

THIS MUCH I KNOW
about LOVE OVER FEAR ...
CREATING A CULTURE FOR
TRULY GREAT TEACHING

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Crown House Publishing Limited
www.crownhouse.co.uk

First published by
Crown House Publishing Limited
Crown Buildings, Bancyfelin, Carmarthen, Wales, SA33 5ND, UK
www.crownhouse.co.uk

and

Crown House Publishing Company LLC
6 Trowbridge Drive, Suite 5, Bethel, CT 06801, USA
www.crownhousepublishing.com

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

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

Print ISBN: 978-184590982-6
Mobi ISBN: 978-184590983-3
ePub ISBN: 978-184590984-0
ePDF ISBN: 978-184590985-7

LCCN 2015940767
Printed and bound in the UK by
Gomer Press, Llandysul, Ceredigion

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Chapter 1

Truly great teaching

My first teacher

A garden is a grand teacher. It teaches patience and careful watchfulness; it teaches industry and thrift; above all it teaches entire trust.

Gertrude Jekyll

When I began my teaching career at Eastbourne Sixth Form College one of my biggest influences was Kate Darwin. We were appointed on the same day but she was nearly twenty years older than me. Kate is a truly great teacher and one of the wisest people I know.

We shared the driving from Brighton to Eastbourne and within the confines of our cars we swapped stories. Kate's dad had been to Cambridge and won a university prize which her husband-to-be, Chris, was awarded a generation later. Kate's dad was a head teacher. He died suddenly when Kate was only 18 years old. He had written with the same ink pen for the whole of his life; the story of her dad and his Waterman is best told in a sonnet I wrote for Kate:

Different Strokes

His choice of pen remained the same
From undergraduate Cambridge days
To signing his headmaster's name –
A Waterman in mottled beige.
The cursive blacksmith's art had honed
The ink-filled gold into a tool
For use by him and him alone –
His hand made them inseparable.

Gold outlasts all. The pen was left
A legacy, bequeathed to her

Whose writing pleased the family most:
 But straining through the unknown curves
 It snapped, to leave the nib's new host
 Mourning afresh, doubly bereft.

And whilst not educated like Kate's father, my dad was a teacher in many ways too. Apart from learning how to play golf with him, he taught me a lot about the countryside. He'd grown up four miles from his school and had to walk there and back every day through the Sussex fields. He taught me how to strip a sapling for a bow and arrow, how to predict the weather, how to catch a fish. I can remember as a 6-year-old watching him stalk a trout in an eddied pool on a Sussex stream for nearly an hour before he caught it. He was a study in patient persistence.

I hadn't realised quite what a teacher he was until my eldest sister, Bev, who knew him that much longer than I did, wrote to me nearly thirty years after he'd died:

Dad was always there for each of us as we grew up. He took Dave [my eldest brother] and me for long walks in the country and knew everything about nature. He helped me with my stool-ball, helped me ice and decorate my Xmas cake, and even tried to teach me how to hit a golf ball!

Luckily for all of us his job did not interfere with home life. Once he clocked off he'd finished until the alarm went off the next morning. He was able to enjoy his post round out in the countryside, and was a valuable member of that community. He helped feed the lambs at the farm, took an old lady flowers and eggs, posted her letters and was the only human contact that she had.

Every March he would pick the first primroses of the year and send them to Auntie Nancy. He was out in the fresh air every day, observing all four seasons, not confined to four brick walls like the majority of us are.

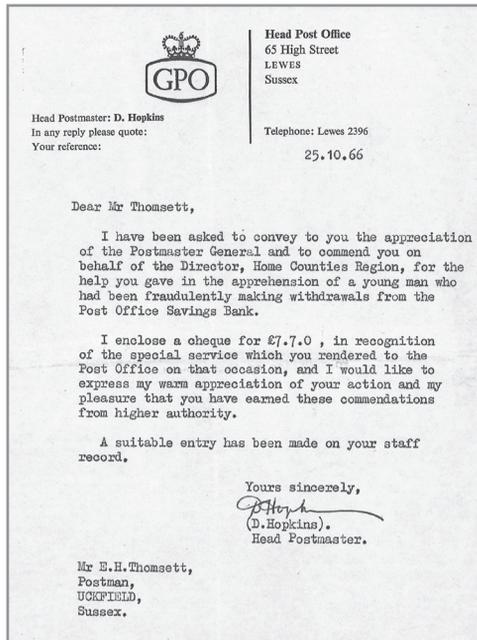
I see dad in his own way as a teacher. He was not well-educated – through no fault of his own – but he taught us right from wrong. He showed us how to respect the countryside, kindness,

honesty, stoicism, love and gratitude. Above all he was able to give each of us his time, a gift more precious than status or money. He was a very wise man.

After I'd wiped the tears away, one thing that struck me about Bev's words was the first three things she cites which dad showed us: *how to respect the countryside, kindness and honesty*. They are the exact same values of our school: respect, honesty and kindness.

Dad tended roses with pure artistry. He died three years from retirement and the chance to lie in his own bed of roses forever. And just as Kate was chosen to receive her dad's pen, I became the depository for all my dad's possessions. Mother still sends me odd artefacts she finds, like his National Service discharge documents – he was conscripted into the navy for two years.

His glasses were a shock when I opened the case; they are half-rimmed ones and the way he used to look over the top of them and grin seemed encased with them. Mother sent me this letter which is now framed on my office wall:



In the event of a fire this is the first thing I would grab. The letter captures perfectly dad's honesty which Bev had so sharply observed, and I love the way the class system – which pervaded mid-1960s Britain – is clearly evident in the letter's tone. Worth noting too that in 1966, £7.7.0 was a week's wages to a postie.

Truly great teaching

The fundamental purpose of school is learning, not teaching.

Richard DuFour

Before we go any further, it's important to explore the core business of any school: teaching. And it's worth emphasising that we are trying to focus upon teaching not teachers. Professor Chris Husbands explained beautifully why it is worth making this subtle distinction in a blog post where he pointed out, 'We can all teach well and we can all teach badly ... more generally, we can all teach better: teaching changes and develops. Skills improve. Ideas change. Practice alters. It's teaching, not teachers.'¹ This is a helpful distinction because it depersonalises pedagogy so that we can at least begin to talk about improving teaching without being critical of the individual person who is doing the teaching – something which is generally so hard to achieve.

The more I read about teaching, the more difficult it is to define teaching, let alone truly great teaching. If you read Graham Nuthall's *The Hidden Lives of Learners*,² or Daniel Willingham's *Why Don't Students Like School?*³

¹ Chris Husbands, Great Teachers or Great Teaching? Why McKinsey Got It Wrong, *IOE London Blog* (10 October 2013). Available at: <https://ioelondonblog.wordpress.com/2013/10/10/great-teachers-or-great-teaching-why-mckinsey-got-it-wrong/>.

² Graham Nuthall, *The Hidden Lives of Learners* (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research Press, 2007).

³ Daniel Willingham, *Why Don't Students Like School? A Cognitive Scientist Answers Questions About How the Mind Works and What It Means for the Classroom* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

or Paul Hirst's 'What is Teaching?',⁴ you'll understand why anyone could feel confused about what truly great teaching looks and sounds like.

Hirst says, 'Successful teaching would seem to be simply teaching which does in fact bring about the desired learning.'⁵ Within that seemingly simple statement lies the complex relationship between teacher and student, something quite delicate but crucial to successful teaching and learning. And when Biesta writes, 'it is not within the power of the teacher to give this gift [of teaching], but depends on the fragile interplay between the teacher and the student. Teachers can at most try and hope, but they cannot force the gift [of teaching] upon their students,'⁶ what he is hinting at is the primacy of teacher–student relationships. Because teaching is a human activity, the relationship between teacher and student is fundamental to whether the student learns from the teaching.

With Hirst and Biesta in mind, I think those best qualified to define the qualities of a successful teacher – and so give us a good idea of what constitutes successful teaching – are our students.

One of the most constructive organisations I have worked with as a head teacher is John Corrigan's Group 8 Education. John is an excellent coach and he articulated very clearly a way for us to talk about teaching with our students. One of the activities we undertook was based upon John Corrigan's work on what students look for in a successful teacher.⁷ Our work with Group 8 centred on thirty descriptors about teachers and teaching which had been shaped by John and his team over several years.

⁴ Paul H. Hirst, 'What is Teaching?', in *Knowledge and the Curriculum: A Collection of Philosophical Papers* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974).

⁵ Hirst, 'What is Teaching?'

⁶ Gert J. J. Biesta, 'Giving Teaching Back to Education: Responding to the Disappearance of the Teacher', *Phenomenology & Practice* 6(2) (2012): 35–49. Available at: <https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/pandpr/article/viewFile/19860/15386>.

⁷ See <http://gr8education.com> and John Corrigan, 'Improving Student Learning Outcomes in the 21st Century: White Paper (Group 8 Education)'. Available at: <http://gr8education.com/discussion-paper/>.

In rank order of importance to students, these are the common features of good teaching identified by our students from the bank of thirty descriptors:

- 1 Teachers respect me.
- 2 Teachers are knowledgeable in their subject.
- 3 Teachers are friendly, approachable and willing to listen.
- 4 Teachers are positive, enthusiastic and have a sense of humour.
- 5 Teachers encourage and help me to succeed.
- 6 In class I do work that is interesting and challenging for me.
- 7 Teachers celebrate my progress and achievements.
- 8 Teachers remind me that my success depends on my effort.
- 9 My classes have clear rules for how I should behave throughout the class.
- 10 Teachers provide me with useful feedback on my work.

It's a pretty good set of descriptors, one forged and selected by students – the only ones who have experienced the full range of teacher quality. This list of the characteristics of good teachers, as hierarchically selected by our own students, only confirmed my thinking about the best teachers I have known. I would suggest that any group of students, when asked for the five key features of a good teacher, will always give you essentially the same answer, namely that good teachers:

- 1 Respect us as adults.
- 2 Are enthusiastic.
- 3 Make lessons interesting.
- 4 Know their subject.
- 5 Explain things clearly and help if we don't understand.

So much of this feedback from students about teachers returns us to relationships. Number one for students in an idealised teacher is that

the teacher respects them. At Huntington we adopt the mantra, 'Always be the adult in the situation', based on the principle of unconditional positive regard as espoused by Carl Rogers.⁸ Furthermore, one of our three core values is respect, and we have always included in our school development plan the aspiration to work in a school where people acknowledge the fallibility of the human condition. We all get things wrong; we just have to try hard not to make the same mistake twice!

So, if we can get the relationship between teacher and student right, we might just be able to encourage the students to accept Biesta's gift of successful teaching. Veronica Weusten's *The Talented Teacher* is a little known gem of a publication in which the author outlines her view that successful teaching depends upon a teacher's character.⁹ I would implore any teacher, youthful or experienced, to read and reflect upon it.

Weusten's book is about the importance of personal authenticity in teaching. She says, in an echo of Biesta, that whilst you may want to be a skilled teacher, it is your pupils who will determine whether or not you in fact are one because, ultimately, pupils prefer teachers they like. Her list of the characteristics a teacher should have, according to students, is remarkably similar to mine: '[a successful teacher] has humour, is pleasant, and maintains classroom order and structure ... is able to explain well, is patient and is just'.¹⁰

So, according to our own students and Weusten, good classroom relationships are key to effective teaching. However, an effective learning environment is not enough to determine or guarantee good teaching because, as Hirst so clearly points out, good teaching depends upon students learning what you think you've taught them. Every teacher in the land has taught a great lesson but discovered at some point, either

⁸ See Jerold Bozarth, *Rogers' Therapeutic Conditions: Evolution Theory and Practice. Vol. 3: Unconditional Positive Regard* (Monmouth: PCCS Books, 2001).

⁹ Veronica Weusten, *The Talented Teacher* [Weusten en Hoornstra], 11th edn (2013). Available to purchase at: <http://www.degelifdeleeraar.nl/en/webwinkel/de-geliefde-leeraar/>.

¹⁰ Weusten, *The Talented Teacher*.

near the end of the lesson or at the beginning of the next one, that what she had thought she'd taught them had not been learnt by the students.

In my first year of teaching I spent hours and hours marking students' work. At the end of the year I sat down with each one of my students and reflected upon his or her progress. I must have written 'Do not paraphrase!' tens of times in the margins of Alison's essays over the year, yet she highlighted in one simple question the ineffectiveness of my teaching when she asked, 'What does "paraphrase" mean?'

This experience with Alison reminded me of the old joke: there were two small boys, John and Jim, who were friends. Jim had a dog. One day they were taking the dog for a walk and Jim said proudly: 'I've taught the dog to whistle.' 'What do you mean?' said John. 'He's not whistling.' 'I know,' said Jim. 'But I said I'd taught him; I didn't say he'd learnt.'¹¹

One of the highlights of my career has been working with Professor Rob Coe from the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring at the University of Durham. In 2014 he co-authored a report for the Sutton Trust entitled, *What Makes Great Teaching?*¹² The report reviews over 200 pieces of research to identify the elements of teaching with the strongest evidence of improving attainment.

Coe and his co-authors conclude that great teaching is that which leads to improved student progress. They acknowledge the difficulty of pinning down exactly what constitutes great teaching, and their reflections on the matter are similar to Hirst's:

We define effective teaching as that which leads to improved student achievement using outcomes that matter to their future success. Defining effective teaching is not easy. The research

¹¹ Paul Green-Armytage, *Colour Zones: Connecting Colour Order and Everyday Language*, in *9th Congress of the International Colour Association, Proceedings of SPIE*, Vol. 4421 (2002), pp. 976–979.

¹² Robert Coe, Cesare Aloisi, Steve Higgins and Lee Elliot Major, *What Makes Great Teaching?* (London: Sutton Trust, 2014).

keeps coming back to this critical point: student progress is the yardstick by which teacher quality should be assessed.¹³

It is hard to disagree with Coe and Hirst. In the end, what is the point of teaching if students do not make academic progress? What I like about the Sutton Trust report is the list of six common components suggested by research that teachers should consider when assessing teaching quality:

- 1 (Pedagogical) Content knowledge.
- 2 Quality of instruction.
- 3 Classroom climate.
- 4 Classroom management.
- 5 Teacher beliefs.
- 6 Professional behaviours.¹⁴

The authors explain that the third component, classroom climate, covers ‘quality of interactions between teachers and students, and teacher expectations: the need to create a classroom that is constantly demanding more, but still recognising students’ self-worth. It also involves attributing student success to effort rather than ability and valuing resilience to failure (grit).¹⁵

All six components are important in helping to define great teaching, but I think classroom climate is a welcome inclusion as it acknowledges the importance of relationships as well as the value of resilience to failure, something I come back to in Chapter 11 on the growth mindset.

Whilst I might have established how darned hard it is to pin down what teaching is, one of the activities a school’s teaching staff ought to undertake is to agree collaboratively on what it is they think constitutes

¹³ Coe et al., *What Makes Great Teaching?*

¹⁴ Coe et al., *What Makes Great Teaching?*

¹⁵ Coe et al., *What Makes Great Teaching?*

truly great teaching. Until they agree what they think truly great teaching looks like, how can they aspire to be truly great teachers?

It doesn't really matter what the Teachers' Standards say or what the Ofsted criteria claim good teaching might look like, or even how, according to Professor Rob Coe, the existing evidence identifies great teaching: colleagues within the same school will profit from engaging in a discussion about what they mean when they talk about truly great teaching. Such a discussion is, logically, fundamental to our profession.

At Huntington we subscribe to Professor Rob Coe's view that great teaching is that which leads to improved student progress, but we have also thought hard about what we think good teaching and learning might look like. As a team of 125 teachers and teaching assistants, we agreed our own 'Features of Truly Great Teaching' and have now adopted them above the ever-changing Ofsted criteria. It may be easy for us to do since we were recently inspected, but Sir Michael Wilshaw made it clear in his 2012 speech to the RSA that there is no prescribed way to teach.¹⁶

This poster on page 19 can be found inside our teacher planners, and it is what we use when we are observing lessons as a support for post-observation developmental discussions.

The very process of engaging in the discussion which led to this set of criteria for truly great teaching was highly valuable in itself; importantly, we undertake a review of the descriptors every two years so that we involve new staff in the process of owning the definition of truly great teaching.

¹⁶ Michael Wilshaw, What Is a Good Teacher? [video], *Royal Society of Arts* (3 April 2012). Available at: <http://www.thersa.org/events/video/archive/what-is-a-good-teacher>.



Truly great schools don't suddenly exist. You grow great teachers first, who, in turn, grow a truly great school.

This is a compelling account of leading a values-driven school where people matter above all else. Too many of our state schools have become scared, soulless places. Tomsett calls for all those involved in education to find the courage to develop a leadership-wisdom which emphasises love over fear.

This Much I Know about Love Over Fear ... emphasises the importance of relationships at all levels in education and firmly places the leadership of staff at the pinnacle of effective school leadership.

Sir John Dunford, chair, Whole Education

The book is a testament to the importance of good teachers and contains a wealth of good advice about how to do the job. It is a pleasure to read and a source of invaluable advice.

Estelle Morris, former secretary of state for education

John's voice and personality shines out from every chapter. By the end it's as if you've worked in his school for years, and you feel comforted, challenged and enthused by that.

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**Dr Lee Elliot Major, chief executive, The Sutton Trust,
co-author of the *Teaching and Learning Toolkit***

We are lucky to have John and this wonderful book to guide us.

Fiona Millar, school governor and *Guardian* columnist

John Tomsett has been a teacher since 1988 and a head teacher since 2003. He is head teacher at Huntington School, York. Tomsett writes a blog called "This much I know ..." and is a regular contributor to the *TES*. He co-founded The Headteachers' Roundtable think tank and is a popular speaker on school leadership. He is determined to remain a classroom teacher, despite the demands of headship, and believes that developing truly great teaching is the main responsibility of all head teachers.

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ISBN: 978-184590982-6



9 781845 909826

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