

Chapter 24

Comparing Lecturing and Small Group Discussions

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ABSTRACT

This chapter contains a description and discussion of the teaching and learning methods of the lecture (content delivery method) and small group discussion (interaction method). It also addresses the various steps in using each of these two techniques and compares them along with identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each technique. These formats are explored and discussed regarding procedures for facilitating and presenting and a planning sheet and an evaluation form for each is included. Major studies are cited and used to support strategies and techniques presented. In summary, these instructional techniques are compared and contrasted for their respective benefits for the adult learner.

INTRODUCTION

Typically when an instructor or teacher thinks about instruction or teaching, lecturing is the mode of instruction that comes to mind. The lecture is an old, traditional teaching method that has been criticized because it provides no opportunity for the audience to participate in the presentation. Telling people what you want them to know, or lecturing, is still one of the most common methods of teaching (Parker, 1993).

A lecture is when the subject matter expert gives an organized, in-depth presentation to an audience. The delivery of a lecture can be formal or informal and is usually accompanied by the use of audiovisual aids. It is a convenient and usually effective method for presenting a large amount of information to an audience in a relatively short time (Brewer, 1997; Brewer, DeJonge, & Stout, 2001; Henson, 1993). The lecture is a method of presenting facts, information, or principles verbally with little or no participation from the audience. The lecture is a carefully prepared talk given by a qualified person (Claycomb & Petty, 1983; Parker, 1993). McKeachie and Svinicki (2006)

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notes that lectures are good for maintaining several reasons. They are appropriate for presenting up-to-date information, summarizing material, and focusing on key concepts or ideas (p. 58).

In contrast, a small group discussion is simply that—a small group that has been organized to discuss a topic of interest, ostensibly for the purpose of learning about the topic. The typical small-group discussion can serve intellectual, emotional, and social purposes. Emotionally, the participants may have some sort of personal involvement in the issue they are discussing, making it important to them (Brewer, 1997; Brewer et al., 2001). Socially, group discussion builds a sense of cohesion and trust with one another (Lee & Ertmer, 2006; Sweet & Michaelsen, 2007).

A well-conducted group discussion will end in acceptance of different opinions, respect for well-supported beliefs, and improved problem-solving skills. Overall, it will promote the sharing of information and all members will gain insight concerning the thoughts of others before reaching consensus on a topic (Young, 2007).

Most of us interface in small groups all the time. Of course most people have work groups in their organization but small groups include school, social, religious, and professional groups as well. The dynamics of a group usually reveal certain features that characterize the group. This chapter will examine some of these characteristic features, including leadership, status, roles, norms of behavior, pressures to conform, and cohesiveness (Brewer, Hollingsworth, & Campbell, 1995).

Both the lecture and the small group discussion seek to educate the participants on a topic. Each method has strengths and weaknesses. This chapter will address and describe these methods and the advantages and disadvantages of each. However, before going into the strengths and weaknesses, it would be helpful to identify several operational definitions relating to these instructional methods. They are presented at the end of this chapter.

BACKGROUND

Procedural Steps in Using the Lecture

The lecture technique begins with careful preparation on the part of the presenter. For the lecture to be effective, the presenter must know his or her subject matter. Any attempt to learn as you go can be easily revealed in the lecture presentation (Petty, 1999; Wood, 2005).

Once the presenter is prepared, the lecture is simply a matter of presenting the material to the audience in a way that will keep them interested and get the material across clearly (Brewer, 1997; Brewer, DeJonge, & Stout, 2001; Toole, 2000). To do this, the following steps must be taken.

Step 1: Outline Your Presentation

Careful preparation is essential because the presenter will lose the audience at the first sign of rambling. Every good lecture begins with a good outline. The outline will not only keep the presenter focused but also provide a good checkpoint for the listeners. Share your outline with the audience by telling them what points you are going to cover and then talking about each point in order. Keep the outline simple so it doesn't become a distraction from your lecture.

Step 2: Keep It Simple

Most audiences can only absorb a few main ideas at each sitting. Generally, two to four main ideas should be the maximum presented during a lecture. Although the concepts can be complicated, the structure of the lecture should be kept simple.

A good start can set the tone for the whole lecture. It also helps to establish the purpose of the lecture both in your mind and in the mind of the listeners. The introduction should be carefully planned and as interesting as possible.

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