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Do-It-Yourself Lecture Makeovers

YEARS AGO WHEN I first started teaching my idea of an engaging lecture was to bring blank overhead transparencies to class, and write on them while talking. I even mastered a David-Lettermanesque delivery to my lectures that got me a few laughs here and there...and served to fuel my enthusiasm for teaching. What I didn't realize then is that I wasn't a good lecturer...and that what I was delivering was far from engaging.

Lecture is an instructional approach used by many faculty...sometimes out of habit, lack of alternative models, or necessity (e.g., constraints of the physical space, limited in-class time, high number of students). We know stuff about our discipline, so it requires little effort for us to talk about that stuff. Although we have to prepare for class, the preparation is relatively easy when our plan is to lecture...again, because we know our stuff. But, who is doing all of the fruitful cognitive processing on the topic -- the person preparing the lecture, or the person listening to the lecture? So, the questions of the hour are -- regardless of the efficiency of lecture, does lecture really achieve what we want to achieve? Are students engaged, and are they processing and retaining what we are sharing with them?

It turns out that the answer is no. So, does this mean we need to stop lecturing, or are there ways to improve the lecture approach?

Seems to me that the more we can have students do something with the content -- as opposed to listen to us talk about the content -- the better. Therefore, embedding students-do-something-now strategies throughout a lecture is a good way to enhance the students' experience and opportunity to process and reflect on the content. Acknowledging that this is not an easy task in a traditional lecture hall (equipped with fixed stadium seating!) with 100+ students, here are a few examples of students-do-something-now strategies that may work regardless of the instructional constraints:

Think-pair-share. This strategy involves (1) asking the students a question about the content; (2) giving students an opportunity to consider the question, study their notes and/or text; (3) confer with their neighbor regarding their answer to the question. There are many

variations on this strategy, especially in terms of how to handle the "share" aspect. For example, a pair can join up with another pair to discuss the question; using Clickers, pairs can log their response (this is a nice option for providing the whole audience with instant feedback, and for giving you as the lecturing information that can help provide direction for the next part of the lecture.); and pairs can log their response and their names on to index cards, pass them to the front, and the lecturer can randomly select a few responses to share with the whole group. [Note: This approach also provides a jumping off place for the rest of the lecture, and the index cards with students' names can be used for student participation grading.]

Interview. Instead of lecturing, I have had students interview me about the topic. I start this strategy by telling students that during the interview they must collect all of the information they need on the topic to fulfill the requirements for writing an essay, completing a project, or preparing for an exam. Then students -- in teams with an elected interviewer, in rows with the person in the front deemed the official interviewer -- work together to determine what 3-5 questions their group (team or row) needs to ask in order to achieve the objective. This strategy encourages students to reflect on what they already know, what they can find out via their text or other resource, and what they absolutely need to ask their professor. It also helps them construct good questions, and prioritize needs. [Note: I have previously described a related strategy, called Stump the Professor.]

Point-counterpoint. One of the best lecture-enhancement strategies I've used is to invite a colleague to participate in a point-counterpoint discussion on a particular topic (often controversial), with the students as our audience. This strategy allows students to listen to two (or more, as with a panel) practitioners/experts discuss and debate issues related to the topic. It helps students recognize that there are differing perspectives on the issues, and to see how colleagues grapple with those differing perspectives.

Fishbowl. Another strategy that has worked well for me is to select different

groups of students to participate with me in a small group discussion, with the rest of the students listening. I form these student groups ahead of time so I can keep track of who has participated, and make sure that I invite everyone in the audience to participate at least once.

Value-added. I avoid lecturing on the same content the students have available to them via the textbook, article packet, or other set of resources. If I lecture on the same content they have available to them elsewhere they learn very quickly to either (a) not bother reading the text, or (b) not bother attending the lecture. As an expert in the domain, I have something unique to offer -- my take on the topic at hand, and my stories about how it plays out in practice. I want students to see the value in both the readings and what I have to share, so I avoid replication.

Making it relevant, Part 1. As often as possible, instead of lecturing in the conventional way, I tell stories or describe cases that illustrate the points I want students to consider. This strategy helps students process the content in a more contextually meaningful way, helping students see how the content is relevant to the working world.

Making it relevant, Part 2. It helps students engage in a lecture if they understand how the lecture content is related to (a) their professional preparation (i.e.,

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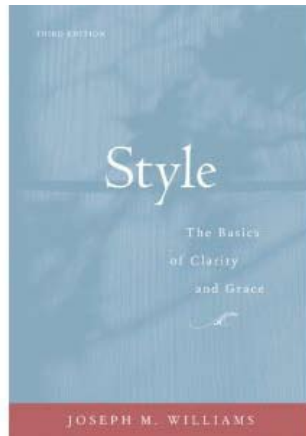
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GOOD ENOUGH

ONE OF THE SIDE effects of actually caring about teaching is that when I come across something that I think will be useful for my students, I really want to implement it NOW. But combine this with a full plate of research, service and (an attempt at) a personal life, and there simply are times when I have to accept that what I am already doing is 'good enough' and I need to wait until next time around to add in whatever it is I want to do. I'm struggling with this right now

because I've been working what feels like around the clock for the last couple weeks and I know I need to let some things go. But I also recently picked up Joseph Williams' *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace* and it has me wanting to completely re-vamp my writing class. This is an amazing little book! One of the things I really struggle with in teaching a writing class is that even when students can see that something they have written is not all that clear, I don't know how to help them learn to re-write it so that it is clearer. That is, I can re-write it FOR them, and they can usually see that the new sentence is clearer, but other than a few general guidelines (like 'try to avoid using the passive voice so much'), I don't know how to explain very well how to write more clearly. But that is exactly what Williams does in this book. I'm sure I'll be writing more about this in the future; my point right now is that we are in the eleventh week of the semester and I'm wishing I could go



back and start the semester over again so I could go through this book with my students before I ever ask them to write anything else, but since I can't do that, I've been trying to figure out if I can still have them read and implement at least parts of it. And tonight, it occurred to me that I simply can't justify spending a bunch of time prepping all this new stuff at this point in the semester, not when I have a conference in Minnesota, three AEA sessions to find discussants for, two gigs with my singing group, and my sister's bridal shower all in the next week and a half, not to mention three referee reports that are all past due (at least I got my taxes done yesterday - whew!).

So I think I'm writing this to assuage my guilt, to convince myself that what I'm already doing for my class is 'good enough'. I know that if I don't take care of myself, I'm no good to anyone else, yadda yadda yadda, and I probably should be proud of myself for setting some limits, but as a chronic over-achiever, I guess I needed to say that this kind of sucks.

Jennifer Imazeki, Good Enough, Blog: Economics for Teachers: Musings about Teaching Economics, April 6, 2010, [http://economics-forteachers.blogspot.com/], April 7, 2010.

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what they will be doing on-the-job), and (b) how they are assessed in the course. I remind students at the beginning, middle, and end of a lecture how the content is related to both their professional work and/or the current assignment they are completing for the course. I then reinforce those relationships by incorporating them into my assessment of the assignment. For example, when I ask students to provide design documentation for an instructional product they have created, I require them to cite not only their readings but the lectures and class discussions as well. [Note: Related, I occasionally use the one-minute paper or quiz strategy, informing students at the start of the lecture that at the end of the class I will ask them to submit a one-minute paper or quiz. Knowing that this is coming encourages students to attend to the lecture and take useful notes.]

Making it relevant, Part 3. My courses are very project-oriented. Therefore, a strategy I have found very helpful is to focus my lecture content on issues directly relevant to the students' ability to fulfill the project requirements.

"Give me a break"...i.e., a pause in the action. This is a simple strategy to implement during a lecture. I allow students time throughout a lecture to summarize what I've shared, clean up their notes, ask for clarification from neighbors, and -- in general -- process and reflect on the content. After the pause in the action, I ask for questions -- often, after time to reflect on the lecture, a few students will find they have a gap in their notes and will ask me a follow-up question. I have found that giving students time to summarize the lecture thus far, in their own words, allows them the time and space to do the same sort of fruitful cognitive processing that I've done in preparing the lecture. If I don't give them time to process and reflect, then the lecture is for naught...and all I have accomplished is hearing myself talk.

These are just a few ideas for enhancing the lecture approach. I find it helpful to mix up the strategies so I am not doing the same thing repeatedly. These strategies have helped me deal with the instructional constraints of large classes held in traditional lecture hall settings. And, ultimately, I have found that I do not actually do that much lecturing, instead allowing students time and space to work with the content in more relevant and meaningful ways that help them stay engaged.

Joni Dunlap, Do-It-Yourself Lecture Makeovers, Thoughts on Teaching, December 9, 2010, [http://thoughtsonteaching-jdunlap.blogspot.com/search/label/Lecture], April 7, 2010.



Frameworks for Higher Education in Homeland Security

This report explores whether there are core pedagogical and skill-based homeland security program needs; examines current and proposed education programs focusing on various aspects of homeland security; comments on the possible parallels between homeland security, area studies, international relations, and science policy, as developed or emerging academic thrusts; and suggests potential curricula needs, particularly those that involve interdisciplinary

aspects. The report concentrates almost exclusively on coursework-related offerings, primarily at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Status: Available Now, Size: 78 pages, 6x9, Publication Year:2005

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