

# TEACHING MODES IN HIGHER EDUCATION



## 2

### *How to Teach Effectively – Lectures & Seminars*

Michaela  
Sepešiová

2.1 The Essence of Lectures

2.2 The Essence of Seminars

# Teaching Modes in Higher Education

## HOW TO TEACH EFFECTIVELY – LECTURES & SEMINARS

Think about

- What are the characteristics of effective teaching? Write down your list of characteristics and compare them with a few colleagues.
- What are the typical teaching modes in higher education in Slovakia?
- Which do you prefer, lecturing or seminars? Why?
- Why is it important to set teaching objectives and learning outcomes?

## INTRODUCTION

Dealing with widening student diversity, more demanding student body, a pervasive language of quality and accountability, rapidly changing technological possibilities yet uneven levels of student familiarity with them, more demanding arrangements with governments, and expectations by students and employers.

It is commonly accepted that schools must prepare autonomous, responsible citizens. In the new millennium with its rapidly changing social and economic conditions, the traditional aim of education, transmission of knowledge, is not enough. Schools are no longer able to predict and then equip learners with the skills they will need throughout the rest of their professional lives. What they need to do is favour the most important of skills; learning how to learn.

Higher education is called as tertiary one, which is the non-compulsory education level. It includes undergraduate, post graduate, as well as vocational education and training. Colleges and universities are the main institutions which provide the tertiary education; and so are known as tertiary institutions. Higher education provides necessary skills and training required for the future career of an individual. Not only that, it provides the required trained human resource for the economy. Universities and colleges are the main institutes which provide the **facilities of higher education** where the teaching and learning process is mostly lecturing in the classrooms. Students are expected to update themselves with self-study.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on effective teaching. These studies discuss ways of making lectures more effective (e.g. Delaney et al., 2010; Race, 2007; Brown and Race, 2002; Edwards et al., 2001; Brown, 1987). When we talk about higher education, teaching and learning processes are the integral parts of it. Apart from informal, formal, non-formal, rote and episodic learning, meaningful learning is important. It refers to the concept that the learned knowledge is fully understood by the individual and that the individual knows how that specific fact relates to the other stored facts.

Current trends in education make increasing demands on modernization, humanization and effectiveness. An important status has been given to lectures and seminars used in

the process of education at universities. Forms of higher education are time-consuming and difficult to organize. University teaching involves certain modes of instruction such as lectures, seminars, tutoring, laboratory experiences, mentoring, excursions, practical training and consultations. Courses and lecturers vary in their educational objectives e.g. learning new knowledge, stimulating student interest, developing cognitive affective skills.

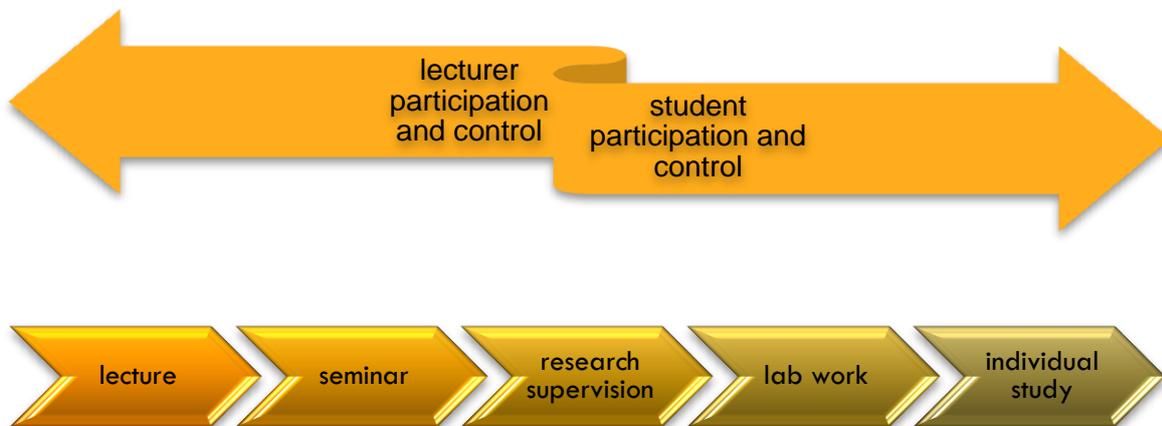


FIGURE 2.1 The various modes of teaching (Source: Adapted from Brown and Atkins, 2002)

At one extreme is the lecture in which student control and participation is usually minimal. At the other extreme is individual study in which lecturer control and participation is usually minimal. It should be noted that even at each end of the continuum there is some control and participation by both lecturer and students (Brown and Atkins, 2002).

## 2.1 THE ESSENCE OF LECTURES

*Lectures are a way of transferring the instructor's lecture notes to students' notebooks without passing through the brains of either.*

Eric Mazur

Generally speaking, in lectures a lecturer delivers information to a group who listen and take notes. However, there is no such thing as a typical lecture. In medieval times lectures were the most common form of teaching in universities. The term 'lecture' was derived from Middle English, which represented an act of reading; from Late Latin *lectura*, from Latin *lectus* which meant to read aloud. According to Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary (1983, p. 817) it is a discourse read or delivered before an audience, esp. for instruction or to set forth some subject. Lectures consisted of an oral reading of a text followed by a commentary. The method of reading aloud from a text or script is still used by some lecturers.

The style of a lecture differs depending upon the discipline and the personality of the lecturer. Some lectures are large, with as many as 100 or more students, while others can be much smaller, perhaps with groups no larger than 10. The size of a lecture will also impact on the style of lecture that is delivered by the lecturer.

Sometimes lectures and seminars are written to stand alone, and each one covers a totally different topic. At other times, they are designed to link together as part of a series. You should make sure that you are aware of the structure of your lectures and seminars. If they are part of a series, reread your notes from the previous meetings before you attend the latest one.

### 2.1.1 Facing Problems by Stakeholders

The lecturing method is mostly used at the degree level classes, as the number of students is also large. Very few students get the practice of preparing notes while the lecture is going on. Most of the students cannot write very fast. A degree level student rarely purchases the reference books; therefore, they have to depend on the notes. The result is they lose interest in the topic and further in the subject.

In an undergraduate class, mostly lecturing method is used. It is supplemented with drawing of diagrams, charts or figures on the black board. There are certain topics in the syllabus, which are more descriptive, monotonous and hence may become uninteresting to the students. Students may ask ready notes for such topics and it is a fact that some teachers do give ready-made notes. Some teachers use the same notes for years together. This results in to the loss of “dialogue” or the interaction which is very much important for both the teachers and the students. Some students do come to the class regularly but others come only occasionally to collect notes from their classmates. The repeated absence in the class results in **to loss of interest to teach as well as to learn**, from both the sides.

Here, the role of a lecturer is very important. If the students do not show interest, the lecturer has to change the method of teaching and make the topic interesting. He/she has to motivate the students to be attentive in the class, as well as to prepare their own notes. They should develop the habit of using the library on their own. It does not mean that there will be no teaching in the class.

Previous survey, such as that conducted by Delaney et al. (2010), has indicated that key behaviour indicators have a positive impact on students’ perception of characteristic of effective lecturers. These can be listed as follows: **respectful of students; knowledgeable, both content and pedagogical knowledge; approachable; engaging; communicative; organized; responsive; professional, and humorous.** Such studies have a great potential to illustrate the gap between students’ and lecturers’ perception of effective teaching.

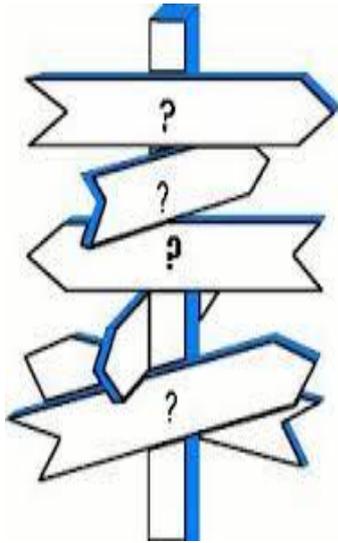
### 2.1.2 Generating and maintaining interest

Gaining and maintaining students’ interest in the lecture is likely to increase their motivation to learn. The **start of the lecture is crucial** and needs to interest students sufficiently to convince them that it is worth staying, or staying attentive, for the next 45 minutes.

While planning and preparing a lecture, one should take into consideration two important competences:

1. Content – a lecturer ensures that lecture content is current, representative, accurate and appropriate;
2. Pedagogy – the objectives are communicated to students.

At the very beginning a lecturer should:



- appear enthusiastic and interested;
- be organised, and take control of the lecture room on your arrival;
- know how to use the lecture equipment.

During the first few minutes the lecturer could:

- go through the learning outcomes for the session, telling them what they should have learned by the end. This can be a little dry;
  - describe a problem or scenario that is of relevance to the topic, and then go on to outline how the lecture will consider this;
  - share their passion and enthusiasm for the subject by telling students why they are personally interested in this topic. Where possible, this could be a link to their personal research;
- link the lecture to some current news or activity. The lecturer could take this step further by asking students to bring examples with them to the lecture, and inviting them to contribute.

To keep students interested during the lecture the lecturer could:

- use relevant and current examples to illustrate the point;
- where possible draw on the students' experiences;
- use rhetorical questions to encourage students to keep on track;
- change the demands on the student as the lecture progresses. Vary between note taking, listening, and active participation;
- use visual materials or artefacts that are relevant to the topic of the lecture;
- use live links to the web to demonstrate currency of the material being presented.

Brown (1987) in his study highlights that students gave high ratings of interest to lecturers who adopted a narrative mode of delivery where informal language was used, and problems and findings were described as if telling a story. In addition, high interest ratings were given where examples related to both the topic and to the students. These studies are not new, but are still very relevant today. The study by Evans (2007), involving history students from four universities, concluded that students rated the enthusiasm of the lecturer very highly, and indicated they felt that it was a prerequisite for their involvement. These types of study show that **an effective lecturer can deliver far more than the transmission of information and ideas, and there is often a need to explain this to students.** In particular, it may be important to explain to students why simply having a copy of the PowerPoint lecture is no substitute for lecture attendance.

### 2.1.3 Organisation and structure

A lecture needs to be well organised in order for a student to make sense of it. Most texts on lecturing, or on giving lectures, talk about paying attention to the beginning, middle and end and these are aspects most lecturers are comfortable with. The case studies illustrate some strategies for structuring used by experienced academics in their lectures.

However, difficulty can arise when the lecturer perceives the structure to be perfectly clear, but the students do not. This can happen because the lecturer, who knows the subject matter very well, fails to provide the signals and clues that guide the student through the lecture. Thus, despite the overall structure, the student gets lost or misses the key points. Brown (1987) has suggested a number of simple ways to give students the sorts of clues and signals they need (see table 2.1).

<b>Signposts</b>	These indicate the structure and direction of the lecture	<p><i>Last week we covered... and this week I will be developing those ideas further.</i></p> <p><i>Today I want to consider...</i></p> <p><i>First, we are going to look at...</i></p> <p><i>Second, I'll spend some time considering...</i></p>
	There are also statements which indicate ends of the topics within the lecture	<p><i>So, that summarises the key features of...</i></p>
<b>Links</b>	These are phrases or statements that link part of a lecture together, and they often involve the use of rhetorical questions. Having just come to the end of a topic, you could say	<p><i>So what does that mean in practice? Well, let's go on to have a look at . . .</i></p> <p><i>So we can conclude then that . . . But what does that really tell us about . . . ? Well, if we go back to the first item we considered today . . .</i></p> <p><i>So, you can see that this is the final step in the process. So what now? If we know that this happens in this way, what are the long term consequences? Well, we'll now go on to consider those.</i></p>
<b>Foci</b>	These are statements that give emphasis and which highlight key points	<p><i>This is the most crucial step of the process...</i></p> <p><i>There are three absolutely essential points that need to be made.</i></p>

TABLE 2.1 Simple Ways of Signalling (Source: Adapted from Brown, 1987)

Preparation is a key to getting the most out of your lectures. While **planning and preparing a lecture**, ask yourself

- How well structured is my lecture?
- Are the sections clearly organised and well linked?
- Will students know the key points to take away?

The following tips one might find helpful.

- **Signposting**

Speaking in public is very difficult. However, we are lucky when we do this because there are many standard phrases that we can use to structure and construct our lectures. This means that we can concentrate on the content of the lecture, and communicate what we need to say.

As lecturers use a variety of techniques, such as giving verbal signposts to alert students as to when they need to copy down a key point, and also to provide structure to the talk. Some examples of verbal signposts referring to:

1. *Structure*

Lecturers will often set out the structure of their lecture at the beginning. For example:

This lecture will examine what ... . First, we will look at the ..., then we will examine ..., and finally we will look at ... .

The key points to note down are often highlighted and say something as obvious as

The key thing to remember about this is... or the most important consequence of this is ....

2. *Changing topic*

If you wish to change a topic use verbal signals:

We shall now discuss ... or Turning to ... ,

3. *Summary*

Many lectures and seminars will contain summaries that will recapitulate the key details covered. They are often introduced by phrases such as

To summarise ... or To recap what has been discussed ...

4. *Conclusion*

Do not forget to end with a clear conclusion using verbal signposts such as

In conclusion ... or To conclude ...

Find the followings some useful phrases that you can use when you make your lectures (see Appendix 2.A).

Remember: when you give a lecture there are three main parts to the lecture: **the introduction, the main body and the summary.**

#### 5. *Overview*

Today I am going to talk about .... My lecture will be in three parts. Firstly I am going ... Then I am going to talk ... and .... Finally, I'm going to ... . The lecture will probably take around xx minutes. There will be time for questions at the end of my talk.

#### 6. *The main body of the lecture*

During your lecture, it is a good idea to remind your audience occasionally of the benefit of what you are saying.

#### 7. *Keeping your audience with you*

Remember that **what you are saying is new to your audience.** You are clear about the structure of your talk, but let your audience know when you are moving on to a new point. You can do this by saying something like "right", or "OK". You can also use some of the following expressions:

If you are using index cards, putting the link on the cards will help you remember to keep the audience with you. In addition, by glancing at your index cards you will be pausing – this will also help your audience to realise that you are moving on to something new.

#### 8. *Language for using visuals*

It is important to introduce your visual to the audience. Give your audience enough time to absorb the information on the visual. Pause to allow them to look at the information and then explain why the visual is important:

#### 9. *Summarising*

At the end of your lecture, you should summarise your talk and remind the audience of what you have told them. Relate the end of your lecture to your opening statement.

#### 10. *Handling questions*

Thank the audience for their attention and invite questions. It is useful to re-word the question, as you can check that you have understood the question and you can give yourself some time to think of an answer. By asking the question again you also make sure that other people in the audience understand the question. After you have answered your question, check that the person who asked you is happy with the answer.

If you do not know the answer to a question, say you do not know. It is better to admit to not knowing something than to guess and maybe get it wrong.

### *11. What can you say if things go wrong?*

You think you have lost your audience? Rephrase what you have said. Cannot remember the word? If it is a difficult word for you – one that you often forget, or one that you have difficulty pronouncing – you should write it on your index card. Pause briefly, look down at your index card and say the word.

### *12. Using your voice*

Do not speak in a flat monotone – this will bore your audience. By varying your speed and tone, you will be able to keep your audience's attention. Practise emphasising key words and pause in the right places – usually in between ideas in a sentence. For example

The first strategy involves getting to know our market (pause) and finding out what they want. (pause) Customer surveys (pause) as well as staff training (pause) will help us do this."

Do not forget – if you speak too fast you will lose your audience (for more, see Appendix 2.B).

#### • **Reading lists**

You should usually provide a list of recommended reading in advance. It is important that students read through the material on this list, as it will ensure that they understand the key concepts that will be covered in the lecture or seminar. It will also give them an opportunity to familiarise with any specialist terminology, names, etc.

### **TIPS to sum it up**

Some lecturers find it helpful to identify two or three students whom they know well enough from seminars to assess when they might be getting confused. If your key students start to look worried, it is as well to pause and check everyone understands the topic.

It is also worth pausing periodically and asking if anyone has any questions or would like you to go over any particular points. After all, you are there to teach and, if you have lost them all, it is not much help.



Your students will also appreciate a handout. If you are using slides, this will often be a copy of them. You should hand this out at the beginning of the lecture, so that they can supplement it with their own notes if they wish. You should also make sure that they have any handouts or slides electronically, for those who make notes

on a laptop or tablet.

Some lecturers provide background reading in advance of their lectures. However, do not be surprised if nobody has read it.

## 2.2 THE ESSENCE OF SEMINARS

*Let students do (most of) the work. (Pelz, 2004)*

Many of your students will be making the transition from school to university where students are expected to become independent adult learners. Research demonstrates clearly that adults learn most effectively when they are actively engaged and drawing on experience (Belletti, 1999; Kelly, 2010). While lectures can be a one-way flow of information, seminars are settings where active, experiential learning can take place in a context of diverse experiences and views. The more the seminar environment supports this type of learning, the more self-directed and responsible students can become.

The most important thing to remember about your role as lecturers is that you are there to facilitate a process of learning, not lecture on content. In some disciplines, while your knowledge of content is important, you only need to know enough to lead a productive discussion and promote experiential learning. In others, thorough knowledge of content will be needed. When preparing your seminar, remember to prepare both content and strategies for engaging students.

Seminars create opportunities to:

- explore topics in more depth;
- share ideas in a way that will advance your thinking;
- learn from other people's experiences and background knowledge;
- gain perspectives and points of view that you might not have otherwise considered;
- identify and sort out any misunderstandings.



### 2.2.1 Teaching objectives and learning outcomes

Broadly speaking, all educational purposes can be defined as follows:

- What it is intended that the lecturer will do (an aim or an objective);
- What it is intended that the student will have learnt, or will be able to do, as a result of a learning experience (an objective or learning outcome).

In the past, objectives have often been defined in terms of the teacher's activity. Nowadays this is not true because **teaching objectives** need to be defined in terms of the fundamental purpose - **student learning outcomes**.

Planning is always much more effective than unplanned work; therefore one of the most important things you need to do while planning is **to identify your aims and objectives**.

You need to know what it is you expect your student will achieve, what it is he/she will know or will be able to do by the end of the lesson.

Learning outcomes are quantifiable statements that speak about what students should know, or be able to do as a result of taking a course, seminar or completing a program. Learning outcomes are often verbalised as a result of participating in (XX), someone will be able to (Action verb) (Learning statement).

*By the end of this chapter students will be able to explain the differences between the main teaching modes in higher education.*

*By the end of this chapter students will be able to verbalise min. three attributes a remarkable lecture should have.*

Worthy learning outcomes should be student-centred; focused on results from an activity not activity itself; aimed at skills, competences and abilities essential to the subject resp. discipline based on professional standards; clear and specific to be measurable and assessed.

By teaching objectives we encounter information and knowledge teachers intend to teach. Objectives are described as brief, clear statements that describe the desired learning outcomes of instruction; i.e., the specific skills, values, and attitudes students should exhibit that reflect the broader goals. There are also difficulties in defining teaching objectives in terms of academic content. To define objectives, the teacher has to consider the overall educational purpose of the activity and the nature of the skills which it is intended should be developed.

Stating educational objectives has several benefits:

- help to design the course/seminar – the content, the methods, the assessment;
- communicate the intention of the course/seminar to students;
- identify resource needed.

Lecturers should be aware of the **importance of teaching higher-order thinking skills**. Brookhart (2010) defines higher-order thinking as divided into three categories: those that define higher-order thinking in terms of **transfer**, those that define it in terms of **critical thinking**, and those that define it in terms of **problem solving**. While Bloom's Taxonomy (see Pictures 2.1 and 2.2) is not the only framework for teaching thinking, it is the most widely used framework. Bloom's aim was to promote higher forms of thinking in education, such as analysing and evaluating, rather than just teaching students to remember facts (rote learning). Learning was divided into three domains of educational activity:

- Cognitive: mental skills (**Knowledge**)
- Affective: growth in feelings or emotional areas (**Attitude or self**)
- Psychomotor: manual or physical skills (**Skills**)

Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Objectives: Cognitive Domain

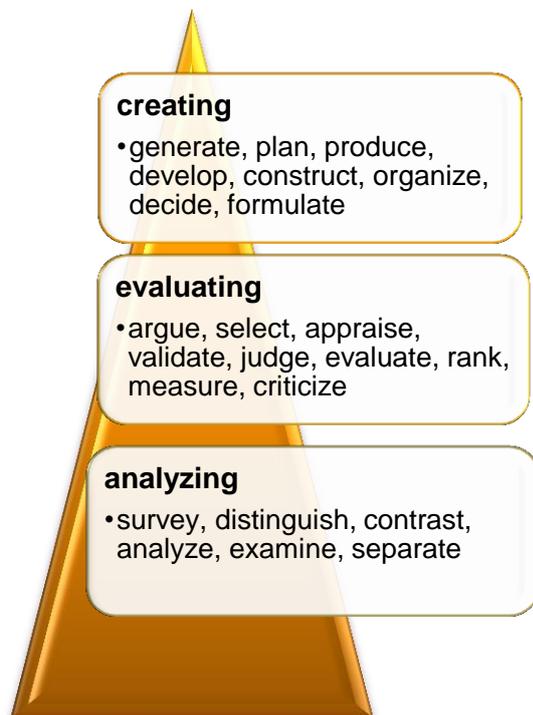


FIGURE 2.2 Higher order thinking skills

(Source: Adapted from Bloom and Krathwohl, 1956; revised by Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001)

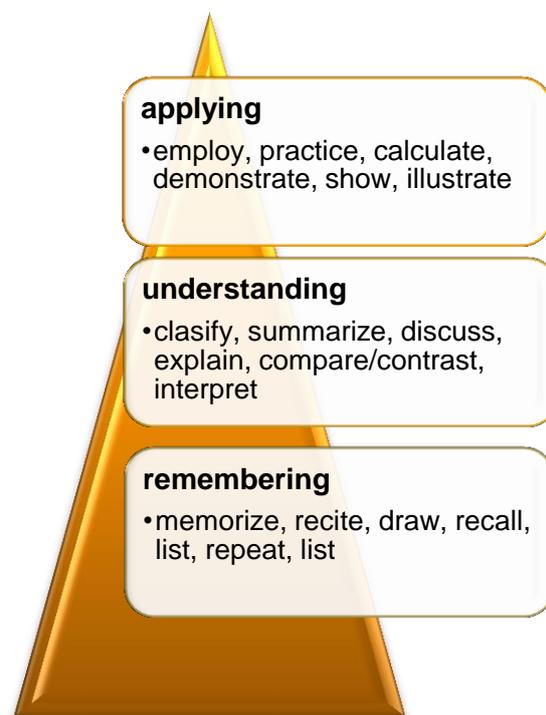


FIGURE 2.3 Lower order thinking skills

In order to foster deep conceptual understanding, consider using the following strategies:

- Teach skills through real-world contexts
- Vary the context in which student use a newly taught skill
- Emphasise the building blocks of higher-order thinking
- Build background knowledge
- Classify things in categories
- Arrange items along dimensions
- Make hypotheses
- Draw inferences
- Analyse things
- Solve problems
- Encourage students to think about the thinking strategies they are using.

Active learning is an umbrella term for learning and teaching methods which put the student in charge of their own learning: through meaningful activities, they think about and apply what they are learning. It is a deliberate contrast against passive learning. It can be argued that life is a group game, and working in small groups helps students to pick up vital survival skills for well beyond their formal studies. You cannot develop your listening skills much by going to the best lecture on listening. You cannot become better at interpersonal skills just by reading all about it in the library, or downloading the latest scholarly research about it onto your hard disk.

### 2.2.2 Collaborative and cooperative learning

This is the most common form of active learning, involving group or team work of some kind. Collaborative learning is where the students work together for shared outcomes and are assessed as a group, whereas cooperative learning refers to group work where a common goal is achieved, but students are assessed individually.

*Pros:* Easy to apply to any discipline; excellent real-world experience in transferrable skills for students; students learn together by sharing strengths.

*Cons:* Group work can be difficult in practice, particularly if students are not given advice beforehand (as in any team, leadership roles and workload issues tend to cause friction); and overarching group marks can cause dissatisfaction.

As Cohen (1989) states, the strongest reason for getting students to learn together in small groups is the high level of learning payoff that they can derive from explaining things to each other. Take the case of six students, at the point where just one of them has 'seen the light' regarding something rather complex - be it a concept, a theory, a process or the meaning of life. If this student now explains it to the other ones, the explainer remembers forever, and gets a real command on the topic. The act of explaining something to other people is one of the best ways of causing the brain to sort out the ideas involved, as they have got to be sorted out satisfactorily for it to be possible to explain it. And the other five students are advantaged too. They are having the topic explained by someone who has just understood, and who remembers exactly how the knowledge or information has been constructed. This is much better than having it explained by someone (a lecturer) who has understood it for ages, and cannot remember how it was constructed, and possibly cannot understand anyone not being able to understand it.

Vygotsky's (1978) **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)** is another theoretical framework inferring benefits for students engaged in student-to-student activities in the seminar. The ZPD could be explained briefly as a kind of social and mental setting in which learning becomes possible. For a student, this is the shared social environment framed by the opportunities for learning both within and outside of the classroom. Students learn through observing and engaging in social interaction with their peers (and the teacher) more than they could by independent means. Development happens within a student's ZPD. This allows for **peer scaffolding occurring**. Scaffolding can be seen as a metaphor for the possibility of one peer to facilitate raising the level of another. This can happen directly, as when one student gives instructions to another, or indirectly, as when one student observes and emulates another.

It is also important to remember that students have a variety of learning styles and come from diverse backgrounds and many will not have had any experience of active or experiential learning. However, diversity adds strength and interest to seminar participation and discussion. You have five minutes where the whole audience is listening. The problem is to keep it that way for another 40 minutes. You should arouse interest; therefore you make sure that students know

- where we are;
- where we want to go;

A seminar is generally understood to be a small group meeting in which students and a tutor discuss information on a chosen topic. Seminars provide an opportunity to explore

topics by discussion, and to identify and sort out any problems. Some tutors may use the opportunity to introduce new related topics. Most seminars last from 45 to 90 minutes. Seminars need not necessarily be face-to-face contact, they can also occur in online environments.

Often a seminar is led by a student who prepares and presents the topic and kicks off the discussion. So that the seminar is of benefit to everyone, it is the responsibility of the other students to contribute their ideas, opinions and questions. For this to work well these contributions should have been researched and prepared in advance. The tutor's role is as a facilitator. Their **aim is not to 'give a mini lecture'** but to **try to encourage contributions from all those present by asking questions that stimulate further discussion**. At the end of the seminar they may sum up and draw some conclusions.

Often when students communicate some ideas to others the process of putting their thoughts into spoken form enables them to help clarify them further. It may also allow them to see things in a way that they had not done before. In a seminar, the group shares the responsibility for keeping control of the discussion. This gives them the chance to gather their own thoughts before presenting them against the different points of view that are offered by the other participants. In this way, a group can collectively advance their level of thinking through an effective combination of independent reading and group discussion. As students become more familiar, and in turn more confident, with discussing as a group, the discussions will become closer to the level of ideas that they are reading in texts.

Your first role as a seminar tutor is to provide materials in advance for your students to prepare. This may be some background reading, or perhaps a case study to consider. You may also want to provide some potential discussion questions for your students to start to consider their answers. At the seminar itself, you need to begin by setting the scene at the beginning of the seminar. In an ideal world, your students will have prepared and come ready to discuss a particular question or set of questions, but it will not hurt to remind them of the subject and give them a starting point for discussion.

By taking part in seminars students will learn more about a subject area, and become more comfortable with the language of the subject area. Terms which before they thought were aliens now have some meaning. Besides that, they will have the opportunity to develop a wide range of skills that will enable them to get a good degree and make them more employable graduate (Andrews & Higson, 2008). Below are some of the transferable skills that have been defined as skills developed in one situation and used and transferred into another one.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listening</li><li>• Negotiation</li><li>• Leadership</li><li>• Teamwork</li><li>• Oral communication</li><li>• Taking responsibility</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sharing knowledge</li><li>• Time management</li><li>• Developing an argument</li><li>• Collaborating with people from different backgrounds</li><li>• Dealing with conflicting opinions</li><li>• Producing and using visual aids</li></ul> |
|--|---|

TABLE 2.2 Soft Skills Inventory (Source: Adapted from Drummond, Nixon & Wiltshire, 1998)

Working in small groups can allow students to embrace a range of interactive and collaborative skills which are often hard to develop in individual study situations, and impossible to develop in large-group environments such as lectures. Many of these the small-group skills they acquire will help them with obtaining employment or pursuing further studies. Key skills such as:

- Coping with the normal difficulties of interactions between human beings
- Working in teams
- Managing time and processes effectively
- Listening to others' ideas sympathetically and critically
- Thinking creatively and originally
- Building on others' existing work
- Collaborating on projects
- Seeing projects through to a conclusion (Race, 2007, p. 126).

According to Race (2007) learning in groups allows students to develop cohesion with their peers, when classes are becoming so large as to exclude feelings of whole group identity, particularly under module schemes where large cohorts of students come together from disparate directions to study together on a module.



FIGURE 2.4 Cohesion cycle (Source: Adapted from Race, 2007)

Among important skills for teachers, those of listening, asking and answering questions and responding are paramount in small group settings.

One of the best things about attending a seminar is discovering and experiencing something new. By sharing your concerns you will be able **to put them into perspective**. You will also come to realise that there are different ways of approaching the same topic. In a seminar, the focus is on sharing ideas and working together to enable everyone to become more familiar and confident with the course content. Seminar groups often become supportive of each other's efforts.

It is likely that during a semester you will ask students to lead a part of a seminar. This may involve them preparing and presenting a topic for the group and then leading a discussion. This involves a careful balance of keeping the number of points you want to make to a limit, to allow some time for discussion, but not rushing and having a couple of extra things 'up your sleeve' which **can be left in or taken out depending on time**.

- **Setting agendas**

It is important to include processes in each seminar that allow students to orient themselves quickly to the course and the tutorial or lecture, particularly for those who may have missed a class. Students often want to know 'why' certain content is being covered and frequently reviewing and placing this in the overall context of the unit is very helpful.

Examples of how you can *facilitate orientation*:

- provide handouts of course objectives and course outline;
- provide an agenda for the session with approximate times—open to negotiation (remember to include processes such as rounds, evaluations, brainstorming, etc.);
- arrange furniture in the room to suit the group;
- if possible, greet students by name as they arrive;
- relate work to last week's class or lecture;
- review the course so far to create a context;
- ask students if there is any unfinished business from earlier seminars;
- indicate how you will be responding to any feedback from the previous seminar.

- **Setting group rules**

Group rules are principles of participation that will assist your seminars to be conducted in productive and participatory ways. It is wise to set up ground rules in your very first seminar and it is even better for students to create their own. You can revisit these group rules as necessary throughout the semester.

Examples of group rules for a seminar or discussion group:

- do not interrupt people
- start on time
- participation should be reasonably equal
- support each other to participate
- no put downs
- everyone does his/her preparation
- remind people if they break rules
- anyone can suggest a change to ground rules any time
- provide handouts of course objectives and course outline.

- **Breaking up the group**

Breaking up a large group (more than 10) into small groups increases participation and facilitates learning. It also takes the focus away from you as the 'expert' and encourages self-directed learning. We might recognise these types of groups:

- *Pairs* (reflective/buzz) - 5 minutes - opportunity for quick reflection on what is being discussed or what student is experiencing;

- *Small groups* (3, 4 or 5) - 10-30 minutes - opportunity for more focused discussion and/or problem-solving;
- *Pyramids* (ones, twos, fours...) - 20-40 minutes - opportunity to break down complex tasks; important to have a different task for each stage (e.g. individuals read a short article; pairs come up with one contentious issue arising from the article; fours discuss the issue and identify different perspectives; if time, eights report to each other their discussions and report back to the whole group);

Strategies for breaking into groups:

- allow students to self-select;
- line-up according to specific criterion (birthday months, familiarity with topic, confidence about speaking in group, etc.)
- number students off to create more random groups, without the anxiety of self-selecting (e.g. to create 4 groups, number students 1- 4 around the group, group the 1s, 2s, 3s etc.);
- allocate students to groups according to your own observations (e.g. putting high contributors together; separating or mixing genders) .

- **Encouraging participation**

A seminar where students are all participating is very rewarding - high levels of interaction have been shown to increase learning. The following are some suggested strategies for increasing participation rates:

- give structured opportunities to speak, such as:
  - *rounds* (speaking in turn, it is okay to pass and it's okay to repeat what someone else has said);
  - *student questions* (student facilitates the discussion until question is answered to their satisfaction);
  - *brainstorm* (call out ideas in any order, do not justify or explain, do not comment on other ideas—use concept mapping to order and make sense of the ideas, if appropriate);
  - *participatory brainstorm* (students note down ideas, you ask for one from each person and keep going round until all ideas have been exhausted).
- break up the group
- remember to talk less-seminars are not meant to be mini-lectures
- remind students about group rules if discussion is being dominated
- you stop talking, leave the room, or sit outside the group
- use a 'buzzer' - any student can stop the flow at any time to ask a question
- put high contributors in a group together
- give dominating students specific roles (note taker, facilitator, timekeeper etc.)
- have a rule that no one speaks twice before everyone has spoken once
- set up debates
- use open rather than closed questioning

- be honest about your own strengths and limitations
- help create a positive and respectful climate by encouraging low contributors and
- use gentle and easy questioning to encourage shy and passive students
- remind students that there is no such thing as a stupid answer
- give students time to answer (silence can often mean reflection)
- allow students to put down ideas and discuss with a partner before asking for contributions
- ask a variety of questions (e.g. open-ended; one right answer; feelings and emotions; personal experiences)

- **Encouraging student leadership**

Students' active participation and taking more leadership in seminars are important strategies for increasing student self-reliance and confidence. Two major strategies are giving students different roles and conducting student-led presentations. Give students responsibility for different roles such as:

- facilitator of large and small groups
- time keeper
- note taker
- summariser
- process monitor.

Student-led seminars are not so common practice, and are not always positive experiences for the teacher or the student presenters. To ensure a more satisfactory experience:

- prepare the group-discuss fears; indicate how process will be different; give wide scope for choice of date and topic;
- brief leaders individually before their presentation - help with process suggestions such as having an agenda and objectives; discuss the questions they will ask and methods they will use to involve the group; assist with copying material for them for handouts and overheads;
- support leaders during presentation - sit in the group; offer encouragement; do not take over;
- give feedback - giving each person a chance to say what worked well and what could have been improved upon; offer one-to-one feedback giving the student a chance to self-evaluate first (Fisher & Carson, 2005).

- **Facilitating the Discussion**

Managing or facilitating a group discussion so that everyone gets the most out of it is a skill that needs to be learnt and developed. Through practice, and review of students' practice, they will become better able to prepare and communicate ideas, encourage all participants to contribute their ideas and build on each other's contributions, achieve the objectives in the given time and motivate people do any follow-up work.

- **Questioning**

Good questioning techniques require continuing preparation, practice and reflection by students and teachers alike. Preparation of a repertoire of questions in advance will allow the teacher to work effectively and flexibly in the small group. Similarly, student-to-student interactions in groups are enhanced if students prepare questions at the outset or end of a class.

How you as the facilitator ask a question is important in fostering student responses this includes both the tone of your voice and your body language as well as the timing of your questions and the use of pause and silence.

- **Listening**

The process of listening is an active one that calls into play a number of thinking functions including analysis, comprehension, synthesis and evaluation. Students' listening skills may be developed by thinking about all the levels of a students' comment in this way:

- **what is said:** the content
- **how it is said:** tone and feelings
- **when it is said:** time and priority
- **where it is said:** place and environment.

Through your teaching practice you will be able to listen attentively and build up your expertise in this area and encourage your students to listen to one another as well.

- **Responding**

Listening in silence by paying undivided attention to the speaker is an active process, engaging and heightening awareness and observation. Appropriate responses are usually made when the tutor has considered not only the cognitive aims of the session but also the interpersonal needs of the group and the individual learner's level of confidence and knowledge. Different responses will have different consequences for the individual student and for the behaviour of the group as a whole. Therefore, an appropriate response can only be deemed appropriate in the context of the particular small group teaching session (Griffiths, 2009).

- **Feedback and Evaluating**

Strategies for evaluating seminars include:

- ongoing self-monitoring of how the tutorial group is going to
  - use pyramid process - ask what is going wrong and what is going right; individuals write answers to these questions; pairs identify problem areas;

- o fours discuss possible solutions, then report back to large group which selects proposals for change
  - o use questionnaires with the same questions throughout the semester to track change
- observation
  - o observers from within or outside the group can report back to the group on how they see it going
  - o video recordings can be made to allow whole group observation
  - o ask a critical friend to observe a tutorial in order to provide constructive feedback
- one-minute feedback - process by which students give anonymous feedback at the end of each seminar or lecture. You can use unfinished statements such as

‘the key thing I learned today was ...’; ‘something I found valuable today was...’; ‘something I would like to know more about is...’; ‘a way to improve things for me in this group would be...’; ‘what I will take away from the session is...’; ‘what frustrated me today was...’ etc.

Vary the statements each week and demonstrate your responsiveness by addressing the feedback the following week (Fisher & Carson, 2005).

- **Closing the Group**

It is important to end the group’s time together with a final evaluation of what they have appreciated about being in the group and what they have learnt over the semester.

### 2.2.3 Troubleshooting

There are some suggestions for overcoming some of the common problems you are likely to face in your seminars (see Table 2.3). As you can see, your skill as a tutorial leader involves understanding something about groups and using your interpersonal skills. It takes time and experience to develop these. Remember to involve students in identifying and solving problems as well. Talking to experienced teachers and group leaders is also beneficial. It is recommended that you identify someone who can act as a critical friend when problems arise - someone who takes their teaching seriously and who may have encountered the same difficulty. Below you may find

PROBLEM	SOLUTION
no active participation	Break into groups. Ask what is going on. Do a round on ‘what I want from this group’ or ‘what I find tricky about this group’.
none preparation for a seminar	Explore the issue with the students. Remind them of deals, or recheck deals. Suggest incorporating preparation into group rules. Set specific tasks for different people. Set group work. Allocate facilitation

	roles to students. Alternate weeks which involve prepared reading and those which involve reading in class.
some students dominate a discussion	Thank the contributors and then invite others to speak. Ask students to raise their hands before speaking. Have a round (each person speaks or passes). Appoint dominant students as facilitators of small groups or give them other roles. Break up the group. Remind students about group rules.
silence in the class after asking a question	Rephrase the question. Ask easier questions. Give students time to write down notes before speaking. Try a pyramid sequence. Remind students that all responses are fuel for discussion.
sarcasm/put downs	Confront the behaviour. Remind students of group rules. Invite discussion about consequences of such behaviour. If problem persists, speak to the students involved outside the class.
irrelevant discussion/going off the point	Set a clear theme at the beginning, check that the group agrees and if the discussion wanders ask 'I'm wondering what the present discussion has to do with what we agreed?'
Too abstract discussion	Ask the group to relate back to their own experience. Bring them back to the here and now. Use personal statements yourself.
not listening to each other	Remind them of the group rules. Try a listening exercise. Ask for a one minute silence. Change the seating arrangements. Ask students to paraphrase what they have heard. Articulate what you see or feel ('It seems that people are not listening to each other').

TABLE 2.3 Common problems and solutions (Source: Adapted from Fisher, 2005)

### TIPS to sum it up

Provide training in group skills and roles. Establish roles and responsibilities (or help students to do so), with clear guidance on what is expected.

Do not over-use group work, but vary it with other teaching methods.

To overcome dissatisfaction with group marks, include an element of peer marking or student self-assessment of their own contribution.

Have a series of questions ready to move the discussion through key areas of the subject. Have a back-up plan.

You can either share these questions at the beginning of the seminar, or just interject them at suitable moments, either when the discussion flags or to move it through the key areas.

One of the key roles of a facilitator at any event is to help the group to manage their time so that they have a chance to discuss everything.

During your preparation, make sure that you consider how long the group will need to spend on each item or discussion question, and that they have enough time to discuss everything. If not, cut down the number of questions. You can always bring them in later should discussion stop earlier than expected.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has explained the central importance of teaching modes in HE. We have gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of lecturing and seminars leading. Taken together, it suggests a role for lecturers in exploiting the appropriate teaching modes. In reality, how you approach your lectures and seminars is very much up to you; therefore, the following characteristics may be useful.

When to choose a...	
...lecture	...seminar
When you need to get a large amount of information across to a big group in a short space of time;	When the group needs or wants to discuss alternative ideas and debate their merits;
When the group needs to know about facts or alternative theories, but not to discuss their relative merits;	When you want to check the group's understanding about a particular topic;
When you want the group to know and understand a particular idea in some detail;	When there are fewer facts, and the topic is more a matter of opinion and/or there are several possible alternative interpretations and actions;
When you are the expert and your role is to provide information.	When you feel that your role is to facilitate discussion and not to provide information.

TABLE 2.4 Differences between lectures and seminars

This distinction is perhaps becoming less clear-cut, with many tutors using lectures as a more interactive discussion session, designed to engage students and keep them awake. It is far from the old stereotype of a lecturer who stands at the front and reads out the handout, making copious notes on a whiteboard as he does so. This is particularly the case for social sciences, where there is less 'truth' and more 'opinion'.

In reality, how you approach your lectures and seminars is very much up to you.

## QUESTIONS

1. Try to figure out what makes an outstanding lecture that is able to promote student learning.
2. Which attributes should a remarkable lecture have?
3. Do you think that students appreciate the benefit of attending lectures and seminars? If not, how might you make this clearer?
4. Think about the differences between three ways of teaching that you might experience on your course: a lecture, seminar, and workshop.
5. Create your own seminar plan. Remember to include:
  - the aim of the lesson
  - teaching objectives
  - learning outcomes
  - tasks planned and timing
  - teacher resources
  - assessment criteria

Key (possible answers)

Q1: three aspects – generating and maintaining interest, student engagement, and the importance of a good structure.

Q2: It is delivered in a way that is informative, interesting and engaging.

The content is well organised and easy to follow. Students can understand the development of the argument, or the logic in the ordering of the information or ideas. Students feel involved. This may be through some type of active participation, use of relevant examples to which they can relate and by being made to think about what is being said. The ability to engage students through questioning, no matter what the class size, is an important way of getting students involved. Students leave wondering where the time has gone. Students leave knowing that they have learned something(s), and are often inspired to go off and find out more.

### Q4: **Lecture**

Formal presentation to a large group of students; Lasts up to an hour with time for questions afterwards; Method for conveying information about a subject; Speaker may use visual aids or give a hand-out; Students in the UK should take notes while listening

### **Seminar**

A way of teaching groups of on average 15-25 students; Group discussion allows deeper investigation of topic; Students may be asked to present / lead on set topics; Group interaction through informal arrangement around a table

## Workshop

A teaching session often with a practical focus; Likely to involve hands-on activity as well as structured group work; Students work together with an experimental or investigatory aim, sometimes using computers

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 2.A

#### *Introduce yourself*

Good morning/afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen, my name is X from Y

#### *Introduce the topic*

Today/This morning I'm going to talk about/I'd like to talk about ...

The aim of my lecture is to ...

I'd like to tell you a little about ...

#### *List what the stages of your lecture are*

I've divided my lecture into X parts.

First, I'd like to talk about ...

Second, ...

Then, (I'll move on to/consider/deal with/focus on) ...

After that, ...

Next, ...

#### *Introducing a new section*

Let's move on to ...

Moving on to ...

This leads to ...

Let's turn to ...

Finally ...

#### *Moving backwards and forwards*

As I mentioned earlier, ...  
I'll be talking more about this later.  
I'll return to this point.

#### *Using visual information*

This slide/diagram/transparency shows ...  
If you look at this graph it shows that ...  
What is interesting here is ...  
I'd like to draw your attention to ...

#### *Replying to difficult questions (when you don't have an answer or don't want to answer a question)*

That's a good point.  
I'll come to that later if you don't mind.  
I'm afraid I don't have that information to hand.  
I'm afraid I'm not the right person to answer that.

#### *How long will you speak for and do you want to answer questions?*

I'm going to speak for about X minutes/hours/days.  
Please keep any questions until the end.  
If you have any questions please feel free to interrupt.  
I'd be happy to answer any questions at the end.

#### *Summing up*

So, to summarise, ...  
In conclusion, ...  
That concludes my talk. If you have any questions I'll do my best to answer them.

## APPENDIX 2.B

### **Useful language for overviews**

My lecture is in three parts.  
My lecture is divided into three main sections.  
Firstly, secondly, thirdly, finally...  
I'm going to...  
    take a look at...  
    talk about...  
    examine...  
    tell you something about the background...  
    give you some facts and figures...  
    fill you in on the history of...

concentrate on...

limit myself to the question of...

Please feel free to interrupt me if you have questions.

There will be time for questions at the end of the lecture.

I'd be grateful if you could ask your questions after the lecture.

### **The main body of the lecture**

As I said at the beginning...

As you remember, we are concerned with...

This ties in with my original statement...

This relates directly to the question I put to you before

### **Keeping your audience with you**

I'd now like to move on to...

I'd like to turn to...

That's all I have to say about...

Now I'd like to look at...

This leads me to my next point...

### **Language for using visuals**

This graph shows you...

Take a look at this...

If you look at this, you will see...

I'd like you to look at this...

This chart illustrates the figures...

This graph gives you a breakdown of...

As you can see...

This clearly shows ...

From this, we can understand how / why...

This area of the chart is interesting...

### **Summarising**

That brings me to the end of my lecture. I've talked about...

Well, that's about it for now. We've covered...

So, that was our marketing strategy. In brief, we...

To summarise, I...

### **Relate the end of your lecture to your opening statement:**

So I hope that you're a little clearer

To return to the original question, we can achieve...

So just to round the talk off, I want to go back to the beginning when I asked you...

I hope that my lecture today will help you with what I said at the beginning...

## **Handling questions**

Thank you for listening – and now if there are any questions, I would be pleased to answer them.

That brings me to the end of my lecture. Thank you for your attention. I'd be glad to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you. So you would like further clarification on our strategy?

That's an interesting question. How are we going to get voluntary redundancy?

Thank you for asking. What is our plan for next year?

Does this answer your question?

Do you follow what I am saying?

I hope this explains the situation for you.

I hope this was what you wanted to hear"

Admit to not knowing something than to guess and maybe get it wrong. You can say something like:

That's an interesting question. I don't actually know off the top of my head, but I'll try to get back to you later with an answer.

I'm afraid I'm unable to answer that at the moment. Perhaps I can get back to you later.

Good question. I really don't know! What do you think?

That's a very good question. However, we don't have any figures on that, so I can't give you an accurate answer.

Unfortunately, I'm not the best person to answer that.

## **What can you say if things go wrong?**

Let me just say that in another way.

Perhaps I can rephrase that.

Put another way, this means...

What I mean to say is...

Can't remember the word?