Engaging your students

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David Carlin, a lecturer from the School of Applied Communication, won the 2007 Early Career Academic RMIT Teaching Award. David shares his thoughts regarding student engagement.

What does 'student engagement' mean to you?
Student engagement, to me, is about finding ways for students to be energised and excited by the process of learning; for them to be productively immersed in the tasks they are attempting and in dialogue with the concepts they are discovering.

What steps do you take in the planning of your courses that address how to better engage students?
I work with colleagues to design courses that I as a student would find exciting and stimulating. I try to see things from the student point of view.
I make sure that the rationale and structure of the course is very clearly communicated, and that a transparent 'learning contract' is established between myself, co-teachers and students, so that a high level of mutual trust and respect can be fostered.
I make sure that the assessment tasks are designed to closely reflect and enable the learning outcomes of each course.

What strategies do you use in your teaching to engage learners?
Firstly, unless teaching very large classes, I demonstrate my respect for the students by making an effort to learn their names!
Further, I endeavour to ensure that students understand exactly what is required of them and why, throughout the course. I place emphasis on communicating why there is intrinsic value for them as students in each learning activity, above and beyond the purely instrumental value of achieving good grades.
I encourage the students to be active contributors in lectures, tutorials and online in their reflective practice. I try to model my own enthusiastic and critical engagement with the course curriculum.