Attacks on the Traditional Lecture: A Case of Academic Chuunibyou?

Russell Crawford
Keele University

Chuunibyou: a Japanese slang term describing a tendency in people to look down on others, preferring minor trends in an effort to be 'cool'. Here, I propose this term as apt for a recent and unfair inclination by some with academic chuunibyou to view the traditional lecture as a poor pedagogic tool.

My central belief here is that the lecture remains a useful, relevant, pedagogically-focused application of the professional teacher working her/his craft and can be viewed in essence as facilitating a powerful 'pedagogy of gesture' (Church *et al*, 2004; Crawford, 2014). Whilst the craft of teaching is varied, diverse and often discipline-specific in nature, session delivery style typically focuses upon pre-set delivery modes such as the lecture, small-group tutorial, seminar, practical class and field work (Eble, 1988). The list of session types is long, but what is understood in selecting any one of these delivery modes is that it creates an expectation in learners (Dowling *et al*, 2003). As an experienced lecturer who enjoys giving lectures, I frequently find myself having to advocate this style of teaching to colleagues, in order to counter widespread criticism of it that seems to stem from both 'popular' opinion and what I consider 'academic chuunibyou'. Whilst there are various anti-lecture stances in the literature, two that seem prominent and that I frequently hear from colleagues are that the lecture is 'teacher-centred teaching' (used pejoratively) and that there are constraints when considering issues of inclusivity (Turner, 2015). I would argue that these and other criticisms of the lecture are conditional on the quality of the teacher's pedagogic session planning and should certainly not put practitioners off using what is an undeniably versatile teaching tool when well-designed.

As part of what I view as 'academic chuunibyou', the lecture has, in recent years, come under particularly negative scrutiny as newer, alternative teaching modes are elevated by the undermining of an original staple of the system (Oermann, 2005). Other teaching modes, such as team teaching, small-group discussion and peer-to-peer learning, have not been as critically lambasted as the poor old lecture though, as one might expect, they themselves do not actually fare any better when subjected to the same degree of scrutiny (Fischer *et al*, 2004; Topping and Ehly, 1998; Shulman, 2000).

The concept that the teacher is the one best placed to decide on the mode of delivery seems obvious to this author, but criticism of the lecture as 'teacher-centred teaching' essentially disempowers practitioners (especially new ones) from being able to decide this for themselves, almost shaming them into 'innovating' (read: not using a lecture format) for its own sake, thereby disposing of a pedagogic rationale and damaging the learning process by removing a useful weapon from the teachers arsenal (Oblinger, 2005; Hembrooke and Gay, 2003). I would make the point that the teacher is the one best placed to make this decision, which should always be with a qualified eye on the learning outcomes rather than with 'academic chuunibyou'. There is a tendency, in this author's opinion, towards a reductive Socratic view of the lecture as being transmissive in nature and, whilst this can be true, the skilled practitioner uses the lecture too effectively for it to be thus (Turner, 2015).

I have always designed my lectures on the premise that the pedagogic point is not to 'impart knowledge' but rather to present ideas, information and analysis, provoking learners to think about the subject, a process hardly 'passive' for them. The opposite, in fact, is the case: the audience may be sitting without talking (an oversimplification of 'passive'), but is fully and actively engaged in synthesising the flow of the lecture, quite in accordance with the threshold concepts pedagogic philosophy (Meyer and Land, 2005). In this way, the lecture should be considered an 'intellectual experience', in which the content, design and, most critically, the performance all coalesce into a riveting and unique pedagogic product, offering a staunch defence against 'academic chuunibyou'.

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