

# 8 Teaching

I could never treat education as something cold, mental, merely technical, and without soul, where feelings, sensibility, desires, and dreams had no place, as if repressed by some kind of reactionary dictatorship. In addition, I never saw educative practice as an experience that could be considered valid if it lacked rigour and intellectual discipline.

—Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom<sup>1</sup>

If you visit a school using Mantle of the Expert, what will you find? Will it be entirely strange? Will the wall displays be unfamiliar, will the students act and talk in unexpected ways, will their work look different or incomprehensible? Or will most things feel familiar? Will the desks be where you expect them to be, will the students still be writing and doing sums, will they occasionally argue and misbehave? The answer to all these questions is probably yes.

Mantle of the Expert does change how a classroom feels, how it operates, and how the students behave. But the classroom doesn't become something entirely different: classrooms are still recognisably classrooms, they still have tables and chairs, a carpet area, and drawers for the students; they still involve lessons where the students do handwriting practice, timetables, and phonics; they still involve routines, rules, and habits of behaviour. The big differences, noticed by most visitors, are the relationships between adults and students, and the levels of engagement the students have in their own learning.

Classrooms using Mantle of the Expert have a buzz about them, a sense of business and purpose, urgency and direction. You're unlikely to hear students saying things like "I've finished" or "what do I have to do now?" and you're unlikely to see avoidance strategies or a lack of interest, or students struggling to understand what they're doing. It's not that these behaviours disappear entirely, just that they occur much less often. In classrooms using Mantle of the Expert, the students' work is meaningful and important, it connects with things they've done in the past, and it feels authentic and real to them.

Talk to a student in one of these classrooms and they'll tell you what they're doing, why they're doing it, and what they'll be doing next. They are likely to give you, if you ask, a blow-by-blow account of the events since the start of the context, with characters' names, locations, and actions. They'll show you displays on the walls, notes, and

drawings, each with their own significance and meaning. Students in classrooms using Mantle of the Expert share ownership of the space. As a community, they own the stories, the maps, and the artefacts of the team. They own the work being done to complete the commission, and they own the responsibility they have to the client. It's about belonging, being an important person, making a difference, and owning the learning.

This change doesn't happen by chance: it takes time and it takes concerted effort. This chapter is about the demands this change makes on our practice as teachers. It's about the stuff of teaching, the craft, the science, and the art of working in a classroom with young people on the purpose of education.

I've divided the chapter into three parts. The first is about questioning: collaborative questioning and framing a question. The second deals with classroom organisation: behaviour, motivation, and differentiation. The third looks at classroom practice: forms of representation, dramatic imagination, and dramatic action. I've treated each topic separately, as if in a textbook, with the aim of creating a reference section you can dip in and out of as needed. Some of the topics touch on areas we have already discussed, while others involve new lines of conversation.

### QUESTIONING

Questioning is the lifeblood of teaching. As Morgan and Saxton observed, "Education is a process of inquiry and questions are the chief agents by which meanings are mediated." Being able to ask a perceptive question, followed by one that probes a little deeper, and another that gets to the heart of the matter, while at the same time bringing the students along with no feelings of anxiety or of being interrogated – this is the art of great teaching.

## Collaborative questioning

In collaborative teaching, the teacher endeavours to work with the students, developing lines of shared communication and power. It is not her role to cross-examine them, to find out what they know or don't know. Her role is to develop and support their capacity for inquiry. This process involves a number of key principles:

Use language that invites participation and reduces anxiety: "I wonder if...", "It occurs to me...", "If you were...".

Try to avoid asking questions you already know the answer to. It might not always be possible, but it's a more authentic way of working.

Consider yourself a fellow traveller and ask the kinds of questions

you'd like answered – "I always wanted to know...", "What do you think would happen if...". Don't worry if the questions don't always have an answer: this is the way with inquiry.

Treat the students' answers with respect and don't rush to judgement. Too often when students' answers don't match our expectations, we feel let down. Battle this inclination and work with them to develop their answers into something stronger. Children sometimes struggle to find the words to say exactly what they mean, so give them time and help out if needed – "I think I understand...", "Could it be...", "There might be a chance...".

Really listen to their answers. Listening is about more than just moving from one answer to the next. As Linda Laidlaw observed, "Active listeners are genuinely interested in the reply and willing to let it change them in some way." Acknowledging students' answers, pausing, looking interested, building on their thoughts, are all important signals to them that you take their ideas seriously: "That's interesting...", "I see what you mean...", "I suppose...".

Avoid praise, unless it is sincere. It might seem counter-intuitive when we're talking about reducing anxiety and building student confidence, but insincere praise can have a damaging effect. Children learn early to recognise insincere praise, and they quickly come to dislike it. So be careful: if you praise an answer or a useful suggestion, make sure your praise is genuine.

## Framing questions

Finding the right language to encourage thinking and promote dialogue is essential as you promote a 'community of inquiry'. Here are some guidelines:

A question must have a purpose, such as to draw out information ("If you worked in an animal park, what kind of animal would you look after?"), to shape understanding ("What do you think Florence will find when she walks into the hospital?"), or to press for reflection ("Why wouldn't he want his wife and child to see his tears?").

Set the bar high. You can always come down a rung or two if your questions are met by blank faces. Don't underestimate what children, even little ones, are capable of. "Is it wrong to buy and sell animals, do you think?" "We can't save every soldier in here – what should we do?" "The wolf is hungry and has little mouths to feed. What will happen if we set her free?"

Probe and encourage students to go deeper: "Could you say a bit more?" "What makes you say that?" "That's interesting – why do you think...?"

Scaffold using your own thinking: "It occurs to me...", "What do you think of this idea ...", "I'm struggling here, how about ...?"

Ask questions that challenge existing thinking and encourage reflection: "For me that feels strange. Where has he learned that turning away and covering your pain is the right thing to do?"

Ask questions that invite and sustain the students' interest in the material: "How can we take the baby chimp from her mother without causing her too much distress?" "What kind of world is it where men can't show their emotions to their children, even when it might be the last time they see them alive?"

### TAXONOMY OF 'QUESTION STARTERS'

Activating and transforming knowledge and understanding

- How much do we know about...
- Is it true that ...
- Is there any reason...
- Is there a way to...
- I've often wondered why...

Considering another point of view, and introducing new information

- They do say...
- Some people think ...
- I've heard...
- Has anyone thought...

Bringing attention to, studying, analysing

- It does seem strange...
- Did anyone notice ...
- Can you make out that word (or symbol)?
- Isn't there a...
- Do you notice anything...
- I think he might be trying to tell us something...
- Could you tell whether...
- I don't know about you, but it's making me think ...

## Considering implications

- Do you think it would really help
- So perhaps we need to...
- There must be a reason for...
- There might be...
- What might it mean?
- Will this affect...
- Have we thought about the consequences of that?

- Does that allow us to...
- People usually do things for a reason...
- I guess it's possible...
- We don't want to... or do we?
- If we're going to... I guess we'd need to...

## Deepening, connecting, reflecting

- Just think, we're not the only ones who've...
- I wonder whether other people have been faced with this problem?
- I guess it's a bit like...
- It makes me think of the time when ...
- Do we feel differently about this now?
- Did it seem to you ...

## Hypothesising

- Now, supposing...
- If people would let us...
- It could be...
- I would guess if....
- If we could...
- Maybe...
- Perhaps...
- It makes me wonder what would happen if...
- I mean, if it were true...
- Would it be good if...
- Are you happy to go along with this and see where it leads?

## Offering choices

- -Which...
- We'll need to choose whether...
- It seems, from what you're saying ...
- Do you want to... or ...
- Given the situation, we could ... or ...
- Is there an argument for doing one of these tasks before the others?

# Acknowledging, summarising

- It's clear...
- Like you, I think ...
- After all of our efforts, we've...
- So we're saying ...
- Shall we remind ourselves...
- It seems we've decided...
- You seem to be saying...

## Seeking agreement

- For now, can we agree...
- Is it possible...
- Do you think we could...
- Would you mind if...
- For a while...
- At the moment, can we agree...
- Can we live with that?

## Directing

- We'll (or we'd) need to...
- Would you like to see ...
- Should there be...
- Had we better...
- If we're going to..., I guess we'd need to...
- Perhaps we might...
- Can we, just for a moment ...
- Let's see if we could ...
- Just have a little look ...
- Just go over there for a moment and ...
- We'll have to make sure...
- Might we be able ...
- We can look now at ...
- Would you give a bit of time to...
- There must be time for us to...
- Can we work in such a way...
- No doubt, there'll come a time when...

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#### CLASSROOM ORGANISATION

#### Considerations

Along with the language of teaching, it's important to consider how your sessions are going to be organised, the techniques you plan to use and the expectations you aim to establish. Together these will create the kind of classroom environment you want to develop where the students work as a community, people are treated with respect, and learning flourishes.

The space – Decide in advance how you want the students to work: in a circle, in lines, behind desks, together on the carpet, standing up or sitting down. Each choice will create its own dynamic and establish a different atmosphere. Sometimes you will want them close and in front of you so you can maintain eye contact and keep them focused. At other times you may want a more distant and formal atmosphere, where the students are in rows behind desks (imagine a conference meeting between the marine archaeologists and the British Museum).

Giggling – Some classes can't help giggling, especially if they are new to drama. The shock of the new, the oddness of having people talking in role and working 'as if' can feel odd to them and their natural reaction is to giggle. If this happens, don't worry, but try to nip it in the bud, while doing your best to protect both the person being giggled at and the people doing the giggling – "I can understand why you're giggling, but we're not doing this to make you laugh. Can we have another go? This time let's take it seriously. Giggling is for the playground."

Sometimes the giggler is a student who has volunteered to be out front. Being stared at by your friends can be embarrassing, especially if you are new to drama, so the situation needs to be handled sensitively. The most important thing is to protect the person's dignity ("You don't have to do this. Are you okay to carry on? It can be difficult when everyone's looking at you. Would you like someone to take your place?" And so on.) In my experience nearly every child I've worked with has wanted to continue. When they do, I give them this advice: "I find that the best thing to do is not look in people's eyes. I imagine they're not there and look at the ground or into the distance, which helps somehow. Would you like to have another go?"

At other times, students might giggle at other students' suggestions. This can be awkward and shut people down. My solution is to take the suggestion seriously and emphasise the intent: "Ryan, were you trying to make us laugh or make us think?" Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, students will say, "Make you think." In which