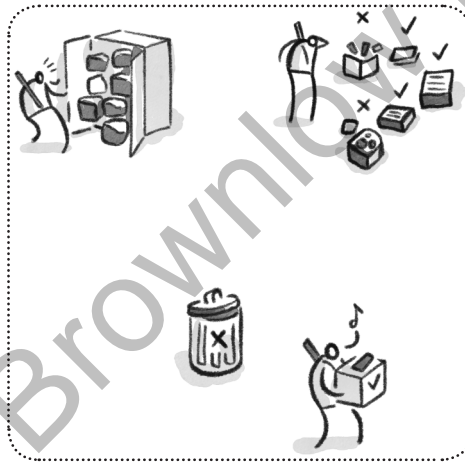


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Introduction

A primary teacher's cupboard can tell many tales: items kept for years after they cease to be part of the curriculum can be unearthed from its depths. After all, they may be needed again. Some objects in the cupboard have never been used: those heavily discounted wooden flowers – surely they hold too much potential to be thrown out? You can never be entirely sure what is stored in The Cupboard until the time comes to reorganise it, once and for all.



Both of us have recently experienced the need to sort through the mysterious items in our cupboards. Mel moved classrooms and, despite having relocated many times and held on to the entire contents – including those resources lurking at the back which had been passed on by previous guardians – this time she decided that a full-scale de-clutter was required. Jo needed to locate her copy of a storybook that she knew would be perfect for teaching some English lessons on imperative verbs; she knew it was somewhere in The Cupboard. Many items were found which are completely irrelevant to what happens in our classrooms now, each with its own tale to tell.

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We discovered display resources and activity sheets for literacy and numeracy lessons, now called English and mathematics in the new national curriculum. These were not replaced on the shelves. Alongside them were Velcro ability-group signs for various subjects, dating back to when we first started teaching. We have long since moved away from grouping children by ability so they were added to the growing collection of discarded items. Boxes of redundant test papers were found, including one or two papers stretching back to the year Jo took her own Year 6 exams! Needless to say, they weren't in line with the current curriculum so were no longer needed. We also found various leaflets, booklets and publications from long-closed government bodies, kept for reference but gathering dust.

Once our cupboards were well-organised and stripped back to the essentials, it led us to consider what would be left if we went through the same exercise with our teaching. Those who have been in the profession for just a few years will have already witnessed a sea change in what constitutes a good lesson and in how teachers should make assessments. Others, who have been teaching for longer, will have observed many transformations, variations and amendments – a constantly changing cycle. We decided that good practice remains at the heart of this ever-changing profession.

In recent years, schools in the UK have been given a greater degree of autonomy over what they choose to teach and how they assess pupils. Alongside this, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) have stopped grading individual lessons. Teachers have more freedom in class than they've had for over a decade, and can develop their teaching in a way that suits them, their schools and their pupils. Analysis of PISA results suggests that “when autonomy and accountability are intelligently combined, they tend to be associated with better student performance”.¹ So, in this current climate of change and autonomy, in which we strive hard to enable our pupils to succeed, what does good practice look like?

1 See Miyako Ikeda, School Autonomy and Accountability: Are They Related to Student Performance? *PISA in Focus* 9 (Paris: OECD, 2011). Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/pisainfocus/48910490.pdf>, p. 1.

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In *Making Every Lesson Count*, Shaun Allison and Andy Tharby point out that these changes are welcome but daunting. They ask, “If we are to make every lesson count, what simple and manageable actions have the greatest impact on learning?”² In this book, we have embraced the ethos and six evidence-informed pedagogical principles identified by Allison and Tharby and applied them to the primary context. These principles – challenge, explanation, modelling, practice, feedback and questioning – lie at the heart of good practice and successful teaching. We are not offering quick fixes or gimmicks, instead we hope that new and experienced teachers alike will benefit from our exploration of how attending to the small details can enhance practice and create a rich learning environment.

Everything that follows in this book is underpinned by two values: *excellence* and *growth*. Ron Berger, in *An Ethic of Excellence*, suggests that, regardless of their family background, abilities or disabilities, he wants the same thing for all his pupils: to give them the chance to be excellent – to create work of which they are proud and which is worthy of that pride.³ Having high expectations of pupils is simply the starting point; it is the culture within a school that encourages and supports pupils to succeed. Berger recommends that schools “consciously shape” the culture so that academic effort, caring about your work and taking pride in drafting, redrafting and creating an excellent final piece of work becomes the norm.

Encouraging children to aim for excellence links to Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck’s ideas about mindset. Dweck’s research has led her to believe that people’s opinions about themselves have a profound influence on their lives.⁴ She has identified two mindsets that human beings adopt when faced with an obstacle or challenge: a *fixed*

² Shaun Allison and Andy Tharby, *Making Every Lesson Count: Six Principles to Support Great Teaching and Learning* (Carmarthen: Crown House Publishing, 2015), p. 2.

³ Ron Berger, *An Ethic of Excellence: Building a Culture of Craftsmanship with Students* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), p. 6.

⁴ Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: How You Can Fulfil Your Potential* (London: Robinson, 2006).

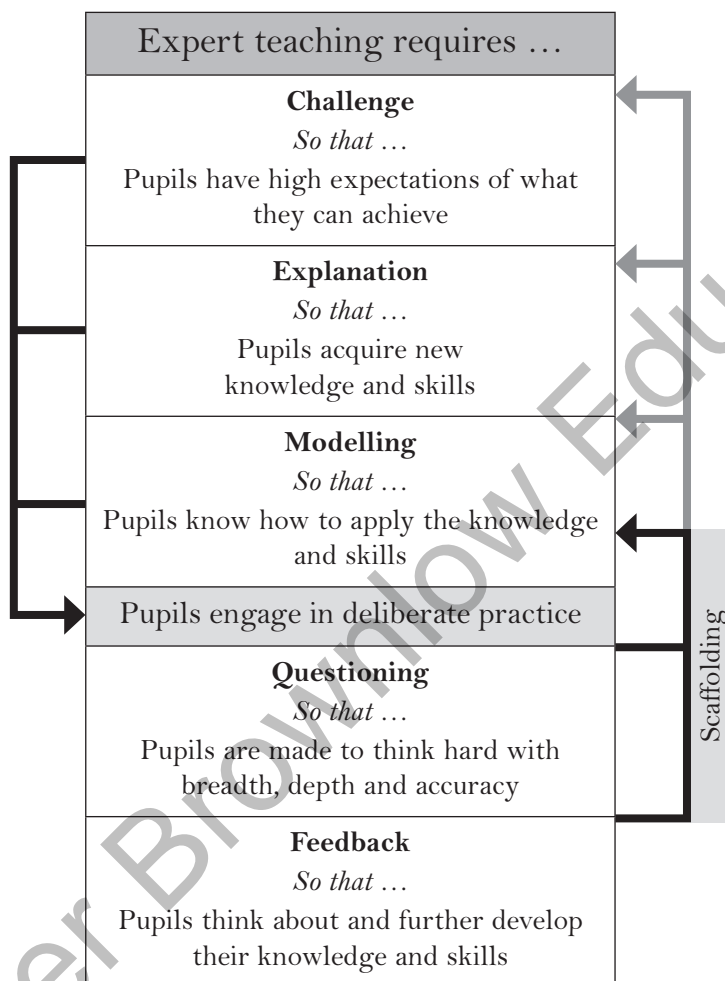
Making every primary lesson count

mindset or a *growth mindset*. Those who display a fixed mindset believe that abilities and personal qualities are carved in stone. They engage in activities when they are confident of success and avoid situations in which they may fail. Others, demonstrating a growth mindset, know that qualities such as intellectual ability can be developed through effort. In other words, with a fixed mindset, if a child doesn't succeed, they may blame it on their natural ability – for example, claiming they have always been a poor speller and accepting this as a fact rather than seeking to improve. Alternatively, those with a growth mindset strive to learn from their mistakes, aiming to do better next time. They regard failing as an opportunity to learn. Dweck has since cautioned that we are all a mixture of both mindsets, but recognising when we, and our pupils, are demonstrating the traits of a fixed mindset will help us to engage in the struggle to succeed. For example, if a child struggles to begin a piece of writing, helping that child to appreciate how they are feeling, and how they can move forward, will hopefully lead them to recognise this stage on another occasion and provide them with a strategy for overcoming this.

A school ethos which gives pupils the opportunity to work hard and aim for excellence can only flourish when great teaching is taking place every day in the classroom. In this book, we will share with you what the research evidence suggests, what we have learned from inspirational teaching colleagues at our school and, above all, what we continue to learn from our day-to-day experiences as classroom teachers.

We have tackled the same interrelated pedagogical principles as discussed in *Making Every Lesson Count*, which can be implemented in different year groups, subjects and topics as appropriate. The principles work as follows:

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The focus of Chapter 1 is *challenge*. This chapter evaluates how high expectations and struggle allow pupils to move beyond what they can do now.

In Chapter 2, on *explanation*, we consider how best to convey the concepts we are teaching to our pupils. Teacher talk and concrete, clear examples are key, so these are discussed in detail.

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We move on to *modelling* in Chapter 3. This involves discussing and dissecting a piece of work, or creating an exemplar and verbalising the thought process required.

Pupils must engage in *practice* in order to ensure that learning is embedded effectively. This will be the focus for Chapter 4.

Without *feedback*, teachers and pupils have nothing to guide them on the right path. Chapter 5 ponders the cycle through which teachers give feedback to children about their work and receive feedback to inform future learning.

Like explanation, *questioning* is a skilful art which has a range of purposes. In Chapter 6 we review how teachers can use questions to test for misconceptions, solidify understanding and promote deeper thought.

Within the context of a solid foundation of effective classroom management and strong relationships between adults and pupils, these six principles are designed to help you guide your children towards independence. They are not designed to be a cycle which is adhered to in each lesson or topic. Rather, the principles are interwoven throughout teaching sequences and can be called upon when necessary. Sometimes, two principles can be most effective when adopted simultaneously – for example, using questioning to gain feedback about a child's learning or using modelling to support an explanation.

Each chapter begins with two fictional scenarios which are rooted in situations primary teachers typically encounter. We then consider the principle – what it is and why it matters – before explaining some strategies that can be employed in day-to-day practice. Each chapter concludes with a list of reflective questions. Hopefully you will find these useful to review your implementation of each principle as you are preparing for and reflecting on lessons, and hopefully they will enable you to use planning, teaching and assessment time effectively to ensure the best learning outcomes for your pupils.

Introduction

We have already mentioned that we believe that at the heart of this ever-changing profession lies good practice based on two key values: we hope this book will inspire you to develop a culture of growth and excellence with your pupils.

