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# INTRODUCTION

It's always a good feeling when you bump into an ex-student who positively acknowledges you. If they do take the trouble to talk to you we guarantee they won't say something like, 'I've really missed seeing you write up your lesson objectives' or 'I loved the way you differentiated your worksheets'. When an ex-student remembers you fondly it will be because you engaged them with their learning and helped them in their lives. We're confident this book will support you to make you and your teaching much more engaging and memorable.

It's a challenging time to be a teacher. Wage freezes, job cuts, league tables, government initiatives and oversight, a curriculum overly focused on teaching knowledge and students who present ever more complex forms of resistance to learning. Nevertheless, many teachers still find the job a rewarding one because, unlike so many other professions, we really can make a difference to the lives of others.

It's also a challenging time to be a student. Demonised by the media, molly-coddled by parents and spoon-fed by teachers, they face a world riddled with problems, not least ever more brutal labour markets and increasing global uncertainties.

Yet despite these challenges there are reasons to be cheerful. How teachers are trained is becoming more 'evidence based', squeezing out a lot of the fads and quackery that have blighted our schools in recent years. And despite some surveys to the contrary, we know that teaching is still a profession that many of those on the outside still look up to with admiration and even awe.

Over the last five years, we've been delivering teacher training to thousands of teachers in primary and secondary schools. In particular, we've undertaken extensive work with more than 750 teachers (as of July 2012) in a series of Outstanding Teaching Training Interventions (OTTI). This has provided us with the opportunity and privilege of observing and videoing over 2000 lessons. In all the many outstanding lessons we've observed, there have always

been four common and essential and interdependent ingredients. We refer to these as 'The Big Four'. Increasingly we are referring to them using the acronym FACE.

- one **Feedback:** From a teacher perspective, learning needs to be structured to provide opportunities for the teacher to get frequent feedback on the progress of the learners. It's this feedback that informs the direction of the rest of the lesson and all future planning. From a student perspective, as learners move through the education system they need to become increasingly adept at judging the quality of their learning against success criteria and then applying effective strategies to constantly improve the quality of their work.
- two **Autonomy:** Lessons need to be structured to reduce teacher talking time, thereby providing the 'oxygen' for learning to take place. Students need space and time to consolidate, extend and deepen their understanding of what they have been taught. To do this students need to have the knowledge, attitudes, skills and habits (KASH) to learn effectively not just from their teacher but also from other sources including their peers.
- three **Challenge:** Without challenge there can be no progress; but challenge needs to be differentiated in order to appropriately stretch all students at their different levels of ability.
- four **Engagement:** Without engagement nothing else is possible. It provides the glue that binds all the previous elements together. Engagement is characterised by a sense of *flow* – a profound sense of being fully absorbed by whatever it is you're doing. Without this deep kind of engagement it will be very tricky to get students to step up to the challenge of learning. Engagement is essential if they're to become more independent in their learning, develop the confidence and courage to give themselves and each other quality feedback and rise to the challenge of stretching themselves to the limit. For teachers, engagement is the starting point of everything. It's the fertile soil that enables sustainable learning to take root and flourish. Without it the paper aeroplane designers will have a field day! And it's on this element of the Big Four (FACE) – engagement – that we'll focus in this book.

Our Big Four also corresponds closely with another oft-quoted source, Professor John Hattie's seminal work on teacher excellence.<sup>1</sup> The results of his work are very clear: teachers can make the most significant difference to a student's learning, but it's only the truly expert teachers who can do this.

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1 J. Hattie, *Distinguishing Expert Teachers from Novice and Experienced Teachers. Teachers Make a Difference: What is the Research Evidence?* University of Auckland, Australian Council for Educational Research, October 2003. Accessed at [https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/proflearn/docs/pdf/qt\\_hattie.pdf](https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/proflearn/docs/pdf/qt_hattie.pdf)

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ENGAGEMENT?

When we talk about an *engaged class*, we don't just mean the class is compliant and following instructions. Engagement, in the context of this book, refers to the class enjoying and being absorbed in the challenge of their learning and through that engagement making observable progress. We realise that consistently high engagement only really happens when all of the Big Four are in harmony. However, when we work with teachers we only work on one thing at a time. We always start with seeing how good a teacher is at engaging their students and we do this through getting them to explore the 'levels' of their teaching.

## WHY WE USE LEVELS

A key element of the way we work with teachers involves the use of graded descriptors and strategies explaining how to 'level up'. Throughout this book we share with you the same set of levels that we use in our training programmes. They will support you to plan, assess and evaluate how good you are at engaging your classes:

Level 1a = Outstanding Secure

Level 1b = Outstanding Unsecure

Level 2a = Good Secure

Level 2b = Good Unsecure

Level 3 = Satisfactory

The levels have been highly influenced by John Hattie's conclusions.<sup>2</sup> At each level we illustrate the actions, attitudes and behaviours of both teacher and students and how to move up them.

Many of the teachers we've worked with have told us that they are often confused by the official criteria for assessing them. Some have said things like: 'I used to know what outstanding looked like but now I'm not so sure.' Others have said that they became even more confused by feedback on their lessons from senior managers. One teacher was told, 'That was a good lesson with some outstanding features, but I can't quite put my finger on what would make it outstanding.' How useful is that? Other teachers complain that they

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2 Ofsted (2012), *The Framework for School Inspection from January 2012*, 30 March 2012. Ref: 090019. Accessed at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/framework-for-school-inspection-january-2012>.

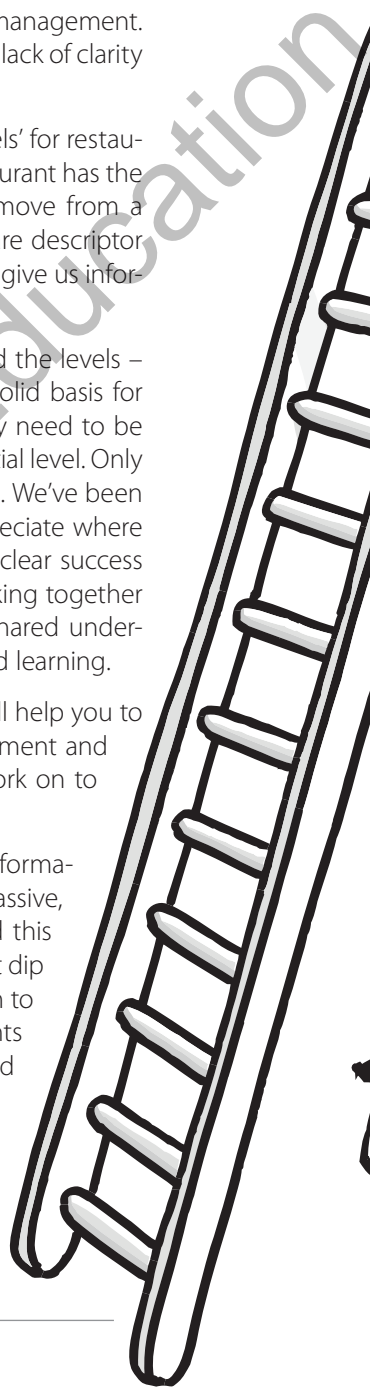
have been given contradictory feedback from different members of senior management. This is not a criticism of these teachers, far from it. It is more a reflection on the lack of clarity and guidance from others who are often just as confused as they are.

Ratings, scales or levels do help us in many aspects of our lives. There are 'levels' for restaurants rated by the likes of the famous Michelin Guide. The more stars the restaurant has the better quality dining experience you would expect. Similarly, martial arts move from a white belt up to a black belt and then new levels or dans after that. There are descriptor levels for storms, terrorist alerts and so on. These scales help to inform us and give us information about what to expect.

With all the confusion about official evaluations in mind, we have developed the levels – each one having its own set of descriptors – to provide real clarity and a solid basis for benchmarking. Teachers, like students, require clear success criteria and they need to be aware of the 'gap' between their current level of performance and their potential level. Only when the size of the gap is realised can they apply strategies to try to close it. We've been told by many teachers that working with the levels helps them to fully appreciate where their own teaching practice needs to develop. Therefore the levels provide clear success criteria that are transparent to individual teachers or groups of teachers working together and observers. The levels are designed to support teachers to develop a shared understanding and to apply real quality to the processes of improving teaching and learning.

This book will help you to *live* Assessment for Learning in your teaching. It will help you to judge what level you are currently at for the crucial area of student engagement and how to identify, from the next level descriptor, what you might need to work on to push yourself and your learners on to the next level and beyond.

We know from our own experiences that high-quality education can be transformational – it lifted our families out of poverty. A single teacher can make a massive, positive difference to the life of a young person. Whether you wish to read this book from cover to cover, focus on a particular chapter that attracts you or just dip in and out of certain sections, we're confident you'll find ideas and inspiration to make your teaching more fun, your lessons more engaging and your students more mature, independent and eager to learn. Whether you're an experienced teacher or new to the profession, we hope you enjoy our book.





**Level 1a**

The students demonstrate that they are highly motivated and possess excellent learning dispositions. Students are clearly in FLOW most/all of the time. The students are highly engaged through their own curiosity and enjoyment of the learning/struggle to learn. The teacher has created a student-led lesson (20:80) and acts as activator and challenger. Students are enjoying opportunities to express themselves creatively in a variety of ways and are making rapid progress.

**Level 1b**

The whole class seem to be highly engaged and are making significant progress in understanding new ideas/concepts through participating in the classroom activities. FLOW is evident for the students as the teacher skilfully creates a student-led lesson (30:70). All discussions are purposeful and there is evidence that students are showing initiative and creativity. Many intrinsic motivators appear to be present.

**Level 2a**

Nearly all of the students seem to be engaged by the activities and there is clear evidence of enjoyment/understanding why the learning is important. Teacher input (40:60) and there is evidence that students are taking more initiative with their learning. The classroom environment is one of positive relationships and many students are in FLOW because the teacher has set appropriately challenging activities. All students are making good progress.

**Level 2b**

Most students motivated to participate. There is some evidence that the teacher is building positive relationships with individuals and the class as a whole. Teacher input (50:50). Some use of intrinsic motivators. The activities used are effective and have good impact on learning. Most students are making good progress.

**Engagement (FLOW)**

Level 1a + 1b:  
Outstanding

Level 2a + 2b  
Good

Level 3:  
Satisfactory

**Level 3**

Nearly all the students are on task, although there may be occasional low level disruption/inertia. Students are engaged in learning but few are getting into FLOW perhaps due to lack of challenge. Less evidence of collaboration, struggle or variety. Teacher input high. Progress is satisfactory.