

“Types” of Facilitation

My stimulus for this article was “Just My Type, A Book About Fonts” by Simon Garfield. He mentions a talk by Beatrice Warde, a grand dame of typography, called, “The Crystal Goblet, or Why Printing Should Be Invisible.” Her thesis was that typography existed to convey ideas, not to draw attention to itself.

You can take a similar view to facilitating enquiries. When you hear P4Cers envying someone else’s facilitation skills, it’s usually because “She does it so that you hardly notice she’s doing anything.” For something to be “art concealing art”, there must of course be some art to conceal – and there are always some key moves that gently focus the enquiry and push for depth. But the facilitation is transparent, so that participants are more aware of each other’s thoughts than the facilitator’s moves. “Arial” facilitation requires humility as well as skill.

More active, obvious facilitation can also have a place, as can showy fonts – but you wouldn’t want a whole enquiry to run in *Informal Roman*. Extending the metaphor (and also hinting at how using metaphors in enquiries can set off new thinking), here are some “types” of facilitation to consider.

Arial Black – if you have to go into stern, teacher mode to address behaviour during an enquiry, how do you avoid that dampening the flow of ideas?

Century Gothic – Do you give enough space for reflection?

Comic Sans - How would participants explain a concept to a younger sibling? Helps to promote clarity.

Courier New - Twin with another class and “mail” each other questions.

Curly M1 – typographers would call this a “feminine” font. Does your facilitation favour one gender? Do you try to get boys to be empathetic but not girls to be competitive?

Jokerman – What is your attitude to laughter in an enquiry? Do you welcome it because it relaxes and leads to creativity, or do you think of it as irreverent?

Lucida Handwriting - Do you or someone else take notes during the enquiry? It gives a business like feel to it and can help with focus.

OCR A Std - How would you explain this concept to a computer?

Old English Text – Can you use something historical as a stimulus?

Papyrus – is there any permanent, written record of your enquiries that can be used for reflection in the future?

Prestige Elite Std - How do you deal with pupils who are more proficient at enquiry and continue to stretch and challenge them at the same time as involving others?

Times New Roman – How formal is your facilitation? Is the difference in your role explicit to the children, or might they still be inhibited to say what they think in front of teacher?

Traditional Arabic – What is the role of P4C for children from conservative, religious backgrounds? Should they be provided with opportunities to question their beliefs?

Wivaldi - Can you use music to establish a mood or signal shifts in the enquiry? Having music with a louder volume can encourage more animated discussion in groups. When you then turn it off, it's natural for people to quieten down.