

Presentation: A key part of the learning process

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There has been argument and discussion for many decades on what constitutes the learning process. This paper will not engage in that discourse; nor in the evaluation of types of learning. It is contended here that learning does occur in a variety of ways and that teachers do, in practice, utilise a number of approaches and techniques in encouraging and facilitating learning. The emphasis of this discussion is the learner's output in the context of a learning episode: presentation.

Presentations have become an important feature of business activity during the last few decades. Each day, around the world, millions of presentations are made: ranging from major events at large conferences to small inter-office presentations of suggested new approaches or procedures. Presentation is becoming an important skill in the modern world. In what ways might it be an important ingredient of children's learning at school?

The contention here is that learners' output, sometimes in the form of a 'Report', is often used by teachers as an aid to assessment or evaluation.

“I taught this subject matter (by didactic exposition) and now the students will write me an essay to demonstrate that they can repeat it. I will mark the essays so we all know how much the students have learned.”

“The students made hypotheses about the outcome of their learning and then engaged in processes of enquiry and/or discovery. The outcome of these processes was a confirmed, revised or rejected



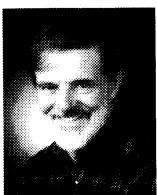
hypothesis. They will now write up a report to demonstrate both their new understanding of the hypothesis (learning) and so that I can evaluate the learning process and the effectiveness of the learning.”

“I identified some skills that the students needed to acquire. They have practised them, concentrating on particular nuances or subsets of the total skill and now are skilled both in recognising the complexity of the performance as well as in performing the new skill. I will get them to demonstrate their new skill in a performance (presentation) so that I can assess them.”

It is the contention of this paper that these outputs can provide a greater opportunity for engaging in effective learning and can constitute an important focus for the learning cycle.

There would seem to be some important ingredients in the presentation process that teachers can emphasise in order to maximise learning opportunities. Among the components of the presentation process are: information compilation, content design, the structure of the presentation, the media used to build the presentation and the skill of the presenter in 'telling their story' with maximum effect to their audience.

Gathering the information has



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not been included in this list as it is contended that the presentation process begins with already assembled data. In the classroom this means that some teaching-learning process has been carried out.

Presentation can take a variety of modes on a continuum of personal involvement. On the one hand, a relatively uninvolved presentation might consist of displaying someone else's visuals while reading a prepared script. On the other hand explaining a personal point of view using a variety of media, personally chosen for their effectiveness in presenting your case is likely to call on much more personal involvement from the presenter. This 'involvement' is a first clue to the educational possibilities of maximising presentation opportunities. It is the process of 'making it your own', that determines one of the parameters of learning. Most teachers have experienced the process of having to teach an unfamiliar topic, and most would probably agree that the requirement to teach it made their learning more meaningful and more concrete. In order to teach someone, it is important to know what you are teaching. When the end of the learning episode is teaching your new learning to someone else, you need to be confident that you have indeed learned.

Presentation can be seen, in part, as teaching others about the topic of one's presentation. Presentation as performance can be seen as enlightening the audience in the intricacies of the artistic value of the work as well as demonstrating your understanding of your performance (as in Master Class performances). Presentation of research results can be seen as enlightening the audience in new knowledge as well as in implications for future activity. Presentation of newly learned skills or factual information can be seen as passing on those skills or information. When presentation is seen as transfer (compare the scientists concern with technology transfer), the learner becomes a teacher and the benefits of cementing confidence in their learning can accrue.

The act of manipulating the presentation process, itself contains valuable educative experience.

Most presentations start with some sort of information compilation. This is a period when the learner must sort through their learned experience and determine the key components. It is important to see links between the various pieces of information, to see their relevance to the current learning and to be able to restructure information in order to explain those links and show the progression of detail that constitutes the totality of the new learning. It is important to have a clear picture of the totality being presented: this implies a clear understanding, in the learner's own frame of reference, of the subject. There appears to be a clear link between this understanding and the internalisation process of 'making new learning one's own'.

The next step in preparing a presentation often concerns content design, and the structure of the presentation. In this phase the learner is concerned with passing the new knowledge on to others. Story-telling skills come into play, as do formal essay and report writing skills. The background of knowledge and information which the learner draws on in deciding the order in which information is presented draws on these skills and applies them to the learner's understanding of the subject matter (the new learning). It is possible that the process of organising information, prioritising facts and structuring the messages into a readily receivable form (with, for example, a recognisable beginning, middle and end) also helps to clarify the learner's new concepts and new understandings. It is also clear that such skills are, in themselves, worthwhile abilities for children to learn at school.

At this stage, decisions also have to be made about the media to be used. Decisions here need to be based on knowledge and understanding of a variety of media (so that informed choices can be made) and also on knowledge and understanding of the appropriateness of each medium and any pertinent features of it that can maximise

effective communication of the particular subject matter being presented. For example, the picture and sound capabilities of video could be capitalised on in demonstrating nuances of dramatic performance; a projected graph might be an effective support in explaining relationships between a number of variables.

Finally, the presenter must present. In whatever form this occurs, their capability in using presentation technologies as well as their capabilities as an expounder of information (for example their story-telling skill) will impact on the success of the presentation. In developing these skills and in improving them, it could be seen that learners become better able to integrate, manage and apply new information as well as developing worth-while skills for the classroom and beyond.

The proposal is that presentation is an important skill for teachers to develop themselves and to teach to their students. It carries its own educational benefit as well as providing a means for guiding and cementing new learning. The mechanisms by which it can be taught; the opportunities for developing Essential Learning Skills through teaching it and its relevance to the Essential Learning Areas are the subject of the Professional Development programme currently being developed by The Media Centre at the University of Waikato, as part of an APEID programme.¹ Information about the package is being placed on the web site at <http://www.tmc.waikato.ac.nz/presentation/> as it is developed. The developers welcome input and feedback from interested parties.



References

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- 1 APEID - UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Programme of Educational Innovation for Development. The sixth programming cycle: The Development of a Teacher Training and Learning Resource Package for Open and Flexible Lifelong Learning.

