Coffee and Cookies: Conversations On Good Teaching

RMIT Higher Education Lecturers
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Summary of Findings
Table of Contents

Project Description

Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. p.4
The Interviews ............................................................................................................................................. p.4

Feedback (GTS Items 5 and 20)

Providing feedback to students.................................................................................................................. p.5
Figure 1: Methods used to provide feedback ............................................................................................. p.5
What methods lecturers are using to provide feedback............................................................................. p.6

Motivation and Interest (GTS Items 9 and 17)

Motivating students and stimulating their interest .................................................................................... p.7
Figure 2: Methods used to motivate and interest students ......................................................................... p.7
What lecturers are doing to motivate students and make their courses interesting ..................................... p.7

Understanding Student Difficulties (GTS Item 19)

Understanding and assisting students experiencing difficulties with coursework ..................................... p.9
Figure 3: Methods used to assist students experiencing difficulties with coursework ............................... p.9
What lecturers are doing to assist students experiencing difficulties with coursework .............................. p.9

Explaining Things (GTS Item 4)

Explaining things ......................................................................................................................................... p.11

Changes to Courses

Making changes to courses in Semester One 2007 .................................................................................... p.11
Figure 4.1 Changes to structure .................................................................................................................. p.12
What changes lecturers have made to the structure of their courses ......................................................... p.12
Figure 4.2 Changes to the organisation and presentation of material ....................................................... p.13
How lecturers have changed the organisation and presentation of material ............................................ p.13
Figure 4.3 Changes to assessment ............................................................................................................... p.14
How lecturers have changed assessment in their courses ........................................................................ p.14
Figure 4.4 Changes to feedback .................................................................................................................. p.15
How lecturers have changed the provision of feedback in their courses .................................................. p.15

Motivations for Change

Motivation for making changes .................................................................................................................. p.16
Figure 5: Motivation for lecturers making changes to their course ............................................................. p.17
Why lecturers made changes to their courses in Semester One 2007 and 2008 ........................................ p.17
Presentation and Student Enquiries

Presentation and Methods..............................................................................................................p.18
Table 1: Percentage of lecturers using different methods of presentation........................................p.18
Answering student enquiries..........................................................................................................p.18

Further Issues and Comments

Further comments..............................................................................................................................p.18
Figure 6.1: Lecturer responses to an invitation for further comments................................................p.19
Lecturer comments............................................................................................................................p.10
Figure 6.2: Lecturer comments regarding the CES...........................................................................p.20
Comments on the CES.......................................................................................................................p.20
The personal nature of teaching.......................................................................................................p.21
Final thought.......................................................................................................................................p.21

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements............................................................................................................................p.22
List of participants..............................................................................................................................p.22
Introduction

In late 2007 a project initiated by Professor Jim Barber (Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic) sought to answer the question – ‘What drives good teaching?’ Initially a range of quantitative analysis techniques were employed on CES data to identify key indicators of good teaching. Factor analysis implementing a five factor model confirmed the presence of a good teaching factor, but showed some difference across subject areas in the way the GTS items correlated with both this and other factors. Summaries explaining the analysis and indicating the strength of correlation of items to the good teaching factor, for each subject area, were distributed across the University through the Heads of School. They are also available online at [http://www.rmit.edu.au/teaching/cesanalysis](http://www.rmit.edu.au/teaching/cesanalysis).

In early 2008, 107 HE lecturers across 43 subject areas were invited to take part in a semi structured interview about their teaching. These lecturers were identified through comparison of GTS scores from Semester 1 2006 and Semester 1 2007. Of the 107 courses, 80 had shown a significant increase in GTS score from 2006 to 2007, and a further 27 had achieved a significantly high score in both years. They were not alone in achieving this; many other courses also showed either great improvement in, or consistently high, GTS scores. However, time constraints, and a desire to have a variety of disciplines and class sizes represented, meant that not all these lecturers could be invited to participate.

This report shares some responses of the lecturers from 44 courses who accepted the invitation to be a part of this project. They were asked questions 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.

The Interviews

As the participants in this project were identified for slightly different reasons, two sets of questions were used. The first set of questions will be referred to as Increase questions. They were developed for Semester One courses where GTS was at least 12% higher in 2007 than in 2006. These were then slightly modified for lecturers who had achieved high GTS over both semesters (to be referred to as High questions). The reason for this was mainly to gather more detail about changes from those who had significantly increased GTS, and more detail about teaching methods from those who had maintained a high GTS. Where questions differed slightly, this will be noted. Of the 44 lecturers interviewed as part of this project, 29 were asked Increase questions and 15 were asked High questions. Although the set questions took around 20 – 30 minutes, many lecturers were involved in further, more informal, discussion with the interviewer about their teaching and learning experiences, some of which will be reflected here. It is important to note that the number of lecturers recorded as providing an answer to any question (given in bold) includes only those who specifically recalled during the interview that they used that particular method in their classes. Others may actually have used that method (as was sometimes revealed in informal discussion), but did not provide it as an answer at the time as it was not foremost in their mind, or may not have been their primary method and therefore was seen as having less weight as an answer. For all questions, most lecturers gave more than one answer.
Providing Feedback to Students

Two GTS items in particular seem to have caused much consternation over the past few years for many staff: Item 5 ‘The teaching staff normally give me helpful feedback on how I am going in this course’ and Item 20 ‘The staff put a lot of time into commenting on my work’. Interestingly, these two items correlated most highly with good teaching in 29 of the 41 subject areas for which a distinct Good Teaching Factor could be extracted. In a further 9 subject areas, one of these items was the factor most highly correlated with good teaching. During discussions with staff, two main issues surrounding these items seemed to emerge. One was the differing interpretations of what constitutes feedback (especially between students and staff), and of what types and amount of feedback were seen as adequate. The other was the issue of how to provide feedback to larger classes without using up every available hour of every day to do so! Feedback on progress, as well as commenting on student work, was also often provided very differently due to the nature of the subject area or class size. Responses to these two items have been combined as commenting directly on student work was generally also referred to as feedback by staff. Also, according to student responses, these two items were highly positively correlated.

Lecturers answering High questions were asked ‘What methods do you use to provide feedback to your students?’ Of these, four had also made some change to their provision of feedback. In relation to feedback, lecturers answering Increase questions were asked ‘Have you made any changes to the nature and quantity of feedback to students (from 2006 to 2007)?’ As 21 of them reported changes in this area, the total number of lecturers giving one or more responses regarding feedback was 36.

![Figure 1: Methods used to provide feedback to students (7 most frequently occurring answers)](attachment:methods.png)
What methods are lecturers using to provide feedback to students?

As seen in Figure 1, the two methods most highly favoured for providing feedback to students were class discussion and written feedback. However, most lecturers did employ other methods as well. Many lecturers noted the importance of ensuring their feedback to students was “timely”, regardless of the method employed. (Eight lecturers did not answer this particular question.)

27 lecturers answered that in 2007 class discussion was one of the ways they provided feedback. This included encouraging questions, and working through problems or solutions, in class. One lecturer encouraged students to keep a log book of specific questions to ask. Many noted that sharing of questions in class could help students feel they were not alone in needing clarification. 6 lecturers also specifically noted that they used such class discussion, along with group work and self and peer assessment to encourage students to work things out for themselves.

23 lecturers cited written feedback, including drafts, often using words like ‘lengthy’ or ‘detailed’. This included 7 who said they had increased the amount or quality of their written feedback.

9 spoke of the importance of being positive and encouraging in giving feedback. This included recognising and rewarding students’ efforts and skill development when marking assessments, along with the content of their work.

9 lecturers used marking guides or criteria to assist provision of feedback.

9 utilised the DLS or email. One lecturer introduced update emails, sent to students every three to four weeks, providing review, future direction and both specific and general feedback. These emails include “Happy Messages”, for example, ‘Today’s class went really well . . .’ for positive reinforcement.

9 cited individual verbal feedback/commenting on work as important.

6 lecturers noted that they were labelling feedback or explaining why a particular method was used, in order to highlight its use to students as well as any limitations. For example, a lecturer teaching large classes calculated with each class how many hours it would take to provide detailed written feedback on all assignments. He then explained the methods he would instead apply – a marking guide for individual feedback, and discussion in class for general issues. Students clearly understood what feedback they would receive, how and when. Another lecturer focussed on questions and feedback in his Friday tutorial and actually labelled it “Feedback Friday”.

Some other methods that individual lecturers were using to provide feedback to students:

- Homework sheets – some worked through together
- TERISSA – a method of evaluating and reflecting on problems either individually or as a class (see www.terissa.com for information)
- Progress report emailed in week 8
- Use of standardised copy and paste of why something is good or needs improvement (to cut time spent and enable more detail).
Motivating Students and Stimulating Their Interest

The two GTS items in this section were positively correlated: 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. Lecturers in both groups 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, as well the tendency to make the course interesting in order to motivate students, the answers to these two questions will be reported together. Also, according to student responses, these two items were highly positively correlated. As all lecturers answered these questions, the total number of respondents was 44.

Motivating Students and Making Courses Interesting

![Bar chart showing methods used to motivate and interest students](chart.png)

Figure 2: 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 numbers of answers for each method in Figure 2 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 over many years.
35 lecturers spoke about the importance of demonstrating the context, relevance, or practical or real life application of what they were teaching and/or about ensuring that information was kept current.

25 lecturers cited using a variety of activities, materials and methods of presentation as a way to keep classes interesting for their students, and also to motivate them. This included 6 who used guest speakers, 4 who utilised case studies and 2 who took their students on field trips. There were also 4 who used anecdotes or stories as a different way to present information.

20 mentioned their 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.

20 lecturers spoke about intuition and/or flexibility in their teaching. 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 achieved this by asking the students what they expected from the course, or even setting goals together for the course.

18 felt that it was essential to have a good rapport with, and empathy for, their students. Some spoke about the importance of knowing their students, trust or a good teacher-student relationship.

18 lecturers encouraged interaction or guided discussion in classes to motivate student interest and involvement.

17 believed that students responded well, and were more likely to be motivated, when courses were well organised and structured, and there was clarity in objectives, expectations and assessment.

14 practised positive encouragement to motivate students, including 6 who encouraged students by affirming the knowledge they brought with them to their course and/or demonstrating what they had achieved so far.

13 lecturers specifically focussed on ways of engaging their students.

Some other ways in which lecturers motivated students or made their courses interesting:

- Class tests/class notes allowed in end of year exam – to motivate attendance
- Challenging students/setting high expectations
- Problem based learning
- Competition for group work with prizes for winning groups
- Research competition throughout course (optional) where questions are given each week – small prizes awarded and a certificate & reference for participation
- Telling students why others have failed in the past
- Having a successful student from the previous year talk to the students about what to expect in the course
- ‘Reflective Moments’ – pausing to ask what has been learned so far, either in the session or the course, and inviting students to share their thoughts with the class
- Physically moving among students
- Provision of morning/afternoon tea (usually tea or coffee and biscuits but sometimes students would bring something special in); showing care and consideration – especially on cold mornings!
- Having an “Ad break” during class. In order to break up the theory, the lecturer tells a light, interesting story from the background of the subject; e.g. the story of a Nobel Prize winner and their contribution.
Understanding and Assisting Students Experiencing Difficulties with Coursework

Of the 41 subject areas for which a Good Teaching Factor could be extracted, Item 19 ‘The staff make a real effort to understand difficulties I might be having with my work’ correlated most highly with good teaching in only one subject area in Semester 1 2007. However, it ranked second in 8 areas and third in 27 areas, generally with a very strong positive correlation, indicating that it was a fairly important item to the majority of students. Even though the question asked was specifically about coursework, many lecturers noted the importance of empathy and understanding when their students were experiencing problems or hardship in their personal lives as well. In informal discussion, several lecturers shared stories about students who had experienced various difficulties, and the ways in which they had provided support to help these students overcome asperity and achieve. This help was often specially tailored for the individual circumstances and required extra time and effort, but the pride felt in their student’s success, as well as the student’s gratitude, was both rewarding and motivating for the lecturers. As all lecturers interviewed were asked, ‘What steps do you take to assist students experiencing difficulties with coursework?’ the total number of respondents for this section was 44.

Assisting Students Experiencing Difficulties with Coursework

![Bar chart showing methods used to assist students](image)

*Figure 3: Methods used to assist students experiencing difficulties with coursework (10 most frequently occurring answers)*

What are lecturers doing to assist students experiencing difficulties with coursework?

There are various ways in which lecturers aim to assist students. As seen in Figure 3, the four most frequent answers are all different ways of demonstrating to students both the lecturer’s concern for their learning, and willingness to guide them in that learning.
20 lecturers spoke about inviting and encouraging students to ask questions, both within and outside of class or via email, and always encouraging students to come and see them if they were having any problems. It was often mentioned that this encouragement must be genuine and regular for students to really internalise it and feel comfortable; it is not enough to say it once. 2 also emphasised to students that there are no dumb questions – only the ones left unasked!

17 lecturers stressed the importance of availability/accessibility to students.

12 mentioned one-on-one consultation with students, either by appointment as needed, or as a regular way of providing support, feedback and assistance.

11 believed it was important to show empathy and care for their students, and to be approachable. Students are more likely to seek help from someone they feel is genuinely interested in their welfare.

11 lecturers provided sessions or activities specifically designed to give help and feedback to students, or to assist them in the development of necessary skills; for example, essay writing or using the library. These sessions were sometimes in addition to normal scheduled classes.

9 lecturers allowed draft submissions, or resubmissions, with feedback, given in order to provide extra help for those students who need it.

8 talked about having an awareness of different needs or background and/or allowing flexibility in presentation/assessment to allow for this.

7 lecturers encouraged peer help through group work, monitored DLS discussion, or the class environment.

6 referred students to others (especially SLC) for more specialised help where needed.

5 mentioned having set consultation/open door times

3 noted that they attempted to identify problems and address them in class and/or approached students individually to offer help.

3 provided helpful tips and resources on handouts or DLS and 2 gave marking guides.

3 lecturers utilised tutors to provide extra support to students.

Some other things lecturers were doing to assist students experiencing difficulties:

- Student learning plans
- Records of progress – emailed to students with advice in week 8
- Quasi interactive videos on DLS for each topic
- Online quizzes with answers and guidance for further help
- Emphasis on time management
- Encouragement to keep a log book of questions – EXACTLY what they need to know
- One lecturer emphasised that if a class was missed, the student must see the lecturer or a tutor to catch up so they don’t fall behind or miss anything important
**Explaining Things**

Lecturers were not asked any questions directly linked to CES Item 4 ‘The teaching staff are extremely good at explaining things’. In 30 of the 41 subject areas it either did not load on the Good Teaching Factor at all, or was complex (meaning that it loaded on more than one factor), and showed a weak correlation with the Good Teaching Factor. Conversely, it was one of the three items most highly correlated with the Good Teaching Factor in only one subject area of 41. This would seem to indicate that, for the vast majority of students, Item 4 was only poorly related to their perception of good teaching, or else not at all related to their perception of good teaching. Furthermore, there was a difficulty in how to effectively frame a question to which the answers would vary so much depending upon the subject matter and the personality of the lecturer.

**Making Changes to Courses in Semester One 2007**

The initial set of questions (Increase questions) was partly based upon the assumption that some change had probably been made in courses which had achieved a high increase in their GTS, and that students had responded positively to this change. Lecturers were asked about anything they may have done differently in 2007, compared to 2006, in four broad areas: structure, organisation and presentation of material, assessment and feedback. Of 29 lecturers, 27 had made at least one change to their course and many had made several changes. The 15 lecturers asked High questions were simply asked ‘If any, what changes have you made to the course over the past few years?’ and 12 answered that they had made some change. For purposes of comparison, their answers have been allocated to one or more of the abovementioned categories, as appropriate. It is interesting to note that of the 5 lecturers who said they did not make any changes to their course, two were new to teaching the course and stated that they couldn't be sure how their teaching in 2007 may have been different from 2006, and two noted that, while they had made no major or specific changes, they constantly reassessed their teaching, and had planned changes for 2008.
What changes have lecturers made to the structure of their courses? (30 respondents)

16 lecturers said that they had updated their structure or content to make it more practical or applicable.

15 had clarified the structure of their course, including the objectives, topics, focus or expectations. This included 3 who provided a weekly plan for students.

11 had changed the assessment structure, including 2 who removed the exam.

8 lecturers said they were using a more “discussive” or interactive format, including 4 who also said they were providing more choice/ownership for students.

Some other ways in which lecturers had changed the structure of their courses included:

- Running everything according to time – even guest speakers
- All groups to submit work for oral presentation in the same week
- Highlight every lecture e.g. guest lecturer, debate, competition
- Practitioner exhibition for students to attend prior to course (optional)
- Provision of extra labs/tutorials
Changes to Organisation and Presentation of Material

Figure 4.2 Changes made to the organisation and presentation of material within a course (3 most frequently occurring answers)

What are the different ways in which lecturers have changed the organisation and presentation of material in their courses? (28 respondents)

15 lecturers said they had increased their use of the DLS and discussion board in their presentation of material including lectures, power points, plans and timetables.

6 said they provided students with objectives, plans, lectures, or assessment criteria in advance to assist their preparation and planning.

6 lecturers were using contemporary material, especially pictures and audio visual, to more effectively present information to students.

While these were the major changes to organisation and presentation of material, some of the other things lecturers felt had been helpful were:

- Talking around the main points on power point and encouraging questions and discussion
- Giving students reasons for why doing things
- Providing lab manual to contain work
- Handouts in form of summary points
- Update emails every 3-4 weeks – review and future direction with positive reinforcement
How have lecturers changed assessment in their courses? (29 respondents)

11 lecturers had increased the number of assessments in order to spread them more across the semester and/or to enable them to provide more feedback to students.

10 lecturers, on the other hand, had reduced the number of assessments, including two who had removed the exam from their course. A further 2 had reduced the weighting of the exam.

10 provided students with marking criteria for assessments and/or had increased the clarity of expectations.

5 offered more ownership to students by allowing them to choose the topics and/or mode of presentation for part or all of their assessment.

4 lecturers said that they had made the assessment for their course more practical.

Some other changes made to assessment which lecturers felt were positive:

- Peer assessment
- Part of assessment online
- Class quizzes
- Encouraging and rewarding skills development and effort as well as content
What changes have lecturers made in the nature and quantity of the feedback they provide to students in their courses? (24 respondents)

17 lecturers had either introduced written feedback or increased the amount and quality of what they provided. This was often achieved by giving students the opportunity to submit drafts, or by increasing the spread of assessments, which allowed more opportunity for lecturers to comment on student work and progress.

13 lecturers spoke about providing more feedback in class, either through questions and class discussion, or by working through examples/solutions with students.

6 spoke about using email and/or the DLS to communicate feedback to students.

6 emphasised the positive, particularly by encouraging skill development and recognising and rewarding effort, not just content.

4 lecturers introduced marking guides/criteria to assist their provision of feedback.

3 noted that they approached students individually to discuss their progress.

3 utilised discussions with small groups during group work as an opportunity to provide verbal feedback.

2 lecturers spoke about using class conversations to ascertain how well students were developing their understanding of concepts covered in the course.
Other differences in the provision of feedback which lecturers felt were helpful:

- Labelling feedback
- Homework sheets – some worked through together
- Student mentors/tutors
- Spreadsheet with typed responses (students seemed to study it more)
- TERISSA – a method of evaluating and reflecting on problems either individually or as a class (see www.terissa.com for information)
- Email with both specific and general feedback and including positive reinforcement (every 3-4 weeks) – “Happy messages”
- Structured/specific weekly topic feedback

Motivation for Making Changes

While the above were all specific changes made by lecturers in 2007, several lecturers also made reference at some point during the interview to the fact that they felt it was important that they maintain an openness to change in their teaching. While they sometimes described this openness in different ways, it can be divided into two broad categories – reassessing and tailoring. Of the 44 lecturers interviewed, 14 mentioned regularly analysing the learning and teaching in their classes. They used terms like review, self analysis, critique and refinement. Many of them also stressed the constant nature of this process, as well as the importance of being willing to “try new things”. Furthermore, 18 lecturers talked about flexibility and responsiveness in their teaching in order to more effectively address the differing needs of students, including student areas of interest, learning styles, cultural background and study or work background. Again, the fact that this must be an ongoing process to be effective was often emphasised. From these answers it could be inferred that, where students are responding positively to a course, at least one of the reasons could be that the lecturer is responding to them.

After describing changes in their courses for 2007, lecturers answering Increase questions were asked ‘If any, what changes have you made to the course for 2008?’ Out of 29 respondents, 26 had planned further changes, and one was not teaching the course in 2008. Briefly, the majority of changes were in the following areas: assessment or provision of feedback (17), increased clarity, especially of course objectives (9) and updating of content and/or presentation (8). These responses seem to support another of the assumptions made when considering interview questions - that effective lecturers would be constantly reassessing the quality of the learning and teaching in their courses. Working from this supposition, the last of the High Questions asked was ‘Is there anything about your course which you would like to change or improve assuming you had the time and resources to do so?’ All of the 15 lecturers who were asked this question answered without hesitation. The fact that they did not have to take time to think about their answers would seem to indicate that they had already spent some time analysing ways in which they could further enhance learning in their courses. (As far as they could, with the time and resources available to them, some had attempted to implement some of these desired improvements, but most remained “wish list” items.)

As we surmised that changes made to courses achieving a high GTS were, at least in part, responsible for the score, all lecturers who said they had made changes in 2007 and/or 2008 were asked ‘What was your motivation for these changes?’ Most had more than one motivation for doing things differently in their courses. While some of these were very course specific, there were several responses in common as well as some answers which were also relevant to previous questions. There were 41 respondents in total.
Lecturer Motivation for Changes

Figure 5 Motivation for lecturers making changes to their course (8 most frequently occurring answers)

Why did lecturers make changes to their courses in Semester 1 2007 and Semester One 2008?

19 lecturers made changes to their courses based on student feedback including one or more of the following: CES feedback, class surveys and conversations with students.

16 made alterations in their teaching which were designed to improve the student learning environment or experience, including 4 who wanted to better address the different learning needs/styles of their students.

10 spoke about increasing clarity or improving the focus of their course.

9 lecturers made changes based on their philosophy of teaching or past experience, including 2 who were influenced by their own recent experiences as students.

8 lecturers aimed to maintain or increase the relevance and applicability of the content or assessment in their course.

6 said they had wanted to challenge students more and encourage reflective/self directed learning, including 2 who also wanted students to develop teamwork skills.

4 were motivated to make changes as a result of their own review of the course.

3 cited the Graduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning as a motivator for them to implement changes in their course.
Presentation and Methods

The 15 lecturers answering High questions were asked whether or not they utilised certain methods of teaching and presentation in their courses. Only a yes or no answer was required. It was thought that a trend may emerge in the methods implemented by these lecturers, but it quickly became apparent this wasn’t necessarily so. Lecturers often commented that a particular method was just not one that could be effectively utilised in their discipline area; for example, web testing was not something which would be helpful in an art course. However, all lecturers felt that clear learning objectives were important for students, and all used some form of problem solving to assist learning. Use of other methods varied depending upon both the subject area and lecturer preference. Lecturers also used other methods of presentation not on the list, for example, audio visual materials. The aim was always to use methods of teaching and presentation which best enhanced student learning. The table below indicates the percentage of lecturers who used each method, by portfolio.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>BUS Yes% (n = 2)</th>
<th>DSC Yes% (n = 9)</th>
<th>SET Yes% (n = 4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DLS</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power point</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online notes</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overheads/document camera</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web testing</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer assessment</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tutors</td>
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<td>25%</td>
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<td>Problem solving</td>
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<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-defined objectives</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Percentage of lecturers using different methods of presentation in their course

Answering Student Enquiries

Lecturers answering High questions were also asked ‘Do you set yourself a turnaround time for answering students’ email or phone enquiries?’ Of the 14 who answered ‘yes’ to this question, 6 said they replied within 24 hours and 5 between 24 and 48 hours. However, seven of them averred that they answered more quickly wherever possible. The remaining 3 stated only that their response was either ‘ASAP’ or ‘immediate’. Three of the lecturers also noted that they did not reply to emails on weekends (although they generally would still read them).

Further Comments

After the formal questions all lecturers were asked if there was anything further they would like to add which they thought was relevant to their interview about good teaching. There were 38 respondents, and while many of them reiterated answers to earlier questions, most raised disparate issues. They were also asked for any observations about the CES, to which 25 lecturers gave a response.
Further Comments

Figure 6.1 Lecturer responses to an invitation for further comments (7 most frequently occurring answers)

9 lecturers expressed their concern with issues affecting student learning, principally poor attendance and passivity. Some were also worried that there was not enough time for effective learning, and that there is not enough critical thinking and problem solving in degree courses.

7 noted the nature of the course or cohort as an aspect which they felt may have contributed to their GTS score. For example, that it was a post graduate course, that tutors were used, or that the 2007 cohort had been a particularly active one.

6 felt that it would be beneficial if there was more sharing of ideas on teaching. One of these also saw more collaboration between lecturers from different universities as a valuable way of learning and sharing ideas.
5 lecturers said that they had found the Grad Cert Teaching & Learning or Training & Assessment valuable, particularly for sharing ideas and gaining strategies.
4 believed there should me more recognition of the value of good teaching, especially by making advancement possible for lecturers based on their excellence as teachers.
4 lecturers reiterated their belief in the importance of empathy and rapport with students and 3 stressed that it was very important to critically self analyse their teaching.

Some other aspects of their teaching lecturers felt were important:

- The atmosphere of the class. This lecturer made the comparison of wanting to return to a nice restaurant because of the ambience.
- Students MUST see purpose, applicability and passion
- The importance for students of a sense of belonging (e.g. through SSCC)
- Setting parameters of what it is possible for a lecturer to do
- Use of blackboard is a good form of engagement outside the class – continuing the conversation
- The importance of personality, and how you use it to engage students.
When asked for comments regarding the CES, there were 25 respondents.

12 spoke of the need for a better understanding of the CES by staff and/or students. This included lecturers who said they had explained it further to their own students, as well as staff who said they would like to be able to make better use of their results.

8 believed that there was a lack of clarity in the wording and/or scale, including those who were concerned at the lack of neutral option. (There may have been some confusion here, as 3 only counts as a negative for the purposes of calculating a GTS score from the six GTS items.)

4 mentioned feeling pressured or intimidated by the CES, or noted that teachers could feel demoralised by poor GTS results.

3 said they had found either the aggregated results or the comments very useful.

Some other issues regarding the CES:

- Problems with facilities or technology could affect GTS indirectly by making the lecturer seem disorganised
- In some subjects the CES is administered in tutorials, where lecturers believe it would be more useful to tap into lectures
- Concern that the CES could drive teaching negatively; teaching for good feedback as opposed to good teaching
It is worthwhile repeating that these answers were those given to these specific questions in the more formal question and answer part of the interview. In more informal, relaxed conversation, many of the lecturers discussed some of these issues more broadly.

The Personal Nature of Teaching

Another issue which was often discussed was the importance for teachers of being 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 teaching to do it this way”. The fact that these people are open to other ideas is evidenced by the number who talked about their desire to see more sharing of ideas, or about the approaches they used which were inspired by someone else. They just need to feel free to teach in the way that works best for them.

Coupled with this was the need to assist students to learn in the most effective way for each particular discipline. As the quantitative analysis for the CES Project showed, students’ perceptions of good teaching differed across subject areas. As noted earlier, our belief that we might find some pattern in the methods of presentation used was unproven; each lecturer used those methods which they felt best presented their material and supported their own teaching practices. Lecturers often acknowledged that a method used successfully in one of their classes didn’t always effectively translate to others, for various reasons including subject, class size and learning objectives. Many lecturers were also acutely aware of the individual needs of students, and were prepared to adjust methods and expectations to assist each one to achieve their personal best.

Final Thought

We hope that, if you were inspired by any of the ideas shared in this report, 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 (2005)

Michelle Bedford, August 2008
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