

**Title:**                   **What triggers students' interest during first year university lectures?**

**Presenter:**       **Sarah Fong, Kathleen M. Quinlan**  
University of Kent

### **Session Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- explain the key features of interest theory (Renninger & Hidi, 2015) and its implications for learning design
- critically reflect on their assumptions about what students appreciate about lectures compared to empirical evidence from more than 700 students attending 12 case study lectures across various disciplines
- identify some of the particular behaviours students associate with friendly, enthusiastic and approachable lecturers
- summarise key findings from a study of what triggers students' interest in first year university lectures and consider implications for their practice

### **Session Outline**

Lecturing is a primary instructional mode in higher education, particularly in introductory modules. This format is often seen as a way to enthuse and motivate students, yet evidence suggests lectures are relatively ineffective at inspiring students' interest in the subject (Bligh, 1998). Stimulating interest is vital to education, as the level of a student's interest influences their attention, goals, emotions, ability to self-regulate, study strategies, and learning outcomes (Renninger & Hidi, 2015). Despite its importance, there is little higher education research on how different forms of instruction promote students' interest. This session addresses that gap.

We will define the key features of interest theory (Renninger & Hidi, 2011; Renninger & Hidi, 2015), focusing on the earliest phase in the development of interest: triggered situational interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). The assumption that interest is malleable focuses attention on how students' interest can be stimulated, nurtured and developed by teachers and through instructional design.

We will summarise a mixed-methods study of 12 first year lectures across a variety of subjects that included observations and data collected from students (n=706) about what they found most interesting in those lectures. Studying a copy of the questionnaire that students completed, session participants will predict students' responses. Actual findings from the research will be compared with participants' predictions. The lead presenter is currently an undergraduate student and served as research assistant on the project. As

the session focuses on students' perspectives, she is well-positioned to represent students' views and explain the findings, adding a student voice to the conference.

To conclude, participants will consider the implications of these findings for their own teaching and for how new teachers are prepared to teach.

### **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

Part 1: Present a short introduction to the problem, focusing on the ubiquity of lectures in the first year, along with concerns about the effectiveness of lectures in inspiring students' interest. (5 minutes)

Part 2: Briefly present key features of interest theory (Renninger & Hidi, 2011; Renninger & Hidi, 2015) and the phases of development of interest, with a particular focus on situational interest. (5 minutes)

Part 3: Briefly present the methods used in the study (5 minutes)

Part 4: Distribute the student questionnaire used in the study (2 pages of text), allowing time for participants to review and predict students' answers. Participants will silently read the student questionnaire, followed by discussion of predictions in pairs. (10 minutes)

Part 5: Present the results of the study, highlighting the features that students reported as most interesting within the observed lectures and giving illustrative examples, including a few short video clips. Comparisons between actual findings and participants' predictions will be made during an interactive presentation. (10 minutes)

Part 6: Conclude with questions and answers and a plenary discussion of implications of the finding for teacher development. Given these results, how might you enhance your own teaching? How can these findings be used in preparing new teachers?

### **References**

- Bligh, D. A. 1998. What's the use of lectures? Exeter: Intellect books.
- Hidi, S., & Renninger, K. A. 2006. The four-phase model of interest development. *Educational Psychologist*, 41(2), 111-127.
- Renninger, K. A., & Hidi, S. 2011. Revisiting the conceptualization, measurement, and generation of interest. *Educational Psychologist*, 46(3), 168-184.
- Renninger, K. A., & Hidi, S. 2015. *The power of interest for motivation and engagement*. New York: Routledge.