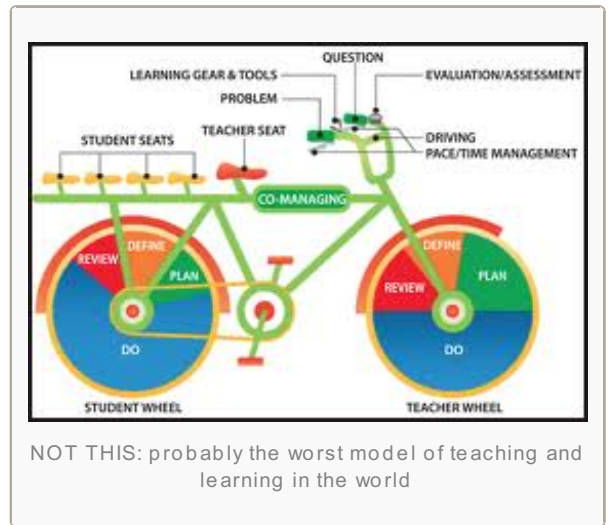


Great teaching happens in cycles – the teaching sequence for developing independence : June 24, 2013

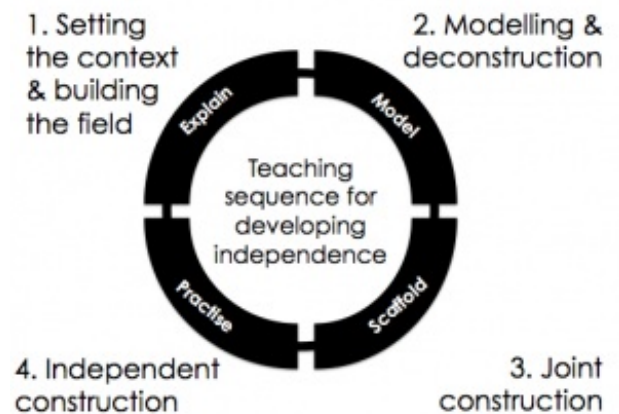
Last year I wrote a post called [The Anatomy of an Outstanding Lesson](#), which has become by far my most viewed post with almost 10,000 page views. Clearly teachers are hungry for this kind of thing. But it's become increasingly obvious to me over the past few months that many of my notions about what might constitute an outstanding lesson have been turned on their head. It's not so much that I was wrong, more that my understanding was incomplete.

If we accept, as I'm sure we do, that as teachers we want to accomplish different things at different points in our schemes of learning then it can't possibly be right that there is just one acceptable template for great lessons.



I've always believed that great teaching and learning depends on cycles or loops, and I've been furiously honing my ideas on what I think might be the ideal teaching cycle. I think it looks something like this:

We start by explaining a new concept, its subject specific vocabulary and how it connects to those things students have already learned. When this exposition is complete and students' basic understanding is secure, we then move to demonstrating, Blue Peter style, a model of how this concept might be applied and deconstructing how it was put together. Once the processes are clear we can then move to providing a scaffold to enable students to apply the knowledge they have learned. Then, when students have met a minimum standard of control over these processes when will allow them, with clear guidance and feedback to practise all they have learned independently. And finally, when they have mastered the skill they have practised it is time to connect new concepts and increased complexity; the cycle begins again.



It should be clear that no part of this cycle is really possible without any part. If you have failed to explain the concept you hope students to learn they will become confused and quickly become lost. If you don't explicitly model how to apply this new knowledge then the process will remain mysterious; some will pick it up but many won't. Neglecting to scaffold throws students in at the deep end before they are ready to swim. The arm bands offered by a competent teacher provide a much needed feeling of safety and equip students with the ability to take risks within a safe environment. And not allowing students to practise means that they would never really encode the knowledge they've learned and will miss the opportunity to transfer concepts from working to long-term memory.

This may seem obvious, but it does not reflect the way many teachers feel they are expected to teach. Or perhaps it does; increasingly, it has become an expectation that each part of this cycle should be, briefly, included in one 50-60 minute lesson. The madness inherent in believing that learning takes places in neat, lesson-shaped chunks has resulted in the Four Part Lesson, the Ofsted lesson and the reluctant acceptance that if we want to please observers we must perform a Monkey Dance and conceal the

(essential) parts of our teaching that certain people seem not to approve of. Skipping over the fundamental need to explain, model and scaffold in order to demonstrate the 'preferred' Ofsted method of minimal teacher-talk and independent learning for its own sake may have done more to damage children's education than any other single dictat.

It is my contention that while you may not want or need to cover just one of these elements over the course of single lesson, they may equally be times when it is necessary. As Nuthall tells us, "learning takes time and is not encapsulated in the visible here-and-now of classroom activities." That being the case we need to allow students the time they need by providing them with the rich, fertile soil of excellently crafted lessons devoted to each part of the cycle. There must be an acceptance that any and all of these four types of teaching can be considered outstanding when done well. Currently, teachers fear to teach lessons described variously as didactic, teacher-lead or 'from the front'. This must change. We need to allow teachers to teach and, by extension, children to learn.

My intention therefore, is to outline, over a series of posts, what I think make be a template for great teaching in each of the four essential parts of the teaching cycle. Hopefully we might all benefit from seeing that it's not only desirable but also possible to teach outstanding lessons that explain, model, scaffold and those in which students practise what they've learned.

I will post on **Stage 1: Explaining** later in the week.

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