

A Coaching Approach to Education

Six steps towards successful teaching in tomorrow's
Education System

Martin Richards

Teacher, Trainer and Coach



Foreword

When I met Martin for the first time, I didn't know about his vision for school, nor that we – despite our 25 years' age difference – would be starting on a journey of lifelong friendship. But after several inspirational talks for my classes, I knew this man was special. Martin has a clear mission and the gift to inspire others.

His vision about school is built on the belief that every student (read: everyone) can do so much more than he or she (or anyone else) thinks they can, and that tomorrow's school system will focus more on fostering self-belief, and treasuring the talents and deeper potential that every student possess.

This book could have been given another name, since a coaching approach to education is much wider than just coaching. A coaching approach (or whatever we want to call it) consists of an important – and in some ways new – approach to the education system as well as to the students in it. This book contains valuable tools and inspiration for teachers.

Since Martin wants to support and inspire people (read: teachers) all around the world, and doesn't know how else to manage it without being a constant traveller for the rest of his life, he wrote this book. This might be the start of something new. I hope you will enjoy it as much as I have!

Julia Bertilsson, college teacher.

“I might not be able to give teachers the public recognition they deserve for the work that they do, but I can teach them about a coaching approach. And that will be my contribution to a better world.” Martin Richards

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Book One - Introduction

Giving advice is not always the best way to go

In the 1990's I taught English to Adults. On one particular course, we had come to the stage where we were comparing the several different past tenses in English. As part of the lesson we had started an activity where the students were to write a short report on what they did, had done, have done, have been doing, were doing, etc.

In order to give the students an interesting context, I told them a story in the role of policeman, and asked them to write an alibi. I stood at the front of the room and in a knees-bend, hands behind my back, and theatrical policeman voice, I told them a story. You get what I was doing, don't you? I included a sense of silliness and seriousness in the story-telling and the students engaged with the scenario of writing an alibi, and were rising to the challenge of the different past tenses. They were discussing the difference between "At 6pm, I was working at my office" or "At 6pm, I worked at my office": Very productive and useful conversations about the English Language.

I don't give advice any more, but I do guide teachers in making their own choices about how to become better teachers. I trained as a professional coach with the Coaches Training Institute, and I work as a Teacher-Coach, coaching teachers.

A colleague had walked past the open door of my classroom and noticed the deep engagement of my students and, at the coffee break, asked me how I had achieved it. She had been struggling to get and hold the attention of her students and felt the need for some advice.

Young as I was, I gave some advice and told my colleague exactly what I had done, and left out the important details. I simply said, "Oh, I just arrested them and told them to write an alibi for yesterday evening".

After the coffee break, my colleague went into her class and arrested her students, saying that some books had been stolen from the school and that everyone should write an alibi for yesterday evening. The students responded loudly, some left her course.

I don't give advice any more, but I do guide teachers in making their own choices about how to become better teachers. I trained as a professional coach with the Coaches Training Institute, and I work as a Teacher-Coach, coaching teachers.

A Coaching Approach to Education

Some of the reasons why a coaching approach to education is necessary:

- We can rely on the fact that living and working conditions in the world change, have always changed and will continue to change. The pace of changes will probably get faster, and faster.
- Education is the way communities have developed for preparing the next generation for their living and working lives, learning from what's been done before.
- The Education System is continuously looking for the best ways to get the best results for ourselves, now and in the future.
- Any well-functioning system uses feedback to learn from its own results.
- Coaching (the art of questioning) is an empowering way to learn from results in order to deal with continuous and accelerating change.
- Coaching moves the communication focus from "Tell" to "Ask".
- A coaching approach is a natural addition to headteacher's skillset.
- A coaching approach is a natural addition to a teacher's skillset.

CONTENTS

The First Six Steps to a Coaching Approach to Education

Step One - Positive Language

Self-awareness exercises, listening to your communication and moving away from negative language and towards positive language.

Step Two - Humour, not Jokes

A foundational step in the role-change from teacher to coach. This step demands and develops your bravery and self-confidence.

Step Three - Asking, not Telling

You will move from '!' to '?', i.e. from 'knowing' to 'believing', and from being in control to being in charge.

Step Four - Using Open Questions

Tune up your teaching questions to include coaching questions. Teach even more through dialogue.

Step Five - Asking for Feedback

Exercises in awareness and courage. This step will move you towards powerful, positive communication.

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

Exercises in generating mistakes to learn from. You will become more caring, vulnerable and assertive, turning the Victim Triangle upside down into the Winner Triangle.

A Coaching Approach

Step One - Positive Language

Since the school working environment is filled with verbal communication, Positive Language is the first step because it encourages you to LISTEN, in particular to yourself.

All developments come from working with yourself, and usually start by removing something, so look for words and phrases that can best be deleted.

When you use Positive Language, some of the effects you will begin to notice are:

- The positive effect that your thoughts and words are having on the people around you, i.e. the Pygmalion Effect.
- You hear your Inner Audio Loop, the voice that tells you to be wary, be careful, give up, etc. You learn how to use that information in a more constructive way.
- You become more aware of why people say what they do, and recognise the Drama Triangles that surround you, and detach from the worst of them.
- You can then begin to work on using the Positive Language that is needed to soften the Drama Triangles, and create the working environment in which change is possible.

A Coaching Approach

Step Two - Humour, not Jokes

Where Step One first focused on you as teacher, the next step is to focus on the connection between you and your students, revealing the the careful lesson design, so that the adventure of learning is shared. Learning comes quicker when students are fully engaged in the learning process, and not simply passive recipients of necessary and useful information.

Inspired by the work of Georgi Lazanov, the ‘caring, game-leader’ aspect of the role of the Suggestopedic Teacher puts you in a role similar to that of a Magician / Entertainer.

The clear link between humour and Learning Styles and the modern understanding of how the human brain learns suggests that learning activities that include a combination of right-brain and left-brain thinking are most effective. According to neuroscientists, humour is the result of making connections between both brain halves.

You will begin to observe the following effects of using Humour:

- You become more confident that your planned lessons will attract and hold your students’ attention, and have the desired academic effect.
- You connect with your students in different ways.
- You use humour by design and as needed, the number of humorous moments increases, you plan the laughter and the learning, and you speed up the learning.
- You increasingly make use of neuroscience’s understanding of the structure and function of the brain.

A Coaching Approach

Step Three - Asking, not Telling

Look at the modern role that a teacher plays in the education system. There have been many changes in the education system, both externally applied by various government and local policy changes, and internally due to parents' and students' expectations of what education will give them. These changes continuously influence the relationships between teachers and students.

The film 'Shift Happens' will encourage you to move slightly away from knowing, and become more comfortable with not knowing, to move away from authority based on superior knowledge and towards superior skills in adapting to teaching a wider range of students.

The traditional role of Teacher / Instructor expands to include Mentor / Coach / Facilitator, and a greater degree of flexibility and skill in navigating the different roles. Hersey-Blanchard's model of Situational Leadership is a useful model for illustrating the range of leadership roles that a teacher chooses from. Indeed these are the same roles that are being taught and trained in the adult World of Business and Industry. Why not teach them at school too?

The model of human interaction, Transactional Analysis, gives further tools for illuminating communication in the classroom. You can explore a transition from Parent to Adult, and to encourage students to move from Child to Adult.

Parent > Adult, Child > (aspiring) Adult

When you use 'Asking, not Telling' you will see these effects:

- Your working relationship with your students will improve.
- You will use questions to design your lessons, guide your conversations and discussions with students.
- You will better understand what's going when conversation gets closer to conflicts, and know what to ask to move in a more useful direction.

A Coaching Approach

Step Four - Using Open Questions

This step opens the toolbox that is shared by teachers and coaches, as well as leaders in general.

The full register of coaching skills includes: meeting ethical guidelines, establishing the coaching agreement, establishing trust and intimacy, coaching presence, active listening, powerful questioning, direct communication, creating awareness, designing actions, planning and goal-setting, managing progress and accountability, and a twelfth skill, integration, where coaching skills are integrated with teaching skills.

The coaching framework used in this chapter is called GROW, which stands for Goals, Reality, Opportunities and Willingness (to change).

Once you start using Open Questions you will begin to see these effects:

- Lessons start in a more engaging and fun way.
- You will have an increased tolerance of not knowing the right answer.
- You will be teaching with your “hands off”, allowing the students to learn.
- You will move more easily between the instructor, teacher and coach roles.

A Coaching Approach

Step Five - Asking for Feedback

As a teacher you naturally give your students feedback (formative assessments) to nurture their continued development. This chapter looks at how you can receive feedback so that you can continue to develop as a teacher. Furthermore, you will see how to give and receive professional feedback from your colleagues too.

John Hattie's "Visible Learning" put into one research document all the effective ways of improving students' grades. In the top ten is feedback from students to teachers, so feedback has to be an ingredient of a Coaching Approach.

When you use Feedback you will notice these changes happening:

- You will be able to better filter your own experiences of teaching, and learn from them.
- Your professional relationship with your students will become more balanced and respectful.
- You will be more proficient at supporting teaching colleagues in their professional development.

A Coaching Approach

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

This final chapter takes you, the teacher, to a place where you guide your students in such a way that they maintain their creative, collaborative “outside the box thinking” which will be so necessary for them when they enter the adult world.

Here you are in “Coaching Country”, with your focus on actions in the present, and the students' desired future. The coaching approach includes the idea that since the future is mostly unknown, it is therefore malleable, i.e. subject to our desires and wishes. You are also in “Teacher Country”, where mistakes can be made in a safe way, and learned from.

Much of this chapter connects to the earlier work on Your Inner Audio Loop and Drama Triangles. The work here demonstrates the Pygmalion Effect, i.e. your belief in your students strongly affects the results they get.

You will be creating and maintaining a working environment where mistakes are accepted, encouraged and carefully engineered.

As you learn to deal with your own mistakes, engineer mistake-rich activities and model responses to Making Mistakes, you will notice these effects:

- You will have greater ability in planning lessons with (manageable) mistakes, and allowing your students to learn from them.
- Your students will see that mistakes are worth making, partly for the immediate learning, and partly for the long-term bravery that grows and guides them in the adult they are becoming.
- Your students will accept responsibility for their mistakes, making learning possible.
- You will hold true that “Making mistakes is not the same as being a mistake.”
- You can more easily guide your students to see that although you cannot undo a mistake, you can choose how to respond to it.

School is like a Hall of Mirrors

Step One - Positive Language

Why is it that one teacher gets her hand bitten off by her students, and another can have the same students eating out of her hand?

What do you think it is that makes the difference?

CONTENTS

- Moving from bracing yourself against what you expect, to embracing what's actually there
- Focus on Verbal Language
- Positive Language, the Effects of and Reasons for it
- Your Internal Audio Loop

Stories

- The Teacher Who Used Paper clips
- Victim Dances – Teacher and Student, Teacher and Teacher

Teachers Toolbox

- Positivity and Comfort
- Increasing Positive Language in the classroom
- Dealing with your Inner Audio Loop
- Getting rid of those horrid little words
- The Victim Triangle and the Winner Triangle
- Lovely Little Words, Supportive Language, Reward Phrases and Affirmations
- The Listening Litmus Test

Step One - Positive Language

Moving from Bracing Yourself Against What You Expect, to Embracing What's Actually There

I think a large part of the answer to why some teachers get their hands bitten off, lies in the mechanics and biology of human perception.

As a teacher I made thousands of decisions every working day, based on the impressions that I perceived.

Perception is complicated, overwhelmingly so. We have learned a lot from neuroscience in the past few decades about the processes that go on inside our heads. Briefly put, it seems that many of the impressions that come through our senses are deleted before they get deeper into our brains, we simply don't take them in very far. The impressions we do take in and process for meaning get distorted (misunderstood) and generalised (i.e. we think we hear things we recognise we have heard before).

I understand that we have to do this, in order to remain sane. But it comes at a price. It is a price we pay in every decision we make. And that's the good news.

As a teacher I made thousands of decisions every working day, based on the impressions that I perceived. And what I have learned later in my working life is that those decisions were based on impressions that had been distorted and generalised in my own mind. Much of what I thought I saw and heard was in fact the product of the thinking processes.

It seems that we perceive a distorted version of reality. It is as though we perceive a reflection of what's already in our minds rather than what's actually out there. As worrying as that might initially sound, this is actually good news. As we become aware of our thinking processes we can begin to choose how we process the impressions that come to us.

So that's why I use the metaphor of “the world is a hall of mirrors”. What we see is a reflection of what's already in our minds. Nowadays, I focus on using what I've learned about human perception processes to an advantage – by orienting to the positive. Yes, I'm a blue-eyed optimist!

Step One - Positive Language

The Focus on Verbal Language

If you have been working in a school for a few years you will have noticed that the school working environment is filled with communication. Your instructions, questions, explanations, encouragement, interventions, negotiations, discussions, conversations, demonstrations... and more.

And the students' communication, their questions, explanations, encouragement, interventions, negotiations, discussions, conversations, demonstrations, too.

You know what I mean.

And all that communication can lead to problems, through all the deletion, distortion and generalisation that our minds do for us. What examples do you have of when your words have been misunderstood? Or when you have misunderstood someone else?

Do you get problems in your class from time to time? I hope so. Problems are often the result of miscommunication and I would really worry if a teacher said they had no problems in class. It would suggest to me that they were not communicating at all.

But where does the responsibility for solving these problems belong? It's all too easy to see the problems in class as the responsibility of your students, their families, society or the country's culture. However that approach seldom gives the resolution and progress that we wish because looking elsewhere for the responsibility moves the focus away from us and what we CAN do. If you are pointing away from yourself regarding responsibility, you are not alone. Students, parents, and societies all point away too.

Whatever the situation, you can ALWAYS start with yourself, adjusting your thoughts, your words and your behaviour, orienting to the positive. Paying attention to your communication in your own mind, as well as communication with your students and colleagues gives you some influence over the outcome.

For me, this short prayer sums up the focus I put on my communication:

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

What's more, when you work with your communication, you also become a living role model for how your students can break free of any limitations they may be experiencing from their families, society or culture. You will be teaching them to orient to the positive too.

As the first step in developing your positive language, I suggest that you can pay attention to your own verbal communication, because it will encourage you to LISTEN, initially to yourself. It's a place to

For me, this short prayer sums up the focus I put on my communication.

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

start.

Step One - Positive Language

Positive language:

- Includes thoughts, words and habits that maintain and increase students' chances of becoming a successful adults.
- Builds the students' self-confidence, their belief in their future.
- Is inspirational, motivational, constructive and instructive.
- Occurs in all communication, verbal, non-verbal (facial expression) and para-verbal (proximity and stance).

Let's get started

All personal developments come from working with yourself, and usually start with removing something.

Step One - Positive Language

The Effect of Positive Language in the Classroom

Some of the effects you might notice are:

- The “Self-fulfilling Prophecy Effect”. The effect that your thoughts and words are having on the behaviour of the people around you, also known as the “Pygmalion Effect”.
- You hear your “Inner Audio Loop”, the voice that tells you to be wary, be careful, give up, etc.
- You become more aware of why people say what they do, and recognise the Drama Triangles that surround you, and detach from the worst of them.
- You begin to work on using the Positive Language that is needed to soften the Drama Triangles, and create the working environment in which change is possible.

Reasons for Using Positive Language

There is at least this one, clear and compelling reason for using positive language in our communication. It might be filed under the “Pygmalion Effect”, or “Self-fulfilling Prophecy Effect”.

Simply put, your words, behaviour and habits influence your students’ words, behaviour and habits, and students’ results are linked to their thoughts about themselves. Students’ results are connected to their habits, their words and their thoughts.

“Self-fulfilling Prophecy Effect”

Thoughts > Words > Behaviours > Results

we use when speaking to each other, and when speaking to ourselves for that matter. Using positive language aims to reduce negativity in our conversations, and increase positivity, and thereby improve the chances of success.

All the more reason to monitor and maintain your own positivity?

There are at least these two powerful influences in the classroom on a student’s success; the teachers’ expectations, and the student’s expectations

Moreover, there are at least these two powerful influences in the classroom on a student’s success; the teachers’ expectations, and the student’s expectations. Subtle indicators of our expectations can be heard in the words

Step One - Positive Language

Your Internal Audio Loop

It is time to introduce you to your subconscious programming. You learned many programs (ways of thinking without thinking too much, an automatic response to a situation) from your parents, family, school and society regarding how to behave in different situations, what was safe, good and healthy for example. These programs can be likened to self-protective stored audio loops “Be careful ...” ”Stop before you ...”, ”Look both ways ...”.

Some of these audio loops are not in touch with the present moment and no longer serve their original intended purpose.

What does your Internal Audio Loop tell you?

The Internal Audio Loop is one of the many names given to the persistent trains of thought that can, if unchecked, take you down into the rabbit’s hole of negativity and into a Victim Mind-set.

In the Teachers Toolbox there is one way to reinterpret the words that your Internal Audio Loop uses. You listen to what the Intention is, find a better way to say that and make the connection between the two.

Step One - Positive Language

Stories in this Chapter

In this chapter, in “The Teacher who Used Paper Clips”, I describe one way to make your language more positive, with help from your students. It also shows one way to keep track of your progress.

There are two stories “A Difficult Class” and “Parent's Night” where I share with you my experience regarding my Inner Audio Loop. Shout if you recognise yourself.

The last two stories “Victim Dances”, are reconstructions of conversations at school that taught me the need to take care of what puts both me and others into a victim mind set, and how to find ways of getting myself, students and colleagues, out of the trap.

- The Teacher who Used Paper Clips
- A Difficult Class?
- Parents Night (mare)
- Victim Dances
- Teacher and Student
- Teacher and Teacher

Step One - Positive Language

The Teacher who Used Paper Clips

Now it's time for me to tell you about the teacher who improved the learning environment in the classroom by being Assertive and Vulnerable. She asked her students to use their skill of being Caring. See the Winner Triangle in the Teachers Toolbox at the end of this chapter for more details.

Follow me to her classroom. She has decided to tackle the biggest problem in her working life. Her

The teacher is concerned that she's not a good teacher, that she has chosen the wrong profession and is considering quitting at the end of the term

students can be moody, difficult, and challenging. They resist most of the learning activities that she wants them to do, and are consequently not progressing well through the course. The students are losing confidence that they will pass the course, and are worried about their academic and employment options if they should fail. The teacher is concerned that she's not a good teacher; that she has chosen the wrong profession and is considering quitting at the end of the term.

With support from coaching she has identified that it is her communication with the students that can be improved. She anticipates that this will create a positive spiral where she will regain faith in herself as a teacher, and her students will regain faith in themselves and their post-school options.

Near the end of the lesson the teacher called the class to attention to tell them how she felt about the communication between herself and the class had been over the past weeks.

"I have something to say to you all. I have something to ask you all."

The class hushed.

"Looking back on this lesson, and the past few week's lessons, I feel that we can improve the learning environment, by improving the way we communicate."

The students exchanged looks.

"Communication is a shared responsibility. You share 49%, and I have the other 51% of the responsibility. So I want to start making some changes with what I say to you. Will you help me with that?"

There was general agreement to help.

"During the next week's lessons I ask that you give me an indication when I say something that is not positive, or not supportive. Can you do that?"

A discussion ensued around the exact meaning of 'not positive' and 'not supportive'. The teacher rounded off the discussion by sharing her list of 'horrid little words and phrases' that she wanted to

remove from her communication.

The class also agreed to a specific sign that would be an indication to the teacher if she used any of the 'horrid little words' that she had mentioned.

During the next week's lessons the teacher took with her a box of paper clips and a dish. Each time the students indicated that she had said a 'horrid little word' she took a paper clip out of the box and put it in the dish. At the end of the lesson she counted the number of paper clips and wrote that in her journal. Her aim was to have no paper clips in the dish by the end of the fifth lesson.

For the first of the five lessons she took the students' indications at face value, and without challenging the students picked up a paper clip and put it in the dish. During the second and third lessons she paused after each student's sign and asked with honest curiosity "What could I say instead?" Most often she then used the words or phrase that the student suggested.

After the fourth lesson, the number of paper clips had reduced to almost none, the teacher began to offer to give feedback to certain students, "Would you like me to give a sign when you use language about yourself that is not positive, or not supportive?".

I met this teacher again close to the end of term in a final coaching session and asked how things were progressing. Not only had she gained the confidence of her students, she had also regained confidence in herself as a teacher and had decided to continue in the profession, "for a few more years".

My reflection as coach is that not only has this process eased the tension between the two sides, and improved the learning environment, but has also raised the expectations of the teacher and her students. All of them have experienced the importance of positive language in forming a productive working environment and they have at least one set of tools for making the kind of changes they might want to see in their communication. I have not met any of the students since they left school, but I imagine that they will have benefited from this teacher's bravery and honesty in tackling the big problem in their working relationships, and have a role model for when they might need it in their own working relationships.

Not only had she gained the confidence of her students, she had also regained confidence in herself as a teacher and had decided to continue in the profession, "for a few more years".

Step One - Positive Language

A Difficult Class (?)

I used to teach at a school. I'm smart, I learn fast. By the third week of the first term, I knew which classes were going to be easiest to teach, and which ones were going to be the hardest. In each class there were students who were funny, students who were easy to teach, and others who were going to give me problems.

At the back of my mind a voice was beginning to make certain statements:

“They are going to make things difficult.”

“They are out to stop me teaching.”

“This class is difficult to teach.”

“These students aren't teachable.”

“These students are aggressive / rude / stupid.”

“These students will laugh at me / not take me seriously.”

Every day, as certain classes started, so did the voice

Every day, as certain classes started, so did the voice. It told me what to expect of that class, which students were going to challenge my authority, to trip me up and make my lessons into a shambles. And guess what. The voice was right. Everything it predicted happened, and more.

At the start of some lessons I was mentally fired up, ready to return fire, to give back what I was receiving and do so to such a degree that I would win. Because I was the teacher.

Luckily, I had studied some Transactional Analysis at University and the deeper truth of the situation began to make itself known to me.

I will tell you about that in this chapter. The cure for the negative words that I was hearing, the words that were draining my energy and killing my relationship with my students was to listen to the words in a different way, and to use Positive Language.

Step One - Positive Language

Parents' Night(mare)

Parents' Night is when parents come to meet teachers and hear how their children are doing at school. It is my experience that there is seldom any in-service training in dealing with parents at Teacher Colleges, nor at schools.

Initially, I had thought that I was going to explain to the parents the grades that I had given their children, and describe what strengths and weaknesses their children had in my subject. I was not prepared for the parents' defensiveness regarding their children's lower-than-expected grades. Nor was I prepared for the parents' demanding attitudes regarding what needed to be done to raise the grades. All the parents wanted me to spend more time with THEIR children, to make MORE demands on them, to set MORE homework etc., etc., so that THEIR children could get better grades. It felt like the children's grades were the result of something I was doing, or not doing; rather than what the children were doing, or were not doing.

The second time Parents' Evening came around I was getting stressed in advance about whether or not I had given the students fair and accurate tests of the students' abilities, and whether or not I had given all the encouragement and guidance possible to increase the students grades. At the back of my mind I knew that tests are never wholly reliable measures of ability, and I knew that I could always have done more to support every student.

In the back of my head there was a voice telling me:

"I can't do this."

"I'm not a good teacher."

"I don't have enough time to do a good job."

"I don't have enough experience to deal with these parents."

"I don't know enough about methods for testing to speak confidently about how accurate they are."

At the time the voice seemed reasonable, logical and right. Of course I'm not a good teacher, some of my students were getting lower-than-expected grades, the tests were not wholly reliable, and I could always do more, MUCH more, if only I knew what. Yes I was a bad teacher. And with that mind-set, I was going to meet the parents.

You can understand that any comments the parents made that evening challenging my teaching skills, questioning my testing and grading system, querying the amount of time I had spent with THEIR child... All of it fitted into my prior expectations that had come from the pre-programmed inner dialogue of failure.

Step One - Positive Language

Teacher and Student Victim Dance

This story comes from when I worked as a teacher. I thought that I had been crystal clear about deadlines for example, and still I had the kind of discussions as follows.

Viewed from a Transactional Analysis point of view, this teacher T and student S are engaging in an interaction that can be described using

My notations of (P), (R) and (V) are my later interpretations:

S (V) Sir. Why haven't you marked my essay?

T (P) You didn't hand it in on time.

S (V) No, I did. I left it on your desk on Friday.

T (P) Well, you should have put it in my hand. Friday was the very last day and...

S (V) You didn't say that. You didn't say to put it in your hand, you just said hand it in.

T (V) I was standing at the front of the class, collecting papers from everyone else...

S (P) You didn't tell me to put it in your hand. You should mark my essay.

T (V) I can't mark it now. I have already...

S (P) I don't care. You should mark my paper like everyone else's.

T (P) There was a deadline. You didn't hand it in on time.

S (V) You're just trying to fail me.

T (R) That's not true.

S (V) Sir, would you PLEASE mark my essay.

T (R) Well, I don't know if I am allowed to do that.

S (V) Oh come on, you can mark it. No-one will know.

T (V)... I have deadlines I have to keep too.

S (R) Yeah, but it doesn't make any difference to you if ONE essay is late, huh? C'mon.

T (R) Well, I suppose I could make an exception. Just this time.

S (R) Ah, you're great sir, you're a great teacher, THANKS.

How would Positive Language have helped?

At any point, the most mature person, I presume that's the teacher, could have asked themselves a question about what the other person, i.e. the student, needed to hear, know or feel. Then, the teacher could have moved the conversation towards what they both needed to learn from the situation.

Step One - Positive Language

Teacher and Teacher Victim Dance

In this second illustration I will take you to a time when, for a short period I taught some after school activities, After School English, which was basically an opportunity for students to practice speaking English in a freer atmosphere than ordinary lessons. I was not employed by the school and my lessons were scheduled whenever the students were available, and my lessons were located in whichever room was free at the time.

In this interaction T1 and T2 are engaging in an interaction that can be described using the Roles of Persecutor (P), Rescuer, (R) and Victim (V), albeit in a much more subtle and sophisticated way than the previous story between the teacher and the student.

My notations of (P), (R) and (V) are my interpretations:

T1 (P) Did you have a lesson in Room 237 yesterday, at the end of the day?

T2 (R) Sure did.

T1 (P) I was in there first thing this morning and the room was a tip. Do you know anything about that?

T2 (V) A tip? What do you mean?

T1 (V) The chairs and tables were in a mess, scattered around the room

T2 (R) What do you mean? Like there had been a fight?

T1 (P) No. The room wasn't put back the way it's supposed to be.

T2 (V) And what does that mean 'supposed to be'?

T1 (P) Tidy, with the chairs and tables in their proper places.

T2 (V) And what are the 'proper places'?

T1 (P) In rows of course.

T1 (V) It was such a mess it took fifteen minutes to sort it out.

T2 (V) To put it back the way it 'should be'?

You can see where this is going, can't you? The two teachers T1 and T2 risk losing the opportunity of working together to provide each other with the best working environment for each other.

Footnotes

T1 is an organised person, and requires a working environment that is reliable and stable.

T2 is a creative person and requires a working environment that can be changed to meet the needs of the students and lesson.

Neither teacher has ownership of Room 237. However, T2 is not usually there, and T1 is frequently there. Before this interaction T1 and T2 had never met.

How would Positive Language have helped?

At any point the most mature teacher could have asked themselves a question about what the other teacher needed to hear, know or feel. Then the teacher could have moved the conversation towards what they both needed to learn from the situation.

Step One- Positive Language

Teachers Toolbox

Positivity and Comfort describes two foundational elements, just outside the current scope of this book, that need to be in place before you build any higher.

Increasing Positive Language in the classroom shows where you need to start when you are going to increase the positivity of your communication.

Dealing with your Inner Audio Loop picks up on the stories told here, and makes more positive sense of what's going on.

Getting rid of those horrid little words lists specific words that are known to be less than positive. You can choose to work with these, or you may have others that you would prefer to start with.

The Victim Triangle and **the Winner Triangle** are models for understanding your Inner Audio Loop, and ways of building a more authentic relations with your students.

The last sections **Lovely Little Words, Supportive Language, Reward Phrases** and **Affirmations** are ways of increasing positive language in your classroom.

The **Listening Litmus Test** checks how what you are saying sounds like to everybody else. Are you saying what they need to hear?

Positivity and Comfort

What makes this a classroom and who decides?

Two foundational elements that will increase your chances of successfully implementing Positive Language, and becoming a Brilliant Teacher are:

- **Expectations and Shared Goals** - everyone involved with your class knows what to expect from each other. The goals can be academic goals and / or other goals relevant to your students.
- **Rules for Behaviour** - inside the classroom certain rules apply. Knowing what they are, the benefits of following them, and consequences of not following them increases the sense of positivity and safety.

For this book, I will presume that these two foundational blocks are already in place. If not, please finish building them before you progress any further with **Positive Language**, because you are going to be Vulnerable and Assertive, and you are going to ask your students or a colleague to be Caring.

Step One - Positive Language

Increasing Positive Language in the Classroom

Imagine that you are going to change the kind of clothes that you wear. Perhaps you've changed jobs, the weather has changed, or fashion has moved on since you last bought yourself some new clothes. Look at your wardrobe: it's full isn't it? You might be the one person in a hundred whose wardrobe is super neat and tidy, and has space for more clothes, but most people's wardrobes are pretty full. How easy will it be to put the new clothes into that wardrobe? The majority of us will need to do a spring clean, a clear out, to make space for the new clothes.

And so it is with behaviours. We usually need to reduce or eliminate one behaviour before taking on a new one.

It's relatively easy to take on a new behaviour for a short while. Slowly, we might see that the old behaviour sneaks back into our lives, and maybe squeezes out the new and more desirable behaviour. So allow yourself the time to apply the changes at a pace that suits you.

What does that mean for the work we are doing with positive language? It means that we may well need to spring clean, to identify and reduce our use of non-positive language, to clear it out to make space for more desirable positive language.

And we may need some support with that. There are three sources of support:

- Yourself
- Your students
- Your colleagues

In the story you are about to read it sounds like I am trying to sell you a lifetime's supply of paper clips, but really I want to show you where and how to get the support you will need in cleaning up your language. The help comes from those who will benefit most from your positive communication. The paper clips are simply a tool to measure your progress.

There are three sources of support

yourself
your students
your colleagues

Step One - Positive Language

Dealing with Your Inner Audio Loop

Regarding the Victim Dances, I learned later (by attending courses in Transactional Analysis, and Coaching) that what was going on in my own mind was an in-built self-protection system, designed to protect me from taking too much risk. This knowledge has enabled me to deal with similar situations better. Now I know that the inner audio program has a positive intention and is usually provoking me to take action so that I am better prepared for what is in front of me. That's why my parents had said "Be careful", "Watch out", to prepare me.

Now I am better prepared for what is in front of me

What's on Your Radio?

What channel do you choose to listen to?

	Difficult Class	Parents Night(mare)
the Inner Audio Loop says	"They are out to stop me teaching"	"I don't have enough experience to deal with these parents"
the Intention is	To provoke me to identify which students might need extra attention	To provoke you to GET experience so that you CAN deal with parents
a better way to say that is	Find out who might be out to stop me teaching, and learn to deal with them.	"Prepare yourself to deal with the parents, in a collaborative and constructive way."
the connection between the two is	"They are out to stop me teaching, BUT they are encouraging me to learn how to deal with them."	Since I don't have enough experience to deal with these parents yet, I will read some Transactional Analysis books

Step One - Positive Language

Getting rid of those Horrid Little Words

One teacher that I was coaching, and about whose change process you will read in the following pages, set about identifying what it was in her communication that was less than positive. As she reflected on what she actually said in class which had produced the negative working environment, and against which she was struggling on a daily basis, she identified a personal list of words that we called “Horrid Little Words”.

Her personal list is confidential, so in this book I have used a list of words that have been frequently identified in coaching sessions as ‘horrid’ in some way. For each word I suggest an alternative.

Horrid Little Words

Try
Must
Not
Help

Try - is a horrid little word

“I will try to get these test results to you by the end of the week” has a negative, dis-empowering assumption that you might not succeed.

So say the truth “I have two hours tomorrow to mark these test papers. I will mark as many as I can and tell you on Thursday how much more time I need to mark the rest of them.”

By saying this you will open up your and the students’ degree of choice about “trying to do something” or “doing what I have time for, and asking for more time.” Of course, there may be no more time, and so there will be consequences, but they will have been chosen freely.

Must - is a horrid little word

“I must get these papers ready!” contains sense of victimisation by a third person who will punish you if you don’t succeed. It also contains a drain on your energy, because you don’t say that you want to do this work.

Use instead “I am going to get these papers ready, now.” to communicate to yourself and others that you are making a choice and commitment to doing the work.

By saying this you will show yourself and your students that you are making an active choice in what you do, because you want to do it... And be a role model for the students having choice.

Not - is a horrid little word

When you tell your students “This isn’t hard” you are also saying “You are wrong if you think it is hard.” If you say “don’t forget to do your homework”, you are setting up an image of them forgetting homework.

A more encouraging thing to say is “This becomes easier as you learn how to do it.”, or ask “What do you need from me to make this easier?” Regarding the homework, say what you really want them to do, “Remember to set aside an hour for the reading homework, so that you are well-prepared for tomorrow’s lesson, and can have fun and join in the discussion.”

By using this kind of language you are presenting an image of success, and empowering your students with strategies for achieving goals.

Help - a horrid little word

“I will come and help you in a minute” contains the message “You cannot do this by yourself”. The helper-role is less helpful than it intends to be.

Say instead “I’m tied up at the moment. I will be ready in three minutes, if you still want some help from me.”

This suggests that the student can, if they want to, do it themselves, find support from someone else, or wait until you have time for them. You have shown them alternative strategies without hinting that they are helpless without you.

Some ways to get rid of the Horrid Little Words on your own

Aim: Speak positively at all times

Listen to what you say and keep half an ear open in case there might be some negative assumptions in what you said. If so, breathe in, back up and say what you really want to say.

Tip

Record yourself - you might like it.

Step One - Positive Language

The Victim Triangle

The Inner Audio Loop model helps you to understand your inner dialogues. There is another model that is going to be really useful for understanding your dialogues with your students: it is a description of the Victim Triangle, as developed by Stephen Karpman.

The Drama Triangle is a psychological and social model of human interaction in Transactional Analysis (TA) first described by Stephen Karpman, in his 1968 article “Fairy Tales and Script Drama Analysis”.

Three Roles

- (V) Victim
- (P) Persecutor
- (R) Rescuer

Stephen Karpman's Drama Triangle [Karpman, 1968]

As I illustrated in the examples the roles of Victim, Persecutor and Rescuer as described in Transactional Analysis, you may well recognise their associated behaviours in the less constructive interactions between yourself and your students. Although taken from personal experience, the example below illustrates the kind of dialogue that other teachers have reported as taking up too much of their time, draining too much of their energy, and in some cases leading them to leave the teaching profession. You might recognise yourself:

The Winner's Triangle

The Winner's Triangle, developed by Acey Choy, [Choy, 1990] is another elegant piece of theory adapting Karpman's Drama Triangle [Karpman, 1968] to show the three roles being inclusive of other peoples' ability and worth.

There are three Capabilities; Meta skills that you can use to get YOURSELF out of the trap of the Victim Mind-set. Note that this refers to you getting yourself out of the trap. You can guide your colleagues or students in getting out of their traps, preferably after you have decided how you will work together.

Three Capabilities

You will need to develop these three capabilities:

- Being Caring
- Being Assertive
- Being Vulnerable

The Winner's Triangle developed by Acey Choy [Choy, 1990]

How to create a Winner Triangle

In brief, you ask yourself a question about what the other person needs to hear, know or feel (Caring). You then then steer (Assertive) the conversation towards what you both need to learn (Vulnerable) from the situation.

Step One - Positive Language

Lovely Little Words

Now that you have made some space in your wardrobe by clearing out some of the unwanted non-positive language, you will have space for new words and phrases.

The two examples that I have here are Supportive Language and Reward Phrases.

Supportive Language

Some head teachers insist that their teachers use positive language every day, so it might be a good idea to create a list of things you could say to your students:

- I am sure that you can do it.
- I can see that you did your best.
- I can see you are having a great time in this lesson.
- I really enjoyed my time with you today.
- I appreciate your help with _____.
- It was so good of you to help with _____ today.
- Look what a great time you had today.
- Thanks so much for _____.
- What a good memory you have.
- What fun you had with your classmates.
- What was your favourite part of the day?
- You learn so fast.
- That was a beautiful piece of work.
- You can be proud of yourself today.
- I see you really enjoy _____.
- You're improving your _____ every day.
- You've got a great head on your shoulders.

Is it difficult to find opportunities for saying such things to certain students? You might find that you have more often said other things to them. What if you do not wait until the student deserves the Lovely Little Words, but say them anyway, in advance? I think that's called feed-forward.

Say them anyway, in advance? I think that's called feed-forward

How to Say the Lovely Little Words

All the above phrases are best delivered in an honest and neutral way, and perhaps they are best said directly to the student who needs to hear them, including the student's name, with strong eye contact and a warm smile to convey your honesty. Remember the Pygmalion Effect - here it is in action.

Step One - Positive Language

Reward Phrases

Like other teachers you may well have favourite and often over-used 'Reward Phrases', things you say when your students exhibit desirable behaviour. Do you use phrases like "Well done", "Good", "Nice work", or "Correct".

I invite you to be more adventurous and write down what YOU would like someone to say about YOUR best work.

You could involve your teacher colleagues and get even more phrases, so that each of you has a broader and more exciting vocabulary to choose from. Ask your colleagues "What are your favourite Reward Phrases? Do you use just a few, are you wearing them out, and do you need some more? Can we take the time now to pick out some new ones to use in the coming weeks?"

Ten reward phrases

Here are ten potential reward phrases, in alphabetical order.

- Amazing
- Astonishing
- Astounding
- Brilliant
- Fantastic
- Glorious
- Impressive
- Magnificent
- Splendid
- Wonderful

What are your top ten reward phrases?

Step One - Positive Language

Affirmations

When you are focusing on developing your positive language, you can always give yourself some support. Give YOURSELF some positive feedback, be caring of yourself, you know you deserve it.

One way of giving myself some support that tickles my funny bone is to hang a mirror by the classroom door so that I can say some positive things to myself at the end of the day.

What are your favourite affirmations

Some of the things I tell myself are:

- I trust myself, my students trust me
- My lessons are filled with fun, purpose and learning
- I am a brilliant teacher - I am Caring, Assertive and Vulnerable

Step One - Positive Language

The Listening Litmus Test

It ain't what you say, it's the way that you say it...

When you are developing your Meta skills, trying out a new way of supporting your students using positive language, you will probably come up with or choose some phrases that you'd like to use during the upcoming lesson, like "I am confident that you can do it", "I am proud to have you in my class", or "You must be proud of yourself". In order to get the greatest beneficial effect, you may want to be sure that you are using the best phrases, and in the right way.

One way to test the phrases before you use them is to listen to them yourself, say them aloud and ask yourself "Does this phrase generate the kind of energy that I want to have in my classroom?"

"Does this phrase generate the kind of energy that I want to have in my classroom?"

The words are important, but not as important as how you say the words. Listen to your intonation and phrasing. Is it possible that a student, who may well be in a minor Victim State, might interpret your phrase in a non-positive way? How can you change the way you say the phrase so that it will more likely have the most beneficial effect? What positive non-verbal communication might you need to add?

Timing is also important. In what situations will you choose to speak?

Proximity and stance are important. Where will you be standing, in relation to your student, and the other students, when you choose to say the Lovely Little Word, or the Reward Phrase?

Knowing When to Add the Sugar

Step Two - Using Humour, not Jokes

Unless you are already a stand-up comedian, a trained actor/actress, or someone who's comfortable doing improvisation on stage in front of a possibly hostile or disinterested audience; you might want to learn a handful of strategies for how to add humour into the classroom environment.

In this chapter we explore why it's important for a teacher to have humour in their repertoire, when to add it, and how to plan ahead or respond spontaneously to the students' needs for an engaging, memorable and humorous lesson.

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- Moving Towards a More Authentic Relationship
- The Benefits of Using Humour
- Humour, not Jokes
- The Effects of, and Reasons for Using Humour

Stories

- Looking in the Rear View Mirror
- 3 Ways to Generate Humour
-
- Master of Interruptions
- The Fool, Making Mistakes
- Anecdotes with a Twist
- Humour, not Jokes

Teacher's Toolbox

- When to add the sugar?
- Stories with a Twist

Step Two - Using Humour, not Jokes

Moving Towards a More Authentic Relationship

Where Step 1 focused on you as the teacher, Step 2 focuses on the connection between you and your students: your working relationship.

Your relationship is revealed partly through your carefully designed lessons. You may well already use brain-friendly techniques for designing lessons. You can add humour so that your students can learn more and quicker, and are more likely to pass courses and develop positive attitudes to adult life and work. By having a good time when you teach you demonstrate that adult life has great potential for fun. Again, you are a role model.

Through humour the adventure of learning is more deeply shared. Learning comes quicker when students are fully protected by a safe and caring relationship.

There is a clear link between humour and how the brain functions. The modern understanding of how the human brain learns suggests that learning activities that include a combination of right-brain and left-brain thinking are most effective, and I think that's what should be used in modern classrooms.

For changes to become long-term ones they are best done in a controlled way, by continuously rewarding and incrementally challenging. This chapter gives you a structure that includes a range of humorous activities which can be made incrementally more challenging and rewarding. You will be able to include as much and as many humour activities as you wish to plan in advance and still be able to adjust to the mood of the students on the day.

According to neuroscience, humour is the result of making connections between both brain halves

Step Two - Using Humour, not Jokes

Humour - fresh food for the soul

- Jokes are like frozen, tinned or dried food - convenient.
-
- Humour is like fresh food - full of energy and inspiration.

Humour, not Jokes

-
- Tell a joke today and people may laugh at your joke.
-
- Tell the same joke tomorrow and people may laugh at you.
-
- Tell the same joke again and people may throw things at you.

What makes you laugh?

- What kind of comedy is right for you?

Step Two - Using Humour, not Jokes

The Effects of using Humour

You may observe the following effects of using Humour:

- You become more confident that your planned lessons will attract and hold your students' attention, and have the desired academic effect.
- You connect with your students more authentically than before.
- You use humour by design and as needed, you plan the laughter, and you speed up the learning.

Furthermore, you increasingly make use of neuroscience's understanding of the structure and function of the brain.

Humour

- Activities that connect the right and left brain halves.
- Activities that authentically connect the teacher and students.
- Increased student confidence that the teacher is confident and in charge.

Ready for humour

First you need to be in charge of yourself before you use humour to connect with your students. You need to clean up your inner dialogue, your "Inner Audio Loop", otherwise your doubts and fears may leak out through when you use humour.

Step Two - Using Humour, not Jokes

The Reasons for Using Humour

There are several reasons for using humour in lessons.

- When done properly, humour creates an atmosphere of trust in the classroom. It also attracts and holds students' attention.
- In order to engage the student's whole brain; employing feelings as well as logic, using the 'big picture' as well as details, accessing the future as well as the past. Use humour!
- Learning becomes enjoyable as the student's own brain makes the switch from left to right brain thinking.
- When students know that you are a humorous teacher, and have prepared in advance to make them laugh whilst they are learning, they will run to get to your lessons on time. The fact that you have prepared humorous lesson material, and have the skill and courage to use it, will increase the students' respect for you as their teacher.
- Because of the way human brains are designed to pay attention to messages with an emotional content, lessons that contain humour are more memorable. The message contained in the lesson is easier to receive and remember, and later recall.
- Humour is healthy! "Humour and laughter can foster a positive and hopeful attitude. We are less likely to succumb to feelings of depression and helplessness if we are able to laugh at what is troubling us"- Patty Wooten.
- For you, the teacher, knowing that the students have come to your lessons ready to learn will make your job much easier; you won't have to struggle to get students' attention. You won't have to cajole them into doing exercises or engage in activities. Knowing that your students are willing to share in the learning will enable you to focus your energy on other important aspects of teaching.
- For you, the teacher, allowing the lightness of humour into the classroom will give the more serious moments more weight. We all have to work with serious, challenging, perhaps tedious moments in our lessons. Prefacing these with the lightness of humorous moments makes our communication more varied and effective, and your job will be much easier.

Step Two - Using Humour, not Jokes

Stories in this Chapter

In the “**Master of Interruptions**”, I pay homage to one of my great teachers who taught me the skill of humorous interruptions, as well as passing on his love for Mathematics.

I need go no further than myself for examples of classroom foolishness. In “**The Fool**”, I do my utmost to connect to my students with endless variations of foolishness, carefully designed, increasingly silly and daring; as well as spontaneous bursts of foolishness as the moment dictates.

**Get creative with your humour,
whilst keeping your academic hat
on**

Watching teachers capture the attention of students as they arrive (late) to class, involving them in preparation for deeper study with elegance, grace and humour, using “**Story-Telling**”, as the vehicle that carries the students into the lesson.

“**Napoleon**”, is one story that I tell here, to inspire you to get creative with your humour, whilst keeping your academic hat on.

Step Two - Using Humour, not Jokes

Looking in the Rear View Mirror

My school teachers and likely your teachers too, used jokes and humour. Remember?

When I reflect back on which out of jokes or humour I preferred, I would have to say that the jokes were mostly embarrassing, especially when you'd heard them a few times. It felt like the teacher were trying too hard to be liked by us their students, and I can recall that we made life more difficult for teachers who tried too hard. There were, of course, teachers who managed to infuse their lessons with lighter touches of humour, and my impression is that we felt that these teachers were relaxed, in command and worth respecting. As students, we showed respect for teachers whose lessons engaged us more fully.

As students, we showed respect for teachers whose lessons engaged us more fully

As a teacher myself I have taught using jokes and set-ups, as well as using humour. If I ask myself which worked best, I will readily admit that some of the lessons that included deliberate jokes backfired spectacularly, probably because the joke was not connected to the class I was teaching. On the other hand, lessons that included humour went like a dream where everyone had a great time and learned a lot. At first I was not sure which came first: the ease of learning, or the humour. On reflection I note that the lessons where I felt I could include humour were the most rewarding, so I felt relaxed and confident enough to include humour in the next lesson. This showed my students that I was in command and worth being respected, and so we had a great time and learned a lot. A positive spiral had been created.

Looking back, I can see that many of the teachers for whom I had great respect, and even love, used different aspects of humour. One of them was called Mr. Alan White and he was a Maths teacher at Sussex University in the 1970's. His story is included in this book.

Step Two - Using Humour, not Jokes

Three Ways to Generate Humour

I have experienced at least three different ways of generating humour in the classroom. These experiences have been as a student and as a teacher. I am sure that professional speakers, comedians and actors (hint, hint) will be a valuable resource for discovering many more ways, however here are my three contributions for humorous classroom activities.

Following what we learned from neuroscience, in essence, the classroom activity needs to have a structure over time where the logical flow is interrupted by an unexpected change, an incongruity, which generates an emotional 'kick' as the brain changes from left-brain thinking, to right-brain thinking in order to comprehend what's going on.

Humour generates an emotional 'kick' as the brain changes from left-brain thinking, to right-brain thinking in order to comprehend what's going on

Step Two - Using Humour, not Jokes

Mr Alan White - Master of Interruptions

If your lessons hold your students' attention, they will more eagerly come to your lessons because they want to be with you. When your students want to come to your lessons, you can teach them!

One of my University professors was an expert at keeping our attention at the highest level, by using interruptions.

Initially the interruptions seemed to be natural ones.

- The roll up projection screen rolled up right in the middle of the lecture.
- The lights went out, with a bang.
- The professor left the room in the middle of a sentence, was gone for several minutes then walked back in again and continued as if nothing had happened.
- The professor walked away from the traditional podium. He walked up the aisle to the back of the lecture room talking and waking up students as he went. Still talking, he turned round and walked back to the podium and continued lecturing to a much-awakened audience.

These interruptions happened so often that we began to expect them. Many of his lectures were interrupted by one of an increasing variety of interruptions, to which we gladly looked forward.

The timing changed from being sometime near the middle of the lecture, to being closer to the end. Indeed some lectures lacked an interruption, which was in itself an interruption!

Our respect for the professor grew as we understood that he was deliberately engineering interruptions for our benefit. We anticipated them, talked about them during the coffee breaks and showed our appreciation of his ever-increasing creativity in providing for our needs, by turning up on time for his lectures.

Towards the end of the year the interruptions had developed to such a level that we knew that this last lecture was going to include an 'epic interrupt'. The delivery of this final interruption was provided by some students who threw open the lecture room doors and made way for a 250cc motorcycle to roar into the room. It drove up the aisle to the top of the lecture hall, and down again, leaving the room filled with petrol fumes and the roar of approval and appreciation from the students and lecturer alike.

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Step Two - Using Humour, not Jokes

The Fool, - Making Mistakes

“I play the Fool in order to bring humour to my classroom. It’s a role that I deliberately take on, like a coat or a cape. I think most of my students know that, even though I enjoy playing the role of Fool, I do it mostly for them.” - Martin Richards

Here are some ways of creating humorous moments, based on 'making mistakes'.

- Pause (appear to have lost your place in what you were saying). Wink at the students to let them know that you are doing this deliberately.
- Say "Left" and point "Right", Say "Up" and point "Down". Remember to wink.
- Write something wholly incorrect on the white board, and continue as if it were correct. Pretend to be taken aback when the students catch the mistake, then tell them it was not the first or the last one today. This encourages students to keep an eye / ear out for more 'mistakes'.
- Include 5 mistakes in the first half of the lesson, and when you get to halfway through the lesson, mention that you are doing it deliberately, and ask how many mistakes students have noticed.
- Write a sentence that is too long for the white board and mime writing on the wall. Then mime wiping the wall clean. Wink!
- Drop your white board pens, or why not chuck them all up in the air as if you were going to juggle them; and fail to catch them.
- Look for your glasses, whilst wearing them on your head. (OK, you may have done that for real, but I mean that you choose to do it, at a time that suits the mood of the class.)

Note

Winking works better in some cultures than others. You may need to find out what signal to use in your multi-cultural class that will tell the students “I know what I am doing, this is deliberate.”

Step Two - Using Humour, not Jokes

Story-Telling

An example of an anecdote with planned language point, homonyms.

The English teacher was telling a story even before the students arrived. He seemed to be rehearsing for a play. As the students came into the room they were given a piece of paper with three words written on it.

Some of the words were like these classic mistakes your / you're, there / their . Other homonyms included aloud / allowed, ate / eight, bare / bear.

The language point being offered was that some words sound almost the same when spoken, and the only way to know which word is being used is to understand the context of what is being said.

The teacher's story ended and he started again, including some gestures that suggested that the students who were present were to look at their pieces of paper. Some students made the connection, and their understanding of what to do (match the written words with the spoken words) spread around the class.

As the last students arrived, the teacher embarked on a third rendition of the story, with more deliberateness and small pauses after the selected words whilst the teacher made eye contact with the students who thought he had just said 'their' word.

At this point the teacher moved into the next section of his lesson and used the homonyms from the story.

Step Two - Using Humour, not Jokes

Napoleon

Another example of a story with an academic point.

At the start of the lesson, the history teacher started with an anecdote about the Napoleonic Wars. She introduced some background information, telling who was involved, where and when. Then came more details about the events that led up to a particular battle on a particular day. To the casual listener this was just an ordinary history lesson; an anecdote with the information to be learned. But the history students started to giggle and look at each other in disbelief as the anecdote unfolded with increasing mentions of such things as aeroplanes and tanks. At the end of the story the teacher told the class what Napoleon had said to his girlfriend, "Not tonight Josephine", which he had sent in a text message on his smart phone. At which the students burst into gales of laughter.

Step Two - Using Humour, not Jokes

Teacher's Toolbox

”**When to Add the Sugar?**” Asks how you know when it is time to increase the level of humour in your lesson.

”**Stories with a Twist**” hints at a source of stories that can become humorous anecdotes that contain an educational point.

Step Two - Using Humour, not Jokes

When to Add the Sugar

How do you know it's time?

This is a way that I like to use, probably because I have spent a lot of hours playing a certain computer game. I imagine an “energy-meter” just above the students' heads. It shows how much energy they have left.

I listen: I listen to the 'chatter', when it reaches a certain level, I know it's time to pull a rabbit out of the hat.

I look: I watch the students' body language. When it drops above or below a certain level, or certain students start to fidget I take that as a signal to change gear.

When a lesson has “crashed and burned”, I reflect on when it was that I lost contact with the students. Then I plan a humorous moment at the start of the next lesson, or if possible in between the lessons when I have had ongoing e-mail contact with the students. A well-placed slice of humour can set them up for a great next lesson.

Step Two - Using Humour, not Jokes

Stories - with a Twist

“I use stories to welcome students who come to the lesson on time, or early. The first 5 - 10 minutes are for anecdotes.” Martin Richards

Using anecdotes, real or otherwise, engages your students with positive energy.

You can prepare some anecdotes based on real situations and include the material that you wish to teach.

Unlike jokes, anecdotes can be used again and again.

What are your anecdotes?

What your stories with a twist?

Swimming is What You are Doing When you are Not Drowning

Step Three - Asking, not Telling

This is where Coaching and Teaching meet up, collide, and merge. They meet up, in the sense that both ask questions. They collide in the sense that the questions are for different purposes. They merge in the sense that there is learning for both.

CONTENTS

- Thank you Socrates

Stories

- Mr. Tell
- Comment allez vous?
- Trivial Pursuit

Teachers Toolbox

- Lesson Plans
- Socratic Questions
- Open Questions

Step Three - Asking, not Telling

Thank you Socrates

Coaches ask questions to support their client in connecting with what they really want, what's stopping them and how they might get around those obstacles.

Teachers ask questions all the time – I think!

A lesson with an introductory question that piques the interest of the students means that the rest of the lesson has direction and momentum. By asking “What's the relationship between the number of sides and the sum of the internal angles in a polygon?”, “What are some uses of the number 3.14159?”, “Why does pi never stop, and why is that interesting to Mathematicians?”

Coaches ask questions

In a coaching situation, the coach asks the question, but the inspiration for the question comes from the client.

The coach is a kind of mirror, reflecting back what the client says.

Why? Because it says so in the course plan.

A coaching question might be “Where do you want to be 5 years from now?” The client's response gives the coach the next question to ask, and the next and the next.

Your task becomes one of arousing the students interest to study such things.

Why 5 years from now? Because the client has come to you to be supported in making changes to their life, and only they know what they want their lives to be like.

In a teaching situation you ask questions aimed at moving the students in a particular direction, for example “What is the relationship between area and perimeter for shapes like these ...?”

Why? Because it says so in the course plan, you have to study area, perimeter and circumference. Your task then becomes one of arousing the students' interest to study such things.

Author's Note

For me I felt that teaching and coaching mostly merge at this point. I almost said “I don't need this chapter”. I thought “Teachers and coaches, here is where you meet, you should understand each other.” Then I realised that I ABSOLUTELY had to write this chapter, because there is some risk of collision in this meeting too, especially regarding the agendas from which the questions come.

I have to write this chapter because what's blindingly obvious to one person is not usually obvious to everyone else.

Step Three - Asking, not Telling

Shift Happens

Teachers, in case you hadn't noticed, things keep shifting and changing, in every aspect of life and in the education system too. The shifting and changing calls into play your abilities to move with those changes, and even to move ahead of those changes.

Teacher, you are no longer in the glorious position of being the Guru, of knowing more than your students. Now you are required to be experts in how students learn, how to motivate and guide them towards passing courses and achieving life-long success. This requires a shift: a change in the way you communicate with your students, away from telling and towards asking (brilliant and powerful) questions.

This requires a shift, a change in the way you communicate with your students, away from telling and towards asking (brilliant and powerful) questions

Many teachers that I have met have come a long way on this path and are learning ways of guiding their students in critical thinking. This shift in communication will take you into conversations that are less easy to control, and puts you at risk of drowning. However, you can learn ways to be in charge, and to swim.

This chapter takes up why the change from telling to asking is so necessary, and suggests ways of planning lessons around structured learning conversations that manage risk, maximise student learning and prepare students for rewarding lives as successful adults.

Step Three - Asking, not Telling

Asking, not Telling

Watch the film '**Shift Happens**'. It will encourage you to move away from knowing, and become more comfortable with not knowing, to move from authority based on superior knowledge towards authority based on your superior skills in adapting to teaching a wider range of students.

You probably need some guidance in moving from the traditional role of Teacher / Instructor to a role set that includes include Mentor / Coach / Facilitator, and a greater degree of flexibility and skill in navigating the different roles as needed. You will need some models, and tools.

The **Hersey-Blanchard** model of **Situational Leadership** is a useful model for illustrating the range of leader roles a teacher could choose from. Indeed these are the same roles that are being taught and trained in the Adult World of Business and Industry. Why not school?

The model of human interaction, **Transactional Analysis** gives further tools for illuminating the communication in the classroom. In this case I am advocating that you explore a transition from Parent to Adult, and to encourage students to move from Child to Adult.

Parent > Adult, Child > (aspiring) Adult

Bernice McCarthy's Lesson structure **4MAT** helps to turn the teacher's focus from 'what do I want/need to tell the students?' to 'what do they want/need to know?'

Step Three - Asking, not Telling

Getting Ready for the Shift

In order to successfully manage the 3rd step, 'asking rather than telling', you will need to have:

- A clean internal communication with yourself, and clean external communication with your students
- A strong and trusting connection with your students that makes their learning enjoyable.

Why? Because you are going to change the teacher role that you play, from Guru to Facilitator.

Step Three - Asking, not Telling

Reasons why Asking has become more important

There have been many changes in the education system, both externally applied by various government and local policy changes, and continuously ongoing internal changes in the relationships between teachers and students, partly due to the fact that education has changed people's expectations of what adult life will offer them. The children who arrive at school today do not have the same mind-set as their parents had 30 years ago. This shows, for example, in the level of respect students have for teachers today compared to then.

The school leaving age has changed. A generation ago students left school whilst they were still young teenagers. Now it's necessary to stay in school even as adults. There has been a shift in roles. Teachers are increasingly being asked to act as Local Parents or Social Workers, to guide students in their becoming-adult choices.

Now it's necessary to stay in school even as adults

Coaching is used in sports and business to access employees inner drives. One of the key indicators that you are listening to a coaching conversation is that one person is asking questions, a lot of them, open questions for the most part.

The role of teacher has changed, teachers used to be seen as a Guru, at the top of the mountain. The students were as Novitiates, climbing the mountain. However, the mountain moved!

As the film 'Shift Happens' suggests, the information that was taught last year/ decade is not wholly relevant now.

Teachers can be seen as Surfers, riding the Information Wave. Students are as Explorers, riding their own waves. By that I mean that students are learning how to learn, focusing on the learning skills, rather than information.

Modern motivation theory and practice in business has moved from External to Internal Motivators

External motivators
= because I must

Internal motivators
= because I want to.

Step Three - Asking, not Telling

Stories in this Chapter

I have gathered together many of the 'old-fashioned' habits of teachers I have known or worked with and made a collage called "Mr. Tell", who is still operating on the old paradigm that 'teacher knows best'. I look at some of the reasons why Mr Tell is becoming obsolete.

In "Comment Allez Vous", I tell the story of the French teacher who ran her class like a cross between a café and a cinema, to great effect.

From my days as a primary school teacher I have picked the week when the questions came from students rather than me. The students took the teacher role in "A Trivial Pursuit?" and I learned a lot about motivation.

Step Three - Asking, not Telling

Mr. Tell

He's not real, he's a caricature, a pastiche of the worst elements of teachers I have encountered when I was a student and when I was a teacher. However I think that many readers will recognise that they too have encountered such a monster, at least in part.

I'm not Mary Shelley, but this is my 'Frankenstein Monster', and he's called Mr. Tell.

We now visit Mr. Tell, who's teaching a class.

Mr. Tell has not retired yet, but is close to it. The teacher is relying on (and enjoying) their Guru Role. You can hear him telling the students stuff from the teacher's book and from his university learning. He is telling stories from his previous experience. The teacher's deep-rooted attitudes are apparent even when they are not politically correct nor shared by the students.

You get a sense that this teacher has told his students all the time, certainly all this lesson, probably all last term and indeed it's likely to have been going on for many years.

You get the impression that this teacher knows what was right.

However, you notice that the students attitude is less than productive, they are disrespectful and their behaviour is occasionally disruptive. The teacher deals with these disruptions through an authoritarian approach, which includes threats and punishments.

The students are doing what they can to stop the teacher from telling them all the time.

Why is this happening?

From such a short visit, we can only guess. Perhaps you could argue that these students are not as well-disciplined as previous students.

However there are a few facts that have become visible during the lesson.

You get the impression, he knows he's right.

- The teacher's experience is 10-20-30 years old, the students' experience is more current. There is a gap.
- The students already know more than the teacher in certain areas. They are up to date regarding modern things like computers, smart phones and the internet.
- The students know that they can find such information as places, names and dates that their teacher is gladly telling them about, at the click of a button.
- The students seem less inclined to absorb and remember info that's already available online.
- The students are not impressed with the teacher's ability to recall facts and recount stories.
- The students are not impressed by the teacher's wide range of knowledge.
- The knowledge is not going into the student's heads partly because they know that it is 'out there' somewhere, and all they need to do is go and find it.
- The students want something different to what's being offered. When they get bored, they play up and disrupt the lesson even when they know full well that they are supposed to pay attention.

Step Three - Asking, not Telling

Comment allez vous?

Let's go to a more modern classroom, and listen to a French teacher. She has chosen to use a coach to develop her teaching skills. The coaching includes lesson observation and an individual feedback session. The teacher aims to use different types of questions to guide the lesson.

This is an edited version of my coach report from observing the lesson, with selected notes on the examples of each type of question the teacher used.

The teacher took five minutes to set up the room before she allowed the students to enter the room. When she opened the door, she was 'in role', spoke only French and guided the learning through the use of different kinds of questions.

The TV screen is set up and the window blinds are down. The teacher greeted students with cloth over her arm and the words "Comment allez vous?" The students moved to their seats that had been set up as a café with 3-4 chairs per table. The teacher used a Focus Question to bring the students attention to the ongoing lesson.

"What do you think is happening here today?"

Then she moved to asking a Process Question to gain consensus around what they were going to do in order to learn.

"How might we check each other's understanding of what we see and hear?"

Then she showed a film

It was a WW2 story. Two French Underground conspirators meet and share information about what's going on near their town. Together they make plans, and then they leave.

The teacher then used Follow up Questions

"What might the film have been about?"

"What did they decide to do?"

"What was their reasoning?"

The next exercise was a Role Play. For each table the teacher gave out 3-4 role cards, each had some character information, and some news about the town. The students at each table were asked to prepare a short performance based on the film that they had just watched.

Summary

Focus Questions

- “What do you think is happening here today?”
- “What are we going to do?”
- “What are we going to learn?”

Process Questions

- “How might we share what we learn?”
- “How might we check each other’s understanding of what we see and hear?”
- “How shall we make sure that everyone gets to speak at least once today?”

Follow up Questions

- “What did you see?”
- “What did you learn?”
- “What might the film have been about?”
- “What did they decide to do?”
- “What was their reasoning?”

Step Three - Asking, not Telling

A Trivial Pursuit?

Sometimes asking questions can guide the learning in a different way than I have described so far.

Some years ago, I was teaching a junior class of eleven-year olds. The students were of similar ages, and differing interests. I had noted that they were more or less engaged in the set school work and I was looking for an activity that would raise their energy and enthusiasm and engage all of them in a shared event, and in particular make use of their different backgrounds, knowledge, interests and levels of motivation.

At that time, I had a book called "200 General Knowledge Questions" and had intended asking the class a few questions every day as a way of gathering their attention at the start of lessons.

The combination of the book, and the fact that I was looking for a shared event, seeded a student-generated game inspired by Trivial Pursuit.

When I had asked a few of the General Knowledge Questions during one week, I noticed that they were more exciting for the students than the set school work, and decided to follow their energy. I chose a particular week on which to run this event. I created half a dozen teams each with three or four students. On Monday, I gave each team a bunch of randomly selected questions that I had photocopied from the book. The teams worked for half a day, Monday to Thursday, researching using the school encyclopedias to find as many answers as they could. On Wednesday, I collected and redistributed any teams' unanswered questions to other teams. Their answers were had-written on A4 paper. By the end of the week we had almost two hundred researched and answered questions on a wide range of subjects.

On Friday, we played a class-wide tournament based on Trivial Pursuit with each team answering randomly selected questions.

Step Three - Asking, not Telling

Teachers Toolbox

Questions can be used to do more than ask what someone else knows. In “**Lesson Plans**” I use a set of eight questions that guide you in the design of any lesson so that it will engage every kind of student.

The section “**Socratic Questions**” lists half a dozen questions that can deepen the discussions in the classroom, at different levels.

The last section “**Open Questions**” introduces six layers of more general questions that you can use to generate deeper classroom discussions.

Step Three - Asking, not Telling

Lesson Plans

Would you like to readily generate lesson plans that are effective and respectful of different learning styles?

I thought so.

Questions are a powerful way to give structure to the learning experiences that you give your students, especially when you use the same questions that are uppermost in your STUDENTS minds. So what questions do students have about what they are learning? You may well have heard students ask “Why are we learning this?”, or in other ways challenge what is being taught. So that’s the first question to answer. WHY. The others are WHAT, HOW and WHAT IF.

Questions are a powerful way to give structure to learning experiences

Bernice Mcarthy produced a comprehensively effective and respectful lesson planning strategy called 4MAT in the 1970’s.

Let me ask you, as if I were your mentor, the four 4MAT questions, so that you can more quickly write a lesson plan that’s going to include all your students in an active learning session.

Why are they learning this?

What are they learning?

How will they learn / use this?

What if they want to use this in real life, outside the school environment?

4MAT Explained

The 4MAT lesson plan is process of delivering information based on a shared experience. It has four parts each with an exercise for the student's right-brain and left-brain (in that order). This kind of lesson plan engages students in interactive activities. The students focus more on their learning process than the lesson content - because it is not just what you do, it's the way that you do it that's important for their learning.

	Right-brain	Left-brain
WHY	Connect	Attend
WHAT	Imagine	Inform
HOW	Practice	Extend
WHAT IF	Refine	Perform

The 4-MAT process has plenty of activities. An initial "attention grabber" that teaches a lesson and promotes interactive learning and a core component where they can practice the learned concepts in another activity. Finally, the lesson wraps up with something to take home so that the learning can be integrated with the students' real world.

Step Three - Asking, not Telling

Socratic questioning

Questions that lie at the heart of critical thinking.

This chapter would not be complete without mention of Socratic Questions. However I don't recall any stories where I have used them in a classroom so I will simply leave this list:

Six types of Socratic questions:

1. Clarification
2. Probing assumptions
3. Probing reasons and evidence
4. Viewpoints and Perspectives
5. Probing implications and consequences
6. Asking about the question

Step Three - Asking, not Telling

Open Questions

The next chapter is all about Open Questions, and I will introduce the idea here:

These most commonly begin with

- What
- Who
- Where
- When
- How

Then there are these varying degrees of openness:

Open

What is your favourite film?

Half-open (framed)

Would you give me three examples of films that you like?

Multiple choice

Which kind of film do you prefer: comedy, horror or sci-fi?

Yes/no

Do you like scary films?

Leading questions

Since you like horror movies, you like "the Exorcist", don't you?

Statement

Funny films are good for your health.

Handover question

What else would you like to know about films?

Opening Pandora's Box - gently

Step Four - Using Open Questions

CONTENTS

- Open Questions – preparation for asking open questions
- Benefits of Using Open Questions

Stories

- Motivational Lesson start
- Not Stealing the Learning
- Planning the Workload, together

Teachers Toolbox

- Steering through questions
- GROW questions

Step Four - Using Open Questions

Open Questions

Simply put, open questions are those that cannot be answered yes or no.

Preparation for asking open questions

Open questions are powerful, really powerful. They encourage students to give voice to what's really going on for them, in the moment. You will be accessing their thought processes, making their thoughts more visible, and revealing their values, dreams and fears.

It's good to be ready for what comes out when you open this potential Pandora's Box.

That's why I encourage you to prepare by using positive language, and cleaning up your own inner dialogue, learning about your students' inner dialogues at the same time. I recommend humour as a way of establishing a deeper connection with your students and embarking on the journey into the unknown by asking more and better questions.

This chapter is about using open questions, because they open minds.

Step Four - Using Open Questions

The Benefits of Using Open Questions

Open questions have the following characteristics:

- They ask the student to think and reflect on what's important to them.
- They will give you opinions and feelings.
- The responsibility for the conversation is shared with the student.

The two disciplines of
Teaching and Coaching meet
here

Teachers

Teachers ask questions for a variety of purposes, including:

- To actively involve students in the lesson
- To increase motivation or interest
- To evaluate students' preparation
- To check on completion of work
- To develop critical thinking skills
- To review previous lessons
- To nurture insights
- To assess achievement or mastery of goals and objectives
- To stimulate independent learning

Coaches

Coaches ask open questions because open questions, open minds.

Coaches listen to what's behind the answer - what is driving the student? The coach can then reveal to the student what the student's drivers are, and make it possible for the student to choose to focus on their own selection of their drivers.

Coaches question what's behind the students' responses, with curiosity and without judgement, aiming to deepen the learning and promote action.

Step Four - Using Open Questions

When to Use Open Questions

Before the Lesson

The **4Mat** Questions guide your lesson design so that you include all the natural questions in your students' minds in the most effective order, and have a balance of left-brained and right-brained activities.

A coach might choose to structure an individual coaching session using the method **tGROW**, where the topic, Goals, Reality, Opportunities and Willingness (to change) will be explored through the use of questions.

“Give a man a fish and you have fed him for a day.

Teach a man how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime”.

During the Lesson

Guiding your students with different types of questions:

The Focus Questions, focus the students' energy and attention on the 'now' so that they are ready to learn.

Process Questions, collaboratively plan how the lesson will proceed towards the set goals so that you are all “on the same page.”

Follow up Questions focus on what the students have learned, their experience of learning and improving their learning skills and strategies. This maximises and generalises the learning so that it can be used in many other parts of students' lives, rather than attached to a specific subject.

Use **Socratic Questions** to guide your classroom conversations towards greater depth, and reveal learning of the subject and beyond the subject.

After the lesson

Use **Open Questions** to go beyond the classroom and promote deeper understanding, and move students towards action in the real world, outside the classroom.

Step Four - Using Open Question

Stories in this Chapter

Stories that illustrate when Open Questions can be used

In the story “**Motivational Lesson Start**”, I describe how a teacher uses open questions to set up the lesson so that the students are eager to get started, working alone, or in groups; ready for teacher-support.

From my work as a teacher of Mathematics I borrow the example of 'roots of negative numbers' to show how to use open questions to make sure you are ... “**Not Stealing the Learning**”.

The story “**Planning the Workload, together**”, comes from when I was working with a very mixed class, a new book, and a variety of motivation levels and interests. My work became much easier when I used open questions to collaboratively plan the workload.

Step Four - Using Open Questions

Motivational Lesson Start

We enter the classroom where a teacher is starting a lesson.

On the board there is a list of Activities that the teacher has planned and prepared for this lesson. There are three piles of books and worksheets on a trolley, ready for the students to collect when they are ready. Much of the work can be done independently or in small groups, these are marked with a 'G' on the board. Some of the work needs to be explained by the teacher and those are marked with a 'T' on the board.

There are three times written on the board. The start time, the time of the "mini lecture" when the teacher will explain some part of the work being done today (actually it's a video), and the end time of the lesson, when the students will go to their lunch or another lesson. There is also, in big red letters, a date for when a larger assignment shall be handed in, two weeks from now.

At the start of the lesson the teacher stands by the door, and welcomes the students one by one catching their attention and giving them a smile as they come into the classroom. The teacher also deals with students who are not quite ready to learn. Some students are still talking on their phones, some are having loud conversations with each other, and some are still wearing outdoor clothes. These students are greeted with the words "What do you need to do to get ready for this lesson?" in a calm voice. Some students respond by running to their lockers to fetch books or pens.

It seems as though the teacher is collecting tickets from travellers boarding a train.

The time is now six minutes after the start of the lesson, most of the students are seated and looking at the board and taking note of what's prepared for this lesson.

The teacher walks calmly to the front of the room and waits. It takes a few minutes for all the students to settle down, and they are interrupted by a couple of 'late' students coming into the room. The teacher asks one of the last students who came in to shut the door, the door locks. There is a school rule about starting lessons on time, and the rule is being enforced.

The teacher then asks a few questions to the class as a whole, and uses body language to point out the Activities on the board.

"What do you need to get done today?"

"Which of these activities do you choose to do first, second... last?"

"Who do you want to work with? Look around and make eye contact. Groups of two or three will work best. It's OK if you want to work alone today."

"Who is going to listen to the "mini lecture" today? Please raise your hand. OK we are going to do that at XX:XX and we will be there (points at video screen)."

By now most of the students are visibly itching to get started. When the teacher says, "Pick up the materials you need and get into your groups", there is a rush of activity. After a further four minutes

most of the students have found materials and partners to work with and are engaging in the mechanics of learning. The teacher moves around the room supporting students in their choice of materials and partners, but does no explaining at this stage.

Now a full quarter of an hour into the lesson the whole class hushes as they get to grips with reading the questions and the texts they have chosen.

Step Four - Using Open Questions

Not Stealing the Learning

The square root of a negative number

I was teaching a Maths class.

The students knew how to solve quadratic equations where the solutions were whole or real numbers. Now we had come to quadratics where no such solutions were possible. Insert video of teacher laughing manically - ha ha hah.

This is a 'watershed moment' in understanding Maths. The answer opens the door to a whole new kind of number, upon which much of the electronics industry relies. Without this kind of number, no radio, no TV, no mobile phones.

It's a teacher's great joy to see when students get this concept; and the temptation to help by giving them the answer is all too tempting sometimes. There is a risk that we steal the moment from the student because we enjoyed it so much when we learned it ourselves. What's needed here is some self-discipline and a few open questions.

The students understood that the 'square root' was the number that when multiplied by itself will give the target number.

In brief, the students had found answers to the square root of target numbers such as 81, 100, 9000 and similar numbers. They had also used calculators to look up the square root of 80, 1000, 9, 5 and similar numbers.

Now they were looking for the square root of -81, -100 and -9000. Their calculators were displaying the word ERROR.

In essence my conversations with the students, one-to-one and in small groups, went like this.

T What's the problem?

S Looking at their calculator they said "It says 'ERROR'"

T So what's the problem?

S We can't answer the question.

T What are you looking for?

S A number that gives us -81 when multiplied by itself.

T How will you know when you have the right answer?

S When it doesn't say "ERROR"

T What's special about 'square root'?

S It's what you need to answer the question.

T You mean 'the number that when multiplied by itself will give the target number'?

S Yeah

T What's the target number?

S Eighty-one

T Is it?

S No, it's minus eight-one.

T And what have you tried?

S Nine

T And what have you not tried yet?

S Ah. Minus nine

T And what do you get when you try minus nine multiplied by minus nine.

S Eighty-one

T And...

S Is that it then?

T What's the target number?

S Eighty-one

T Is it?

S No, it's minus eight-one.

S So minus nine isn't the answer

T No

S So what is? Can't you tell us?

T Not yet. What else have you tried?

S Nine, and minus nine

T And what have you not tried yet?

S Decimals!

T And what do you get when you try a decimal?

S Like nine point zero?

T Give it a try. What do you get?

S Eighty-one. But not minus eighty-one.

T So what have you not tried yet?

S Can't you just tell us?

T Yes, but that would be stealing the learning from you!

S We have tried everything!!!

T You have tried whole numbers and real decimals. So what kind of number do you need?

S We need something else!

T Are you ready to hear about a different kind of number?

S There's a DIFFERENT kind of number???

T Are you ready to hear about a different kind of number?

S Yes.

T Then I am ready to tell you about...

Step Four - Using Open Questions

Planning the Workload

We are in the classroom, listening to a teacher use a range of open questions to collaboratively plan the week's workload for a whole class.

The teacher's plan is to use questions that cannot be simply answered yes or no.

Questions that start with:

- What
- Where
- When
- Who
- How

If you pick up a copy of the textbook, you will notice that it's huge! The book contains hundreds of chapters each with drawings and texts aimed at explaining some aspect of the topic. There are worked examples and guidelines plus graded exercises showing how to find answers and present them. There are "A", "B" and "C" exercises that cover "type A" routine exercises similar to the examples, "type B" problem exercises plus "type C" research and puzzle activities. All the work seems to be designed to be done individually and with little input from the teacher.

Furthermore, there are references to on-line versions of the introductions, explanations, worked examples and research articles. Phew!

The students have their own copy of this massive book and workbook, and access to the class computer. They are seated, packed together in the classroom like sardines in a tin. There is very little room for the teacher to move between the seats and desks.

You can see that there's enough work in the book to occupy an 'average student' for a whole year. According to the preface the book is designed so that the 'above average' student who learns more rapidly and needs less repetition, as well as the 'below average' student who needs more repetition of the basics, can all find plenty of stimulating work to do.

The students have been using this kind of book for half a term now and refer to the different types of questions and exercises as "A", "B" and "C".

The teacher asks the students one by one "What chapters will you be studying this week?" and the students call out which chapter they will study, and which types of questions they will work with. The teacher modifies their goals with encouragement and challenges, reducing repetitive workload in favour of research and puzzles for some students and more emphasis on basic repetition for others. Not all the teachers' suggestions are readily agreed to; some are renegotiated, others are enforced as compulsory.

Some of the teachers questions are:

“What’s that chapter about?”

“What are the topics called?”

“What do you expect to learn by the end of this lesson / week?”

“What is the benefit to you of doing (that type of question)?”

“What’s your challenge today?”

“Which question can I ask you to share with the class before the end of the lesson?”

“When will you have completed that section?”

“When will you have done half of that?”

“Where will you find resources for that question?”

“Where will you pin up your answer to that question?”

“Where will you be in that chapter ten minutes before the end of the lesson?”

“Who do you want to work with today?”

“Who do you want to share those answers with?”

“Who will you ask for help if you get stuck?”

“How committed are you to that?”

“How does that fit in with the course goals?”

The student notes their week’s goals, commitments and challenges in their exercise book. The teacher notes them on the class wall chart that’s pinned to the wall. It shows the wide variety of individual study paths in the class.

Throughout this planning stage the teacher maintains a lively “you can do it” approach with their students and weaves the planning with comments on the usefulness of the topics and relevance to the overall course goals which are also pinned to the wall.

It takes half the lesson time to make this plan.

Step Four - Using Open Questions

Teachers Toolbox

The section “**Big Questions**” describes a source of questions that students find interesting, and which can be adapted to any subject or combination of subjects in project form

“**Different Question Types**” lists the effects of six different kinds of question, so that you can better steer the classroom discussions towards higher or lower energy levels,

There are four “**GROW Questions**”, each with its own purpose, and as a guide I have included “Sample GROW questions” too.

Not all students will respond eagerly and loudly to your open questions, since there can be some tensions between the students. Here I give several suggestions for “**Responding to Students responses to asking questions**”

And a final reminder of why teachers ask questions, “**Twelve Results of Asking Open Questions?**”

Step Four - Using Open Questions

Big Questions

I have noticed that successful teachers work with project-based learning that extends beyond the common 'subjects' and include a multi-disciplinary approach to learning.

Two Key Questions used in setting Big Question Projects

- 1) What do you need to know in order to be able to find out the answer to these questions? (You don't need to answer the questions)
- 2) Who might find this information useful?

Depending on the age of the students and the scope of the project, a "Big Question" is used to start the project, such as:

Transport Theme

How many times do the wheels of the train rotate on the journey from X to Y during one year?

Global Theme

How old is the Earth?

How do you know?

How can you find out?

When will there be the maximum possible number of people living on the Earth?

How can we protect ourselves from famine / drought / ...?

Health Theme

How should one to locate ambulance stations, so as to best serve the needs of the community?

How do major hospitals schedule the use of operating theatres? Are they doing it the best way possible so that the maximum number of operations are done each day?

Mathematics

Try the "Monty Hall" effect. Behind one of three doors there is a prize. You pick door #1, he shows you that the prize wasn't behind door #2 and then gives you the choice of switching to door #3 or staying with #1, what should you do? Why should you switch? Make an exhibit and run trials to show this is so. Find the mathematical reason for the switch.

Step Four - Using Open Questions

Different Question Types

Steering the energy in the room through your choice of questions.

Types of Question and their effects on the students' level of energy:

Open	Increases, most of all
Half-open (framed)	Increases somewhat
Multi choice	Moderately increasing
Yes/no	Moderately decreasing
Leading questions	Decreases
Statement	Decreases, most of all
Handover	Could go either way

Here are examples of different types of teacher questions

Open

- What is your favourite _____?

Half-open (framed)

- Would you give me three examples of _____?

Multiple choice

- Which kind of _____ do you prefer: X, Y or Z?

Yes/no

- Do you like _____?

Leading questions

- Since you have a _____, you like _____, don't you?

Statement

- _____ is good for your health.

Handover question

- What more would you like to know about _____?

Step Four - Using Open Questions

GROW Questions

When to use them?

When you are not informing or instructing the students in what to do or how to do it. Use them when you want students to think about what they are doing, and why are they doing it.

Asking these kinds of questions will be of great assistance in making students look for their own answers.

Sample Grow Questions

Topic

- What would you like to focus on today?
- What is on your mind?
- What has happened since last time we met?
- What is the most important of these different issues?
- What have you learnt since our last discussion?

Goals

- Specifically, what do you want to achieve?
- If you could have one wish granted, what would you ask for?
- What do you want to be different when we are done here?
- What do you want to happen that's not happening yet?
- What is important to you right now?
- What results do you want from this coaching?
- How challenging is your goal?

Reality

- How much can you personally affect the results?
- What have you done about the situation so far?
- What's happening right now?
- Where are you in relation to your goal?
- What relevant skills / talents / knowledge / personal qualities do you already have?

Options

- Suppose you had already reached your goal. How did you get there?
- If you had more resources/time/money, what would you do differently?
- What could you do to make a difference?
- What does your head say about this?
- What does your heart say?

- How have you dealt with a similar situation before?

Will (Drive)

- Who needs to know about your plans?
- What else can affect the result?
- On a scale 1-10, how willing are you to go ahead?
- What is the resistance within you to reaching your goal?
- What is driving you to reach your goal?
- What will you get out of the next step?

Step Four - Using Open Questions

Responding to Students responses to open questions

Some of your students will willingly answer the questions that you ask them, or the class in general. You will want to encourage them. Using your curiosity and non-judgement, you might use some of the Reward Phrases

- "Amazing"
- "Great"
- "Magnificent"
- "Super"
- "Wonderful"
- "Outstanding"

When students say "I don't know"

Some students find it too challenging to answer in front of their peers. You will want to make it easier for them to answer.

You could ask:

- "What is it you don't know? (and how can you find out)"
- "What's getting in the way of you knowing?"
- "How important is it to you to know this?"
- "What if you did know, what next?"

Working with silent or shy students

If you are not getting enough verbal response, it's usually better to switch to writing, or discussing in smaller groups or pairs.

Waiting for the answer after asking the questions

If your questions are too challenging, you might choose to ask your students to work alone or in pairs, and give them a few minutes to think, discuss and write down answers to your question before they possibly commit themselves to a more public answer in front of their classmates.

Not jumping on students who do answer

If you usually direct follow up questions to the student who just answered your lead in question, they may regret answering and find it too challenging to answer the next question. You might choose to direct your follow up question to a different student, or to the class as a whole.

Step Four - Using Open Questions

Twelve Results of Asking "Open" Questions?

1. Assess learning.
2. Help a student to clarify a vague comment.
3. Prompt students to explore attitudes, values, or feelings (when appropriate).
4. Prompt students to see a concept from another perspective.
5. Ask a student to refine a statement or idea.
6. Prompt students to support their assertions and interpretations.
7. Direct students to respond to one another.
8. Prompt students to investigate a thought process.
9. Ask students to predict possible outcomes.
10. Prompt students to connect and organize information.
11. Ask students to apply a principle or formula.
12. Ask students to illustrate a concept with an example.

The Treasure Chest

Step Five - Asking for Feedback

CONTENTS

- The Benefits of Asking for Feedback What's included in asking for feedback
- Range of Feedback

Stories

- Using Students' Feedback
 - - Be careful what you ask for
- Student Lesson Feedback
 - Students giving themselves feedback
- Managing Feedback
 - Inspiring teachers to open up to feedback, from students, colleagues and others

Teacher Tools

- Student Feedback Forms
- Colleague Observation Feedback Forms

Step Five - Asking for Feedback

The Benefits of Feedback

The benefits of observation and feedback are many

- Teachers will see what their students see every day, and so gain several different and useful perspectives on their own teaching.
- Effective teaching practice can be documented, and shared with other teachers. There's no need for new teachers to reinvent the wheel.
- The observing teacher automatically reflects on their own situation and teaching.
- Sharing the results of the feedback develops feedback skill, which can develop respect.
- Observation and feedback makes teaching more professional.
- Teachers are less isolated, can work more in teams.
- The observer's observation skills are improved.
- There will be more information about, and greater agreement on the skills that a certain teacher needs to develop.

Step Five - Asking for Feedback

Included in Asking for Feedback

I have included a range of activities that allow useful and honest feedback from the students to their teachers, from the teacher to themselves, and between teachers. The feedback can be direct or in a coaching manner.

Direct and coaching feedback

Direct feedback is when the person giving feedback says what they saw, heard, and (sometimes) felt. Coaching feedback is when you are asked questions about what you saw, heard, felt; questions about what drove your actions and the reasons and feelings behind your choices in the moment you made them.

When students for example know that you are taking their feedback into consideration, they often calm down, show more consideration and respect, and learn more

Being in charge

Being in charge of when the feedback shall be done, by whom and what to focus on, i.e. asking for feedback, makes the feedback process and results more manageable. You can ask for what you want, when you want it, and use it as you wish. When students, for example, know that you are taking their feedback into consideration, they often calm down, show more consideration and respect, and learn more.

Step Five - Asking for Feedback

The range of feedback

The range of feedback you might want to explore is as follows:

Style of Feedback	From whom > to whom	
Direct	T > S	
Direct	S > T	S as mentor
Direct	T > T yourself	
Direct	S > S themselves / each other	
Direct	Other T > T you	Other T is your mentor
Coaching	T > T yourself	Be your own mentor
Coaching	S > S themselves / each other	
Coaching	S > T	
Coaching	T > S	
Coaching	Other T > T you	

More questions to consider

Feedback – about what?

How to observe?

How to give back the results of the feedback?

Type	From	To	Aspect	Method
Direct	Teacher	Student	Pronunciation	Grade
Coaching	Teacher2	Teacher1	Classroom Management	Coaching Conversation

Step Five - Asking for Feedback

Stories in this Chapter

In the story “**Using Student’s Feedback**” I tell about what happened when I felt the need for knowing more about the learning in my class: I asked.

“**Student lesson reflection**” is the result of a classroom observation where we hear about students giving themselves feedback at the end of the lesson. Here are some great questions to ask at the end of a lesson, and some to ask at the beginning; a kind of feed-forward.

In “**Managing Feedback**” we follow an inspirational talk to teachers about the benefits of asking for feedback in a concrete and planned way.

Step Five - Asking for Feedback

Using Students' Feedback

“Be careful what you ask for, you just might get it.” Jean Midwinter

As a teacher, I asked.

I felt that I wasn't quite reaching all the students in one particular class. We had had several great lessons during the terms so far where everyone seemed to be engaged and active in their own way and yet I had a nagging feeling that something was amiss.

Every teacher in the school had for months been working on 'Formative Assessment' and I realised that I too would benefit from similar feedback. The idea of bringing colleagues into the classroom seemed too challenging since they were tied to their own timetables. And then I realised that there were already twenty students whom I could ask. I was looking for a quick and easy way to get honest feedback from the students. The obvious solution was to use an anonymous feedback form, on paper.

During the term I had previously given the students in this class several sessions with feedback, in public and in private, so they were quite used to the idea and format of giving and receiving feedback. Towards the end of one lesson, I placed an Excellent / Good / OK / Poor feedback form at the front of the class and invited the students to make a mark where they assessed the quality of my lessons (in general) to be. At the end of the lesson I moved to the back of the room, tidying up, and the students made their marks as they left the room.

I had chosen 4 categories to avoid getting too many "middle" answers. I anticipated there would be a spread of answers across the range. I hoped for a few "Excellent" marks.

I got a wake-up call.

Although the majority of the marks were Excellent and Good, there were two marks under Poor. I found it oddly difficult to focus on the generally high mark that the class had given me. What stuck out in my mind were the two Poor marks, and that I had no idea who had made them. I realised that I had opened up a channel of communication with the students that was different and more useful to the usual classroom situation.

At the start of the next lesson I told the class the results that they had given me and that I was really happy to get a generally high mark, and worried that I was not serving at least two students well enough. I did my best not to look at any students and told the class that I was deliberately looking at the ceiling because I didn't want to publicly identify the students here and now, and I did want to encourage them to contact me to discuss what I could do to support them better.

In that moment of feedback it occurred to me that I could ask all the students what they thought might be beneficial changes to my teaching. I told them that I was going to ask for more feedback

later because I felt it gave us more connection and that such a thing is useful for learning.

Some days later, I think it was a Friday, I put out another anonymous Feedback Form. This time the headings were More of / Same / Less of, and I invited the students as they left the classroom to note what activities they would like to have more of / the same of / less of

In this way I was able to get input into the design of the lessons.

Step Five - Asking for Feedback

Student Lesson Reflection

Welcome to a classroom observation where students are being guided in giving themselves feedback on what they have learned from the lesson.

We are sitting at the back of the classroom having watched a whole lesson unfold with its fair share of order and chaos, planned activities done and other activities not done, some students fully involved and other students less so.

The teacher has gathered in all the equipment and papers that were used in the lesson. The next thing on the schedule is lunch. The students return to their seats, waiting for the final instructions from their teacher.

The teacher stands at the front of the class and calmly asks each student in turn, these three questions:

“What did you learn today?”

“How well did you pay attention today?”

“What do you need to do better next time?”

The whole process takes about eight minutes, during which the students have revealed for themselves the results of their own efforts during the lesson; and allowed them to note at least one thing to do differently next time.

The process is carried out with order, respect and full involvement. The students listen with respect to each other’s learning and suggestions of what to do differently.

After the last student has spoken, there is a short pause until the teacher tells the students to go to lunch. Then there’s a rush for the door, and a delightful, youthful chaos as twenty students head towards food.

In my mind’s eye I can imagine this teacher start the next lesson with the same students with these three questions:

“What will you learn today?”

“How well will you pay attention today?”

“What will you do better this time?”

But I will never know, because it’s time for me to move to a different class.

This teacher was quite new to using coaching questions to guide the students feedback to

themselves. Some of her questions might be developed over time to include:

“What did you learn today, and how do you know?”

“How well did you pay attention today, and how did that feel?”

“What do you need to do better next time and what might you get out of it?”

Step Five - Asking for Feedback

Managing Feedback

I was invited to give a talk at a gathering of teachers. The aim was to encourage the teachers to open up to feedback, from each other as well as their students. I guessed that some teachers were already involved in some kind of observation and feedback activities in their teaching teams, and knew from personal experience that many teachers were initially resistant to the idea of head teachers or colleagues coming into their classrooms to observe and give feedback.

My strategy was to empower the teachers, to let them know that there were ways to manage the feedback that was already happening, and thereby open them up to other teachers giving them feedback.

This is a rough transcript of the talk that I gave.

Do you ask your students for feedback on your lessons and courses?

Do you plan to include feedback from your students in the future?

Planned or not, it's already happening

You can see their feedback in the quality of your relationship, the communication between you, and your shared sense of purpose.

As a teacher you probably give your students feedback all the time. Not just when you return their test papers with a grade, but every time you get into conversation with them. The tone of your voice and your body language speak loudly, much louder than your words. You probably already know that.

And the students give you plenty of feedback in the tone of their voices and their body language. You probably already know that too.

The challenge is to get some clarity and constructive changes from their feedback.

This is rather like Formative Assessment in reverse, I mean - it's the teacher who's getting assessed.

So I'm suggesting that you, as a teacher, ask your students for feedback in a more concrete and planned way than simply observing the general tone of voice and body language. Based on the information you receive, you will be able to influence the quality of your relationship; the communication between you; and your shared sense of purpose.

So what's coming up in your mind right now about asking students for feedback? If your relationship with the class so far has been less than wonderful, some students might use feedback as

an opportunity for revenge. You might learn some inconvenient truths about your teaching. You might risk having your self-confidence shattered by certain remarks. So let's see what you can do to minimise the potential damage so that you can get to the useful information that can guide you in developing your relationship with your students.

First of all, the feedback can be anonymous.

Second, the feedback can focus on one lesson, or part of a lesson.

Then, depending on your current relationship, interpret the feedback with the knowledge that there might be some revenge going on.

Finally, take a pinch of salt with the feedback!

Step Five - Asking for Feedback

Teachers Toolbox

In the section “**Student Feedback Forms**” I include two types of feedback, with several examples of each.

Anonymous

- What do you think of?
- Activity Design
- Learning Styles
-

Detailed

- What did you think of?

The more challenging section “**Colleague Observation Feedback Forms**” there is a framework called SCORE that I recommend for teachers giving or receiving professional feedback. I also give example Shadow Questions and Reflection and Experiment Questions, with Direct Feedback and Coaching Feedback

The “**Sample Scorecards**” have been used by teachers to get feedback after an observation by a coach or colleague

Step Five - Asking for Feedback

Student Feedback Forms

3 Anonymous Feedback Forms

Use one sheet for the whole class.
Pass it round the room, or pin it to the door.
Good for a first experience of giving feedback.

1) **What did you think of today's lesson?**

Poor OK Good Great

2) **Activity Design**

What do you want? (Give examples)
More of / Same / Less of

3) **Learning Styles**

What works best for you?

I learn best when I work...

Independently, with the book
In small groups, with worksheets
Whole class, lecture or worked examples

Step Five - Asking for Feedback

4 Detailed Feedback Forms

Use one sheet for each student.

Good for allowing more detailed comments

1) **What did you think of today's lesson?**

Explain what you want the students to give you feedback on, for example:

2) **Content**

How relevant was it for this course?

3) **Delivery**

How interesting was it?

4) **Effect**

How much did you learn today?

Step Five - Asking for Feedback

Colleague Observation Feedback Forms

SCORE Cards

It's useful to base teacher-to-teacher feedback on an agreed set of principles and criteria. These are really useful, based on SCORE:

S hadow - generally getting to know the teacher's situation from their point of view.

C riteria - picking out some specifics to pay attention to during the upcoming observation.

O bservation – The teacher observes their colleague in action during a lesson.

R eflection - Together the teachers think back on and reflect on what happened during the lesson.

E xperiment - Selecting some different activities, ways of thinking, ways of tackling issues etc.

Step Five - Asking for Feedback

Questions to Ask

Shadow Questions to ask, and what to agree on before the Observation.

The aim of this stage is to generally get to know the teacher's situation from their point of view.

Reality

- What are your current challenges with this term / course / class?
- What do you usually include in these lessons?
- What do you usually do first / in the middle / at the end?

Goals

- What do you want to get done in this lesson / this week / in this course?
- What activities will you absolutely include?
- Specific question: When (after the start of the lesson or activity) do you aim to have all the students' attention? (for example)

Reflection and Experiment Questions

The Observer can ask when guiding their colleague after the Observation, during the Reflection and Experiment stage of the feedback process. Remember that the observation influences the events in the classroom, so don't judge!

Coaching feedback

Ask

- "What did you see?"
- "What did you hear?"
- "How did you feel (when... happened)?"

Direct feedback

Say

- "What I saw was..."
- "What I heard was..."
- "(What I felt was...)"

Step Five - Asking for Feedback

4 Sample Scorecards

1) Time spent on each student

Useful for Teachers who want to be sure that they are including all their students, and are not favouring certain students. Also useful for Democratic classroom. Invisible / Silent students.

Method

During a short, 10 - 15 minute period during the lesson, note which students are in communication with the teacher.

The teachers consider together

What shall “students who are in communication with the teacher” include during this observation?

Observer instructions

- Make a list of the student’s names, or if you don’t know the students’ names well enough, make a map of the room showing where the students are in the room.
- Choose a (secret) time to start and end this observation. Keep it secret so that the observed teacher does not ‘perform’ differently than they usually do.
- At the start time put a tally mark next to the student who is in communication with the teacher.
- Continue noting which student is in communication, asking questions, or answering the teacher’s questions until the end time.
- Stop

2) **Where the teacher was standing**

Useful as a basis for possibly optimally redesigning the layout of the classroom, avoiding 'problem areas'.

- Decide together when to start and how long to run this part of the observation.
- Make a map of the room showing where the students are in the room.
- At the start of the observation put the number '1' where the teacher is standing.
- Every minute, put a '2', then '3', then... where the teacher is standing.

3) **Open Questions, or not?**

Decide in advance what kind of questions you want to have more of in the lesson.

You might choose, for example to become more aware of these three types of questions.

Open Half-open Closed

The observer listens to what the teacher asks and says, then makes a note of the actual words the teacher uses under the appropriate heading.

4) **Time spent on different activities / interactions**

Useful as a basis for coming up with new strategies that will better include specific and desirable activities and interactions.

Decide which activities to focus on, and what's included in these activities.

Example #1 Teaching, Motivating, Disciplining

Example #2 Teacher explanations, silent reading, individual work

The Wizardry of Making Mistakes

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

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- The Benefits of Learning from Mistakes

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- Guess and Guess Again
- Teacher's Mistakes
- Making Use of the Wrong Answer
- The Origin of the Sample Work Technique
-

Teacher's Toolbox

- Speaking in Class
- Using Sample Work
- Islands
- Mistakes Meter

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

The Benefits of Learning from Mistakes

“There are no mistakes, only opportunities for learning.”
- Martin Richards (amongst thousands of other people)

HERE >>> PAIN >>> BENEFIT

What's in a mistake?

How afraid are you of making mistakes? I have to admit that in certain areas I'm more scared than in others. When I first moved to Sweden I felt pretty scared of speaking Swedish. For two years, the embarrassment of speaking like a duck was stronger than the social and business benefits of communicating in the local language. And then I began to see that I was losing out socially, and professionally. So, quite suddenly I made up my mind to speak Swedish and I went to school and rapidly learned the words and grammar, and to sound like a duck. Swedish is an easy language, once you have decided to learn it.

How afraid are you of making mistakes?

How scared are your students of making mistakes?

How scared are your students of making mistakes? I'm sure a quick survey of your class would reveal that some students are not even willing to publicly state that they are scared of making mistakes. I have asked students the question “Who's afraid of making mistakes?” and seen how they look at each other to see if it's OK to make such an admission in public.

In a class where mistakes are taboo, the learning is limited. Where there is stronger focus on the Pain, there is less focus on the Benefits. So the question that you have to answer is how to promote the view that making mistakes is a learning technique. How can you do that? I suggest that you become a role model, and make some mistakes in class, as a demonstration of what you believe.

Famous mistakes

Louis Pasteur once said, "Chance favours the prepared mind." That's the genius behind all these accidental inventions - the scientists were prepared. They did their science on the edge of what was known and were able to see the magic in a mistake, set-back, or coincidence. It turns out many of society's most well-known inventions were simply mistakes.

I suggest that you become a role model, and make some mistakes in class, as a demonstration of what you believe.

History is full of mistakes that have led to beneficial results. Physical and rhetorical battles have been won and lost due to simple mistakes, changing the lives of millions of people. Should mistakes be avoided? It depends on whether or not you see the result as a benefit.

From the world of science and business you probably recognise that mistakes lie behind the invention

or discovery of rubber tyres, penicillin, potato chips, the pacemaker, microwave ovens, fireworks, corn flakes, ink-jet printers, and many others. Imagine how different our lives would be without those practical things.

How would your life be if mistakes were not allowed at all, or if they were minimised to reduce embarrassment, discomfort or pain. What might you risk losing?

How would anyone learn to ride a bike if falling off was seen as a mistake? How would anyone learn to pole vault, if the pain of falling (and landing on the hard ground) was seen to be too much? How could companies make investments if the pain of failure was perceived to be unacceptable? What successful businessperson made no mistakes?

“Success requires the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm” Sir Winston Churchill

Risks of limiting mistake-making in the classrooms, and beyond

If we limit mistakes in the classroom we risk creating a culture of being inside “the box”, and losing creativity, enthusiasm, and joy. We risk creating a “Be Right, Do Right” society in which people are limited by the pre-existing rules of how things shall be done.

Mistakes can be better interpreted as learning

The ability to plan to make (manageable) mistakes, and learn from them will give students important life skills that will serve them in their unknown futures.

Mistakes are worth making, partly for the immediate learning, and partly for the long-term bravery that grows and guides the adult-to-be.

When students accept responsibility for their mistakes, learning becomes possible. Teachers may have to hold true that “Making mistakes is not the same as being a mistake.” and communicate this to their students through their actions in the classroom. How teachers respond to “the wrong answer” will be a vital opportunity for showing what they believe in. Students who have experienced elsewhere that mistakes are painful and to be avoided will naturally challenge anyone who lives by a different code.

As teacher you can guide your students to see that although you cannot undo a mistake, you can choose how to respond to it. Before you request that a student sees the mistake as a step towards a desirable result, you will have to show them that you can do the same thing. In this chapter I list a number of manageable ways of including errors, mistakes, and bloopers that will encourage students to believe that you see errors as a way ahead in learning.

“Making mistakes is not the same as being a mistake.”

Growth starts when you can see room for improvement. So, what are you scared of doing wrong in your classroom, and how are you going to manage that so that you can be a role model for the Magic of Mistakes?

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

Stories in this Chapter

The metaskills teachers use in working with mistakes are Curiosity, Respect and Generosity. You will see how those values show up in the three illustrative stories

In the story “**Guess and Guess Again**” you will read how a French teacher uses her Curiosity to make productive use of the students’ errors.

In “**Teacher’s Mistakes**” the focus is on the teacher who generously makes mistakes, deliberately. Her planning of this kind of lesson models the belief that mistakes are OK, and shows that they are a very good way to increase students’ urge to discover and learn.

In “**Making use of the wrong answer**”, you will see how deep respect is generated through the teachers use of student’s mistakes. I recall this story from when I was a student. I still appreciate the skill of the teacher who never made us wrong, and work to live up to the high standard that he set.

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

Guess and Guess again

It's the afternoon at a secondary school and we have joined a French lesson to observe the teacher and give her feedback. We are sitting at the back of the room and are listening to the teacher set up the next part of the lesson. Our role will be to note the way the teacher responds to students' mistakes. The teacher has described a strategy that she uses, and wishes to become more consistent in using. She has given us a sheet of paper where we can note our observations.

Listening to the students we can hear that there are indeed many languages in the classroom as she told us there were. Some students seem to be speaking native French. The mood in the room is cheerful and the students readily prepare for this exercise by writing the numbers 1 - 20 in a column on a sheet of paper, as instructed by the teacher.

At this school the common language used in the classroom is English. We note that the teacher speaks English about half of the time, and uses French when she is teaching the French words. Perhaps French is not her native language, but she's good at it.

The teacher turns on the projector and twenty French words are projected onto the white board. The class hushes as they visually take in the words that are in this exercise.

"I want English translations of these words", the teacher instructs.

Each of the words is displayed one by one. The teacher says the word out loud, and uses it in a simple sentence. This gives the students but a short time, about 10 seconds, to guess the translation to English. The teacher takes out a square of paper from a box she is holding and calls a student's name, turning to that student she indicates "Say it now!"

During the next twelve minutes we hear three kinds of answers, according to the observation that we are making.

Vacant answer e.g. "dunno", teacher simply moves on to next word on the list. She comes back to the word later in the exercise once all the words have been shown.

Wrong answer, the teacher investigates the connection with curiosity and humour. "What's the connection you made?", "Where does that word come from?", "What inspired you to say that?", "How did you come to that?"

Right answer, the teacher says "Mais oui.". Sometimes she asks first "How did you come to that?"

In all cases the right answer, i.e. the English translation and the French words are then shown on the board. The teacher then asks the class as a whole about the possible connections between French word and English word, using guessing, humour and curiosity again. "How might these two words be connected?", "What's the connection?", "What's a way to connect these?" And then the teacher moves on quickly to the next French word, allowing students just enough time to write down the

English words if they need to.

It turns out that all the French words that had been shown on the whiteboard come from a longer text. Now the teacher moves to the next exercise that will use that text, but our observation time is over and we leave the room to reflect on what we have seen and heard.

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

Teacher's Mistakes

Teachers make mistakes too, sometimes deliberately.

I was in the teachers' copying room and I picked up a stray text from the photocopier. It looked like a newspaper article about the Napoleonic Wars. Without thinking, I started reading it as I walked to an empty chair in the staffroom. I sat down and continued to read. There was something about this news article that was a bit curious. Naturally the Napoleonic Wars wouldn't have been in the newspaper, nor on the radio, or TV for that matter, but there was something about the article that caught my attention, I read on.

About three-quarters of the way through the article, it hit me. Napoleon couldn't possibly have heard the news from his generals on his walkie-talkie. I rushed ahead through the text and sure enough the text was full of small references to modernities that Napoleon could never have enjoyed. He could never have told Josephine that he loved her by sending a text message on his mobile phone. Then I read back through the first parts of the text, there were dates, and names of people and places that I had assumed were correct, but were they? Suddenly I had the urge to research the article to unveil the true dates, places and people; and indeed find out how Napoleon actually communicated with his generals. Was it pigeons, messengers on horseback, flags, mirrors?

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

Making use of the wrong answer

I may be misremembering, but I feel that I have a clear recollection of one my Secondary School Maths teachers, Mr. William Kitney. It was his way of dealing with the wrong answers that we gave as students that awakened my desire to become a teacher.

What I recall is that he would never put anyone down for giving a wrong answer. He always found some way of getting at the learning from whatever answer we gave.

At first I didn't notice that he was using a technique, then I did. It was like understanding a conjurer's trick, once you've seen it, you cannot not see it. I must admit that I gave some seriously wrong answers just to see how he would deal with them. Sorry, Mr. Kitney. However, my naughtiness was soon outweighed by my respect for the skill of this teacher.

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

A Final Story

This technique (teach + technique) developed itself from my need to get a lot of essays marked on time.

The twenty-or-so essays in front of me each had three or four pages. Phew! This was going to take me hours to get through. I had planned to sit in the staff room and plough through this pile of texts before I went to teach the next lesson, however a colleague was sick, or called to a meeting and I was asked to cover his lesson. I took the pile of essays with me.

I had previously used a technique for essay-marking that cut down the time I spent correcting language errors - I stopped after the first page! However, I had used this technique a little too often and my students had requested that I mark their essays all the way through! So now I was committed to a lot of work, and I had a lesson to cover.

I started the cover lesson by talking through the absent teacher's work that was set for the class. The students were to read a chapter in their books, then write about it, answering certain questions from the book. "Easy enough. Perhaps I will have time to get some essays marked", I thought.

Four students finished the set work well before the end of the lesson and were looking for something to do next. So I invited the four students to look through some of the essays and underline any language errors they found.

Suddenly I found myself in deep discussions about vocabulary and grammar about the essays that had been written by students who were two years older than the class I was covering.

Other students rapidly finished their set work and joined the essay-checking activity which grew and grew to include the whole class.

Now I was watching young students discuss the grammar of essays that had been written by their older school colleagues.

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

Teachers' Toolbox

The tools described here include ways to increase students' use of mistakes, for learning.

”**Questions to Use**”, where I describe the mind-set a teacher needs to have when working with mistakes, and some of the questions that I use in class.

”**Speaking in Class**”, where you will find three tips for getting more and relevant student interaction when holding class discussions and the like.

”**Using Sample Work**”, which makes use of one student's work in another class, anonymously where necessary.

”**Islands**”, which is a physical metaphor for getting students to stand for their opinions.

”**Mistakes Meter**”, which is a way of raising awareness of the need to take risks and make mistakes for the purposes of learning.

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Thanks Socrates

Ever since Socrates questioned the slave boy, teachers have been trying to get young people to participate in class discussions. Discussions have strengths and weakness, often complementary to the strengths and weaknesses of other forms of instruction.

However, you may notice some resistance in getting students to participate constructively when speaking in class. Sometimes the potential pain of their speaking up overshadows the benefits of contributing to the discussion. For many students speaking in class is filled with pain, and even though teachers have told their students the benefits of being able to speak in public, there is still a need for the teacher to manage their fears.

**For many students
speaking in class is filled
with pain**

An indicator of a good discussion is that each student experiences that they are at the edge of what they feel is challenging, and succeed!

HERE >>>> PAIN >>>> BENEFIT

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

What's going on in the teacher's mind?

My Mission	Awakening the Learner, Deepening the learning
My Identity	Guide, Facilitator
My Values	Curiosity, Humour and Courage
My Mind-set	“Wrong answers are the doorway to deeper learning”
My Action	Ask open questions!

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

Questions to Use

These are some of the questions I currently use when I am teaching.

Asking open questions

- What's your thinking behind your answer?
- What did you use to work that out?
- What might another answer be?
- What might a different answer be?
- What method did you use?
-
- How did you get to that answer?
- How did you come up with that connection?
- How did you arrive at that?
-
- If that was not the right answer, what else might be?

General Encouragement moving from Words to Actions

- Please show us your working on the board
- Tell us how you got that answer
- Show us how you arrived at that answer
- Put your working on the board so we can all learn from it

Sometimes, if the lesson needs to be moved ahead I simply have to admit that I want my students to guess the right answer.

“Hmm, I have a different specific answer in my head, who can guess what it is?”

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

Speaking in Class - three tips

I have been coaching teachers for years and they have developed many ways of managing the fears that students experience, in such a way that students can succeed in speaking in class discussions.

Here are three tips for getting more interaction.

1 If students are shy or lack confidence.

"I don't know what to say", or "I haven't got anything interesting to say", or "They will laugh at what I have to say" are typical student comments.

Use Roles to Hide Behind

Use role play as part of the speaking exercise. Shy students get confidence from speaking from 'behind' the mask of an assigned role. For example, divide students into groups of three with one student in each group as "Speaker" for the group and others as "Supporter" Only the Speakers are allowed to speak to the audience, and can get support from their Supporters as they need. To add more speed, the roles can be rotated after a few minutes.

2 If the student seems to follow the discussion, but in silence

"By the time I think of something to say, the discussion has moved on, so I prefer to just listen", some students might say.

Shush and Slow Down

Use silence and slow the discussion down. At the start of the discussion, ask students to jot down some ideas, or ask students to discuss ideas with a person next to them. During the discussion, allow time for students to think before letting them talk. Avoid calling on the first student who raises a hand, instead say, "Just take a few moments to think about this" and then choose the next person on your speakers list.

3 If the students are afraid of your follow up question.

Students can be afraid that if they say something, the teacher will follow up with a more challenging question. Typically, these students will avoid making eye contact with you so as to avoid being chosen to speak. They may answer "I don't know", even when you know that they do.

Limit, Repeat and Redirect

Say "I will ask you just this one question...", and keep to it. Then you can repeat the student's comment and ask the follow-up question to a different student or the whole class, and not to the student who's afraid of you. You might say, "Martin describes ... Who can suggest ...?"

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

Using Sample Work

From one class collect samples of work that has errors. Perhaps you can keep samples from one year to the next, perhaps a colleague has something you might borrow. It's important to consider having the student's names on their work. Ask the students for permission to use their work in this way. You might be surprised how many students are OK with this, even proud.

There are many ways to work with Sample Work.

- Pass out copies of the sample work to individuals or teams of students and have them identify and correct the errors. Summarise the learning on the board.
- Post a number of samples on the walls and have the students look at them before you start teaching. You might also invite small group discussion, or class discussion before you start your lecture. You may find that the discussions cover all of your lecture, and you can then move on to something else.
- Ask students to classify the errors, rather than correct them.
- Ask students to write feedback to the student who wrote the sample work. This is great when you have parallel classes studying the same course, even if they are out of phase with each other.

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

Islands

- Standing where the answer is represented

Materials

A list of factual questions, and questions about opinions, for example:.

- The capital of France is
- The product of three and eight is
-
- The weather today is
- The best footballer is

Method

Stand on a chair in the centre of the room and as soon as you have gained the students' attention say "Paris" and point at one corner of the room, and say "Berlin" and point to another corner of the room. Then pause and ask "The capital of France is ...". The students will run and stand in the corner of the room that they believe to be the right answer.

Continue the lesson with a mixture of factual questions and opinions, such as "Warm", "Cold", "The weather today is ...".

What is important is not the answers to the questions, but how the students discuss with each other when they have chosen different corners of the room. Sometimes the students will run between the corners as they change their minds about the right answer, sometimes you will step off your chair and guide the discussion with questions such as:

- "How sure are you?"
"How do you know?"
- "What might you say to help the others agree with you?"

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

Emotional Intelligence Development

More sensitive issues can be dealt with using the Islands approach.

Materials

Questions about ...

Method

As Islands, indoors or outdoors

Questions about friends

- You can become friends with your worst enemy
- You can say whatever you like to your friends
- You should always do what your friends say
- You should always say what you think

Possible “corners”

Yes, Maybe, No, (No answer)

Questions about relationships in the class

- In our class everyone is friends with each other
- In our class it's fun almost all the time
- In our class people dare to think differently
- In our class there is too much chatter during the lessons
- In our class we laugh at people who answer wrong

Possible “corners”

Always, Sometimes, Never, Don't know

Step Six - Instilling Learning from Mistakes

Mistakes Meter

Allowing time for your students to realise that you value their taking risks, making mistakes and learning from them will prepare them for upcoming class activities that are more risky.

Ask students in turn at the end of the day, questions like these:

- “What risks did you take in your learning today?”
- “What mistakes did you make today?”
- “What did you learn today?”
- “What did you achieve today that you haven’t achieved before?”
- “What grade do you give yourself for making mistakes today?”

Let the students give themselves a grade from 1 to 10.

For some students challenge the grade by asking them to support their grade in some way.

- “What makes you give yourself that grade?”
- “Why especially a ‘seven?’”
- “What would you need to do to get a higher grade?”
- “What do you need to do to give yourself a ten?”

Conclusion

One question that fuelled the writing of this book came from a teacher who had become interested in coaching. He asked “What do I have to learn, to become more like a coach? And where do I start?”

It took me half a year to arrive at this answer, and I am only half-way through. This is Book One, Book Two will come in 2014 with six more steps to successful teaching in tomorrow's education system.

Teacher Tools

Register of teacher tools, and where to find them:

4 Mat Lesson Plans.....	3
Affirmations.....	1
Anecdotes.....	2
Audio Loops.....	1
Big Questions.....	4
Colleague Observation Forms.....	5
Focus / Process / Follow Up Questions.....	3
GROW Questions.....	4
Horrid Little Words.....	1
Interruptions.....	2
Islands of Opinion.....	6
Making Mistakes.....	2
Mistakes Meter.....	6
Open Questions.....	3
Reward Phrases.....	1
Sample Work.....	6
Socratic Questions.....	3
Speaking in Class.....	6
Steering the Energy Flow.....	4
Student feedback forms.....	5
Supportive Language.....	1
The Serenity Prayer.....	1
Victim Triangle.....	1
Winner Triangle.....	1

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Download updated copies of this book, coaching tools for teacher, read the blog and much more from Martin's website www.martinrichards.se



Martin Richards BSc, PGCE, CTI trained coach

Teaching + Coaching Fusion!

Question

How could coaching add to teaching?

Answer? Find out

My Background

Teacher, from 1980, teaching Mathematics

Business English Trainer, from 1990, freelance at companies and organisations in West Sweden

Coach, from 2005, freelance, at companies and organisations in West Sweden

Teacher, from 2008, teaching English

My Life Mission

To contribute to an Education System that prepares youngsters for a full and rewarding Adult Life.