

Session 5 Teacher Deep Dive

Giving Didactic Presentations

When we typically think about *teaching*, didactic presentations come easily to mind. We imagine a teacher at the front of the room, presenting information to attentive students who are sitting in rows and all facing forward. While this is hardly the entire picture (as you know from 4 previous sessions of leading practices, reflections, and sharing), part of your teaching responsibilities will require the straightforward presentation of information to students. If you divide up the class session into parts, you'll notice the different kinds of information:

- **Preparatory:** introductions, overviews, previews, questions to spark curiosity. Presenting preparatory information comes at the start of class, before an activity, and as a transition between activities.
- **New Content:** vocabulary, concepts, techniques, research, rationale—all of which will support them when they attempt a practice. Content is not presented to be memorized, but to be applied. Usually, you provide examples, illustrations, questions, analogies, etc. to facilitate understanding.
- **Review:** You'll also use didactic presentations to facilitate individual, pair, or group reflections. Review helps students make sense of their experiences, see patterns, analyze, interpret, assess, and prepare to make future choices.

"Instead of being a coach who facilitates exploration, in didactic presentations, the teacher is an authority on the matter, somebody who knows."

-Rob Brandsma

In tone, style, and format, didactic presentations will shift the teacher's role and students' expectations. When assimilating new information, students often desire an authoritative presentation. It makes them feel safe to ask questions, explore, doubt, and move at their own pace.

Teachers are certainly not expected to have all the answers, but they are expected to demonstrate *mastery* of whatever topic they are presenting. It fosters trust and credibility. Largely, you will accomplish this by thoroughly reviewing and even partially memorizing each lesson script within this curriculum.

While didactic presentations are primarily a way to get students information, it's important to still engage students in creating their own knowledge. This means that even while students are learning new knowledge from you, they are always *agents* of learning, not simply recipients. During didactic presentations, you can help students create knowledge in the following ways:

- Ask pre-knowledge questions to help students tap into what they already know (about stress, joy, pain, distraction, etc.) and meet new information with prior knowledge.

- Pose scenarios or what-if situations that can help students conduct thought experiments with new concepts (for example, “How would you approach a friend who engaged in negative self-talk? How can you approach yourself with the same compassion?”)
- Incorporate student questions, answers, and experiences into the didactic presentation when possible. Student contributions are apt for you to draw:
 - Similarities, differences, distinctions, nuances, commonalities, changes, developments, patterns, limitations, theories.
 - For example, “I hear John say your tension feels hot and is located in your shoulders. And Sam’s tension is hot and located in the back. What could these two areas have in common? Where do others feel tension? What might heat be telling us about our bodies and emotions?”
- Use copious examples, analogies, and illustrations to help students see content from multiple angles.
- Ask students to contribute their own examples during didactic presentations.
- Within your comfort level, use personal examples or anecdotes to illustrate a new concept, or empathize with student experiences.