

# Teaching for Transformation in Agile Learners

## Three Primary Teaching Styles

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Teaching for transformation has three broad teaching styles with almost as many nuances as teachers. First get a good, basic grasp of these three, then adapt to fit your unique personality and preference and audience.

1. **Directive Teaching for Transformation:** The expert teacher prepares the “food” for consumption and then delivers it through directive, one-way teaching or preaching. This is the most common style we think of when we say “teach,” like most preaching in churches and teaching in schools, podcasts and lectures. It functions best with a highly gifted, interesting, expert teacher who can hold us in rapt attention. Many of us have learned a great deal through this learning norm of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, if we have taken initiative to put into practice what we have heard.

This teacher-centric method is certainly valid, demands the most time for training and may take decades to learn well. At times it may be the most effective style for highly motivated learners, especially when time is short, and information is unique or specialized. Interestingly, this may also be most effective for less motivated learners in order to draw them in. This style is more content-based, although excellent communicators use this to effectively rally the troops. According to some studies, we normally retain only 5%-10% of what we only read or hear, so it’s also limited for lifelong *life*-learning and doing.

2. **Discussion Teaching for Transformation:** A teacher prepares a subject or passage and brings it to the group. Through guided questions, the teacher then draws from the passage salient truth for the learners...usually from the teacher’s viewpoint. This is also expert-driven teaching, centered around the teacher’s preparation.

This style has a shorter learning curve to teach well, so we multiply teachers more quickly. This style adds much value because of participation by the members. However, since each person can only bring what they have previously learned in the past, it limits our scope and tends to slow down growth for shy learners. The group interaction may however spark fresh in-group insight.

Many have been helped through this popular style. This teaching style ranges from purely *inductive* learning (all questions; no direct input from the teacher) to where the teacher as one of the participants adds short “bursts” of teaching (my preference). Because we convey less information in the same amount of time compared to **directive** teaching, normally the lesson plan centers around **one** key thought to convey. Learning normally increases because of the group give-&-take in community.

3. **Discovery Teaching for Transformation:** Certainly, the goal in all healthy teaching is *discovery*. It’s proper though to ask if teaching has truly occurred if **no** learning takes place. This style incorporates cutting-edge learning and brain studies that point to a more effective way to position learners to discover insights for themselves. Next week’s lesson is prepared in advance, outside the group by as many as will. This “*flipped learning*” (pre-preparing what we dialogued about) provides each learner with increased opportunities to see fresh insights and to put truth into practice in some way **before group** time, even in small, incremental ways. The priority has now shifted from more knowing to a *Both/And/And* approach to knowing, doing and experiencing truth.

Each week, we have opportunities for seven new 24/7 learning adventures since God’s mercies are new each morning! Although leaders are one member in the group, each member shares with very short “bursts” since our primary goal is to equip and release learning in one another. We all aim to come as both teachers and learners. I encourage leaders to “*study for yourself and teach for others.*” Study as deeply as you wish, but only bring what is helpful for the group.

***Which is the best style to use as we are teaching for transformation?***

I value all three styles of teaching and have used all three effectively, so it depends.

“*What do you want to accomplish by teaching?*”

What is your end goal? All three styles are completely valid and have been greatly used in the church over the centuries. However, each is designed to accomplish different results.

Is the group a larger group of highly motivated learners with a more difficult subject? Then I prefer a well-trained teacher who has studied the subject in some detail. I will take what I hear and put it into practice personally with ***directive teaching.***

<b>Three Main Styles of Teaching</b>				
<b>Teaching Styles</b>	<b>Led by...</b>	<b>Group Size</b>	<b>Participation</b>	<b>Learner's Prior Prep</b>
Directive	Teacher	No Limit	None/Little	None
Discussion	Teacher	5-20	Active	None
Discovery	Group	3-6	Active	Full

Is it a group of any size of non-believers or believers with lower current motivation? Then give me an inspiring ***directive*** style to light a fire.

Is it a smaller group, perhaps with non-Christians or new Christians who have little Bible knowledge to bring? Then I prefer the guided style of ***discussion*** to help people move along the continuum toward new life and growth through Bible-focused discipleship.

Is it a smaller group of 3-6 with a commitment to pre-prepare because of a high desire to become lifelong *life-learners* and doers? I would choose a ***discovery teaching*** style.

*Of course, I admit that that this is my personal opinion, and the question is open to discussion.*

My opinion though comes from the three primary goals I see for teachers. *First*, to equip and release life-related Bible learning and doing in others to make radical disciples. *Second*, to develop a “soil” in community conducive to flourishing spiritual growth. *Three*, to multiply effective teachers since anything with life reproduces (2 Timothy 2:2). Make learning active by adding your own goals for teaching.

*What’s your aim as you teach?*

Primarily that you present well? Only that they learn info? Mostly that there’s relational connection? Or more holistic? Be honest with yourself. If you want to improve as a teacher, identify the baseline where you presently are.

Biblical knowledge without doing and experiencing its Reality in life ends up deceiving us (James 1:22). The head is for knowledge gathering. The heart is for experience gathering as we put knowledge into practice. For authentic heart-change, metabolize knowledge into experience, just as food is metabolized into energy.

According to some studies (see free PDF ***90% High Leverage Learning***), we normally retain only 5%-10% of what we only read or hear. and **70%** of what we do (up to 90% retention if we also pass it along to another). If this is even close to accurate, why would we deliberately focus on a style that returns 5%-10% when 70% up to **90%** is available.

If our goal is to maximize LifeChange by teaching for transformation in community and multiplying leaders, then I suggest encouraging the group to shift to more *discovery* type teaching and learning. My web page, *Mining God's Word*, attempts to equip Christians to learn this way.,

As we develop such a learning "soil" together, my experience is that *discovery* is most conducive for healthy, lifelong life-learning. Each person takes responsibility to bring to the community "*fresh bread*" from what each learned from the passage this week, like in 1 Corinthians 14:23. This personalizes active learning since each person is unique. Each prepares at the level they are presently able, putting truth into practice (perhaps only in a small way) and ideally passing along one idea to another this week.

Now primary learning happens *during the week*, and the results are brought back to debrief in the group as a treasure to the learning community. This type learning is more free-flowing, with a give-&-take focused around question/answer like Jesus (in the temple at twelve, Luke 2:46-47, and the hundreds of questions Jesus asked). "*Each one teach one*" so every person comes as both a learner and a teacher. The dynamics of the natural learning community is now the center, rather than one gifted teacher.

Two great tools to unleash creativity and the self-learning process in people are the art of listening and the art of asking/answering questions. Notice, both are learnable skills. Note the activities when Jesus learned in the temple at twelve.

After three days [his parents] found him in the temple courts, **sitting** among the teachers, **listening** to them and **asking** them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his **understanding** and **his answers** (Luke 2:46-47, **emphasis** added).

Jesus was *sitting* in a group learning environment *listening*, *asking questions*, and *answering questions* with *understanding*. Luke sketches this simple model for natural teaching and learning that Jesus practiced...listening and asking/answering questions.

*How does this stack up with what you and I have experienced in learning?*

A listening heart prepares an understanding mind! The only time we cannot learn is when we forfeit our listening hearts as lifelong life-learners. Look at the healthy description of Jesus' life a few verses later, certainly in part a result of this healthy, simple, natural learning style.

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Lk 2:52).

### **Where Do I Go from Here?**

1. For *Directive Teaching*, if you feel drawn there by the Spirit, go for it. I've been trained to preach, and have for a number of years, but that's not my wheelhouse. The "*Hook, Book, Look*" process combined with a "*Bible Reading*" is the simplest (yet not simplistic), easiest way of effectively beginning to preach to a larger group. When interested, read the free PDF articles, *Hook, Book, Look Bible Reading* and the one-page overview, *HBT, One-Page Overview*. All the other sub-webpages could be a help to your preaching though, so perhaps at least skim these. However, I would suggest finding a mentor, reading good books on preaching, listening electronically to a variety of styles you like, and finding somewhere you can practice. For instance, Christian rescue missions often are looking for those who will preach. Nothing grows skills faster than practice, especially if you have a coach guiding you (*Deliberate Practice*). If we are teaching for *transformation*, this can be a crucial part of the process, sowing vision.

- Yet studies show most only retain 5%-10% of what they merely read or hear. *How will you adapt directive teaching to significantly raise the level of application?*
2. For *Discussion Teaching*, read the free PDF article, *Launching a Discussion Group*. These are basic ideas I've gathered from a number of sources. For more, the group called *The Navigators*, a life-to-life discipleship ministry, have perhaps the best tools to support through discussion because they have been focused on this for so many years through Dawson Trotman, their founder. His biography, *Daws*, is superb and provides insight into the motivations underlying this ministry. I'm looking forward to reading *Dawson Trotman: In His Own Words* because the summary mentions many quotes from his own journals. If you can get your hands on a little pamphlet by Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, this has moved me (sold on Amazon.com in a ten pack). *Discovery Bible Study (DBS)* has experienced great international results in missions by using discussion Bible groups for evangelism, especially with people groups with lower reading skills (*DBS-One-PageOverview*). Here is one explanation of DBS by InterVarsity.
  3. For *Discovery Teaching*, go to the first sub-webpage, *Draw Out What God Has Put In*. In my opinion, this culture for *discovery teaching* is different from *discussion teaching* above because each has different purposes. Thus the separate sub-webpage. The "soil" developed in *discovery teaching* is unsurpassed for growing motivated lifelong life-learners. However, many similarities still exist between *discovery* and *discussion*. Both develop an interactive group with give-&-take. Each requires a love for people that guides toward their highest and best by becoming Servant-Teachers. Both must learn to ask good questions. Both accelerate learning as we tap into adult motivation. Because both have less control than *directive teaching*, it's crucial to learn how to turn difficult people or problem situations into opportunity to grow.
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