

Review of Dynamic Lecturing

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Harrington, Christine and Todd Zakrajsek. *Dynamic Lecturing: Research-Based Strategies to Enhance Lecture Effectiveness*. Stylus Publishing, LLC., 2017.
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The value of lectures has been called into question in recent years. However, Christine Harrington and Todd Zakrajsek argue in their book, *Dynamic Lecturing: Research-based Strategies to Enhance Lecture Effectiveness*, that when well prepared and appropriately incorporated, lectures are still one of the most effective ways to enhance learning. Lecturing and active learning need not be exclusive of one another, they claim. Student levels and desired learning outcomes dictate the kind of lectures instructors should adopt, as well as the ways they could be adapted. The authors make use of evidence-based research to support their defence of lecturing as a form of instruction, especially when blended with student activities.

In part one of the book, Harrington and Zakrajsek make the case for lecturing and delineate the different forms a lecture can take. They outline seven types. The first is formal lectures, which Harrington and Zakrajsek define as consisting of pre-written, well-organized, controlled, and highly informative speeches. This is what most tend to associate with the idea of the “sage on the stage,” and a disadvantage is these traditional lectures can result in low attention and disengagement. Second is storytelling lectures, which aim to capture attention and give a meaningful context to content, but can be time-consuming for instructors to both create and present, and are not necessarily relatable to all students. Discussion-based lectures are next, and they typically start with questions based on assigned work. The drawback with these is that they tend to be less structured and lead participants off topic. The fourth type is visually enhanced lectures, which integrate the use of slides or other visual tools into any other form of lecture, providing a relatable reference to new information. Visual support is a powerful learning aid, but because such lectures require high organization, they could result in rigid presentations that do not allow student questions and comments to shape them. Demonstration lectures show problem-solving techniques. This fifth type of lecture can be followed by opportunities for students to apply what was learned, which promotes engagement and the transfer knowledge and skills. However, they can take a great deal of planning and time. The sixth type, online lectures, are typically shorter and are a necessity for web-based distance education. They can provide supplementary resources for students that can be accessed as needed, but tend not to be as engaging as face to face lectures, and significant amounts of time are typically involved in creating them. Finally, interactive lectures are lectures that make use of tools such as student response systems, which help keep student attention. Less information can be covered with this style, and the lectures are also time-consuming to prepare, but research revealed by Harrington and Zakrajsek shows that they do increase overall learning.

In addition to elucidating the advantages and disadvantages with each type of lecture, Harrington and Zakrajsek describe a range of strategies to promote student involvement in their seven lecture forms.

The second part of the book takes up the bulk of the text (7 of the 11 chapters) and focuses on ways to make lectures more effective for learners. The section argues that lectures are particularly valuable for novice learners, who benefit from foundational knowledge in a subject area before they delve into more creative and critical thinking. Lectures are efficient in that students can

potentially learn large amounts of new information in a relatively short amount of time, and help students make important connections between topics. Through observation of an impassioned expert delivering content in a thoughtful, organized, and inspiring way, students can become engaged and more motivated.

Following suit from previous chapters, suggestions offered in the final part of the book are specific, research-based, and detailed. This last section provides ideas for preparing more active, impactful lectures. Some examples include:

1. Assigning readings to complete before lectures.
2. If readings prove too hard, which can be demotivating, providing a mini-lecture before assigning the readings to allow students to make connections with prior knowledge and to highlight the key ideas.
3. Identifying the three most important concepts covered in a given lecture.
4. Catching learners' attention with a question, story, image, or short video.
5. "Chunking" content; using short lecture segments broken up with reflective pauses and engaging activities.
6. Activating prior knowledge with non-weight bearing quizzes, polls, or pair-share followed by large group reviews.
7. Breaking down complex concepts into simpler parts.
8. Selecting several meaningful examples.
9. Integrating opportunities for students to reflect in order to augment long-term retention and recall.
10. Giving immediate feedback via brief quizzes in order to serve as retrieval practice and improve long-term retention and recall.
11. Using student response systems and polls to provide real-time data on comprehension levels, informing the instructor if immediate adaptation is required.
12. Promoting critical thinking by asking questions such as how two concepts are similar, different, or related, or what the potential advantages and disadvantages of a certain technique are.
13. Requiring students to write their answers before verbally responding.
14. Summarizing key points at the end of the lecture or supportive activity.

These final chapters of Harrington and Zakrajsek's work also provide tools and resources for evaluating lectures, including easily adaptable rubrics, charts, and questionnaires for the evaluation of one's own or others' lectures. They recommend that instructors keep a teaching journal, including answers to a set of questions that promote reflection and provoke thinking on how to adapt and improve lessons. Other suggestions include reviewing a video recording of a class with a faculty colleague and creating and participating in a supportive faculty learning community. In addition to providing venues for constructive feedback, these provide opportunities for faculty to share research on the scholarship of teaching and learning.

The book focuses on research-based strategies and not on individual teaching styles or preferences. Multiple citations to studies on teaching and learning are infused into each page of the book, and each chapter is followed by a bibliography, making it easy for the reader to find sources. The studies referenced are generally well explained.

Although the book does not contextualize lecturing into a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) framework, it does provide takeaways that are both instructive and validating for language and content faculty at Miyazaki International College, a Japanese institution offering an English-medium, liberal arts program. Faculty here have always had to adapt their

lecturing style here due to the language proficiency and learning background of the student body. Here, as everywhere, there is always room for improvement and faculty continue to strive for increased efficacy in the classroom.

The authors claim that lecturing is better for novice students, but some of the research used to support this argument is slightly problematic. Gauging one's own level of understanding through self-reporting is not the same as demonstrating mastery of a given subject. The authors themselves admit that students do not always accurately evaluate their own learning (see page 115). Yet a study based on data derived from student self-reporting was used to argue that lectures are more helpful than active learning sessions in the case of novice learners (page 10).

In a CLIL context, self-assessment of learning would likely be even less accurate. According to the authors, although undergraduate students are generally learners at the novice level, I postulate that most CLIL learners, especially in Japanese institutions at the freshman or sophomore level, do not yet have adequate language ability to be able to digest a great deal of content particularly from the more traditional lecture types. Video-recorded lectures available online can provide added benefits especially for CLIL learners that were not fully elaborated upon in the book: they can allow for a 'flipped' classroom, so that more class time can be allotted to active learning activities such as discussion in English. They can also serve as preview and review materials that can be accessed again and again by students, and can be built upon with activities to provide scaffolding – again for students to make use of outside of class time, such that class time can be better used for much-needed English language practice in an EFL environment.

Dynamic Lecturing is unlikely to provide the seasoned lecturer with any novel information, but there is value for everyone in being able to reference a set of defined lecture types with their respective pros and cons clearly laid out. The model materials supplied at the end of the text to help plan and evaluate lectures may prove particularly helpful as they require instructors to think through how to choose and implement a particular lecture style to better ensure that it will meet student learning objectives. It is likely that both new and experienced instructors will be better equipped to make their lectures more effective after reading this highly pragmatic, well-written book. Even those who tend to favour instruction that embraces inquiry-based, problem-based, experiential, or social learning will probably find value in the pages of this thought-provoking text on lecturing.