

## International Conference Presentation

### NET2009 Annual International Conference

Fitzwilliam College University of Cambridge. 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> September 2010

(NET is an international peer reviewed conference)

**Title** What students can tell about lecturers when they are teaching: manifestations of confident and under confident lecturers.

**Author/Presenter** Paul Street

#### Abstract

Delivering a lecture requires confidence, a sound knowledge and well developed teaching skills (Cooper and Simonds 2007, Quinn and Hughes 2007). However, practitioners who are new to lecturing large groups in Higher Education, may initially lack the confidence to do so, which can manifest itself in their verbal and non-verbal cues and the fluency of their teaching skills. This, results in the perception that students can identify the confident and non-confident teacher during a lecture (Street 2007), so potentially contributing to a lecturers level of anxiety prior to and during a lecture. Therefore, in the current educational climate of consumerisation, with the increased evaluation of teaching by students, having the ability to deliver high quality, informed, and interesting lectures assumes greater significance for both lecturers and universities (Carr 2007, Higher Education Funding Council 2008, Glass et al 2006).

This paper will present both the quantitative and qualitative data from a two-phased mixed method study with 75 nurse lecturers and 62 nursing students in one University in the United Kingdom. The study investigated the notion that lecturing has similarities to acting (Street 2007). The findings presented here are concerned with how students perceived a lecturers' level of confidence and how lecturers believed they demonstrated confidence. In phase one a specifically designed

questionnaire was distributed to both lecturers and students and a response rate of 91% (n=125) was achieved, while in phase two 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with lecturers.

Results suggested that students in a lecture could identify if the lecturer confident or not by the way they performed a lecture. Students identified 57 manifestations of non-confidence and lecturers identified 85, while 57 manifestations of confidence were identified by students and 88 by lecturers. Overall, these fell into 12 main converse categories, ranging from body language to the use of space within the room. Both students and lecturers ranked body language, vocal qualities, delivery skills, involving the students and the ability to share knowledge as the most evident manifestations of confidence. Elements like good eye contact, smiling, speaking clearly and being fluent in the use of media recourses where all seen as manifestation confidence, conversely if these were poorly executed then a presentation of under confidence was evident. Further, if the lecturer appeared enthusiastic it was clearly underpinned by the manifestation of a highly confidence lecturer who was secure in their knowledge base and teaching abilities:-

‘Some lecturers do appear enthusiastic but others don’t. I think the ones that do know what they are talking about, you can see it in their voice and in their lively body language. I think they are also good at involving the students even. I think the good ones are able to turn boring subjects into lively and interesting ones’. (Student 50)

Significantly more lecturers than students felt the lecturer should appear confident when lecturing. The lecturers stated it was particularly important to do so when they did not feel confident, because they were concerned with appearing capable. It seems that these students and lecturers perceived that expressive and apparently confident lecturers can make a positive impact on student groups in terms of involvement in lectures, the data also suggested the reverse, for the under confident lecturer.

Findings from phase two indicated that these lecturers assumed a persona when lecturing, particularly, but not exclusively, when they were nervous. These lecturers went through a process of assuming and maintaining this persona before and during

a lecture as a way of promoting their internal perceptions of confidence but also their outward manifestation of confidence. Although, assuming a convincing persona may have a degree of deception within it, but providing the knowledge communicated is accurate, the deception may aid rather than hinder learning, because it has enhanced the delivery of a lecture. The deception of acting a little more confidently than one feels, therefore, might be justified when the lecturer knows the knowledge they are communicating is correct, unlike that in the Dr Fox Effect where the person delivering a lecture was an actor and did not know the subject in any detail or depth for the deception to be justified (Naftulin et al 1973).

In conclusion, these students and lecturers perceive that confident and enthusiastic lecturers communicate their passion for the subject in an interesting and meaningful manner through the use of their voice, body, space and interactions, in such a way that shows confidence in their knowledge and well as their teaching abilities. If lecturers, therefore, can take a step back to consider how they deliver lectures in apparently confident ways this may increase their ability to engage their students and not only help them being perceived as a good lecturer, but also contribute to the genuine act of education.

## References

Car, G. (2007) Changes in nurse education: being a nurse teacher. *Nurse Education Today* 27 (8), 893-899.

Glass, J.C., McCallion, G., McKillop, S.R. and Stringer, K. (2006) Implications of variant efficiency measures for policy evaluations in UK higher education. *Socio-Economic Sciences* 40 (2), 119-141.

Higher Education Funding Council (2008) *The National student survey*. Available online at: <http://www.thestudentsurvey.com> (accessed 11 January 2008)

Naftulin, D. H., John, M. D., Ware, J. E. and Donnelly, F. A. (1973). The Doctor Fox lecture: a paradigm of educational seduction. *Journal of Medical Education*, 98: 630-635.

Street, P. (2007) What a performance: recognising performance arts skills in the delivery of lectures in higher education. *Learning Teacher Journal* 1 (1) Sept p 3-22

Quinn, F. and Hughes, S. (2007) *The principles and practice of nursing education*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Stanley Thornes, London.