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Title **Persona adoption: a model to help new lecturers develop confidence when teaching.**

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Abstract

Delivering lectures to large groups of students can provoke high levels of anxiety, particularly for new lecturers (Exley and Dennick, 2009). Further, to provide an informative and engaging lecture requires a teacher who is confident, has a sound knowledge and well developed teaching skills (Bentley-Davies 2010). Thus, new lecturers often need experience and supervision to develop the tacit knowledge and insight into their own style and persona when teaching in order to feel confident when delivering a lecture (Quinn and Hughes 2007). Considering this model, therefore, may potentially contribute to the development of lecturers performance in the classroom.

This paper will present the results of the second phase of a two-stage mixed method study that investigated the similarities between lecturing and acting. Twelve in-depth interviews were undertaken with lecturers within one School of Nursing in The United Kingdom. Findings, established a model of 'persona adoption' that represents a series of stages that lecturers may go through to both develop and take on a persona when lecturing. This persona is often different from the way they lecturers present themselves in other parts of their working life.

The first stage of this model of persona adoption is when the lecturer is subjected to a range of '*influencing factors*' that provide not only the basic information about a lecture, but also the perceptual stimuli about giving a lecture on a specific subject, to a particular number of students, at a certain academic level. These influencing factors then inter-play with the '*facets of the individual*', which represent the lecturer's self-concept, subject knowledge base and philosophy of teaching. This may result in a cognitive dissonance between these '*facets*' and the '*influencing factors*', so affecting the lecturers' perceptions, thoughts and feelings about having to give that particular lecture. This results in the lecturer undertaking specific '*back stage preparation*' during which they decide on the content and modes of delivery to prepare in light of that discourse. It may result in delivering the information via single or multiple methods, which during the lecture will require various levels of interaction and participation from the students.

Just prior to the lecture, the lecturer builds or '*puts on their persona*' and gets into role, making their initial impact with the group. They use the '*elements of acting*' as proposed by

Tauber and Mester's (1994) eg animated voice and body, space, props humour and suspense and surprise to portray and maintain their persona. This leads the to lecturer demonstrating either positive or negative '*persona characteristics*' in terms of appearing confident, knowledgeable, fluent in the technical skills of delivering the lecture, being interesting and engendering interaction with the students, or not. These characteristics, may or may not, potentially heighten student interest, attention and attitudes to learning as suggested by Tauber and Mester (1994). This depends on whether the lecturer has successfully used the persona and if the lecturer has been able to engage students in the lecture, in competition with other factors that may be taking the students' attention.

Although the model suggests a linear process, to a great extent, the elements might be more interdependent and interrelated. This might suggest that depending on the lecturer's perception of their effectiveness during the lecture, that they may decide to continue or adapt their persona and methods to appear more confident. Furthermore, depending on how successful the lecturer perceived the session to be, both their reflections 'in' and 'on' practice could influence how they teach in the future (Zwozdiak 2011). Therefore, these reflections become part of the facets of the individual, via the '*reflective feedback loop*', in the model, which then in turn influences progression through the model in subsequent lectures.

This study concluded that these lecturers went through a process whereby they compare the demands of the lecture with their own knowledge base and skill, this resulted in them undertaking specific preparation in terms of content and delivery style, then they adopted their persona immediately prior to entering the lecture, maintain it throughout the lecture via the use of the elements of acting to achieve an informative interactive lecture. The results of which then feedback into their self-concept as a lecturer and consequently may affect the persona they project in future lectures. If lecturers, therefore, can take a step back to consider how they deliver lectures and the way they can deliberately, yet apparently naturally, use their voices, bodies, space and humour in meaningfully, to engage their students in lecture, it will not just result in them being perceived as a good lecturer, but also be a genuine act of education.

References

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