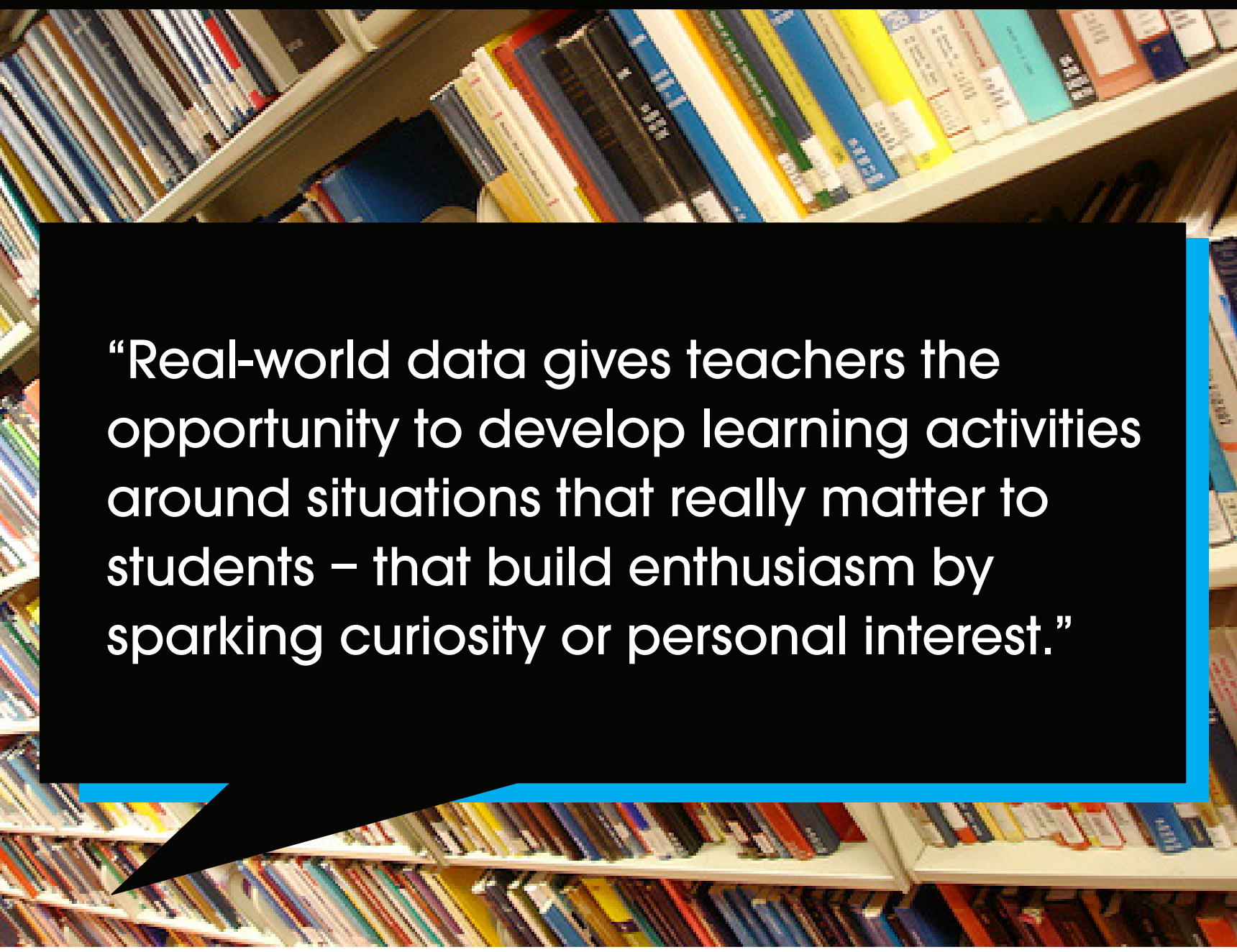


Learning and Teaching: Telling Stories about and with Data (research-based)

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“Real-world data gives teachers the opportunity to develop learning activities around situations that really matter to students – that build enthusiasm by sparking curiosity or personal interest.”

In the beginning...

Almost all UK social science students graduate with only a limited experience of skills in handling quantitative data; few students use any quantitative methods in their project/dissertation work, and hardly any undertake secondary analysis of existing data.

This situation exists despite radical improvements in web-based access to and manipulation of data, a rapidly-developing situation in the last 5-10 years. It is not well understood how these valuable data resources are being used in learning and teaching, as delivery of learning takes place at an institutional level and experiences are rarely shared.

In 2009, we undertook a project to better understand how the socio-economic real-world data Mimas provides to students is used across the academic social science sector to raise student skill levels.

Finding stories

- Summer 2009 - work commissioned to uncover who's using the data in teaching
- Semi-structured interviews with teachers and students
- Stories (or case studies) written up as news items on the Mimas website - "Census data - from the real world, for the real world" and "Helping economics students 'keep it real'"
- More in-depth stories to be made available with multimedia content to share with other social science teachers and students
- Emphasis on using real-world data to help students develop real-world skills
- Report compiled by the UK's ESRC to investigate levels of quantitative methods teaching at undergraduate level for social science students

“... it's connected with getting your hands dirty and looking at the real world. Standard courses have data that's already in some senses cleaned and used to show an econometrically interesting point of view, when you actually start to investigate the world... things aren't straightforward.”

Benefits to teachers

Data services can develop learning resources - saving teachers time

Encourage teachers who are less confident in using data

Benefits to students

Learn what data is available for analysis, also the limitations

Helps them study real-world scenarios with real-world data

“and if you can get somebody from a teaching background to tell teachers about using online resources, it's amazing how ... they come running to you and they say 'I've learned about this!'”

“These new found skills are going to make them marketable in the workplace.”

Increase in the willingness to share resources

Increases capacity of quantitative methods teachers

Introduces research methods at an early stage

Increases statistical capacity for future careers

Key findings

- Social science students using data in their studies help address the shortfall in this vital skills area
- Data and statistical literacy is a useful and marketable skill
- Using data at undergraduate level gives students both experience and confidence in data analysis, preparing them for postgraduate level

The story continues...

The project has provided us with a vast amount of information, and we're sharing this with our stakeholders. It's clear that Mimas' valuable data services are being used in real-world teaching, and as a next step, we'd like to gather more feedback from the data community. The ultimate goal is to build a supportive community of teachers who can share ideas in the teaching of quantitative methods. Mimas will continue to provide a platform for data users in line with our remit as *an organisation of experts doing quality work that is of measurable value to the wider academic community and beyond.*