Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development

Reflecting on University Teaching: Academics' Stories

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Not Just Another Brick in the Wall

Rick Snell

Rick Snell is a Lecturer in Law at the University of Tasmania, Hobart. In the mid 1990s Rick transformed himself from an accidental tertiary teacher into a Public Law teacher with a mission to strive for excellence. As a student he rarely encountered subjects or teaching styles that stimulated his intellectual or civic development. In the present environment of scarce resources, within a State that struggles for viability in all areas, he believes he has a duty to motivate, enthuse and entice his students into expanding their skills, confidence and civic participation levels. His students undertake empirical research that involves a mixture of applying legislation, critically analysing articles in law journals, and communicating with practitioners (public servants and other professionals). He talks here about the advantages of this project-based approach over traditional teaching and assessment methods.

As a student, I was bright, I was innovative, I was imaginative—but exams didn't give me the opportunity to show it. All I needed to do to pass exams was cram for a day or two beforehand. Just doing exams, I was able to drift through university without really being pushed, without really being challenged. But research papers gave me the opportunity to show what I could do. I used to get very good marks for research papers because I lived those papers for the period I was doing them—I absorbed knowledge, I contrasted ideas, I was innovative. It was only because of my self-motivation in doing research projects that I managed to learn something on the way. It would have been even nicer to have had someone to challenge me from time to time, to say, 'Well yes, that's okay, but you can do better'.

I didn't like exams as a student and I still don't like exams. I knew I wasn't very good at exams. I was aware I knew just enough to get through, and you really didn't have to know a tremendous amount to get through. The process was more rote learning and memorising than anything else. So in many ways, the way I teach now is a complete adverse reaction to, and attempt to distance myself from, the examination process.

When I first started along the path towards project-based teaching, I had no clear end in mind—apart from desperately trying to avoid the negative aspects of the examination process. I knew I wanted a high level of involvement with my students, right from the beginning right to the end of the course. I wanted to see students produce something that had intrinsic worth and value in itself, that wouldn't just end up being shredded. I wanted to see students actually develop during the course, to grow in some way, either directly as a result of interacting with me or indirectly as a result of interacting with other aspects of the course. And I wanted my courses to be the start of an open-ended learning process for students that continued beyond the final assessment for the unit.

While doing their research projects, my students often develop a passion for being involved in social research. I try to encourage them to see that becoming a lawyer in a legal office is not the only end result of getting a law degree. A law degree is a tool that you can use for other things as well. I encourage my students to be agents of change in the community, to use their legal knowledge and skills in a positive way. I want my students to realise that, as in Bryce Courtney's *The Power of One,* one person or a couple of people can actually change ideas and can create a ripple effect in society. They've got a responsibility to do that if they want to become public lawyers. A democracy needs this sort of social involvement, and I believe the university has a duty, especially in a small place like Tasmania, to map out the terrain.

Considering the problems with exams

Often students feel that exams aren't fair because they don't actually test all their knowledge. I might know a lot about the subject—I might have spent my whole year learning A to Z about the subject, I've read literature, I've put it all together—but then the exam only tests me on one or two things in the narrow range between X and Y. I may not have actually learned those little bits because I didn't see them as being as important as the rest. So from a student's perspective, exams aren't a fair test of the quality of their learning.

When you talk to students and ask them how they thought they went in the exam, they usually have no idea. To them, exams are a lottery. To me, any type of learning situation that can be described as a lottery, and that actually demonstrates the traits of a lottery, isn't a very good learning situation because it encourages people like me (when I was an undergraduate student) to cut corners, to skim, to have a very surface approach to learning for exams.

If you happen to be sick, if your kids have kept you up all night, if you have a relationship that breaks up (as they do under the stress on the day before an exam), none of this is taken into account. It's just your performance in that little amphitheatre at the particular time of the exam that counts. And in the space of two to four hours, you're expected to make your mind switch between three or four discrete topic areas and produce excellent results!

From the lecturer's perspective, another problem with exams is that we can give only very minimal feedback. (In fact, we hope we don't have to give any feedback, because then we'd have to expose our examination procedures to scrutiny and every student could come by and ask us, 'Why did you mark me down? What's your basis for giving me this mark?'.)

Despite these problems with exams, this University (my Law School included) still relies on exams as the major form of assessment. There's a whole heap of reasons for this, and I've heard them all for the last seven years because I've had endless debates with people here about exams. Some of these reasons are as follows.

- Exams are the only way you can tell that what you get from students is actually their work.

- By using exams for assessment, you don't need to be so actively involved with students throughout the semester, so you have more time to do research.
- Once exams are in the system it's very difficult to get rid of them. In fact, in some areas of the university, exams have been institutionalised—in the Arts Faculty there's a requirement that at least 50% of assessment in each subject *must* be assessed by examination.
- In the area of Law, a lot of academics who've spent time in private practice argue that identifying the problem and looking for little trip wires in a question to trigger a certain line of thought and come up with a coherent response is what you need to do in practice, and they say exams are a very good way of testing students' skills at this.

Exams have a way of shaping lecturers' attitudes to students. You start your very first year of teaching bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and having great respect for the students. But then you feel they let you down because they don't perform very well in exams, or they're just into shallow learning to pass exams and you want them to get involved in deep learning, so a conflict begins to develop between you and 'them'. Then in the second year, and more often than not in the third year, you start to have a very strong reaction against students because you're thinking, 'This is the third year now, and I'm telling these "no-hopers" the same thing, and they're still not getting it'. You'll have done some marking by now and if you believe exams are a valid test of people's talent and skills, it would be no wonder if you, like most lecturers, start treating students as hopeless. In the end, you just see students as these people who produce 'this type of shit' at the end of the year.

When my involvement in various subjects forces me to participate in an exam process, I try to make that process as user-friendly and student-friendly as possible. I run a kind of exam training session for my students, and I outline what I consider to be the major features. I let them know what the examiner is looking for. I make it clear to them that an examiner is only going to be able to spend a few minutes reading each exam response, so first impressions are very important. I also put in place a number of measures to make it easier for them to translate or transfer from the exam system to this project-based system. It would be unfair just to say to students that they just have to do it this way, even though they're used to exams.

Changing attitudes toward Public Law

The teaching of Public Law in the past has been very dull, and has mainly concentrated on intricate analyses of case law. It hasn't really looked at the impacts of these laws, whether they actually work or not in practice. What we teach students in our classrooms can have little relevance to what actually takes place in practical life. Being a former public administrator myself, I know this full well. I believe there is an obligation on Public Law teachers to bring the theory and practice together much more.

The key thing I want to get across to my students is that this is not just an academic subject. It involves Government, it involves exercises of public power, and it involves public/private disputes. It is, if you like, part of a civics type approach. I try to get

students to think about it in these contexts: Put yourself in the shoes of the public official making the decision. Put yourself in the shoes of the person affected by the decision. What more could the public official have done? Are the rules and laws set up under Public Law actually enforceable? If you were faced with having to absorb all the guidelines of procedural fairness and making this decision, would you have been able to do it or would you have cut corners to achieve the outcome you wanted? And once you'd actually done that, is there any obligation on you to do something constructive about it?

Geoffrey Palmer wrote a paper about teaching Public Law, just after being deposed as the Prime Minister of New Zealand. His basic thesis was that Public Law teachers ought to be reformers. Public lawyers have a duty to people as fellow citizens, and I think this is a fairly important difference from Criminal Law and defending people for criminal actions and so on. In a democracy, and particularly in a Liberal democracy, Public Law plays such an essential role and I believe, as does Geoffrey Palmer, that the majority of public lawyers and the majority of Public Law teaching has failed this democracy. Very few lawyers see themselves as performing a public service role in this wider definition. One of the things I try to get across to students is that the environment isn't passive. It is active. It's their responsibility to come up with ideas. It's not good enough for them just to write a research paper that pits one idea against another and comes to an indefinite conclusion, but rather they need to understand what's going on, what's motivating the situation. They need to have respect for all the different points of view, but they need to put an idea forward and be open and courageous enough to float an opinion and then see what impact this has.

A student comments ...

The research projects I did under Rick Snell's guidance presented me with the first opportunity I had to formulate my own ideas and proposals for reform during my law degree. As nobody else had researched our particular topic, the work we produced was the first of its kind. It was a challenging but highly satisfying task.

One of the key points I try to get across to my students is this: it's no use arguing or putting forward ideas that don't have any practical value. It may be a good idea in theory, but there may be reasons why it won't work in practice. It's important to know what would stop it from working, and this shouldn't be left to the courts to sort out because most people don't get to court—it's too expensive. You need to be much more pro-active—it's better for your client if you can get in and actually change the regulatory environment so that your client can function, or if you can set up the groundwork for arguing a public interest case in court.

Project-based learning

In the sciences, the role of research is to go out and explore our geological basis, our flora and fauna. But in the humanities, and especially in the political science/public administration/legal area, we do very little in the way of charting our terrain and

attempting to become directly involved in it. This area is very under-researched empirically. In the database, there's one article on empirical Admin Law research, and that's from America.

The research projects in this subject are like a navigation exercise—we're going out charting. I try to sell them to the students on the basis that they are involved in a much wider learning process. I tell them that it's not just a case of me teaching them Principles of Public Law in this semester for them to get a pass or credit and then move on. Rather, I tell them they'll be involved in a massive research project that three or four hundred students have been involved in over the past few years, that they are now joining that project, so they'll feel they have an obligation to take the project another small step forward. They may not understand it as a whole, they won't be fully aware of where it's going, but they will be contributing in some way, and they will have to be professional when they go out to do the work.

A student comments ...

Rick's obvious enthusiasm and accessibility helped me to push my limits and conduct 'real' research, as opposed to academic exercises. I feel I have an actual, as opposed to theoretical, understanding of some areas of Administrative Law. The psychological benefit of building on and drawing from the work of previous students is significant. This adds to one's commitment, as one's work is actually going to be used in some 'real' way.

The projects are organised into nine major subject areas, including freedom of information, watchdogs, government business enterprises, and so on. The students choose topics within these major topic areas and then they are assigned to tutorial groups, so all the students doing freedom of information are in the same tutorial group and so on. The whole idea is that they will have a mutual support network and will see themselves as being engaged in a minor study within a larger frame of reference called 'freedom of information'. With this experience behind them, I hope they will work in a collaborative way as little groups within wider groups, that they will see themselves as working within a particular sub-area of a wider discipline.

I encourage students to start a project from scratch and develop it, and I will provide continuing input and feedback. A lot of students are very keen; they see this as a golden opportunity to do much better than they would do in exams. They come and talk to me about their ideas. I make contacts for them in government circles. I encourage them in their project, give them comments on drafts of their output, give them special lessons and programs to assist them with their project. I spend a lot of time talking with students. I try to make my goals explicit. I also let it be known that I don't mark by the bell curve, so effectively there are no limitations on who can do well. I hope that students will produce a product at the end of the process which (a) they will be proud of and (b) they can show to future employers and anyone else to exemplify the best they could do at that stage given the resources

A student comments ...

As students, we were given responsibility for our own learning and we were encouraged to reach a higher level of analysis and excellence in our work. Rick acted as a mentor rather than a teacher, providing us with assistance and direction, but encouraging us to think for ourselves and to take the initiative to make our work comprehensive, articulate and relevant to the everyday workings of our subject, Administrative Law. The critical use of sources, empirical research and communication with practitioners was vastly different to any other learning process I've experienced, and engendered confidence and greater ability in extending research beyond secondary sources.

Students in the past write to students in future years to tell them to leave the ground unsullied for later students—to be professional and polite in their dealings with bureaucrats and not give them a hard time, because there'll be students in the following year who'll turn up to do the same sort of thing and you don't want to have the door slammed in their faces. So in this way continuity is built in. All the research projects are retained and are available to students in future years to look at for ideas. They provide a guide, a point to build from; there's been a general increase in quality over the years.

I've also been thinking of having a mini-expo. Students would write up their projects and display them on A4 or A3—the key points, an abstract, what they got out of it—so that they can all become aware of what the others have done. Another idea is to put some of the better papers together as a small publication presenting, say, ten interesting research projects on *Watchdogs and Ombudsmen* and another five on another particular process. That would take time but it's a way to say to them that the results of their projects don't just stop here—that they may move on, but that their papers will continue to be circulated.

Encouraging students' community involvement

At the very least, I hope the students will get the idea out of the whole process that they should become engaged and passionate about whatever they're doing. The idea of 'seizing the day'. I try very hard to remain professional and enthusiastic in my reactions to them, no matter how much pressure is coming at me from various sources.(Occasionally I let my moods show.) I want them to be aware that they're involved, that they have a civic duty that needs to be acted out.

As an example, this year there's been a massive enquiry at the national level into Freedom of Information. As they were learning about Freedom of Information as part of the course, I got them to put in a submission to the Government. For three weeks they worked together collaboratively to put together a submission to the Law Reform Process. Now, in the discussion paper that came out as a result of that process, their submission was cited, I think, nine times, plus a quote was used. To me, that is a significant achievement, both in terms of the students having input to the national discussion paper and in terms of what they learned through the particular process of putting the submission together.

A few years ago, some of my students gave a presentation on Administrative Law reform to the parliamentary Labor Party, who were in opposition at that time. I think these parliamentarians, for the first time, started to perceive the broader implications of Administrative Law. They were exposed to new ideas that had been put together in a fairly enthusiastic manner. Resulting from the debate at that forum, there was a new commitment, an informed commitment, in the parliamentary Labor Party to Administrative Law reform. And that started because they had been exposed to these young people with ideas.

A student comments ...

Rick's active-learning approach was effective in getting students involved with the course in a way that more traditional methods cannot often achieve. Rick encourages students to use their work in the 'real world'. He asked some of us to present our work to the Tasmanian Labour parliamentarians as part of their Administrative Law workshop. We gave short speeches and answered questions about our research. Rick also asked a fellow student and myself to write an article based on essays we had written, which he subsequently published for us in the FOI Review. It was very gratifying to see our work being used by professionals.

I'm finding that these projects and this approach gives students a wide angle of entry into what I regard as Public Law. One of my past students approached me just a few days ago. She and her friend did a study on tenancy reform in Tasmania. She came into tell me that she has volunteered her time to work with the tenants' union. This is a major personal involvement for her. She's getting involved as a mini-professional, and for me this is an exciting process. I don't push them to do this sort of thing, but it's clear what I'm encouraging students to do—which is not just to sit back but to become involved. A democracy needs this type of involvement if it is to work. It needs that passion, that engagement, that participation, regardless of what you private agenda is.

The feedback on the student projects that I've received from the various organisations, statutory authorities and individuals who have been the subjects of the projects has been very encouraging.

A parliamentarian comments ...

I find it very pleasing that young students at the University of Tasmania have been using this legislation and particularly the students in the Administrative Law course .... Many of us, on this side of the House anyway, have been approached over the past few years to discuss certain assignments with some of these young people. It is a very pleasant experience, I might say, to have that contact with young people and to see the way they are thinking, their development of thought—which I suggest is far greater than mine was, particularly at that age—their maturity of thought and the topics in which they are interested.

Working in pairs

In my first year of this, students did their projects individually—because that's how you do exams and because my peers would be critical of allowing joint work. I did allow some students to work in pairs on joint projects but I monitored this much more closely than the individual work. Then I found that the joint projects actually worked better and produced better results. In the following year, I encouraged students to work in pairs. This year, I've encouraged students even more strongly to work in groups (partly to reduce my marking workload).

As the subject progressed, I became more attracted to them working in pairs and to the collegiality associated with this. I think a synergy comes from people with different talents getting together. I strongly emphasise the process of producing and working though drafts, and by working in pairs they are almost forced to do this. When you're working in a pair, you have to put something down in writing to let the other person know what stage the project is at, and you work from there.

Working together enables them to overcome some of the concerns they may have about getting out into the wider community and interviewing people—academics, politicians, members of parliament. It's a daunting process the first time as an individual to meet your member of parliament, or the minister or a high ranking civil servant, to have to negotiate with them and interview them, and even just arrange a time for an appointment. When the students are working together in pairs, at least they will be able to provide each other with some mutual support.

In pairs they can usually draw on a wider range of skills. Tasmania being the place it is, they may also have some pre-existing contacts between them. 'My dad knows so-and-so, so we can call him first and go down that particular path.' It also means they can divide the workload and be more available to fit in with the people they're trying to meet with when both of them can't be there at the same time.

I think it also improves your negotiating skills, because you're forced to work with someone else and you have to negotiate who's going to do what task and when, and so on. It also provides students with the opportunity to actually talk with someone about their project. They actually talk about and discuss the general principles in the field, try to interpret the literature for each other, contribute different views on the same point, and try to reconcile these different perspectives.

It becomes clear from students' conversations with me that they are picking up on this peer learning or co-operative learning process, and they start to have respect for each other. Law HD students tend to be very egotistical; for them, the other students are not really there at all because they themselves are excelling and they can see the others struggling with concepts. Sometimes these students, who may secretly prefer to do a simple project on their own, get dragged into a joint project by an enthusiastic friend who's a Credit student. After working together, these higher grade students come to be amazed that other people actually do have talents and skills and abilities which they don't have, and this allows, if you like, a mutual recognition to start taking place.

I had one student who initially did an individual project. She's a high ranking HD student and she has always worked by herself. Then she did a joint research project in the advanced class, and in her view this was a far more enlightening, far more useful experience. She was one of these people who are afraid to get out and about, but the person she did the project with wasn't afraid at all, so this gave her a wider experience.

There are some major disadvantages with working in pairs, and I've experienced a number of them. One is the boyfriend/girlfriend pairing when the relationship doesn't survive the course of the project. The other is that students are confronted by the different ways they do things, for example their writing styles, because it would be very rare for students working together to have the same writing styles. Yet in real life you are often required to work with others to produce an outcome, whether in the public service or the law or elsewhere. They need to learn to merge their own individual likes and dislikes about writing styles to produce a joint effort in a joint project.

Understanding learning

I think learning is skills-orientated. Learning is acquiring skills and using them—not knowing heaps of facts and ideas, but knowing what to do with facts and ideas. I like comparing what a person was like before they started with what they're like at the end: Are they doing something now that looks smooth and effective and efficient? Are they able to engage in debate and discussion? Able to present evidence? Are they able to adapt, to modify, to experiment? If they are, then they've learned something. But if they are doing the same thing over and over again and they haven't made any adjustments during the whole process, then they haven't been learning.

The most important aspect of the teaching process is that it is a continuing process of discovery for the students and for the teacher. The final output of the teaching is not just a highly polished, innovative research report but also an overall improvement in communication skills and an ability to apply active research in other circumstances. When I commenced this style of teaching, I wasn't aware of Action Learning and Action Research and the equation 'L = P + Q' (Learning equals Programmed Knowledge plus Questioning Insight). Yet this equation sums up the type of learning I'm trying to encourage.

Relating to students

Examinations force most lecturers to merely perform the role of an assessor. If your predominant role is that of assessor, there's no need for you to actually become involved in the students' learning process because it's not your responsibility—your responsibility is just to judge the students as they come through the process. Of that type of approach, I think that is probably the most unsatisfying aspect. It encourages lecturers to have minimal reaction to students, especially so now that exams just have their student numbers on them and we don't even know who the student is. So if you have

exceptionally bright students who actually do something of value in the exam, you don't know who they are until you've been through the whole process and had the numbers decoded, and by then they will have finished your subject and walked out the door.

So a major part of this project approach is a heavy emphasis on them coming to see me to talk about their particular process. I try to make myself as open and available as possible, via email, in personal conversations or in discussions with groups, whatever, to work out any problems that may occur. Through this I get to know more about them than I would though an exam process. Here students actually talk to me about the process. One of the most important aspects from my point of view is that this enables me to become much more involved with the students, to know them as individuals, and to enjoy, if you like, a relationship that is almost like a postgraduate supervision. I try to ensure I maintain a fairly intense involvement with them, that we have a professional exchange. This allows me to see their merits as researchers and their process of development along the way.

I want my involvement with students to be a two-way process, so I try to allow them a window into my own professional life, to be clear on what I'm doing. I may be allocating only forty percent of my time to actual teaching because I'm off doing other things as well, and while I'm dedicated to teaching, these other things are all part of the same process. I try to involve the students in my life and my professional activities so they can see and understand that Admin Law isn't just a dry subject, that it actually has connections to real life.

Now, reality being what it is and given my position of power and their transience though the subject, no matter how much I would like these relationships to be equal, I can't make them entirely equal. But wherever possible, I encourage the students to treat me on an equal basis. So I provide as many opportunities as possible for students to talk to me about how their projects are working and about the learning processes taking place.

> ***A student comments ...***
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> *Generally students are sold short through lazy lecturers with little commitment to the teaching aspect of their jobs. In contrast, Rick Snell demonstrated by his commitment to his students that learning would be an exciting journey where excellence was achievable. His style and philosophy are unique in the seven years of my total tertiary education and the admiration of his students is universal and well deserved. He expects a lot of his students—but because of his approach, students seem to spend a lot more effort willingly in his subject—because they know it will be recognised, and they definitely felt empowered by a more active role in their own education. They are taught to be self-sufficient in their learning.*

Integrating teaching and research

It's important from my career point of view to carry out research. By marrying the two together, teaching and research, I have been able both to advance my career and to give much more back to my students.

My students inspire my research. They provide little launching pads for me to develop and expand ideas from. I always acknowledge their contribution because I treat my undergraduate students as if they are postgraduate students, and I make it clear to them that this is a collaborative type of research process going on here. In future years, I might be able to return the favour by giving them opportunities, by saying, 'I've done all this research, I've got these contacts and there's something that needs to be done, something that's significant and interesting and which will make a contribution—why don't you do it?'.

I really would like to get across that teaching has just as much validity as research, that the two can work hand in hand and that students are the key in this process. This means you have to have a one-to-one engagement with students as people, as individuals; you need to appreciate students as people who are worthwhile being involved with, not just a component of a task we undertake to get our money so that we can do our research. Unfortunately, the people who get ahead (get appointed or promoted or tenured or their contracts renewed) are usually those who have demonstrated greater research ability—by cutting themselves off from students as much as possible and putting all their efforts into their thesis or their refereed articles and so on. They'll be the ones who will get ahead while you, if you're thinking about teaching, will be making a lot of sacrifices in terms of time and energy that will keep you away from research.

Developing the practice

I'm from a working class background, a mining town on the west coast. When I finished school, I was going to work in the mines because I felt I'd had enough of the education process. But the mines closed down about the time I did my matriculation, so I only stumbled into university because my other options were cut off.

I can vividly remember the first time I knew I'd made it as a university student. We used to have six to eight students in a tutorial in those days. We were required do a research project, write it up and present it to the class. We all had to read each other's research projects and do up one page critiques. For the first time in my university career, I was actually required to critically think about another student's piece of work. And suddenly I found I could really get stuck into this—not in a nasty way—but that I could see the gaps in their work. I could picture the framework and I could see that there was a bit missing here and a bit not emphasised enough there. This really clicked for me, and then I found I could look at things in a new way. I wasn't just patting someone on the back because they managed to get through the rigours of getting their project in, I was responding to them in a much more analytical, professional manner. In what I'm doing now, I've tried to replicate some of that feeling.

I didn't start off developing my teaching practice by doing heaps of reading. The reading came as I went through the process of teaching. When you think about it, there's very little time and opportunity for you read about teaching, do research, and actually teach. Most of the literature on teaching is not accessible to people who aren't from an educational background, and most of the examples are from disciplines other than law.

Therefore, there's very little debate and discussion about teaching because there is so little time and attention given to it. I think innovation is a lonely affair because even though there may be one or two people innovating, they won't connect because there isn't an established forum in which to do this.

If you try a couple of innovative things in a lecture and they don't quite work, or maybe they do work but you're rushed for time, the easiest thing to do is get back up and give a lecture. I find myself resorting to this from time to time. The 'traditional' way of university teaching is the easiest way, and therefore it can be attractive.

I'm fairly cautious about which innovations I use. I usually adapt ideas I've come across in a book or seen at a course before I put them into practice. Someone may say something that triggers something in me, and I'll think about it in terms of, 'Is it me? Can I use it?'. Every time you use an innovation, the next questions should be, 'Why should I stop here? What do I do from here?' It's really easy to slide back to the worst practice as a lowest common denominator.

Keys to good teaching

My general aim in teaching is to create excitement and enthusiasm in the subjects I teach, and to encourage my students to direct their energy toward having a direct impact on our society. What's important is your enthusiasm for your subject, your involvement with your subject, not just in the classroom but in a wider manner. The subjects I've least enjoyed learning and the people I've least enjoyed being taught by were the ones that were most disinterested. They may have had a great love for their subject—they may have been world experts—but they didn't come across as getting a kick out of their subject. I think nothing kills a subject or presentation more than someone who doesn't want to be there, or who gives every appearance of not wanting to be there. When I'm involved in a subject I don't have much enthusiasm for, I go back to traditional methods. But when I'm involved in a subject I'm deeply committed to and enthusiastic about, I'm always looking about for what I can do that's new, for what exciting idea will come through the door next.

I use a lot of sporting analogies because I love sport, and I especially love cricket. In teaching young people how to play cricket effectively, the responsibility for learning has to go to them. You can talk to them, you can explain things to them, but it's what they do with what you give them that's going to make the difference between an ordinary fast bowler and a brilliant fast bowler. You can't train someone to be a brilliant fast bowler. You can give them the training, you can show them the videos, you can show them examples and so on, but it's only when something happens in their minds that triggers their desire to learn that they'll go up to the nets for twenty hours a day and just bowl at the stumps and they'll learn as they go on. Your input can improve their process of learning, but what drives them, what motivates them, comes from within them. So, in this way, the responsibility for learning really has to be shifted to the students, but it's got to be shifted in a responsible way. My role as a teacher is to assist in getting the triggering process to take place, both by example and by creating an environment and atmosphere in which it can take place.

It's important to communicate with students at their level, to make your knowledge accessible to the students, without devaluing what you're trying to get across. I aim to open up a world view for them by talking about what Admin Law looks like and feels like, and how it operates. I take it to bits and put it together, play around with it, look at the essential features of it. This allows students access to the subject and knowledge that I possess. I think you need to treat the students with respect and treat them as individuals worthy of the learning process. I think you need to be pushing always for excellence even if you're not achieving it. At least you're trying to do your best.

Rewards of teaching

What gives me the biggest buzz is interacting with the students. It's a unique opportunity to be exposed to a range of individuals, their ideas, their intellect, their previous life experience, why they're doing law, where they go on to after this process. In this law school we have a number of mature-aged students (we actually have two medical doctors going through as undergraduates at the moment) and we have a large number of overseas students. Out of my 140 students in Principles of Public Law, twenty to twenty-five are overseas students from about seven South Pacific countries and we have a large contingent from Malaysia. We have a former Tongan parliamentarian and Chief Magistrate going through now who is Registrar of their Supreme Court and who is going to become their first Tongan Judge. The chance to meet these people and to engage in a dialogue with them is, for me, the biggest kick I get out of teaching.

I'm most proud when students actually start to enjoy the subject, because Admin Law is not a subject that students are likely to be highly impressed by, just by its nature. So I find it rewarding if I manage to turn some of my students on to some aspect of it.

One of the greatest sources of dissatisfaction about teaching is that you may never get to know what real effect you've had on your students. Very rarely have I ever gone back to any of my teachers to tell them what they did for me. One, you're generally too embarrassed to do it. Two, you may not fully appreciate the effect of their teaching until, like me, you have the opportunity to put it into practice and trace it back to your first experience of it. And three, their teaching is only part of a process and if it was done really well you probably wouldn't notice it. In an ideal environment, good teaching wouldn't stand out from everything else.