

INDEPENDENT
THINKING
ON ...

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Jackie Beere



DEVELOPING INDEPENDENCE AND RESILIENCE
IN ALL TEACHERS AND LEARNERS

Independent Thinking on Teaching and Learning has the potential to be a game-changer. Grounded in reality, it shows how, through self-reflection, assessment and evaluation, educators can transform their everyday teaching and achieve better outcomes – and, more importantly, the book also recognises how pupils can help them to do just that. I shudder to think how many children might achieve more if the half a million teachers in the UK put into practice the common sense and practical advice it contains.

DAVID REESON, INDEPENDENT CONSULTANT IN SOCIAL CARE AND FORMER DIRECTOR OF KPMG

Jackie has produced a book that looks at the job of teaching from numerous angles. Written with a sense of the reality of life in classrooms, it pulls together a range of theoretical perspectives and is full of suggestions for developing the craft of teaching to improve learning for all pupils.

We all want to be better teachers, and reading *Independent Thinking on Teaching and Learning* will help us improve our practice.

**MICK WATERS, PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION,
UNIVERSITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON**

Independent Thinking on Teaching and Learning is a very reflective piece of work that has a mixture of practical solutions and research-informed ideas. It is a fantastic tool for every teacher and school leader, and an excellent resource for CPD with staff. A must-read.

**ELIZA HOLLIS, EXECUTIVE HEAD TEACHER,
THE FOREST CE FEDERATION OF SCHOOLS**

With *Independent Thinking on Teaching and Learning*, Jackie Beere offers a timeless guide which reflects on the elements of great teaching and learning through the lens of her extensive experience in the profession. Jackie

considers the latest agendas and policies alongside previous versions, offering well-informed critiques of the best approaches to teaching and learning. The book is essential reading for entrants to initial teacher training, providing an up-to-date compendium of approaches, ideas, dos and don'ts that will serve them well on their journey in teaching.

**LUCY WESTLEY, SENIOR LECTURER IN INITIAL TEACHER
TRAINING, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHAMPTON**

Independent Thinking on Teaching and Learning is perfectly timed as we enter an era of accessible and plentiful research on metacognition, cognitive science and pedagogy.

As time-poor professionals, it's helpful to have clear navigation to bridge the gap between research and practice, while not forgetting the emotional aspect of teaching. In Jackie's own words: 'I have sifted through the jargon and pulled out what I believe to be the very best practice that works to help our children learn.' And this is exactly what you will find in this book. It is an incisive and comprehensive guide that draws on trustworthy research and presents it in a digestible form, supported by reasoning from classroom experience. It has lots of practical ideas to help busy teachers in any stage of their career, with each chapter being relevant for the challenges faced in modern-day teaching.

Overall, this book is a superb addition to any teaching and learning library – and is a resource that will surely stand the test of time.

**GAVIN BOYLE, DIRECTOR OF LEARNING,
ST CHRISTOPHER'S SCHOOL**

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independent
thinking press 

First published by

Independent Thinking Press
Crown Buildings, Bancyfelin, Carmarthen, Wales, SA33 5ND, UK
www.independentthinkingpress.com

and

Independent Thinking Press
PO Box 2223, Williston, VT 05495, USA
www.crownhousepublishing.com

Independent Thinking Press is an imprint of Crown House Publishing Ltd.

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First published 2020.

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Page 131: pose, pause, pounce, bounce © Pupils First UK Ltd. Created by Pam Fearnley (pamb566@btinternet.com).

Edited by Ian Gilbert.

The Independent Thinking On ... series is typeset in Azote, Buckwheat TC Sans, Cormorant Garamond and Montserrat.

The Independent Thinking On ... series cover style was designed by Tania Willis www.taniawillis.com.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

Print ISBN 978-178135339-4
Mobi ISBN 978-178135350-9
ePub ISBN 978-178135351-6
ePDF ISBN 978-178135352-3

LCCN 2019953748

Printed and bound in the UK by
Comer Press, Llandysul, Ceredigion

This book is dedicated to my wonderful mum
and my amazing grandchildren, Lyla, Josh and
Taran, who all represent my fortunate past and
my precious hopes for the future.

When writing this book, I was always thinking about
all the inspiring teachers I have known and how much
our future, as a nation, depends on them.

FOREWORD BY IAN GILBERT

Since establishing Independent Thinking in 1994, we have worked hard to share with educators around the world our belief that there is always another way. The Independent Thinking On ... series of books is an extension of that work, giving a space for great educators to use their words and share great practice across a number of critical and relevant areas of education.

Independent Thinking on Teaching and Learning takes us right back to where it all really started, when I was fresh-faced and fresh out of teacher training, and no one had heard of academies, Ofsted or, indeed, me. I had come into the world of education (as a teacher of French) to be able to work directly with young people on learning and motivation, and I knew that there were many different approaches that could be used in the classroom to make things better for all young people.

While we didn't have Twitter as a vehicle for people to tell me how stupid I was to suggest that students might learn in different ways, it meant that we could have real conversations about the nature of teaching and learning and about how, although learning is learning, we don't have to treat everyone the same in the classroom.

And who knows, maybe some of the things people talked about back then didn't do all that they claimed to do, but they did something and that something was worthwhile. According to Durham University researcher Steve Higgins, although the claims made about 'pseudo-scientific' practices were wrong, 'the practices undertaken in schools may have some education value for other reasons'. Indeed,

he suggests that those claiming such approaches can't work because the science behind them is flawed are themselves displaying a 'lack of critical (or scientific) thinking as brain-gym and NLP might be reliably effective at achieving certain outcomes, just not for the reasons the proponents expound'.¹

In other words, teachers aren't stupid and who is anyone to tell them that what works doesn't work? After all, as we have been saying for a long time now, there is always another way, especially in the world of education. Which is why long-time Independent Thinking Associate Jackie Beere is still so much in demand for sharing her insightful, compassionate and rigorous approaches to teaching and learning across the UK and further afield.

And why this book is such a perfect addition to a series for teachers which is all about thinking for yourself.

**IAN GILBERT
BIRMINGHAM**

1 S. Higgins, A Recent History on Teaching Thinking. In R. Wegerif, L. Li and J. Kaufman (eds), *The Routledge International Handbook of Research on Teaching Thinking* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 19-28 at p. 21.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Ian Gilbert for persuading me to write this book and renew my passion for the most important profession in the world. We have shared our journey through decades of change in education initiatives and in life – and if I ever want a new perspective, I know who to turn to. He has gathered around him an amazing group of educationalists at Independent Thinking, who never fail to have the energy and passion required to inspire. I want to thank the Independent Thinking family for giving me decades of opportunities to keep finding ‘another way’.

Everyone at Crown House has always been so supportive, patient and helpful throughout the long and challenging process of writing – I couldn’t imagine working with a nicer bunch of people.

Without my husband, John, to provide me with encouragement and feedback, this book would not have seen daylight, so a massive thank you to him and also to my daughters, who continue to inspire me. Since the arrival of my grandchildren, my belief in the teaching profession and the power it has to influence the next generation has multiplied. I want to thank all the teachers who work so hard to mould our children into great learners despite the challenges of the 21st century. We need to value and reward them for the vital work they do.

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FIRST THOUGHTS

Teachers are so important. According to Ron Berger, the best question you can ask any pupil or member of staff to find out what a school is like is: what does it take 'to fit in, socially and academically' around here?¹

And now, at last, Ofsted agrees: 'Inspectors must use all their evidence to evaluate what it is like to attend the school.'²

Make no mistake, it is the teachers that create the experience of school for the pupils.

The advice in this book draws on the latest educational research and many of the Ofsted descriptors of 'outstanding teaching' that have been produced over the years. Even if they are not the latest guidance, they are still useful references for what success looks like. However, this book is determined not to merely link practice to Ofsted's latest sound bites, because they change with every government or secretary of state for education. Each has a different agenda and tends to dispose of previous policy for political reasons. Remember initiatives like Every Child Matters, SEAL (social and emotional aspects of learning), PLTs (personal, learning and thinking skills), character education, personal development, curriculum intent, AfL (assessment for learning), safeguarding and citizenship? All have had their time in the sun and some, as you will see in this book, are still relevant and useful.

1 R. Berger, *An Ethic of Excellence: Building a Culture of Craftsmanship with Students* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), p. 35.

2 Ofsted, *School Inspection Handbook*. Ref: 190017 (2019), p. 39. Available at: <https://www.govuk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif>.

This book aims to be a timeless guide to great teaching and learning, aimed at new teachers and teachers who want to renew their passion. I have sifted through the jargon and pulled out what I believe to be the very best practice that works to help our children learn. You have the assurance that the advice in this book is not included simply to satisfy this administration or current inspection framework; it is included because it has been tried and tested by great teachers over decades.

The current focus on 'evidence-led' practice is helpful, but every child is an individual. We always need to remember that while research can claim that a technique works brilliantly, in practice we might find that it doesn't work for certain children. Research can also be contradictory. Is red wine healthy or dangerous, and what really is the best way to learn to read and write? This book is based on my own judgement, informed by evidence, but grounded in my experience of the huge variety of human responses to learning in different contexts. Use this book to find out what works, then find out what works for you and your individual pupils and build on that to fulfil their potential.

There has never been a more important time to be a teacher. Our young people seem more fragile and insecure than ever. This insecurity can destroy any chance of happiness and blight potential achievement. Social media dominates their lives and has the capacity to create a contagious culture of comparison and, thereby, self-judgement. Everything from their looks, the music they choose to listen to and the places they go can be measured by 'likes' and 'friends'. Teachers can offer an antidote to this pressure by modelling and nurturing the love and support for each other that is innate in all of us. Helping children to be resilient as they learn and giving them thinking strategies – metacognitive tools

– will protect them from taking social media – or themselves – too seriously.

Teacher recruitment and retention is a serious problem, especially for schools in disadvantaged areas that need great teachers the most. Our school leaders are facing massive challenges – coping with budget cuts and ever-changing political diktats – but they know that their main priority is growing wonderful teachers. Teachers are all individuals with their own unique strengths and challenges: there has never been only one way to be a great teacher. I hope that teachers and leaders can use this book to build on their strengths and challenge their weaknesses so that they make the greatest impact on each and every child's academic and personal progress.

Every child in this country will become a more resilient, productive, confident and generous citizen if they learn with teachers who care enough to show them that they have limitless potential to be happy and successful.

Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

VICTOR FRANKL³

3 V. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Pocket Books, 1984 [1959]), p. 86.

CHAPTER 1

UNLEASHING YOUR TEACHER POWER

Have you any idea how powerful you are? If you have any doubt about the difference you make to the lives of the children in your class, consider your own education. Can you think of the teacher who inspired you or the teacher who belittled you with a comment that still resonates in your adult life?

No child remembers a secretary of state for education or Ofsted chief inspector, but every child remembers a teacher or teaching assistant (TA) who believed in them or shared a passion that became contagious. It's often not the stuff they taught us that we remember, but the way they connected with us. The way they really listened, cared about us and understood our world. The way they modelled their own passion and beliefs, so we could tune in and enjoy the thrill of learning.

As teachers, we may have experienced a moment of flow when a class is truly engaged and entranced by our message. It's a delight to connect with our learners in this way – but it takes much more than a good lesson plan and an interesting topic to do it. What makes it happen is often that unspoken humility and love in our body language, facial expression and eye contact that seeks a human connection first – and educates later.

WHAT DO THE LEARNERS SAY?

Pupils at two excellent schools made the following anecdotal comments when asked about their school experiences:

	Learners from Years 4–6	Learners from Years 7–11
What's your favourite thing about your school?	How nice people are to each other. All the trips we go on. The library, because it has a lovely range of books. Everything we learn is interesting and fun.	Seeing my friends. Teachers who are really helpful. People with individual needs get help. Trips.
What stops you learning?	Personal worries and concerns. Sitting with friends who want to chat about stuff and distract me. When other children chat and don't get on with the work.	Bad behaviour. When teachers go over the top with their power. Weak teachers.
What sort of teaching and learning helps you make the most progress?	Working with lots of different people helps me. When the teacher is enthusiastic and makes the lesson	Seeing it being done. Knowing why – the reasons help me remember.

	Learners from Years 4–6	Learners from Years 7–11
	<p>fun. A teacher who has a lively voice and sounds as if they enjoy teaching us really makes me want to learn.</p> <p>I like it when we tackle a problem together with a class goal – because we struggle together.</p> <p>By working with other people you can learn so much about a subject. Learning from friends works for me and seems to help my brain. We work in partners for reading and editing work and we work in groups for project work.</p> <p>When a teacher does the unexpected, it really helps us remember. I like it when our teacher links the lesson to something we can remember, like Neptunes for numerators and</p>	<p>Having the steps shown to us.</p> <p>Working with friends.</p> <p>Playing games and group work.</p> <p>Mini quizzes and making flashcards or mind maps for homework.</p> <p>Peer assessment when you can see another person's work.</p> <p>When teachers mark to improve our work, not nitpick.</p> <p>Teachers modelling answers.</p> <p>Acronyms and songs like the photosynthesis song.¹</p>

1 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1_uez5WX1o.

	Learners from Years 4–6	Learners from Years 7–11
	<p>Dinosaurs for denominators in fractions. And she draws a line with her hand and calls rounding 'rainbows', which makes it easy to remember.</p> <p>My teacher makes us repeat over and over again as a class when we learn new vocabulary – like saying 'absorb' every day so it really, really sinks in.</p> <p>We have balloons with difficult words written on in the classroom, so it reminds us to use them in our work.</p>	
What do you need to do to fit in around here? (A question to discover the values and culture of the school as defined by how pupils experience it.)	<p>You have to be able to do lots of different things – help friends, play sport, do work – be flexible and be willing to go for it.</p> <p>Be kind to each other.</p> <p>Act with respect to others.</p>	<p>Care about exam results.</p> <p>Get on with teachers.</p> <p>Don't be completely good.</p> <p>Be me.</p> <p>Our school motto is 'exceeding expectations'.</p>

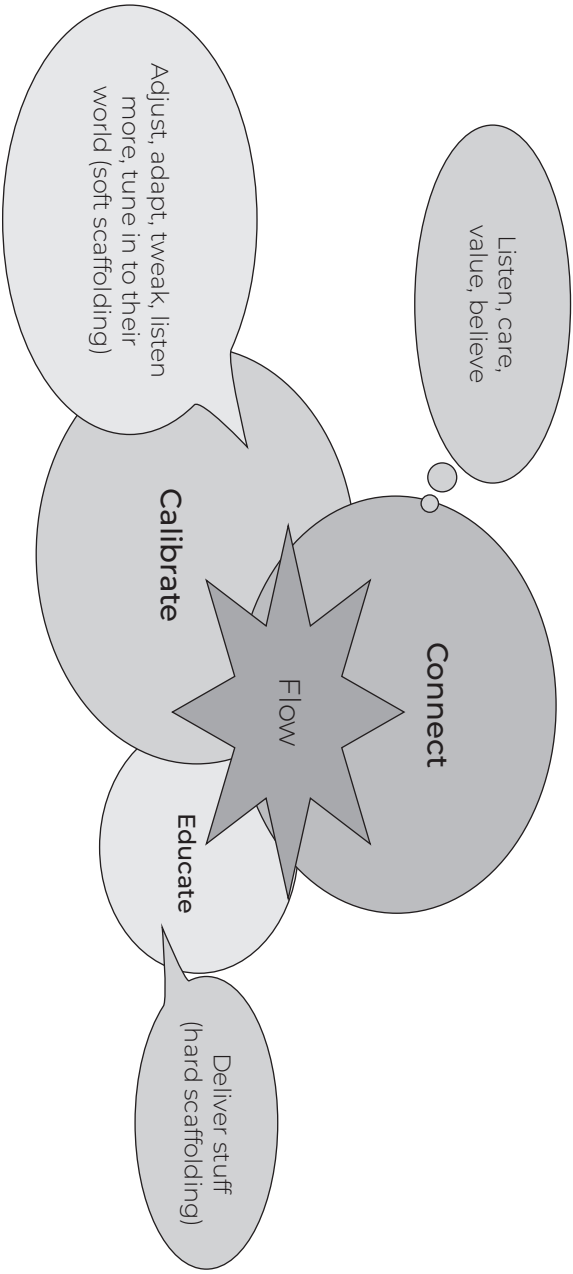
	Learners from Years 4–6	Learners from Years 7–11
	Be yourself and you will be fine. Be active, don't be a passenger and always try your best. Do what the school motto says.	

So, how can you really connect with and enthuse your pupils – even the most difficult ones – and turn them on to learning?

CONNECT AND CALIBRATE

Great teachers tune in and connect with their pupils, greeting them by name with a smile and noticing their mood. During the lesson they constantly respond to the pupils' moods, calibrating their voice and body language, improvising and tuning in to keep the human connection when the education begins. Demonstrate the behaviours shown in the image that follows with love and a determination to open their minds to learning.

Teaching can be an exhausting and exhilarating profession – on the same day! It's not how you feel or what happens to you that matters; it's how you connect and calibrate that matters in the classroom. How you respond to pupils depends on how you perceive the world. This chapter will help you discover how to choose the mindset





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ESSENTIAL READING FOR ALL TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS WHO WISH TO MAKE AN IMPACT ON THE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THEIR SCHOOL.

We all want to be better teachers, and reading *Independent Thinking on Teaching and Learning* will help us improve our practice.

MICK WATERS, PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON

A fantastic tool for every teacher and school leader, and an excellent resource for CPD with staff. A must-read.

ELIZA HOLLIS, EXECUTIVE HEAD TEACHER,
THE FOREST CE FEDERATION OF SCHOOLS

Jackie Beere, OBE worked as a newspaper journalist before starting a career in teaching and school leadership. She was awarded an OBE in 2002 for developing innovative learning programmes and is the author of several bestselling books on teaching, learning and coaching. Since 2006, Jackie has been offering training in the latest strategies for learning, developing emotionally intelligent leadership and cultivating a growth mindset.



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ISBN 978-178135339-4



9 781781 353394

Education Teaching skills and techniques