

What Do Outstanding Teachers Do to Teach Outstanding Lessons?



By Ron Piper

"Expression is the dress of thought..."
Alexander Pope in *An Essay on Criticism*



This modelling project will aim to describe what outstanding teachers do to teach outstanding lessons. The project has a particularly powerful appeal to me in that I have a specific responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning in the school where I work as an Assistant Headteacher. Being able to model and share the underpinning structures and processes of outstanding practice with members of staff will have a huge impact in enabling colleagues to make significant professional gains in their own classroom practices and serving to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning provision across the school. It almost goes without saying that the findings from the modelling project will have a significant bearing on the school's future CPD provision. What, after all, would be the point of knowing what outstanding teachers do if I then did not find a way of disseminating the findings? Importantly then, this modelling project will describe the structures and processes which typically manifest themselves in what is referred to as the Wow factor. In its briefest terms, this project will endeavour to

point to exactly what the differences are that make the difference between satisfactory and outstanding teaching.

Methodology: How the modelling was completed

- 1** Selection of outstanding practitioner – a teacher now in her third year of teaching English. She completed her probationary year at the school and since then has gone on to become the Deputy Team Leader of English. She is widely recognised across the school as an outstanding practitioner and as such is often observed by colleagues. SLT observations confirm her as outstanding. She consistently meets the Ofsted lesson observation criteria.
- 2** Lesson observation – I observed a lesson with a Y9 class. The information gathering focused on: physiology, gestures, eye accessing cues, predicates, sub modalities, questioning, metaprograms, second positioning, features, patterns.
- 3** Practitioner interviews – Elicitation of beliefs, metaprograms, micro strategies, states and information from logical levels.



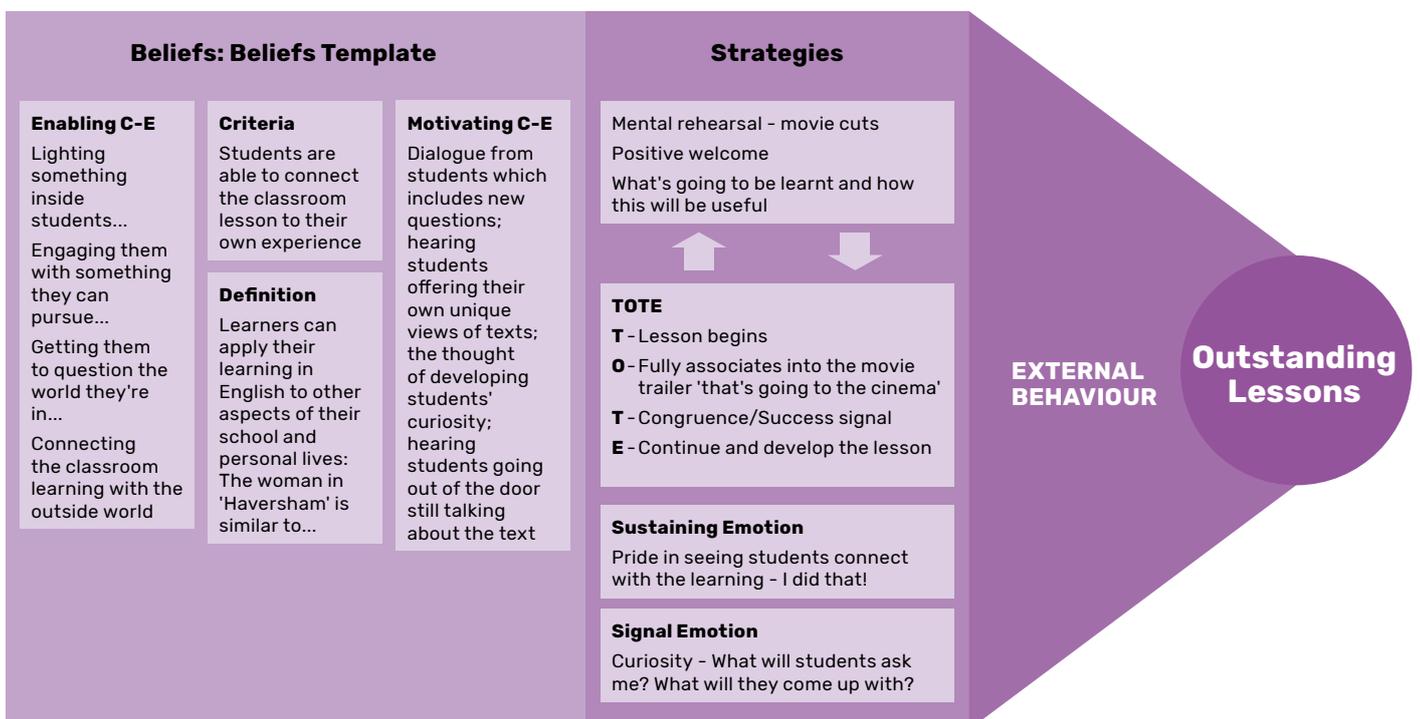
Results

Perhaps the most significant learning from this project is that outstanding lessons are created a long time in advance of their delivery. There is, in this exemplar's case, a significant gestation period from when the lesson is first conceived to the point when it is actually taught. The exemplar has a very specific strategy for delivering her lessons, which can best be summarised thus:

- Ideas, thoughts for the next lesson are *glimpsed* following conclusion of lesson

Perhaps the most significant learning from this project is that outstanding lessons are created a long time in advance of their delivery.

- Tries to *see* where the students are in the scheme of work and then *pictures* where she wants them to be
- Constructs and plays a trailer in her head and *watches* herself delivering the lesson to students and notices their reactions
- Thinks about how the trailer could change
- Re-runs the trailer but this time with different scenarios, together with an internal dialogue that takes the form of questions, e.g. *How will this work, What's an alternative* etc.
- Leaves the emerging lesson
- Reflects on and *visualises* other ongoing lessons and distils what she thinks are the successes in each
- Returns to the developing lesson and changes it by embedding into it successful practices from other lessons
- Runs *several cuts of the movie trailer* to get the right combination
- Asks the question *Am I confident doing this?*



- Test for confidence is that she can *see herself* delivering the lesson
- *Hears* some of the words that she is going to use
- *Sees some of the visuals* that she wants to use in the lesson
- Runs – *sees and hears* the student interactions – the ‘final cut’; the cut ‘that’s going to the cinema’
- Feels the excitement in her body about what the students might do
- Has a dialogue on how the lesson might take a different direction

NB. Italicised words are verbatim from the exemplar.

The strategy, clearly a very elaborate one, relies upon a number of sub-strategies which, collectively, lead to what happens and is observable in the classroom. The shorthand description of the strategy can be coded as follows:

$$V^i \gg V^e \gg V^{ic} \gg V^{ic} \gg V^i \gg V^{ic} \gg V^i \gg A_d^i \gg V^{ic} \gg V^i \gg A^{ic} \gg V^e \gg V^i \gg A^{ic} \gg K^i \gg A^{ic}$$

What would happen if there was no trailer, trailer cuts or final version? The exemplar would feel apprehensive and worried; she would be scared if she did not have the trailer strategy. She has not, therefore, thought about preparing for lessons in any other way. Her belief is that the trailer strategy is necessary for student (and her own) learning. The strategy enables her to achieve a high degree of congruence with her goals and objectives, which are noted as: being able to learn herself, opening up pathways with students, getting learning going home with students, making the world a more interesting place, and helping students to see where they fit in. The strategy is a critical factor.

The strategy, which might easily be described as an elaborate mental rehearsal, overlays several key metaprograms. The fact that the lesson is constantly evolving and developing is suggestive of a *towards* program in that the exemplar is using the strategy as a means of moving towards a realisation of a lesson, which will give her more of the feelings that flow out of the fulfilment of her goals and objectives. She is creating something for students. It was notable in the lesson observation, too, that the *towards* program was more than evident in her dialogue with students. There were more than several occasions when she told students that acquiring the skills and knowledge would enable them to achieve not just English skills and outcomes, but life skills too. The lesson had clear *towards* goals.

The *towards* metaprogram is overlaid by two others: internal/external and match/mismatch referencing. It is noticeable that in

The focus on difference seems to jumpstart the thinking and curiosity that underpins her own and the students’ learning.

developing the trailer and coming up with new cuts, the exemplar is dependent on student reactions as she imagines them. When she runs the movie it is not just herself that she sees; rather, it is herself with the students and noticing the students’ reactions. The outstanding lesson is test-driven and fine-tuned as a result of imagined student feedback. There is, therefore, a significant degree of external referencing going on.

The other but no less important metaprogram that seems to be underpinning the strategy is the match/mismatch. Not only is the emerging lesson constantly changing but the very focus of it seems to hinge on difference. The exemplar’s question sets are largely directed towards getting students to comment on the differences between texts and, in this particular lesson’s case, images. She regularly holds – figuratively – one text or image in one hand and another text or image in the other and invites students to notice differences. The focus on difference seems to jumpstart the thinking and curiosity that underpins her own and the students’ learning. I wonder if this emphasis is responsible for engaging students’ thinking and interest? Clearly, the behaviour is related to her own learner curiosity, which is part of her classroom identity that will be discussed later.

The evidence for achieving her goals and objectives is very firmly kinaesthetically based. If the lesson is going well, she feels something in the region of her abdomen. She is able to calibrate this feeling and can measure the success of the lesson using this as her measure. Having a success reference or a congruence signal is important: without it, an essential element of the TOTE is missing and it would then become too easy to get trapped in a cycle without the possibility of exit.

The fact that the exemplar has an identity that she is a learner in the classroom whose purpose is to learn with and alongside students is significant in considering the steps she takes to achieve her goals. Her classroom language is speculative and firmly in a Socratic mould; it is learners’ language. *I wonder what would happen ... How might ... What might be ...* are typical start points when she begins to interact. The frequent use of the collective pronoun *We* also signals a different relationship with the students. This is a good example of how belief and identity sets can impact on external behaviours which, in a school environment, seem to have such a powerful impact.





The other characteristic learning skill that is evident in the exemplar's teaching skill set is listening. Given that her identity in the classroom is that of student, she acts out part of this role through very intense listening. She gives students her undivided attention, it seems, in the hope that she can learn too. Modelling learning by second positioning students suggests itself as being a strong element of the teaching skill set and serves as the perfect complement to the sustained Socratic poses observed in the lesson.

But what happens if, at the test part of the TOTE, the lesson is not going as expected? The exemplar has a strategy for this, which, in its shorthand version, looks like this:

Ki >> Vir >> Vic >> Ki

If the exemplar feels that her goals and objectives are not being met, she re-runs previous clips of the movie and then constructs alternative clips before fully associating into them and checking for her congruence/success signal. If necessary, she will do this for however many times it takes to get the signal.

The impactful language and behaviour of this exemplar seems to be organically linked to her sense of what she believes she is doing in the classroom when she is teaching and, critically important it seems, *who* she is when she is teaching and the higher *purpose* of her teaching. Language and behaviour are fully aligned and congruent with her beliefs, identity and purpose. More than this, though, it seems that being in a curious state – *What will the students ask me? What will they come up with?* – is another influential factor in the difference that makes the difference. Perhaps it is the case that students engage with learning best when they are sharing the experience of being outside a comfort zone with a teacher?

Practical application

Knowing what this exemplar does to teach outstanding lessons is all very interesting but how, exactly, is it possible to replicate this in other teachers? Put simply, what do other teachers have to do in the light of this analysis of outstanding practice?

The place to begin with developing outstanding teaching practice is at the level of beliefs, identity and purpose. The fact that the exemplar has a belief that she is a student in the classroom significantly impacts upon her use of language. Use of language, and in particular speculative, subjunctive uses, is a critical factor in engaging and prompting thinking, judging from the lesson observation. This type of language is commensurate with generating student behaviours that are aligned with learning. So, I wonder if knowing this provides the first step in any change process aimed at enabling teachers to become outstanding? Clarity on who and what you are and exactly why you are in the classroom seems to be fundamental. Providing teachers with a coaching opportunity would be the perfect way in which to address this.

The second important place to go with the findings from this project is the rehearsal strategy that this exemplar uses. It will be taken as said that all teachers are familiar with the requirements for a three-part lesson that makes use of AFL, ICT and the lengthy checklist of Ofsted expectations. What seems to make the difference, though, is the mental rehearsal. Being able to see how a lesson unfolds and to have the chance to align it with personal goals and core values is a way of fine-tuning a lesson and dealing with problems *before* they actually happen. The process of mental rehearsal in this exemplar's case is a wholly sub-conscious skill. Others for whom this is new will have to consciously practise it before it becomes second nature and an embedded part of their lesson preparation. The obvious start point here is to go through the steps of mental rehearsal with a coach, laying particular emphasis on preferred sub modalities, and then to practise.

An important part of this exemplar's strategy is the success signal which, in her case, is felt in the stomach area. This follows her checks with the students who she either sees as engaged and learning or disengaged and bored. Having a congruence or success signal is important, not least because it enables the opportunity to benchmark success or to try alternative approaches. The identification and recognition of a congruence signal is an important part of enabling other teachers to become expert in the rehearsal strategy.

Being externally referenced is an important element in this exemplar's practice. Gauging and being aware of student responses is vital, it seems, in crafting and sustaining outstanding lessons. It might be worthwhile working with staff to establish where they are positioned in relation to this metaprogram and try to move them more into external referencing – if necessary – for the time they are teaching. A strongly internally referenced teacher might, for instance, be falling short of teaching outstanding lessons because they simply are not able to develop a test element of a TOTE pattern and therefore doom themselves to repeats of fundamental errors.

Just as the internal/external metaprogram is important, so too, it seems, are the towards/away and match/mismatch programs. Encouraging students towards specific outcomes for the purpose of enabling other things to happen suggests itself to be a highly motivating element. Learning to *avoid* in the classroom context is not a good motivator. Perhaps, most significantly, though, is the mismatch element of this exemplar's practice. In class the exemplar focused on the difference between things and quite often illustrated the process by holding – figuratively, at least – a poem or word in one hand and something else in the other hand and inviting comparison. It is this focus on difference that seemed to prompt high levels of thinking and engagement. So, in terms of improving practice, another way forward would be to encourage teachers to focus on differences and thereby prompt student curiosity. In a strange but connected way, AFL (Assessment for Learning) in its purest sense is exactly about difference: comparing what you know to something new, being cognisant of the gap and deciding on the steps to be taken to effect a reconciliation of the known and the new.

It was noticeable in this exemplar's case that she always gave instructions and received feedback in a particular place. When receiving feedback, she adopted a Socratic pose. There were aspects of her physiology that actually modelled the responses she wanted from students. Students' behaviour changed when she moved to particular places in the classroom: there was a pattern of anticipation and expectation. Interestingly, I asked the exemplar – after the lesson, of course – to give instructions and to receive feedback in a different place. The response? *It felt odd.*

We all know how when some people talk, you just hear 'blah blah blah ...'

So, the marking out, albeit subconsciously, of mental territory seems to be another factor in the exemplar's outstanding lesson strategy which might be readily adopted by other practitioners.

Watching this exemplar at work reminded me of a passage from a book I read recently, Robert Dilts' and Stephen Gilligan's *The Hero's Journey*. "We all know how when some people talk, you just hear 'blah blah blah ...' and you just get bored. But when others say the same words it grabs your heart, it wakes you up, it lifts your level of consciousness. What's the difference that makes the difference? ... Bringing your words and your calling alive by speaking your intention in a centred and extended way." It struck me that the exemplar was totally centred in her identity as a learner: it was this classroom identity that was central to making the difference. Her identity was the direct source of her language, her physiology and behaviours – the key elements of successful communication. ■



Summary of practical application: how teachers can use modelling findings

Outstanding Element	Training and Development
Classroom Behaviours	Teacher uses Modelling Visit Summary Sheet (download from https://anlp.org/rapport-resources) to second position the exemplar: uses the exemplar's language, adopts, physiology and gestures
Mental Rehearsal	Teacher practises the strategy, uses it and notices the difference. Alternatively, notices their own preparation strategy and considers how it might change in the light of these findings.
Belief, Identity and Purpose	Teacher – with the help of a coach – assumes a learner identity in the classroom and develops new beliefs with regard to what she/he is doing when teaching
Use of Language	Teacher analyses their use of language: Is it learner's language? Is it curious language? Does it model the language that is desirable on the part of students? Understand that language can be used, as in the exemplar's case, to pace and lead.
Metaprogram Awareness	Teacher – with the help of a coach – identifies their own metaprograms and assesses their impact in the classroom. For example, the extent to which the strongly internally referenced teacher is oblivious to students' lack of understanding. Is there too much emphasis on what might be avoided rather than on what might be gained?
Physiology	Teacher experiments with changing their physiology e.g. What happens if a Socratic pose is used to process feedback?
Learning Territory	Teacher experiments with establishing different areas of their classroom for different things e.g. an area to give instructions, an area to receive feedback and so on.