Teaching for amateurs

Peter Fox PeterFox=Coach@eminent.demon.co.uk 17 Aug 2006 ©

If you organise improvement sessions, run classes or lead community activities then this is for you. What follows is for anybody who wants to, or needs to, instruct; whether in a class or one-to-one, whether as a volunteer coach or as a paid team leader.

There's a lot of stuff packed into a few words here. Don't try to take it all in at once.

1

In the next two or three minutes I hope to show you where 99% of teachers go wrong. Once you've clicked with the problem we can get stuck into solutions which will also be "Hey that's so obvious now!" moments.

TEACH OR LECTURE?

Nowadays we have come to assume that 'teaching' is a matter of telling and showing people what to do. You might have been on a course where they showed you how to speak clearly and use visual aids. We see it on the telly all the time. But that's *lecturing*. Worse - to suit TV formats - vital skills are glossed over and viewers start to treat all instruction as entertainment; where the value comes from the ability of the presenter to generate interest rather than the viewer's desire to acquire the skills needed to make the finished result.

If you are instructing in a subject which requires
- judgement,
- perseverence,
- where you want students to ask for assistance when necessary

then you need to do more than "do what I do" and "here is an instruction sheet".

To see why, take a pencil and paper then using your 'other' hand write your name or address. What do the results look like? Would you say "legible but crude"? What needs practice - Verticals, horizontals, circles, tails, keeping on the line? As I sit here I can't say. I *could* give written instructions to cover nearly every defect and *could* give homework practice exercises - but that would be me spraying you all over with hints and tips not *you* getting to grips with the most serious defects in *your* handwriting. So you tell me (ok - tell yourself) which letters are the poorest. What is the nature of the defect? How can you practice that element?

The moral of this exercise is:
- Instruction must be student based.
- It isn't what is said that matters but what is heard.
- The students are not there to listen to the teacher but to learn.
- Different students will learn different things in different ways at different times.

The rest of this article will deal with the skills of teaching as opposed to lecturing.

OBVIOUS?

Firstly and most importantly: Nothing is obvious.

Is that obvious? It is *to me*. What could possibly go wrong with the simple instruction "...on a low heat until brown..."? *I* wouldn't know what you meant - I could make a stab but my 'low heat' might be the very lowest I could get and my 'brown' might be charred and dried out! That is the 'guess and mess' approach. At my dancing class I was instructed "Left..." Does that mean "Stand on my left and step with my right"[1] or "Stand on my right and step with my left"? (In *my* case it hardly matters as I have never got the hang of Left -v- Right when under pressure - So that isn't obvious either!)[2] It is very easy to use technical terms or be sloppy in terminology which leaves some of the students guessing and the others confused.

So - if 'nothing is obvious' is the problem then what's the solution? Take a few moments to think through your teaching and learning experience to get a feel for the problem and approaches to solving it... ...Ok time's up. Hands up all those who said 'prepare hand-outs'. Good try - That's what everybody else does - You'll make a fine *lecturer*. Any other suggestions? Aha - somebody at the back says "Find out what the students know and don't know, then start from there." Brilliant, logical and can be extended to 'can do and can't do' and 'are comfortable with' and 'are worried about'. Now can anyone tell me how we might find these things out? "Ask?" Yes. "Test?" Yes. "Observe?" Good. "Challenge?" Now *that's* interesting.[3] What have all these things got in common? That's right! : Communication *from* student *to* teacher.

Now is *that* 'obvious'? And does my comment above about where you want students to ask for assistance when necessary make more sense now? That's another way to find out what students don't know/are unhappy with/can't do.

REVISE

At this point would you re-read the whole of the article up to this point again. The objective is to consolidate your knowledge. Whereas the first time I was giving you bricks of information and getting you to pile them up, this time you will be able to see for yourself exactly which brick is which and where it goes. (Also you might like to wonder at the slightly unusual writing style - we'll look at what lies behind it shortly.)

You may like to compare your notes with the review at the end.

2

What did you learn from re-reading the last section?

I wonder if you noticed that I told you what the objective of the exercise was? How important is that? Perhaps some readers have given up already because they were fed up with juggling ideas without 'getting anywhere'. Well yes, that's the problem: Some people want the finished thing instantly. It's natural to try to get this boring learning business over so we can have a play but as a moment's reflection will show, you can only learn a bit at a time. One of the skills of a good teacher is being able to convince students that they are steaming ahead even if they haven't reached their final destination yet. I shall have to leave it to the reader to devise for themselves a little self-assessment exercise to investigate how students in their classes are assured that they are making 'definite progress' *throughout a session*.

IMPORTANCE OF REVISION

I hope you learnt at least two things:

A - The value of revision. At each revision the facts are checked but in a more advanced context - so they make more sense, are more relevant, and further facets can be exposed.

B - The need for a teacher to be working at the same thing as the student. To do this the teacher needs to be constantly observing progress and applying the next 'lesson' at that point.

In a short while I'll show how all these words are going to fall into place in a single smooth operation that you can pick up in a couple of hours - but first I want to revise the two points just covered.

A - Revision is more than repetition.

- It is recall, confirmation and practice.
- The teacher can use it to test the students in order to measure their progress.
- It builds confidence and is evidence of progress well done.
- It is a starting point for what comes next.

Why do you think I chose to revise this matter here and not wait until later? I'll tell you : Because I wanted you to revisit revision while the value of it was still fresh in your mind and make it clear that it wasn't a throw-away bullet point.

Without looking, can you remember that the second point (B) was? Well done if you could, but I wouldn't be at all surprised if you couldn't. I've just battered you with a set of bullet points so no wonder if they pushed point B out. (Got that 'Don't'?) You'll get some hands-on practice in a moment which should help you get this under your belt.

B - This is the third visit to this topic. That's because it is central to good teaching. If a student has 'lost the plot'

(a) how do you know? They will guess[4], scheme to avoid direct questions and cheat so not to appear dumb.

(b) there's no point in pretending they are still with you.

The really sad thing is that many teachers somehow expect students to catch up by 'making an effort' when it's not effort from the student that's needed but

enlightenment from the teacher.

To sum up : The teacher shouldn't be saying "come here", that's how you train dogs. Your job is to be a guide and a guide has to be with them : "Now we're together here, we see and know the same things... Let's go on, I'm right behind you".

REVISION IN PRACTICE

How would you organise revision? Typical methods are question and answer sessions in a group, setting an exercise (I'll have important things to say about exercises later) and revisiting 'simple stuff' and working at the *quality* of performance there. Have you noticed how as you observe the revision you identify weak spots, confidence and mis-placed confidence? Of course you did. (Obvious isn't it.)

Here is a self assessment exercise for you in two parts:

Part 1 Devise some sort of revision. It might be back-track of a syllabus or be drawing together threads that students should be familiar with. How can you use your class time efficiently? How do you decide what sort of things you're going to be looking for? How flexible will it be?

See if you can find something basic that 100% of the class should be able to do standing on their heads. (You can wrap it up with something more tricky but still be looking at this particular bit.)

Part 2 Now do the exercise and see how many bad habits have crept in, how many students get stumped when put on the spot and how many mistakes and poor performances there are.

The objective of the first part of this exercise is to get you thinking about efficient revision [continuous...], while the second part will give you a firm basis for what you knew in a vague way about the actual skills and knowledge of your students.

In the next section we will quickly look at the nature of messages and recall then go on to look at teacher-student interaction. There is a very simple technique for doing all the stuff we've been discussing in the last two sections, however it does require taking a bit of a plunge so you need to be happy with the underlying concepts we've just dealt with first. In sections after that we'll look at teaching methods in practice.

3a

A Here is something obvious: It is easier to learn one or a couple of things at a time than a dozen. The same applies to acquiring skills.

B Here is an observation: Knowledge (or skills) learnt easily are recalled easily.

C Here is a well known effect: Distinctively tagging something with an icon or style makes it easier to recall and associate with other things.[5]

Exercise:
(1) Read the above again. Now close your eyes and try recalling the essence of the three points.
(2) Write "Few easy icons" in the margin. Now try the recall again.
Some techniques are more effective than others.

Here is an example for you to try: *"If the battle of Hastings was in 1066, which century was that? 9th, 10th or 11th?"* In answering this you have really been asked to show you know the way in which we allocate 'umpteenth' century names to dates. But there's more going on in your brain than that. I'll tell you what I think it is and you can tell me if you think I'm right: You have (re)discovered a very simple way of joining together bits of your knowledge. You already knew the Battle of Hastings was 1066 so I didn't bother pestering you with that again, you already knew the way 1966 is not the 19th but the 20th century but what you've just learned is how well you were able to connect two bits of knowledge. Very few people will have known the answer by rote - mostly it's a process of working things out. How smartly and confidently you worked it out is what you've learnt[6].

Quickly, before leaving this question here are a few alternatives I could have used.
(2) What century was the Battle of Hastings?
(3) Was the Battle of Hastings in the 10th Century?
(4) If something happened in 1066 what century was that?
(5) Was 1028 in the 9th, 10th or 11th century.
Why do you think the original 'hits the spot' better than options 2 to 5? If the objective was to give you a ready-use mental tool to convert dates to centuries, a tool that you know works every time, but you might be a little rusty at, then '1066' is a handy starting point. It's a bit like handing you a tool with the handle ready to grasp rather than you having to pick one from the rack and fiddle around getting the right grip on it. So that's a definite B. 1066 is a C. Now go back and reduce to the minimum (for purposes of A) what this section has been about.

3b

Instant quiz: When did you first hear the phrase "Once you've learnt how to ride a bicycle you never forget"? Of course you can't remember. But in contrast, if you ever rode a bicycle you will have no trouble getting on one again many years later. Isn't that funny? ... No - I have bamboozled you. The first clause was about your *learning* experience but the second was about *recall*. You may not be able to recall *learning* to ride a bike and you haven't forgotten the saying. But we do forget lots of things, it is a natural process that we need to get a feel for, because as teacher's we're in the business of trying to make sure that doesn't happen.

We want the learning process to be enjoyable and rewarding so that the students come next week. Part of teaching is developing the appropriate ambiance. But are your classes just social gatherings? If your students are going to go on to bigger and better things they need to do some serious work! So far I've dodged this unfortunate aspect - but what do we mean by "work", "learn", "train" and "study"? This is the meat of the pie.

Revision : What is the meat of the pie?

Are you wondering where riding bicycles comes into this? Did you actually learn anything from that paragraph? Have another look for the meat. Pretty stringy isn't it. But perversely if you were telling a colleague about section 3 tomorrow, images of bicycles would probably be in there somewhere (together with a puzzled feeling) - Which of the A-B-C items in section 3a does that illustrate?

Revision(1) : What is the meat of the pie?
Revision(2) : If that's the meat - what is the pastry? (Hint: If that's a bit of a problem question have another read of the whole paragraph.)

Yes, that's right : The Pastry is the learning environment, the meat is what is learnt. Notice that (2) was testing your *understanding* as well as exercising your knowledge. You now know what all pastry and no meat is like. Sadly with you reading this and me writing it there is very little pastry to *this* pie but I have tried to wrap it up by the style of the presentation.

Lastly in this section: We didn't answer the question "what do we mean by work?". The best I can do is say it is some activity that results in 'progress'. We know the teacher points the student in the right direction and gives them encouragement, but the student is the one that actually does the activity. Later we'll put more meat on these bones(!) but for now you might want to pick apart some aspect of your student's work to see if you can find the ingredients for yourself.

4

This article is for the amateur instructor who seems to have acquired the role over time or by default. Don't be dismayed by the detail below, you will find it incredibly rewarding as you discover the effectiveness of using simple techniques that will soon become second nature.

I hope you've become accustomed to my style of presentation. If we were both in a classroom or sports field then I'd be quizzing you all the time. Asking you to consider situations, getting you to come back with points just covered, testing your understanding, getting you to perform and recall, keeping you from being too confident, too bored, too worried. Generally we'd be rattling along at a right pace of lots of 'obvious' steps with plenty of opportunities for you to exercise your new knowledge and skills.

Do you remember what section 1 was all about? One way to look at that is to say the teacher and pupil are *both* confident that the student can take another step and since those steps are small there must be lots of them. Intelligent, enthusiastic and competent students can be given opportunities to take big jumps knowing that there's a good chance they can find a way for themselves with only the odd reference back to the teacher.[7] That's what the teaching method in the box above does.

In section 2 we looked at revision and observation. Can you see how throughout this article we've continually been revising? Unfortunately I can't observe your progress and have had to guess how quickly and thoroughly you've been making progress. That's what the teaching method in the box above does.

In section 3 we looked at the basics of good ways to burn-in knowledge (which applied to skills also) and began to wonder at what makes learning 'happen'. It shouldn't come as a great surprise that one of the best ways to learn is *to exercise* the knowledge or skill.[8]

So here is an exercise to do just that.

1 Select one or two particularly dense or slow students for a remedial session.

2 Clarify in your mind two things:
(a) What level you expect to be starting from and
(b) What you hope to clarify and achieve in this session.
You might want to start from what's frustrating.

3 Consider the 'obvious' that make up (a) - You will be testing these early on in the session and may have to think of ways to make the 'obvious' easy for the students to grasp.

A lot of this comes from practice. (Watching an accomplished teacher can be a fast-track eye-opener.) For example when I ask a skater to start on their left foot; almost as a matter of course I'll ask them to wave their left hand at me or touch their left foot as I'm telling them what to do. If that fails then do again with pantomime actions. Yes, it takes time but redoing the exercise takes even more time and possibly still doesn't deal with the issue.

4 Consider the small steps that make up 2(b). Will you be working on three things separately then putting them together or item 1, then items 1 and 2 then items 1,2 and 3 or show the whole thing and deconstruct it. How are you going to get these items across. Whether it is Tudor monarchs or Toe loops you need a structure in your mind for the bits that make up the whole.

This is quite a bit of preparation, but after a while you will find that you can 'busk it' without any notes and very minor preparation - mostly thinking of better ways of getting through to students and varying the pace of sessions.

5 At the start of your special session you can *get the students* to recap. This is the (a) part. Quiz and observe and follow-up. (Adjust terminology to suit the sort of activity you do - perhaps 'show me' instead of 'who, how, what' etc.) You might find yourself spending the whole session on remedial work just the (a) bits. Do not fret - you have put the conveyor belt method behind you.[9]

Reward *every* response with some sign of approval ("good" is a good start) with extra enthusiasm for the sort of responses you want. Even a duff guess can be greeted with 'well at least you tried...that's a start...we'll soon get the hang of this' noises. How about "OK - Everyone agree with Carl?" or "Wow! that's a big-un!" or (with an 'either-or') "Orrrrr" said with a big grin.

Clamp down on guessing where they should *know*.

Getting students to communicate to the teacher is *the* key teaching skill. What a difference to lecturing! Review the box at the head of the section.

5

This section is a discussion of teaching techniques. It might be worthwhile listing the headings for post-session analysis. What worked, what didn't, what opportunities were missed, what techniques need more practice; then jotting down a reminder checklist for review before the next session. Do this on your own or with colleagues. You can get feedback from students as well.

CLASS DISCUSSION

Encourage debate about the hows and whys, that way students stick the issue on their own mental maps. Try to keep definite matters definite unless there are logical reasons for being able to arrive at the answer. "Are fishes mammals?" is a case that can lead to useful debate but "What's the French for Umbrella?" probably isn't. "Should we say 'The cat *are* black'?" is a nice simple step we can develop to arrive at a general rule (A bit like that 1066 exercise).

When performing skills, get the rest of the class to give marks out of 10 or cheer when some element is done right at last. Develop the whole classes critical abilities. Can they observe? Can they suggest improvements?

PACE

Efficiency goes hand in hand with pace. Many teachers are vague, need to explain

things more than once, change their exercise objectives in mid-spiel, and don't ask direct questions. Compare "John. When would you be in low gear?" with "As you know gears are often useful when starting and stopping, we did gears last week, now we'll ... Oh can somebody tell me about gears". Oops! (It's a common problem which we can all suffer from on a bad day.) Look at really good teachers and you'll see they control pace, typically piling the coal on. Although they're adaptable - Two 'identical' sessions never are - you won't see them 'swerving'.

- Fast pace doesn't mean good teaching, that's just shouting and bullying.

- Good teachers invest a little time minimising unproductive time. They will have got their props in order, emphasised the importance of 'being ready' to the students, briefed their assistants and have worked out the least time consuming way of moving from one thing to the next, or doing two things at once.

Change pace from time to time but *don't change focus*. Suppose you've just done some physical exercise and a rest is called for. OK have a rest but keep minds focussed on what went right and wrong or who did well and who needs to try harder or "who can tell me what we did different this time" or "what is it that makes us need a rest...and is there anything we can do to improve our fitness or avoid trouble?". (Notice the *teaching* here. ie. eliciting communication from students.)

REVISION

Revise and keep referring back. Frequently the current step will flow from the previous. Suppose last week we identified three rules of good radio communications, this week we can start putting them into practice. You might set a test... possibly in the form of "Write down the three rules of good radio communications spaced out on the page - we'll use this as a worksheet for today's exercise". You are trying to get the students to join their bits of knowledge into a whole - It's your job to supply the glue, screws, string and nails as well as the bits.

Revising last weeks work is essential for subjects requiring physical coordination.

EXERCISES

A common and sad feature of a lot of amateur teaching is not breaking a task down into parts and not looking at each part objectively with a view to helping students crack that issue on its own. This is a matter of dropping all the context, analysing what's left then finding ways to teach those bits.

For example if a singer needs more oomph, better timing and to present themselves to an audience these are separate things that can be dealt with individually. There may be technical matters, tricks and tips all of which need going over. There are too many things to think about all at once so it will be no good giving a barrage of advice and saying "now have another go". There are lots of ways oomph might be tackled which are nothing to do with the final result. For example a who can sing the loudest challenge, or bellowing on the Hockey pitch, or how long can a note be sustained.

BREAKTHROUGH! EXERCISES

Surprisingly, students often impose limits on themselves through fear, nervousness or bad habits. "I can only do it if..." is a frequently heard excuse. Some know what they're supposed to do but refuse to be convinced that what you're telling them is not only right but essential.

As a teacher it is your job to instill confidence and trust. So far so good. But also to lead and convince. Whatever you do, DO NOT punish somebody when they're struggling - That's like giving the poor swimmers stones to carry 'to make them better'!

Your first job is to analyse what's *really wrong*. This may take time and ingenuity and you shouldn't jump to conclusions. Getting to the bottom of problems like this is one of the things that gives teachers a little buzz. (The big buzz comes when the student makes the breakthrough of course.)

Then you have to think of ways to bypass the problem. A head-on approach without a run-up is definitely not the answer. (In truth there may not be an answer. It seems that about 10% will never be very good at any given subject - But don't jump to the conclusion that your problem student is one of these.) The most important thing is that you and the student both know the precise object of the exercise and method.

Different things work for different people : Sex and age matters a great deal. Sometimes you can use sauce, light bullying, physical manipulation and peer pressure ... but (a) only if you and the student both know the precise object and method and (b) you KNOW there will be a successful outcome before the student gets upset. (It should go without saying that a teacher should never lose their temper with a student.)

- Overcome fear by actual hand-holding.
- Overcome fear by a confidence-building run-up.
- Small, slow and simple (really s, s and s) steps!

Another handy technique is distraction. Sometimes a pupil is just concentrating too hard. You may be able to find a way to get them to use their skill without having to think too hard about it. Games and silly variations are valuable in this respect.

FEEL-GOOD : REWARDS AND ENTERTAINMENT

A teacher needs to reward pupils for doing well. Doing well often means nothing more than making an attempt or offering a response. T: "Can somebody tell me what a baby cat is called?" P: "Is it a catling?" T: "No. Good try David. There are some baby animals '...ling' aren't there..."

It's basic human nature to feel good when praised - but also for many simply being recognised as a person and given a little individual respect is a novelty. Often a teacher's immediate response is to spot the problem and tell the pupil about it and leave it at that. T:"No you're still going wrong...". On its own this is continual disappointment for the pupil. A good teacher will have established the basic premise of "I know you can do it, I know you're trying, it just takes more coordination/practice/looking again at the text book, a different approach". They do this by *saying so* to begin with, then making it clear by body language and tone of voice for the shorter version "Try again". (Normally pupils soon pick up on your encouraging nature so you can drop back to the less time consuming responses.) A simple rule is to

use the word "try" when dealing with an issue. You can sneak a "don't" in later in the sentence.

If everything 'falls in a heap' then that's a time for discussion - as the pupil tells you their mistakes you're giving them big smiles as they recognise where they're going wrong. (You might need to use tricks from sections 1-3 above to clarify the issues for the pupil.) Finally you can do a really simple thing that shows you are respecting their personal judgement and lets them feel independent and capable: Ask them "Are you ready for another go now?"

Fun is a good tool for a teacher to use. This can be a valuable relaxation break or a continuous light hearted ambiance. Some teachers find this very difficult and somehow end up muddying the waters and confusing students rather than making it an opportunity to exercise knowledge, explore skills or illustrate dangers. Sometimes all it takes is a reversal of something or breaking up the usual pattern to give novelty which some find easier to deal with than others - but it's only a bit of fun. There may well be a serious side to the exercise which makes it all the more interesting for everybody. (The most effective shocks are those that follow a light-hearted spell.)

Certificates, public performance charts, awards, badges and all public acknowledgement of achievement are good motivators. All of these work on the 'look how good I am everybody' principle. (But please don't hand out certificates for attendance - What achievement is "To certify that X sat at the back and picked his nose for two days".)

PRESSURE

From time to time you should put students under pressure. There are a minority of people who are dull and disinterested and only come to life when pressure is applied. This may be symptomatic of boredom - in which case you need to adapt - but also, particularly when there's a performance looming ahead, it may be that the student is working things out for themselves and 'helpful last minute advice' is irritating.[10]

Concentration and effort increase when people feel that have to do well and somebody will be watching. Competition isn't everybody's cup of tea but it can generate a great deal of creativity, attention to detail and desire to achieve. (It should go without saying that a teachers should avoid competitions with inherent dangers that can get out of hand through inexperience or inappropriate risk-taking.) Naturally there's stress leading up to a competition, relief at the end and satisfaction with achievement. These emotions will have different values for each student. A good teacher will use them to get the whole class to work together as a team, and also to discover what makes individuals 'tick'.

Pressure doesn't have to be competitive. For reasons discussed above students can often achieve more than their limited expectations if they're motivated by wanting to do well for all the social reasons of belonging to a class of peers, proving their abilities to a teacher and showing off to everyone.

Your job as a teacher is to understand the psychology of individuals and provide an environment where everything is possible. It's a fantastic feeling when your students are showing and telling you things that were beyond them a week or so ago instead of making excuses.

STUDENTS AS TEACHER

One of the best ways to learn something is to teach it. Many times I've been humbled by the way which one child can enthuse, encourage and get results from others. Splitting into carefully selected groups can work a treat - *provided* you give extremely clear and simple instructions about what's expected.

This technique shades-off into "Sally, can you demonstrate..." which combines pressure, feel-good, pace and revision in one neat package.

- If Sally makes a mess of the demonstration then there's no harm done - everyone learns, everyone knows there's no such thing as perfection and anyone who sneers soon finds it's their turn!
- If Sally does well and finishes with a smile of knowing she's done well, then the others want to be able to do what she's just done.

Naturally you'll be selecting your better students for this role. It keeps them busy and makes them feel good even if they're not learning much new just at the moment.

PRACTICE

Ah yes. Work! Your objective is to get the students to exercise their skills, initiative, knowledge, imagination or whatever. While the broad objectives may be the same their precise objectives are likely to be different for each student.

- Firstly you need to get across what you're expecting across the board. If you don't explain this (and many teachers fail here) then don't be surprised when you get vague results.
- Secondly you will emphasise specific points for specific pupils. "David, you should find this easy but I won't accept untidy work" or "Jane, you know why you lost marks last time..."
- Thirdly, **the really difficult bit**, *follow through* the special instructions when evaluating the results. This is difficult because you might have simply chatted to the student about something you were keen for them to attempt or keen for them to pay special attention to. You *must* cover these issues when de-briefing after the work has been completed. (Why? Because you have to show that these details are not throw-away suggestions but important aspects specific to the student's overall progress.) For many teachers this means making written notes.

You have to find ways to make the work *interesting* or *worthwhile* for the students. It doesn't matter if the practice is being supervised or not - it still has to avoid pressing any de-motivation buttons - but better still, if possible, it ought to be, giving them an emotional reason for wanting to do it. Fun, satisfaction, curiosity, and confidence building for example.

After a while students will be able to see for themselves the value of work and practice or if not at least get into the habit of doing it. But

- This won't happen if you don't point it out to them beforehand. eg "I want you all to ... so we can use them next week for ...".
- And as soon as possible afterwards. ("Here are your certificates")
- And making it clear that they don't 'need your permission' to do things on their own.

It's good to be able to praise a lot of hard work in front of a whole class. You're not complaining that the others haven't met the standard expected, but encouraging those that want to put in extra effort.

6

CONCLUSION

This article is for the amateur instructor who seems to have acquired the role over time or by default. Don't be dismayed by the detail above, you will find it incredibly rewarding as you discover the effectiveness of using simple techniques that will soon become second nature.

All of the above has been small, manageable *obvious* steps. There was nothing stressful or complicated. If you read the whole article in one go then well done for trying but there were dozens of raw points which need to be identified then planted in your own teaching method. Perhaps now is a good time to re-read the complete article and extract items for a plan of experiment - "How would I do this?" "What would be a good testing ground for..." "Let me think back over the basics that might be getting forgotten" and so on.

Your new approach will revolutionise the quality and quantity of your student's learning. You will spend a lot less time struggling with sluggish students and more pinpointing problem points, fixing them and moving on at the fastest pace *the students are capable of*.

- Have a plan but be flexible
- Watch and learn from the technique of top class teachers
- Listen for questions and think before answering

7

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Is it better to agree objectives and methods between teacher and pupils before doing an exercise or to set a challenge and pick through the results?

When a pupil doesn't perform as well as hoped for should you backtrack through previous work until they manage the simpler task, or should you try another teaching technique, or should you press on after telling the pupil to work harder, or should you break the problem down for the pupil into simpler bits, or should you assign another pupil to help, or should you hold up the whole class until the pupil has reached the necessary standard, or should you get the pupil to analyse their defects, or should you repeat the lesson more slowly, or should you ask the rest of the class how the pupil could improve?

Is there a danger of 'rewarding failure' by giving special attention to slow learners?

A teacher without a plan is like a what without a what?

Why are questions so much more effective than instructions?

How do you decide if unit has been learnt? Do we mean to final standard or enough for us to move on?

How does a teacher manage to remember what to revise and tag what needs remedial work?

If there's an exercise that requires a lot of the teacher's time to evaluate, how could the class themselves be harnessed to provide the labour?

What is the difference between teaching and lecturing?

Have you got a plan of how to consolidate the ideas in the early stages of this article?

Have you got a plan for how to implement the methods? (Time allowed 2 minutes).

Are there any circumstances where "Copy me - do as I do" is an appropriate teaching method?

What are the different facets of revision?

8 REVIEW NOTES

1

- Lecturing is not teaching
- Nothing is obvious to begin with
- Efficient communications from student to teacher are essential

2

- Need for continuous progress
- Revision is a continuous and essential process
- A teacher rarely says "come to me" but frequently "now we're together let's go on together"

3a

- The end objective of knowledge learning is recall
- The end objective of skill learning is fluency
- Find out what works for quick, easy and permanent learning. (Varies between students.)
- "Few Easy Icons"

3b

- Meat : What is learned
- Pastry : Learning environment
- The teacher must supply a balanced combination for a tasty and nourishing pie.

4

- Practical eliciting technique
- Exercise for student to learn...
- ... and for teacher to observe
- Step by step - Needs a plan and judging when to go onto next.

5

- Teaching techniques will soon become second nature
- Review headings after each session...
- ...prepare for the next accordingly

6

- There are lots of points in this paper...
- ...you'll absorb them as you go.
- Now set up your own 'pastry' plan

7

- These questions should be interesting and explore your understanding of what you've been learning.
- Try discussing them with students 'out of class'

1. In skating you refer to the foot you're standing on.

2. I use this true illustration to point out that time after time there are really really basic matters that derail a student's progress. These basics can be so basic as to be 'beneath the radar' of an instructor. Can you imagine a 14 year-old boy who could not see how to use a spanner on a nut?

3. Challenging as a teaching technique is worth exploring. Go carefully and evaluate your results. In my experience this 'gets through' to some but turns-off others and needs to be kept tied to your teaching objectives.

4. I introduced the phrase 'Guess and mess' somewhere above. If you immediately thought of that phrase when you read 'guess' here than that's an illustration of the power of catch phrases (also exaggerated actions and fantastic illustrations) to persist. A handy tool - often useful to introduce a change of pace. A bit like this note.

5. Look up Anchors and Neural Language Processing. (Warning: Lots of rubbish written on the subject.)

6. Perhaps now you'd say it was 'obvious' or mischievously you can't wait to try it out on colleagues and friends to see how 'well educated' they are. This is a perfectly natural thing to do - To challenge your peers from a position of smugness. Social interaction of this sort establishes rank, develops a 'team' view of an issue and tells you how much you can rely on your mates when you need them to deliver. If you teach in an environment where there don't appear to be opportunities for people to 'show off' or 'exercise their skills' in front of others then you need to develop them. Don't forget the importance of out-of-class social interactions.

7. The ultimate is when the pupil outclasses the teacher - which is a fantastic thrill for the teacher and reflects well on everybody.

8. Another is to involve some emotion - such as fear of losing or thrill of winning. But it's a risky strategy to rely on as people can react very differently - although sometimes team coaches spend a lot of time getting everyone to feel the same way for this reason.

9. Which is more important? The students really learn even if not at the regulation pace or something rubs off on them as you whizz by at the speed which suits you?

10. You can show a self-contained worrier how supportive you are by asking them what their priorities are for the event ahead. If you think there's something missing then (a)get them to list it somewhere in their priorities then (b)rack it up the importance scale.