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To Lecture or Not to Lecture: Engaged Teaching and Learning

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The lecture mode is certain to be included in your repertoire as a teacher – it does however, have serious limitations. Before looking at suggestions to support effective lecturing, I would like to describe the problems associated with lecturing. Henderson and Nash (2007) observed that lectures are a one-way process. Students are passively listening to information. This hinders the comprehension of students who have not learned to be effective listeners or note-takers. Lectures can be repetitious and limit the pace of learning to the pace of the speaker. Lectures evolve around the interest of the speaker which causes the students to accept the teacher as the final authority on the topic. McKeachie (1986), in his summary of decades of research, found that students retain 70% of information in the first 10 minutes of a lecture; the retention is only 20% in the last 10 minutes. Kulick (1975) found that lecturing is a superior method for promoting the learning of factual information, but the discussion method is better suited for promoting critical thinking. Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991) found that when students need to analyze, synthesize, or integrate knowledge or when long-term retention is desired, lecturing is not the most effective method.

Just as there are problems associated with the lecture method, there are appropriate uses. Those situations include the following:

- When a teacher wants to clarify an issue, expand students' knowledge beyond available resources, or share a personal experience (Henderson & Nash, 2007).

- When content material is not available in written form or is too complicated. When the idea to be presented is a model or procedure that you developed (Pascal, 1983).

- When you must communicate a large body of factual material to a large number of students in a short period of time (McKeachie & Kulik, 1975).

- When introducing content materials to students whose motivation or interest is limited (George, 1995).

Listed below are suggestions for planning and delivering more effective lectures. The suggestions are based on the work of McKeachie (1994) and George (1995).

Suggestions for Planning Effective Lectures

- *Plan to actively involve the learner after 15 minutes*. A variety of active learning strategies can easily be implemented in conjunction with lecture content.
- *Teach students to think and learn*. It is tempting for lecturers to become abstractors of encyclopedias. Consider your role as one of analyzing material, formulating problems, developing hypotheses, bringing evidence to bear, criticizing and evaluating alternative solutions.
- *Avoid trying to cover too much*. This is probably the most common error of lecturers. Lecturers often overload the students' information processing capacity. The resulting net learning gain experienced by students is often less than if the lecturer had focused on a narrower range of information.
- *Use an organizational principle*. Commonly used principles include the following: cause to effect, time sequence (for example, stories), theory to evidence, problem to solution, pro versus con to resolution, familiar to unfamiliar, concept to application.
- *Use advance organizers*. These organizers may take the form of an outline, model, or list of how the lecture is structured; these organizers are especially helpful to students coping with new information. It is better to provide an overall framework for the lecture. Students tend to fall into passivity when provided with overly detailed notes.
- *Provide motivational cues*. These cues may include a discussion of why the material is useful, difficult, or current.
- *Utilize a "Thesis-Centered" lecture mode*. This mode has one main thesis or generalization, which is stated at the beginning by the lecturer. The body of the lecture is then directed toward providing support of the main thesis through the use of an explanation, analogy, illustration, statistics and of their factual data, and testimony (the repetition is essential to establish the main thesis). The conclusion of this model is the restatement of the thesis and summary of support for the

thesis (this restatement is much more important for students in cross-cultural settings).

- *Utilize a "Problem-Solving" lecture mode.* This mode begins with you establishing a culturally relevant and meaningful problem. Next, you establish several criteria for solutions. Following this step, you hear various solutions, evaluate each solution, and decide among them.

- *Encourage students to take notes.* Several studies show that students who take notes remember material better than control groups who take no notes. The note taking process involves elaboration and transformation of ideas, which increases meaning fullness and retention. For some students, however, note taking may interfere with processing of the lecture.

Suggestions for Appropriate Delivery of Lectures

- *Lecture in fifteen minute segments.* Straight lecturing can be broken up with demonstrations, audio-visual interludes, and break-out activities.

- *Be enthusiastic.* Research consistently indicates that enthusiasm by lecturer is an important factor in effecting student learning and motivation.

- *Provide changes.* Variation in pitch, intensity, pace of lecture, visual cues (gestures, facial expressions, movement to blackboard or overhead) tend to recruit and maintain attention.

- *Include language supports to increase student comprehension. These supports may include the following:* "This is important," "Now, note this," and "This is the author's main point." In addition to these language supports, identify and defining key vocabulary before the lecture is also helpful to the students.

- *Use nonverbal supports.* The novelty of your posture, movement, and gesture can be used to your advantage. Likewise, your proximity to students can have an effect on student attention (research has show that students closest to the teacher are more attentive). Be alert to the fact that you may create discomfort in your actions are dramatically different from those commonly found by the students.

- *Provide many examples*. Studies of outstanding lecturers indicate that two things occurred; they used a simple organizational plan and many examples to explain their critical points.
- *Use periodic summaries within the lecture*. Meaningful repetition enhances the learning process for students. Additionally, summaries can help students identify the most critical aspects of the lecture.
- *Prepare outlines*. Effective outlines might include simple linear outlines, skeletal outlines, or concept maps.

Hopefully, the suggestions outlined above will be helpful in the teaching situations you may encounter in the future. As always, you effectiveness as a teacher is dependent upon the skills and attitude that you bring to the classroom. It is my hope and prayer that you will demonstrate responsive instruction that exhibits respect for the backgrounds of your learners.

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