



The dialogic presentation as a more compassionate approach

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Presentation abstract

Presentations are a common means of communication worldwide with learners expected to carry out presentations as a means to disseminate academic knowledge (Tsang, 2020). Yet despite the issues that presentations induce in terms of stress (Merz et al., 2019), concerns over inclusivity (Mann and Clift, 2021), lack of presentation experience (Bankowski, 2010) and questions over transferable skills (Byrne, 2020), the traditional monologic presentation remains at the forefront of assessing through speaking. This lightning talk called for change and showed how the traditional monologic presentation is no longer relevant to today's teaching and learning in higher education.

The talk presented a reimagined way to present called the dialogic presentation. This innovative method of presenting involved small groups of peers in the process, thus encouraging a dialogue and redirecting student focus away from the aforementioned issues. The dialogic presentation also considered the environment the presentation takes place in and how that can be adapted in order to further reduce the potential for issues from external factors. As a result, the dialogic presentation has the potential to increase the quality of the presentation experience and the output. The dialogic presentation was presented clearly and efficiently through Pecha Kucha, highlighting the simplicity of the activity and its use in teaching and learning.

Keywords: presentations; language; spoken skills; inclusive assessment.

The dialogic presentation

Figure 1. Features of a dialogic presentation.

The dialogic presentation

- Small group
- Comfortable environment for both speaker and group members eg. around a table
- Presenter displays laptop and 'presents' to audience
- No script or memorisation
- Group members interact with presenter and highlight points they see during the 'presentation'
- No strict time limit
- Becomes a dialogue between students
- Focus on group members rather than teacher

Community response

This presentation touched upon key issues faced by students across the education system, and this was highlighted by the attendees. Dialogic presentations could support the development of transferable skills within the student community, and in using real world workplace scenarios:

I've been thinking about ways of developing students' presentation skills and the idea of gradually building up to more formal/traditional presentations. I think dialogic presentations would be a really good option.

While the positive impact of dialogic presentation is evident, whether this could be a suitable summative assessment, is an area that requires further research and guidance:

I will look to utilise this as a framework for a formative strategy, although I can see how it works as an alternative assessment but may be less effective as a formative.

Another participant suggested the marking criteria for discussion skills used in Functional Skills English very helpful. This could be utilised or adapted to suit the programmes.

Engagement in a presentation, traditional or dialogic, can have a significant impact on the experience of the presenter, and their confidence levels. The skills of “presenting” vs “discussing” are entwined and leads back to a synergetic relationship between the presenter and the audience:

I like how they break down the distinction between presentation and discussion skills, which are often treated as separate, but I think they are actually interrelated... Good presentations often give the 'feel' of a discussion, and I think it may be best to build the two skill areas in tandem.

Leading from that, an important aspect that requires further planning is handling groups of unengaged or difficult students:

I foresee the impact on an individual's grade if they present to a group of generally unengaged/difficult students, which could be a potential issue. Would a possible solution to this be identifying a group facilitator (presenter chosen: either a peer or staff) as a vital overseer to give some security for the one leading the dialogic presentation?

Next steps and additional questions

Two further questions arose from this presentation:

1. How can this method be utilised best in entirely online or hybrid courses?
2. How can the concepts of “audience”, “purpose”, and “format” be brought into the dialogic presentation for assessment clarity?

Author's reflection

Thank you for your comments. I can confirm that every time myself or a colleague has used the dialogic presentation there have been no issues with student engagement, however, it has had limited use (only with pre-sessional English students) and although there has been no 'difficult' students it is absolutely an area that will come up as it becomes more widely used. To deal with this I would initially suggest that the teacher acts as moderator to the dialogic presentation, entering the group if issues arise. I will look to develop other ways to deal with these issues and provide teachers with instructions on how to deal with them.

In creating the dialogic presentation, I wanted to create a situation where students could demonstrate that they would talk with people rather than at them (which is what a traditional presentation does). In a traditional presentation, students also often feel the need to 'impress the teacher' as they aim for a high grade; this often leads to a lack of engagement with the audience. The dialogic presentation addresses this by bringing attention to the group members, who can also support each other during the discussion.

All of the comments have been very useful in taking forward the dialogic presentation and I will definitely take them on board in its development.

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