

Seminar as a work form for BA-thesis

Antti Rissanen & Kalle Saastamoinen
NDU, Department of Military Tech., Finland

Introduction

The best practice to achieve personal learning goals is to have continuous interaction with one's advisor. In practice average student works alone with the learning material portal or participates lectures where teacher's presence is shared with large audience. On the other hand learning in studying groups allow students to negotiate meanings and express their own ideas. Supportive environment help students to establish effective relationships with their tutors and trainers. Yet many tutors and trainers find the leadership role difficult to perform satisfactorily in group centered learning and the role of real communicative interaction stays easily less prominent. [1] In this study we concentrate on the bachelor's seminar for thesis and especially on communicative skills. The objectives of the seminar discussion can be for example, that each participant presents their views in a comprehensible and reasoned manner, shows interest in the debate and the views of others, and the ideas presented.

Questions

The nature of the scientific debate itself may be unclear to BA-level students when the students see the written report as a main goal. Also as new issue is how to activate communicative skills when there is no change for face-to-face seminar?

Communication in learning

University seminar practices vary according to university, discipline or department. On the BA-level students present their thesis at different stages. For the department of Military technology, most of the seminar presentations should be based on literature gained for the theme, because formal courses supporting technical or mathematical research orientation are not always given in every sub-specific theme. With gained knowledge student would practice scientific thinking and communication skills in seminars. Because the seminars have only supportive role, the goals for each session are often described at a fairly general level. Writing skills are usually more prominently displayed in practical achievements. Voice communication is often vague or does not appear at all, because a too long presentation with PowerPoint may hinder any attempts to start discussion.

The meaning of communicative skills

Communication skills have been seen equally important in studying activities. In addition, the performer needs the ability to process given feedback. Without these interaction skills the utility value of the presentation for all members in a group may suffer. When considering the learning objectives in bachelor's studies, the realistic goal of scientific discussion skills development requires more attention. Due to less splendid communicative abilities also remarkable ideas may get less attention. Seminar types lecturing and workshops have their own role in interaction

development [2]. However, the development of communicative skills would need more attention in general educational strategies.

A summary and conclusions

After the first seminar, the follow-up for the major tasks, writing the thesis and scheduling the work are most important goals. Therefore, the integration of communication skills in training seems to take less prominent role. Additional tutor's personal guidance in written form is needed if the timeslot in seminar schedule has been used for general discussion. Even if traditional seminars and workshops have limited effect on the skills of scientific discussion [3] also in such arrangements for communicational interaction should be given more space. We have planned to activate all students to participate on seminar work and at the same time sharpen their skills of argumentation. Because at the moment contact based teaching is not all the way possible, the seminars will be conducted with ZOOM. Even if lecturing protocols will change the attention should be given to communicative abilities as intensively as with in classical learning arrangements.

Reference

- [1] Jaques, D., & Salmon, G. 2007. *Learning in groups: A handbook for face-to-face and online environments*. Routledge.
- [2] Penttinen, L. 2005. *Gradupuhetta tutkielmaseminaarissa*. Jyväskylä Studies Education, Psychology and Social Research 269. Jyväskylän yliopisto
- [3] Karp, D. A. & Yoels, W. C. 1976. The college classroom: some observations on the meanings of student participation. *Sociology and Social Research* 60(4), 421–439.