

Teacher as Facilitator

The teacher's role is to guide and assist students as they take on more responsibility for their learning. Teacher as a facilitator requires a change in standard teaching approaches. This approach can be combined with other strategies.

Appropriate Student Level: Any Level

Suggested Class Size: 3 – 100+

Ease of Use Rating: Moderate

Activity Description:

Envision the class as a 'social-system' that requires direction not instruction. With as little explanation or direction as possible present the class with a problem, concept or idea and an expectation about a final result or objective.

The problem should:

- Be well-conceived
- Meet course/class objectives
- Be appropriate for the time allotted
- Require collaboration and discussion

Students should discuss in small groups or pairs to arrive at the final answer – the teacher should circulate from group to group listening, answering questions and redirecting where necessary. Final answers can be submitted in written or oral formats.

Facilitating learning may take many forms. The purpose of the facilitation is to move the responsibility for learning from the instructor to the student. One way to do this is give the students an explicit list of "learning objectives" for classroom sessions, reading assignments and homework assignments — the list contains concepts that are important for them to learn from the assigned exercise. The list establishes a framework into which the students fit bits of knowledge as they encounter them. Another benefit is that the list also forces the instructor to keep the classroom sessions on target. Rather than providing a brain dump that is known about a particular topic, focus is on the listed concepts. If lecturing, put the list on the board and check off each concept as they are discussed (Liebman, 1996).

Something to keep in mind, to make this method active students need to learn to self assess whether they understand the concepts or not. The self-assessment may or may not be instructor guided. There may be a need to help students assess their learning initially and then allow them to work independently as the semester progresses. Simply, listing objectives and checking them off doesn't necessarily have impact on student learning – particularly if the objectives aren't well conceived.

References:

- Herrick, Richard S. (1999) "Using data pooling to measure the density of sodas: An introductory discovery experiment" Journal of Chemical Education, 76(10); pg. 1411
- Liebman, J.S. (1998) "Will This Be On the Test" OR/MS Today - February 1998 - Issues in Education <http://www.lionhrtpub.com/orms/orms-2-98/issuesined.html>
- Neville, Alan J. (1999) "The problem-based learning tutor: Teacher? Facilitator? Evaluator?" Medical Teacher, 21(4); pg. 393