The impact of performance skills on students' attitudes towards the learning experience in higher education

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One way to assist in transforming a lecture experience into an occasion that can attract and engage students is via the use of performance techniques. Investigating the impact of certain types of performance skills on students' attitudes towards the learning experience can help better understand the relevance of such techniques in face to face and online learning experiences. This paper outlines a project which: i) surveyed students about their attitudes towards face to face and online recorded lectures, ii) surveyed students about their attitudes towards performance techniques, in particular, spatial awareness, vocalisation, eye contact and passion, iii) interviewed lecturers about the potential benefits of performance techniques to student learning in the lecture theatre, and iv) investigated which factors most affected a teacher's decision to incorporate performance techniques in the lecture theatre. The results suggest that students and lecturers value face to face delivery of content, recognising the benefit of performance techniques in the lecture theatre. Recommendations are made regarding ways to encourage a wider use and evaluation of performance techniques in teaching and learning at the university level.

Introduction

Teachers have much in common with actors, especially when they view the lecture experience as a type of performance assisting student engagement (Friedman, 1995; Harrison-Pepper, 1991; Heathcote, 1980; Keiper, 1991; Lessinger & Gillis, 1976; Sarason, 1999). Despite the apparent commonality in the roles of actors and lecturers, there have been limited and intermittent discussions over several decades associated with the relationship between a teacher's use of performance techniques[1] and students' learning gains. Teachers who illustrate enthusiasm towards their subject, and towards improving engagement and learning, are usually and intentionally implementing performance techniques such as facial expression and gestures (Tauber & Mester, 2007; Murphy & Walls, 1994). Additionally, students are generally more motivated by teachers who use performance based teaching practices than those who do not (Bolton, 1979; Charles, 1979; Felman, 2001; O'Toole & Lepp, 2000; Tauber & Mester, 2007; Whatman, 2000). Performance skills such as vocalisation, eye contact, being spatially aware and a teacher's obvious display of passion not only improves student engagement but also assists in the retention of larger amounts of information (Coats & Smidchens, 1966; Patrick, Hisley & Kempler, 2000).

The available literature relates predominantly to K-12 teaching. There is a noticeable lack of research focusing on the use of performance techniques in higher education teaching. It remains one of the least investigated, developed or discussed aspects of teaching practices in higher education with little appearing in the literature in the last 15 years. With the rapid changes which technology is bringing to education (and higher education in particular) it is timely to re-energise discussions around the use of

performance techniques in the lecture theatre. This paper aims to explore the impact of specific performance techniques on students' and lecturers' attitudes towards the learning experience in higher education, from an objective theatre practitioner's perspective within a representative case study. Exploring students' and lecturers' attitudes towards performance techniques in the lecture theatre can provide useful data and insights concerning existing face to face and online pre-recorded lectures as well as future virtual lecture designs.

Literature review

Tauber and Mester's (2007) resource text is one of a few that comprehensively identifies and investigates the teacher's use of performance techniques in the classroom. Other aligned literature which investigates and focuses on certain visible signs of enthusiasm techniques such as eye contact, facial expression, vocalisation, gesture and movement, has been explored in relation to the frequency of such techniques used by "outstanding" university professors (Murphy & Walls, 1994), and comparing these findings to "novice" teaching practices (WikEd, 2006). Within these particular studies there has been minimal reference to students' perception of such techniques. For example, Murphy and Walls' (1994) study viewed four "outstanding" university professors who were videotaped on two separate occasions during a lecture session. Their body language was analysed for the number of times that they exhibited the following behaviours which are listed in order of greatest occurrence: 1) vocalisation, 2) eye contact, 3) gesture, 4) movement, and 5) facial expression, to determine common enthusiasm characteristics for student-teachers to use. An unpublished 2006 research project took Murphy and Walls' (1994) study and investigated the similarities and difference between the four "outstanding" professors and compared the common enthusiastic techniques to the teaching practices of "novice" teachers (WikEd, 2006). The results showed that the "outstanding" professors scored approximately 15% higher in each of the categories than the novice teachers, further emphasising that performance techniques are more often implemented by teachers with pedagogical experience.

Additionally, even though there have been a number of studies (Bauer, 2002; Bettencourt, Gillett, Gall & Hull, 1983; Coats & Smidchens, 1966; Collins, 1978; Murphy & Walls, 1994; Pineau, 1994; Richmond, Gorham & McCroskey, 1987; Rosenshine & Furst, 1973; Smith, 1979) investigating the effective use of passion to assist student engagement, and a substantial amount of research based within theatre studies (Chekhov, 1991; Chorpenning, 1931; Levy, 1987; Stanislavski, 1936; Ward, 1939; Zinder, 2002) analysing the connection between the effective use of voice and an actor's obvious display of passion, there have been fewer studies (Anderson, 1971; Kim, 2004; Knapp, 1971; Richmond, Gorham & McCroskey, 1987) completed in an effort to determine the impact of a teacher's use of performance techniques such as vocalisation on student learning. The majority of research literature, besides Tauber & Mester (2007) and Felman (2001), refers to the practice and value of performance techniques in either the secondary school context or the teaching of theatre and drama students for secondary education qualifications, or practicum outcomes regarding drama in education for teacher-artists (O'Toole & Lepp, 2000; Timpson, Burgoyne,

Jones & Jones, 1997; Travers, 1979). These studies focus on teachers' practicum abilities and their views on the importance of performance techniques in education rather than students' perceptions. How to best implement voice, eye contact, spatial awareness and to display passion in a higher education context and within current face to face and online delivery modes and future virtual teaching environments remains largely uninvestigated.

More recently, a limited number of studies have appeared discussing the various reasons why students may choose online delivery modes over face to face lectures and the reasons behind the decrease in student numbers in face to face learning environments (Franklin & Peat, 2001; Johnson, Aragan, Shaik & Palma-Rivas 2000; Massingham & Herrington, 2006). These studies provide minimal reference to the use or lack of performance techniques by teachers as a possible cause of student absenteeism at face to face lectures. The studies rather refer to influences such as university staff time constrictions, the push for research outcomes, financial 'cut backs' and student life style choices as causes for changes in the teaching environment. Technological advances have also facilitated an increase in the number of students accessing content online (Franklin & Peat, 2001; Johnson et al. 2000; Mills, Yanes & Casebeer, 2009). While there is an increasing interest in online teaching, with research projects being conducted into what constitutes 'best practice' in this environment, there remains lingering concerns regarding the quality of lecturers' performance in the lecture theatre which have not been resolved (Parsons-Pollard, Diehl Lacks & Hylton Grant, 2008). Researchers such as Massingham and Herrington (2006) and Ponzurick, France and Logar (2000) report students' preference for face to face instruction, being more satisfied than students who receive courses via distant education or online pre-recorded lectures.

Some studies (Dell, Low & Wilder, 2010; Franklin & Peat, 2001; Johnson, et al, 2000) have indicated that while students (and lecturers) expect and prefer face to face lectures as part of the university culture and experience, there is little difference between student achievement when studying via distant education or face to face learning experiences. Other studies (Sheely, 2006; Tucker; 2001) have presented an alternative view regarding student perspectives on the choices they make regarding content delivery. This variation in findings may well signal a possible link between the impact of performance skills on students' attitudes towards the learning experience in higher education and the choices students make between online and face to face learning experiences. This paper investigates student and lecturers' views on the use of performance techniques in the lecture theatre and their perceived affect on student learning.

Aims

The primary aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of students' and lecturers' attitudes towards the relevance of certain performance techniques in the lecture theatre. The secondary aim was to investigate a possible relationship between students' preferred modes of delivery of lecture material (face to face or pre-recorded online), and the lack or use of performance techniques by the lecturer. Beyond

application in the lecture theatre, it was hoped that the findings of this study might help to inform discussions and the planning of online and virtual course implementation.

Methods

The study was conducted at The University of Western Australia. Data were collected over a two year period from first year undergraduate students (n=66) in an introductory creative writing unit via a questionnaire administered during a tutorial. The participants were from various disciplines including Law, Business, Science and Arts with the majority being from the Humanities. In addition, four individual, face to face interviews were conducted with lecturers from the School of English and Cultural Studies (n=3), and the School of Biochemistry (n=1). The research questions guiding this study were as follows.

1. How does the teacher's incorporation of performance techniques in his or her mode of delivery impact students' attitudes towards the learning experience?
2. Which of the performance techniques (spatial awareness, voice, eye contact and the display of passion) do students and lecturers believe are useful to the learning experience in the lecture theatre and why?
3. What factors affect a teacher's decision to incorporate performance techniques such as spatial awareness, voice, eye contact and displaying passion into his or her lectures?
4. What attitudes do students and teachers hold regarding the impact of performance techniques such as spatial awareness, voice, eye contact and the display of passion on the learning experience?
5. How might the findings of this study inform current and future academic practice concerning delivery of lecture material (face to face and online)?

Prior to conducting the questionnaire and interviews, the researcher explained and emphasised the meaning behind each performance technique to ensure a common understanding and to increase the degree of reliability in the participants' responses. The descriptors used were those employed by Murphy and Walls (1994):

> spatial awareness … walking at least two steps in the same direction from one
> location to another … vocalization … a noise coming from the vocal chords
> of the teacher in an interesting way such as tone and inflections and eye
> contact … an occurrence of looking into the eyes of any student in the class
> [or scanning the audience] (p. 2)

Passion may be regarded as the sum effect of the use of performance techniques such as spatial awareness, vocalisation and eye contact. For the purposes of this study it was described as, "the magic of learning, the challenge to make a difference, the wonder of knowledge … Every teacher who can recapture that passion within is prepared to handle the tools and techniques of the classroom [or lecture theatre]" (Murphy and Walls, 1994, p.140-141).

In responding to the questions, both students and lecturers were asked to consider a typical lecture theatre as the learning space context.

The surveys

The researcher used a theatre practitioner's perspective as well as a phenomenographical approach in the designing of the questionnaire which consisted of 12 questions (see Appendix A), allowing students to add qualitative data to exemplify the survey responses. The first two questions focused on the students' major and preferred mode of delivery of lecture material (face to face *versus* online). Questions 3-10 were presented as a Likert rating scale (O'Toole & Beckett, 2010) and focused on the value students place on a teacher's use of spatial awareness, vocalisation, eye contact and a teacher's obvious display of passion in the lecture theatre, and in relation to a) helping students to pay attention, b) helping students to be more enthusiastic about the subject being taught and to want to learn more. Questions 11 and 12, also Likert scale questions, focused on the importance of the overall use of performance techniques in the lecture theatre. Students were invited to provide qualitative comment on the ways in which the use of performance techniques by lecturers may affect their personal learning experience. Once the quantitative data were collated, the frequencies of students' responses were tabulated and the percentages calculated. The analysis of the students' surveys involved formulation of descriptive statistics and the grouping of the qualitative responses by theme.

The interviews

The four face to face semi-structured interviews with lecturers from The University of Western Australia focused on the teachers' beliefs regarding students' views towards face to face or online delivery modes as well as the teachers' personal implementation of specific performance techniques in the lecture theatre The teachers' reflections and attitudes on the importance of such performance processes in the lecture theatre were also noted (see Appendix B). Three interviewees each had 20-30 years experience and one was an early career lecturer. The teachers' qualitative interview data were coded according to common themes which emerged during the interview conversations (see Appendix C).

Results

Face to face and online delivery of content

Students in this study overwhelmingly reported a preference for face to face lectures over online delivery (72%), 17% suggested that they had no preference and 11% preferred online delivery of lectures. Students' preferences towards face to face lectures were based primarily on an acknowledgement that they experienced greater engagement with the learning in that context. Comments such as, "I engage … in-person better" and "I understand better in lectures" were examples of this argument. The engagement was in turn attributed to an ability to focus better in lectures. As one student put it, "I am able to concentrate", and another believed it was because of "less

distractions in the lecture theatre". An absence of distractions that might otherwise be present in the online delivery was articulated by a student who commented, "[online lectures are] too confusing with lectures, power point and notes all opened up on my desktop at once". For some, the environment in which online lectures were typically viewed also made the experience less desirable than the face to face alternative. One student explained this by saying, "there are less distractions in the lecture theatre than at home with the screaming, barking, TV, food and so on".

Students acknowledged the role of performance techniques in making the face to face lecture a preferable mode of delivery over its online counterpart. This was evident by comments including "[lectures provide] better interaction… easier to pay attention", an appreciation that "body language, facial expression…contribute to learning", and "if the lecturer makes good eye contact, speaks clearly and loudly…I understand better in lectures". In summary as one student commented, "it gives it a more human feel". A specific example was provided by one student who commented on an individual lecturer's style, and his impact on the student's attention and engagement.

> In Politics, our first lecturer was really good, everybody turned up just to see what he would do next, but [as well as] being entertained we also learnt more and had an added motivation to understand the topic.

Students who reported a preference for the delivery of online pre-recorded lectures cited reasons of convenience, such as the flexibility of when and how often they could listen to and view material. Timetable clashes and other commitments often impacted on their preference for online delivery. Typically as one student explained, "it depends on my workload … it can be good when you miss a lecture or can't make one". A number of students valued the ability to revisit the material several times, and believed this assisted in their learning. An example of this was explained by the comment, "I'm able to pause, rewind, repeat, do it in my own time and take notes".

Reflecting the comments of both those preferring face to face as well as those preferring the online mode of delivery, the students who had no particular preference based their judgment on a combination of individual lectures and aspects of convenience. One student commented, "It depends on the lecturer really" and another explained:

> They [lecturers] are better in person, however, I feel that you get more out of them via Lectopia.[2] [It] depends on my workload. Usually would attend personally, but if I have stuff going on, I'd watch Lectopia.

Student attitudes toward the use of performance techniques

Ninety three percent of students believed the use of space, voice, eye contact and passion by lecturers was important or very important in affecting their personal learning experience. Additionally, individual performance techniques were rated separately by students as being effective in maintaining attention and encouraging learning. The results of the students' surveys are summarised in Table 1.

In terms of perceived effectiveness in assisting students to pay attention participants unanimously ranked voice and passion equally high (100%), followed by eye contact (91%) and spatial awareness (82%). Similarly, in terms of assisting them to be more enthusiastic about the topic and encouraging them to learn more, students ranked passion (100%), voice (91%), eye contact (74%) and spatial awareness (73%). These results arguably support the proposition that, as tools of overall effectiveness for learning, students rank passion highest followed by voice. While eye contact rated highly (91%) as a means of maintaining attention, students rated eye contact less effective (74%) and approximately as effective a performance tool in encouraging learning as spatial awareness (73%). There is a clear indication from the results that the students completing the survey differentiated between the different types of performance techniques employed by teachers and their relative ability to both gain the students' attention and positively impact their learning experience. Explanatory comments supplied by the students provided an insight into their attitudes towards the individual techniques.

Table 1: Percentage agreement expressed by students of the effects of performance techniques on their engagement and learning

Key survey questions	I tend to pay more attention % agree	I am more enthusiastic about the topic and I am encouraged to learn more % agree
When a lecturer moves around the room during a lecture …	82%	73%
When a lecturer uses their voice well during a lecture …	100%	91%
When a lecturer uses eye contact during lectures …	91%	74%
When a lecturer is passionate about the topic during a lecture …	100%	100%

Student attitudes toward the use of passion

All students agreed that a lecturer's obvious display of passion helped them to pay attention and to be more enthusiastic, encouraging them to want to learn more (Table 1). The emphasis placed on the display of passion as a technique that helped students retain information and be intrinsically motivated was highlighted by comments such as, "when a lecturer is enthusiastic it is much easier for me to be there and I therefore will remember more" and "being passionate about the topic makes me feel enthusiastic about it too". An interesting and somewhat unexpected connection between lecturers' enthusiasm and perceived reliability of content was made by one student who explained that, "it creates the feeling that you are there for a reason and someone who has an obvious passion for the subject seems like a more reliable and interesting source of information".

Student attitudes toward the use of voice

Every student surveyed agreed that the effective use of voice by a lecturer helped them to pay attention. A slightly lower percentage believed it assisted students to be more enthusiastic and to want to learn more (91%). One possible explanation for the high scores can be found in the qualitative comments. Students often expressed that the ineffective use of a teacher's voice adversely affected their learning experience, deterring them from attending face to face lectures. As one student stated, "I once had a lecturer who stood at the microphone and read off notes from his computer, never looking up, monotone voice and I never went back". Other students suggested similar concerns such as, "without these elements [voice] of presentation the lecture experience can become quite tiring and therefore harder to engage with" and "no monotone is also more engaging" and lastly "voice can be a total drag to listen to, particularly if it's monotonous or irritating".

Student attitudes toward the use of spatial awareness

Spatial awareness was recognised by fewer students (82%) as having an impact on their attention in the learning environment, with fewer still (73%) agreeing that it assisted students to be more enthusiastic and encouraged them to learn more. One possible reason for this is associated with students' overall views on spatial awareness, that it is most effective when utilised in conjunction with other techniques. As one student explained:

> … when a professor moves around and is more animated and the
> entertainment value goes through the roof. Add to that enthusiasm and a
> passion for the subject and everyone has an enjoyable experience. Enjoyment
> is crucial, a good learning strategy and retaining information. Thus, better
> result and a better uni experience.

Student attitudes toward the use of eye contact

Eye contact, while still acknowledged as a useful technique, was rated as such by fewer students (91% agreed it helped students to pay attention and 74% agreed that it assisted students to be more enthusiastic about the topic and encouraged them to want to learn more). The large differences in these particular scores may be due to a variety of reasons. For instance, one student with a disability noted that eye contact was extremely important to his learning experience. The student explained it by saying, "As I am hearing impaired, more gesture and eye contact helps me to understand what the lecturer is saying". Another student reasoned that eye contact or spatial awareness wasn't as important to the learning experience as the delivery of content, "I'm often writing down notes, so their eye contact and use of space is sometimes irrelevant to my learning experience". A number of students made the connection between lecturers' use of eye contact and their display of passion. An example of this is illustrated in the comment, "I just think that if a lecture makes a lot of eye contact and it's obvious he or she really loves the topic – you're encouraged to listen to what they are saying".

Lecturers' responses

The lecturers' responses predominantly reflected students' attitudes and preference towards face to face over online delivery methods. More specifically teachers agreed that face to face learning helped student "engagement" and produced "a more human [personal] and therefore positive learning experience". However, in contrast to the majority of students' views, teachers were equally positive about online pre-recorded lectures. This was mainly due to teachers' perception of students' hectic work commitments or missing lectures due to sickness. As one lecturer noted, "It is best to have face to face but both is also essential because of students' busy schedules".

All four lecturers agreed with students that a teacher's obvious display of passion in the lecture theatre positively affects student engagement and encourages learning. However teachers also pointed out that the delivery of content and a teacher's pedagogical and professional experience was more important. As one academic stated:

> If you're [the teacher] not interested it's because you have a lack of
> enthusiasm, you will alienate the students and that is a disaster … I use my
> own experiences and what I know to enhance the lecture. I try and relate it to
> what I already know … If you're not confident of your area of content but
> with experience it doesn't matter because you will draw in threads of what
> you already know to assist this situation.

Additionally, all four lecturers agreed that the overall use of performance techniques in the lecture theatre were important in producing "personal contact with students" and assisting students to "remember information". One lecturer explained that without the use of performance techniques in the lecture theatre the students will fall asleep, "no matter how interesting the subject is, if a lecturer has a tiny voice it's bad, they will lose interest". However, lecturers were also slightly divided and raised conflicting views when asked about the importance of individual performance techniques. In the responses that did not seem to recognise the connection between individual techniques and a resultant display of passion, the lecturers generally felt that the use of eye contact, voice and spatial awareness were not as important as passion or the delivery of content.

Lecturers also elaborated on what was deterring them from implementing such techniques. For example, two lecturers commented that a lack of training as well as the imperative to cover the content was a concern. One early career teacher explained what he perceived as the competing demands between student engagement and content delivery, "I'm unable to cover content appropriately when focusing on student engagement in the lecture theatre" and an experienced lecturer stated, "a lack of [performance technique] training" was deterring him from using performance techniques effectively in the lecture theatre. Additionally, when lecturers were questioned about the use of voice there was a divergence of opinion, perhaps influenced by the norms and expectations of their discipline or by their own teaching and learning experience. Two experienced teachers asserted that the reliance on technology (microphone) as well as having notes on the podium prevented them from

projecting their voice, or using pitch and volume. One lecturer expressed this by saying, "I feel forced to stay behind the podium because of my notes and the microphone". Similarly, another teacher commented, "I'm anchored to the [podium's] microphone and the visualiser and I can't talk off the top of my head". In contrast, an early career teacher as well as a teacher with a formal acting degree suggested that voice was extremely important. The teacher with background experience in acting went to great lengths to incorporate voice in the lecture theatre. He explained it by saying:

> I emphasise words with a strong loud voice and it booms all over ... if
> however the lecture theatre is large with a larger group I will use the
> microphone and concentrate on rhythm and tone rather than projection.

Whereas, the early career teacher posited that the use of voice was most useful within a combinational approach in order to assist in "grab[bing] their attention" and to "learn more":

> I think that using the space well, eye contact, voice and engagement are
> extremely important in creating a learning environment for students that grabs
> their attention and assists in them learning more. Spatial awareness, pace and
> using your eyes and sounding interesting in what you're talking about.

The majority of lecturers' comments and views suggest that a teacher's experience does not necessarily contribute to their ability to implement performance techniques into the lecture theatre. Rather, a lack of training as well as the need for confidence building is often deterring them from doing so.

Discussion

This research project focused on the university lecture theatre, and not the clinic, laboratory or small group teaching environment, presenting no findings to suggest that the use of performance techniques are more important than the delivery of content. This study did not present any data that illustrated the number of times students attend face to face over online delivery methods or vice versa. Nor, did this study illustrate how to successfully implement specific techniques or a combination of performance techniques in the lecture theatre. Additionally, there was no data to advocate that performance techniques improved student learning, but rather "[performance techniques are] another pedagogical means to achieve teaching and learning goals" (Higgins, Beachamp & Miller, 2007, p. 217).

While taking steps to ensure a level of reliability by confirming a shared understanding of the techniques, it is important to note that the researcher envisaged that the survey questions would encourage students to complete a broad exploratory response, and that the personal comments would support different interpretations and potential varied responses in terms of how participants interpreted "effective implementation of performance techniques", "paying attention", "more enthusiastic", and "to learn more". Therefore, the researcher's emphasis on the meaning of each performance technique prior to each survey and interview being completed, encouraging the participants to

comment on why they felt this way as well as to give examples was important to the research project as part of the mixed method case study.

The current study investigated student and lecturer attitudes and lecturers' practices associated with the use of performance techniques in the lecture theatre in higher education. Recent and rapid technological advances have resulted in the proliferation of online delivery of content including live recordings of face to face lectures, which are subsequently or alternatively made available to students. The traditional model of the lecture being delivered in a lecture theatre to an 'audience' of students is changing. It is relevant therefore to extrapolate the findings of this study beyond the traditional lecture theatre to the online environment. Two questions arise which the results of this study can begin to address:

• What do we know about what students value in the delivery of a standard lecture which might be transferable to the online environment?
• Is the students' choice of one form of delivery (face to face *versus* online) over another influenced in any way by the use of performance techniques?

The findings of this study, that students vastly preferred face to face over online delivery modes are consistent with the limited and anecdotal reports previously available (Felman, 2001; Massingham & Herrington, 2006; Tauber & Mester, 2007). The reasons offered by students for this preference involve recognition of a greater level of engagement in lectures. This engagement in turn is facilitated by lecturers' display of passion which amongst other things is demonstrated by their use of performance techniques such as voice, spatial awareness and eye contact. These findings do not contradict but rather complement previous studies which suggest that students are choosing online delivery modes over face to face modes of delivery due to work commitments and life style issues (Franklin & Peat, 2001; Johnson et al. 2000). It may not be solely conflicting responsibilities that is keeping students from attending lectures in person. The discussion should perhaps now be focusing on how, given the student preference for face to face delivery of content, teachers can value-add to the lecture experience.

The results indicated that there was a disconnect between teachers' perceptions and those of the students regarding the usefulness of performance techniques to enhance the learning experience. While both teachers and students recognised the importance of passion in the delivery of content, when it came to the individual performance techniques the lecturers tended to temper their endorsement by introducing the argument for content knowledge and experience as being equally or more influential. For instance, the majority of students agreed that voice was as important as passion in gaining student attention and only slightly less so for encouraging learning, whereas teachers were divided and suggested that content knowledge and experience were more important than the implementation of voice. It also appears that the teachers did not equate the lack of performance skills in the lecture theatre as being an important reason behind the decrease in student attendance at face to face lectures even though students suggested otherwise. In this study, students clearly stated that they preferred face to

face delivery of content over online delivery modes, and especially when the lecturer was "passionate" and "displayed interest".

Interestingly, despite a general endorsement by both students and lecturers for the use of performance techniques in the lecture theatre, both groups noted that they were rarely implemented effectively. This might be a reflection of the belief expressed by some of the lecturers interviewed, that passion and voice were less important than content knowledge and pedagogical experience. Additionally, some teachers interviewed believed that they were unable to implement certain performance techniques such as passion and voice due to a lack of training. Three of the lecturers, expressed some unease about not being formally trained in the area of performance techniques, and having the knowledge to be able to evaluate the effective use of such techniques. As one lecturer explained:

> I use performance techniques without thinking about it but if I were to
> undergo training that specifically focused on eye contact or moving about the
> space, I could enhance the lectures because I'm really not aware of what I'm
> doing, I just do it.

Alternatively, it may be due to teachers believing that they were too constrained by in-built microphones, being bound to technology at the podium, and the recording of lectures to consider or worry about using performance techniques. This view might be misguided in the light of students' comments suggesting that they believed a teacher's lack of performance techniques indicated a minimal level of displayed passion, which did influence student absenteeism. It would appear this barrier to the implementation of performance techniques by lecturers may be due to them being unaware of students' attitudes towards the impact of performance techniques on their learning experiences. As Felman (2001) points out:

> too many professors often remain … isolated and alone, tucked neatly behind
> a podium peculiarly academic in nature, peering at impeccably prepared
> notes, and waiting for the staccato sounds of sufficiently respectful applause
> (p.xvii).

Of the cohort of lecturers interviewed only one had a formal acting qualification and no one had a formal teaching qualification. This is common among academics at the university level where more importance seems to be placed on the research expertise of the academic, or their workplace superiority (Giles, Wetherbee & Johnson, 2003; Spencer, 2003; Vaughn & Barker, 2001). Formal preparation for teaching in higher education does not typically include a focus on performance techniques as a usual skill. Usually, such skills and strategies are primarily learnt on the job through observation of others, and from aspects of trial and error (Goulden, 1991; Grobe, 2001; Felman, 2001; O'Toole & Lepp, 2000).

While what the students want and what the lecturers deliver is at odds we remain unable to adequately answer the second of the questions posed by this study which is: is the students' choice of one form of delivery (face to face *versus* online) over another influenced in any way by the use of performance techniques? There is a need to

revaluate "best practice" associated with current aspects of face to face as well as online delivery of lectures (as well as future online and virtual learning environments), and the degree to which they assist in meeting student learning needs. The results of this study suggest that students do want passion from their lecturers made evident by the use of techniques such as vocalisation, spatial awareness and eye contact. The results also bring good news. Rather than viewing the inevitable move towards online delivery of content as an impediment to the thoughtful use of performance techniques, we can be reassured in the understanding that the two techniques that are transferable to an online environment, namely passion and voice, are those most valued by students.

Future directions

This research project indicates that more can be learnt from studies conducted in the higher education context and across a broader area of subjects regarding performance techniques in the lecture theatre, clinic, laboratory, classroom or tutorial group and indeed in their corresponding online environments. For example, related areas of further research might include the investigation of the impact of performance techniques amongst larger cohorts of students, at different levels, from different disciplines, in diverse teaching environments in a range of higher education institutions. Other types of performance techniques, such as role playing, comedy, surprise, the use of props, blocking, energy, concentration and improvisation, could also be researched and the findings discussed as a comparison to this study to better understand the pedagogical benefits of performance practices in face to face as well as online teaching contexts. Moreover, the specific ways in which students believe teachers are able to effectively implement an obvious display of passion, using facial expression and body language or how to best introduce a combinational approach, or whether it is more beneficial to implement individual performance techniques in the lecture theatre (as well as in online learning programs) would also be of interest, and worthy of further investigation and analysis.

Conclusion

While it is difficult to speculate on best practices associated with effectively implementing individual or a combinational approach regarding performance techniques, this preliminary study provides scope to further explore the use of such techniques in face to face and online as well as future virtual teaching and learning environments. This study has established that the delivery of content, while consciously using performance techniques, is difficult and challenging for some teachers. Perceived interacting tensions include delivering content successfully, while being confined by microphones, not being able to *ad lib* and survive without lecture notes, and not being formally trained in acting skills. These aspects represent the main practical reasons teachers cite for feeling uncomfortable displaying obvious passion or using their voice effectively.

Overall, this study concurs with past research that the lack or use of performance techniques in the lecture theatre can negatively or positively affect student engagement (Felman, 2001; Murphy and Walls, 1994; Tauber and Mester, 2007). The majority of

students in this study supported face to face over online delivery of content and the lecturers supported the use of both. The data and comments illustrate that students believe that they learn more when they are confronted with lecturers who engage passionately with their subject and use their voice effectively. However, attracting and holding students' attention is never easy, and this study has indicated that implementing certain performance techniques such as passion and voice in the lecture theatre is one way in which a lecturer can assist improved student engagement and learning. This study would suggest that proactively incorporating performance techniques (those discussed in this project and others) into teaching preparation programs in higher education and into ongoing professional development for teaching academics could be beneficial for both teachers and students.

Acknowledgements

Endnotes

[1] Throughout this paper, the phrase "performance technique/s" is used, referring to "acting skills" or "performance skills" which are terms commonly utilised by theatre practitioners in the acting and theatre field.

[2] Lectopia is an online lecture delivery system commonly provided alongside most face to face lectures at The University of Western Australia. The Lectopia version is recorded during the face to face lecture, and made available within 24 hours for students to access via The University's learning management system.

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Appendix A: Survey questions for students studying at The University of Western Australia

Participant background data

Age:
First year undergraduates

NB. The term "performance technique" is used in this questionnaire to describe the practice associated with a lecturer presenting content using the voice, spatial awareness, passion and eye contact in the lecture theatre, assisting student engagement.

1.   What is your major?
2.   Do you prefer lectures to be delivered in person or via *Lectopia*?
3.   When a lecturer moves around the room during a lecture, I tend to pay more attention?
4.   When a lecturer moves around the room during a lecture, I am more enthusiastic about the topic and I am encouraged to learn more?
5.   When a lecturer uses their voice well during a lecture, I tend to pay more attention?
6.   When a lecturer uses their voice well during a lecture, I am more enthusiastic about the topic and I am encouraged to learn more?
7.   When a lecturer uses eye contact during a lecture, I tend to pay more attention?
8.   When a lecturer uses eye contact during a lecture, I am more enthusiastic about the topic and I am encouraged to learn more?
9.   When a lecturer is passionate about the topic during a lecture, I tend to pay more attention?
10. When a lecturer is passionate about the topic during a lecture, I am more enthusiastic about the topic and I am encouraged to learn more?
11. How important do you believe the use of the space, voice, eye contact and passion by teachers during lectures is in affecting how you feel about your personal learning experience?
12. Can you please explain why you feel this way and/or give an example of an experience you have had where the teacher's use of space, voice, eye contact and passion has impacted on your learning experience?

Appendix B: Interview questions for lecturers teaching at The University of Western Australia

Participant background data

Sex:
Age:
Number of years in the teaching profession:
Qualifications:

NB. The term "performance technique" is used in this questionnaire to describe the practice associated with a lecturer presenting content using voice, spatial awareness, passion and eye contact in the lecture theatre, assisting student engagement.

1. How do you think students would rather receive lectures?
2. When you give lectures do you tend to a) move around the room, b) pace on the spot, c) stay stationary behind the podium, or d) other?
3. When you give lectures do you a) consciously use eye contact that focuses on every student, b) scan the room to suggest overall eye contact, c) read from your notes and occasionally give eye contact, or d) other?
4. When you give lectures do you a) use your voice to project up to the back of the theatre, b) rely on the microphone, c) use different sound levels to emphasis important words/sentences, or d) other?
5. What might be preventing you from implementing certain performance techniques such as eye contact, voice projection, spatial awareness and passion towards the subject more readily in a lecture?
6. What types of techniques do you implement in lectures to assist in creating passion towards a subject that you're unfamiliar with or do not find enjoying?
7. How important do you feel about using the space well, eye contact, voice and passion as techniques in creating a learning environment for students to assist them to pay more attention and to want to learn more?

Appendix C: Overview of teacher profiles and results

NB. In areas where a number of themes are mentioned I have lined up similar responses so that patterns are easily seen.

Gender/Age	Teacher 1 F 28	Teacher 2 F 65	Teacher 3 M 65	Teacher 4 M 55
Yrs Experience	5	30	30	20
Teaching and/or Acting Qualification	None	None	None	None, BA in Acting
Subject/s currently taught	Bio Chemistry	English Literature	Creative Writing	Performance Studies
Attitudes towards face-to face delivery of content	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
Advantages for students	A positive and engaging learning experience	A positive learning experience	A positive learning experience	A positive and engaging learning experience
Disadvantages for teachers	Unable to cover content appropriately when focusing on student engagement	Human communication that is real	None	A live and powerful performance
Attitude towards pre-recorded online delivery of content	Neutral	Positive	Positive	Neutral
Advantages for teachers	Better for students if they have missed lecture/s	Better for students if they have missed lecture/s	Better for students if they have missed lecture/s	Better for students if they have missed lecture/s
Disadvantages for teachers	Unable to get to know students	Unable to get to know students	None	Unable to get to know students
Attitude towards spatial awareness in the lecture theatre	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Attitude towards eye contact in the lecture theatre	Positive	Neutral	Positive	Positive
Attitude towards voice in the lecture theatre	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Attitude towards obvious display of passion in the lecture theatre	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive

Advantages of using performance techniques in the lecture theatre for teachers	• Student engagement • Remembering information • Personal contact • Answering questions	• Personal contact • Engagement with subject	• Personal contact • Engagement with subject	• Personal contact • Passion towards subject • Entertainment
Disadvantages of using performance techniques in the lecture theatre for teachers	• Lack of training • Lack of confidence • Peer reflection	• Content is more important • Lack of training	• Content is more important	• Peer reflection

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