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Analysis of a lecture

By Gerald D. Bailey

The most frequently used teaching method employed in higher education is the lecture. Despite the ridicule of being ineffective, overused and outmoded, lecturing has survived some 2,500 years as a major method of instruction.

George Brown's **Lecturing and Explaining** is a well organized and fascinating text dealing with the lecture method. The text is divided into six units: two units deal with the concept of explaining, three units discuss lecture and one unit explains how to help students learn from the lecture method.

The two units on explaining deal with the important skills of explanation in classroom interaction. Brown contends that explaining is a critical behavior in a teacher's total repertoire. He defines explaining as "the teacher giving understanding to someone else by providing information." Brown believes it is necessary to classify explaining into three categories (1) interpretative (what), (2) descriptive (how) and (3) reason giving (why). Overall, the instructor who desires to become adept at explaining must always remember that the information in explanations should be well structured and interesting to the student.

Brown's discussion on lecturing is particularly well thought out and researched. The author defines lecture as an "oral method of giving information, generating understanding and creating interest." The readers are provided with an overview of the basic skills which make up a lecture: (1) explaining, (2) orientation, (3) closure, (4) liveliness, (5) using audio visual aids, (6) varying student activities, (7) giving directions, (8) comparing and (9) narrating. This component classification provides the reader with an understanding of what is involved in lecturing and should allow the teacher to become more proficient when analyzing personal lectures.

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In Unit Four, Brown highlights the major models of lecture: (1) classical model: major concept with numerous subconcepts, (2) problem-centered: statement of problem followed by a series of solutions and (3) sequential method: series of linked statements which lead to a conclusion. These three different models may be the most significant contribution to the total area of methodology study since it allows the teacher to become more cognizant of how to inject variety into teaching style. In short, the information should allow the teacher to begin to realize that there are many different approaches to a lecture. Equally important, the teacher should recognize that organizing a lecture in different ways provides for variety which promotes student attention and motivation.

While many of the concepts in the text are limited in scope, the reader should find the section dealing with anxiety when lecturing of particular interest. Brown indicates that many lectures (beginning and experienced) suffer from anxiety. There are at least seven common defenses that the teacher needs to guard against.

The discussion of narrating and spatial arrangements when lecturing will also be of significant interest. The literature summary dealing with nonverbal behavior is mandatory reading for every classroom teacher.

The latter sections of the text are more appropriate for the inexperienced or novice teacher. The narrative in Unit Five enumerates five steps necessary for organizing and preparing a lecture. They include: (1) What do I want my students to learn?, (2) Free association, (3) Reading, (4) Organizing, (5) Setting the lecture out and (6) Rehearsing. To the experienced teacher, this kind of discussion will not be of particular value. However, it is important to remember that these are the basic steps to effective planning in any kind of methodology.

The final chapter deals with helping students learn from a lecture. This type of "teaching" is often overlooked by both authors of methodology texts and practitioners. The areas that are highlighted include: (1) student listening, (2) the study analyzing modes of discourse and (3) student note taking. Hopefully, the reader will be motivated to employ several of these important strategies suggested by the author.

The appendices are a collection of ideas and activities dealing with such concepts as the videotape playback and student feedback. Unlike other appendices in most books, the documents provided are of particular value. The author could have easily integrated the appendices as major concepts in the text.

The most distracting feature of the book is the endless related activities suggested by the author. They are interspersed throughout the narrative and their presence breaks the continuity of the narrative. These suggested activities continually force the reader from the main narrative and interrupts the natural flow of the text.

Overall, the text is well conceived and well documented. Hopefully, the author will endeavor to expand some of the concepts in depth in a more lengthy text. Anyone in higher education, with many years of experience or new to higher education, will want to purchase this book for their professional library.