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Please, Don't Lecture Me?

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Abstract

Lectures are delivered by the lecturers but not received with the same spirit by students. There is a plethora of researches and criticism about the negative effects of lecture methods still it is most obvious way to transact the curriculum in higher education- despite its harmful effect. The present paper discusses the reasons for wide-spread popularity of lectures, reasons for not using lecture method in higher education and strong reasoning on ineffectiveness of lecturing in 21st century.

Keywords: Lecturing, Methods of Teaching, futility of Lecturing, art of communication

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Introduction

Mr. Kapoor went into the class of third Year B.A. (English). He started giving a lecture as if he was unstoppable. He was so much engrossed or pretend to be so, lecture that he did not observe the body language of his students. His students were withdrawn, yelling and agitated. Many started murmuring and secretly passing the WhatsApp messages. Mr. Kapoor kept on and on until one student told him to stop as time was over. After his departure, everyone felt relief. When one student asked another student, "What have you learnt from his lecture today?" the answer was silence- absolute since with grinning or remorse.

This is common scenario in common higher education classes. Lectures are delivered by the lecturers, but they are received or not- is always a question. From past twenty years, lecture method has been criticised a lot as it is one of the easiest ways to complete the syllabus and students are almost passive during this state. This method is considered as one of the most common and most popular among the higher education teachers. This method indicates the teacher-centric classroom with hydraulic model. Bombarding of information was done by the lecturer and whatever students try to catch, understand and retain as per their capacity. It is also considered as most boring and impractical practice as it does not provide any active role to students. But is the lecturing to derogative and degrading that whole of lot of literature on internet and in elite libraries is cursing this method? According to George Leonard (1992), lecturing is the best way to get information from teacher's notes to student's notebook without touching student's mind. Quite drastic definition!

Our "great teachers" have formed the habit of teaching students by telling- it may be inspiring due to passionate and entertaining oration but this way of teaching is not much to touch the hearts and minds of students. Teachers of higher education ought not to talk much in the classroom. They must use lecturing only when the purpose is just to transmit information which may not discovered or understood by the students. Hereby lecturing has its role in higher education but not much (Finkel, 2000).

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Time has changed but our teachers are changing at the rate of snail. Earlier the focus was on knowledge transmission now knowledge is freely and fully available on the internet. Chances are there that better material in better format with better style is presented on internet than students are learning now in the classroom on the same topic. As information is free and easily grabbed with few clicks, focus has shifted from information sharing to experience delivering. Promising future of teachers are dependent on the ability to articulate the material in such a way that provide exalting experience. The role of teachers have changed from informer to performer and with performance, they have to transform the students. Teaching is to touch the life forever which is possible only through providing remarkable experience in the classroom. Now the question is: Does lecturing help to create remarkable experience in the classroom? If the answer is no, why the practices of adopting flip model of classroom, blended learning, constructivism and connectivism are routinely practiced? One of the depressing answers of this is: tradition. It has been coming the ages of our ancestors and sometimes, it is also a semi-truth that lecturing is what lecturer knows. On the other hands, being accustomed to these passive practices, lecturing is what students expect as this is the path of least resistance for both teachers and students with no scope of discussion, argument or debate.

One more favourable reason for teachers to lean towards lecture method is desire of teacher to be the centre of attention and to control the classroom. Though outer space looks quite calm and attentive, actually there is no control over what is going on in the students' heads. Here, the demarking lines between teaching and learning are blurred by the teachers. Bligh (2000) offered classic advice to instructors to improve their lectures. He himself raised serious doubts on the value of lecturing- no matter how carefully and skilfully, it is delivered. The traditional style of continuous exposition may not promote or justify learning with fulfil the objective of making students thinking individuals.

Though many professors are found not good at lecturing still they adopt lecturing as it is one of the easiest method than creating active environment which promotes meaningful learning. Apart from this to experiment with different methods, teachers must have the grasp on pedagogy. Let's face it sternly: Prof. X may the master of Indian philosophy and has achieved mastery over all the basic concepts of Indian philosophy. But mastery over the subject does not guarantee for better teaching. He might not have those teaching to develop the similar mastery among his students. that's why he resorts to lecturing to complete his tasks. There is a difference between Mathematician and Maths educator/ English Language scholar and English Language educator.

One last reason to resort on lecturing is economic one as it cheaper to pack the large number of students together in one hall and deliver information through lecture rather than adopting alternative methodologies.

Eric Mazur, a Physicist at Harvard University has campaigned against stale lecturing techniques for 27 years. The data of the advanced research (Freeman et al., 2014) also affirmed to the world that lecturing has been outmoded, outdated and ineffective way to teaching.

One major change that has come in the recent years- rise of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). The whole world has started adopted MOOCs as one of alternative (perhaps regular in future) methodology for teaching. India has also taken the digital initiative by creating the programme named Study Webs of Active –Learning for Young Aspiring Minds programme (SWAYAM). It is a digital learning platform that facilitates hosting of all the courses, taught in classrooms from Class 9 till post-graduation to be accessed by anyone, anywhere at any time. More than 1,000 specially chosen faculty and teachers from across the country have participated in preparing these courses. But the pathetic situations are designed many of these “specially chosen” teachers by delivering the lectures in the same pattern as they have been delivering in the classrooms though out their lives. Only difference that comes by this practice is – now students does not require to go to classroom, they can get the lecture on their devices in their homes. Lecturers are not physically present to student but virtually, they contribute the same passive practices on screen.

The simple truth that teaching fraternity needs to understand that it is about what teachers teach but what students learn. Just walk into any classroom of higher education where lecturing is going on. You will find some students dozing, some are texting, some are shopping online. This is a sad scenario in many of the classrooms. On the other hand, it is an established fact that students attention span in the classroom is maximum 10 to 15 minutes. When teachers have such a short time, don't they utilize it with more caution? What do you say?

Furthermore, lecturing is an art. To give an effective lecture and capture the attention through lecture require lot of preparation and training in communication skills. But most of lectures are taken as professors are reading their notes aloud.

Here are 10 reasons whylectures just don't work (Clark, 2014):

1. Babylonian Hour

We only have hours because of the Babylonian base-60 number system, which first appeared around 3100 BC. But it has nothing to do with the psychology of learning.

2. Passive Observers

Lectures without engagement with the audience turn students into passive observers. Research shows that participation increases learning, yet few lecturers do this. Interactive lectures are really employed by professors.

3. Attention Fall-off

Our ability to retain information falls off badly after 10-20 minutes. Ability to focus for such a short time can make justification for an hour long lecture. When attention fall off in 20 minutes, what's use of passive listening for remaining 40 minutes.

4. Note-taking

Lectures rely on students taking notes, yet note-taking is seldom taught, which massively reduces the effectiveness of the lecture. Students are busy in jotting down the notes in most of lecture time. They note whatever they feel important. This pattern of finding key points of lecture reduce the effect of lecture.

5. Disabilities

Even slight disabilities in listening, language or motor skills can make lectures ineffective, as it is difficult to focus, discriminate and note-take quickly enough.

6. No Pause & No Reflective Practices

If something is not understood on first exposure, there is no opportunity to pause, reflect or seek clarification. This approach contradicts all that we know about the psychology of learning.

7. Cognitive Overload

Lecturers load up talks with too much detail, with the result that students cannot process all the information properly.

8. Tyranny of Location

Students have to go to a specific place to hear a lecture. This wasteshuge amounts of time, especially if they live far away from campus.

9. tyranny of Time

Students have to turn up at a specific time to hear a lecture.

10. Poor Presentation

Many lecturers have neither the personality nor skills to hold the audience's attention.

These reasons are enough to leave this method of lecturing as lecture may not capture the attention and interest of students. why to retain lecture as a valued pedagogical tool when its effectiveness is so limited. Now in 21st century, the old justification, "We have always been doing this way", will not work. With all the above reasoning, this paper does not condemn

lecture method but the way to use this method. Tools are always objective; it all depends upon their use. If much pain is taken to deliver the lecture adding the art of communication, passion and creativity, it will surely be effective, otherwise please, don't lecture!

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