roles in their work, family and community
- Availability of resources, including time, energy and money
- Support from their peers and family
- Distance, time and cost of travelling to training

Dispositional factors involve a person's attitude about themselves and learning generally. Dispositional factors include:

- Self-confidence
- Self-esteem
- Attitude towards learning
- Attitude towards the organization that is offering the workshop or learning opportunity

Academic factors are related to a person's ability to perform essential skills and their level of literacy. Examples include:

- Literacy and numeracy skills
- Critical and reflective thinking skills
- Attention and memory skills
- Learning disabilities

Physical factors are the physical limitations that can influence participation. These can include temporary ailments or permanent conditions such as:

- Impairments in vision, hearing or speech
- Disabilities that limit mobility
- Mental illness

By considering these different factors, it is possible to identify individual barriers that can prohibit someone from attending or participating fully in our workshops.

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Systemic Barriers

“Systemic” refers to something that is spread throughout – that affects a whole system or group of people. Systemic barriers include beliefs, policies, practices, or procedures that discriminate against certain groups of people. Common systemic barriers include sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, ageism, and ableism (Burke, Geronimo, Martin, Thomas, & Wall, 2002). These barriers involve discrimination against people because of their sex, race, class, sexual orientation, age, or ability.

Systemic barriers are part of the unconscious, and sometimes conscious, bias of people. They are written into policies, part of our practices, and influential in what we choose to include and exclude in our workshops. Systemic barriers can be identified and challenged when they are expressed openly, such as verbal insults. However, when they are hidden in our practices or policies, systemic barriers are difficult to identify. It takes deep analysis and discussion to find and change these hidden barriers.

The Connection between Individual and Systemic Barriers

Individual barriers are often caused or influenced by systemic barriers. For instance, as a result of sexism, women generally have fewer financial resources and more competing priorities. This limits the time and money they may have to participate in workshops. In another example of racism, the education system in some countries has been used to oppress indigenous people. They were punished if they spoke in their native language or practiced their traditions. As a result, these oppressed indigenous people may have negative memories of formal education, have low self-confidence and self-esteem, and be resistant to participating in other educational opportunities.

Addressing Barriers to Participation

Ensuring that your workshops are inviting spaces open to a broad range of participants begins before the workshop and continues throughout the workshop. Below is a checklist that you can use before and during your workshop to help reduce barriers to participation.

Before the Workshop:

Advertising

- News about the workshop is shared through a variety of communication channels (such as online, and with different community groups and organizations)

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Registration Process

- Options are available for people to register for the workshop at a variety of times and through different methods (such as in person, over the phone, and online)
- Registration forms are simple to fill out for people with low literacy
- The price of the workshop is affordable to the target population and a range of payment options have been provided

Time, Location and Accessibility

- The workshop location is a convenient distance from participants
- The workshop location can be easily accessed by public transportation or arrangements have been made to provide transportation for the participants
- The workshop location is accessible to people with disabilities (for example, in a wheelchair)
- The workshop space allows participants with visual or hearing impairments to be close to the focal point of the room
- The workshop has been scheduled at a time that is convenient for a variety of participants
- Child care services are available for the participants
- Participants have been consulted on their dietary needs
- Food options are available that cater to different dietary needs (for example, vegetarian)

During the Workshop:

Workshop introduction

- There is diversity amongst the trainers (such as people of a different race, class, gender)
- The trainer's words and body language are welcoming and respectful
- Ground rules are established that address respect for all participants and equal opportunities for participation
- Icebreaker activities are used to create comfort and safety amongst participants
- Participants are invited to speak with the trainer about any questions or concerns

During the workshop

- A variety of active learning techniques are used to engage a diverse group of participants
- Visual materials are created with a large font size that can be read easily at a distance by participants with visual impairments
- The trainer has checked to ensure that everyone can hear and see well
- Participants work in a variety of small and large groups with different people
- Participants are given the opportunity to take on a variety of roles in the workshop (such as observing, reporting back, leading discussions, providing information)

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- The trainer is conscious of power imbalances between individuals and groups, and works with participants to address the issues.
- The trainer is aware of the participants' cultural and religious practices, and makes allowances for these during the workshop where appropriate (such as prayer times, appropriate workshop openings and closings)
- The trainer is aware of cultural practices that may be oppressive or exclusionary toward specific groups, and strives to minimize these during the workshop or reduce their negative impact (for example, if women cannot speak in the presence of men, then they are given the chance to speak together in small groups)
- Disrespectful and discriminatory behaviour is addressed by the trainer without attacking the person responsible
- The trainer stops an activity to address any conflict and power imbalances
- Start and end times and breaks are respected by the trainer and participants

(Bentley & Bentley, 2005; Burke, Geronimo, Martin, Thomas, & Wall, 2002; Arnold, Burke, James, Martin, & Thomas, 1991)

We can minimize barriers and encourage meaningful participation through careful planning and oversight during our workshops. This does not mean conflicts and challenges will not arise. However if they do, the best way to handle them is by preparing strategies beforehand that you can use in the moment. See CAWST's *Trainer Essentials: Troubleshooting Guide* for ideas on how to address particularly challenging situations.

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