

The Decoding interview took place on July 7, 2023, at the Bavarian Center for Innovative Teaching in Ingolstadt during a workshop organized by the Decoding the Disciplines working group.

## **Transcript**

[00:00:00] **Speaker 0:** Recording in progress.

[00:00:08] **C1:** <Name of E>, you had a bottleneck. Can you tell us about it? Him? It?

[00:00:17] **E:** It. The bottleneck is:

[00:00:17] **E:** How do I get my colleagues to want to teach in my Scale-Up room?

[00:00:32] **C1:** Hmm. In what, again?

[00:00:32] **E:** In my scale-up room. I'm planning to set up a scale-up room. And in there, I can no longer deliver a standard lecture – facing the class. I can't stand at the front because there's no clear orientation for me as a lecturer with a front and a back. Instead, there are students sitting with their backs to me. And – my colleagues say, 'I can't teach in there'. That means I'd like my colleagues to use engaging teaching methods that can also be implemented in a room like that.

[00:01:15] **C1:** Okay, to me, those are two separate issues: using active teaching methods and using your room. Which is more important to you?

[00:01:26] **E:** Using active elements.

[00:01:30] **C1:** In your own lessons.

[00:01:34] **E:** In their own lessons. Yes

[00:01:35] **C1:** In their own lessons. Yes.

[00:01:38] **E:** Can I just interrupt again for a moment? I find it really difficult when <Name of C2> is sitting here and I want to have a conversation with both of you.

[00:01:45] **C1:** Shall we swap?

[00:01:46] **E:** Yes

[00:01:47] **C1:** You sit here and the two of us sit there.

[00:01:50] **E:** It's just... I feel so – awkward. Yes, I'm ready now. Yes, yes,

[00:01:55] **C2:** Exactly.

[00:01:59] **C1:** Okay, so you'd like your teachers to make more use of the possibilities offered by active teaching methods?

[00:02:22] **E:** Yes. Okay. And if they can do that, I actually believe they'll naturally move towards a new classroom layout as well.

[00:02:32] **C1:** But that's the second goal?

[00:02:33] **E:** That's the second goal.

[00:02:34] **C2:** And that means it's fine with you if we put that to one side for now?

[00:02:41] **E:** Yes. Because I believe they need that as a basic skill to be able to teach in the classroom. Yes.

[00:02:49] **C1:** OK. How can you tell that they aren't doing it? That they aren't using engaging methods in their own lessons?

[00:03:13] **E:** From conversations in the staff room.

[00:03:18] **C1:** Like what?

[00:03:18] **E:** Where they tell you that they find professional development seminars absolutely dreadful, that you're just forced to go there, have to spend the day there, and that you can't use any of it in your own teaching. And they see it as a necessary evil that creates work they don't want to do, or can't do, or pretend they can't do.

[00:04:07] **C1:** I didn't quite understand that last sentence.

[00:04:10] **E:** They say they have a fully developed lecture plan. And they'd have to revise that or think about: Which parts of it do I take out to teach them differently? Plus: Will I actually get any content across at all if I use such 'fluffy' methods now?

[00:04:46] **C2:** If I may just jump in here. This line of questioning strikes me as a) a bit vague and b) we'd have to rely on hearsay. Wouldn't a better question perhaps be why you do it? Because then, as an expert, you can explain why you do it. Otherwise, we'd just be speculating about your colleagues. That's how I've understood it so far.

[00:05:27] **E:** Mhm.

[00:05:28] **C1:** If I've understood you correctly, you're struggling with – 'ideas' isn't quite the word – with the observation that others don't dare to use active teaching methods in situations where they consider it to be more effort. Have I got that right? And not just more effort, but without the confidence that it will definitely pay off?

[00:06:10] **E:** Yes

[00:06:11] **C1:** And as <Name of C2> says, can you think of situations in your own life where – now you're talking about yourself, not her. Do you know of situations where you've heard about a new method, you have absolutely no guarantee that it might work in your teaching, and it's clearly more effort for you – and I know you've got quite a lot on your plate at the moment – and yet you still take the step to give it a go? Do you recognise this situation in your own life?

[00:07:05] **E:** That was such a long question. Which situation am I supposed to recognise?

[00:07:09] **C1:** Do you recognise the following situation in your life? You've heard about a new, engaging teaching method. You have no guarantee that it will work for you. And you've got a lot on your plate. And yet you take the plunge and give it a go. Do you have a specific example?

[00:07:41] **E:** Yes.

[00:07:41] **C1:** I see. Can you describe it to us?

[00:07:46] **E:** Well, I'm really struggling to keep these three sub-questions in mind today. But the question is... You've heard about a new method, so why don't I use it anyway – let me put it simply. Is it because I believe in science?

[00:08:08] **C1:** I'm not concerned with the 'why' just yet; I'm concerned with the situation. Do you know of a specific situation where this has come up or could come up?

[00:08:28] **C2:** Where you personally faced the question: Do I use the new method, or is it too much for me?

[00:08:38] **E:** Yes. Several times already. I've been through this when introducing "Should I use peer instruction questions?", "Should I try an inverted classroom?", and now I'm already on the third one – or rather, this is the third time I've asked myself: "Do I want to try a new classroom layout as well?" But I think the most drastic was, so to speak, introducing the peer instruction questions for the first time. And I didn't offer them... consistently either. Because the added value wasn't clear to me during the first run. And the effort involved was immense. In terms of "How do I organise the clickers?" You had to carry them from building to building.

[00:09:42] **C1:** You had these questions,

[00:09:43] **E:** Some of the questions were already prepared and could be used as they were, whilst others were devised by me. And I couldn't immediately see the added value for the students. I actually stopped doing them for two years and then reintroduced them. And now that I've run them for a semester, I can see developments where the questions might be working better now than they did six years ago.

[00:10:32] **C1:** OK. I have a suggestion: that we take as a case study for this conversation the situation where... you'd tried it before and it didn't go so well. But then – I think you said, two years later,

[00:10:50] **E:** Mhm

[00:10:50] **C1:** A while later, you did eventually take the plunge and give it a go. Would that be a suitable case to examine how you went about taking that step?

[00:11:12] **E:** Because the circumstances have changed so much, it's probably not a very suitable case. There was the shift from... to the flipped classroom; I suddenly had more time – so that criticism that 'it takes too much time' – I was able to counter that with a different teaching method that covers the whole scenario. Technologically, a lot has developed. I was no longer reliant on the clickers that I had to carry into the lecture theatre, because the lecture theatres now at least have Wi-Fi, so that students can use their smartphones... And the circumstances have changed in favour of the teaching method.

[00:12:00] **C1:** Do they have, or did they have?

[00:12:00] **E:** Well, it was a matter of moving from 'I've stopped' to 'I've started again'; there was a sort of turning point in between, and that's why I decided to revive it.

[00:12:08] **C1:** OK. What about the first instance where you used peer instruction for the very first time? Was that a case involving a threshold?

[00:12:27] **E:** It was a small hurdle, yes.

[00:12:31] **C1:** Do you know of a situation with a higher barrier to entry?

[00:12:44] **E:** Ah, that's difficult.

[00:12:44] **C1:** Or can you think of a situation you haven't tried yet where the barrier would be higher?

[00:13:21] **E:** I can't get started today. I...

[00:13:23] **C2:** Perhaps we should go back to your original question. You wanted to know: how can you get your colleagues to do it?

[00:13:30] **E:** Yes.

[00:13:33] **C2:** Which of the situations you have in mind right now would best fit your colleagues' situation? The first PI introduction? The second? Let's try to identify that specific situation.

[00:13:56] **E:** Well, I would now... May I have a go? I'm not basing this on a specific method or situation. For me, it doesn't really matter what I introduce. I always have... the fear and worry: 'Will my students still learn anything? Can I manage this? Is it good enough? And what arguments are there for doing it despite all the worries and concerns?'

[00:14:40] **C1:** Okay, that sounds good. We've actually got this new <Name of C2> method. No, not <Name of C2>. Let's go with something else. The Petersen method. The new Petersen method. Perhaps you've heard of it? And it would be great to introduce it into your own lessons. Would you like to walk us through the process? How might you go about introducing the Petersen method, even though nobody knows about it, and even though you're not sure it'll work?

[00:15:29] **E:** First, I'd do a lot of research into the method.

[00:15:33] **C1:** Okay. Is that the topic we can take up now?

[00:15:36] **E:** Yes. Yes. Yes.

[00:15:37] **C1:** Okay. Because for me, that's the transition to the next phase of the conversation. Okay? Okay, how do you go about it?

[00:15:49] **E:** That means: Our bottleneck is... Or: As an expert, how do I introduce a new method? Or is that the positive way of putting it?

[00:16:03] **C1:** How do you bring yourself to introduce this new method, even though there are several difficulties involved? Do you think this is a suitable topic for this conversation?

[00:16:26] **E:** Yes. For me, we could leave out those difficulties for now. But first of all – there are bound to be pros and cons. I'd say: How do you introduce a Petersen method or a new method?

[00:16:39] **C1:** No, not how you introduce it. But how you bring yourself to do it.

[00:16:43] **E:** Yes, or... how I get myself to do it

[00:16:44] **C1:** You're obviously an expert at introducing things. But I think you want to get others to overcome that mental barrier.

[00:16:58] **E:** Mhm.

[00:16:58] **C1:** And you can do it too; you're an expert at this as well. So I think – maybe I'm wrong, but I think what matters to you isn't how you implement it, but how you take that first step, overcoming your reservations and going for it anyway, even though it takes a lot of effort. You don't know if you can pull it off, you don't know if it'll work.

[00:17:29] **E:** Mhm

[00:17:29] **C1:** Is that right? Does that make sense to you? Okay. I just want to be absolutely sure I haven't pressured you into this.

[00:17:47] **E:** Yes, I feel a bit like I'm in the hot seat.

[00:17:50] **C1:** I'll take that as a yes. Is the situation (unclear) to you? I'm putting the lady in the hot seat right now. Is that what you want?

[00:18:10] **E:** Let it cool down again

[00:18:10] **C2:** Let it cool down again. Yes. As an expert, why don't you just start by describing how you would go about it?

[00:18:30] **C2:** How do you motivate yourself?

[00:18:41] **E:** I'm someone who loves facts, but I don't blindly trust them. What I mean is, at some point you hear about the method for the first time and think, "Oh, that sounds interesting." And you think, "I want to give my students... the very best possible experience." And one study or several studies say, 'This is a brilliant method; you should use it – it's had great success, or students have had great success with it'. The first time you hear this, it's usually through hearsay, and then I start by checking: Is the

hearsay true? Is there any evidence for this method anywhere? Whether in books, articles, or whatever, something that backs it up a bit. And then I look at examples next, preferably from my own subject area, where people have already done this. So that I've seen the application, the approach, and the implementation in action. But seeing it myself in person would of course be ideal; you don't usually manage that. But at least seeing it documented somewhere. And then, as a first step, I usually try – with minimal effort on my part – to take a ready-made example and incorporate it into my teaching. And the more extensive the method is – that is, if it's a method that has to run throughout the whole semester because something has to be done five times at the start, middle and end, building on each other – that's a bigger hurdle for me to overcome than if I know I can use it as a standalone element in a single session.

[00:21:03] **C1:** May I briefly summarise these points?

[00:21:06] **E:** Mhm.

[00:21:06] **C1:** So, you look for... you look for evidence in the literature?

[00:21:24] **E:** Because I believe that teaching itself is a science.

[00:21:27] **C1:** Because why?

[00:21:28] **E:** That teaching is a science. I think that's a basic assumption I hold.

[00:21:42] **C1:** Mhm. Yes, I think that's very important too. And then you look for examples in your own teaching where that would fit?

[00:21:56] **E:** No, for examples from people who've already done it, which I can adapt so I don't have to start from scratch, so to speak.

[00:22:09] **C1:** (writes:) "that work for me"? Is that...

[00:22:27] **E:** Yes.

[00:22:27] **C1:** And then there was something else. You wanted to ask a question about it. I can't remember what it was. That's the last thing you said.

[00:22:44] **E:** As a stand-alone solution. I'm trying not to use... methods that are long-winded,

[00:22:54] **C1:** Hmm.

[00:22:55] **E:** I'm not just going to give it a quick try.

[00:22:59] **C1:** So you want to know the... duration.

[00:23:03] **E:** I'd rather keep it small and, ideally, actually see "Ah yes,

[00:23:10] **E:** it actually works".

[00:23:13] **C1:** Small enough that it's feasible.

[00:23:18] **E:** Yes, and that it can be integrated into the existing concept.

[00:23:30] **C1:** Oh, new point. I'll write that down first. (writes:) to be feasible. Again, what was the last thing?

[00:23:49] **E:** That can be integrated. So, I haven't tried the flipped classroom as a standalone experiment. Because I already knew from literature reviews and so on that, even though many people say you can do it, if I tell my students, my cohort, 'Now, before next time, read the text or watch this video, and then the next session will be completely different from usual', then I don't do it either, because I know it will probably fail.

[00:24:31] **C1:** You said earlier that it has to... that my words now have to fit with your working style, with your existing working style. Yes

[00:24:40] **E:** Yes, it just has to be integrable; I think that's the key point.

[00:24:41] **C1:** It's integrable (writes). In my seat, integrable into my working style?

[00:25:00] **E:** Or teaching style, actually.

[00:25:12] **C2:** As I understand it, we're already there. Actually, during the selection and implementation phase of a new method – the Petersen method, or whatever it's called – that's how I understand it now. I'd like to go back a bit. Because at this point you've already made the decision: I want to introduce a new method that I'm now convinced of based on the literature. That's how I understood it.

[00:25:50] **E:** For me, the consideration is, I could introduce it. But I could also drop out at any point. So, if I find that the evidence fits at the top, of course, but I can't find any examples that actually fit my subject, then I'd put it aside again.

[00:26:08] **C2:** I'd still like to take a step back and look at your decision-making process. What I haven't quite grasped yet is: what made you decide to get started here in the first place? Because this is where you start putting in the effort.

[00:26:32] **C2:** How did you get to the point where you said, 'I'll read up on it and then join this group'?

[00:26:59] **E:** (very long pause to think) On the one hand, curiosity; on the other – and this might sound strange when I say it here – I want to belong to a group like yours. But that's only possible, so to speak, if I can contribute something myself. In other words, I can't just take; at some point, I have to contribute something to the group.

[00:27:32] **E:** And you want to be remembered by your students. So perhaps I imagine that if five of my students are sitting together sometime later, they'll say, 'Gosh, do you still remember <Surname of E>, the one we had back then?' And not, 'Oh man, that one...' Because I would have liked to have had a different kind of lesson myself. Because, looking back on my professional life, I realised I'd been brought up to be what I'd call a 'maths whizz' – someone who could calculate super-fast and super-well, but didn't understand a thing. You can get great marks, but that doesn't necessarily make you the best engineer. I think those are my reasons for looking at scenarios in the first place.

[00:28:50] **C1:** Those are, of course, very lofty motivations.

[00:28:59] **E:** It's also interesting to consider the price you pay for it.

[00:29:05] **C1:** For the effort.

[00:29:11] **E:** So, what kind of resistance do you face? These are all things you can do relatively behind closed doors. But then going public with them does tend to cause some resentment. And you have to be prepared to put up with that.

[00:29:37] **C1:** And if I've understood you correctly, you manage it because this fits with your ideals – I'm not sure if 'ideal' is the right word in German. It fits. It fits with your self-image in some way. I'd like to bring together this motivation you've been talking about. Firstly – I've forgotten the first point now – but you want to be accepted within a group, a specific group. You want to be remembered positively by your students. And what did you say before?

[00:30:41] **E:** The students should acquire skills, that is, gain understanding.

[00:30:48] **C1:** Okay.

[00:30:51] **E:** That was it, my students should acquire skills.

[00:30:57] **C1:** Okay. Let's take the following scenario: you've come up with an idea, devised a plan, where you believe the students will clearly gain an understanding – in other words, acquire the necessary skills. But in doing so, you run the risk of not being supported by this group. Which would be more important to you?

[00:31:43] **E:** Quite selfishly, the group.

[00:31:46] **C1:** So that's a stronger motivation; it generates a stronger motivation.

[00:32:03] **E:** Not a stronger motivation, but it would be a bigger setback. The motivation would also be... So there wouldn't be that sense of belonging, which I didn't have at the start either. Would that... My students should acquire skills and, if necessary, not be held back. But if there's now perhaps a group that says, 'Ah, phew' [note: meant rather negatively]. Then I still want my students to be able to do things, but introducing a new method would, so to speak, be held back by the regulatory factor, so that I say, 'Well, they'll acquire those skills somehow else, or that skill isn't so important to me anymore.'

[00:32:55] **C2:** When you just mentioned the group, just to clarify for me, the term 'group' – were you referring to your colleagues?

[00:33:05] **E:** Exactly, in the second instance it was the group of colleagues. Before that, it was the group – I'm being quite specific here – the working group, that is, everyone who has a positive attitude towards learning, teaching and development. And there was actually an initial nudge from within the university itself, from a teaching specialist who opened my eyes a bit, saying, 'Look, there's more to it than just "stand up there and give a lecture".'

[00:33:43] **C1:** And was she a role model for you?

[00:33:52] **E:** My mini-group, so to speak, who gave me a boost. There's at least one person who still pats you on the back afterwards, even when things go wrong, and says, 'Hey, great that you did it and gave it a go.'

[00:34:10] **C1:** I'd like to jot down two things. Firstly, what appears to be an important assumption: namely, that students want or need to acquire skills in some way. Secondly, as part of this – so that you can take all this on – it's important for you to seek out groups that offer you support. May I write these two down? (writes – not visible) Must or want? I'm undecided.

[00:35:10] **E:** Must. They don't know that they're supposed to want to.

[00:35:26] **C1:** Okay. And then, yes, for your own peace of mind, you need that support.

[00:35:33] **E:** Yes.

[00:35:59] **C1:** Are you happy with the list?

[00:36:10] **E:** Yes, I am.

[00:36:12] **C1:** Have we left anything out?

[00:36:16] **E:** Whether we can leave anything out or whether...

[00:36:23] **C1:** Whether the three of us might have let something slip through the net?

[00:36:44] **C2:** If I take that on board, there's one more term I feel is missing from the list. That would be the topic – what did we call it? – one's own ideals, one's own values. As I understood you, values, curiosity, and your personal vision – that's also a driving force behind getting involved in the chain in the first place.

[00:37:17] **E:** Yes.

[00:37:18] **C1:** Can you put these values into words?

[00:37:35] **E:** For me, those are covered. For me, it's about students having to acquire skills, being allowed to acquire skills – for all I care, they can acquire skills – teaching as a discipline, and me as a person who isn't the one saying 'I'm leading the way'. For me, those are the three most important aspects.

[00:38:10] **C1:** May I make a suggestion? I'm really curious about this. I don't think it's simply a matter of seeking approval from people; rather, these are very special people from whom you'd like to receive support. And I suspect that these people stand for something you consider very important in the world. From which people would you like to receive support?

[00:38:56] **E:** Now we're back to ideals. People who share the same ideals or basic assumptions as me.

[00:39:04] **C1:** Namely?

[00:39:06] **E:** That teaching is a science whose success can be proven, and that students should acquire skills.

[00:39:19] **C2:** That was a point, that and that. (underlined on whiteboard: teaching is a science; acquiring skills; support)

[00:39:28] **E:** For me, those are the three basic assumptions that are absolutely crucial.

[00:39:44] **C1:** I think we might have come to the end of this conversation. We could, of course, go into exactly how you do that. The question is whether you'd like to explore

that further, or whether you'd say, 'No, that's fine, it gives a complete picture.' What do you think?

[00:40:13] **E:** For me, this is the point where I say 'Slow Food', as <Name of a member of Decoding working group> always so aptly put it: decoding is Slow Food. I think we should leave it at that and let things take their course for now, because this particular topic of support wasn't really on my mind. It's also stirring a lot within me right now. And so I'd like to say: I think we're [done]

[00:40:56] **C2:** Okay.

[00:40:59] **C1:** Thank you both. That was lovely, that was really lovely.