

CHAPTER 2 ★

Facilitating vs. Teaching vs. Lecturing



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Unlocking
the
MAGIC
of
Facilitation

Unlocking the Magic of Facilitation:
11 Key Concepts You Didn't Know You Didn't Know
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Facilitating vs. Teaching vs. Lecturing

“The greatest sign of success for a teacher is to be able to say, ‘The children are now working as if I did not exist.’”

- Maria Montessori

A wise person once said, “If this is a book about facilitation, why is there a chapter about teaching and lecturing?” That person was our first-pass editor (and likely you). It’s a fair question. In the last chapter, we talked about the nuance of facilitation, and how facilitation is a tough subject to teach. Well, one of the ways we’re hoping to help you understand that nuance is by talking about two things that facilitation isn’t—but that it gets confused with, and are as integral to most training or learning experi-

ences as facilitation itself. And besides, what's more nuanced than talking about a thing by talking about what it isn't?

DIFFERENT METHODS WITH THE SAME GOAL: LEARNING

Although we identify as educators whose method of choice is facilitation, we also find ourselves putting on our teacher or lecturer caps. All three methods of achieving learning have their perks, and to know which is best when, we must first understand the differences among lecturing, teaching, and facilitating.

Two helpful things to consider when dissecting the differences among lecturing, teaching, and facilitating are (1) the levels of **agency** the educator and learners hold over the content covered; and (2) the level of **active participation** required by the educator and learners. Let's define these concepts so we're all on the same page:

Agency, in this case, can be thought of as the “capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices” (Wikipedia) for what content will be learned.

Active participation is the level at which the person is engaging the other people involved—vocally, externally, and in a way that affects the outcome of the overall learning.

More simply, agency is who is deciding what's learned, and participation is how that learning is achieved.

LECTURING: HIGH EDUCATOR AGENCY & PARTICIPATION, LOW LEARNER AGENCY & PARTICIPATION

Lecturing has achieved a negative connotation in most

social circles, but it is not without its value. Lecturing can be thought of as any time the educator is speaking directly to the learners in an uninterrupted way until their point is made. Beyond the bias that the word “lecture” evokes, our main concerns are that lecturing is often overused and sometimes not treated with enough care.

In lecturing, the educator has high agency over the content that will be covered, and also must be actively participating throughout the entire learning experience; whereas the learners have little to no agency, and little to no participation is required. This high level of educator agency and low learner participation is helpful when...

- ★ there is something really specific that needs to be learned, and the group cannot do without it;
- ★ you’re crunched for time and have a high level of content to cover;
- ★ the educator holds some specialized knowledge that the group likely does not; and/or
- ★ there is a highly disproportionate ratio of educators-to-learners (there’s a reason universities are full of lecture *halls*, not lecture closets).

Lectures are often thought to be long (or really, really, really long if you want to be melodramatic about it), but there is no set length that qualifies a lecture. To emphasize this, we want to introduce you to the idea of mini-lectures (or *lecturettes*, if you wanna gender *everything*), which are short lectures—generally no more than 5-10 minutes—that teach a specific, concrete point.

We use mini-lectures throughout trainings when we want to present a chunk of information before getting feedback or

taking questions. We like to thread them through other activities, or material that we also teach and facilitate. If you are hoping to accomplish a training that involves your group, you should avoid lecturing for all (or even most) of the time. Even if the training is incredibly short, back and forth is crucial for participants to feel included and important.

TEACHING: MEDIUM EDUCATOR AGENCY &
PARTICIPATION, MEDIUM LEARNER AGENCY &
PARTICIPATION

Teaching is the method of learning that we experience the most. It's often confused with lecturing, and is generally the go-to default for achieving a learning goal with a person or a group. While teaching has a lot of value, one of our goals with this book is to get you out of default-mode thinking, and push you to be intentional with all of your choices. Choosing when to (or when not to) teach is an important choice.

Teaching, in the context of a school room, often carries a power dynamic where one person is seen as the “Teacher,” meaning the person who holds the knowledge and the ability to disseminate that knowledge, and everyone else is seen as “Students,” those without knowledge who need to be taught. This way of thinking is what Paulo Freire calls the “banking model” of education, and while many school teachers (and school systems) ascribe to or perpetuate this form of teaching, it is not the type of teaching we’re referring to in this chapter. That understanding of teaching more aligns with what we describe above as lecturing.

In this chapter, we’re using “teaching” to describe a co-created relationship between educator and learner. Teaching, as opposed to lecturing, requires that the learner has buy-

in, the educator is ever conscious of the learners' wants and needs, and by frequently checking in with the learners, the educator gives the learners opportunities to ask for clarification, redirection, or a deeper understanding of a particular idea.

To put it more simply, one might say that lecturing is done *at* a learner, while teaching is done *with* or *for* a learner.

Teaching is the middle of the road on both the agency and active participation front. In teaching, the educator has medium agency and high active participation; the learner also has medium agency, and medium-to-low active participation. This medium of everything is perfect for learning goals that aren't too hot and aren't too cold. We recommend teaching when...

- ★ you have a sense of what material needs to be covered, but the group could live without everything, and you're able to head down a few rabbit holes if the group asks;
- ★ you have a few more minutes available than what it would take to just say all the things, but you don't have buckets of extra time;
- ★ you know a lot about a particular thing, but you also have a hunch that you're not the only one in the room who does; and/or
- ★ the group of learners is big, but not so big that you couldn't learn all of their names in a few minutes if you gave it a shot.

FACILITATING: LOW EDUCATOR AGENCY &
PARTICIPATION, HIGH LEARNER AGENCY &
PARTICIPATION

Now that you have a few different ways to think about

lecturing and teaching, you probably already have a strong hunch about what we're going to say about facilitating. And you're probably right: facilitating is everything that lecturing and teaching *isn't*. As we've moved through the three concepts using agency and participation as our anchors, you've likely noticed a trend: lecturing, teaching, and facilitation exist on a continuum of sorts, with lecturing and facilitation being polar opposites, while teaching is in between the two.

In facilitating, the educator has low agency over what content will be learned, and a low level of active participation; whereas the learners have a medium to high amount of agency, and a high amount of active participation is required for it to work. Facilitating is communism for learning: it's decentralized, it requires everyone's involvement, and Sam's uncle will get mad if you bring it up at Thanksgiving dinner.

Don't mistake the low educator agency and participation as a sign that the educator can check out. Facilitation requires an incredible amount of focus, intention, and engagement from the facilitator—even if they aren't doing most of the talking.

Facilitation is often activity-based. Activities prompt a group to participate in a scenario that is an abstract representation of the intended learning; then, through processing that scenario (i.e. talking about the experience), the learning is solidified. However, facilitation can take a variety of forms, including games, discussion, reflection, dialogue, and more.

This whole book is about facilitating, so we're not going to spend too much more time on it in this chapter, but there are a few times in particular we think facilitation is the bee's knees. Facilitating is perfect when...

- ★ you can leave most of the decision-making of the exact things the group will learn to the group itself;

- ★ you have plenty of time;
- ★ there is no doubt that the learners, as a community, already have some or most of the knowledge you're hoping to learn, and might just need some help realizing it, or organizing their way of thinking about what they already know; and/or
- ★ there isn't an overwhelming ratio of learners to educators, or you're able to easily convert some of the learners into educators (e.g., break the big group into smaller groups, and assign each group a facilitator of sorts).

KNOWING WHAT TO USE WHEN: CONSIDER REQUIREMENTS AND RESTRAINTS

There are countless recommendations we could make, beyond the ones we made above, about when it's right to lean on lecturing, teaching, or facilitating; but most of them would come down to our subjective bias (don't think we have to spell out what ours would be, considering the title and subtitle of this book). Instead, we recommend you consider the requirements and restraints of any learning situation, and then pick the method of engagement best for the moment.

In this case, the **requirements** are pre-determined learning outcomes or goals for the experience, the decisions about which are out of your hands. For example, answers to questions like "Are there specific ideas, concepts, or understandings that the learners *must know*?" would constitute requirements.

And by **restraints**, we mean the conditions around the

experience that are out of your hands. For example, the amount of time you have, the number of participants in the group, and the physical setting in which the learning will take place are a few possible restraints.

With the requirements and restraints in mind, the choice often makes itself. Knowing the differences among lecturing, teaching, and facilitating fall largely on agency and active participation, you'll often find yourself seeing that lecturing is great when there are a lot of, or very limiting, requirements and restraints; and facilitating is perfect when you have more wiggle room in both areas.

And when in doubt, know that it's totally okay, and totally recommended, to mix it up: variety is the spice of life, and sometimes you won't figure out the best method to achieve a particular learning outcome until you've tried a few different ones.

EDUCATORS? LEARNERS? FACILITATION BLURS THE DIFFERENCE.

If you think back to our primer on facilitation, you'll recall that one of our favorite things about facilitation is how the idea-exchange is not unidirectional. That is, the educators are learners, and the learners are educators. In this chapter, we've used the language of Educator and Learner as an intentional detour from our typical Facilitator and Participant, because we want to make clear that sometimes the facilitator is the one learning and the participants are the ones teaching. That is, in every scenario above (lecturing, teaching, and facilitating), the person serving as Educator could be you or someone else.

What's more, the methods that facilitators and partici-

pants have at their disposal when serving as educators are one and the same: both facilitators and participants can choose to lecture, teach, or facilitate. If this is getting too abstract, let's consider a typical training moment that incorporates all three methods of achieving learning, being employed by both the facilitator and the participants:

Facilitator: "Why do you think we just did that activity?"
[Facilitating]

Participant 1: "You wanted us to realize [...], because for our roles it's important to know [...]" *[Lecturing]*

Participant 2: to Participant 1 "Can you explain what you meant by [...]?" *[Facilitating]*

Participant 1: "I meant [...]. Is that more clear? Perhaps if you think of it like [...] it will help." *[Teaching]*

Facilitator: "Well said! And to put that another way, [...]"
[Teaching]

Facilitator: "There is also another reason I wanted us to do that activity: [...]" *[Lecturing]*

And now, to put our Authors of a Book About Facilitation Caps back on, we want to leave you with this challenge: though it may be difficult, we believe it's possible to achieve the learning of pretty much any content through facilitation. And throughout this book, we hope to show you how.



One Book *Four Ways*

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