
Introduction

This final volume in *The Active Classroom Series* is intended to help anyone who works with educators in a training capacity. At the outset, I want to make the distinction between speakers and presenters, and between presenters and workshop facilitators.

Over the years, I have seen and heard (in person, or on tape or CD) many powerful speakers. I chose many of them because I wanted to hear what they had to say on a particular topic. On many occasions, I chose them because I wanted to hear *how* they said what they had to say. It is a pleasure to listen to good speakers; I find I can often learn a great deal from them on two levels: content and process. The speaker's job is to inform, inspire, entertain, and to cause me, perhaps, to think about the issues she brings to the speaker's platform. On those occasions, I am an attendee; as such, my role is to sit and listen. If I choose to think and reflect on what is being said, so much the better. The speaker is the one doing most of the (visible) work, and my role is (predominantly) passive.

The transition from speaker to presenter, as I define it, requires the introduction of several elements. This may include an extensive use of electronic slides and other visual imagery. The presenter is much more likely to avoid the lectern as he moves around the room. Presenters may well involve the audience in conversation and activities, but it is still the presenter who is doing the lion's share of the work. I have presented to thousands of elementary and secondary educators over the years, and in the early years I exhausted myself in an attempt to "educate them" about this or that program or topic. I told jokes, sang, danced, pulled a rabbit out of a hat—and otherwise expended energy in prodigious amounts. What I *did not do* was involve them deeply in the learning process. I was doing most of the work; once again, they were attendees whose primary task was to sit and listen.

In a workshop with a good facilitator, the whole training landscape changes. In a great workshop, 80% of the work is done *not* by the facilitator *but by those in attendance*. A well-run workshop is composed of the facilitator and participants—and *participants participate*. I believe that good facilitators need to get their workshop participants standing, moving, pairing, sharing, explaining, describing, and getting to know several participants whom they did not know when they arrived—*all in the first 20 minutes*. This early engagement sets the tone for the workshop; it communicates clearly that the role of those in attendance is going to be active—*not passive*. The role of the person in charge of process is to facilitate that process in such a way that participants are properly and effectively supported, encouraged, involved, and fully engaged in their own learning.

Good facilitators spend time building a reflective capacity among workshop participants that may well accompany them back to their buildings. Getting participants to think, reflect, and learn does not necessarily involve a lot of electronic gadgetry; three of the most effective workshop facilitators I have ever seen used nothing but a large, black marker and endless sheets of chart paper. These outstanding facilitators understand that learning is about making connections, reflecting on what we already know, and combining what we know with new information in order to create new knowledge and understanding. It is the *mind* that makes this possible, and it is the job of the facilitator to engage the minds of participants from the outset. When the opening bell tolls in a speech, it tolls for the speaker. When the opening bell tolls in a presentation, it tolls for the presenter. When the opening bell tolls in a *workshop*, it tolls for the participants, and *everything the facilitator does from the first five seconds forward says that a workshop is not a spectator sport*.

In every workshop facilitator, there is much of the speaker and a good deal more of the presenter. Facilitators lecture, tell stories, explain, and entertain. They also listen, question, think out loud, challenge the thinking of participants, and facilitate countless reflective conversations. Their workload should consist of 20% of the total work. The remaining 80% is done by the participants, with the facilitator's invaluable assistance as a facilitator of process. In the hands of a good facilitator, participants will walk away with much more in the way of information, knowledge, and skills. The three most important skills developed in a good workshop relate to communication, reflective thinking, and collaboration.

Most of the communication from a speaker flows in one direction, from the speaker to the audience. This is fine, since the object is to deliver information and provoke thought. A good presenter makes

that information and communication flow a *two*-way street. She may be skilled at answering questions and talking with members of the audience. In the hands of a skilled workshop facilitator, interaction is simultaneous—with participants talking and reflecting in pairs and groups—and it is frequent. Those conversations promote thinking and provide opportunities for participants to adjust their thinking. This constant interaction exposes participants to new ideas and different perspectives. Along the way, participants get to move, and not just sit. This increases blood flow to the brain, and it releases neurotransmitters (think dopamine and serotonin) that make thinking possible.

The Active Workshop contains much that will help speakers, presenters, and workshop facilitators alike. There are frequent—and fully intentional—references to classrooms. Well-facilitated workshops for educators should operate as efficient laboratories for elementary, secondary, and college classrooms. The most powerful professional development available to teachers should take place *in their own classrooms*, where teachers determine to act less like speakers and presenters and more like workshop facilitators. What those facilitators do to help teachers should be only one step removed from what teachers do, in turn, to help their students. What is experimented with in a workshop can be, when the opportunity is right, experimented with in the classroom.

Finally, Michael Fullan (2010) makes two pertinent points about organizations and progress. He says that “to get anywhere, you have to *do* something,” and “in doing something, you need to focus on developing skills” (p. 32). Workshop facilitators can help educators develop communication, critical thinking, and collaboration skills that can then be transferred to classrooms all over the United States. I haven’t mentioned subject-area content yet, but I believe, with Lipton and Wellman (2000), that “process skills and content are not easily separated” (p. 5). Each supports the other, and “explicit strategy instruction is as important as explicit content instruction” (p. 5). In workshops and classrooms alike, process and content combine to promote powerful learning. Good workshop facilitators are in a position to be able to assist with that combination by choosing the right strategy for the right job.