

## **1. One for All, All for One**

Imagine a classroom where there's a sense in every pupil that they are there not just for themselves, but for everybody else, so that they're there to support and help every other pupil in the class, and that the class collectively is also there for each individual student. So that's the principle of One for All and All for One. It's very different to that sense of everyone for themselves that's so common in life, so common in schools. So it's a deep sense of really all being in it together for each other. And it has a highly inclusive feel. No one is left out. No one is excluded. There's a strong sense of unity in the class, not of separation. There's a strong sense of harmony, not disharmony.

For example, suppose there's a test and somebody gets less than they hoped. They're really unhappy. So the whole class feels it, feels for them and wants them to improve, wants to help them improve. And if somebody does really well and they're happy about it, then everybody else is happy in their success.

You might have heard of this principle from *The Three Musketeers*, the Alexandre Dumas novel of 1844. And it's also associated with Switzerland. In the mid 19th century, I think it was 1868, there were some huge storms in the Swiss Alps, and officials launched this big campaign, and they used the All for One and One for All to really evoke this sense of unity and solidarity.

There was a really extraordinary educator called Jamie Escalante. If you've seen the movie *Stand and Deliver*, you'll know something about him. He was Bolivian, and in his early adulthood, he taught mostly maths. And he realised pretty quickly that children learn faster when learning is fun, when it's a game, when it feels a challenge. And the way he set up his classes was that he as the teacher was really the role of a coach and the students were the team. And he really made sure that everybody knew what they were working together towards and that everybody was on the same team. So in La Paz, this was in the 1950s and early 60s, the opponent was the annual secondary school maths competition. And the team goal was to reign as champions over all the local schools. And it was extraordinarily powerful. So this is certainly one way that you can implement the principle of One for All and All for One in your classroom.

It's not the only way. Another way would be to look at the class average and for everybody in the class to feel that the class average is important. It's important for them as much as their personal scores.

And there are certain tactics that you can bring into the class to do this. Some of these may actually arise spontaneously, such as peer-to-peer learning, you know, the pupils actually helping and supporting each other directly, mentoring each other directly. So what you're really doing is creating this culture of the pupils supporting each other. They're rooting for each other. They're happy for each other's successes.

The really important thing is that there's a common goal. There's a common goal that everybody's excited about and which is mutually supportive for all of the pupils.

When you start doing this in the classroom, we would absolutely love to know how it's going. So please let us know in the comments. You'll also be benefiting a lot of other teachers because they will learn a lot from your experiences too.

## **2. Flow State**

One of the biggest barriers for learning is when you're distracted, unfocused, and your mind is not on the subject you're supposed to be learning. And sometimes teachers see that pupils are distracted and they say to the pupils, 'concentrate!'. But that doesn't help them very much without an understanding of how concentration works or what, as a pupil, you're supposed to do to actually concentrate. There's a state of mind, state of heart and mind, which is the opposite, really, of that distractedness and the lack of productivity that happens as a result.

It's often known as the flow state and most commonly associated with the great Hungarian-American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. When he was a young man, Csikszentmihalyi was really fascinated by artists, and particularly those who would get completely engrossed in their work. So he would watch artists, especially painters, who were so immersed in their work that they would lose all awareness of time. And he studied this phenomenon for many years. And during the 1970s, he interviewed people who experienced these sorts of deep states of concentration. And they would quite often use language like, 'it was like floating', 'i was carried on by the flow'. And as a result, he called this state the flow state.

So the flow state is a state of high concentration, but not concentration in the way that we often think about concentration - the kind of furrowed brow type concentration. This concentration has no tightness, no tension about it. So it's both highly alert and yet at the same time relaxed. And during this state, even hard things become easy, become comfortable. You may have heard people say things like they're in the zone, or they're locked in, or they're in the groove. These are all expressions of this same state of heart and mind of being in flow.

It's well known in sports. So for example, there are stories of famous golfers who relate being in the zone in a state of flow where they may be standing over a really long, difficult putt, including even a putt to win a major championship. But because their mind is in this state, the hole looks really big and the entire process feels so easy. They just stand over the putt and their mind is very, very still and everything just happens naturally and easily. When tennis players talk about it, they talk about when the ball's coming towards them, it looks so big that they couldn't possibly miss it. They couldn't possibly not place it exactly where they want to place it. The greatest musicians sometimes talk about this. There's a famous story about Mozart writing his Jupiter Symphony. And he related how the entire symphony of, this is a half an hour piece, occurred to him in a flash. So in this flash, which just lasted a few seconds, in his mind's eye, he saw the entire symphony.

And that's very much how the mind is in the state of flow. Extraordinary insights, extraordinary creativity simply just arises in the mind. There's the famous Einstein story of when he was 16, in one of these kind of states, he imagined chasing after a beam of light. And that particular thought experiment then played a big role in his development of special relativity.

So how can we actually get into flow? How do we get into this sweet spot? One of the important things to know is that you can't order it to happen. You can't instruct it to happen. It happens when the conditions are right. As it happens, the other eight Kind Gen Principles are all extremely supportive of being in the flow state for pupils. So the more you put those into practice, the more you'll be creating the conditions for your pupils to be in a state of flow.

And there are three important other conditions. One is that whatever activity they're being set must have clear goals. So as a pupil, they have a really clear sense of what it is they're trying to achieve. And that creates structure, it creates direction. The second is that whatever the task is that they're doing needs to provide clear and immediate feedback so

that for them as learners, they can adjust their approach and tactics as necessary. And the third, in some sense, is the most important, which is that the way that they perceive the difficulty of the task and their own perception of their skill, their ability to actually meet that challenge needs to be well-balanced. A way to think about this is if you think of a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is the task seems ridiculously easy, and 10 is it feels practically impossible. So the flow state is most likely to occur when the mind perceives it around a seven. If it's significantly below a seven, then boredom is likely to set in because it just feels too easy. If it's much above a seven, anxiety sets in, stress sets in, disempowerment sets in because it just feels too hard relative to one's ability to actually do it.

So for us as teachers, how do we know whether we've hit that kind of spot of seven out of 10? Well, one way to do it, there's some very interesting research from the University of Arizona, and they observed that students who are getting the right answers to something like 85% of the time, so in other words, 15% of the time they're getting them wrong; In that kind of area, students perform the best over time. So when consistently getting a lot more than 85% right, it's probably too easy. So they're likely to get bored. And when consistently getting less, significantly less than 85% of it right, it's probably too hard. And so anxiety, stress is setting in.

When you start doing this in the classroom, we would absolutely love to know how it's going. So please let us know in the app comments. And other teachers for sure will learn a lot from your experiences, too. Thank you so much.

### **3. Empathetic Listening**

The teacher-student relationship is key, it is fundamental to learning in the classroom. And one of the most important ingredients of that relationship is trust. When a student, a pupil, has trust in you as the educator, they feel that you have their best interests at heart. They feel you know what you're doing. Then you have a lot of space to guide, to mentor, to lead their learning. And conversely, without trust, strong trust, getting great results in the classroom is impossible.

When there's a lack of relationship, particularly trust, you often get behaviour issues as well as underperformance. Absolutely key to building relationship is how you communicate, because communication is really the action of relationship. This includes how you speak, what you say, and particularly how you listen. And communication also includes not doing either of those things. It includes our facial expressions, our body language, obviously how and what we write. All of these things are communicating something.

To build trust, a pupil really needs to feel heard, really needs to feel listened to. And that starts with us as educators paying really close attention when they're speaking with us. And having that attention, that quality of empathy, really connecting our own hearts with their experience, trying to really recreate their experience from the inside, trying to see things with their eyes, hear things with their ears, and feel with their feelings.

That's not so easy to do. It means going beyond ourselves. It means letting go of our own ego. A way to access this is when you are in conversation with a pupil, is to observe how you are being in the conversation, and particularly how you're listening. To look in your own mind for any filters, filters for listening. A way to think about this is if you walk around wearing red glasses, everything looks red, even though it's not. So let's suppose you're in a hurry and you're listening through the filter of impatience. So there's part of your mind which is thinking, oh, please get on with this so I can go. If we're listening through that particular

filter, does the pupil really feel heard? Do they really feel they have your full attention? Or if we listen through a filter of annoyance, then we hear everything that they're saying with that taste of irritation and annoyance. And the person who's speaking feels it. They know it deep down.

So the key here is noticing and letting go of whatever filters we're listening through. It is really being present with our pupils as they speak and really communicating to them through the way that we listen, that we care about them. And that in itself creates deep empathy. In doing this, we're giving our pupils an extraordinary gift, which is the gift of feeling heard because most of us go through our lives never really feeling heard by almost anybody. So the extent that you can do this with your pupils is really the extent that you'll be able to build trust, build deep relationship with them and actually have them really listen to you when you speak. If they feel deeply heard and listened to, when you're telling them things about what they need to do to improve their work, when you're giving them words of encouragement, they'll listen. The space to actually hear what you're saying will actually be there.

Alright, so when you're doing this with your pupils, we would absolutely love to know how it's going. So please let us know in the app comments. Other teachers for sure will learn a lot from your experiences too. Thank you so much.

#### **4. Empowered Learning State**

How much learning is going on if a pupil feels bored? How much learning is going on if they're feeling anxious? How much learning is going on if they think the subject is too hard for them? Or they think the subject really isn't their kind of thing? How much learning is going on if they're distracted? They're physically present in the lesson, but their mind is somewhere else.

If we're really going to optimize learning, and also by extension well-being, the state of mind, state of heart and mind is so important. So try asking yourself what states of heart and mind really help learning.

For example, curiosity. When the mind is really curious about the subject, it wants to investigate it. It wants to check it out. It feels empowered through curiosity. So it wants to, it is interested in the subject. It feels that it's relevant in some shape or form. It's relevant to our life. It's relevant to something we're interested in. And those two things also give us a sense of determination. So even when the going gets hard in the learning process, which it's bound to do at some point, then there's a sense of commitment to it and resilience, being able to bounce back when things are tough.

So as teachers, as educators, one of the key things we want to have our pupils understand from us is that we believe in them. And that having somebody else believe in us is enormously powerful. It's truly one of the greatest gifts we can give our pupils.

We also want our pupils to feel a sense of at-stakeness, that there's something at stake for them, something which they feel is genuinely motivating. It's not a punishment, but something they feel excited by.



Having a sense of fun. Fun is very motivating. So what can we do as educators in the classroom to make it feel fun? What can we do as teachers, as educators, to make the topic feel relevant? That it is actually of some use, some real use to them.

These are all things that we as teachers need to be very creative around, to really see and spot when a student is feeling disempowered and to ask ourselves how can I help them get into an empowered state? What can I say? What can I do to shift the way that they're looking at this topic, the way they're viewing it?

There are also some really important tactics around this. So one is to keep the learning active. Just going through textbooks, highlighting things is a very passive way of learning and not productive. Another thing is to use spaced repetition. There's a lot of research and great information out there on the decay curve of memory and it's very important and significant for us as teachers because there's a clear link between memory and skill and enjoyment. So the more we can support the students in actually memorizing and growing their skill in a particular topic, in a particular subject, generally speaking, the more they'll enjoy it and vice versa. It's a relationship between those two things where one conditions the other.

Rest periods are important during lessons. And actually there are studies that show that in the rest period itself is when the brain actually forms the synaptic connections to actually learn and memorize those things that it's been doing in the session. Plenty of other tactics as well, which we'll share elsewhere.

So when you start doing this in the classroom, as always, we would love to know how it's going. We would love to know what's working and what's not working. So please share your thoughts in the app comments. Other teachers for sure will learn a lot from you too. Thank you so much.

## **5. Safe to Fall**

We live in a culture where failure is looked down on. It's very often punished, it's kind of a dirty word. And this is very consequential in learning and not in good ways. In a classroom, if pupils don't feel safe to try and then fail, they very often won't even try. So this fear of failure discourages experimentation. It discourages risk-taking with learning. And in a lot of ways, this leads to underperformance.

To learn really effectively, to optimize learning, you have to be willing to fail repeatedly. Let's take an example. Let's take the example of a baby trying to learn to walk. In a study of 130 toddlers, aged between 12 and 19 months, the researchers found that toddlers fell on average 17 times an hour. And if they were new walkers, they just started trying to walk, they fell on average 69 times an hour. That's more than once a minute on average. Imagine as a parent, after your toddler falls a couple of times, you say to them, 'oh, forget it! You failed! You're just not going to cut this walking thing! Just carry on crawling!'

To really learn optimally, you have to fail often and use the failure as feedback.

Each failure is important information if you use it well. The Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget, used to study failure in children. And he realized that children who are allowed to make mistakes and then correct their mistakes actually retain information a lot more accurately. And in that particular process, they then develop their own learning methods. They understand themselves well enough, figure out how they best learn. The key to making this a principle, the principle of being safe to fail, safe to fall in the classroom, both for yourself and for your pupils, is really having a non-judgmental attitude around this. Some things are going to work, some things won't, and that is absolutely fine.

So what you want to do is to celebrate and create a culture of learning experimentation, learning innovation. Continually encouraging through the failures, just like you do with a toddler who's learning to walk. And exactly as for the toddler who's learning to walk, it's not

how many times you fall that actually matters. It's how many times you then stand up afterwards.

There is an important thing to say about testing here. So testing, as we all know, as educators, is an important part of learning because it's through testing you see where you're at and what needs to be worked on. But to reduce fear of failure and really allow pupils to experiment and try more, a very useful tactic is to reduce the stakes when testing as often as possible. So low stakes tests, self-administered tests, fun tests, so pupils can see for themselves how they're doing without the stress of high stakes testing.

As always with all the principles, when you start doing this in the classroom, we would love to know how it's going, what's working for you, what's not. So please do share in the app comments. Other teachers for sure will learn a ton from you as well. Thank you so much.

## **6. Respect**

In one of the other principles, we looked at how critical trust is in the teacher-pupil relationship. Another really vital quality is mutual respect.

When there's a lack of respect from the student to the teacher, it means that anything you say as the educator is effectively being lost. Without respect, there's no real listening. Without respect, you can't help a pupil get motivated. Without respect, teaching is pretty much impossible. So this is a big deal.

The same is true in a slightly different way when there's a lack of respect between the students. When pupils disrespect each other, it creates a lot of toxicity, a lot of negativity in the classroom. And those things really harm learning as well as well-being. When we as the teacher, we as the educator, don't have respect for the pupil, it's impossible to bring out the best in that person.

It's really important to understand that force or threats or coercion don't create respect. So we can shout all we like at the pupils. We can impose punishments like detentions all we like. None of these things are going to get the pupils to respect us or the pupils to respect each other.

Respect comes from having inspiring qualities that others look up to, others admire. For example, if we are compassionate, caring, if we have integrity, we do what we say, if we are honest, we're generous, we are respectful of other people, if we are clearly on top of our subject, if we're well prepared, then we're giving the pupil something to respect.

A wonderful example of creating respect in the classroom was from the amazing educator Ricky Braithwaite, who was from British Guiana. He went into a completely failed classroom in inner London, where respect was pretty much non-existent. And through creating this

kind of culture of respect, he completely transformed it. There's a movie on this called To Sir, With Love, and Sidney Poitier plays the lead role.

An important way to earn respect is to really deeply listen to other people, and in this particular instance, to your pupils. I talked about this in the Empathetic Listening Principle.

And respect is a two-way street. So if you want respect, you've got to give respect, first of all.

And in the classroom, to create that culture of respect between the pupils, helping them understand that the journey of life is so much to do with how we treat those we encounter, and particularly our ability to treat them with respect. You'll find by creating and fostering a culture of respect in the classroom that the relationship between you and the pupils, and between the pupils themselves will be strong. And with that strength of relationship, it's really amazing how much learning takes place.

As with the other principles, when you start doing this in the classroom, we would love to know how this is going. So please do let us know in the app comments. Other teachers will learn a huge amount from your experiences too. Thank you so much.

## **7. Honouring Each Child's Uniqueness**

There's a famous drawing relating to education in which seven completely different animals are all lined up. So there's a bird, a monkey, penguin, an elephant, fish, a seal, and a dog. And they are all in front of an examiner and behind them is a tree. And the examiner says, 'for a fair selection, everybody has to take the same exam. Please climb that tree'.

That graphic is a surprisingly accurate representation of our education system because our system is strongly biased towards particular types of intelligence, particularly two things: One is the ability to use words. The other the ability to use logic and mathematical reasoning. As a result, a student might not have particularly great natural ability at maths, but is a brilliant natural dancer or artist, or not be particularly naturally great at writing essays, but have off the scale social and emotional intelligence. But they have to sit and be judged by the same standardized tests as those whose natural abilities lie in the area being tested and the way that that area is being tested.

In truth, every pupil is unique and has abilities that are unique to them. Somebody who did some very interesting research and thinking about this is the American psychologist Howard Gardner. He developed the notion of multiple intelligences. And depending on which version of his model you use, there are, in his model, eight or nine different types of intelligence. There's what he calls bodily kinesthetic intelligence, which is really about being body smart. There's interpersonal intelligence, or people smart, as you can think about it, the ability to read other people, to form relationships, create relationships, social intelligence. Then there's verbal linguistic intelligence, being word smart. That's one of the things which is tested heavily in our current system. Or logical mathematical intelligence, logic smart, which is also heavily developed and tested in our system. Then there's naturalistic intelligence, being nature smart. There's intrapersonal intelligence, being self-smart, being able to understand yourself, having a lot of emotional intelligence. There's visual spatial intelligence, being picture smart. A lot of people who go into art or architecture, things like

that, have that kind of intelligence. And the other one, major one that he talks about, is music smart, obviously being musical. And sometimes another one that's added to this is spatial intelligence.

The implication of this is huge because if you have a class of, let's say, 30 pupils, you're going to have 30 different blends of different types of intelligence. And for us as educators, the ability to recognize and honor these kinds of individual differences in the pupils is really the beginning of a successful and deep teaching relationship. An important part of that is recognising and crucially accepting that a pupil's unique abilities, unique strengths might actually not be in our own subject and being totally fine with that. When we understand each pupil's uniqueness, we look at them differently. We don't compare them to other students because we realize it's like comparing the proverbial apples and pears.

Another important aspect of this is that if a pupil is very good at a particular subject or a particular activity, that can be leveraged as a confidence builder to help other subjects. There are plenty of studies that show that people who double down on their strengths do better in life than those who spend all their time trying to lessen their weaknesses. And in my experience, it is exactly the same in education. So a child who is, let's say, very able at maths, but lags behind in literacy, for them to focus on strengthening their maths gives them a lot of confidence. And that confidence can almost always be later extended to their literacy. And then their literacy skills really leap up.

As with all the other principles, when you start doing this in the classroom, please let us know how it's going, what's working for you, what's not working. If you could put your thoughts in the app comments that would be great. Other teachers will also learn from you!

## **8. Find the Child's Best Learning Way**

A pupil's best learning way can be very different to the way normally used in the classroom. It can be very different to our own personal way of learning.

You may be familiar with the story of Helen Keller and her extraordinary teacher, educator, Anne Sullivan. Helen Keller became blind and deaf as a very young child, probably through meningitis. And unsurprisingly, this poor child going through this experience of losing her sight and being unable to hear became very, very troubled and her behavior became impossible. And her father brought in tutor after tutor to try and work with her, but nobody could do anything with her. One day he heard about an educator called Anne Sullivan, who was from the Perkins School for the Blind. Anne was herself not entirely blind, but did not have good eyesight. And she had learned a way of communicating with the blind, known as the manual alphabet, where you write the letters on the hand of the person who is blind.

She arrived at Helen's house and started trying to teach Helen words using this method that she had learned. And so, for example, she would pick up a doll and place it in Helen's hand. But Helen's mind couldn't make the connection between these strange scribbles on her hand and the doll. And she got more and more frustrated, and one day just threw the doll in frustration on the ground and smashed it.

Anne was on the point of giving up, but one day, a hot day, she was in the garden with Helen. Anne was thirsty and she figured that Helen was probably thirsty too. And she went to the water pump and started pumping water and took Helen's hand and held it under the water. So as you can imagine on this hot day, the feel of this cool water on Helen's hand was very calming for her. And she smiled and Anne instinctively started to write the word for water on Helen's hand as the water was splashing down on it. So she wrote W-A-T-E-R slowly and then she wrote it again but a little bit quicker W-A-T-E-R and then again quicker and quicker and after a few repetitions, something clicked in Helen's mind. And she



grabbed Anne's hand and she wrote the word water, W-A-T-E-R, in Anne's hand. And it was the first time that she made the connection between the letters that were being written in her hand and the object, in this case, water. And she then bent down and touched the ground and was asking Anne to spell the word ground, which Anne did. And by the end of that day, Helen learnt over 30 words. And within a fairly short period after that, she could write fluently using this manual alphabet.

Why this story is really important is that in order for her to be able to teach Helen, Anne had to be able to let go of her view and training about how to teach. She had to let go of all of the methodology that she had learned and to be very, very present with Helen and to observe how Helen was, what Helen was responding to and to work with that and to find a way of communicating the lesson in a way that Helen herself understood. In other words, she had to find Helen's best learning way.

So for us as teachers, for us as educators, we need to do the same thing. For different children, different things are going to work. For some children, let's say peer-to-peer learning works brilliantly. They hear something from one of their peers and it just sounds different and easier to understand than hearing it from a teacher. It sounds more accessible. For some children, project-based learning works really well. Their minds really connect with it, connect with the relevance of it. For some children, games, a games-based approach to learning. For some children, theatrical-based approaches, like, for example, if you want to teach children about a battle, rather than standing next to the blackboard and writing the names of the generals, actually going out into the playground and acting it out is a very powerful way of teaching. For some children, drawing, sketching is very powerful. Some children work very well while dancing. You can actually teach maths while dancing! So the key here is to be very open to what the child's best learning way might be.

The wonderful thing is that different solutions for particular individual children often work well with other children too. So you can apply one solution for a child to the whole class.

And sometimes great things will happen. For example, if you realize that a child understands much better when they're on their feet, sometimes getting the entire class up on their feet and doing part of the lesson standing can work very well for everybody.

As with all of the principles, a real key to it is our creativity as educators. When you start doing this in the classroom, please let us know how it's going, what's working, what's not working, and put your thoughts in the comments. Other teachers will also learn a whole lot from your experiences. Thank you so much.

## **9. Blank Sheet Attitude**

Often as educators, and this is really due to how the mind works, we draw conclusions about a pupil's ability. And those conclusions are drawn from how they perform, perform in tests, perform in class, and also from their behavior. And particularly when a pupil, is low performing, quite often we will form the view that they don't have that much ability. Or that they are 'trouble', if their behavior is bad. And both of those views or either of those views really are disempowering for us as educators, and then ultimately disempowering for the pupil too, in terms of our ability to really teach.

Surprisingly, perhaps, it can be that the lowest performers can sometimes be amongst or even the most gifted, the most able in the entire class. To give you an example from my own experience, I used to teach the piano, and I had a pupil who was easily in the bottom, say, 10% of students. So this was a pupil who after a year, actually more than a year, probably two years of lessons, was still on book one of a very, very basic primer series.

And other pupils who had started at the same time were way ahead. And my mind had formed the conclusion that this boy was not cut out to play the piano. I was on the brink of speaking with his mother and saying, 'look, I'm really sorry, but I just don't think it's worth him continuing with this. He doesn't seem to be enjoying it and isn't making much progress either'.

Luckily, before I spoke with her, I sat down with this boy and I said to him, 'it seems to me that you don't enjoy this. You come here and it's boring for you and this book is horrible for you. That's just, that's how it seems. What do you think?' And then I also said to him, 'do you like the piano? Is there anything, is there any piece that you've ever heard on the piano that you like, that you'd actually like to be able to play?'

And to my amazement, he opened YouTube and wrote the name in the search of a piece by Chopin. It's called The Revolutionary Study. So if you're not familiar with the piano repertoire, The Revolutionary Study by Chopin is a virtuoso piece. It's really hard. It's a piece that most people who start the piano are never able to play. It's just way too difficult. And even those who are talented and work hard, it's usually years of work before they can get anywhere near being able to play that. So he said, 'I want to be able to play this'.

I saw in my mind when he said that, that almost any teacher would kind of gently smile or say, 'yeah, great', and dismiss it, at least mentally. But something in me thought, okay, let's roll with this. Let's see what we can do. I printed out a copy of the music and put it in front of him. Now, of course, a piece like this, even on the page, looks really hard. It's just a black page full of notes. And this boy couldn't read a single note of music!

So we started by me showing him a little bit of one of the hands, nice and slowly, the first little bit, the first bar and to my amazement he copied me well, very well. I thought 'wow that's interesting' so then i showed him a bit more of it another few bars and he was able to copy that too and within a few minutes he could play the whole of the first line one of the hands and i was like 'oh my goodness this is amazing'. Then I played a little bit of the other hand - same thing, he could play, he could copy it.

And by the end of this lesson, he could play several lines of this ferociously difficult piece, and it actually sounded like the piece! Now, even for a really advanced pupil, that would have been a brilliant accomplishment. For this boy, who previously could hardly play anything, anything at all, even the simplest piece on the piano, this was nothing less than a complete miracle! And over the course of the next couple of years that I worked with him, he learned several of the most difficult pieces in the piano repertoire exactly the same way.

This experience completely transformed my understanding of what any pupil is capable of in any subject. I realized the enormous importance for us as educators to have a blank sheet attitude towards a pupil. We never know, we have no idea really what any pupil is really capable of. On this topic, the great American educator, Marva Collins, was famous for saying that she never gave up on her students, no matter how much it appeared that this topic, this subject, was beyond them. In fact, she mentioned in an interview that if Abraham Lincoln were enrolled in a public school these days, he would almost certainly be in a severe learning disability program. Abraham Lincoln couldn't read until he was 14.

So it's incredibly empowering if we come from the point of view that any pupil in our classroom has potentially infinite learning potential, even in the subject that we are teaching, even if it really appears that they have no chance, that they are really not cut out for this subject.

A way to access this is to look at your class and just look at what conclusions your mind has formed about the pupils, especially if they are middling or low performers, and to drop into the mind the possibility that you could be wrong, very wrong, about any or even all of those students.

And then secondly, to connect with the pupils and to ask them, what do they want? What do they want in their lives? What do they want for themselves? And you may, for example, hear from a child who seems terrible at maths, who is completely disengaged from their maths lessons, that they want to be able to go into their family's business, and they love the family business, they want to be able to understand it. And immediately that gives you a doorway into the world of maths. You might then be able to teach them the entire subject from the perspective of their family business, even if at that point their understanding of maths is very elementary.

So approaching the pupils, approaching the teaching from this angle can open really extraordinary, mind-blowing possibilities.

As always, with all the principles, when you start doing this in the classroom, please let us know how it's going, what's working for you, what's tough, to share your thoughts in the app comments. Other teachers too will learn so much from what you share. Thank you so much.