The Role of the Facilitator in Adult Learning: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective

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1. Question for You

What is your best **intellectual take-away** from this conference?

1. **Think** and take notes (2 minutes, silence)
2. **Share** with someone you don’t know (2 x 3 minutes)
3. We’ll **hear** from a couple of you (2 minutes)
2. The One-Way Street of Adult Learning

- Presentations immobilize and, eventually, bore most people
- Yet, this is the default mode of adult learning
- A lecturer delivers content
- Act as a facilitator of people’s learning process (Ravn, 2014)
- Like the Buzz Dyads, Silent Reflection, and Sharing in the Large Group
- A learning facilitator involves students in tasks that combine the material presented with their own interests and experience – and they do it together
- Especially important for adult learners: experience + professional focus
3. Why is Learning Facilitation a Good Idea?

- Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2011) posits three psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness.
- A PowerPoint presentation easily frustrates all three:
  - Autonomy: Lecturer decides topic and holds forth
  - Competence: Students’ experience and skills are irrelevant
  - Relatedness: Students are not allowed to interact (“Hush!”)
- A facilitated process (like the one we did) reverses this:
  - Autonomy: Participants get to think and talk about their own interests
  - Competence: They sharpen their thinking by having to present it to peer
  - Relatedness: They meet a stranger
4. Other Facilitated Learning Processes for Professionals

- **Swirl and Swap** (30 minutes): In a roomful of strangers, everyone meets a new person every five minutes and presents their interests – and, if possible, refer the partner back to someone they just met with similar interests (Hansen, 2007).

- **The Knowledge Exchange** (60 minutes). 20 professionals in a circle. Each has a minute to tell about a challenge and a resource. Then everyone finds someone they can help or use, in groups of 2-3, in 2-3 rounds. (Ravn, 2016)

- **Two Consultants, Free of Charge** (30 minutes): “A” presents a professional challenge. “B” and “C” listen, then generate and share ideas on how “A” may tackle his challenge, while A listens silently. Then they all talk, but “A” must not address useless ideas. 30 minutes. (Elsborg and Ravn, 2007)

- **Ability Spotting**: “A” tells “B” about a successful effort. “B” listens and writes down the special talents that “A” evidenced. “B” explains each to “A” (McAdam & Lang, 2003)
5. Research Proposition

- Facilitated learning processes for adult learners work in so far as they satisfy learners’ psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness.

- Research plan: **Re-do previous intervention research** on learning conferences which showed that when facilitated, conferences produced greater learning and other positive outcomes (Ravn & Elsborg, 2011). Now include survey on psychological needs.

- Hypothesis: **Need satisfaction moderates outcomes.**

- Refinement: As a control, do “student exercises” that look like facilitated involvement but only have the students **go through the hoops** in a pressured and inauthentic manner.

- Ergo: Facilitating processes only produces results **if done respectfully** and with a view to people’s skills, i.e., aligned with SDT psych’l needs
6. Contribution to SDT

- SDT tends to do need support in **dyads**.
- **Social and cultural contexts** are considered increasingly, but who is the agent. Who does this?
- A **facilitator** provides for the needs of tens or hundreds of people.
- A **professor** can lecture to 300 students, but how do you engage their psychological needs properly?
- **By facilitating them** – and not just by children’s gaming, like Cooperative Learning, but by knowledge sharing processes devised for grown-ups – such as those presented previously.
8. References (b)


7. References (a)


Thank you for your attention!