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# How to Use THE LECTURE AS A LEARNING / TEACHING TECHNIQUE with ADULTS

by John A. Henschke

## INTRODUCTION

The most spontaneous response one might give upon seeing the above title may be "DON'T! DON'T use lecture as a learning/teaching technique with adults!" However, that may be an easy "dodge," a bit presumptuous, and unrealistic since it almost goes without saying that the lecture remains and, for sometime to come, probably will remain a most important learning/teaching technique in adult education (in the church as well as in other adult education programs). In fact, the lecture is one of the oldest and most direct learning/teaching techniques. Thus time has made it so hallowed that many people have confused the lecture and learning/teaching as being synonymous.

In the midst of its long-standing history and acceptance, as well as the mystique and confusion which surround it, *the lecture can be used to great advantage if:* (1) one has some grasp of what the learning/teaching process is; (2) it is clearly understood what the lecture can accomplish and what it cannot accomplish in the learning/teaching process; (3) the same guidelines are applied to the choice and

use of the lecture as are applied in choosing and using the wide variety of learning/teaching techniques (old and new) in the learning situation; and (4) strong consideration is given to using other techniques like audience participation, discussion, and simulations to enhance the use of the lecture.

This article *is not devoted* to the how of developing and giving a lecture. The public libraries, as well as two sources<sup>1,2</sup> listed here, abound with such discourses.

Most of these resources would agree with one writer<sup>3</sup> that a good lecture must: (1) motivate group interest; (2) be well organized and clear; (3) be developed well; and (4) be presented well.

In lecture preparation, the following steps would be suggested by that same writer: (1) analyze the learning group; (2) determine the exact purpose to be accomplished; (3) determine the main points and do necessary research; (4) organize the points and materials; and (5) develop and support the points. Good lecture presentation would be natural, conversational, direct, animated, enthusiastic, with sufficient voice projection and emphasis to be heard,

<sup>1</sup>Paul Bergin et al., *Adult Education Procedures* (Columbus, Conn.: Seabury Press, 1963), pp. 137-166.

<sup>2</sup>Frederic P. Zoltn, "The Lecture," Lester R. Skel and Robert L. Craig, eds., *Training and Development Handbook* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), pp. 161-183.

<sup>3</sup>ibid., pp. 164-166.

supported by appropriate gestures and visual aids, and with constant awareness and concern for listener acceptance and understanding.

This article is devoted to considering in turn each of the four propositions mentioned above on how to improve the use of the lecture, with accompanying suggestions. Since volumes could be written elaborating on each proposition, it is obvious that only a "skimming of the surface" and not "coverage in depth" will be possible here. Thus, it is hoped that this article will help the reader *think through and answer some questions* in regard to improving his or her use of the lecture as a learning/teaching technique. It is further hoped that this article will also raise some questions and curiosities in the reader's mind that will stimulate further inquiry. It is not asked that the reader agree with what is said and defined in this article, but it is asked that the reader accept what is said and defined for purposes of understanding the author's line of thinking.

### THE LEARNING/TEACHING PROCESS

This process is indeed complex. It is not for those who wish an easy "cut and dried" answer of one, two, three. Learning is a human process and accordingly does not attempt to explain that which is attributed to grace. It is an internal process with the person, controlled by the learner and engaging his whole being—intellectual, emotional, and physical. It is based on the growing body of research which suggests that *adults can learn*, contrary to the popular notion that "you can't teach an old dog new tricks."

Teaching formulates the other side of the learning/teaching process. Here is how one adult educator states the case:

The truly artistic teacher of adults perceives the locus of responsibility for learning to be in the learner; he conscientiously suppresses his own compulsion to teach what he knows his students ought to learn in favor of helping his students learn for themselves what they want to learn. I have described this faith in the ability of the individual to learn for himself as the "theological foundation" of adult education and I believe that without this faith, a teacher of adults is more likely to hinder than to facilitate learning.<sup>4</sup>

### DEFINITIONS

"Format" or "Method" is the organization of persons for purposes of a learning experience.

"Technique" involves the variety of ways that the learning experience is managed so as to facilitate learning.

<sup>4</sup>Michael S. Karpov, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* (New York: Association Press, 1970), p. 21.

"Lecture" is referred to here as a technique, not a format or a method. The lecture is a carefully prepared oral presentation of a subject, theme, or problem by a qualified person. It may also be labeled as a *speech* or *sermon*.

### ASSUMPTIONS

Assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners are also crucial components of the learning/teaching process. A growing body of knowledge indicates that adult learners are different from child learners. These are not so much real differences as they are differences in assumptions that are made in traditional education (Christian education as well as secular education).

The assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners are that, as a person matures: (1) his/her self-concept moves from being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directing human being; (2) he/she accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly valuable resource for learning; (3) his/her readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of one's social roles; (4) his/her time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application; and accordingly (5) his/her orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to problem/situation-centeredness.<sup>5</sup>

### IMPLICATIONS

Since "participation," "ego-involvement," and "interaction" are boldfaced words in the lexicon of the adult educator, the assumption is often made that the more active the learner's role is in the process, the more he/she is probably learning. It is acknowledged and accepted that some persons may wish not to be involved actively in the learning process. Thus, use of the lecture as a learning/teaching technique needs to be designed and implemented to not only maximize the opportunity for interaction, ego-involvement, and participation to the extent the participants desire it, but also to increase the adult learner's competence in self-direction and the other characteristics of adult learners mentioned above.

### WHAT THE LECTURE CAN AND CANNOT ACCOMPLISH

In any educational experience, objectives serve to indicate what that particular activity is seeking to accomplish, including content components as well as behavioral aspects.

The lecture is suggested as one of the most appropriate learning/teaching techniques for the behavioral outcomes of knowledge and values. Other more appropriate techniques may need to be chosen for the

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

behavioral outcomes of understanding, skill, attitude, and interest.

There is also some evidence in education that straight factual, descriptive, or explanatory material may be learned by direct absorption through the lecture, whereas principles and concepts may be best learned by group-participation learning/teaching techniques.

## GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING THE LECTURE AND OTHER LEARNING/TEACHING TECHNIQUES

### QUESTIONS

Three guiding questions to be answered when choosing the lecture as a learning/teaching technique are: (1) How does your selection and use of the lecture fit into your understanding of the way people change and grow (learning theory)? (2) What position does this lecture hold in the context of the goals toward which you are working in the learning/teaching situation? (3) What immediate and observable needs, at this time, with these persons, does this lecture meet?

### CRITERIA FOR DECIDING

Additional factors which influence the decision of whether or not to use the lecture include:

- (1) The more the instructor knows about the subject at hand and the less the participants know about it, the more appropriate the lecture would be.
- (2) The more knowledge and experience the group has with the subject, the more a group participation technique should be considered in place of the lecture.
- (3) If the size of the group is over twenty persons for any one activity and no smaller groupings can be used, the lecture should be considered.
- (4) The lecture can deal with more facts in a shorter time than any other technique.

### PURPOSES

The lecture may include any or all of the following purposes:

- (1) presenting information in an organized way;
- (2) identifying or clarifying problems or issues;
- (3) motivating, stimulating, persuading, and influencing attitudes of the listeners;
- (4) analyzing a controversial issue;
- (5) inspiring the audience;
- (6) encouraging further study or inquiry.<sup>6</sup>

## LECTURE ENHANCED BY OTHER TECHNIQUES

### PROCESSING INFORMATION

One problem of today's world is that we have what University of Missouri Professor Daryl Hobbs called an "information overload." This means we have more information than we know how to handle and how to process. Some of the information overload comes from lectures.

One way to process some of our real concerns arising

<sup>6</sup>Paul Bergin, et al., op. cit., p. 157. (Adapted and expanded by this author.)

out of the "overload" is to engage existing church and community groups in problem solving.<sup>7</sup> Here is one way the lecture can be used in combination with and enhanced by another technique—problem solving.

### LECTURER CALLED A SYMBOLIC HEALER

Most people are involved in some aspect of the competitive business community.

It is suggested that a speaker may also serve as a "symbolic healer to reduce the tensions, frustration, and possible feelings of guilt arising inevitably from the structure of a highly organized, highly specialized and competitive business community."<sup>8</sup>

The suggestion that use of the lecture can be enhanced by using it with other techniques is based squarely on the notion that quality in adult education is in direct proportion to the quality and extent of interaction, ego-involvement, and participation of the persons involved.

If this author were charged with the practical responsibility for a one-hour educational meeting on any theme, subject, or problem which required use of the lecture, here are three ways he would consider designing the program.

A lecturer who is knowledgeable on the theme, subject, or problem to be considered would be invited. He should also be willing to "roll with the punches" or "freewheel."

1. Before the speaker gave his lecture, the participants would be divided into pairs, threes, or groups of four to six. They would be asked to generate questions or identify problems they would like the lecturer to talk about, thus outlining his speech—an "inductive lecture."

2. Before a lecture, the audience could be divided into four sections to serve as "listening teams." One section could listen to the lecture for points requiring clarification, one for points of disagreement, another for points for elaboration, and another for problems of practical application. After the lecture, sections would "buzz" for a short time to pool their thinking about points they want raised and to select a spokesperson to present the issues to the speaker.

3. Following a lecture, the members of the audience could be asked to form buzz groups to discuss how they plan to apply the information to their own situations. Then a spokesperson would be asked to report from each group.<sup>9</sup>

### CONCLUSION

If this article has offered one or more usable ideas and/or has stimulated the reader's curiosity to conduct a personal continuing inquiry on the use of the lecture as a learning/teaching technique with adults, it will have accomplished the author's avowed purpose.

<sup>7</sup>Daryl Hobbs, "Trends and Needed Changes in Voluntary Associations" (Association Training Conference, University of Missouri, Kansas City, April, 1972). (Speech delivered.)

<sup>8</sup>Leslie L. Felt, *The Small Meeting Planner* (Houston: Gulf Publishing Co., 1972), p. 61.

<sup>9</sup>Malcolm S. Knowles, op. cit., pp. 158-159.

**LARGE GROUP**  
**MEETINGS**

**ENHANCING INTERACTION**

**WITH**

**LISTENING TEAMS**

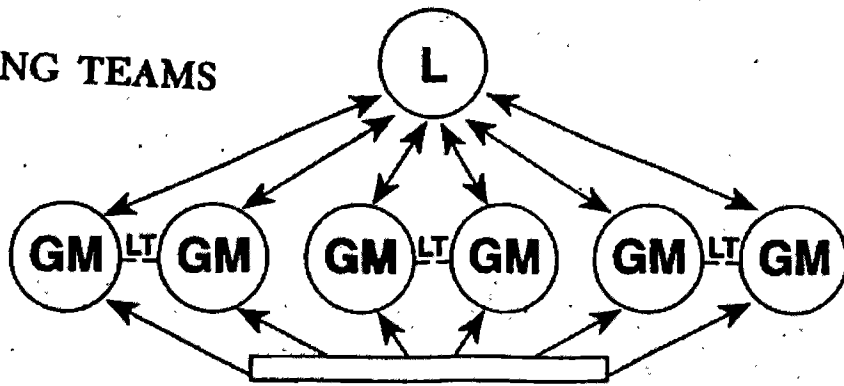
**CLARIFICATION**

**REBUTTAL**

**ELABORATION**

**PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

## 24. LISTENING TEAMS



(2) before a presentation the audience can be asked to serve as "listening teams" according to the section of the room they are sitting in—one section to listen to the presentation for points requiring clarification (the clarification team), another for points with which they disagree (the rebuttal team), another for points they wish to have elaborated on (the elaboration team), and a fourth for problems of practical application they wish the speaker to address (the application team). After the presentation the teams are asked to "buzz" in groups of four or five to pool their thinking about the points they want raised, following which one member of each group gives a summary of its deliberations and the

speaker responds to each item in turn, until time runs out or all items are discussed;

I have a deep commitment to applying principles of adult learning in everything I do—even in one-hour keynote speeches. Indeed, one of the most frequent (and gratifying) comments I get on evaluation sheets of my sessions is, "Malcolm practices what he preaches!" This makes me both happy and sad—sad that it should be such a noteworthy behavior.

My foundational principle of adult learning in making presentations is that the learners be active participants in a process of inquiry, rather than passively receive transmitted content. A second principle is that the process should start with and build on the backgrounds, needs, interests, problems, and concerns of the participants. My experience is that when people have the opportunity to learn by taking some initiative and perceiving the learning in the context of their own life situations, they will internalize more quickly, retain more permanently, and apply more confidently. And I am convinced that every learning experience should result in both some acquisition of content and some enhancement of their self-directed learning competencies.

### Theory of Large Meetings

These principles also provide the foundation of my special theory of large meetings, which are a prominent mode in conferences. The additional basic premise of this special theory is that the educative quality of a large meeting is directly a function of the quantity and quality of interaction in the meeting. This is to say that the more

and better the interaction within and among the various elements of a large meeting, the greater the learning is likely to be. A second premise of the theory is that there are three areas in which interaction can be influenced:

1) the platform itself, (2) the audience, and (3) the relationship between the platform and the audience. Let us examine the possibilities of each in turn.

*Interaction on the platform* is at its lowest point with a single speaker or film. The amount of interaction can be moved up a notch by adding a chalkboard, flip chart, filmstrip, or some other visual aid for the speaker to use. Interaction can be increased another notch by adding one other person, so that two people are interacting in debate, dialogue, or interview. Maximum interaction can be achieved by introducing two or more people to the platform for a symposium, panel discussion, group interview, dramatic skit, or demonstration.

*Interaction between the platform and the audience* is at its first level up from passive with an invitation to the audience to ask questions of the speaker following the presentation. A still-higher level of interaction can be achieved by bringing representatives of the audience on to the platform to serve as "reaction" or "watchdog" teams. A reaction team is asked simply to listen to the presentation and then to give its reactions in a series of statements or through a panel discussion. A watchdog team is asked to listen for terminology or concepts it thinks members of the audience may not fully comprehend and to interrupt the presentation at any time to ask for clarification. To the extent that the people selected to serve on the teams are truly representative of the main characteristics of the audience (in terms of age, gender, special interests, occupations, and geography), to that extent will the audience psychologically identify with the interaction on the platform.

*Interaction among members of the audience* can be promoted in several ways. The audience can be asked to meet in small groups of from two to five or six without moving from their seats and perform several functions: (1) Before a presentation, they can be asked to take a few minutes to pool the questions or issues they would like the speaker to address and have one member summarize the result—thus, in effect, outlining the speech

for the presenter; (2) before a presentation the audience can be asked to serve as "listening teams" according to the section of the room they are sitting in—one section to listen to the presentation for points requiring clarification (the clarification team), another for points with which they disagree (the rebuttal team), another for points they wish to have elaborated on (the elaboration team), and a fourth for problems of practical application they wish the speaker to address (the application team). After the presentation the teams are asked to "buzz" in groups of four or five to pool their thinking about the points they want raised, following which one member of each group gives a summary of its deliberations and the

speaker responds to each item in turn, until time runs out or all items are discussed; (3)

following a presentation, the audience can be asked to form buzz groups to discuss for a few minutes how they plan to apply one or more of the ideas contained in the presentation, with the results being summarized by one member of each group.

Occasionally

~~to be added half an hour to the~~  
I ~~add a~~ component in the design, which I think of as "back-home application," but which in the literature is usually referred to as "transfer of training." I ask the participants to reflect for five minutes on their experience so far and to select one or two ideas they have picked up that they think they would like to try out in their back-home situations. After five minutes I ask them to form groups of four or five and take turns describing to other members of their group (1) the idea they would like to experiment with; (2) the steps they would take in applying it, and (3) any obstacles or resistances they anticipate encountering in putting it into effect. After a reasonable amount of time (depending upon the time available), I call them back to order and invite volunteers to present their plans to the total audience. After each presentation, I invite members of the audience to react to the plan and, particularly, to suggest strategies for dealing with the obstacle and resistances. During the last five minutes or so I add my own ideas about strategies for bringing about change.

I.

II.

III.

IV.

V.

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EXCERPTS FROM

Applying Principles of Adult Learning in Conference Presentations

Malcolm S. Knowles