

the

BIG

BOOK of

independent

THINKING

Do things no one does or
do things everyone does in
a way no one does

Edited by Ian Gilbert

Crown House Publishing

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Crown House Publishing Limited
www.crownhouse.co.uk

First published by

Crown House Publishing Ltd
Crown Buildings, Bancyfelin, Carmarthen, Wales, SA33 5ND, UK
www.crownhouse.co.uk

and

Crown House Publishing Company LLC
4 Berkeley Street, 1st Floor, Norwalk, CT 06850, USA
www.CHPUS.com

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British Library of Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

10-digit ISBN 1904424384

13-digit ISBN 978-190442438-3

LCCN 2006923067

Illustrations © Les Evans

Printed and bound in the UK by
Cromwell Press, Trowbridge, Wiltshire

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Introduction to Independent Thinking Ltd

Independent Thinking Ltd is a unique network of educational innovators and practitioners who work throughout the UK and abroad with children and their teachers and school leaders. It was established in 1993 by Ian Gilbert and delivers in-school training, development, coaching and consultancy as well as producing books, articles, teaching resources and DVDs and hosting public courses.

Ian Gilbert is the founder and managing director of Independent Thinking Ltd. Apart from his speaking engagements in the UK and abroad, he is the author of the bestselling *Essential Motivation in the Classroom* and *Little Owl's Book of Thinking*.

David Keeling is a professional actor, drummer, magician, stand-up comedian and committed educationalist who specialises in bringing the best out of some of the hardest-to-reach children in British schools.

Nina Jackson is an opera-trained music teacher with huge experience working in special needs, music therapy, teacher training and mainstream teaching where her research into music for motivation and learning is achieving national recognition.

Jim Roberson is a former professional American football player from the Bronx who is teaching in a challenging south coast school where his role is the 'Discipline Coach'. He also runs a unique 'work appreciation' programme for disadvantaged young people each summer in a number of authorities.

Matt Gray is a professional theatre director and teacher who is currently working at Carnegie Mellon University in the US. Before that he was a leading trainer at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts as well as directing theatre in London and abroad.

Guy Shearer is the Director of the Learning Discovery Centre in Northampton – a centre working to promote smarter learning that sometimes uses new technologies.

Andrew Curran is a practising paediatric neurologist at Alder Hay Children's Hospital in Liverpool. He is on the board of the *Emotional Intelligence Journal* and is leading a number of research projects on the neurological benefits of an education system that teaches – and practises – emotional effectiveness.

Roy Leighton is a lecturer at the European Business School, a coach and trainer to top-level business, author and TV programme maker, his first major series being *Confidence Lab* on BBC television. Apart from his speaking work for Independent Thinking Ltd, he is also a sought-after consultant across the UK, working with senior management on school change.

Michael Brearley is a former teacher and head-teacher who is now a leading trainer and coach in school leadership, effectiveness and emotional intelligence in the classroom. He has been involved in a number of successful long-term school transformation projects across the UK and written several books and programmes.

Introducing David Keeling

What's big and ginger and makes you laugh? For those of you who have never seen David Keeling in action, you will have to put aside the image you have now of a carrot in a hat or Chris Evans's latest TV programme being taken off the air, and focus instead on the common sense that David dishes out in his chapter.

For over five years, David has worked with young people who were failing – and being failed by – the system and has consistently achieved the seemingly impossible task of helping many of them re-engage with, and refocus on, their success in school and beyond.

His own story is one that many young people can relate to. He is someone who struggled not only with the narrow academic demands of educational success but also with the relevance of school itself, especially secondary school, where he attended a 'bog-standard comp' somewhere off the M1 to the west of D. H. Lawrence.

A crucial weapon that he advocates and employs himself to great effect is the use of humour. I have seen him win over large groups of disaffected Year 11s within seconds by his self-deprecating wit and his ability to see it – and tell it – how it is.

He points out how important laughter is for the learning process, something that is backed up by recent research revealed in the journal *Scientific American Mind*. Psychologist Kristy A. Nielson of Marquette University was testing her subjects for recall by teaching students thirty new words. However, one group was played a humorous video

clip half an hour after the learning process. Both groups were then tested for recall one week later. The group that had followed the learning with the laughing showed a 20 per cent better recall rate than the other group.

You could have a 20 per cent increase in your class's achievements just by using laughter as a learning tool – and now you have the research to back you up when Ofsted come around and accuse you of having 'too much fun' in your lessons. In fact, copy the following sentence on to a piece of paper and stick it in your desk drawer for later use:

We are not having fun, Mr Inspector: we are simply using positive emotions to obviate negative reptilian brain responses in order to access the limbic system to optimise dopamine release and facilitate autonomic learning.

Having fun and enjoying yourself is not an optional extra for a human being, whatever the age. A *Time* magazine feature in February 2005 took a look at a great deal of the research being carried out worldwide on the benefits of happiness, benefits that include reductions in heart disease, pulmonary problems, diabetes, high blood pressure, colds and infections of the upper respiratory tract. Happy people developed 50 per cent more antibodies after a flu vaccination, and, in a longitudinal study of 1,300 men over ten years, there was 50 per cent less heart disease in the optimistic men. Not to mention the fact that, according to gelotologists (no, you look it up), a hundred laughs is the equivalent of a ten-minute

Chapter 1

On Love, Laughter and Learning

David Keeling

Before I leap dramatically into the chapter, I would like to begin by doing this same exercise with you, the reader, right now, to keep you on your toes and to make sure that you are not just flicking through to find the pictures.

It is an exercise that I always do at the beginning of my sessions. I do it because my work within education is usually centred on one word: success. So, I like to check with the group to see how successful the one hour, morning or day will be and what responsibility the group are taking to make sure that it is as successful as it can be.

A great pal of mine and fellow Independent Thinker, Roy Leighton (see Chapter 7), trained in Kabuki theatre in Japan and they use this exercise as a technique for getting into what they call a 'state of flow' or a readiness to be absolutely fantastic.

I'd like to put you in this state now by checking three things – your levels of:

- Energy;
- Openness; and
- Focus.

On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is low and 10 is high, what is your level of 'Energy' at this moment in time?

I normally get the students to shout their answers out after a count of three, but I suggest you do it in your head so as not to distress those who may be close by.

If you think you are a '1' then please – and I think this is the correct term – 'be arsed' to have a go. If you don't try, how will you ever know? And if you think you're a '10' try not to go through the roof!

Now do the same for 'Openness', by which I mean how open are you to getting involved in your learning, to contributing, to believing that you can change the way you think about yourself, where you are going and what you can achieve?

Finally, do the same for 'Focus'. What's your focus like at this moment in time? Is this the fifth time you've read this sentence? Are you already wondering what's for tea tonight or thinking, 'Does my bum look big in this?'

Many of the kids I come into contact with find it almost impossible to exist in the 'here and now', for they are constantly preoccupied with other things that are not related to the task in hand.

I have been to many sessions where some of the audience (normally those sitting at the back) express that they are here against their will and would much rather be somewhere else. The only problem I have with this is that they can't go anywhere else, but if they continue to focus on what is out of their control then they risk not getting anything valuable done – and what is the point of that?

A Chinese proverb loosely translated puts this argument beautifully: 'If you have one foot in the past and one foot in the future you will piss on today.'

So I ask you again, what is your focus like at this moment in time? Jot your scores down for Energy, Openness and Focus and we'll come back to them later.

Now that we've worked out what sort of state of readiness you are in for a chapter such as this, let's get on with the main thrust of what I have to say. All that you will read in this chapter has come together over a ten-year period to challenge the hearts, minds and spirits of kids from all over the country.

When I say kids, I mean either *big* kids (anyone 16–116), including, parents, teachers, care workers, businessmen and -women), or *little* kids (anyone aged 6–16), this time including high achievers, the gifted and talented, C/D borderline, EBD (those with emotional and behavioural difficulties) or indeed SBQs (smart but quiet kids, the ones who just seem to get on with it and who are often the most neglected).

All of the work I'm involved in is geared towards improving self-esteem, self-expectation, motivation, confidence, goal setting, visioning skills, success, the brain and how it works and how amazing it is, dealing with change and creativity within the individual. These areas are explored and expressed in a unique way incorporating anything from stories, quotes, jokes, games, improvisation, forum theatre, practical strategies, music, magic and boundless energy.

Ultimately, all of the above has been used to help people become more confident learners and enable them to find ways of embracing change, developing the qualities required for success and finding their own sense of happiness.

Oh, yes, I almost forgot: the majority of the work that I do in schools is with disaffected kids. For eight years, involving thirteen schools, and more than eleven thousand young people, Independent Thinking associate Roy Leighton and I have been running programmes alongside the Raising Standards Partnership in and around Northamptonshire that have the sole purpose of

enabling these youngsters to feel 'capable' and 'lovable' – two words that for us are the real definition of self-esteem.

We have achieved so much within these schools using a technique called 'forum theatre'. (It's a bit like role play but less damaging.) The main aim of this theatrical device is to set up a scenario based on the ideas given to us by students involved in the programme. During the scene there will always be a point of conflict between the characters, which needs to be addressed by the members of the audience, who have now taken the role of directors. It is their job to stop the action whenever they feel that the characters are doing something wrong, e.g. being disrespectful, arguing, intimidating someone or being ridiculous (this is usually my job).

At this point the directors have the power to give advice to the actors on what they could be doing to improve the scene and generate a more positive and beneficial conclusion. The scene can then be rerun as many times as it takes until the best possible outcome is achieved.

Where this device has really come into its own is when the kids decide that they no longer want to be spectators and instead become 'spect-actors'. In this role, the kids get the opportunity to replace the actors and lead from the front in terms of resolving the onstage conflict. This allows the students, within a safe environment, the chance to rehearse their successes. There are no right or wrongs: there is just participation and a desire to transform the action into a more positive direction.

For the kids I have worked with on these programmes, this experience has helped no end in the building of confidence and an openness to look at things differently and to try many ways to create successes. It is through my experiences here and also as an associate of Independent Thinking for over five years working the length and breadth of the country that I feel ably qualified to give advice and suggestions to you in your work with disaffected young people.

Introducing Jim Roberson

I have just been flicking around the channels on my new television set, getting the hang of how it all works using good old ‘experiential’ learning. What do you mean, ‘Read the instruction book first’? Trying quickly to zap past the various lunch-time news programmes where the news is stretched to fill the time they have (I’ve always thought that if they made the news reports shorter there would be less news and fewer bad things happening in the world), I caught a caller to one studio berating schools for not sorting out the problem of ‘discipline’ in the classroom. If teachers would only achieve this, then all children would receive a better education, no matter what sort of school they attended and how many tiers the system may or may not have. The caller went on to describe the situation as being analogous to having a gas leak, where changing service provider won’t alter the fact that the gas is still leaking.

If I had a proper job, rather than playing with my new TV, I could well have been spending the time sitting in a staffroom somewhere in the country, discussing similar sorts of problems with my colleagues. However, instead of the word *discipline* I would probably have heard myself using the term *behaviour* instead.

These two words – *discipline* (which entomologically-speaking has experienced a journey that started meaning ‘to grasp intellectually’ but by the early sixteenth century had come to mean ‘orderly conduct as a result of training’ and was used by the Puritans in 1585 for their own expediency) and *behaviour* (interestingly from Old English meaning ‘to contain’) – seem to

be at the root of all the education world’s ills. Behaviour is, obviously, what the children are doing wrong and, obviously, what such behaviour needs is discipline, if only the teachers knew how to give it.

Yet perhaps both terms are missing the point and by coming at things in a different way, as Jim Roberson demonstrates in his work and in this chapter, we can fundamentally change the nature of schools for the better. For Jim, *behaviour* is the ‘B-word’ and he forbids its mention. *Discipline*, on the other hand, is neatly described neither as something others do to you to get you to behave nor even as something you do to yourself.

Rather, discipline is ‘what you do for yourself’.

What Jim advocates is a trade-off between children and schools, whereby schools ‘open up’ to teach children *everything* they will need to prosper at and beyond school, no matter what career and life choices they make. In return, children start to acquire and then implement the strategies and benefits that come with self-discipline on an ongoing basis, following the four steps described in Jim’s inimitable fashion as:

1. doing what has to be done;
2. doing it when it has to be done;
3. doing it as well as it can be done; and
4. doing it that way all the time!

Like all the writers in this book, Jim is out there ‘walking his talk’, working daily with children from some very challenging backgrounds in an

Chapter 3

The Disciplined Approach

Jim Roberson

Introduction

Ask teachers, parents and the public what they think the big issue in schools is and more than likely they will mention how out of control things seem to be. Teachers are being swamped by the behavioural issues they are dealing with daily, being placed in situations where the priority seems to be controlling behaviour rather than helping the students learn.

Yet I sometimes wonder what behaving has to do with learning. Just because someone is behaving (for 'behaving' read 'quiet'), does this necessarily mean they are learning? And, whose responsibility is their behaviour, anyway? If the children are acting in an inappropriate way, is it the teacher who is at fault? I often come across students complaining about such and such a teacher saying, 'He's rubbish, because he can't control us.'

I realised a while back that these ways of looking at things both lead us down a one-way street. Maybe the way to consider the challenge in the classroom doesn't lie with focusing on behaviour but another word – *discipline*. The word *discipline* conjures up an era of military-style punishment that harks back to the school days of those of us of a certain age, a time of slippers, canes, paddles and a great deal of detaining and shouting.

But there are two fundamental differences in my take on discipline:

1. Let's look to change the focus of what we mean by 'discipline'. It is not what someone in

authority does to you. Far from it. It's not even something you have to subject yourself to. For us it means not what you do *to* yourself but what you do *for* yourself.

2. My belief is that school should be the place where you learn all you need to learn – including discipline – to succeed in life, whatever form that success may take. This moves school way beyond just being a place of academic study where if you do well you'll fit in and if you struggle you're in trouble. What are the children who are constantly being punished getting from their education? Maybe by changing the way we look at things, they could get a whole lot more. This is what I mean when I talk about 'opening up' school.

So, let's open up school so that it becomes – for all students – the place where you learn what you need to be successful, where you learn how to get it right. The Disciplined Approach has been put together over 21 years' experience as a teacher, a coach of American football (as well as a player) and – the most important job – as a parent and husband.

Rather than being something you do to children, the Disciplined Approach is the slow bit-by-bit process of getting someone to see the sense in good *self-control* and *self-discipline*. With the Disciplined Approach, it's all about the individual.

In this chapter, I want to take you through some of the basics of such an approach so you can understand the way it works, the reasoning

behind it and the benefits to the children of using it – both in school and beyond. And, because at the centre of the Disciplined Approach it is not the system or the teacher but the child, we have to start with what that child is bringing to the table as he or she enters your classroom. What is the attitude the child has to learning? What is the luggage – or baggage – the child brings to school that will affect the way that child learns, reacts and behaves?

(And, when I talk about ‘baggage’, bear in mind that I work in a school on the south coast with some seriously disaffected and challenging children, not to mention the work I have done in central London with schools experiencing major ‘behaviour’ problems in their classrooms. Examples of the sort of ‘baggage’ I am dealing with in children is things such as ‘school is shit’ and ‘teachers are racist’.)

No matter what baggage they have, remember that the ethos in the Disciplined Approach is that ‘school is for learning’. Period. No argument! This can be a challenge for some of the children I am working with. But the real challenge is the one I throw down for schools: ‘School is for learning – *whatever is needed for success.*’

In other words, it can no longer be a question of some children passing and some failing using specific academic criteria. It has to become a situation where all children will benefit from their time spent at this school in a way that will equip them with *whatever it is* they may need to be successful beyond school, regardless of their academic achievements or aspirations.

What this means is that we can work with the child to help them discover what they want and then work with them to help them achieve it, something that immediately moves the goalposts away from the situation where we are trying to coerce the child into sitting still while we try to teach them material that they perceive to be irrelevant, impersonal and uninspiring.

The first thing we need to do here is to get us all on the same page. Let’s define terms here. When I am taking teachers through the Disciplined Approach in my INSET sessions, I ask them to identify a list of ‘behaviour issues’ that we can work with to help move them into ‘discipline issues’. This list usually includes things such as swearing, being late, being rude, disrupting lessons, uniform problems. The task is to shift the way we look at the issues so we can approach them from the point of view of the Disciplined Approach. By doing this we are able to offer immediate tips and advice to help the students help themselves. This idea of helping individuals to help themselves – to become their own doctor – is at the core of this approach.

I also ask for a definition of discipline. What often comes back is a sense of its being something that one person does to another or, if they consider *self-discipline*, then it is something that you make yourself do.

For us, though, remember: discipline is not what you do to yourself but what you do for yourself.

In the era of children’s rights and newfound freedoms, with opportunities for all, young people will not achieve what they are capable of without discipline.

Without discipline, freedom is self-defeating, one cannot attain one’s goals and therefore neither can one fashion a good life. Freedom without discipline becomes freedom to not reach your goals.

– John F. Covalleskie, ‘Dewey, Discipline and Democracy’ (Northern Michigan University Philosophy of Education, 1994)

Chapter 5

Peek! Copy! Do! The Creative Use of IT in the Classroom

Guy Shearer

Introduction

I've always thought that plagiarism gets an awfully bad press in educational circles (although, if you're reading this passage on screen having scanned it into your computer and plan to alter it a little and pass it off as your own, *stop now!*). OK, so there are some bad examples like 'Teflon learning' (search, copy, paste, hand in) and good old-fashioned cheating, but there are times when copying a few ideas here and there is one of the best ways of coming up with something genuinely original of your own.

Truly original, new, non-recycled, non-retreaded ideas are ever so hard to find these days. I go to conferences and events to discuss 'innovative e-learning' and it is rather depressing to see so much orthodoxy and conformity, and I don't pretend not to be part of that.

I have to admit that the thing that really fires me up as a teacher isn't that light-bulb moment, or that sudden-change-of-attitude moment: it's the instant someone says or does something I hadn't expected, hadn't imagined and would never have done myself – a new idea escapes into the universe.

Whether you're hooked on novelty or not, I hope this chapter will be useful, anyway, as independent, free thinking is great when combined with all the power of enlightened approaches to learning (come to think of it, it's pretty good in less enlightened ones too) – and so rarely are creative

thought and ICT put together into (or just outside of) the same box. You may not buy into the premise that plagiarism leads to originality, but the ICT ideas may come in handy.

In the next few pages, you'll find a genuinely honest-to-deity original learning model and some ways of linking the use of ICT into that process (and some ways ICT is used to stop it – know thine enemy). I've held back on too many product plugs, but there is a bit at the end pointing you in some good directions.

The peek-copy-do cycle

I have no idea at all where new ideas come from. I'm sure that in the deeper recesses of the brain there are bits that get fired up by all manner of things: talking in good company, an amazing stimulus, a feeling of freedom, an insoluble problem. Many things elsewhere in this book relate to getting into the right state for that to happen; here we're just looking at how to use ICT to throw enough recycled ideas into the air for something else to come out the end. Sometimes these new thoughts get lost because of the way we communicate (chairing a big meeting with a tight agenda and a pile of original thinkers is like herding monkeys) or the way we're encouraged to 'do it right' (or 'do it as I do it'). ICT can help give them an outlet.

For me, the four strongest stimuli for coming up with new ideas rather than simply recycling the

old ones in the same way over and over again are:

- having a real need to solve a problem;
- seeing something I quite like that doesn't do what I want;
- seeing something I definitely don't like that tries to do the same thing that I want to do; and
- seeing how someone does something and realising I can apply that to something else.

The process I'd like to describe I call the *peek-copy-do cycle*. It works in a circle, and you can start anywhere on it you like. I see learners working through problems by peeking at ideas and half-ideas from elsewhere (sometimes seeing something you don't like is the best stimulus to help you decide what you do), by mimicking approaches (taking elements without actually duplicating them) and trying those ideas out and testing them.

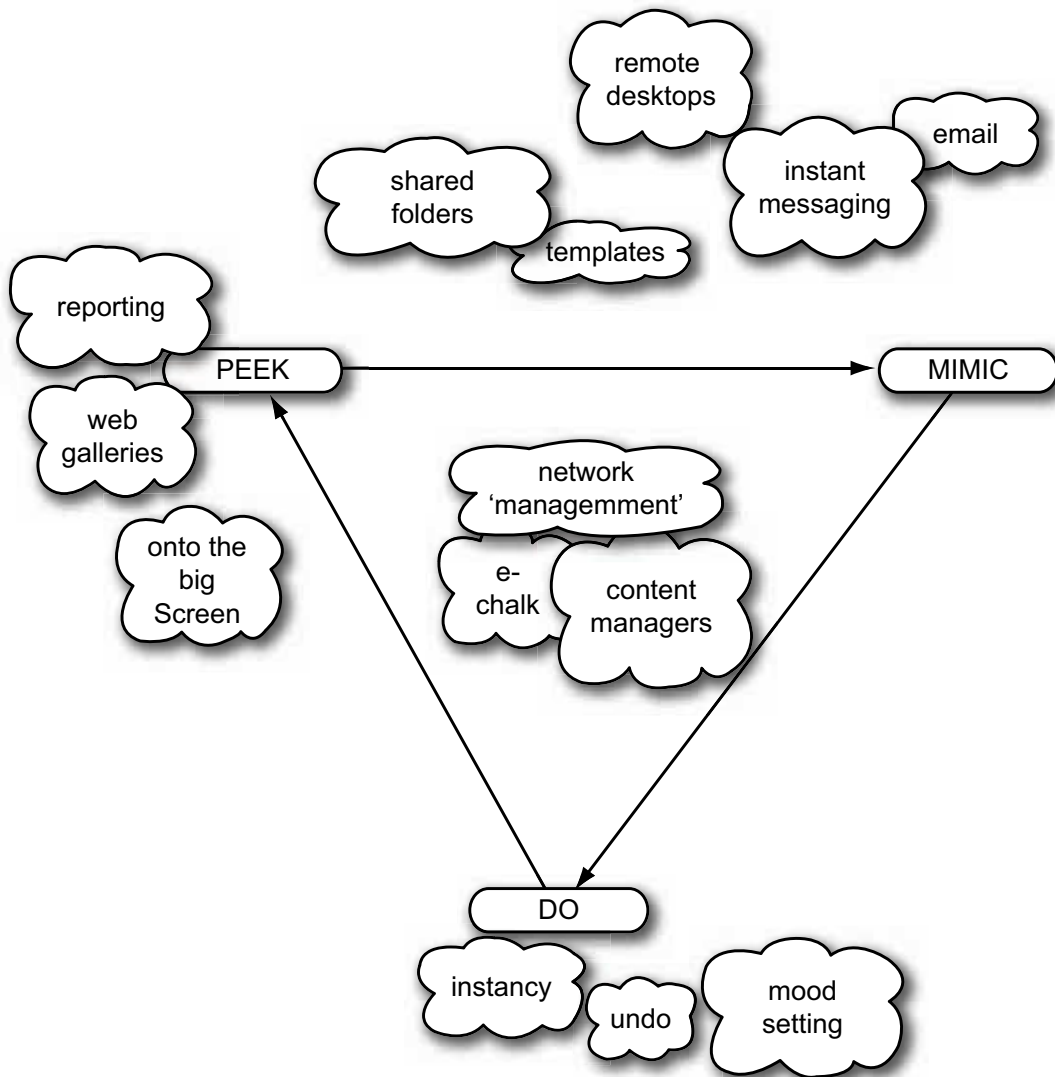


Figure 6.

This process happens all the time although we don't always encourage it – and it happens in different ways in the different stages of our lives. I imagine it like a kind of sink where ideas and people slop around without very much happening. Sometimes we're helped to pick up on the ideas around us, given time to take bits from here and there in true hunter-gatherer fashion and then to try them out to see if they work, and gradually we climb higher to the overflow of success. When a group of learners reach the overflow we get a variety of different solutions to a problem or task that really belong to the people who made them, and often we're surprised by how they did it.

Sometimes we're prevented from pulling ideas in and, given one ('the right one') or none, actively discouraged from using the way the people around us are solving the problems we face (cheat!) and told to stop wasting time and get on with it. This leads to the plughole of conformity – at best our group produce exactly what we wanted, built to the order of our lesson objectives carefully splashed onto the whiteboard, at worst they do bugger all and rebel.

ICT is really good as a tool to support this process because it easily lets us watch many things to see what we do and don't like (we can rewind, transmit, store – for pennies), copy and alter and produce all manner of solutions; but all too often this goes against the grain of what we think is 'fair' and 'right' (hey, let's lighten up a little!).

ICT supporting peeking

Isn't it annoying when you're really into something and someone is looking over your shoulder and maybe asking questions or misunderstanding what you're up to? Good peeking doesn't annoy or restrain the person who is actually doing the doing. Various technologies help us to peek – although maybe we're not using them for that right now (see 'ICT and the war on pedagogy' on page 107).

On to the big screen

Many times I go into a lesson and either the whole class are looking at the big screen or it is being totally ignored (usually it's an interactive whiteboard or projected image, but lower-tech approaches qualify too – they just take longer to draw). In the 'don't peek' classroom, the big screen is used to show what we're supposed to be making, the start and the finish and especially the right answer – which sends an important message:

- My screen is bigger than your screen, therefore ...
- I am cleverer than you, which means ...
- Do it the way I do it and ...
- Don't waste time thinking of your own way (resistance is futile).

By all means use the projector to show learners' stuff, but get them showing stuff there too. Have one group plugged in all through the lesson and encourage everyone to watch what they're doing when they like. Stop the lesson (I want to get off) from time to time and call up different people's screens onto the whiteboard and compare notes; or, even better, don't compare notes but let people decide what to see for themselves from time to time.

Instead of plenaries being about showing the right answer, about showing the answer someone worked really hard to do (ah, bless!), about ticking your learning objectives, highlight some different routes that were taken, because ICT allows you to replay processes really easily.

One good trick for doing this is to save a copy of someone's work, then do lots of undos (hold down the control button and tap Z a whole bunch of times), then use the 'redo' command to replay forwards the whole process that was gone through (practise this with the software you use first – it doesn't work universally!). Another trick that works well is to leave a camcorder pointing at the whiteboard while someone works through a problem, then play the film back to the class at fast-forward speed.

“This inspirational book has far-reaching implications for both the theory and practice of education in the future ... It should have a profound effect on every teacher that reads it.”

Clare Smale, Editor, *Teaching Expertise*

Independent Thinking Ltd is a unique network of educational innovators and practitioners who work throughout the UK and abroad with children and their teachers and school leaders. It was established in 1993 by Ian Gilbert to ‘enrich young people’s lives by changing the way they think – and so to change the world’ by delivering in-school training, development, coaching and consultancy. Ian achieved his objective by gathering together a disparate group of associates – specialists in the workings of the brain, discipline, emotional intelligence, ICT, motivation, using music in learning, creativity and dealing with the disaffected. This book is a collection of the best work from his associates, including:

‘How the ‘Brian’ Works’ by Andrew Curran, Consultant Paediatric Neurologist at Alder Hey Children’s Hospital

‘Living a Creative Life’ by Roy Leighton, author, coach, trainer and lecturer at the European Business School

‘Build the Emotionally Intelligent School’ by Michael Brearley, author, trainer, coach and former head teacher

‘On Love, Laughter and Learning’ by David Keeling, actor, drummer, magician, comedian and educationalist

‘Music and the Mind’ by Nina Jackson, opera-trained music teacher and a specialist in special needs, music therapy and teacher training

‘The Disciplined Approach’ by Jim Roberson, former American football player, coach and teacher

‘Peek! Copy! Do! The Creative Use of IT in the Classroom’ by Guy Shearer, Director of the Learning Discovery Centre, Northampton

‘The Best is the Enemy of the Good’ by Matt Gray, theatre director and teacher at Carnegie Mellon University

The motto of Independent Thinking Ltd is to ‘do things no one does or do things everyone does in a way no one does’. With a chapter from each of the associates plus an introduction and commentary by Ian Gilbert, this book is meant to be dipped into and to get you thinking for yourself – thinking about what you do, why you do what you do and whether doing it that way is the best thing at all.

“This is a book that will encourage you to ask searching questions, rather than seek off-the-shelf answers. Ian Gilbert and his team have put together a thought-provoking and academically rigorous compendium of ideas that can help you to make creative leaps forward in your classroom and school. I warmly recommend this to teachers and school leaders who wish to make a real difference to the lives of young people.”

Brin Best, award-winning education author and director of Innovation for Education Ltd

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ISBN 978-190442438-3



9 781904 424383