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Dynamic Lecturing: Book Review

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I. INTRODUCTION

In June of 2017, Todd Zakrajsek gave a fascinating interview on the *Teaching in Higher Ed* podcast, hosted by Bonni Stachowiak. The topic was the interplay between lecturing and active learning. Zakrajsek's thesis was that the two need not be mutually exclusive. He discussed research supporting a blend of lecturing and student activities, depending on the level of the students and the learning objectives of the course. His balanced and positive approach is reflected in his new book, *Dynamic Lecturing: Research-Based Strategies to Enhance Lecture Effectiveness*, written with Christine Harrington.

II. ENHANCED LECTURES

The authors argue that research does not support abandoning lecturing altogether. Lectures can be valuable for novices, giving them an accurate foundation in a subject. Lectures are efficient for helping students learn large amounts of new content in a limited time. A lecture by an expert can help students recognize important concepts and make connections between topics. Students can learn about the problem-solving process by observing an expert. The enthusiasm of a teacher can motivate and inspire students. Lecturing early in a course can build foundational knowledge for critical thinking and creative activities later in the course.

There are many types of lecture other than a traditional, formal lecture. Story-telling is a powerful lecture technique to capture attention and give a meaningful context to content. A discussion-based lecture may start with questions based on assigned reading. Interactive lectures, with tools such as clickers or polls, help keep student attention. Demonstrations of problem-solving techniques, followed by opportunities to apply what was learned, promote engagement and the transfer of knowledge and skills.

Harrington and Zakrajsek describe a wide range of strategies to promote student involvement and list disadvantages as well as advantages of each strategy. For example, reading may be assigned before class to prepare students for class activities, but some students find it difficult to learn from reading. A 5 – 10 minute mini-lecture previewing the reading, making connections with prior

knowledge, and highlighting important concepts may be helpful.

There are also suggestions for planning effective lectures. For example, identify the three most important concepts of each lecture. Start with a “hook” or attention-getter, such as an image, question, or story. Use short lecture segments interspersed with active learning pauses and attention-grabbing activities. Activate prior knowledge with informal quizzes, polling, or pair-share followed by large group review. Break down complex concepts into simpler chunks. Choose meaningful examples. Incorporate opportunities for reflection, to enhance long-term recall. Give brief quizzes followed by immediate feedback to serve as retrieval practice and improve long-term retention. Clickers or polls provide real-time data on comprehension. Ask questions that promote critical thinking, such as how two concepts are similar and different, or what are the potential advantages and disadvantages of a problem-solving technique. Ask students to write their answers before verbally responding. Summarize key points at the end of the class.

The authors conclude with a chapter on self-assessment and improvement activities. As throughout the book, their suggestions are specific, detailed, and research-based. For example, keep a reflective teaching journal. Address questions such as, “How well did I communicate the main ideas for the lecture?” and “When were the students most engaged?” Review a video recording of a class with a faculty colleague. Participate in a collaborative supportive faculty learning community, where faculty members share goals, discuss scholarly research on teaching and learning, and provide constructive feedback to one another.

Dynamic Lecturing is an inspiring book, rich with thought-provoking and practical ideas. Whether a proponent of lectures, inquiry-based learning, or a blended approach, whether a new or experienced teacher, every reader will find something of value in this beautifully written guide.

REFERENCES

- [1] C. Harrington and T. Zakrajsek, *Dynamic Lecturing: Research-Based Strategies to Enhance Lecture Effectiveness*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2017.