

Using communication papers to facilitate interactive instruction

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Thoughts on communication papers to facilitate interactive instruction are presented. The author focused on the lecture course 'Mind and Behaviour' and the seminar course 'Seminar in Psychological Readings' in Hiroshima University. Students wrote their questions and comments on the day's lecture or class on a communication paper that was provided to them at the beginning of each session. The author addressed these queries/comments at the beginning of the next lecture or class. Students mentioned that the communication papers made the courses interactive and facilitated understanding. In addition, the use of interactive instruction had some positive outcomes. Firstly, the interactive style of instruction let the students know other students' opinions and widened their knowledge. Secondly, the communication paper gave students opportunities to cultivate their thoughts. Finally, the communication papers acted as memos for the students to use while expressing their opinions. The author's observations suggest that the communication papers helped the students to express the questions they thought.

Key Words: communication paper, interactive instruction, instructional design

The author has been an assistant professor at Hiroshima University and has been studying instructional design to develop teaching methods and contents related to psychology since 2011 (cf. Tanno, 2011, 2012). For instance, the author's reflections on course styles and instructional modes were presented in Tanno (2012), which demonstrated the use of group work in the lecture course and conversational interaction in the seminar course. In this study, students commented on the examinations and the author noted the observations related to the students' reactions. It was found that group work in the lecture course made the lecture bidirectional and helped motivate students to be active, engaged, and attentive towards the course. In addition, conversational interaction in the seminar course helped students find informal information and supported good presentation performances, and stimulated quality discussions.

The author was concerned with two courses: a lecture course, 'Mind and Behaviour', and a seminar course, 'Seminar in Psychological Readings', offered in 2013. 'Mind and Behaviour' is a

lecture course in the liberal arts, mainly for students within the Faculty of Education, Medicine, and Pharmacy, at Hiroshima University. It is offered to students in the second semester of the first year of the programme. It is taught by the assistant professors of the Department of Psychology, who share the lectures for Introductory Psychology. A total of 108 students took this course as well as 2012. The author was one of the four assistant professors in charge of the course, and delivered a course orientation and three subsequent lectures. The course, 'Seminar in Psychological Readings', is a series of four seminars offered to the students in the Department of Psychology in their second year. Four seminars are offered in each academic year, two each semester, and students must take two out of the four seminars offered. In the courses, the students review a major textbook on introductory psychology as well as empirical articles, and present their reviews in the seminars. The assistant professors provide supplemental explanations and feedback on student presentations. This paper pertains to 'Seminar in Psychological Readings 3', which the author offered in the second semester in 2013. A total of 14 students took this course as well as 2012.

The present research note deals with the application of interactive instruction in a course and the use of communication papers to facilitate the same. The author has often faced situations in which, despite having many questions in mind, the students have not expressed any queries related to the course contents. Although some students asked questions after the course, most of them did not express these during the actual session when they were given an opportunity to do so. It can be assumed that interactive courses, in which the course instructor responds to and expands upon students' questions, are beneficial for both the students' learning and faculty development. The author speculated that it is possible to apply an interactive method of instruction by using communication papers that collect information about the students' questions and comments related to the day's lecture or class, which can be responded to and expanded upon in the subsequent lectures or classes.

Method

The author used communication papers in both courses (i.e. 'Mind and Behaviour' and 'Seminar in Psychological Readings'). The students received the communication papers at the beginning of each lecture or class. They were instructed to write their questions and comments on the day's lecture or class, which were subsequently collected by the author at the end of the session. The author answered the questions and addressed the comments at the beginning of the next lecture or class. This was done over the entire semester, except for the third lecture in the 'Mind and Behaviour', in which questions were answered by the other assistant professor using slides prepared by the author. It may be noted that the students still had the freedom to express their queries at any time during the lecture or class.

On the last day of the author's lectures in the courses (i.e. the third lecture for the 'Mind and Behaviour' course and the fifteenth class for the 'Seminar in Psychological Readings'), the students were requested to submit their overall comments on all the lectures and classes conducted by the author. This information was significant as it helped the author gain an insight regarding the utility of the communication papers, and was beneficial for the author to develop future courses.

Results

Students' comments. The following are some of the representative student responses to implementation of the interactive method. For the lecture course, 'Mind and Behaviour', students mentioned, 'The lectures were interactive and kept me engaged', 'It was a good feature of the lectures that the lecturer caught up with the students' opinions', and 'It was a valuable opportunity for me to know the other students' considerations through the lecturer's replies to the students' comments'. For the seminar course, 'Seminar in Psychological Readings', the students mentioned, 'I have recognized the depth and fun of Psychology by knowing the lecturer's replies to the students' comments, and have been more interested in Psychology' and 'Asking questions about the course trained my thinking once I tried to force myself to make questions when I had no question'.

Author's observations. Some students used the communication papers as memos or tools to enable them to convey their queries efficiently for their questions. For instance, when students asked questions directly at the end of each lecture in the 'Mind and Behaviour' course, some of them partially read them from their communication papers. Similarly, during the class in the 'Seminar in Psychological Readings' course, most of the students read the questions that they wrote on their communication papers.

Discussion

The present paper is a research note that aimed to describe the author's thoughts on the use of communication papers in the courses, 'Mind and Behaviour' and 'Seminar in Psychological Readings', offered at Hiroshima University. Students wrote their questions and comments on the day's lecture or class on a communication paper that was provided to them at the beginning of each session. The author addressed these queries/comments at the beginning of the next lecture or class.

Students mentioned that the communication papers made the courses interactive and facilitated understanding. A student directly indicated that the lecture (i.e. 'Mind and Behaviour') was interactive and engaging. Further, one student appreciated that their opinions were taken into consideration. It seems that undergraduate students preferred an interactive but not unilateral style

of instruction. In fact, Tanno (2012) reported that students found interactive instruction as favourable, which was evident from one student's expression, 'Although most of the courses at the university seem to be passive and one-sided, this course is absolutely active and favourable'.

The use of interactive instruction had some positive outcomes. Firstly, the interactive style of instruction let the students know other students' opinions and widened their knowledge. Secondly, the communication paper gave students opportunities to cultivate their thoughts. Finally, the communication papers acted as memos for the students to use while expressing their opinions. The author's observations suggest that the communication papers helped the students to express the questions they thought.

The author did not receive any criticism or negative comments from the students, although more than 100 comments were collected from the two courses. The students' comments demonstrated positive and supportive evaluations towards the implementation of this method. It is however necessary to further shape this method to construct relationships between the lecturer and the students that will enable critical discussions. This would ensure implementation of interactive instruction in the real sense of the term.

References

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