

Caroline Bentley-Davies

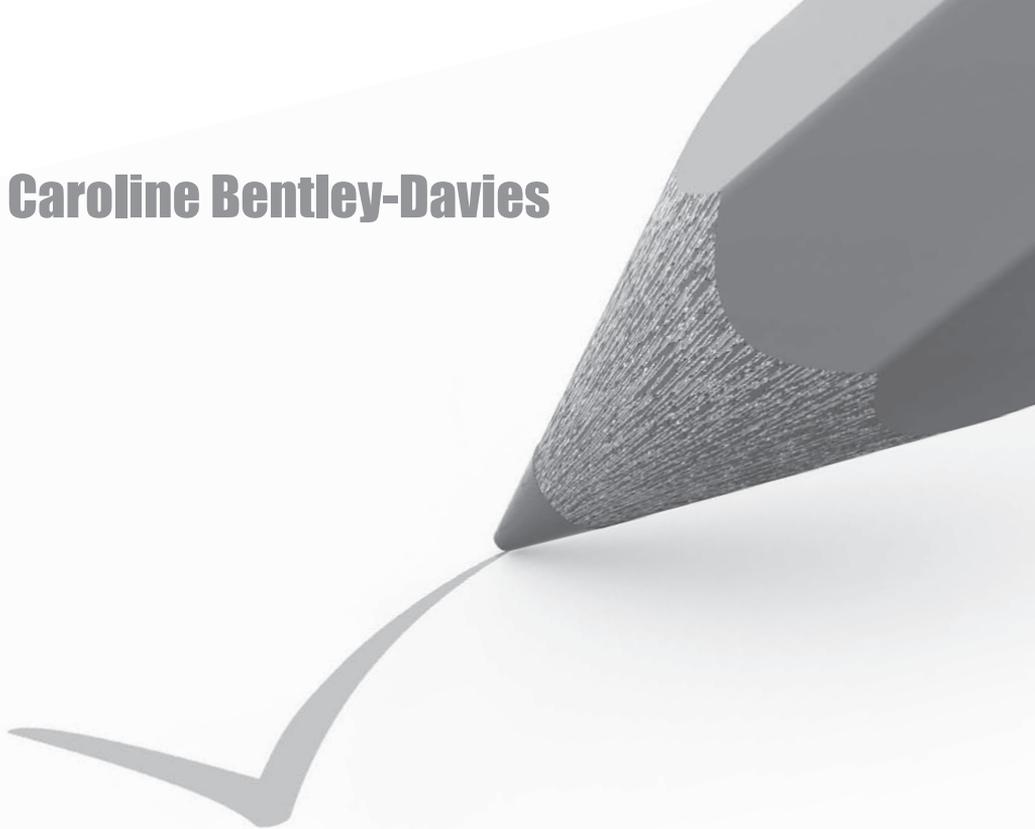


**How to be an
Amazing
Teacher**

“... a highly credible and relevant resource for teachers committed to supporting and enabling effective learning.”

John West-Burnham, Professor of Educational Leadership, St Mary's University College

Caroline Bentley-Davies



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Amazing
Teacher**



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Introduction

How to be an Amazing Teacher

In most people's school experience there was an amazing teacher: the teacher who changed their outlook on life, helped them to succeed and whose lessons will never be forgotten. Don't we all dream of being *that* teacher? Like all of us, I started my learning journey as a student. I was fortunate enough to have a great many good teachers and some that were really special. They had that 'amazing' quality which meant that at the end of their lessons we would look at our watches surprised that an hour had flown by so quickly. We were engrossed and fascinated by their lessons, but also by the skills they had in fostering and nurturing us as individuals, encouraging us to challenge ourselves and attempt the seemingly impossible.

The successful teachers (and yes there were some that certainly weren't, and I bet we've all had those!) seemed to make teaching appear relatively easy. They had a natural ease and humorous rapport with even the most difficult of classes (for one of my subjects I was in the second from bottom set – and in a traditional comprehensive, you can imagine that student behaviour could be challenging at times). It was only when I started teaching as a PGCE student myself that I realised that although we might think we have a natural aptitude for teaching – and the belief that some teachers are 'born and not made' – it really isn't that simple.

I have since watched thousands of teachers teach lessons in schools across the country, from the inner city to the

country idyll. Some lessons have been truly outstanding; others nothing short of terrible (for a myriad of different reasons). What I will say is that from each and every one I have learnt something, whether it is a crucial aspect of lesson planning, the best way to create a learning environment or strategies to coax an excellent answer out of a nervous student. However, as educationalists we must believe that an individual's skills can be strengthened and improved – in ourselves as well as in those we teach.

My lessons were judged as outstanding when, as a young teacher of 23, the large comprehensive school I was teaching in was inspected. I was rather surprised by this as during the Ofsted inspection I had been teaching in the way I always had and in fact two students had been extremely disruptive in one of the lessons. I had dealt with them just as I would have done with any other disruptive student, so in some respects my behaviour management skills were outstanding – which allowed me to focus on the important job of teaching and learning in the lesson. However, other skills that an outstanding teacher possesses, such as the mastery of interpersonal skills, the ability to track and help students progress over the longer term and finally, but nonetheless importantly, the ability to make sure that everybody counts – including yourself – was a skill I did not finally master until much later as a head of department.

And I'm still learning! This book has been written because when I meet teachers or run INSET days they have a host of questions they want answered: What makes an outstanding teacher? How do I improve my skills? How can you get behaviour right? How can I motivate the students who don't seem to want to learn? These questions not only come from newly qualified teachers but also those with countless years of experience, and very often senior leaders in charge of the quality of teaching and learning in a school. This book attempts to answer some of the most pertinent questions by

reference to my own diverse experience of teaching as well as my observations of amazing teachers and all those that span the spectrum, from good to bad.

As a teacher, I keep up with a wide range of my ex-students and, as those of you who have been teaching for more than a decade will know, sooner or later if you have had a positive impact on your students you will be contacted through Facebook, by email or even memorably the fruit and veg aisle of Sainsbury's: 'Miss, I've become a teacher and it's because of your lessons on photosynthesis/Charles I/*Macbeth*/equations!' What I didn't quite expect while meeting up with an ex-student, sipping coffee and tackling a huge slice of chocolate cake, was to be asked a huge range of questions about how to become 'the best teacher possible'. My protégé's pen was hopefully poised over her notebook. 'What I want is actual rock solid tips ...' she urged. This book is the result.

How you use the book is up to you. However, there are a few guiding principles that underpin the way it has been written so understanding them will help you to get the most out of it. As you will realise on your quest to become an amazing teacher, learning is a dynamic process. Yes I know, like my ex-student you just want the failsafe guide to get the outstanding lesson judgement by Ofsted or know the top ten tips before you move on to your next job. You can certainly read the book like this: you will gain lots of tips and strategies to use in the classroom and it will provide food for thought and help you on your way.

However, learning is a process. To become an amazing teacher, for you, might involve changing some habits, learning some new skills or even (scary stuff) taking some risks. With this in mind, at key moments there are **thinking points**. The idea behind them is that this concept is really rather important and you may wish to pause and reflect

on it for a while. They highlight a key issue and ask you: Do you agree? Is this the case for you? Is this the sort of behaviour or rapport we would see if we peeked into your classroom? It should make you think and, as we know, this is how the best learning takes place.

Similarly, at the end of most chapters there are **reflection moments**. These encourage you to note down for yourself: What are the three things that have helped you in this chapter? What has caused you to think? What might you want to try in your lessons or in your approaches with students? It also encourages you to record a couple of targets related to this area. As research has shown, writing down our intentions is a key way of ensuring that they happen. It provides not only a written reminder but a commitment to try out some strategies, thought processes or teaching techniques that you have decided might help you. Then of course it is up to you to make the effort to try them, evaluate them and if they work (and remember not everything works first time – you will need to practise) to add them to your repertoire. There is sufficient space in each section of the book for you to write these down on the page directly but should you prefer it, or if the copy belongs to the school's teaching and learning group, you may like to buy a small notebook and keep your intentions private. Either way, I do urge you to make a note of them.

It is possible to just dip into the book, particularly if you feel that an aspect of your teaching requires a boost and you have not got the time to read it through from beginning to end. Each section is a complete whole and it will make perfect sense if read in this way. Individual chapters likewise make good INSET reference material or are helpful as a way of improving one part of your practice.

However, the real intention was for the book to be read from start to finish. There is good sense in this, since it takes

you on the journey of an amazing teacher. Section I looks at the key characteristics and skills of an amazing teacher and just as importantly students' perspectives on this (they are not always the same as teachers' views). Section II moves on to the practicalities or the 'nuts and bolts' of developing the skills of an amazing teacher, offering concrete strategies about aspects of lesson planning and delivery that can be readily translated into the classroom. Section III looks at some issues behind underachievement and the groups most usually affected by this: boys, special educational needs (SEN) students and surprisingly Gifted and Talented students. Finally, Section IV tackles some of the areas of teaching that can be problematic for all of us on occasion and deals with issues such as difficulties in the classroom, the need for positivity in dealings with students and the need for balance in our teaching lives.

This book is result of the thousands of questions, experiences and lessons. Keep open minded and try out some of the techniques described. Let me know what works for you – I'm always keen to know about your own tips and ideas that you think are worth sharing. Remember, like our students we are all still learning and it is the acceptance of this mindset and the willingness to take chances in developing new skills that sets us on the way to becoming an amazing teacher.

Enjoy!

Caroline Bentley-Davies
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Chapter 10

Assessment for Learning

How to Make it Happen in Your Lessons

Harnessing effective Assessment for Learning strategies is essential in developing the skills of an amazing teacher. Firstly we must consider the essence of effective Assessment for Learning and then think about how we manage these in the everyday classroom.

Assessment for Learning is the buzz term used in schools at the moment, but what exactly does it mean and why is it so important? It is certainly more than the latest educational gimmick. Assessment for Learning is defined as: ‘the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there’ (Assessment Reform Group, 2002). In essence Assessment for Learning puts the learner – the student – at the heart of the learning process; it is about empowering individuals through good teaching so that students know their next learning steps and are able to progress effectively.

Marking and motivation

Thinking point

What do you think is the most useful in helping students to make effective progress:

1. Getting a numerical mark or grade on a piece of work?
2. Getting a written comment?
3. Getting a numerical/written grade and written comment?

Evidence from Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam (2004) shows that although students like to receive a numerical mark – particularly because it shows them where they are in the scheme of things – what helps them to really make progress is the written comment. This might be a surprise to some – surely a combination of written comment and grade is the ideal? Apparently not if you actually want the student to read your comments and take them in. I am sure we have all had the experience of getting feedback on something, perhaps a lesson observation or other piece of work, and once you have heard the judgement on whether your lesson is deemed good, outstanding or otherwise, there can be a tendency to switch off and not hear the finer details.

This is certainly the case with students. I know after teaching several classes of borderline students where motivation was an issue. If I returned an essay to them – even if I had written lots of positive and guiding comments – if it gained a grade D rather than a C it was dismissed and even on occasion screwed into a ball and thrown away as rubbish! As a prospective amazing teacher this really used to upset

me. Hadn't I spent hours late at night lovingly writing helpful comments to move students on with their learning? It did not fare much better even if it gained the 'magic' grade C. Often these students (predominantly boys, I must say) would look at the grade, sigh with relief then turn around and chat to their neighbour. Despite the hours of marking, my helpful guidance would be neglected. Sometimes it seemed as if I might as well not have bothered; I wondered if there was a more effective way of getting students to act on and value my feedback.

Obviously we need to give students a very clear steer on where they are with their ability and attainment levels. It would be very unfair to give them lots of helpful advice on their work, which might make them think they were achieving at the highest levels, when in fact their achievements were rather more modest. But it is also true that once we write a numerical grade on work our students, like all of us, become blinkered. They see the grade and all it implies rather than the helpful comment

Getting students involved

“ It is good for students to understand the process of marking, especially using strategies such as peer- and self-assessment.

Neil Welsh, PE teacher, Prince William School, Oundle ”

What an amazing teacher needs to do when marking an important piece of work and providing a quality written response is to give students time to read, absorb and act on the information. They may also need to know what grade they received for a piece of work but there is nothing to

stop you holding back this information and giving it out in another lesson. If you can do this then there is much more chance that they will read carefully and take action on the information you have given. Students will certainly resist this at first and will doubtless clamour for 'my mark'; however, an amazing teacher knows that they sometimes need to remain resolute, even if it means resisting a whole class appeal and being seen as unpopular for a while. Stay strong on this point because you really are doing it for their own good.

How do we enable students to recognise where they are and what their next steps should be? Well the teacher certainly has a crucial role in the assessment progress. Often when we think about assessment, tests and exam results spring to mind – that is *summative assessment* which sums up and reflects what a learner has achieved in a final test or examination. Assessment for Learning focuses more on *formative assessment* – which is the range of feedback that a teacher gives to a student that helps them see the next steps in their learning. For example, a summative assessment might tell me that I have achieved 15 out of 20, or a grade E, while formative feedback would indicate what parts of the work has met the criteria, what I have done well and it would identify the next steps I need to take to improve my work.

Effective Assessment for Learning is about intervening *before* the students complete summative assessments (tests, exams, coursework, etc.) to help them discover what is working and what they need to do to make progress. It is about sharing information with students, empowering them and guiding them to the next step. It is only in this way that students can take responsibility for their own learning and ultimately improve.

Encouragingly, research by Dylan Wiliam and Paul Black in *Inside the Black Box* (2004) suggests that not only is formative

How to be an **Amazing Teacher**

For most of us during our school experience there was an amazing teacher – the teacher who changed our outlook on life and helped us succeed and whose lessons we will never forget.

What made them an outstanding teacher and what are the tips, techniques and tactics that make some teachers really first class? How do I improve my skills? How can I get behaviour right? How can I motivate pupils who don't seem to want to learn?

These are questions often asked by newly qualified as well as experienced teachers.

Caroline Bentley-Davies' new book *How to be an Amazing Teacher* explains:

- **The secrets of body language, presence and classroom charisma.**
- **How to unlock the hidden talents of pupils and develop their motivation and engagement through a wealth of innovative teaching techniques.**
- **The tools amazing teachers have mastered to engage disaffected pupils and make the classroom a vibrant and engaging place.**

Carefully blending practical advice, real life scenarios and expert opinion this book will make any teaching career more rewarding and successful.



“... presents a picture of teaching and learning as an invigoratingly open ended voyage of reflective discovery ...”

Carey Philpott, Head of the Centre for Excellence in Teacher Education, University of Strathclyde

“Full of highly practical suggestions and advice.”

Sue Lane, Principal Teaching and Learning Consultant, Peterborough Local Authority.

“An extremely readable and practical guide ...”

Nicola Copitch, Secondary Lecturer in Teaching, University of Wolverhampton

“A really valuable book for all teachers.”

Kate Lewis, Advanced Skills Teacher, Arthur Mellows Village College.

“... provides a canny mix of advice and opportunities for reflection on the journey towards being an outstanding teacher.”

Geoff Barton, Headteacher, King Edward VI School



Caroline Bentley-Davies is an inspector of schools, an adviser and consultant. She runs training courses and observes lessons across the UK. In only her second year of teaching, at the age of 23, Caroline was deemed 'outstanding' by Ofsted. Since then she has worked as a Local Authority Adviser in Northamptonshire and a consultant working both nationally and internationally.

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