
Effective methods of teaching literature

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This article describes the benefits of using effective methods in teaching lecture. Also considers some suggestions of learning process as a factor in increasing the quality of education.

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In any classroom what teachers do have impact on how well-disposed students are to learning. The method/s and/ or resources used by teachers determine whether learners will be active or passive. In our institutions, teacher use mainly the lecture method which is a teacher centered method and the implication is that learners are passive and learning tend to be superficial, Lecture, one of the oldest teaching methods, is still the most widely used method of instruction on our campuses.

Research shows that information is more easily learned when it is linked to what one already knows. Thus the lecture needs to build a bridge between students' knowledge base and the new material or subject matter of the lecture¹. The following are some suggestions as to how to do this:

- Find out what your students already know by collecting information, asking questions, etc.
- As you introduce new topics, start with a review of the material that came before and show how the new content is connected to or builds on it.
- Use examples that are relevant to your students' experiences.
- Make the lecture structure transparent by planning a good introduction.
- Use slides or the board for key points.
- Make sure your conclusion or summary ties the important information together.

One of the biggest barriers to an effective lecture is presenting too much material for a given class. An easy trap to fall into is overloading students' information processing capacity to the extent that they become frustrated and give up. Students learn more and better if fewer points are presented. So it is essential to think carefully about what you can reasonably address in the time allotted.

The most commonly stated purposes of lectures are to:

- convey information;
- stimulate motivation and interest in a subject area. This can lead to deep understanding if opportunities are made available to construct and ask questions;
- generate understanding.

Are lectures an effective means of encouraging students' learning? Research on lecturing suggests that traditional lectures, if well planned and presented, are as effective as other methods (but not more effective) for conveying information². However, there is little point in simply conveying information, however well it is presented, without stimulating students' motivation to learn and giving them opportunities to develop understanding. Methods which actively involve students are more effective than lectures for encouraging them to take deep approaches which are likely to result in developing understanding, encouraging critical thought, challenging opinions or changing conceptions.

This does not mean that all lectures should be abolished. Many teachers enjoy lecturing, and many

students enjoy good lectures. If you choose to lecture, you can do so in a way which maximizes the chances of students developing understanding. Lectures can be used to give broad contextual information, to highlight the important or interesting aspects of a topic, to demonstrate problem solving techniques, or to show the relative strengths of two sides of an academic controversy. They should not, however, be used to transmit information that the students can acquire (perhaps more effectively) from reading their textbook. Lectures which are based around a set text should be used to clarify, expand, or explain the content of the text rather than merely to repeat it. It should also not be assumed that transmission by the lecturer implies reception and learning by students. Students learn more effectively when lectures include activities which engage their thoughts and motivation. The following points from Gibbs and Habeshaw (1989) are particularly relevant to the making lectures more effective.

In addition to introducing active learning, you can capture the attention of your students by becoming a more dynamic lecturer. Here are some techniques you might try ³.

- Start your lecture with an interesting story, a personal anecdote, or a provocative visual.
- Ask a question or state a problem that is central to the material you will be talking about.
- Use real-life examples that are relevant to your students' experiences..
- Use your voice effectively-speak with energy and inflection.
- Move around the room to better connect with all your student

Of course, literature can be used in different way in the classroom. When the course is a literature course, I think it is important that it leads the students to understand how literature works, and if possible, what it is, in contradiction to other things. So I try to offer an account of literature which emphasizes that it is first and foremost art, and that whether one is faced with narrative or lyric or drama, they are art on the same grounds. In discussing a literary work then, I try to keep the attention of the students focused on the elements and properties which result from answering the question, what is literature?

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