Situational interest: why should learners care about what we want them to care about?

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(Photo: Can You Ever Forgive Me? Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2018)
What we’re going to cover:

- Distinguishing situational interest (SI) from personal interest (PI)
- Why do we need to pay attention to SI?
- Ways of creating SI

How:

- Presentation, 25 mins max.
- Activity and questions/discussion, 25 mins
One-minute activity:

Have you heard of situational interest (SI) before?

If so, what does it mean? If not, what would be your guess?
This slide is to remind David to hand out the handouts now.
Interest

“the feeling of wanting to give your attention to something or of wanting to be involved with and to discover more about something”

(Cambridge Dictionary, 2019)
Distinguishing situational interest (SI) from personal interest (PI)

• **Personal interest** (PI) is a learner’s intrinsic, relatively unchanging set of long-term preferences.

• **Situational interest** (SI) is activated temporarily by aspects of the immediate (teaching & learning) situation. It is a “short-term spike in a person's attention” (Azevedo, 2017).

• SI is attention **grabbing**, whereas PI is attention **holding** (Mitchell, 1993).

• PI can’t (immediately) be influenced by the teacher; but SI **can** be (Rodríguez-Aflecht et al., 2018).
Why do we need to pay attention to situational interest?

• A learner’s level of interest in a topic correlates with their achievement in that topic (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). It seems likely that this link is, at least in part, causal.**

• But students’ PI doesn’t always align (perfectly) with course learning outcomes (and we can’t directly influence their PI anyway).

• So we should foster SI.
A bonus: SI might develop into PI (and even if it doesn’t, the SI will aid learning in the moment.)

The four-phase model of interest development

(Hidi & Renninger, 2006)
But **how** can we boost situational interest?

Maybe Hollywood has an answer...
Film trailer: Can You Ever Forgive Me?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvJlaNsf_bY
Ways of creating SI  (1/4)

• use novelty; tell students an unbelievable truth, something that’s true but counter-intuitive

• show an arresting image; use a short disarming piece of music or video

• use suspense; what happens next...?

• use models, artefacts (Palmer et al., 2016) and authentic technology (Ghadiri Khanaposhtani et al., 2017)
Ways of creating SI (2/4)

• give an advance organisier – **signpost** what you’re going to say before you say it

• remind students of the **existing knowledge** they’re going to build upon

• Create **quick-wins** – a sense of having learned something (however small) increases SI (Dohn, 2011)

• start with a **problem or question**; ask students to think of how they would solve or answer it – this alerts them to the existence of a gap between what they know and what they need to know (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2014). For example...
Claire owns some ducks, and notices that their large clutch of 24 eggs is beginning to hatch. She decides to give them some space and return three hours later. The ducklings hatch out at a steady rate of 8 eggs per hour. However, at the end of each hour a fox visits the clutch and eats half of the hatched ducklings. **How many ducklings does Claire discover upon her return?**

(Photo: Smithsonian Magazine, 2019)

Puzzle by Dr Geoff Evatt, School of Mathematics, University of Manchester for the Today programme, BBC Radio 4
Ways of creating SI (3/4)

- include **kinaesthetic** activities (Roberts, 2015)

- Get **off campus**: visit relevant sites, museums, organisations...

- create **active** (as opposed to passive) learning moments (Clapper, 2014), e.g. pairwork discussion, quizzes...

- let students **invent things, conduct experiments**, learn from trial-and-error, and **collaborate** with each other (Dohn, 2013)
Ways of creating SI (4/4)

• give students a reason to care about what you’re about to teach, e.g. they’ll need it for a task/assignment, it’ll protect them from litigation, etc

• give students choices, e.g. of texts, of assessment tasks... and allow them to personalise tasks where possible, e.g. to their own particular work setting (Beck et al., 2012)

• adapt the curriculum a little bit; ask students what they want to study

• set reflective tasks, e.g. asking students to reflect on how they could have done something better (Riberio et al., 2017)
Task: as educators or learners, how can we increase situational interest?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task: as educators or learners, how can we increase situational interest?</th>
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<td><strong>Think of a teaching &amp; learning situation you’ve been in. Briefly describe it:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>What technique could you (or the tutor) have used to boost SI in that moment?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Are there any barriers to doing this? If so, how could we overcome them?</strong></td>
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References


Summary so far

Interest is linked with learning.

Personal interest is the student’s set of long-term interests.

Situational interest is a short-term spike in interest... and it can be created for almost any topic, even if only for a moment.

Try: novelty, images, sounds, suspense, artefacts, problem setting, active learning, kinaesthetic tasks, experiments, offering choices...
**A critical aside**

• interest is correlated with learning (Hidi & Renninger, 2006)

And this might be because:

• interest causes learning

But!

Rotgans & Schmidt (2017b) point out two other possibilities:

• learning causes heightened interest
  or
• interest and knowledge influence each other reciprocally, that is...
Maybe it’s a loop:

That’s fine. And anyway, interest looks like a good thing *in and of itself*.

And we can’t directly influence a student’s sphere of Personal Interest.

So let’s boost Situational Interest.