

# Making every primary lesson count



*Six principles to support great  
teaching and learning*

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Edited by Shaun Allison and Andy Tharby



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# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	<i>i</i>
Introduction .....	1
1 Challenge .....	9
2 Explanation .....	37
3 Modelling .....	65
4 Practice .....	85
5 Feedback .....	111
6 Questioning .....	131
Final Thoughts .....	151
<i>Bibliography</i> .....	<i>153</i>

# 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.

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 SATs! 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 have been given a greater degree of autonomy over what they choose to teach and how they assess pupils. Alongside this, 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”.<sup>1</sup> 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?

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?”<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.

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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.

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.

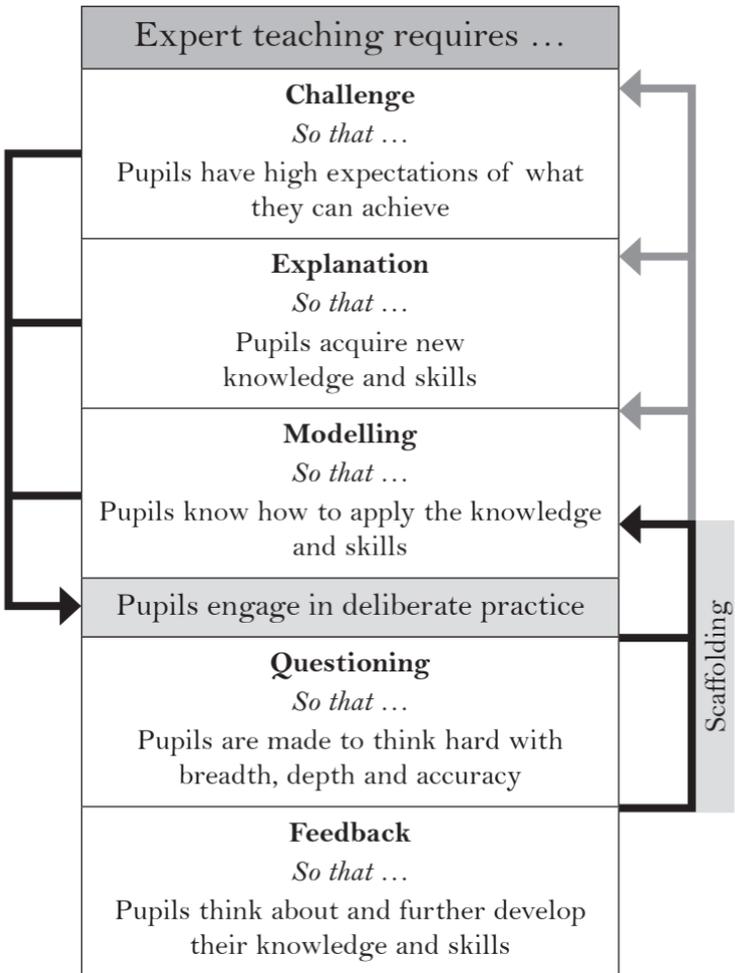
Encouraging children to aim for excellence links to Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck's ideas about mindset. Dweck's research has led her to believe that people's opinions about themselves have a profound influence on their lives.<sup>4</sup> She has identified two mindsets that human beings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

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

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:



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.

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.

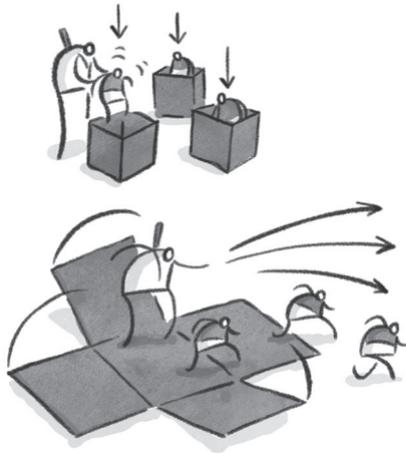
Like explanation, *questioning* is a skilful art which has a range of purposes. In Chapter 6 we review how teachers can use questions to test for misconceptions, solidify understanding and promote deeper thought.

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.

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.





# Chapter 1

## Challenge



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### Elisa – the circle

*When Elisa moved out of Early Years, her Year 1 teacher put her in the Circles group for maths. She spent the year completing fairly easy work and she often had the support of a teaching assistant to do this. As she moved into Year 2, she was, once again, placed on the Circles table. Elisa no longer wondered what she must do to get into the Triangles group and had stopped trying to aim for it. Now she is starting Year 6 and is concerned that she will still be seated with the Circles. On her first day of term, Elisa's new teacher gives each child a sticky note and asks them to write down one thing that they really wish their new teacher knew about them. Elisa writes, "I would like to be on the Hexagons table, like my sister was, because I am clever."*

### Ben's beeline for help

*Year 3 pupil Ben relied on support. In fact, he would make a beeline for any teaching assistant entering the classroom and ask them to work with him. He was also very reward hungry. The only way to encourage him to produce any work or follow a task was to dangle the carrot of a sticker or house points.*

*Although this served the purpose of enticing him to engage with a task, it taught Ben that it was the outcome that mattered rather than the process. This also meant that he expected an extrinsic reward for whatever he produced, no matter the quality.*

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## Challenge – What It Is and Why It Matters

Challenge gives pupils the opportunity to stretch themselves and encourages them to believe that hard work and perseverance will lead to progress. Within the classroom, this means setting challenging targets that all pupils have the opportunity to access and work that probes the pupils' thinking, enabling them to learn in greater depth. Malcolm Gladwell observes in *Outliers* that, as a society, we “cling to the idea that success is a simple function of individual merit”.<sup>1</sup> He suggests that we are too much in awe of successful individuals and far too dismissive of those who fail. Society encourages competitiveness and comparison from the very start of life, from parents who compare Apgar scores (a simple test to determine how ready a newborn is to meet the world) to those who praise toddlers for ability rather than effort: “You’re *so* clever!”

Dweck’s research into mindsets has found that as soon as children become able to evaluate themselves, some of them become afraid of challenges. They become worried about how their intelligence will be perceived if they do not succeed. Elisa knows that ‘clever’ people should always succeed and is already, at the age of 10, comparing herself unfavourably with a sibling. Elisa needs to be encouraged to change her mindset: to believe that the success she craves can be developed through effort, stretching herself, taking on more

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (London: Penguin, 2008), p 33.

Writing in the engaging style of the award-winning *Making Every Lesson Count*, full-time primary teachers Jo Payne and Mel Scott share evidence-informed practice and gimmick-free advice for ensuring that every lesson makes a difference for young learners.

*Making Every Primary Lesson Count* is underpinned by six pedagogical principles – challenge, explanation, modelling, practice, feedback and questioning – and provides simple, realistic classroom strategies from across the curriculum to develop a culture of growth and excellence with pupils.

In an age of educational quick fixes and ever-moving goalposts, this precise and timely book will have a high impact on learning in the classroom: enabling pupils to leave primary school as confident, successful learners equipped with the skills and knowledge required of them.

### Suitable for all Early Years and primary teachers

*What makes Making Every Primary Lesson Count special is the way it is rooted in theory yet packed full of practical examples.*

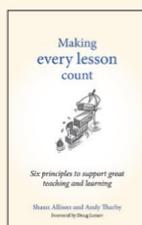
**James Bowen, Director, NAHT Edge**

*Avoids empty preaching and instead offers relevant signposting for the hard-working teacher of today.*

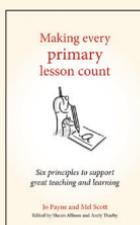
**Hywel Roberts, travelling teacher, curriculum imagineer and author of *Oops! Helping Children Learn Accidentally***

*A highly accessible, practical book for primary teachers which makes constant reference to relevant, current and powerful research evidence.*

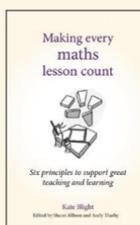
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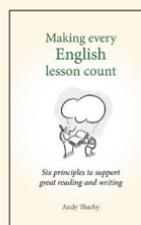
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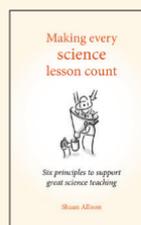
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