CHAPTER TEN

Lectures and the Experience of Relevance

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Introduction

Despite the development of new approaches to teaching and learning in higher education, lectures remain a prominent feature of many courses. Whilst research carried out on lecture methods is not as common-place in the 1990s as it was one or two decades ago, there remains nonetheless a steady output of research which continues to examine and question the effectiveness of lectures. The emphasis is probably less on the identification of teaching skills and teacher characteristics than it was, and more obviously on the lecture methods compared to other methods. Research has also focused more on the merits of combining the lecture method with other methods, for greater effectiveness.

There are very few studies which attempt to look at lectures as they are experienced by students. The study described in this chapter looks at how students experience and interpret the meaning of what is being said in a particular lecture. And since the study took place in the natural setting of the students' undergraduate courses, it also explored the influence of the course context upon learning from lectures.

Existing Studies

That the lecture remains a dominant method of teaching in higher education continues to be regularly confirmed (see, for example, Collier, 1985; Shore *et al.,* 1990; and Butler, 1992). And the prominence of the lecture in undergraduate teaching has stimulated considerable research and discussion (see, for example, Bligh, 1972; Brown, 1978). In the earlier research, empirical studies shared the single aim of assessing the relative effectiveness of lectures as a teaching method. In his review of this research, Bligh (1972) distinguishes between three main objectives for which the lecture method may be used: acquiring information; promoting thought; and changing attitudes. His conclusion from the available evidence, however, is that while the lecture is as effective as other methods for transmitting information, it is not as effective as more active methods for the promotion of thought, and should not normally be used when changing students' attitudes is the objective .

If Bligh's conclusion seems fairly clear-cut, we should recognise the limitations of the research from which it stems. One limitation is that the focus of investigations of teaching has been virtually exclusively on method, in isolation from setting. As McKeachie (1978) observes, a college course cannot be divorced from the total college culture: a method of teaching greeted enthusiastically by students in one institution may be less than warmly received in another. Linked to this is the problem that research has for the most part concentrated on trying to measure the

impact of lectures by testing students' knowledge before and after they have been exposed to lectures and other methods of teaching. The fact that the findings of a large number of these studies have been inconclusive can be seen as a consequence of their narrowness of approach. There has been little attempt to look at lectures from the standpoint of the lecturer, or to explore what students' experiences of lectures have been. Where the attempt has been made, however, the picture presented is a rather different one. Method looms less large, and instead the focus shifts towards factors such as attitude, enthusiasm, involvement and the qualities of the relationship between lecturers and students.

If we look at more recent research on lectures, there seems to be a general acceptance of the conclusions reached by Bligh (1972), which has led to a shift in focus towards exploring the effectiveness either of modifications of the lecture method, using various techniques such as 'buzz groups', or of alternative methods of teaching. Effectiveness is usually measured in these studies in terms of student preference and such studies generally conclude that the 'straight didactic format' is the least preferred method (see, for example, Butler, 1992; and Grieve, 1992).

These studies do not, however, seem to take account of the many studies in the 1970s which raised doubts about the appropriateness of relying on student preference as measures of effectiveness (for example, Ware and Williams, 1975; Coats *et al.,* 1972; and Sherman, 1976). Indeed,

> consistency of response (in such studies) can be attributed just as legitimately to a collective student mythology of teaching, as to any rigorously conceived model of teaching behaviour (Johnson, Rhodes and Rummery,1975).

A more worrying study, from the point of view of the recent research work, was perhaps that of Zelby (1974) who found that students gave high evaluations of lectures deliberately aimed at the level of "information, storage, and retrieval". Lectures aimed at the development of an ability to learn independently and cope with novel situations received the lowest evaluation. It could be argued, however, that today's students are more favourably inclined towards independent learning than were previous generations of students. Certainly, Williams (1992) recently reported that the majority of students in a study she had conducted, prefer more responsibility, and would take on more active roles if they were allowed to. On the other hand, Entwistle and Tait (1990) reported that preferences for these contrasting types of teaching and learning contexts depended on the approach to studying adopted by the student in that particular course. Students with a deep approach preferred stimulating and challenging teaching, while students opting for a surface approach looked for teaching which was less demanding. Thus, we should expect students to vary quite considerably in their reactions to the same teaching methods.

A rare glimpse of lecturers' experiences is given in a study by Sheffield (1974), who invited twenty-three Canadian lecturers (identified as excellent teachers by a sample of their former students) to write about their teaching. All twenty-three used the lecture as the chief vehicle of their teaching and were broadly in agreement that the most important role of the teacher is "to stimulate students to become

active learners in their own right" (p. 199). Other areas of agreement included the belief that there is no one way to teach; the general acceptance that students are important, or are liked, respected or cared for; enthusiasm and love for their subjects; and lastly, a stress upon the importance of preparing properly and on conveying general ideas rather than details. One of Sheffield's own conclusions, based on his examination of both the essays and students' descriptions of the 23 lecturers is that "attitudes towards students and teaching are more important than methods and technique" (p. 215). To this statement, however, he adds the rider that "little is known about how attitudes are formed, less about how they may be changed" (p. 215).

The Students' Perspective

One pathway towards a change in attitudes may well lie in helping lecturers to gain a greater understanding and awareness of the lecture situation as experienced by students. In fact there are a small number of studies concerned with a student perspective and though none of these deals intensively with students' experience of lectures, each does include lectures within a more widely based investigation into students' experiences.

An early study by Marris (1964), for example, involved "discursive interviews in which students were encouraged to talk freely" (p. 2). Its aim was to examine "how the experience (of higher education) appears to the students who go through it" (p. 2). One of the many questions Marris put to students was what they wanted from lectures and what in their experience distinguished good lectures from bad. Whilst Marris's questioning was generalised rather than specific and likely to elicit students perceptions of their 'ideal' lecturer or lecture, he found that "after techniques of presentation, and clarity of arrangement, the students most often mentioned the importance of a lecturer's interest in his subject, and his ability to make it interesting to his audience, so that they were stimulated to pursue it further" (p. 49). In the light of the students' comments, Marris concluded that:

> The essential function of lectures is to place knowledge in a meaningful context. By his synthesis of different points of view, or textbook treatments; by his emphasis on essentials, and the extrapolation of basic principles; by the clarity with which he relates the parts of his exposition, a lecturer can enable the student to perceive the subject coherently. But, perhaps even more usefully, he can provide a more personal context, showing why the subject interests and excites him, how he has used it in his own experience, how it relates to problems whose importance his audience already understands. From this, the student can more easily imagine how he himself could use it: he develops his own context of motives for mastering a problem. (Marris, 1964, p. 53)

A more recent study by Parlett and others parallels Marris's' investigation in its concern to examine and discuss "the experience of academic life more directly from the point of view of its principal consumers, undergraduate students" (Parlett *et al.,* 1977, p. 2). Again, like Marris, Parlett and his colleagues tried,

especially at the beginning, (to) let the students talk freely about their courses, the way they were taught, the way they learned, the staff they knew, the problems they encountered, and the hopes and disappointments they privately harboured (p. 3).

The interviews were deliberately informal and relatively unstructured, and although the aim was to look at university experience as a whole, many of the students' comments were about lectures. These were mostly made in response to the question: 'What are the hallmarks of good teaching?'. This question again is a rather general one likely to invite perceptions which are directed towards an 'ideal' lecturer rather than ones grounded in specific experiences. Nonetheless, a significant difference was found between teachers who were 'interesting and enthusiastic' and those who were 'boring and lifeless'. The concluding observation again puts emphasis upon attitudes towards students and teaching:

> The important point was that teachers should demonstrate their commitment and their 'interest in communicating the subject'. Students want to be stimulated and enlivened by lectures (p. 5).

A study by Bliss and Ogborn (1977), *Students' Reactions to Undergraduate Science*, takes a somewhat different approach. Students were asked to recount 'good' and 'bad' stories about learning. As the authors comment:

> Lectures form a great part of the normal work of science students, indeed it is no accident that nearly half of all the stories were about them. This makes it particularly important to understand a little better what makes a good, and what makes a bad, lecture experience. (Bliss and Ogborn, 1977)

Where the students' stories were concerned with lecturing, therefore, the question was not how 'good' and 'bad' lecturers differed but what distinguished a 'good' from a 'bad' lecturing experience. In several stories, Bliss and Ogborn found "a strong element of reacting well to the personal human qualities of the teacher as well as his teaching ability as such" (p. 114). In good lecture stories typical feelings were interest and increased involvement in the subject; while conversely, a lack of involvement was apparently the most common feeling in 'bad' stories. Indeed, Bliss and Ogborn observe that:

> Running like a thread through both 'good' and 'bad' lecture stories are both involvement and understanding. Essentially all 'good' stories mention interest, enthusiasm, and so on, if they mention nothing else. Essentially all 'bad' stories mention their gloomy opposites. Again, both kinds stress understanding or not understanding as the single most frequent reason for feeling 'good' or 'bad' (p. 114).

Bliss and Ogborn also examine the reasons students give for characterising their experiences as 'good' or 'bad' ones. They conclude that:

> In 'good' stories, reasons to do with the emotional aspect of the teacher-student relationship are more prominent than in 'bad' stories, where the

emphasis is heavily on ideas. It shows also how in 'good' stories, reasons to do with human interaction come more to the fore (p.116).

In all three of these studies, therefore, as in Sheffield's study too, the traditionally narrow focus on the effectiveness of methods and techniques has given way to a wider concern with the teacher-student relationship. As attention has shifted, therefore, towards the experiences of the participants themselves, the teacher-student relationship has begun to occupy the foreground of discussion. Yet each of the three studies of students' experience we have looked at has examined lectures only incidentally, as part of the general pattern of undergraduate teaching. A fuller understanding of student learning from lectures requires a more tightly focused investigation, and we turn now to our own study of students' experience of the relevance of lecture content.

Background to the Study

The students who took part in the study were taking one of three different undergraduate courses: a second-year social science research methods course, a final-year microbiology course, and a first-year applied physics and energy course. Each of the courses was a component in the students' degree schemes, and it was the relevance of the content of the lectures given on these courses, as experienced by the students, that formed the main focus of the investigation. As the lectures occurred as an integral part of the students' degree programmes, it was possible to take into account the influence of the students' experience of the teaching and learning context of the three different courses. Information on the perceptions of the different groups of students was collected by informal interviewing throughout each course together with an end-of-course questionnaire designed to tap into comments and concerns expressed during the interviews.

Because of the numbers of students involved, a sample was selected from each of the courses. The students were chosen on the basis of their response to a questionnaire which sought to identify students who thought that interpersonal qualities of the lecturer (for example, whether or not the lecturer had good student-lecturer rapport), influenced their opinion of the lectures more than impersonal perceptions (for example, whether or not the lecturer had a wide knowledge of the subject). For each course, between two and six students were chosen from those who were apparently most or least influenced by personal factors, together with a further two or three students who seemed to be mid-way on that particular dimension. Altogether, a total of 31 students was selected.

These students' experiences of the relevance of their lectures were in the main studied through the use of a technique known as stimulated recall. Stimulated recall was originally developed by Bloom (1953) to compare students' thought processes in lectures and discussion groups. It involves audio-taping a teaching situation and then, within two days playing back to individual students extracts from the session. The students are then asked to recall the thoughts they had during the original situation. As Bloom himself explains:

The basic idea underlying the method of stimulated recall is that a subject may be enabled to relive an original situation with vividness and accuracy if he is presented with a large number of cues or stimuli which occurred during the original stimuli (Bloom, 1953).

In the current study lectures were recorded and extracts played back to students within 24 hours. Recall sessions took place with individual students, so that the replies given could be probed in depth. The main criteria used in choosing extracts to play back was whether or not they seemed to reflect aspects of what had been observed, over time, to be each lecturer's characteristic style of lecturing. On average eight extracts from a fifty-minute lecture were chosen and these were each played to the students who were then asked to recall their thoughts or feelings at the time of the extract. Students replies were then recorded. In total, 48 recall sessions were carried out with the 31 students.

In the recall sessions students both described what they were doing and thinking at the time of the extract and explained why they thought they had responded in the way they had. The example below shows how students can respond in markedly different ways to the same lecture extract.

Lecture extract

The thing to underline I think, here, is it's not always the organism in maximum numbers which can cause the spoilage. So if you've got 100 organisms in your sample, it's often only 1 to 2 per cent of the organisms present which can actually cause the spoilage that is significant.

Student 1 recall: Now here I had a definite thought, "Yes, what I haven't done in my essay", because I think she was giving that as a particular reference to all of us because we'd all done the essay. What some of us, or most of us, had missed out and I was thinking, "Ah, perhaps I should have done that in my essay". Ah, I was going, just thinking that's a good point, and I should have actually done that... Actually throughout the whole of that part, I think she, there was a lot of information there that I think most of us would probably have missed in our essays.

Student 2 recall: Yeah, yeah, I remember thinking what a hell of a lot of work there'd be to do because she mentioned there could be about 100 colonies but yet only 1 to 2 per cent causes spoilage. So I was thinking, if you've got a plate with 100 colonies, how many you'd have to pick up before you'd pick up a spoilage organism. That was the main thing, but other than that, but you know it's a pretty standard point really, but it would involve a lot of work to get that.

 It can be seen from the above example that the two students are each experiencing the relevance of the lecture content in different ways. The first student is thinking about the lecture content in terms of assessment, in relation to an essay that he had done and whether or not he had included the particular point being made by the lecturer. The second student is thinking more about the meaning of the content, and what the implication might be of what the lecturer is saying. This second

student seems to be thinking about the lecture content in terms of his own understanding of it and the meaning it has for him. He is therefore experiencing the relevance of the content in an *intrinsic* way, whilst the experience of the first student, whose thoughts are directed towards assessment, is by contrast *extrinsic.* Systematic analysis of students' responses to the lecture extracts showed that many responses could be identified as reflecting either extrinsic or intrinsic experience of relevance.

Extrinsic Experience of Relevance

There were essentially two kinds of *extrinsic* experience of relevance. The first was specific in nature, as in the following example:

When I checked on to it being experimental design—the next piece of work is on that—we have to design something, design a piece of research work, and I kept — all the way through — I kept asking, how am I going to use this in my work?

Thus the student is thinking about the next piece of work she has to do. In both this and the earlier example, where the student was thinking about an essay he had recently completed, the students have a specific extrinsic demand in mind and consider how they have tackled or might tackle the task set.

In other cases, the students seem to have no particular demand in mind, nor are they thinking about the content in a way meaningful to themselves. For example:

You expect what the lecturer writes on the board to be the important things, so whatever you write you get that down.

Here the student seems only to think or recognise that what was being said might potentially be useful or relevant. The experience is much more general in nature. The sole reason, apparently, for writing something down is because the lecturer has written it on the board and it must therefore be important. And it is important, one must presume, as something students may subsequently be assessed or examined on.

As just described, an extrinsic experience of relevance, with its emphasis on external demands is, of course, reminiscent of the descriptions given in earlier chapters of a surface approach. Moreover, as we shall see, an intrinsic experience of relevance is qualitatively very similar if not precisely the same as a deep approach. These similarities will be further discussed at the end of the chapter.

Intrinsic Experience of Relevance

In the 'spoilage' example given above, the student realises that one implication of what the lecturer was saying about the number of organisms that can cause spoilage is that picking up the spoilage organism would entail considerable effort. The student thus seems to be thinking more about the meaning of what was being said, and how it relates to his own understanding and framework of thinking. The student is drawing upon his existing knowledge and fitting this new information

into his own framework. He is therefore experiencing the relevance of the content intrinsically. A second example of intrinsic experience parallels the first:

> I had two thoughts, "Yes, it does happen in the hospital situation, where they tend, because staff just forget this person, um, that it's this person's private life: it becomes part of their form-filling". And my other thought was: "I don't think it happened where I worked".

Here again the student seems to be relating the content to her own framework of thinking and experience in a way that is personally meaningful.

In both examples the students actively relate the content to their own understanding in a specific way. In some cases, however, the students are more passive. They appear to acknowledge that the material has some sort of relevance to their understanding, but they do not go further and actively think this through. For example:

> I understood it and I found the content interesting, so I didn't stray, my mind didn't wander.

Influence upon Intrinsic and Extrinsic Experience of Relevance

It was possible to identify three sources of influence upon whether different students experienced the relevance of their lectures as extrinsic or intrinsic: students' general orientation towards the course; the teaching and learning context; and students' background knowledge and familiarity with the subject.

(i) Students' general orientations

Students' orientations towards the lecture courses differed, and the differences were particularly marked in the case of the research method students, some of whom were following a degree scheme in home economics rather than in human science. For these home economics students, the predominant concern was with assessment demands and how these could be met rather than with what might be learnt from the course. As a consequence, many of these students' statements reflected extrinsic experiences of the lecture content.

For the human science students, on the other hand, the research methods course was more generally accepted as being an important and relevant subject: they were able to recognise the significance of it to themselves and to what they were doing. Of the five human science students studied in depth, three were predominantly intrinsic in their experience, and the whole group of five had a relatively high level of intrinsic experience.

One might expect to find similar contrasts between students following a final year option which they themselves had chosen (as was the case for the microbiology students) and those who, like the applied physics and energy students, were following a compulsory first-year foundation course. And indeed, analysis of the microbiology students' accounts displayed a relatively high incidence of intrinsic experiences of relevance.

(ii) The teaching and learning context

Of the three groups of students taking the research methods course, the home economics students, as we have already noted, were the only group not from the Department of Human Sciences. Their perceptions of the teaching and learning context were as a consequence distinctly different from the other students on the course, and displayed substantially less certainty about the relevance of the course to themselves. It was, however, the norm rather than the exception for home economics students to take courses outside their own department and to cope with unfamiliar subjects the relevance of which they could not always see. In such circumstances therefore, one might expect that extrinsic experiences of the relevance of their courses would be frequent and that consequently the most 'successful' students might be those who had best developed work styles tailored to extrinsic experiences. The findings seemed to bear this out, for the home economics students with the highest levels of extrinsic experience of relevance were also those who obtained the highest grades on the course. This finding is all the more striking because, while it could be anticipated in this specific context, it is still at odds with the pattern for the study as a whole. Generally speaking, the students who were predominantly intrinsic in their experience achieved the highest grades.

The context of the applied physics and energy course was also quite interesting. Amongst the students there was, on the one hand, a feeling of uncertainty about the usefulness and specific relevance of the course and, on the other, a high acceptance of the general relevance and interest in the energy component (rather than the physics component) of the course, together with a belief that the course was not so important from an extrinsic, assessment, perspective. These last two factors may have counter-balanced any negative effects of the first. An alternative interpretation is that there were other factors, beyond those associated with the teaching and learning context, which were strong enough to overcome any negative effects of uncertainty and so help to sustain the high degree of intrinsic experience characteristic of this course.

(iii) Students' background knowledge and familiarity

Another important influence upon intrinsic and extrinsic experience of relevance was the students' background knowledge and familiarity with the subject. Here again the home economics students, who professed to have a poor knowledge of research methods, were a distinctive sub-group. As the course progressed, however, this obviously changed, since the high incidence of extrinsic experiences recorded in the early stages of the course declined as the course progressed. Other students, such as the final year microbiology students and the human science students taking the research methods course, were obviously more familiar with their subject and their recall statements reflected comparatively greater degrees of intrinsic experience. Again the first-year applied physics and energy students were interesting because they had an unusually high perception of their background knowledge, and they displayed an unusually high level of intrinsic experiences despite the doubts they expressed about the usefulness and specific relevance of

the course. One student, for example, commented that he could not altogether see how the course fitted in with his other courses. However, he felt very familiar with the course content and to a large extent experienced its relevance intrinsically. Moreover, it was on the apparently more familiar material of the physics component of the course that the highest levels of intrinsic experience were recorded, in spite of the fact that it was the energy component of the course that was perceived as the more relevant one.

Vicarious Experience of Relevance

In analysing the students' experiences of relevance, it was evident that some experiences were closely related to or linked to the lecturer's presentation and were best described not as extrinsic or intrinsic but as vicarious. Students who experienced the relevance of the lecture content vicariously seemed to do so essentially in one of two different ways. Either they took over the lecturer's perceived interest or enthusiasm for the material, for example:

> . . . but the energy is obviously very interesting to him, and of course to us, so the way he puts it over is much more interesting.

or, alternatively, the lecturer seemed, in discussing a particular point, to provide an illustration, and example or a description of his or her own experience which students were able to identify with and take on board as something recognisable and interesting. Thus it was the illustration or the example that the student could relate to rather than the underlying issue being discussed, as in the following instance:

> It was interesting, wasn't it? Interesting to see what – just the information – her explaining her work in another country, what the attitudes are like. It was interesting.

The vicarious experience of relevance is therefore qualitatively distinct. It differs from an extrinsic experience in that it does not seem to be associated with external demands and it differs from an intrinsic experience in that students do not quite seem to see the content in terms of their own view of the world and their understanding of it. Instead the students seem to relate more to something the lecturer offers, whether that takes the form of enthusiasm or an interesting and recognisable illustration or example. Vicarious experience is thus very closely linked to the lecturer, perceptions of the lecturer, and the lecturer's presentation. Interestingly, amongst students who had closer contact with the lecturer (for example, because the lecturer was also their tutor) there was a stronger likelihood of vicarious experience. Furthermore, the students who apparently knew their lecturers best tended to record the highest incidence of vicarious experience, as did those students with the most positive perceptions of their lecturers.

Vicarious experience is arguably the most significant level of experience identified because it brings to the fore an important potential role of lecturers as facilitators of intrinsic experience of relevance where that might not otherwise have occurred. Indeed, in many cases it was very difficult to differentiate rich vicarious experiences from intrinsic ones and there was every reason to believe

that the former could easily lead to the latter. There was, for example, one lecturer whose style of lecturing was such that a great deal of vicarious experience seemed likely to be associated with her lectures. She made extensive use of vivid examples and illustrations, tried hard to bring the subject alive and spoke in an enthusiastic manner. This can be illustrated to some extent by comparing an extract from her lecture notes with the transcript from her actual lecture.

> *Extract from lecture notes:*
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> Commercial process; that they are loaded on the deck of the fishing vessel, may be tumbled, gutted and often contaminated with bacteria.

> *What the lecturer actually said:*
>
> I'm sure you have seen pictures, on television and things, of what happens to the poor old fish, they are tumbled on deck, they are trodden on, they are handled, they are gutted, and they are washed and all these operations add enormous other organisms to them.

And yet, despite this lecturer's style of lecturing, the level of vicarious experience associated with her lectures was not exceptionally high. There was evidence, however, of considerable intrinsic experience which frequently seemed closely related to vicarious experience. For example, in response to the above extract one student recalled:

> It sort of flashed through my mind, actually picturing what happens because I've seen them pulling their catch in, the trawl. It was just like that, they sort of tread all over them, I thought goodness me, how do they ever get back, if they're not in one piece are they fairly fresh?... Imagining all the bacteria on their boots coming off on to them ... I was just imagining it.

It could be argued that this student not only accepts the vivid picture offered by the lecturer (which would make the experience a vicarious one) but goes beyond it in picturing it for himself: 'How do they ever get back, if they're not in one piece are they fairly fresh?'. The student therefore experiences the content intrinsically rather than simply vicariously. Further evidence that many of the intrinsic experiences of this lecturer's students were closely related to vicarious experience of her 'vicarious' style came from analysis of three other students. For one lecture recalled by all three it seemed the lecturer did not achieve her usual level of vicarious projection. The students' experiences of the lecture were mostly extrinsic with apparently hardly any vicarious experience. In the case of a later lecture, however, two of the students' statements reflected greater degrees both of vicarious and of intrinsic experience of relevance. Similarly, the third student recorded more vicarious and more intrinsic experiences for an earlier lecture. In other words, in those lectures where the three students recalled higher levels of vicarious experience, all three also recalled higher levels of intrinsic experience. And conversely, when the incidence of vicarious experience was low, all three recalled high levels of extrinsic and low levels of intrinsic experience. As far as this lecturer was concerned, therefore, there was an evident relationship between

the levels of vicarious and intrinsic experience associated with her lectures.

There was other evidence too, from this and from the other two courses studied, which indicated that vicarious experience could be seen as pivotal and transitional. Where vicarious experiences were few in number, extrinsic experiences tended to be frequent, and where vicarious experiences were abundant, there was also greater numbers of intrinsic experiences, suggesting strongly that vicarious experiences could serve as a bridge towards experiences of an intrinsic kind. The implication of this finding for teaching is clear-cut, especially when seen alongside the earlier finding that vicarious experiences were highest amongst students who knew the lecturer best and who were the most positive in their perceptions of that lecturer. By seeking to heighten vicarious experiences amongst their students, lecturers may help to bring about the personal understanding which is the hallmark both of intrinsic experience of relevance and of a deep approach to learning.

Experience of Relevance and Student Learning

As the study we have just described has shown, students seem to experience the relevance of lecture content in three ways, intrinsically, extrinsically or vicariously. And as we suggested earlier, intrinsic and extrinsic experiences can be related to deep and surface approaches to learning. Where an experience is intrinsic or an approach deep, students perceive learning as bound up with themselves as individuals. As Marton observes, when students adopt a deep approach:

> They grasp the fact that the university subjects they are reading have to do with the same reality as that of their daily lives. This means they make use of their knowledge and skills. (Marton, 1975a, p. 131)

As described in this chapter, intrinsic experience is very much about students making use of their knowledge and skills. Similarly, there is a strong link between extrinsic experience and some of the characteristics of a surface approach as Marton describes it:

> Learning does not take place in a vacuum, but in various social contexts. Learning situations are characterised by the demands they make, primarily in the form of exams, grades, etc. Thus it is a matter of external demands, to some extent inescapable: one must try to learn certain things not because one wants to find out something, but because someone else thinks that one ought to learn them for the future (Marton *et al.,* 1977).

Marton suggests that in a surface approach, the aim is not to find something out but to be able to reproduce a text or to answer specific questions. Students who experience relevance extrinsically similarly focus on what is necessary to fulfil external demands such as these.

It is the vicarious experience of relevance, however, which is potentially the most important result of this study. This finding is especially interesting in relation to traditional research on lectures, a striking feature of which is the frequency with which characteristics or skills of the lecturer such as 'maintenance of student

interest', 'lecturer enthusiasm', and 'lecturer-student rapport' have been identified as 'effective' (see for example Cohen *et al.,* 1973; Wimberly and Faulkner, 1978; and Hildebrand, 1973). What that research fails to do, however, is to clarify the relation between those characteristics and skills and student learning.

Vicarious experience establishes the nature of this relationship. In the course of a lecture, students whose experiences might normally be largely extrinsic may find their interest in the subject matter itself kindled by the lecturer's enthusiasm or, through the medium of a vivid example or illustration, see the content of the lecture as having meaning in the real world. Vicarious experience of relevance can thus be viewed as transitional, providing a bridge between extrinsic experience or a surface approach and intrinsic experience or a deep approach. Through vicarious experience of relevance, therefore, it becomes possible for the lecturer to help students to go beyond the outward demands of a learning situation and make connections between the content of the lecture and their understanding of the world around them.