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## Chapter 24

# Comparing Lecturing and Small Group Discussions

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### ABSTRACT

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

### INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Procedural Steps in Using the Lecture**

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

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

#### **Step 1: Outline Your Presentation**

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

#### **Step 2: Keep It Simple**

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

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

Audiences listen better and retain more when they know what to listen for and what the purpose is. Spell out your objectives at the beginning. Repeat them at the end. Repetition is important for retention. Important points need to be repeated at least three times in order to be remembered.

### Step 3: Use a Conversational Approach

Conversational style is important to the lecture process. The presenter should know his or her audience and tailor the lecture to their level. This includes avoiding unfamiliar words and stiff formal presentations. Brewer and Traver (1976) support using humor, anecdotes and visual aids to help keep the audience alert and involved in the lecture process.

The presenter should arrange his or her material so that the ideas are expressed clearly. Be specific. Use short sentences for emphasis. Terms such as *however*, *nevertheless*, *then* and *finally* are important transitions for the listeners.

### Step 4: Vary Your Speech Rate

Audience interest and retention depends upon how well the material is presented. An average of 100 to 150 words per minute is considered a safe speed for oral presentation. The lecturer should remember to slow down for more difficult material, present simple material at a faster rate, and pause often so that the listeners can comprehend what is being said.

### Step 5: Show Enthusiasm

An appropriate level of enthusiasm conveys the presenter's attitude toward the subject matter. If the presenter demonstrates a high level of enthusiasm, the audience will tap into this energy and be encouraged to listen. Presentation and delivery are keys in sustaining participants' interest. Bellon, Bellon, and Blank (1992) link presenter enthusiasm with participant achievement through the use

of varied voice level, energy, body gestures, eye contact, facial expression, and descriptive words (Brewer, 1997; Brewer et al., 2001; Brewer & Burgess, 2005).

### Step 6: Show Physical Behavior

Moving freely around the front of the room can be a great aid in keeping your audience alert. However, some mannerisms are distracting and run the risk of becoming the focus, rather than the lecture. Leaning on the podium or playing with coins, papers, or a pointer are examples of distracting mannerisms.

Keep good eye contact. Look at the audience in the same way you would if you were carrying on a conversation with them.

### Step 7: Keep the Purpose of the Lecture Clearly in Mind

Before beginning the lecture or the outline, write down the purpose of the lecture. This purpose should be specific.

It is helpful to begin with an advanced organizer—a new introductory idea or concept that can be incorporated by the audience with their existing knowledge of a subject. This helps the lecturer show the audience how his or her information is important to them, thus clarifying the purpose. Joyce, Weil, and Showers (1992) agree that if an appropriate advance organizer is chosen, accompanied by a strong delivery of organized information, successful learning will occur. If the lecturer doesn't know his or her purpose, the listeners will have a difficult time understanding the lecture.

### Step 8: Use Audiovisual Materials and Follow-up Groups

The pure lecture can be greatly enhanced by the use of charts, graphs, handouts, filmstrips, pictures, models, chalkboards, and other interest-arousing

aids. Brookfield (1990) suggests that another way to spark interest is to end the lecture with a question related to the topic to initiate a thought-provoking free flow of ideas among individuals within a group. Follow up the lecture with buzz groups or discussion groups. Interactive discussion allows the listeners to clarify and retain the material (Toole, 2000; Walls, 2005; Young, 2007).

### Variations of the Lecture

The *pure lecture* has a few variations. Lectures can be *formal* or *informal* and can be given in person, by tape recording, or on videotape.

A *formal lecture* is most effective (useful) when introducing new or complicated concepts or ideas or when there is a need to cover several concepts or ideas in a short period of time. The formal lecture is usually given to large groups. The presenter will lecture during the entire allotted time with little or no interaction from the audience.

The formal lecture can be greatly enhanced by techniques that offer some audience participation. Such techniques include the use of the informal lecture, audiovisual aids, and discussion groups (Petty, Lim, & Zulauf, 2007).

An *informal lecture* is designed for smaller groups and lends itself to more interaction with the audience. The presenter can encourage questions and comments and still maintain the lecture format.

Another variation of the informal lecture is the lecture forum. The lecture forum is a talk given by a qualified person that is followed by open discussion with other experts (Toole, 2000; Wood, 2005).

### Appropriate Uses, Suggestions, and Cautions for the Lecture

Because the lecture is a passive form of learning, it must be used carefully and not overused. The lecture technique is best used under the following circumstances (Brewer, 1997; Brewer et al., 2001; Brewer & Burgess, 2005):

- When the audience is large
- When there are many ideas to present in a short period of time
- When the information is not readily available because the topic is too current for textbooks
- When introducing a new subject
- When summarizing or giving directions
- When presenting analysis of a controversial issue (however, here the lecture is more likely to be called a speech)

Points to watch when using the lecture method include the following:

- Know the material.
- Know your audience and watch for signs of fatigue or disinterest.
- Keep the number of points to a minimum.
- Keep the presentation simple and conversational, avoiding unfamiliar words and long sentences.
- Present summaries at the beginning and end.

The informal lecture is especially good for smaller groups and encourages the audience to ask questions and add their comments. Because it is not a discussion group, the lecturer can still maintain control of the information being presented but keep the listeners interested by asking questions. The questions can be designed for the listeners to answer on the spot, or they can be rhetorical questions—ones the lecturer asks, then answers.

The use of audiovisual aids has become extremely popular in the lecture method. Whether it is an overhead projector with computer-enhanced graphics or the chalkboard, the audiovisual adds a helpful learning style or aid to the lecture method. Brewer, Hollingsworth, and Campbell (1995) and Parker (1993) suggest that lectures should use *visual imagery* that ties in with the words in the lecture so the viewer can retrieve a mental picture of the subject to reinforce learning.

Discussion groups, sometimes called *buzz* sessions, are additions to the lecture method that help the presenter check to see if his or her message has been communicated effectively (Brewer, 1997; Brewer et al., 2001).

Breaking into smaller groups to either complete an assignment—written or oral—or to discuss a particular issue that was covered in the lecture increases the effectiveness of this traditional teaching method. During the discussion, the lecturer should move from group to group, checking for comprehension (Wood, 2005).

### Advantages, Disadvantages, and Limitations of the Lecture

When using the lecture instructional strategy, the presenter should be aware of the following advantages, disadvantages, and limitations of this technique (Brewer, 1997; Brewer et al., 2001; Brewer & Burgess, 2005; Petty, Lim, & Zulauf, 2007).

#### Advantages of Lectures

Lecture is still the most common method of instruction. Part of the reason for this is the manner and efficiency of which the material is presented to the learner. These advantages can be summarized as:

- Require little prior participant knowledge about subject matter.
- Material can be presented rapidly and logically.
- Convenient for large groups.
- Directions can be given clearly, therefore ensuring that all participants have the necessary information.
- Economical with classroom time because it immediately focuses the presenter's ideas.
- Easier for presenter to coordinate and control.

#### Disadvantages of Lectures

As with any form of instruction there are some disadvantages of the lecture method. The instructor should be aware of the following caveats that may affect the outcome of this methodology:

- The audience is less likely to retain a large percentage of the material.
- Overuse of lectures that are too long can lead to boredom on part of audience.
- The possibility of miscommunication is greater.
- Reflective thinking on the part of the audience is not encouraged.
- Henson (1993) states that lectures are the least effective teaching method to promote long-term retention.

#### Limitations of Lectures

In addition to advantages and disadvantages there are limitations to the lecture format. It is important that the instructor consider these limitations in constructing or initiating a lecture. These limitations are as follows:

- Not appropriate for hands-on type of skill training.
- Limited feedback from the audience.
- Puts responsibility for material on the presenter.
- Difficult to evaluate.
- Not appropriate for abstract, complex, or highly detailed material.

#### Examples or Applications

Examples of the lecture include formal or informal classroom settings, after-dinner speeches, sermons, political speeches, and some training sessions.

The most effective application of the lecture is as a part of the whole. The lecture can be used



for an introduction and as a summary. It can be especially effective when applied with other tools, such as audiovisual aids and limited discussion groups (Petty, Lim, & Zulauf, 2007).

### **Summary of Lecture**

A lecture should be kept short and interesting, the presenter should have a concrete knowledge of the subject matter, and the presentation should be well organized. When used properly, the lecture can be an effective teaching tool. It is most successful when used informally and enhanced by other methods, such as audiovisual aids and discussion groups. Gilstrap and Martin (1975) note the range for the lecture method by noting that the lecture can “challenge the imagination of each student, arouse curiosity, develop his [or her] spirit of inquiry, and encourage his [or her] creativity” (p. 7).

## **SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION**

### **The Small Group**

A contrast to the lecture method is small group discussion. Creating small groups for discussion is one of the easiest methods for an instructor to enhance learning. However, establishing an instructional small group must be done correctly and with an interface or consideration to the overall instructional process. To properly deliver this process or method of instruction the components and problems facing group interaction must be understood (Brewer, Klein, & Mann, 2003).

Small-group discussion allows presenters to announce a topic or idea for group discussion among participants. A small-group discussion follows democratic guidelines and allows everyone to contribute many ideas for others to discuss and reflect upon. Discussion allows for an interchange

of ideas within the context of a group under the direction of a presenter (Nussbaum, 2002).

Organizations consist of various groups of individuals working together to achieve common goals. The fact that members must work together leads to their relationships with one another. The social process by which people interact face to face in small groups is known as group dynamics. Utilization of group dynamics is a component of small group discussion (Sweet & Michaelsen, 2007).

Whenever groups of people congregated in the same place, they will talk with one another. It is human nature to be curious about our surroundings and other people, and the best way to find out answers to our questions is to talk with one another. A discussion may be information based, concentrating on facts, or it may focus on personal opinion and feelings. People enjoy discussions and the arenas of thought they uncover. Talking with friends reveals attitudes and values and offers insight into ways of solving personal problems (Firestien & McCowan, 1988; O'Connor, 1980; Vora & Akula, 1978).

New ideas can be evaluated and tested using the discussion method. Small-group discussions, under the guidance of a facilitator, allow participants to discuss issues to achieve understanding and consensus after consideration of the viewpoints and ideas of others. Its goals are to spark new thought and concept exploration, encourage analysis of factual information, and develop open-mindedness toward new attitudes and beliefs, so as to accept the opinions of others (Sweet & Michaelsen, 2007).

Small-group discussions serve intellectual, emotional, and social purposes. Intellectually, discussion helps participants become aware of the diversity of opinions on an issue. It also allows participants to realize the complexity of issues when they walk away from a discussion with more questions than when they went into the discussion. This is good because it helps them to think

about all the possibilities. The participants must discern the difference between fact and opinion and thus they must practice the skill of listening.

Emotionally, the participants may have some sort of personal involvement in the issue they are discussing, making it important to them. Others should be sensitive to this. Participants want others to realize that their opinions matter, and once the group responds to this, each participant retains a feeling of self-worth. This is an important affective quality that is key to the building of self-confidence and a sense of belonging.

Socially, group discussion builds a sense of cohesion and trust with one another. Discussion groups are an arena in which differences in opinion, race, gender, and participation should be accepted and celebrated. Differences allow for the diffusion of new ideas and attitudes. Group work of any sort helps participants build their interpersonal skills and confidence about offering individual opinions in a group atmosphere (Firestien & McCowan, 1988; O'Connor, 1980; Vora & Akula, 1978).

A well-conducted group discussion will end in acceptance of different opinions, respect for well-supported beliefs, and improved problem-solving skills. Overall, it will promote the sharing of information and all members will gain insight concerning the thoughts of others before reaching consensus on a topic. Bellon, Bellon, and Blank (1992) believe participants in small groups concentrate better on the topic at hand due to the support of their peers and individual motivation.

### Features of a Small Group

Whether we realize it or not, small groups have definitive features that can be recognized and described. Small groups have some form of leadership, a "pecking order" or status of members, and specific roles that members assume or are assigned (Firestien & McCowan, 1988; O'Connor, 1980; Vora & Akula, 1978).

### Leadership of Small Group Discussion

One of the most important features of a small group is leadership. The leaders of a small group are awarded leadership status by members for any of a number of reasons, including influence with administration or the instructor, seniority, experience, and personality. Although the group leader may have no formally designated authority to act as group leader, he or she guides or influences the group.

### Status or Pecking Order

Another important characteristic of small groups is *status*, which refers to the group's *pecking order*. The amount of status accorded to various group members depends on factors such as seniority, expertise, job classification, and job location. Higher-status individuals--they may get preferred seating at meetings, have their ideas solicited by other members, or be the first to receive grapevine information. Lower-status members may refrain from disagreeing with higher-status members in hopes of gradually gaining increased group status and improving their place in the pecking order.

### Roles of Group Members

Roles are the behaviors expected of group members. Formal roles are written out in job descriptions, whereas informal roles develop as a result of the dynamics within the group. Some of the group roles that may be played are leader, elder statesperson, and those accorded to higher- and lower-status group members.

### Norms of Behavior

Small groups have **norms of behavior**, which define what is and is not acceptable behavior within the group. The following are some examples of Group-Behavior Norms:

1. Members dress neatly at work.
2. Members do not tattle to management about fellow members.
3. Members voluntarily assist other members.
4. Members don't engage in horseplay on the job.
5. Members adhere to time limits for lunch and breaks.
6. Members don't exceed specified performance levels.
7. Members call in sick only when it is absolutely unavoidable.
8. Members don't volunteer suggestions or ideas to management.
9. Members don't work more than a few minutes past quitting time.
10. Members don't badmouth their work group.
11. Members cooperate with people from other departments.
12. Members don't use profanity.

Why do such norms, or codes of conduct, exist? The reason is that group members stand to benefit from them in several ways. Observing the norms may protect jobs, ensure an orderly flow of work, or enhance status.

### Pressures to Conform

Another important characteristic of small groups is their ability to pressure their members to conform to established group norms. Individuals who violate group norms or drift from them too badly may be subjected to a form of group discipline.

### THE NONCONFORMING SMALL GROUP MEMBER

Sometimes group members themselves can potentially derail an effective group discussion. The following scenario is an example of this problem:

*Before the meeting started the participants sat around the large conference table laughing and telling stories. Bill who always had a good story or joke seemed to be in his element with lively conversation. After the meeting began he continued the banter with his those seated next to him. This seemingly uncooperative manner was very distracting to all those in attendance. Finally, the person who had the floor turned and said, "Dog Gone It! Bill, we've had enough of you. Will you quit acting like a child or get out of here so everybody else can learn something? For the duration of the meeting, he paid attention and participated on a level equal to that of the group members.*

Since group members' needs are satisfied by their inclusion in the group, there can be strong pressure to conform to other members' expectations. Possible punitive actions by a group include subtle verbal or nonverbal reprimands, a temporary cold shoulder from other members, or even permanent ostracism. Extreme possibilities include physical threats or bodily harm.

### Cohesiveness of the Group Members

Cohesiveness is the degree to which group members pull in the same direction and have unity. When group membership is attractive to members and meets their needs, there is a greater likelihood that the group will be cohesive. Like glue, cohesive groups stick together. The more cohesive a group, the more likely it is that its members will accept the group's behavior norms, go along with group decisions, and defend group goals and individual members. Cohesive groups have a higher level of friendly, open communication, higher levels of trust among members, and generally less internal friction than less cohesive groups.

This statement is not meant to imply that cohesive groups do not have or fully air dissenting viewpoints on issues. It means, however, that, once these have been aired and discussed, the decisions made will be supported by all members.

## Main Procedural Steps in Using Small-Group Discussion

The purpose of the small-group discussion is to contribute and circulate information on a particular topic and analyze and evaluate the information for supported evidence in order to reach an agreement on general conclusions. To do this, several steps must be taken when conducting small-group discussions (Brewer, 1997; Brewer et al., 2001; Brewer & Burgess, 2005; Firestien & McCowan, 1988; O'Connor, 1980; Vora & Akula, 1978).

### Step 1: Introduction

The presenter must prepare before the discussion for it to be successful. The presenter should try to introduce a topic on which all of the participants have some background knowledge so they have a basis for discussion. If the participants are introduced to a topic that is familiar to them, each will have something to contribute that another participant may not have thought of, thus moving the discussion on its way with many new avenues of thought to explore. The introduction should have four parts.

1. *Instructional Objective.* An instructional objective should be given to the participants at the beginning of the discussion.
2. *Purpose.* The presenter should explain why the groups will be discussing the chosen topic.
3. *Relationship.* The presenter must explain how this information fits in with what has already been learned or what will be learned in the future.
4. *Advanced Organizer.* An advanced organizer is some sort of attention-grabber that attracts participants' interest. Many discussion topics fail because participants aren't drawn into the discussion at the beginning.

The presenter may have to help the participants understand how small-group discussion works to help them make the most of their time. Participants must understand the difference between a discussion and an unguided expression of opinion without pertinent information or facts. Participants might have to do a little research beforehand to get acquainted with the presenter's selected topic. Brookfield (1990) suggests choosing topics that are not too fact oriented or lacking in controversy to spark creative thought and diverse responses (Cohen, 1994).

### Step 2: Directing the Discussion

The presenter is in charge of directing the discussion to get it started. The presenter should ask the participants if they have questions about the topic at hand. These questions can start the discussion, or the presenter may want to ask a few questions from a prepared list to stimulate thought toward the topic. Another way to begin the discussion is to ask the participants to recall and share personal events that have happened in their lives that relate to the topic. This is a good way to get everyone involved. Questions are excellent motivators for discussion.

Sometimes the participants will take different thought paths and deviate from the instructional objective, so the presenter might have to reroute the thinking. Leading questions from the presenter can direct the participants back to the topic. These questions should not be answered with a yes-or-no answer. They should contain key words and relate to the objective of the discussion. These presenter-guided questions will be a model for participants to ask of the peers in their group. King and Rosenshine (1993) found that participants who ask thought-provoking questions in small-group discussions encourage creative answers that increase the learning potential for all.

Once the discussion begins, questions are essential in keeping the discussion moving. They can bring the discussion back on track or emphasize

an important concept. They can draw in shy or non-participating individuals and can be key in checking for understanding.

As the presenter directs the discussion, he or she should decide whether or not the participants are spending too much time on insignificant points. The presenter should try to keep control of the discussion, yet not dominate it. To avoid having the discussion centered around the presenter, he or she should try to enter in only when necessary.

### Step 3: Summarizing the Discussion

Sometimes the participants may be confused or retain a wrong idea as right. The presenter should summarize to make sure the participants understand what has been discussed. For small-group discussions seeking consensus, it is important to summarize to make sure all the participants are thinking along the same lines. A final summary is essential at the end of the discussion. Conclusions should be recorded on the chalkboard so all can see them. The presenter should ask the participants how they would use the information. At times, a discussion will result in the participants' having incorrect ideas. Basically, summarization is helpful for clearing up confusion, covering main points, ending a discussion, and conveying consensus.

### Variations of Small-Group Discussion

In the following variations of small group discussion, each type of group method is described. It is critical that in each case the facilitator achieve closure. Achieving **closure** means reaching a conclusion with respect to a given agenda item that has been discussed. Typically this is accomplished by acclamation or by all members agreeing on the discussion topic. Sometimes this may mean that the group agrees to disagree.

### Cooperative Learning Groups

In cooperative learning, a small group of participants works together to achieve a common goal. Cooperative learning operates on the premise that participants achieve more when they work together. Henson (1993) noted that small-group discussions allow the participants to get to know each other on a personal level and give them a sense of belonging to a team. The goals of cooperative learning are positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction among participants, individual accountability within the group, and interpersonal and small-group skills. This teaching method fosters cognitive development in the areas of retention and achievement and affective development through socialization and self-esteem (Davidson, 1990; Garfield, 1993).

### Problem-Solving Groups

These groups exist in order to cooperate, discover, inquire, and think critically. For example, several participants might work together to solve mathematical problems through exploration. The purpose of the problem-solving groups is to approach real-life problems with an appropriate strategy. The participants find many approaches to the problem and test them for the best possible solution. Cooper (1990) states that problem-solving groups help participants come to logical solutions and make responsible decisions.

### Group Investigation

The presenter breaks participants up into small groups based on particular interests. Each group has a certain category, and they gather information and analyze it for meaning. The participants then prepare and deliver a presentation to the class about what they discovered. The process

Table 1. Handling Inappropriate Behavior

Think of Some Actions for Handling Disruptive and Inappropriate Behaviors at Meetings	
Type Behavior	Suggested Response
Hostile	
Know-It-All	
Loudmouth	
Interrupter	
Interpreter	
Gossiper	
Whisperer	
Silent Distracter	
Busy-Body	
Latecomer	
Early Leaver	

teaches participants to work together, listen to one another, and support each others' work and opinions. This is a group-skill-building teaching method that strengthens peer interaction.

### Handling Inappropriate Behavior

It can be predicted that any group made up of individuals with different personalities will have different forms of behavior exhibited. The instructor or facilitator should respond differently to these individuals. Depending on the situation or outside influences some members may be deemed as hostile or know-it-all. Other group members may be classified as loudmouth or as an interrupter. Equally frustrating for the facilitator is the interpreter, that is one who decides to interpret what others say even though that is not needed or asked for.

Other types of disruptive group members are the gossiper, whisperer, silent distracter, busy-body, latecomer and the equally disruptive early leaver. These are summarized in Table 1. Since every group is different, the facilitator should plan in advance different methods for responding to this behavior. Keep in mind one of the most useful tools for a facilitator is the power of peer pressure.

### Appropriate Uses, Suggestions, and Cautions of the Group Discussion

The group discussion requires great skill on the part of the presenter. The presenter must encourage participants to participate freely and still keep the discussion on the topic. During the discussion, the presenter must help the participants to understand how all the opinions and facts relate to the topic. For the presenter to conduct the discussion successfully, he or she must carefully plan it in advance (Brewer, 1997; Brewer et al., 2001; Brewer & Burgess, 2005; Cohen, 1994).

The presenter must identify the objectives of the discussion. These objectives should be relevant to the needs of the participant, and the participants should have some prior knowledge of the topic. An introduction should be used to explain to the participants why they need to accomplish this objective. The presenter should conduct the small-group discussion with leading questions. Table 2 notes some factors in using questioning techniques effectively. In addition, summaries should be used by the presenter to check for agreement and understanding. Charts, models, or actual objects might help the participants understand what is being discussed.

Each topic of a small group should begin with leading questions to direct participants in the desired pattern of thought toward a topic; for example, "What is the whole impact of recycling on a global basis, and what actions can we take to continue this renewing process?" or "How serious is the damage we have done to our earth?" or "What can we do individually or collectively to make a difference?"

A few cautions are in order. Some participants may want to talk all at once. The group will have to generate some sort of courtesy system to allow everyone to express his or her opinion at different times so all may hear. Some participants may not want to talk at all. The presenter may have to ask a few leading questions and encourage one of the more aggressive participants in the group to

Table 2. Use Questioning Effectively

<p><b>Questioning Skills</b> A key skill is the ability to use questions to involve individual members or the entire group in the communication process. Think of some questioning techniques that can be used by the meeting leader.</p>
<p>Questioning Techniques for Leaders of Meetings</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarifying or elaborating on a point made by someone.</li> <li>• Calling on someone who is reluctant to talk.</li> <li>• Getting specific facts.</li> <li>• Examining possible alternatives.</li> <li>• Initiating group discussion.</li> <li>• Obtaining more participation from the group.</li> <li>• Guiding the meeting tactfully in certain directions.</li> <li>• "Testing the water" as to the group's feeling.</li> </ul>

speaking. One or two participants might monopolize the conversation. The presenter should explain the importance of letting everyone contribute. Some participants may strongly disagree on points and fight with one another. In this case, the presenter must carefully draw the topic to a neutral point so both may see the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments.

**Advantages, Disadvantages, and Limitations of Small-Group Discussion**

When using the small-group discussion, the presenter should be aware of the following advantages, disadvantages, and limitations of this instructional strategy (Brewer, 1997; Brewer et al., 2001; Brewer & Burgess, 2005; Cohen, 1994; Firestien & McCowan, 1988; O'Connor, 1980; Vora & Akula, 1978).

**Advantages of Small-Group Discussion**

Instructors and facilitators should consider the advantages of group discussion so this method of instruction can be used when appropriate for the lesson. Each of these advantages offers the group member an opportunity to learn from the group process itself. These advantages are summarized as follows:

1. All participants in the group can participate.
2. It is a good way to get participants interested in a topic.
3. Participants may more easily understand another participant's explanation than a presenter's explanation.
4. The presenter can identify participants who need assistance.
5. The presenter can identify individual opinions about the topic.
6. It helps the participant see relationships among ideas or concepts related to the topic at hand.

**Disadvantages of Small-Group Discussion**

Of course as with any instructional methodology there are disadvantages that should be considered. While some of these disadvantages may be obvious to the facilitator these disadvantages can be ameliorated by careful planning and consideration. These disadvantages are summarized as follows:

1. It is time-consuming.
2. Some participants in the group may do all the talking.
3. It involves less presenter involvement than other methods.
4. The discussion can easily get off track.

## Limitations of Small-Group Discussion

Careful planning for a small group discussion must consider this method's limitations. An understanding of these limitations can help the facilitator utilize the small group more effectively. These limitations are as follows:

1. It is not a method that transmits information or facts.
2. It involves more talk and less action.
3. The discussion must be carefully planned, not impulsive, to be effective.

## CONCLUSION

With lecture the instructor of adult learners can present a lot of information to a large group very quickly and efficiently. The negative is that many adults are not engaged as learners in a lecture format. On the other hand, small-group discussion develops the cognitive and affective abilities of participants. It is a process of freely sharing information and insights among peers in a welcoming environment under the guidance of a facilitator. Individual effort is encouraged to make a strong team with creative ideas. Meloth and Deering (1994) note that groups are more likely to devote a collective effort toward their prescribed task and become more focused on their goal when in cooperative groups.

## Issues, Controversies, Problems

The most effective application of the lecture is as a part of the whole. The lecture can be used for an introduction and as a summary. It can be especially effective when applied with other tools, such as audiovisual aids and limited discussion groups (Claycomb & Petty, 1983; Petty, Lim, & Zulauf, 2007).

An issue for instructors is that they should keep their lectures short and interesting. It is important to have a solid knowledge of the subject matter, and be well organized. When used properly, the lecture can be an effective teaching tool. It is most successful when used informally and enhanced by other methods, such as audiovisual aids and discussion groups.

The small-group discussion should have as its aim to come to some sort of definite goal or decision based on consensus; for example, "What is the best way for participants to study Shakespeare?" But small-group discussion can also be used for stimulating new ideas and insights without really aiming for a particular decision (Gokhale, 1995). An example of such a question is: "What are some ethical guidelines politicians should follow?"

A controversy and problem with small group discussions is the sometimes lack of definitive outcomes. There is a tendency by some facilitators to allow the discussion to become a "bull" session or "complaints" center. While this may fit some needs of the organization, these outcomes do not allow for instructional benefits.

## Solutions and Recommendations

By following the simple guidelines offered in this chapter, instructors can utilize the advantages of lecture and the advantages of small group discussions to maximize the instructional benefits to the adult learner. The facilitator should carefully measure the disadvantages and limitations of both to avoid the pitfalls each presents. The key to both techniques of planning and understanding of how each technique should be utilized.

## FUTURE TRENDS

Instructional technology is constantly changing our own teaching and learning methods in working with our students. Overhead projectors are almost



obsolete. The Blackboard (an online interactive application that allows students to take courses) is being used constantly for posting lectures, powerpoint presentations, and so forth. McKeachie and Svinicki (2006) noted that technology will enhance teaching and learning. They identified four ways how instructional technology serves useful functions in the classrooms. They are:

1. Providing new opportunities for enhancing student learning that otherwise would be impossible or very difficult.
2. Addressing specific learning goals more effectively.
3. Taking advantage of the rich information now available online.
4. Preparing students for life in a wired world. (pp. 230-231).

McKeachie and Svinicki ends by saying that “successful incorporation of technology tools depends on the extent to which they are connected to course goals, combined with effective pedagogies, and designed to improve student learning rather than being used for their own sake (p. 231).

As instruction is being delivered by electronic technology, it was effect how we deliver instruction in using the lecture and small group discussion. Virtual educational networks, interactive TV lectures, satellite downlinks, computer-based instruction, group and project-based learning technologies, communities of learners, and distance learning, just to name a few of the current technologies that we should try to incorporate in our teaching and learning activities. Brewer, DeJonge, and Stout (2001) wrote a book that deals with moving from in-class instruction to on-line learning that deals with with learners participating synchronously and asynchronous in learning and teaching. The synchronous learning activities provide for real-time interaction among the learners who are at different geographical locations.

## **SUMMARY**

It has been made clear that there is a place for both lecture and small group discussion in programs of adult learning. Prudent and conscientious instructors should review these methods when planning curriculum or instruction and offer a balanced instructional plan using both techniques when possible.

The instructor as the “sage on the stage” can be effective as a lecturer when planning and effort is put into this method. The facilitator as the “guide on the side” can be equally effective in instruction by encouraging controlled discussion with definitive outcomes. There is a place for both and by integrating both the instructor can maximize the instructional process.

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## **KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

**Collaborative Learning:** An instruction method in which students work in groups toward a common academic goal.

**Cooperative Learning:** Is a topic frequently mentioned in conversations about improving education, regardless of the discipline or level of instruction. An activity involving a small group of learners who work together as a team to solve a problem, complete a task, or accomplish a common goal (Artzt & Newman, 1990). A task for group discussion and resolution (if possible), requiring face-to-face interaction, an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual helpfulness, and individual accountability (Davidson, 1990).

**Critical-Thinking:** Items that involve analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of the concepts.

**Drill-and-Practice Items:** Items that pertain to factual knowledge and comprehension of the concepts.

**Group Cohesiveness:** The degree to which group members pull in the same direction and have unity.

**Individual Learning:** An instruction method in which students work individually at their own level and rate toward an academic goal.

**Lecture:** A method of presenting facts, information, or principles verbally with little or no participation from the audience. The lecture is a carefully prepared talk given by a qualified person.

APPENDIX

Table 2. The Lecture Planning Sheet

Date: _____ Time: _____ Site: _____ Instructor: _____
Intended Audience:
Topic Statement:
Objective(s) of Session: 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
Main Ideas of Lecture: 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
Media Needed:
Handouts:
Follow-up Activity(ies):
Summary Notes:

**Comparing Lecturing and Small Group Discussions**

*Table 3. The Small Group Discussion Planning Sheet*

Date: _____ Time: _____ Site: _____ Instructor: _____
Purpose Statement:
Specific Topic/Question to Be Discussed:
Relationship(s) to Former/Future Learning: 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
Advanced Organizer(s): 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
Directions for Organizing Groups: 1. 2. 3.
Directions for Discussion: 1. 2. 3.
Plan for Sharing With Entire Assembly:
Handout(s) (if any):
Equipment (if any):
Summary Notes:

*Table 4. The Lecture—Evaluation Sheet*

Item	Yes	No (Explain)
Was the lecturer's purpose clear?		
Was the pace appropriate? (slower for difficult material, faster for easier ideas and review)		
Was the lecture delivered in an enthusiastic manner?		
Were audiovisuals helpful for clarifying or expanding ideas?		
Was follow-up activity used? (If so, were directions clear?)		
Did the audience participate enthusiastically?		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	
What contribution did the follow-up make to the purpose/message of this session?		
What was the general level of audience interest?		
What was especially effective about this session?		
<b>Suggestions for improvement:</b>		

(You may wish to have someone else consider these items, as well as evaluating yourself.)

Table 5. The Small-Group Discussion—Evaluation Sheet

Item	Yes	No (Explain)
Was the purpose stated clearly?		
Was there a clear relationship to former/future learning?		
Was the topic appropriate for these participants?		
Were directions clear and logical?		
How well did the facilitator manage any tendency to stray from the topic?		
Was there a sharing of information with the entire assembly?		
Did this contribute to general understanding?		
Did the summary clarify and bring effective closure to the activity?		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	
How well did the advanced organizer engage participants?		
Was the specific topic/question a natural outgrowth of the advanced organizer?		
What was the most effective aspect of this learning session?		
<b>Suggestions for improvement:</b>		

(You may wish to have someone else consider these items, as well as evaluating yourself.)