

# **The Learning Compact**

**A framework for creative teaching**

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# Thinking about teaching

Teaching: connecting student with THE SUBJECT  
Shared enterprise between teacher & student  
Enhance teaching by understanding T-S relation  
Enable “creative tension”

Test: Lecture, VLE, breakdowns

# “The Subject”

System of concepts and formal results

Family of methods and beliefs

Echoes of professional practice

Standards of “rigour”

Teacher is active part of subject

# The Learning Compact

**T:** I can help you to connect with THE SUBJECT.

**S:** OK, I guess you probably can.

**T:** Here's what I want you to do . . . .

**S:** I'm not sure where that will lead me . . . .

Student engages with something he doesn't know.

Student *vulnerable*: requires trust.

Teacher is *in debt*: owes student true access to SUBJECT.

# Dynamics of the Learning Compact

Teacher sets tasks and demands trust.

Student vulnerable, insecure.

Affirmation by successful *practice* of THE SUBJECT.

Student develops competence and confidence.

Teacher makes new claims, demands greater risks.

Teacher and students build up shared network of ideas.

# Teacher Attitudes

Respect the learning compact:

- Signal your own competence (not vanity but courtesy)
- Show respect to students, acknowledge their vulnerability.
- Listen to students, and respond to what you hear.
- Be in charge.
- Share your personal beliefs and choices.
- Don't try to "prove yourself".
- But *show* yourself (including your uncertainties).
- Relate students to outside sources.

# Rigour

Never talk *about* the subject  
— enable practice *within* the subject.

As advanced as is feasible,  
as simple as is honest.

Be “on the edge”.

# Hooks

“Key cases” that represent essence of subject.

- *Setup*: Definitions, ideas.
- *Example*: Simple but relevant case.
- *Activities*: Explore example.
- *Interpretation*: Connect to other cases.

Traverse THE SUBJECT, planting a series of hooks.



# Creating Hooks

Use modern theory for guidance.

Locate current position of students.

Find simplest example consistent with background.

Strip away all side issues.

Careful review of past narrative.

Then boldly assert example, as “fact”.

Let students explore freely.

Reconnect findings with narrative.

# Role of the Lecture

Lecture as *exposition*? As *delivery vehicle* for facts and information? as “statement of the theory”? Wrong!!

Common meeting ground to explore “hooks”.

Celebration of shared exploration.

Formal affirmation of the learning compact.

Teacher is conductor of this celebration.

# Lecture Style

Leave room for student exploration.

Listen to the students. Improvise.

Quiet and slow. Allow THE SUBJECT to reveal itself.

Allow for silence.

No ego: let THE SUBJECT speak.

No target syllabus: just connect student with SUBJECT.

# Virtual Learning Environments

VLE is *safe*: registered participants, selected learning resources. Encourages risk-taking.

VLE is *interactive*: Wide range of student contributions. Discussion fora, Wiki principle. Powerful listening device.

# Creative Teaching

Key activity: Carving out hooks.

Then free use of hooks in response to students.

Building shared network of ideas with students.

Personal connection: *This* teacher, faced with *these* students, created *these* hooks, and together we build up *this particular* subject network.

# Threats (I): “Losing the Students”

*Case 1: Poor hooks.* Even committed students fail to understand the case.  $\Rightarrow$  Find better examples, give more extensive review material.

*Case 2: Lack of confidence.* Students are “freaked out” by the material.  $\Rightarrow$  Provide credible lower-level work that reconfirms the student’s competence.

*Case 3: Weak commitment.* Refusal to engage, “Just tell me the answer”.  $\Rightarrow$  Teacher needs to renew his claim on the student: “you really need to work this out”.

# Threats (II): Fearful Teachers

Fear of not knowing enough;  
of not having control;  
of being a poor presenter.

⇒ Trust your students;  
acknowledge your insecurities;  
share a common sense of novelty and exploration;  
re-assure students that any errors will be corrected;  
open up a forum for unresolved topics.

# Teacher Development

Main task: learning to listen.

No simple “technique”;

requires personal growth.

⇒ Personal mentors as catalysts for development.



# Reading

Diana Laurillard, *Rethinking University Teaching*

Peter T. Knight, *Being a Teacher in Higher Education*

Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*

Jerome S. Bruner, *The Process of Education*

John Dewey, *How we Think*

D.R. Garrison & T. Anderson, *E-Learning in the 21st Cent.*

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