

**A COMPENDIUM OF CAREFUL ADVICE FOR TEACHERS**

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# THE DRAGON DEEP INSIDE

**Q** **THERE IS ONE LITTLE GIRL IN MY CLASS WHO NEVER TALKS EITHER TO ME OR TO HER PEERS. WHAT CAN I DO?**

**A** This is an important question but, in return, I have so many questions for you to consider too:

- Have you seen or heard her talk to anyone else in the school?
- Is she just a 'selective mute' in school?
- Have you spoken to her parents about this problem?
- Do you know if she has an existing condition, such as a speech and communication difficulty (SCD) or speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)? If so, what is the current level of support within the school? Is any medical intervention with a speech and language therapist taking place?
- Has she stopped talking recently or has it always been this way?
- How do you get her to communicate her thoughts, her learning, her thinking and her emotions?
- Is she a happy child? For example, does she smile?
- Does she look sad or is she just shy?
- Does she have difficulty maintaining eye contact?
- Is she reluctant to smile and at times has blank facial expressions?
- Are her body movements often stiff and awkward?
- Is she always alone or does she play with others without speaking to them?

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- Have you discussed your concerns with the head teacher or special educational needs coordinator (SENCO)?

When a child doesn't talk at all there may be a developmental delay or they may have a medical condition. However, when a child speaks and understands language, but doesn't speak in certain situations, they might have selective mutism. This is a condition that was once commonly associated with autism but is now recognised as an anxiety disorder. This is why it's essential for you to understand the 'bigger picture' of this child's social behaviours.

Sometimes children displaying the symptoms of selective mutism may just be considered quiet or shy at first. Often a parent or someone else (you in this case) who is familiar with the child will see that they have some or all of the symptoms. A healthcare professional who is experienced with anxiety disorders will be able to diagnose selective mutism. Early diagnosis and treatment can minimise the effects of the disorder, which can in turn reduce further issues later in life.

I will share with you my thinking and possible courses of intervention. However, I must stress that you should consider the questions above and the statements below in order to best help your pupil. There could be a number of underlying problems that are leading to her not talking.



Please **THINK** about whether your pupil demonstrates any of the following signs and whether there is evidence of any of the issues outlined:

- The child is consistently unable to speak when it comes to certain social situations, like school, even though they are able to speak elsewhere, such as when they are at home and with their immediate family. This can be a vicious circle that leads to further social isolation and withdrawal. This will interfere with the child's educational achievement and social communication. Later on, if left untreated, it will also impact on their occupational achievement.
- A child will need to show signs of not talking for at least a month in order for it to be considered a possible anxiety issue. However, the first month of school does not count since a lot of children are quite shy during this time, so this shyness needs to be ruled out first.
- Take into account that a child who has selective mutism may also have a tendency to worry about things more than other children do.

## THE DRAGON DEEP INSIDE

- A child with selective mutism will be extraordinarily sensitive to noise, crowds and busy situations. They may also fear going into public places like shops, toilets or generally crowded areas.
- The child will have difficulty with both verbal and non-verbal expression, which means that they can be very much in their own little world and may not always hear everything you say.
- A child with selective mutism may have frequent temper tantrums at home. These can often be physical rather than verbal.
- A young child with selective mutism may often cling to their parent or carer. This makes school a difficult place to settle, hence them choosing not to talk. It could also be that, due to anxiety, they are physically unable to talk due to throat spasms.
- Selective mutes may appear to be excessively shy when, in reality, they have a fear of people.
- A child with selective mutism may also have an anxiety disorder such as social phobia, which means they do not play well with their peers.



I know this all sounds quite frightening but there are avenues you can explore. **TRY** these strategies with the child to see if they help.

## STIMULUS FADING

This technique involves taking the child into a controlled environment with someone they trust, and with whom they can easily communicate. Gradually another person is introduced into this 'safe' environment through several small steps over a period of time. This is known as 'sliding in' or simply 'little steps'. Usually it takes a relatively long time for the first two people to be introduced. Nevertheless, through this technique the child learns to communicate in a small group setting. If there is still no talking, then just quietly interact with the child using toys, games, written prompts or just be physically close enough so that they feel safe but not threatened.

## DESENSITISATION

This technique enables you to communicate with the child through role play, such as pretend speaking on a phone and via pictures, toys or written messages left randomly in the child's sitting or working areas. This helps them to become mentally prepared to take the next step, which is communicating verbally. Remember, this will be a slow process, but you have to keep at it. A supportive atmosphere is key.

If a child is positively diagnosed with selective mutism, then anxiety therapy may be recommended to treat the disorder. With early intervention and effective therapy, children with selective mutism are able to overcome their anxiety and function in a variety of social situations.

Several types of therapy are effective in treating this anxiety disorder – you might like to try some of them in school. *Play therapy* is an effective therapy choice for children because they tend to be relaxed and less anxious when they are playing. Progress in play therapy then be transitioned into real-life social situations. *Shaping* uses a structured approach to reinforce all efforts by the child to communicate (e.g. gestures, mouthing, whispering) until audible speech is achieved. There is no specific time frame when this might happen.

It's very important that you talk to the other children in the class about the pupil's unwillingness to speak. Stress to them that they should not force her to speak, but encourage them to interact with her as much as they can – for example, through gestures and non-verbal signs.



On page 9 is a **RESOURCE** you might like to use in your classroom to help the other children understand.



Another great **RESOURCE** is the website, [www.anxietyuk.org.uk](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk) – check out the section on selective mutism.

I hope these strategies will help you to support this young lady.

# MY DRAGON WILL NOT LET ME ROAR!

Scared ... afraid ... I cannot speak  
My dragon grabs me ... he takes me deep  
Inside my body, inside my soul

He stops my words ...  
They will not flow

My dragon hides inside my heart  
My head, my mouth ... all other parts  
My feet, my hands, he makes them numb  
Dragon ... stop ... let me speak, not be dumb

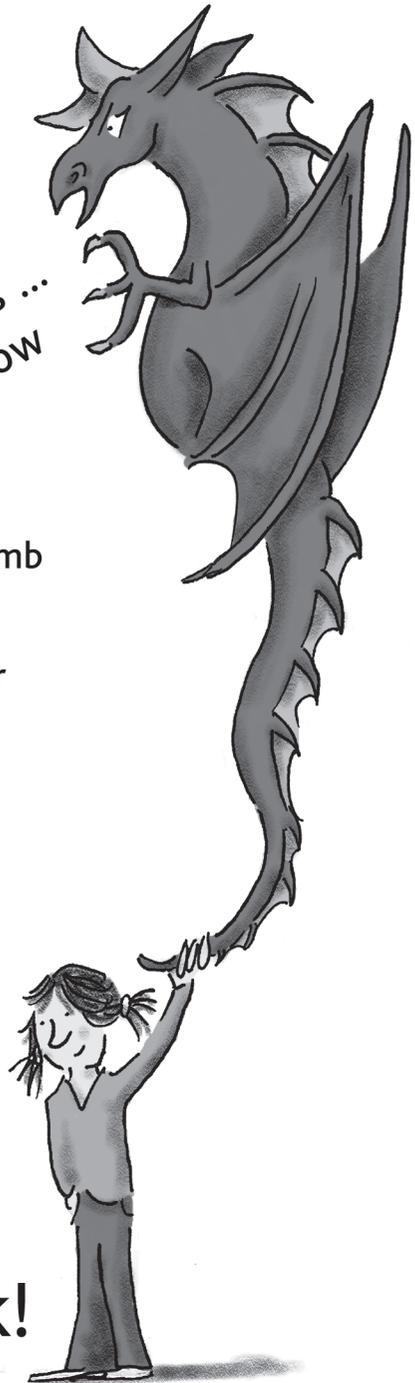
I shake and shake and shake some more  
When my teacher speaks ... I want to roar  
Dragon, dragon, let me speak,  
Don't hold my words and make me weep

I'm shy, I'm mute, I am so sad  
This dragon in me ... oh so bad  
With strength and courage, I will try  
To make some friends, be not so shy

So when you ask me out to play  
I cannot answer and say 'Yay' ...  
This dragon in me, he holds me back  
But one day ...

watch me ...

I'll fight right back!





## THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

**Q** HOW DO I REALLY ENGAGE MY STUDENTS IN LEARNING? I AM HAVING PROBLEMS GETTING SOME OF THEM TO GET ON WITH THEIR WORK.

**A** Learning is a part of everyone's life – it's not just something that happens in the classroom. When you are thinking about engaging students, this means considering their needs from a personal point of view as well as from a learning perspective. Learning how to motivate and engage your learners is one of the most powerful skills you need to embed in your daily teaching and learning routines, but often the question is, how do you do it? How do you ensure that *all* children are engaged? And, the most crucial question, how do you know *when* the students are engaged?

As teachers, our hope is that engaging classroom experiences will serve to enrich the lives of our students who will go on to become articulate, expressive, creative thinkers, who are socially responsible, resilient, resourceful and active citizens in the world. The starting point is to remember that education is about teaching young people not subjects. (The worst case of getting this the wrong way round I've come across was when I met an educationalist who called the learners 'clients'. You'll never hook them in if that's the way you see them! But I'm sure you would never see them as clients.)

When we talk about engaging students in their learning, what we are really talking about is how we go about maximising their inner passion to learn. That inner passion exists in every student, regardless of social, cultural or community background. This means that when we think about and discuss learner engagement, we need to look beyond the student's intellect and see the whole person – the real human being, not the name, date of birth, school entry code number or test scores. Who is the individual behind the data?

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Engagement in learning is about providing students with opportunities to be challenged, to be creative. It's about getting their adrenaline going, getting them excited by learning and for learning, and fired up to make progress. The motivation and engagement of each learner should be like an addiction – the more you get excited by something, the more you want it. It's like a child in a sweet shop (yes, I can relate to that!). Is your classroom full of lots of different mouth-watering opportunities for learning, with something for everyone?

Take the use of technology as an example. Digital technology for learning has radically altered the way we communicate and engage with ourselves, our learners, our parents and carers, our communities and the big wide world in which we live. What's more, many young people find these technologies tremendously engaging. How many children do you know, some boys especially, who can be so absorbed working at a computer but would be totally switched off doing exactly the same activity using pen and paper?

Embracing digital technology for learning can help us to transform teaching, but to achieve this teachers have to be flexible, adaptable and adept at making students' learning experiences meaningful, engaging and thought-provoking. Moreover, new technologies mean that we now have new definitions for what it means to be 'literate'. The child who isn't sufficiently 'academic' to be a traditional 'high achiever' may be a whizz when it comes to computer literacy, and if teachers do not give these students opportunities to achieve and attain, then they are not meeting the learning needs of the whole child. If a teacher is apprehensive or scared of digital technology for learning, and unwilling or unable to include it in their lessons, then they are depriving those learners of an engaging learning experience.

Are you ready to spot those students who need a different and enhanced learning experience and, once you've spotted it, use it to your advantage across their learning? And, on top of various forms of literacy, are you actively seeking to help them develop their curiosity, creativity, communication skills and cultivate an attitude that embraces change? Come to think of it, do your lessons develop *your* curiosity, creativity and communication skills? Do *you* embrace change, particularly changes in digital technology?

## THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

There are a wide variety of opportunities for engaging learners, especially when combined with a caring and compassionate approach, a personal understanding of the learners' needs and skills, and empathy towards them as individuals. These are all important building blocks in creating a meaningful relationship, the outcome of which will be that the learners can't help but be engaged in your lessons.



**THINK** about this question: what does engagement in, and for, learning mean for us as educators?

- Is it in the amount of work they create?
- Is it in the sparkle in their eyes?
- Is it in the way they respond to your questions?
- Is it in the progress they make during lessons?
- Is it in the excitement of learning that may start with you, extrinsically, but then leads to them wanting to learn intrinsically?

One way of looking at your classroom is what I like to call an 'all you can eat learning buffet'. In this learning buffet are copious amounts of different types of learning food which will allow your students to choose what they like to eat, and how much of it, and also the opportunity to come back to the buffet for either more of the same or to try some of the other options available. Knowing that this learning buffet is always on offer in your lessons will hook them in the minute they walk through the door.



Here are some dishes from the various learning buffets I have laid on for children in the past. **TRY** out some of these!

## 60 SECOND BIZZ-BUZZ THINKING

Provide a question and give just 60 seconds for discussion. Share ideas from the 60 second buzz. At the end, to tap into the digital learning buzz, consolidate everyone's thoughts through an audio recording, video or interactive mind map. You might want to try these three apps for Android and iOS devices (these are links to the desktop versions):

- SimpleMind: [www.simpleapps.eu/simplemind/desktop](http://www.simpleapps.eu/simplemind/desktop)

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- Mindjet: [www.mindjet.com/uk/products/mindjet-for-web/](http://www.mindjet.com/uk/products/mindjet-for-web/)
- Popplet: <http://popplet.com>

There are plenty more apps, but there is also good old paper and pen too which might prove just as exciting for some!

### JOT 3 – TOP 10

Using any format – the good old sticky note, a roll of plain wallpaper on the floor, a space on the window or tattoo writing on hands – get the students to jot down three things they learned in the last lesson or three things that they remember doing.

Then get them to collect their top 10 favourite responses from others in the class, so that they can start to work as a team and share each other's thinking. Remember to collect in their responses as they will form part of the learning and thinking process which you can include in the pupils' 'learning portfolios'. These are evidence-based portfolios that you should be keeping in order to track and trace student progress – or, even better, if they manage the portfolio jointly with you. Digital technology can help you here, as both you and the student can gather their learning evidence to share and show personal attainment and achievement. Furthermore, the student can access their learning portfolio at home and add anything they do as enrichment or extended class work to it.

Remember to take some photos of the Jot 3 – Top 10 activity too, so they can refer back to them during their learning journey. For some pupils this can act as a 'thinking hook' – they will be more engaged because they have been part of the process and have enjoyed working collaboratively. Meeting the needs of all learners through a differentiated approach is the key to success: same task, but different ways of producing and recording it (remember that learning buffet!).

## MUSIC FOR ENGAGEMENT

The universal language of music is an amazing way to get your pupils engaged from the off. Choose pieces such as 'Let's Get Ready to Rhumble' by PJ & Duncan (aka Ant & Dec) or even 'C'mon Everybody' by Eddie Cochran. The reason songs like these are amazing tools for engagement is all to do with the fact that 'sound waves make brain waves'. This is a combination of beats per minute combined with just the right lyrics. These songs will get your students' hearts pumping, their bodies moving and their brains fired up.<sup>1</sup>

Remember, when you get your own head around the science and practice of using the right music for the right reason at the right time, then you will also have the skills to be able to choose your own tracks. And if you have explained to the students why the right music for the right reason at the right time is being used, then they too will be able to produce their own playlist of tracks for engaged learning in and out of the classroom.

What's even better, and will absolutely guarantee learner engagement, is if they create their own music. You might suggest iPad apps such as GarageBand, Music Studio, LaDiDa, Loop Twister, BeatMaker 2, Rhythm Pad, Impaktor or Launchpad, or you may want you use Audioboom to get students to record their learning onto a channel that you create for your school or individual student log. Audioboom allows you to record short bursts of audio and post it like a blog. Simple, easy and very learner friendly. You can also make it private so that it only gets shared with those that you want to access it.

## PICK 'N' MIX – THE VISUAL WAY

A picture can tell a thousand words and conjure amazing creative thinking in some students. When you choose a topic or area of study, try to source some fantastic pictures to share with the class and get them thinking, wondering, discussing or collaborating, or just simply embedding themselves in a different way of looking at something.

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<sup>1</sup> To find out more about my own research on the effect of music on the brain and for learning, take a look at *The Little Book of Music for the Classroom* (Carmarthen: Crown House Publishing, 2009).

## **EDUCATION IS LIKE A SHERBET LEMON**

**WE NEED THE STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS - THE HARD EXTERIOR - BUT WE CAN EASILY LOSE SIGHT OF THE MAGIC THAT IS AT THE HEART OF THIS; THE TEACHING AND LEARNING - THE FIZZ IN THE CENTRE.**

**Nina Jackson's mission in *Of Teaching, Learning and Sherbet Lemons* is to put the fizz back into classrooms by solving some of the toughest dilemmas facing teachers.**

You know the child in the class who never asks that burning question because they worry it might make them look silly, even if everyone else is thinking the same thing? Sometimes teachers can be like that child. And they don't know where to turn to get the answers. Which is where Nina comes in. The teachers' questions in *Of Teaching, Learning and Sherbet Lemons* have been anonymised, but Nina's answers will resonate with teachers everywhere, offering them support and practical advice.

**NINA DOESN'T HAVE A MAGIC WAND BUT WHAT SHE DOES HAVE IS YEARS OF EXPERIENCE, HONESTY AND A COMMITMENT TO HELP EVERYONE BE THE BEST THEY CAN BE. AFTER ALL, SECOND BEST JUST WON'T DO!**

**SUITABLE FOR ALL TEACHERS - FROM NQTs TO THE MOST EXPERIENCED - ACROSS ALL SUBJECT-SPECIALISMS AND PHASES; FROM PRIMARY TO HIGHER EDUCATION.**

**NINA JACKSON** is an international education consultant who has a breathtaking grasp of what makes classrooms, children and their teachers tick. She has a master's in education and a particular expertise in special educational needs, digital technology and mental and emotional health. She has transformed learning and teaching in some of the most challenging schools in the UK and has worked extensively with schools internationally. Nina is one of the happiest, most effervescent personalities in education today and puts her own learning, and the learning of others, at the heart of everything she believes in. She is also the author of *The Little Book of Music for the Classroom*. @musicmind

Teachers always want to be the best they can be for their students and Nina reignites our passion for teaching so we can continue to change people's lives through education.

**Dr Barbara Van der Eecken, associate director for quality, BMET College**

This book is packed full of such practical advice and stunning resources ... At its heart is the importance of learning for all – teachers included ... Just fantastic!

**Julia Stevens,  
Halesowen College**

... one is swept along by her positive vision of how wonderful the teaching vocation can still be.

**Stephen Oliver, principal,  
Our Lady's, Abingdon**



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