

# Facilitation Theory

## General

Facilitation theory, sometimes also called *facilitative teaching*, is a [humanist approach to learning](#), developed during 1980s by an influential American psychologist [Carl Rogers](#) and other contributors and is best described in his own words:

- **“we cannot teach another person directly; we can only facilitate his learning.”**<sup>1)</sup> “We know ... that the initiation of such learning rests not upon the teaching skills of the leader, not upon his scholarly knowledge of the field, not upon his curricular planning, not upon his use of audio-visual aids, not upon the programmed learning he utilizes, not upon his lectures and presentations, not upon an abundance of books, although each of these might at one time or another be utilized as an important resource. No, the facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities which exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner.”<sup>2)</sup>

## What is facilitation theory?

Rogers' first significant area of interest was psychology and psychotherapy where since 1940s he started to apply a *client-centered therapy* which promotes trying to help or counsel the client viewing the problem through his eyes. In the second half of the 1960s he started to promote a similar approach for learning and the educational process. His starting beliefs were that people are by nature good and healthy and that every living creature strives to do best from his existence (*the actualizing tendency*).

In his works, Rogers addresses two kinds of learning<sup>3)</sup> introduced by earlier theorists<sup>4)</sup>:

- **rote learning**, referring to meaningless memorization of facts, and
- **experiential learning** in everyday life, which has meaning and personal relevance. It is the result of a natural curiosity, and a recognized importance of the learned material, often acquired through doing, or at least facilitated by student's active participation in the learning process, and often self-initiated. Still, this kind of knowledge is difficult to communicate to another.

Rogers' theory therefore sees the **teacher** as the key role in the process of learning, but not as a walking textbook transmitting its contents, but as the **facilitator** of learning. The facilitation here occurs through the teacher's attitudes in his personal relationship with the students. Rogers suggests three attitudinal qualities necessary for facilitative practice (both in counseling and education). These so called *core conditions* are:

- **Realness.** “It means that he [the teacher] is **being himself**, not denying himself.”<sup>5)</sup> The teacher has to be a real person **aware of his feelings** and able to communicate them appropriately, no matter how exactly does he feel. He should not be just a role in the play of education, ““a faceless embodiment of a curricular requirement or a sterile tube through which knowledge is passed from one generation to the next.”<sup>6)</sup>
- **Acceptance** (*acceptance or trust*). This refers to teacher's **caring about the student** and his

acceptance of student's feelings (one that support learning as well as ones disturbing it). It is the trust and **prizing of his capacity and abilities** as a human being.

- **Empathy.** Empathy means being able to *walk in others shoes*. This means that a teacher can understand student's perspective on the process on learning and his reactions from the inside. The accent here is on *understand*, not *judge* or *evaluate*.

Other tasks of teachers include establishing a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom and thereby facilitating learning and acquisition of new ideas by reducing external factors. A facilitative teacher should also be open to new ideas, listen to students, pay as much attention to his relationship with the students as he does to the content he is teaching, encouraging learners to take responsibility for their learning and actions and to take self-evaluation as the highest form of evaluation. He should also use **class feedback** for further improvements.

Still, not all of the work during the educational process can be done by the teacher. Its **effectiveness** does **depend on the learner** as well. In order to contribute to their own learning, students should be:

- **aware of the facilitative conditions** implemented for their benefit,
- **aware that the problem** to be learned is realistic, relevant and meaningful
- **motivated**, since motivation is, according to Rogers, a tendency towards self-actualization present in all healthy individuals.

If all the necessary conditions are satisfied, *"learning becomes life, and a very vital life at that. The student is on his way, sometimes excitedly, sometimes reluctantly, to becoming a learning, changing being."*<sup>7)</sup>

## What is the practical meaning of facilitation theory?

Rogers' theory, as stated, has rather clear implementation goals, yet they are not always so easy to introduce to the classroom. Establishing a close contact with the students, getting to know them and offering them empathy and support requires a great amount of effort from teachers, who mostly ignore this side of educational process and orientate only on knowledge they are supposed to pass to the students.

Advice for implementing the the *core conditions* are the following:

- **Realness.** Being real does not mean to release all the frustrations and anger on the students. That kind of teacher should not be in the classroom at all. **"The attitudes being expressed in being real must be attitudes of respect, warmth, caring, liking and understanding."** The teacher must not pretend to be all-knowing and perfect, since the students know that can't be the truth.
- **Acceptance.** Teachers should **prize all students** not for their positive/negative characteristics, but because they are all valuable human beings. This prizing can manifest as listening to what students are saying, but not necessary as listening to evaluate, but **listening** to learn his **ideas, thoughts** and **feelings**. Students need to feel free to explain their thoughts. Prizing can also manifest through responding to what the students say.
- **Empathy.** Empathy enables teacher to understand the reasons that led the student to certain behavior or an answer, but also to understand his emotional situation that needs to be solved in

order to enable significant learning.

## Keywords and most important names

- **facilitation theory, facilitative teacher, realness, acceptance, empathy**
- [Carl Rogers](#)

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## Read more

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1)

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2)

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3)

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4)

See for example Ausubel's [Assimilation Theory](#)

5), 6), 7)

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