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Developing as a lecturer-the view from an ITT participant

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Abstract

Associate Professor Ian Lowe, well-known science commentator from Griffith University, tells the story of how he once dreamed about giving a boring lecture at which his students were all falling asleep. He then woke up and found he was in fact giving the lecture.

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Associate Professor Ian Lowe, well-known science commentator from Griffith University, tells the story of how he once dreamed about giving a boring lecture at which his students were all falling asleep. He then woke up and found he was in fact giving the lecture.

The problem of communicating knowledge of substance and at the same time holding the interest and attention of students is a universal problem faced by university lecturers. Most lecturers, and this was true in my case, tend to concentrate on the content of their lectures rather than on their method of presentation.

The Introduction to Tertiary Teaching (ITT) course run by Max Gillett from the Faculty of Education and Liz Ellis from the Centre for Staff Development (which I took in Session 1, 1993) helps academic staff to concentrate more on the presentation side of teaching. It does this by offering theoretical insights, practical advice and a range of innovative techniques. Most importantly for me, it gave me an opportunity to try new and sometimes risky teaching methods and to get immediate and individual feedback.

Liz and Max emphasised the need for interactive learning in lectures as well as tutorials and they demonstrated this in the ITT classes. Although these classes went for three hours on Wednesday afternoons the time passed quickly and they were never boring. Apart from the classes, Liz and Max spent several weeks attending our classes and giving us personal tuition.

Each of us was able to choose which areas of our teaching we wanted to concentrate on. I chose to focus on my lecturing since, as part of my job in Science and Technology Studies, I have to give two hour lectures to large numbers of conscript students from other faculties. I wanted to be able to keep the students motivated and interested and attentive throughout the two hours and at the same time I wanted them to learn about and understand difficult concepts and ideas. With Liz in attendance, I was able to try out a variety of interactive lecturing techniques and get advice from her on what I was doing. Liz was always encouraging and never judgemental. I found this experience invaluable.

Our ITT class was fortunate enough to be a very small diverse group of seven people teaching very different material in different situations. This meant that classes were fun and we were able to gain insights from each other as well as from Liz and Max. Also there was scope during the course to bring up topics and have them included in the course. One such topic was dealing with disruptive students. We role-played various situations that we had experienced and gave each other suggestions for handling them in future. Liz also supplied some written material on the topic.

And yes, there were written assignments too I'm afraid! But actually, they were not so onerous because they revolved around the teaching we were already doing and materials we were preparing anyway. A worthwhile experience, particularly for relatively inexperienced lecturers or others who feel they have become a bit stale.