

## Book Review

# Teaching Intensive and Accelerated Courses: Instruction that Motivates Learning

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Citation: Raymond Wlodkowski and Margery Ginsberg. (2010) *Teaching Intensive and Accelerated Courses: Instruction that Motivates Learning*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. ISBN: 978-0-7879-6893-9

**Publisher's Description:** In this comprehensive resource, Raymond J. Wlodkowski and Margery B. Ginsberg describe how to meet the challenge of teaching intensive and accelerated courses to nontraditional learners and working adults. By making motivation and cultural relevance essential to instruction, they clearly show what instructors can do to enhance learning in classes that can last from three to six hours. *Teaching Intensive and Accelerated Courses* makes full use of the authors' twenty years of experience researching and teaching accelerated courses, along with selected strategies from Wlodkowski's classic *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, to offer tried-and-true practices instructors can use to provide continuously engaging learning.

Some of the rich interest in this book is off the page: expert teachers describing their practice and summarizing their experience in comments and suggestions. On the page, the authors provide a wealth of resources for designers and instructors involved in producing intensive teaching courses. The many years development these authors have committed their professional lives to in the adult education field make current debates over changing worlds of MOOCs, flipped learning, inclusive education, and similar contemporary tertiary concerns, seem over-inflated – a lot of thinking and teaching practice has in fact anticipated many of these changes, as seen in this thoughtful text.

The book has for me two distractions and four real strengths. The first two are noted briefly so readers are prepared to connect to the book's underlying value which makes it a welcome addition to the shelves of practicing adult education teachers. The authors spend the book – except for opening and closing remarks – treating intensives and accelerated learning as broadly the same; so does this review. Other terms such as block courses, or block teaching, also mean intensified teaching, often occupying one or two days over several weekends separated by individual assignment work, rather than semester-long sequences of 1-3 hours of lectures and small classes every week. Thus the crucial task of maintaining students' interests and attention when concentrating class contact hours into a much shorter time is the defining characteristic of such instruction.

The distractions: First, the staging between chapters is somewhat clunky. Chapter three seemed out of sync – an interpolation between setting up the four-fold motivation model of chapter two which is resumed in chapters 4-7. Each of those chapters elaborates on the four

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components of motivating learners in intensive courses. Again, the final chapter 9 seems a step-change from the previous discussions. In each of these chapters there is plenty of useful material; just that the mixture of advocacy for intensive instructors and questions of instructor retention sit awkwardly within the flow of how and why instructors do, or can learn to do, good work teaching intensives. I have no disagreement with the point that sessional/casual/adjunct/ contract staff who do much of the “heavy lifting” in such teaching settings are undervalued, merely the fit of these thoughts with the main flow of the book.

Second, the repeated emphasis of the importance of cultural openness was an interesting inflection in the book. I am not sure if it emerges from a period of time shifting educators’ sensibilities about the need to be less “white” and more flexible and inclusive in responding to learning needs of migrant, Black, Hispanic, or other marginalized student cohorts. Or possibly it is a United States inflection which other educational systems and cultures talk about in some similar ways, but also in different ways. Nowhere else is there such a large block of Anglo-European white population, so perhaps the need to keep moving towards more accepting learning modes, especially for adult learners to whom a sense of exclusion can be terribly demotivating, is appropriate. Whatever the reason, I am not faulting this orientation, but in full sympathy and approval of it. Formal or official policies of inclusion certainly benefit from reminders and urging to help genuinely embed these values in everyday teaching practice and other spheres of life. The authors did not have space to develop this connection they see with adult learning in intensives, but it kept recurring as a meme in the text.

Neither of these are wrongs, but worth commenting on for readers inside and outside the United States to position the book relative to their interests, and gaining the value of the ideas for their own needs and purposes. The four strengths of the book are what make it worth having in an institutional library, borrowing it, or owning a copy as a teacher’s companion. It would also serve well as a text for training instructors developing or delivering intensives. My copy I view in similar light to Ken Bain’s book on excellent teachers, to which I refer below.

The first of the book’s strengths is the description of the motivational framework. The authors say (p. 14) this is offered to “enhance learning in intensives,” for adults. In many ways this has wider application than just intensives, or adults, though obviously this field is where their educational work has developed the value of these strategies for motivating students. The four motivational cores that need addressing the authors posit are the following: establishing inclusion, developing a positive learning attitude, amplifying meaning, and engendering competence. For each of these they suggest a pair of measures (p. 25), “that indicate, from the learner’s perspective, that the condition is present in the learning environment.” Of the four motivational components proposed, the one I have seen the least described and explored in practical terms in educational literature is inclusion. I want to offer a special commendation for pointing to the empowering and enabling effects that inclusive teaching confers on learners.

The two criteria the authors suggest in gauging inclusion are the sense of general respect, and the feeling of connection, found in positive learning environments. Perhaps there is a link here the authors are implicitly making to their underlying theme of cultural openness or sensitivity: “motivation and culture are inseparable,” they affirm at p. 16. Perhaps they are saying adults who do not fit the traditional WASP stereotype because of different cultural experiences and life knowledge are particularly hard-hit by the invisible negativity of lack of respect and disconnection – “you” or “them,” rather than “we” or “us.” It is not an easy thing for instructors to comprehend and learn inclusion when they do not know they are *not* being inclusive; good intentions are necessary but insufficient for inclusive teaching in themselves.

Teachers from any majority, or any predominant group, find it difficult to incorporate this most diffuse but effective agent of learning. Formal rules will not in themselves cause deep inclusion to happen, even if they provide a framework to allow it. I would like to write much more here than is possible, but the stimulus of doing this review pushes me to reflect further on a wide range of experiences about inclusive teaching and learning.

The second strength that appeals to me is the last chapter's suggestions for engagement and retention. Despite my comment on this as an awkward step change earlier in this review, the authors' concern with not just the process of motivation or instructional process is, in itself, commendable. Motivation is indeed a psycho-social process, but teaching is not just a game played on the surface. These are authors genuinely immersed in their industry, who have seen adult education growing in significance across their careers, contributing to that change in socially beneficial ways, but also conscious of the unhappy realpolitik of how casual staff are often used-up in the production of adult education. There are questions of power in this, not just idealization of educational practice. There seems no ready way of changing this given present economic pressures on college education. The authors' unwillingness to simply bracket the issue raises questions about sustainable education policies. So despite my perception of the chapter sitting awkwardly, it contains a valuable point.

The third strength I enjoyed is the teacherly experience seeping into the pages. There are many gems of teaching wisdom and observation made in the pages that are independent of the particular structures of the book, or exposition of material within the chapters, but flow from long experience of teaching adult learners in intensive settings. These, at times, include the charts or boxes that summarize runs of ideas, or the multiple exercises described, but can also be found in notes on methods and strategies that are offered throughout. Sometimes just a phrase or a juxtaposition of two ideas is productive of reflection and thought. Different readers will undoubtedly respond to different ones of these observations depending upon their interests, teaching backgrounds and intended next step in career or understanding. That is all to the good, and the richness of this subtext allows this to occur. As a fan of developments in the scholarship of teaching and learning, the sense here of careful observation made from depth of experience reminds me of Ken Bain's (2004) book, *What the Best College Teachers Do*, based on his long-running research across many institutions and exemplary and inspiring teachers. Teaching research and rigor are ultimately contributions to the professional delivery of excellent teaching and learning.

The fourth and final point raised in this review is the value of the discussion of the motivating effects of meaning and learning, particularly but not solely in chapter 6. The efficacy of meaning-making for adult learning appeals to me. Although I am trained in both psychology and sociology, perhaps this fits my orientation as a teaching sociologist. Other readers may just as readily find main points of interest for them, or extensions of their own insights, in other parts of the book. Again, like inclusion, meaning is integral to the soft, diffuse practices of good teaching. It is the heart and energy around which structures and formalities act as carapace. For my money, the authors well express how inclusion and meaning construction and reconstruction are ultimately the most powerful and effective motivators for adult learning. Inclusion is a key kind of meaning making which is motivational and fundamental for creating willingness and ability to learn. The table at p. 117 of "guiding critical questions" is a great instance of a practical resource in a discussion of meaning in the teaching process. There are plenty of other examples that indicate additional value of the book as a reference or resource for instructors.

### Reference

Bain, Ken. (2004). *What the Best College Teachers Do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.