

LECTURING TO LARGE & SMALL GROUPS

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CHALLENGES TO TEACH LARGE GROUPS

As class sizes increase, two particular issues may arise that can be particularly difficult for the teaching team to manage:

- **First**, in modular systems the lecture may be attended by students from varied disciplines, often with very different skills and knowledge bases. This can provide significant challenges for the lecturer in knowing where to pitch the lecture and how to keep all students interested.
- **Second**, the lecturer may be faced with having to manage disruptive student behavior in the class, which is now reported across disciplines in different universities.

THE OUTSTANDING LECTURE

An outstanding lecture should have the following attributes:

- It is delivered in a way that is informative, interesting and engaging.
- The content is well organized and easy to follow. Students can understand the development of the argument, or the logic in the ordering of the information or ideas.
- Students feel involved. This may be through some type of active participation. The ability to engage students through questioning, no matter what the class size, is an important way of getting students involved.
- Students leave wondering where the time has gone.
- Students leave knowing that they have learned something(s), and are often inspired to go off and find out more.

GENERATING AND MAINTAINING INTEREST

At the very beginning you should:

- be organized, and take control of the lecture room on your arrival;
- know how to use the presentation equipment.

During the first few minutes the lecturer could:

- go through the learning outcomes for the session, telling them what they should have learned by the end.
- describe a problem or scenario that is of relevance to the topic, and then go on to outline how the lecture will consider this;
- link the lecture to some current news or activity. The lecturer could take this one step further by asking students to bring examples with them to the lecture, and inviting them to contribute.

To keep students interested during the remainder the lecturer could:

- where possible draw on the students' experiences;
- use visual materials or artefacts that are relevant to the topic of the lecture;
- use live links to the web to demonstrate currency of the material being presented.

What approaches or methods have you used to generate and maintain interest of students in your classroom?

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

There are different types and levels of student engagement:

- **First**, there is the simple acknowledgement of the students themselves. Build a rapport with the student group by communicating directly with some of the students. For example, chat to students as you are waiting to get started. Make sure students know how to contact you after the lecture if there are things they do not understand. Be approachable and friendly.
- **Second**, attention span can be a particular problem in the lecture. It is often suggested that students can only concentrate for about 20 minutes as passive learners in a lecture ([Stuart and Rutherford, 1978](#)) and changing activity will help them overcome this problem.

Stuart, J and Rutherford, R (1978) Medical student concentration during lectures. The Lancet, 2: 514-516.

- **The third** and probably the most important aspect of student engagement is their active participation in the lecture.

THE FOLLOWING SUGGESTIONS ARE EXAMPLES OF THE WAYS TO MOTIVATE STUDENTS:

- Pose questions for students to discuss in small groups, then take feedback from a few groups to hear what they think.
- Get the students to tackle problems individually, and then compare their answers with one or two others sitting next to them. You do not always need to elicit feedback.
- Show a DVD clip, but do ask the students to look for something specific that you can ask them about afterwards.
- Ask the students to do a mini-test, for example, to check student progress.

LECTURING TO A VARIED STUDENT GROUP

To make the lecture a good learning experience for all students, the following suggestions may help:

- Find out as much as possible about the student groups who will be attending the lecture, in particular what they may already know about the subject so as to profile the range of knowledge and subject disciplines of the students.
- Acknowledge to the students at the start that you know they are a varied group and that the content, organization and supporting materials for the lecture will reflect this.
- When undertaking class tasks, suggest to the students that they work in their closest disciplinary groups.

MANAGING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR

- **Late arrivals**

- Students must arrive on time, as the lecture will start promptly. You may set a deadline that they may enter the lecture up to ten minutes late, but should come in quietly. You may wish to state that students should **not come into the lecture hall more than ten minutes after the start.**
- If there are significant numbers of late arrivals, it is worth checking why they are late. If there is no acceptable reason for their late arrival, remind them of the ground rules.

- **Students chatting**

- Students know that they are not meant to be chatting in the lecture so it is not necessary to make this a ground rule. Similar methods to those are a hard stare, or a short pause, may be enough to stop it. If it continues, ask the students directly if they have any questions about what is being covered. In extreme cases, it might be necessary to ask troublesome students to leave the class.

- **Use of mobile phones**

- The lecturer can ask students at the start of every lecture to switch off their mobile phones.

EFFECTIVE USE OF POWERPOINT

PowerPoint can be a very effective tool for enlivening the lecture. It is easy to import graphics, photographs, charts, graphs, audio and video clips, and to insert live web links. To use PowerPoint effectively in lectures:

- Keep the number of slides to a minimum.
- Avoid using complex background images which detract attention. Ensure a good colour contrast between text and background.
- Do not use over-complex graphs.
- Try to avoid lectures which use only slides with bullet points.
- Consider use of animations within PowerPoint to build graphic explanations of complex ideas if they enhance understanding.

TEACHING IN SMALL GROUPS

- Teaching and learning in small groups is a highly skilled activity.
- In recognizing that small group teaching is a difficult and highly skilled teaching technique, it is important to know that it is also one of the most potentially rewarding teaching and learning methods for tutors and students alike.
- Small group teaching, broadly speaking, is any teaching and learning occasion which brings together between *two and 20 participants*. The participants may be students and their tutors, or students working on their own. Because of the relatively small numbers of students involved, the financial cost of the method can be high.
- It is within the small group that self-confidence can be improved, and teamwork and interpersonal communication developed. The development of group work and other skills is reported by students to foster (способствовать) conditions whereby they can observe their own learning styles, change these styles to suit different tasks and engage more deeply with the content of their subject (*Griffiths et al., 1996*). These latter attributes are often cited as prerequisites for *a deep approach to learning*.

Griffiths, S, Houston, K and Lazenbatt, A (1996) Enhancing Student Learning through Peer Tutoring in Higher Education, University of Ulster, Coleraine.

PLANNING & EARNING CONTRACT

Planning a lesson for a small group in advance and a learning contract are an important way of effecting a safe and supportive learning environment.

Establishing the contract may involve tutors and students in jointly:

- setting, agreeing and understanding objectives;
- agreeing assessment procedures and criteria;
- allocating tasks to all participants, tutors and students;
- developing ground rules for behavior within the group.

Visualize yourself in a room where you teach small groups. Where should you sit to maximize your interaction with the group? Where might a student sit to avoid interaction with the tutor or other students? Where might a student sit if he or she wishes to persuade others of a point of view?

SOME HINTS WHERE TO SIT

- It is well known that communication increases if the differences in social level or status are small. Therefore, part of the tutor's task is to play down the differences in roles and, in particular, play down his or her own authority. This knowledge about the need to minimize social status differences has an impact on where the tutor actually sits within the group.
- Nervous students can be encouraged to participate more readily if their place in the group is opposite to either a sympathetic tutor or an encouraging, more voluble (talkative) student peer.
- A dominating student can be quietened by being seated immediately next to the tutor.
- The level of student participation and of student-student interaction can be affected by the choice of students.

SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE SMALL GROUP TEACHING

- **Questioning**

- The skills of asking and answering questions are not as simple as they might appear. Good questioning techniques require continuing preparation, practice and reflection by students and teachers. Listening
- The timing of asking questions and the use of pause and silence are also important in developing the skills of answering and asking questions.

- **Listening**

- The mental process of listening is an active one that calls into play a number of thinking functions including analysis, comprehension, synthesis and evaluation.
- Listening also has an emotional dimension since it requires an ability to share, and quite possibly understand, another person's feelings, and to understand his or her situation:
- what is said: the content; how it is said: tone and feelings; when it is said: time and priority; where it is said: place and environment.

- **Responding**

- Listening in silence by paying undivided attention to the speaker is an active process, engaging and heightening (повышающий) awareness and observation. The other aspect of positive listening is of course to intervene (вступать в дело) in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes. The more intense our listening is, the more likely it is that we will know how to respond, when to respond and in what ways.