

Teaching vs. Facilitating Science of Mind Classes

Those who sign up for our classes are interested in knowing how new ideas relate to what they already know. They can then create a framework with which they make sense of the new information. As instructors we are both teachers and facilitators.

We are teachers in that we have a background of study and understanding of the spiritual principles of Science of Mind that we wish to offer the participants in our classes. We are facilitators in that we are aware that each participant already has their own answers. Our job is to create an environment and provide the support that participants need to find the answers within themselves that already exist.

Facilitation allows the participants a chance to understand the concepts in the context of their own lives. Each of us are individual spiritual seekers and as such, our learning is beautifully rich and diverse. By using facilitation instead of teaching, we honor that diversity. Below are some of the differences between the two techniques.

Teaching

- Responsibility for learning is on the teacher.
- The emphasis is on what students ought to/should learn.
- The mind set is that the teacher is the one who has the knowledge. The teacher does a majority of the talking, with the students listening or taking notes. Two-way communication is often restricted.
- The teacher is the focal point of the lesson, determining the direction, content and conclusion.
- There are right and wrong answers. Students may be corrected. "You might want to use the word _____ instead of the word you used because _____".
- Brain research has shown that people shut down intellectually and emotionally when learning doesn't feel safe. Having right and wrong answers, or having no time to question what isn't understood, may lead to shutting down.

Facilitating

- Responsibility for learning is on the student.
- The emphasis is on how students learn.
- The mind set is that everyone has knowledge; we learn from each other. The facilitator encourages the students' awarenesses to emerge by setting the context for and focusing the dialog on ideas or new concepts and supporting questioning and interaction.

- There is active exploration, sharing information and participative involvement for everyone. The facilitator is responsible for managing the process by balancing participation, keeping the dialog within the boundaries of the context, and keeping the dialog focused on the topic.
- There are no right or wrong answers. The facilitator gently guides the dialog using encouraging questions and statements like, "Interesting concept! What do the rest of you think? Can anyone add to that? What do you think about this?"
- The Facilitator creates a climate of trust, understanding and cooperation.

Each class lesson has a lesson plan and overall objectives. The objectives are the main concepts we want the students to understand. There are usually 3-4 objectives in each lesson. The curriculum generally includes more than one way to cover the objectives. For both teaching and facilitation, it's important to thoroughly understand the objectives for each lesson.

Teaching

- The emphasis is on covering the entire curriculum.
- There tends to be a need to follow the lesson plan closely even though strong curriculum contains much more than can easily be covered in one class.
- There may be a tendency to "read" parts of the workbook or textbook in class, even though the students have already read it as homework. Reading the workbook is counter-productive; it only serves to discourage them from reading the material prior to class.
- There may be a more rigid concern for time, "We have to move on, we have a lot to cover." Teachers often feel rushed. They are concerned when students want to open up a discussion for fear they won't hit all the points in the lesson.

Facilitating

- The emphasis is on the objectives.
- The facilitator picks and chooses which points in the lesson they will use to cover the objectives. He or she is open to going in an entirely new direction that may emerge from the class if that direction will lead to covering the objectives.
- Instead of reading the workbook the facilitator is more apt to ask questions like, "Which parts of this section caught your attention? Can you tell us why? Anyone have more to add? How was this part similar to our previous reading?"
- Time is more relaxed when the focus is on the main objectives instead of each point in the lesson.
- Students tend to be more engaged.
- Facilitators make use of small group (2-4 students) discussion.
- A feeling of community is built because students hear from each other.

- Quiet participants are drawn out with statements such as, "I'd like to hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet," or "Susan, has that ever been your experience?"
- Students are given an option to "pass" when called upon. Allowing participants to "pass" relieves the pressure some feel to contribute. If there is a student who rarely speaks, facilitators find a question that the student will be comfortable with and ask it when the time is right, gently drawing them out.

Those in our Science of Mind classes break wide open with the dynamics of facilitation! In whole group discussion concepts are presented in terms that are easily understood – no jargon unless the jargon itself is explained. Ask leading questions such as, "Who can tell me about a time this may have been true for you?" or "How does this compare to the work you did for homework?" Encourage participants to direct their answers to the class, not to the facilitator, and this opens up lively discussions. It allows participants to make sense of what they are discovering.

If there is a question that is totally off-topic but important, investigate it. It's part of being flexible – the curriculum can be adjusted to fit the situation. Part of the joy of working with adults is asking, "This is not part of tonight's subject, but it appears to be worth investigation. Are you okay with pursuing this discussion for a few minutes?" Invariably the answer is yes. If the discussion blossoms and could take longer, I ask them again. When people have a say it gives them buy-in to the learning that takes place.

Anytime a question or a real-life situation opens us up for revelation, that's a teachable moment. Jump at them! If someone is in crisis a facilitator may turn a portion of the lesson into how to pray for another. In doing so we are nurturing the one in crisis, we are building community and we are putting our spiritual principles and tools to work in everyday life.