

High Quality Provision in Mastery Classrooms

- engaging effectively in a Standards Based Curriculum

What we understand to be the key aspects of high quality teaching has not changed but the curriculum has. It is now standards based, and to provide high quality learning experiences to enable learners to learn deeply and master standards teachers need to operate differently.

In a standards based curriculum pupils are required to master pre-determined standards by the end of each academic year so that they are equipped with the knowledge and understanding to tackle the learning demands of the following year. Previously we had to get them as far as we could as quickly as we could. The learning journey was a bit like getting from A to B on a motorway- OK if you are travelling in the fast lanes but if you were stuck behind a slow lorry the distance between you and the rest got bigger over time, and getting to where you wanted to be in the time available was a real problem.

A mastery theory of learning is based upon the belief that all learners, bar the most severely handicapped, can master the clearly defined basics as long as they are well taught and have enough time to actively learn and practise as they go, before being expected to learn new stuff. The learning journey in this case resembles a trip to the same place as before, but via A roads so there is time to explore and investigate the landscape, to appreciate the views and soak up the atmosphere, to get to know places better. On this journey you might encounter the odd tractor and flock of sheep, but you have to work together to find a way forward so you all get there in the end, and arrive on time.

The first pre-requisite for successful mastery is that both teachers and learners believe that it **is** possible for all to get there, to learn what is intended in the time available. Without that **changed mindset** it simply will not work. If we don't change that one thing, then we will get what we have always got, which is a very long tail of underachievement and learners who are ill equipped.

*“Living in the belief that the majority are **not** born with natural ability restricts what we can achieve.” Gordon Stobart.*

On the mastery route the learner moves from being a complete novice to a point where he/ she has become something of an expert in that bit of learning. Mastery requires deep learning.

The mistake many make is to think of deep learning as something that some get at the end, when actually deep learning is what happens along the way but only if *the opportunities the learner gets allow it to*. There are very limited opportunities to come off the motorway and explore points of interest that flash past, but on A roads there

are many interesting junctions that pique the curiosity and some you can plan to explore, so you understand much more about the countryside you are passing through and spend time enjoying.

In terms of the teaching the first subtle shift is in how you plan. the key is to plan backwards from the end of year standard and then carefully organise the learning in loops along the way that build progressively towards key “mile stones” throughout the year by way of carefully planned “inch pebbles”. (Tim Sully and Nigel Williams)

Each loop, or planned unit, needs to be appropriately time bound within the year and needs to build on (because it relies on) sound learning in the previous loop. Teachers must take account of the fact that inevitably **all** learners forget some of that which was previously learned, and plan in time to recap and recall key aspects before embarking on the new “stuff”.

- Teachers of course must still be highly skilled in formative assessment. That is they must be very *reactive to individual needs*, able to identify and address misconceptions and barriers to learning, and to *personalise* corrective interventions immediately.
- They also need to be highly skilled in the use of strategies that naturally encourage deep rather than surface learning- traditional skills in using questioning and feedback really effectively are key to this, but so is understanding the use of a range of *constructs* that scaffold the novice through an apprenticeship . In my experience the use and understanding of constructs to help learners make sense of the learning for themselves is often underdeveloped in teachers. (Analogy is a construct-there are many more and CPD to develop the full range is money well spent!)

If you speak with highly successful people, none says they were born with an unique ability in their field. Rather they identify key factors common to highly successful individuals that made them experts ; *opportunity, motivation, sustained specific practice, the chance to organise their understanding, and the time to reflect on performance with a view to improvement.*

The second subtle shift is for teachers to replicate these key factors in their classrooms. Expert, deep learners need expert teachers who :

- Give them many **OPPORTUNITIES** to be actively engaged
- **MOTIVATE** them intrinsically (beyond the ability to pass the tests) and make them curious
- Give them time to **PRACTISE** new skills with appropriately diminishing support
- Teach in ways that mean they have to **ORGANISE** (construct for themselves) their thinking and put the new knowledge into their existing frameworks.
- Provide time for personal **REFLECTION** and adjustment.

Making these subtle changes to the planning of units of work and to how learning is organised in the classroom to bring it in line with a mastery model of learning is the responsibility of the teacher. Many don't yet appreciate that it IS essential.

So far I have used the analogy of learning as a construct to help you make sense of what I am saying . This is further developed in resources available on my website (<http://inspir-ed.net/>)

My model for effective mastery teaching and learning uses another *construct* You will recognise it as a cycle organised in a quadrant format.

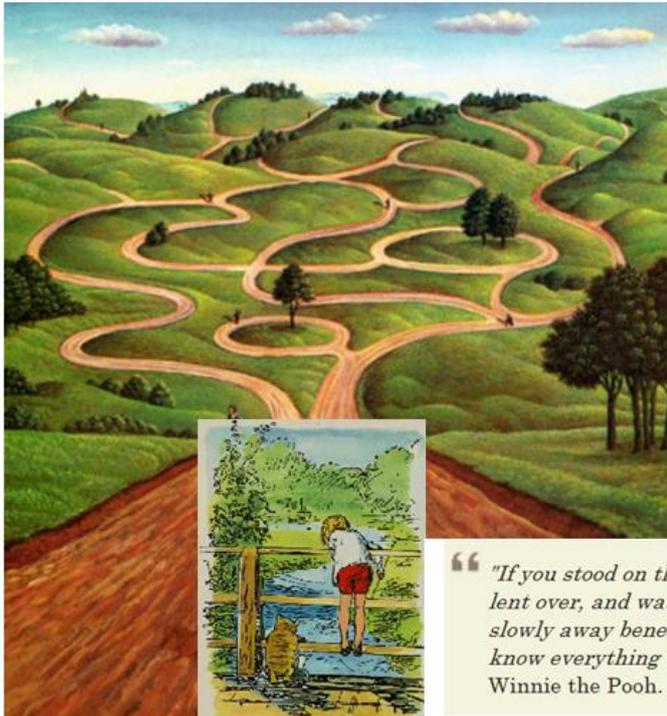
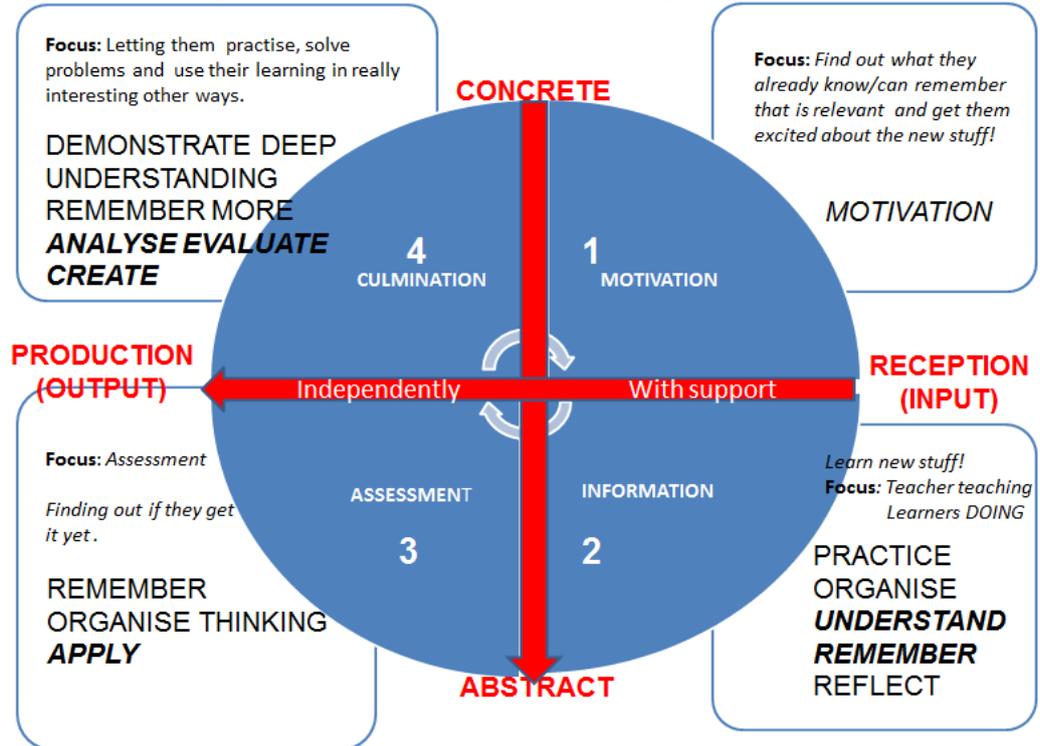
The basic idea is that when introducing new learning we are trying to move learners from their position as a novice using concrete experiences, through a period of apprenticeship where they are supported and guided to gain an increasingly abstract understanding and a degree of automation in the new stuff.

Because in quadrants 1 and 2 they are in the initial stages and are highly supported the tasks and activities with which they engage will be very different from those in quadrants 3 and 4 where they are expected to independently demonstrate their new learning. The way that teachers and learners operate will be subtly different in each quadrant.

Thus the FOCUS in each quadrant is quite distinct so the nature of what type of activity would be observed over time in a mastery unit changes. So too the language- initially questioning and feedback demands that learners **remember and understand** with lots of support how previous learning relates to new, but increasingly tasks they are given demand that they practise **and apply** the new learning until they can demonstrate they can reliably do this independently.

Those who do this quickly need related challenges in the form of tasks that demand them to be **analytical, creative and evaluative** within the context, whilst those who need more time to be confident or have barriers that prevent them demonstrating their understanding yet, need the concepts presented in a different way so personalised intervention and support is the order of the day for them. (Crafting tasks and activities with due regard to Blooms and SOLO taxonomies become key skills for teachers. CPD to develop real understanding of these is useful)

Implications in the classroom! Planning for Mastery



“If you stood on the bottom rail of a bridge, and lent over, and watched the river slipping slowly away beneath you, you would suddenly know everything that there is to be known.”
Winnie the Pooh.