

Why Good Teachers Have Bad Classes



為何好的老師會有差勁的課

In this issue of Speaking of Teaching, we address the issue of why even the best, most knowledgeable teachers occasionally find themselves teaching a course that is just not working. In this introduction we propose several effective approaches to the problem, and then in the following pages listen to the reflections of one Stanford professor who found himself in a class that was not working. Finally we offer a list of excellent books that can help you avoid—or at least respond constructively to—a bad class.



在這個 Speaking of Teaching 的討論上，我們把議題指向：為何就算是最棒或最富學識的老師常偶然的發現他們教的課沒有作用。在這裡的指導上我們對問題提供許多有效的探討，接下來我們也會聽取一個 Stanford 教授感想，關於她發現自己提供的課程沒有效。最後我們會列出一些極佳的書，幫助你避免一堂差的課—或至少正面性的建議。

Bad classes happen for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it is the way the course has been organized—is it coverage-centered or learning-centered? Other times it seems that the traditional teaching methods—lecture and Socratic discussions—just don't engage students the way they used to. Sometimes students just don't do the reading...why is that? Much of the literature on effective teaching suggests that there are several important ways to approach the problem of a bad class: creating a sense of community and collaborative learning in the class, getting feedback about the course from your students early and throughout the term, varying your teaching methods, and bringing significant "active learning" moments into each class meeting.



生動學習(active learning)

coverage-centered

learning-centered 教學取向

差勁的課程通常有許多原因會發生，有時候是課程架構的關係，這堂課是 coverage-centered 或教學取向 (learning-centered)? 其他時候也可能是因為傳統教學方法的關係，像“蘇格拉底的演講及討論”，這些議題使學生不能與他們平常的習慣相符。為何有時學生總不閱讀？多數關於有效教學的文章對於幾個關於差勁的課堂探討如下：創造出一

些關於共通性及合作性學習的理念、在整個學期得取學生對於課堂的回饋、變化你的教學方法，以及在課堂加入些“生動學習(active learning)”的時刻。

More broadly speaking, however, the bad class can be approached from two intimately related directions. In her exceptionally useful book, *Tools for Teaching*, Barbara Davis suggests a student-centered approach of increasing motivation by getting students actively involved in generating the content of each class. Options range anywhere from designating students to be responsible for bringing in discussion questions to assigning short in-class writing assignments, to using debates, case studies, small group projects, and letting students have some say in choosing the course material. She writes, “Students learn by doing, making, writing, designing, creating, solving. Passivity dampens students’ motivation and curiosity” (p. 194).

This is true for undergraduate as well as graduate students. Even for large classes, Davis suggests in a chapter called “Supplements and Alternatives to Lecturing” that there are always ways to bring community and active learning into the classroom.



更廣泛的述說的話，儘管如此，差勁的課程是能夠從兩種相關的面向去解決的，在她格外有用的書“教學的工具(*Tools for Teaching*)”內，Barbara Davis 建議一個以學生為取向(student-centered)的解決方法，藉由使學生活躍的參與提升每堂課的內容去增加學習動機。可供選擇的方法極多像是：指派學生為帶領討論主題負責，指派短暫的課堂內書面作業，使用辯論，個案研究，小組專案，以及使學生對於選擇課堂教材上，能夠有所發言權，她寫道“學生能從做、寫、設計、創造及解決去學習。消極會打擊學生對於學習的動力及好奇心”(194 頁)，這項事實適用於大學生及碩士生，就算在很大的課堂內，Davis 也提議了一個章節，有關“關於講課的補充及選擇性(*Supplements and Alternatives to Lecturing*)”，裡面提到，總是有方法去帶領課堂內學習相關性及生動式的學習。

On the other side of the issue, a more teaching-centered approach is suggested by Wilbert McKeachie in his book, *McKeachie’s Teaching Tips*. McKeachie encourages teachers to be continually open to learning about teaching, and to make extensive use of evaluative feedback from peers, students, faculty development specialists, and even from themselves.

Whether by reading about teaching, attending workshops, talking to colleagues, or observing other teachers in action, McKeachie maintains that in order to know how to handle—and avoid—bad classes, our best resource is our own willingness to learn. He writes, in the chapter titled “Vitality and Growth throughout Your Teaching Career,” Talking about teaching with colleagues can be an invaluable source of ideas as well as emotional support when a class hasn’t gone well. The colleagues need not be in one’s own discipline. You will often get interesting feedback from teachers in other disciplines. (p. 322) McKeachie also strongly suggests that students should be offered the opportunity to provide course evaluation feedback early in the term so that changes can be made before the course is over. This one strategy—agreed on by virtually all pedagogical specialists—can go a long way toward helping a class that is not working.



在解決問題的另一個面向，以多半教學中心(teaching-centered)的解決方法，是由 Wilbert McKeachie 在他的書”*McKeachie’s Teaching Tips*”中所提到，McKeachie 鼓勵老師們持續的學習教學，並且廣泛從這些人得到評價性回饋：同事、學生、教學發展專家，甚至是自己。不管是閱讀有關教學的讀物，加入工作坊、與同事相談，或是觀察其他老師的舉止，我們最好的資源會是我們學習的意願。他在這主題”關於你教學生涯的生命力與成長 *Vitality and Growth throughout Your Teaching Career*”內提到，假如跟同事聊起教學的情形會是對點子無價的資源，並且能夠對於一堂沒有進行順利的課得到情緒上的幫助，同事不一定要與自己學門同領域的，你常常會在其他學科的老師得到有趣的回饋(332頁)，McKeachie 也強烈的建議應該要給學生在學期初期時給個課程評價回饋，這樣一來改變才能在課程結束前造成改變。這是個所有教學專家都會同意的策略，它能夠很持久的去解決一堂沒有作用的課程

Whether student-centered or teaching-centered, there are a wealth of resources and effective approaches available to the good teacher who wants to save a bad class; it could happen to anyone!



Translation

不管是以學生為中心或是以教學為中心的課程，都存在著許多的資源以及有效的解決方法可供各位想要解決差課堂的老師，任何人都可以做到!

(1)Confessions of a Bore

一個製造無聊者的自白

One honest Stanford professor, who asked to remain anonymous, submitted the following essay to CTL for this issue of Speaking of Teaching. We hope that his "confessions" will inspire our readers to explore the options we have outlined in this issue.



Translation

一個誠懇的 Stanford 教授，他以要求不具名的方式寄了這分論文給 CTL 討論關於這個 Speaking of Teaching 的問題，我們希望它的“表白”能夠啟發所有讀者去發現我們關於這問題列出的選擇

During some telephone conversations, there comes a moment when you realize that the connection has been cut off. Perhaps it is a silence from the other end that is just a little too long to be meaningful, or perhaps it is a lack of conviction in your own voice that causes you suddenly to note that the conversation is over (and has been for some time). Imagine that moment stretched into two-hour increments and repeating itself over ten weeks, and you have a recent episode in my

life as a teacher.

With so many years of education behind me, I am naturally no stranger to boredom. One late afternoon in graduate school—I can recall the exact moment: it was deep in a seminar where the poor old professor had already spent hours charging down blind alleys alone and was just launching into another tunnel of soliloquy—I told myself that boring people was unpardonable, easily avoided (wouldn't it be enough just to stop the monologue, open a window and invite someone else to talk?), and swore to myself that when I got to be in the professor's position I would take it as my moral responsibility never to be a bore.



Translation

在一些電話對談中，你會發現有一些時刻聯繫被切斷了，或許是另一端短暫且過長讓你覺得無意義的安靜，亦或是你缺乏確定性的話語讓你瞬間覺得談話已經結束了(並且已經過一段時間了)，想像那段時間延長到兩個小時，並且十個禮拜都會這樣發生，那你就有體會了我身為老師最近發生的一段插曲。

已經經過這麼多年教育的我，無聊對我來說並不是個陌生的詞句。一個在碩士時期的午後，我能夠清楚記得那一刻，那是個書報討論的當下，一個可憐的老教授已經花了數小時沿著盲目的窄巷行進，並且他接著只是開啟了另一段獨白—我告訴自己如此無趣的人，是不可原諒的，且很容易可以避免的(難道不能夠就此中斷獨白，打開一扇窗與人一同對話?)，並且當時我發誓，要是我遇到了跟那教授同樣的狀況時，我會以道德上的責任為戒而不如此無趣。

(2) Fortunately there were no witnesses.

幸好沒有旁觀者

A moral responsibility? Committing dullness is a serious act, I thought then and still think, because you cause the listener to wish part of his or her life away, to be drawn toward an attenuated, granular form of suicide. Bores are torturers. The bore—or to specify further: the deadly bore—does something so dreadful to time that it would have been more merciful simply to kill it. The more vividly one holds in mind the preciousness and finitude of lived time, the less one can condone boring anyone for any reason. These reasonings imply that the bore knows he is being a bore. That may not always be the case. I could not be sure about the professor in that long-ago seminar, but if he didn't know, he was the more to be pitied. I supposed that a bore without self-awareness was forgivable, but only because not entirely responsible; and someone as watchful as I would not have that excuse.



Translation

道德上的責任？承認愚蠢是個很重大的行動，但我更進一步想到，這樣的無趣會讓聽者希望他一部分的存在是沒有的，就像是在引領他人慢性或小部分的自殺一般。無聊是個折磨，這樣的無聊---或說個更精細點---致死的無聊，是個可怕的時刻，不如殺了他會比較仁慈。一個人若是越珍視無價及有限的在世時間，他就越義無反顧的不能容恕無聊。這些原因就是為何人會知道他正在製造無聊，但並不是一定如此，我不確定那些在很長時段書報討論的教授知道與否，但假如他不知道的話，他是最值得同情的。我認為那些不知自己造成無聊的人是可原諒的，但並不是完全的無責任，就像我並不會以自己的警覺心為藉口。

I do watch my audiences like a hawk. I know that what I have to tell them is not always what they got out of bed for. They may have to be amused and cajoled into listening. I set traps for attention, many kinds of traps for different kinds of attention. Jokes, metaphors, gestures, apostrophes, snatches of song, mimic voices, even the sluttish temptations of audio-visual and slide presentations—all are fair means. Eventually, or so I hope, the glow of polemic or the tight structure of a well-fashioned argument will by itself command attention. Facing an audience of a hundred, I keep a half-conscious running tally of the number of glazed eyes and averted faces, and should these rise much beyond ten or fifteen percent, I pull out the emergency measures: a dramatic change of topic, a knockdown argument in favor of the opposing side, even a little shouting and hand-waving to reawaken our memories of childhood punishments. Anything short of a fire alarm will do. We teachers are performers; our audiences tell us what we need to know about ourselves.



我像個鷹隼一樣注意觀眾，我知道我並不是要告訴他們，為何得起床到我課堂上，而是必須哄騙並取悅他們聆聽，我設定一些陷阱，博取注意的陷阱，像是笑話、隱喻、手勢、引號、片段的歌、模仿的聲音，甚至是一段誘惑的聲音穿插在報告內，無所不用其極。最後的結果，或至少我希望的，一段熱烈的爭論或是堅固且時髦的論點會自己引起注意。面對百位觀眾，我會半意識的注意近百位的人看誰眼神開始渙散或是避開了他的臉，當這些在 10 或 15%時，我使出緊急的方案：戲劇化的改變主題、瞬間決定一個爭論並贊同在反對方、甚至是小聲地喊叫或是擺動手去提醒我們童年被處罰的記憶，任何方法就只像個火災警報器一般，我們老師就像是表演者，觀眾告訴我們需要怎樣了解自己。

Or, sometimes, what we would rather not know. Given what I have said, you know that I have no excuse for being a bore: I don't approve of boredom, even on conditional grounds (the value of information imparted does not justify dullness in imparting it, though the perception of value may do away with the feeling of dullness), I know it when I see it, and I devote a lot of energy to watching for it and chasing it away. You should expect me to do anything in my power to avoid the failing I have just painted in such deeply moral colors (the torturing of time, the incitement to suicide by degrees). When you are being bored, the bore seems to be a perpetrator of some kind, the active force behind an offense; when you are the bore, it feels more like helplessness, like being marooned—on Easter Island, for example. "Easter Island" is the name a friend of mine gives to the staring rows of stony, uncomprehending faces you sometimes see from the front of an amphitheater.



或有些時候有些我們甚至不想知道的，就像我所說，我對於自己不成為一個無聊者沒有藉口：我不同意無聊的事物，甚至在特殊情況下(接收的資訊多具價值並不同於接收時多無聊，雖然接收具價值事物時會使無聊的感覺消除)，我在看到時我知道，並且我花很多力氣去監視它並且趕走它。你應該去期待我去做任何會避開我所說的失敗；像我前面所提到

的，那些深具道德責任的事(時間上的折磨、慢性的自殺)，當你已經表現了無聊，這無聊的行為就像是犯下了某種的侵犯，當你是個無聊者時，那就像是種無助，如同被放逐的感覺，例如放逐到復活島上。“復活島”是我一個朋友給那些在露天劇場看見那些觀眾，那些觀眾感覺被僵化或是產生了不解的表情。

I noticed early on in the course I'm making my confession about (a seminar with seven graduate students) that the students had little to say. Were they just timid? If so, they must have been petrified, for the only reaction I could read from most of their faces was a fixed expression that could easily be interpreted as polite hostility; one or two of them regularly met my eyes and nodded, a little too mechanically to convince me that it betokened any strong form of assent. Were we all speaking the same language?

Had anyone come to the class for a good reason, beyond the fact that the class was a degree requirement? Maybe I'll stop the didactic monologue and ask some questions, I thought. Help me, Socrates! But a question thrown out into the air and not picked up eventually becomes a rhetorical question to which the questioner is expected to provide a response. Answering my own question returned me to the stream of my detestable patter. It went on and on. At the very least, I was going to complete the job the university pays me for, and fill out the whole two hours with verbal behavior from which someone might, other conditions being favorable, extract some knowledge.

我注意到在課程剛開始時我正對著沒有太多話的學生表達(一堂只有7個學生的書報討論)，他們只是太膽小了嗎？如果是如此，他們或許只是發呆罷了，唯一我能從他們多數人臉上看到的是個修飾過的表情，或可解釋為禮貌性的反抗，其中一兩個規則性的與我四目相交並點頭，過度機械化以至於無法說服我他們是很強烈的贊同，我們是在說同一個語言嗎？他們其中是否有任何人是除了這是堂學位必修之外，因為很好的理由來這堂課的？我想或許我該停止獨白式的教導並且問些問題，幫助我吧蘇格拉底！但是當丟到空氣中的問題沒人接收的話，就會變成修辭學上的疑問句並且由發問者自己回答，回答我自己的問題變成我一連串令人厭惡的胡言亂語。最後，我只得完成領這所學校薪水後該做的事，整整兩個小時如同他人一樣表現的語言行為，並且比較受歡迎的傳達的些知識。

To construe my verbal behavior as a performance would impel the conclusion that it was not a very successful performance. The audience response was lacking, or at any rate was not registering on the meters at my disposal. So it could not have been a performance. Rather, what I was doing was extruding the required amount of verbal matter (two hours' worth), and shaping it as best I could: a little antithesis here, a little personification allegory there, now and again a chiasmus or a hysteron-proteron. In short, I was talking to myself—unwillingly—and trying to disguise my own boredom with an engagement in the rhetorical materiality of the verbal flow, like a child adding up the numbers of license plates on a long drive.



Translation

假如把我的言語行為用表演去推斷的話會得知這不是場非常成功的表演，失去了觀眾的回應，或不管怎樣都沒符合我的設定，所以這不算場表演，甚至，我只是在擠出兩個小時該有的單字量，並且做最有可能的一點修飾：這裡一點的對應句，那裏一點的擬人法，現在來一點交錯法或倒裝法，我正在不情願的跟自己說話，並且試著在修辭學材料上動手腳去偽裝我的無聊，樣一個小孩子在長途車程中把車牌號碼的數字加起來一樣無意義。

The self-aware bore is a desperate creature. He is conscious of the offense he causes his hearers, conscious of his responsibility for it, and in the worst of cases unable to do anything about it. (I am a few years too young to simulate a heart attack and thus get out of the room.) While my mind raced about, seeking expedients, escapes and alternatives, my voice, reliable after years of practice in less trying situations, continued to emit a certain volume of verbiage under a certain pressure for a certain time (in obedience to a flow ratio established by centuries of academic precedent): and this volume, sculpt and twist it though I might, was, I knew, the very substance of boredom. Boredom fills the room, makes movement impossible, asphyxiates any alternative to itself. It is a painful thing to realize that one is the source of boredom, that dullness has taken one over, like a disturbing odor or an involuntary tic. Possession by devils would have been more exciting. One can only wish for it to be past, and if the audience will not help (my audience was too reserved, too passive or too hostile to try), the only horizon for its being over is the end of the quarter. That means taking the granular death-wish in large handfuls, and having enough left over at the end of class to carry it home.



Translation

自我意識到的無聊者是個無可救藥的生物，他意識到他對自己聽眾的侵犯，意識到他對這一切有所責任，並且最糟的是沒辦法去改變它(假如要假裝因為心臟病而離開這間教室，我還太年輕到差個幾年)，當我的心已經馳騁在外，尋求權宜之計、逃脫之法或是替代方案時，我的聲音很可靠的依照多年的訓練，持續地以一個特定的冗長音量在一特定的壓力且特定的時間傳遞(遵守幾個世紀以來學術界建立起來的流量)：並且這聲音儘管我嘗試去徒勞的塑造並扭轉他，還是是就我所知的無聊物質，無料充斥整個房間並使移動非常困難，使所有替代的可能窒息。當了解到自己是無厘的製造者是感到非常痛苦的，呆滯已經掌管了一切，就像是一個擾人的氣味或是無法控制的抽蓄，假如是被惡魔控制還令人感到比較高興。唯一想到解決的方法，並且在觀眾都不會有所幫助下(我的觀眾太保守，太被動及太不願意嘗試)，唯一能見到結束的地平線只有時間的結束，這代表假如我把這些些微自殺意願的元素收集起來的話，還剩一堆夠我在課堂結束後拿回家。

If our species can feel boredom, there must be a purpose to it. Presumably the reaction is triggered by fruitless activity: those of our predecessors who persisted in looking for fishes in the treetops, and did not feel boredom, starved before passing on their genes. Boredom is the vast penumbra surrounding focus, attention and will; it defines itself relative to these three. But even given this proximity of dullness to more valuable mental powers, there is surely no need to teach people how to be bored: there is enough noise, enough pointlessness, enough waste already, and the very formlessness of these opposites of attention makes it doubtful whether they have a lesson in them that could not be taught equally well by a proportionate amount of time spent waiting in line or searching haystacks for needles. (continued on page four)



Translation

如果我們的物種能夠感覺到無聊，那一定是有需要它才存在，我假設這些反應是被無意義的行為觸發：那些想要在緣木求魚，並且不感到無聊的老祖宗早就在傳宗接代前餓死了。無聊是在“焦點”、“專注”以及“意志”旁環繞的陰影，他因為有這三者才得以定義，但就算給這些接近呆滯上施加多點有價值的精神力量去改變，還是不用怎樣教就可以讓人學會

無聊：在這注意力的反面物質上已經有足夠的雜音、足夠的無意義、足夠的浪費了；以及這些無聊不定的形狀讓人去懷疑是不是有任何教育意義在裡面，那些教育意義沒辦法用大量的時間學會，也跟草堆中找針一樣困難。

An experienced and optimistic colleague of mine urged me to put the experience behind me. "It's not your fault. You are a good teacher. Everyone can have a bad class. They were not ready for or receptive to what you had to say. You will go on to have better classes." Perhaps. But having been an incorrigible, helpless bore for several weeks at a stretch makes it harder for me to hear identity-statements such as "you are a good teacher" as anything but well-meant mantra-chanting. The horror I felt on observing the spectacle of the helpless bore led me to draw a line between myself and the bores, a line which it was not in my power to maintain. Perhaps the stubbornness that made me continue with a class that was not working—that is, my determination not to be a bore, not to admit that I could be a bore—was the real villain of the piece.



Translation

一個有經驗且樂觀的同仁主張我去忘掉那些經驗 “這不是你的錯，你是個好老師，每個人都可能有堂差的課，學生只是還沒準備好或是能接受你準備說的東西，你會繼續下去並會好轉”，或許吧，但是當你是個無可救藥且無助的人，且持續過了幾個禮拜後，你會很難願意聽到相同的陳述，像是“你是個好老師”這些無惡意但像誦經般的言語。這些我所觀察到巨大無助的無聊，讓我害怕的築起一道跟無聊的防線，但是以我的能力是無法維持這條線的，也就是說，那些個我不想成為個無聊者的目標，以及不想承認我會是個無聊者，只會是裡面個淘氣的部分。

Speaking of Teaching is compiled and edited by CTL

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