Coffee and Cookies: Conversations on Good Teaching

Part 2 - MOTIVATING STUDENTS AND STIMULATING THEIR INTEREST

This series of ‘Conversations’ was inspired by interviews with lecturers from 44 courses who accepted an invitation to discuss their teaching experiences as part of the CES Analysis Project. They were asked about changes they had made to their course, and their motivations for doing so, and also about the ways in which they addressed the GTS items most highly correlated with good teaching. The gift of their valuable time, and their honesty, in these conversations on good teaching is most gratefully acknowledged, as is the permission to share some of their wonderful ideas on how to create a valuable learning experience for their students.

More details about the CES Analysis Project and the ‘Coffee & Cookies’ Summary of Findings can be found online at www.rmit.edu.au/teaching/cesanalysis.

A 2007 project conducted by Helen Monk and Robert Webster investigated the experiences of various students beginning their studies at RMIT in that year. ‘Discussions with Commencing Students’ is available at http://www.rmit.edu.au/planning-group/student-feedback-reports and several of the findings are used here to reflect the views of some RMIT students on those issues discussed with lecturers.
A Thought to Begin With . . .

We hope that, if you are inspired by any of the ideas shared here, you will take them and give them the flavour of your own personality, for use in your own way, in your own classes. Ken Bain uses a wonderful analogy to illustrate the need for each teacher to “digest, transform, and individualise what (they) see” when he notes that painting with the same brush strokes as Rembrandt would not, of itself, “replicate his genius”.

“To take the Rembrandt analogy a step further, the great Dutch artist could not be Picasso any more than the Spanish painter could replicate his predecessor; each had to find his own genius. So too must teachers adjust every idea to who they are and what they teach.”

*What the Best College Teachers Do, Ken Bain (2004)*

Motivating Students and Stimulating their Interest

“People often say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing - that's why we recommend it daily.”

Zig Ziglar

Statistical analysis performed on the Course Experience Survey (CES) in 2007 found that the two Good Teaching Scale (GTS) items discussed in this section were positively correlated\(^1\): Item 9 ‘The teaching staff in this course motivate me to do my best work’ and Item 17 ‘The teaching staff work hard to make this course interesting.’ Many lecturers noted that one of the ways in which they tried to motivate students was by engaging them - and then maintaining that engagement - by making the course interesting. It is unsurprising, then, that many of the answers to the two following questions overlapped. Interest and motivation appear to be linked in the minds of both students and lecturers. Participants were asked ‘Are there any particular steps you take to motivate your students? If so, what are they?’ and ‘What steps do you take to make your course interesting?’ Due to the duplication of so many answers, the tendency to make the course interesting *in order* to motivate students, and the two items being highly positively correlated according to student responses, the answers to these two questions have been combined.

\(^1\)Positive correlation indicates a relationship between the items. This means that, where the score for one item changes, the score for the other item will change in the same direction. In this case, where students gave a high score for making a course interesting, they were almost certain to have scored highly for motivation as well. By the same token, a poor score for making the course interesting would most likely be accompanied by a poor score for motivation.
Motivating Students and Making Courses Interesting

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<th>Method</th>
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Figure 1: Methods used to motivate and interest students (9 most frequently occurring answers)

What are lecturers doing to motivate their students and make their courses interesting?

It can be seen from the high frequency of answers for each method in Figure 1 that most lecturers used a range of methods designed to make their courses more interesting for students and to motivate students. Many also gave answers which were unique, and developed as a result of their own style or area, or their observations and experiences over many years.

Providing context/relevance/real life application and/or keeping information current. Demonstrating the relevance or context of topics, as well as developing ways of linking them to “the real world” were seen by the majority of lecturers as valuable ways to both pique students’ interest, and to motivate them to want to learn more. ‘Context helps make meaning clear (Draper & Repka, 2008), and building such applicability into a course provides a framework for understanding content, enables students to connect knowledge with their own experiences, and can help students appreciate why what they are learning is important (Arthus, 2008; Bain, 2004; Gross Davis, 1993; Kane et al, 2004).

“One of the ways we try to motivate our students is to demonstrate the relevance of what they are learning. The field in which these students will be working is vocational, and they need to know why it is so important that they properly understand how to do their job well. Real life examples of the experiences of real people are a good way to show them what happens – and how wonderful it is – when you get it right!”

Keeping information current was a valued aspect of teaching related to relevance and context. Up-to-date examples were seen as important, so that students could better relate to and understand them. Teaching current standards and practices was considered necessary to ensure students were equipped with a proper understanding of what will be required of them in their future employment. Connections between academics and industry were deemed highly beneficial. One lecturer noted that his students gained great confidence in their learning from the knowledge that those teaching and overseeing the
course were closely involved with the development of standards of practice in the industry. Another, from a very different discipline, found this also:

“Students in our courses appreciate the fact that teaching staff are actively involved with policy making in the industry, and make a major contribution to materials and resources for professionals in the field. For students, there is an immediacy which comes from seeing the integration of research outcomes, largely informed by staff work, into the resources they study. This is enhanced by staff members with recent industry experience, who can share stories of their experiences in the field. It is quite motivating for students to know that the material they are learning was developed by members of staff in partnership with industry.”

Many of the focus group students from an RMIT study confirmed this by stating that it was important to them that the information they were being presented with was aligned with current industry standards and practices (Monk & Webster, 2008).

Employing a variety of activities, materials and methods of presentation was cited by many lecturers as a way to keep classes interesting for their students, and also to motivate them. The fact that students benefit from variety in presentation and ways of learning is widely acknowledged (Axelrod, 2007; Bain, 2004; Ramsden, 1992). Lecturers also found that different subjects, and even topics within a subject, often required a different method of presentation. For example, a lecturer might employ PowerPoint as a tool for effective communication of a highly visual topic; whereas a topic meant to provoke critical thinking or even controversy, would work better if presented as a group or class discussion.

‘Variety reawakens students’ involvement in the course (Gross Davis, 1993)’ and students learn more effectively when they are actively engaged in their own learning (Biggs, 1999; Gross-Davis, 1993; McMahon, 2006). The attention span of even the most dedicated students is limited to around fifteen minutes, and therefore extended time spent doing the same thing can reduce how effectively they are learning (Centra, 1993). Different activities can provide a change of pace, and help students refocus their attention (Biggs & Tang, 2007). Among other methods, one of the lecturers developed a unique way to achieve this in his course:

“In order to break up the theory a bit in my classes, I occasionally have an ‘ad break’. I tell my students a story about something which is light and interesting, but still related to the topic we are studying. For example, I may tell them a brief story about a Nobel Prize winner in the field and how they achieved what they did, or what they have contributed to the domain. I have found that students then tend to relate to the theory more - and with more interest.”

Monk and Webster (2008) found that a number of students were attracted to RMIT because it is ‘practically oriented’. Some lecturers provided variety and practical experience through the use of guest speakers, real life case studies, or even field trips.

“I think it is important that everything I teach my students is related back to real life – to what they will be doing after they graduate. To support this, I like to have guest speakers from industry who can share their experiences regarding the kind of problems they face in practice, and how they go about resolving them. I follow this up with a field trip so students can actually see the work being done. I find that hearing about and seeing the theory in action makes it more understandable for students, and certainly more interesting.”

Students appreciate these efforts, as interaction with industry professionals allows them insight into current practice (Monk & Webster, 2008), as well as being able to ‘provide different perspectives and . . . promote deeper understanding’ (Klopfenstein, 2003). Students also want to hear stories about their lecturers’ experiences in the field (Monk & Webster, 2008; susu.org forums, 2006). Some of the lecturers shared anecdotes and stories from their own industry experiences to help illustrate the application and relevance of theory, in an interesting way, and to motivate their students to want to learn more. Stories can bring the theory to life, and ‘The natural progression and inherent logic of the anecdote links categories which may otherwise occupy disparate and singular dimensions (Draper & Repka, 2008).’
Enthusiasm! Nearly half of the lecturers interviewed specifically mentioned enthusiasm, passion or enjoyment; for the subject, the students, teaching, or all three! They noted the positive impact on students, and the tendency for enthusiasm to become both reciprocal and self perpetuating in a class. The belief that ‘Expert teachers are passionate about teaching and learning (Hattie, 2003)’, or that ‘Teachers who love their subject, and show it, can be inspirational (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p.94)’ makes its appearance over and over again in the literature (Axelrod, 2007; Gross Davis, 1993; Kane et al, 2004; Petocz et al, 2006). Students repeatedly express the positive effect on their learning of enthusiastic lecturers who enjoy what they do, whether through focus groups (Monk & Webster, 2008), on blogs (Arthus, 2008; susu.org forums, 2006), or in essays about good teaching (Rieutort-Louis, 2008). One of the lecturers placed a high importance on students attending classes because they want to be there, and conveying her own enthusiasm for the subject, and for learning, was one way to encourage this:

“I think that students need to see you investing in your own material; they MUST see your passion. They need to come on the ride with you. I tell them that this is a journey we are on together – I am learning too!”

It is important to note here that enthusiasm can take many forms, and should not be confused with entertainment. Enthusiasm is generally defined as great excitement for or interest in a subject or cause, and can be conveyed equally as effectively through quiet earnestness as extreme liveliness, as long as it is genuine (Axelrod, 2007). It is the ‘ability to stimulate strong positive emotions in students (Axelrod, 2007)’ which is important, and which will have a lasting effect, as ‘students respond to teachers who . . . have a desire and passion to teach (Monk & Webster, 2008)’. According to John Centra, ‘by teaching more enthusiastically, teachers will receive higher ratings AND their students will retain more of the course content (Centra, 1993, p.77).’

Intuition and/or flexibility were key considerations for a large number of the lecturers. They felt that it was important to be able to gauge the different needs, objectives or learning styles of students, and to be able to provide for them. Many also designed their lectures with ‘clear shape but room for improvisation (Axelrod, 2007)’ – as long as the desired objectives were achieved, they were happy to let student interest guide the path classes took. This ability to show flexibility and adaptability in the classroom, in response to the interests and abilities of students, is a recognised feature of good teaching (Hattie, 2003; Kane et al, 2004; Ramsden, 1992). Students have also expressed their desire for lecturers to be flexible and understanding of their different needs (Anonymous, 2008; Arthus, 2008; Monk & Webster, 2008). Many lecturers spoke of their awareness of different learning styles, and their attempts to present information in ways that were accessible to all students, regardless of preferred learning style.

Several of these lecturers began the semester by asking the students what they expected or hoped to learn, or even by setting goals together for the course. In knowing what interested their students, they could often tailor parts of the course, including assessments, to help students fulfil their personal learning goals as well as those of the course. These lecturers are well aware that ‘People learn best when they ask an important question that they care about answering, or adopt a goal they want to reach (Bain, 2004, p.31).’ (See also Ramsden, 1992; Weller, 2005)

“One of the first things I do with my students is to explore what it is that they wish to learn from the course, what they believe they will need to achieve. During these discussions we set the goals for the course together. Of course, I have a plan and learning objectives already set out, but these discussions both give ME a sense of what will interest my students, and give THEM a sense of ownership of the course. I would say that probably 90% of what students would like to do matches my objectives, but I find the opportunity to ‘have a say’ increases their interest and their motivation, and gives them a sense of responsibility for their own learning. Being open to that other 10% of ideas can also mean taking a different, but no less interesting or important, path on occasion.”

This lecturer was among several who found that the learning experience could be enhanced when they were willing to adapt courses and classes to reflect the needs and desires of their students. Allowing, and even encouraging, choices in learning can increase student motivation, understanding and interest, as well as promoting independence and deep approaches to learning (Biggs & Tang, 2007; McMahon, 2006; Weller, 2005).
Lecturers felt that it was essential to have a good rapport with, and empathy for, their students. The ways in which they connected with their students and communicated their concern for them were as variable as their own personalities, and often built upon many years of experience and growth. For one of these lecturers:

“I really believe in building empathy in the classroom and of telling stories of how I studied and how I learnt a second language, and conquered my fear of public speaking. Having travelled and lived in various parts of the world has added immeasurably to my globalisation of self and I always talk about the globalisation of self that is so important in today’s global society. I believe that sharing my own experiences with the students, and having some knowledge of their backgrounds and cultural sensitivities, helps in building a rapport with them. This is especially true with my many overseas students.”

Some spoke about the importance of a good teacher-student relationship, of knowing their students, or of there being an atmosphere of trust in the class. Much research also emphasises the importance of the interpersonal connection between teacher and student, and the effect on students of knowing that their lecturer sees them, and cares about them, as an individual (Hattie, 2003; Lowman, 1996; Monahan, 2005; Ramsden, 1992).

This is just as important for lecturers teaching large classes as for those in smaller, more intimate settings (Kane et al, 2004). Lecturers often acknowledged the difficulty of cultivating such relationship in larger classes, but had developed different ways to achieve it to some extent. One lecturer physically moved among his students, which Biggs & Tang (2007) note as a way to make large classes feel more personal (Biggs & Tang, 2007). When there was discussion or questions, this enabled him to interact more closely with the student(s) speaking, while still engaging with the entire class. Another lecturer provided morning or afternoon tea in her classes as a way to show care and consideration for her students, especially on cold mornings! Sometimes students would bring in something special to share, and classes would begin in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Other teachers found that taking an interest in their students’ backgrounds, particularly when they were from overseas, from disadvantaged backgrounds, or were mature age students with families, enabled them to better understand and connect with their students. However it is achieved, ‘Teachers who create warm and accepting yet business-like atmospheres will promote persistent effort and favourable attitudes toward learning (Weller, 2005)’. One of the lecturers put it this way:

“I believe that the way a class feels is important for students. I think it is similar to the desire to return to a restaurant with nice ambience; you want to go back because you liked being there. I try to create that kind of atmosphere in my classroom.”

Interaction or guided discussion in class was seen by many lecturers as a good way to motivate student interest and involvement and was encouraged at a whole class level, as well as between students in small groups. Interaction was seen as beneficial in increasing students’ participation in their own learning, as well as making the process more interesting and practical. The importance of encouraging students to build their own understanding, and assisting them to do so, is well recognised (Bain, 2004; Biggs, 1999), and ‘Good dialogue elicits those activities that shape, elaborate, and deepen understanding (Biggs, 1999, p.61).’ RMIT students themselves placed a high priority on interaction, stating that they were ‘most engaged in learning’ where classes were ‘interesting and interactive (Monk & Webster, 2008).’ For one pair of lecturers, interaction was the foundation of all their classes:

“In our course, we ‘team teach’ our students. Part of the motivation for this is that being able to interact with, listen to and understand other people are skills which are vital in our field. The interaction between the two of us in class models this and encourages the participation of our students. We also encourage them to draw on their own experiences as a way for them to engage with others, and with the topic. The course is very participatory, which makes it interesting for students, and guided interaction in class and in groups helps them build important teamwork and co-operative skills.”

Several lecturers included small group work in their courses as a way for students to learn through working together on projects or presentations. Small group work can assist students to develop in their ability to discuss, co-operate and problem solve, as well as increase their independence and responsibility in learning (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Falchikov, 2005). Monk and Webster (2008) found that,
despite an initial reluctance, many RMIT students came to prefer a self directed style of learning, as long as they were supported in adapting to it. Students also appreciate the advantages of group work, but note that strong guidelines are necessary to avoid problems arising within groups (Falchikov, 2005; Monk & Webster, 2008). While small groups are an obvious way to encourage interaction, researchers also contend that lectures are more fruitful when they are a ‘conversation’ or ‘active communication’ which involves the participation of both students and teachers (Bain, 2004, p.117; Ramsden, 1992, p.167). Effective teachers ensure that these conversations are inclusive, and recognise the opportunity they provide, not only to increase students’ thinking and understanding of topics through discussion, but also to ascertain levels of student knowledge and understanding (Bain, 2004; Jackson, 1997; Petocz et al, 2006).

“One of the ways I engage my students’ interest is through interaction. Small groups work together on problems or case studies and then report outcomes to the class; students present real life applications of theoretical principles studied in previous classes; or as a whole group we analyse research articles and discuss the theory behind them. I also take the time occasionally for some ‘Reflective Moments’; I ask students to reflect on what they have learnt so far in that class, or in the course, and invite them to share their thoughts with the class. I do this intuitively, always gauging when it might be appropriate – sometimes when I see eyes glazing over it can be a chance for further explanation, or to change direction. It is also a chance for me to find out how well students are grasping the concepts we are learning and if there are any difficulties.”

**Good organisation and clear expectations.** Many of the lecturers believed that students respond well, and are more likely to be motivated to learn, when courses are well organised, and there is clarity in objectives, expectations and assessment. When new to a course, in particular, lecturers examined the entire layout to ensure topics were structured, expectations were clear, and material was well organised and easily accessible. Lecturers identified different areas they had felt it was necessary to make improvements to clarify some aspect of the course for students. Some provided a weekly planner, with a description of well linked topics and assessments, so students knew exactly what they were doing and when. Others were careful to explain the relevance of each topic to the course learning objectives, and to ensure lectures followed a logical sequence. Clear criteria for assessments were also considered important, and were often supported by detailed explanation of WHAT students must do, HOW to do it, and WHY it was important to do so. Regardless of their specific focus, these lecturers agreed that “clarity makes students comfortable”. One lecturer noted that she made a special effort prior to the commencement of classes to assist her students in ensuring that all administration for the course was dealt with as quickly as possible.

“I think that having to deal with administrative issues can really distract students at the beginning of semester, and detract from the learning experience. I try to have everything really organised, with everything they need to know, and do, set out clearly on the DLS, and I am available to help them if necessary. With the ‘housekeeping’ out of the way early, I find that students feel more relaxed and comfortable, which is more conducive to a positive learning experience than when they are worried, or preoccupied by the fact that some aspect of their enrolment is not in order.”

According to the literature, classes which are sensibly ordered, material which is clear, and objectives which are well explained all contribute to the ability of students to understand the material (Axelrod, 2007; Biggs, 1999; Weller, 2005). Conversely, a lack of clear goals and standards for students can lead to problems with learning and negativity towards classes and teachers (Ramsden, 1992). Clarity was an issue which came up several times in discussions with RMIT focus group students; in relation especially to communication, expectations and program information. They also indicated a desire for objectives, content and assessment to be more clearly linked (Monk & Webster, 2007). One lecturer who recognised this early on restructured the course in order to provide clearer information to students.

“I have developed my course to be super organised, and I think that makes students comfortable and gives them confidence. They always know what they will be doing and what’s required of them because they have a detailed planner which outlines weekly topics and assessments. Reminders are emailed to students as well as all information being available on the DLS. Assessments are spread across the semester which provides a balanced workload, clarifies the link between the material and assessment, and motivates students to keep up with the work.”
Being positive and encouraging towards students. Several lecturers emphasised the importance of continually encouraging students in their efforts, and of maintaining a positive atmosphere in the classroom. They recognised that ‘Kind words often do more to motivate than yet another paper (Jackson, 1997).’ They fostered participation and sharing of ideas, impressing upon students that there is no right or wrong answer when thinking and discussing critically; everyone has experiences to share and an opinion to offer. A few lecturers referred to their classes as a collaborative learning community, and at least one emphasised to students that they need not completely understand a topic they may struggle with, as long as they gain something from it. These lecturers focussed on, and praised, what students were doing well, before addressing areas in need of improvement, both within class and in assessments.

Six of these lecturers said that one of the ways in which they encouraged their students was by affirming the knowledge they brought with them to their course and/or demonstrating what they had achieved so far. If ‘teaching builds on the known (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p.93),’ illustrating to students their own wealth of knowledge can give them confidence, as well as a frame of reference for understanding and integrating new knowledge (Bain, 2004; McMahon, 2006).

“In my course, I teach many mature age and international students who can be quite overwhelmed by the return to study, or the unfamiliar culture. One of the ways in which I try to encourage and motivate all my students in their learning is to emphasise that they come into the course already possessing knowledge. I think people can assume that students are empty vessels. I disagree. I get to know my students, and their backgrounds, and I am acutely aware of who they are. This enables me to demonstrate to them the depth of their prior knowledge, and I constantly remind them of this. I see my role as assisting them in closing the gap between their knowledge and experiences outside university, and the course material.”

Student engagement was a specific focus for many lecturers. How they achieved this varied, influenced by such factors as discipline, year level, topic and personality. Many of the ways lecturers undertook to engage their students have already been mentioned under earlier categories: the lecturer who begins each class with a “rant” on a current topic to stimulate critical thinking and discussion; the lecturer who creates a cohesive learning environment so that students can engage with each other and develop through the sharing of knowledge; the lecturer who aims to include, as far as possible, an activity per class which links to the topic in an interesting way. In stressing the use of these methods as ways to engage their students, these lecturers all appreciated the importance of capturing students’ interest early, and fostering their engagement with the learning material and activities embedded within the course (Biggs, 1999; Ramsden, 1992). One lecturer looked for creative ways to engage her students and pique their interest in important topics:

“I find that demonstrating or modelling what is being learnt can be quite valuable. In a topic which explores the effect of our conduct and the physical environment around us, I capture my student’s attention by modelling a poor quality learning environment. The room is untidy, and I come in late, display a lack of interest and courtesy, avoid eye contact and generally present poorly. When I reveal the reason for this, after 10 minutes of silent reading about quality learning environments, confusion and anxiety turns to relief. We have some quite lively discussions about the importance of the way we relate to people, the negative impact we can have on others and the importance of the physical learning environment. I really believe this practical demonstration engages my students’ interest and empathy, and helps them understand and remember better than the theory could alone.”

A few of these lecturers also aimed to engage and motivate their students by challenging them and/or setting high expectations. They emphasised to students that, although their standards were high, they were also achievable if students were willing to put in the effort. They also stressed that students would not be on their own, but could always come to them for support and guidance. Research tends to associate high standards with high student performance (Ramsden, 1992), but also stresses the importance of providing this assurance that these standards are reachable (Bain, 2004). Motivation is encouraged when the learner has the expectation that they will succeed (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Gross Davis, 1993). For one lecturer:

“I work hard to push my students to higher and higher levels of deep learning and I really believe, when you do that they learn to believe in themselves. They have to learn to make decisions, find perspective, and learn of concepts they never knew existed. I think our students need to see that we have high expectations; but also that we are prepared to work at a high level to help them achieve that.”
Some other ways in which lecturers motivated students or made their courses interesting:
Class tests or allowing class notes to be taken into end of year exams seen by a couple of lecturers as a way to motivate attendance. Two lecturers introduced competitions as a way to motivate effort and interest; one was a competition for small group work, another was an optional research competition throughout the course. One lecturer invited a successful student from the previous year to talk to the students about what to expect in the course. Interestingly, RMIT focus group students felt it would be helpful to have previous students available for advice and insights (Monk & Webster, 2007). A few lecturers noted the use of humour as a way to make courses more interesting for students. While humour is not essential, nor a replacement for good teaching, used effectively and appropriately it can elucidate theory and render classes more enjoyable, and is appreciated by students (Axelrod, 2007; Kane et al, 2004; Monk & Webster, 2007).

The Personal Nature of Teaching

In these conversations, lecturers shared their thoughts on some of the more effective approaches they have taken to make their classes interesting and to motivate their students. Some of these, such as demonstrating relevance, presenting a variety of materials and activities, or teaching enthusiastically were widely employed. They were commonly seen as effective ways to stimulate interest which, in turn, would motivate students to want to learn more. These lecturers perceived the importance of interest to motivation; after all, students who are not in the least interested in what they are learning will hardly be inspired to do their ‘best work’ (Axelrod, 2007; Ramsden, 1992). Ideas such as the ‘ad break’, morning tea, or research competitions were developed by the lecturer as a result of their experiences, research and reflections.

It was frequently noted that it is important for teachers to be true to themselves and their own philosophy of teaching in their classes. Lecturers made comments like “I know that works for some people, but it’s just not me”, “I don’t feel comfortable doing that in my classes”, or “It just fits with what I believe about good teaching to do it this way”. The fact that these people are open to other ideas is evidenced by the number who talked in the interviews about their desire to see more sharing of ideas, or about the approaches they used which were inspired by someone else. However, it is important to these lecturers that they feel free to teach in the way that is most comfortable for them, and most beneficial for their students. This theme is echoed in much of the literature, which acknowledges the difficulty of defining exactly what good teaching is when it can be so many different things, in spite of commonalities, and is so very personal at its best (Bain, 2004; Biggs & Tang, 2007; Kane et al, 2004; Lowman, 1996; Palmer, 2007; Ramsden, 1992).

Coupled with this was the fact that what students find interesting, or what motivates them to want to learn more, varies across disciplines and between year levels. Even within the same course lecturers found that methods which inspired one cohort didn’t always resonate with the next. Lecturers themselves admitted that some subjects are inherently interesting to students, while others are “drier”, and can require more effort on the part of lecturers to find the most interesting way to present them. The impact of factors such as subject, class size and learning objectives cannot be underestimated when considering the nature of good teaching (Bain, 2004; Biggs & Tang, 2007; Palmer, 2007; Ramsden, 1992). Many lecturers were also acutely aware of the individual needs of their students, and were prepared to adjust the way in which they presented information or guided learning in order to encourage deeper learning for all of them.

The stories shared here by lecturers about the ways in which they attempt to simulate interest in their students, and motivate their desire to learn surely demonstrate that, while “Wise and effective teaching is not ... simply a matter of applying general principles of teaching according to rule; they need adapting to each teachers’ own personal strengths and teaching context.” (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p.41)
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“In a completely rational society, the best of us would aspire to be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less, because passing civilization along from one generation to the next ought to be the highest honour and the highest responsibility anyone could have.”

Lee Iacocca

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