

LEARNING MATTERS at LINGNAN

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TEACHING  LEARNING CENTRE

04/99

10 Mar 1999

From the Editor:

*Learning Matters at Lingnan are short papers on teaching and learning that aim to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas about instructional matters. You are most welcomed to contribute to the forum by writing **Learning Matters at Lingnan**, and/or responding to ideas that you either agree or disagree. Please send your ideas and contributions to the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC), Lingnan College.*



Getting Students More Involved By Using Interactive Handouts

The traditional lecturing method has always been criticized as ineffective as a means of causing students to learn. It is very easy for students to remain passive or 'switched-off' for much of the time. And it is difficult for even the best lecturers to keep a group of students with them through a lecture. Some students may be lagging behind, others will be ahead. Students' concentration-spans are much smaller than lecturers would like them to be!

There can be many possible ways of improving the lecturing method, many of which lead to better learning. A simple but effective method is to use interactive handouts to overcome the primary drawback of the formal lecturing method — the lack of student participation and interaction.

Interactive handouts are handouts containing white spaces. They ensure that, every now and then, each student does something. They are handouts around which a variety of activities are structured during a lecture. They present each member of the group with independent activities at a number of times during the lecture. Each student is caused to take an active part in the lecture (even in a large group).

It is always believed that students benefit more if they actively make their own notes rather than passively receiving 'digests' produced by others. Interactive handouts (where students are frequently asked to respond, both in writing and orally) may help to keep them active during lectures. When they don't have so much passive writing, copying and so on to do, there should be more time for students to think about the content of the lecture. With interactive handouts each individual activity takes a relatively short time. There is less chance for concentration to wane.

What is an Interactive Handout?

Why use Interactive Handouts?

P.T.O.



Features of Interactive Handouts

- The handouts starts with a 'List of Objectives'. These are to give students a clear idea of 'where they should be' by the end of the lecture.
- Every now and then, the handout is used to elicit information from members of the group. This can be arranged by posing questions towards the foot of a page, leaving two or three lines worth of blank space. The group is given a minute or two for each student to write down his or her answers to the questions. Then, the class is quizzed orally, and the correct answers sought from students.
- Parts of the handout can be used for revision. Students may be asked to answer one or two short questions about the earlier part of the lecture.
- Now and then, the handout contains space for students to practice things. There can be a graph sheet included for the students to plot some data.
- Occasionally, it is worth using part of the handout for revision of previous lectures.
- Once in a while, it's worth turning the final page or so of the handout into a short post-test. The post-test can be self-assessed by students, or occasionally collected in and marked by their tutor.

It is not difficult for a lecturer to translate his or her own lecture notes into an interactive handout. The main processes are:

- deleting quite a bit of the detail - detail the students don't need to remember. This can be covered in talk rather than print.
- adding blank spaces for students to do important things with (writing blank space is very easy!)
- writing briefings for students regarding what exactly they should do with each blank space. (These briefings should be short, simple and unambiguous).
- designing 'revision' tasks and so on, to form parts of the students learning processes during the lecture.
- providing a clear set of objectives for each lecture - in writing - at the start of each handout.

From lecture notes to interactive handouts

Summary

Students feel that handouts containing so much of their own efforts are 'very much more their own' than if they had been given lecture notes. In other words, students get some sort of psychological 'ownership' of their learning. Even in the lecture situation, important bits of learning are being done under the students' own control.

To summarize, interactive handout material can make students much more active during 'formal' lecture sessions. Additionally, the 'completed' interactive handout belongs to each student in ways that would not happen with lecture notes.

Maureen Tam
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Reference:

Race, P. (1987) *Interactive Handouts - Turning Lectures into Learning Experiences*. Scottish Centre Institutions Committee for Educational Development (CICED).