**Facilitating vs. Teaching**

*by Philip DeVol with Rubén Pérez*

This paper is for facilitators of *Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin’-By World* and other books in the Getting Ahead series. It builds on information about how to be a facilitator found in the Facilitator Notes and User Guides. Most adults tend to be more familiar with the role of teacher than the role of facilitator, so in the following table we draw attention to key differences between the two methodologies.

The following material is not intended to discredit or minimize the vital role of teachers; rather, it is presented in order to show the importance of the facilitating stance in the Getting Ahead work. Indeed, the success and value of Getting Ahead stem largely from the skills of the facilitators.

| **Elements** | **Facilitating** | **Teaching** |
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| Mindset about role | Discussions.  Investigators are the center of attention.  Investigators are the experts about their own lives and community; the facilitator acts as the “guide by your side” and builds on the investigators’ knowledge base.  The facilitator is also a co-investigator, learning along with the rest of the group.  Eye contact is spread evenly among all investigators and the facilitator. | Lectures.  The teacher is the center of attention.  Is the expert on the topic and acts as the “sage on the stage,” developing lesson plans that direct the course of study.  Has the answers.  Eyes are to be on the teacher. |
| Method | Small groups; investigators work as a team with the facilitator.  Use of *Getting Ahead* workbook activities: scenarios, group activities.  The facilitator has indirect control of the class and activities; the facilitator and investigators share responsibility for the success of the learning experience.  Investigators learn through agenda-free explorations and discussions.  Investigators decide what is right for them and set their own goals. | Large classroom; students work individually under the teacher’s direction.  Use of textbooks, PowerPoints, handouts, videos.  The teacher has direct control of the class and activities—and is responsible for the success of the learning experience.  Students learn through directed, goal-oriented activities.  Learning objectives and goals are predetermined. |
| Focus on knowledge | The facilitator allows the group to make learning discoveries.  Does not do for adult learners what they can do for themselves; the facilitator and investigators learn from and with the group. | The teacher direct-teaches the material.  Provides answers and offers handouts, PowerPoints, and videos to illustrate points. |
| Behaviors and environment | Information radiates from the investigators.  Sessions are conducted in a safe, intimate, calm setting; the facilitator sits at the table with the investigators.  The facilitator attends to sequencing of key concepts in Getting Ahead and helps make abstract topics more concrete.  Participates as a group member by taking a turn at reading, writing on charts, creating group rules.  Speaks as much as or less than other group members.  Encourages investigators to draw conclusions from their investigations. | Information radiates from the teacher.  Sessions are conducted in a classroom; the teacher stands in front of the group or sits at the head of the table.  The teacher leads the learning process, which often has linear development.  Leads the activities and does the writing on charts and creation of mental models.  Speaks much more than students.  Seeks “correct” answers. |
| Listening | The facilitator is an active listener, encourages investigators to tell personal stories, and asks the group to respond to elements of the stories in order to draw out new learnings. | The teacher allows students to speak but seldom uses their stories as part of the learning process. |
| Silence | The facilitator accepts silence, allows silence to be broken by investigators, and checks with the group about the meaning of the silence. | The teacher usually fills silence with talk. |
| Introduction to new unit or module | The facilitator poses questions relevant to the learning objectives and helps surface experiences to make connections to the new material. | The teacher tells the students why the unit is important and what they will learn from it. |
| Investigator input and stories | The facilitator asks the group to pose questions in order to reflect, analyze, and speak with deeper understanding relevant to the module; encourages investigators to speak more; and participates in the ensuing dialogue but doesn’t dominate the discussion. | The teacher acknowledges the students’ comments and adds his/her own comments and reflections; both the teacher and the students tend to “monologue.”  Tells the students how the topic and story or comments are related to the topic. |
| Disagreements | The facilitator grants permission to agree or disagree, acknowledges that opinions change over time, and recognizes that views may change even during Getting Ahead itself.  The facilitator models acceptance and a calm temperament. | The teacher seeks to find and state the “right” answer—and often corrects students. |
| Measures and outcomes | In Getting Ahead the key outcomes are:   * Agency and empowerment: Did the investigators take charge of their lives, their future stories? Did they become engaged with their community as problem solvers? * Stability and resources: Did the lives of the investigators become more stable? Did they build resources?   The content in Getting Ahead consists of tools that investigators use to make changes in their lives. | Mastery of the content of the class. |

“In looking at the differences, you may notice that one of the biggest changes is the change in focus from the educator to the student. While one may argue that the students were always the ‘focus’ of education, many educators have trouble giving up the teaching role for reasons of identity, tradition, security or even ego.” –Daniel Limmer, <http://www.emsworld.com/blog/12083494/teaching-vs-facilitating>

Facilitating offers you the opportunity to help empower others by establishing, then nurturing, an environment where people find and use their own voice.