

How do outstanding teachers create outstanding learning experiences?

by Jesvir Mahil MBA

When you ask yourself the question “How am I an outstanding teacher?” what is your first response? Is it “passion”, “character”, “expertise”, “skills”, or something entirely different?

As an Inspector for Further Education Colleges in the UK, I have observed and judged hundreds of lessons. Judgements are based on the **quality of learning** that takes place in the lesson and there are a number of contributory factors that create this learning experience. The teacher is only one of these factors. This article will focus on how outstanding teachers consistently use their passion, character, expertise and skills to create outstanding, transformational learning experiences.

Passion

Outstanding teachers stimulate passion for their subject through inspirational lessons so that learners feel motivated and challenged to learn.

Character

Outstanding teachers are fair to each individual learner in their care and they express this fairness wisely with a deep level of awareness so that each learner feels valued and supported to progress.

Expertise

Outstanding teachers are willing to continuously learn and refresh their knowledge so that they are presenting their learners with the most up to date, current thinking around the subject they are teaching.

Skills

Outstanding teachers have excellent communication skills and excellent management skills that they use to create learning environments where there is trust, respect and collaboration, resulting in creative innovative productivity.

Many teachers preparing for an observed lesson will nervously begin by looking for resources. They will complain about the limited resources available to them. The outstanding ones will confidently begin, with a smile on their face, reflecting on aspects of their course they feel most passionate about. They will have too many to choose from.

Even with so much training in Equality & Diversity issues, many teachers believe they are being fair to their students by “treating them all the same”. They assume that what is good for one must be good for all. Moreover, they assume that what was useful to themselves when they were doing similar courses (decades previously) will be useful to their learners. On the other hand, outstanding teachers understand that they can only be fair when they are aware of the individual needs of their learners and strive to meet these needs effectively. These teachers have easily adapted to life with modern lifestyles that have made an impact on the way we learn and synthesise new information. Whereas so many teachers are still fighting against the tide of mobile phones and Facebook, outstanding teachers have already embraced these technological advances and integrated them creatively to enhance learning.

Perhaps there are still teachers that believe they know enough about the subject they are teaching because they completed a degree in it. Outstanding teachers, passionate about the subject they are teaching, have often learnt more about their subject **after** they completed their initial degree. Traditionally, only university professors are expected to continuously research their subject area and submit articles for publication. Nevertheless, outstanding teachers in Further Education Colleges in the UK are engaged in Action Research (classroom based research used to experiment with new teaching strategies and approaches) and they share their findings without being formally required to do so. This tendency to exceed expectations is of course a key indicator of “outstanding”.

As Inspectors, we develop an intuitive awareness of learning experiences that **exceed** expectations and when we observe ‘tried and tested showcase lessons’ with all the refined features of a “Good” lesson, we have to be skilful in pinpointing what was missing that would have made it an ‘Outstanding’ lesson;

it is always easier to describe the presence of **transformational** learning taking place, than to hypothesise about why it did not take place.

Outstanding teachers create outstanding learning experiences and the evidence of this is visible to all. Whereas many teachers feel successful if they have managed to keep the class quiet and busy with a wide range of activities, outstanding teachers are focused on what the class is **learning** rather than doing. The distinction between learning and doing is not always clear. Outstanding teachers keep checking to ensure that a deep level of learning is taking place whereas many of their colleagues rely on assumptions they have made based on successful completion of activities.

Outstanding teachers create outstanding learners. Together they create outstanding learning experiences. As an Inspector, I would expect to see the majority of lessons I observe to be “Good” as it is the professional duty of any trained teacher to be able to create a good learning environment in which good learning can take place. I would also expect to see a handful of outstanding teachers that are leading the team, either officially or unofficially, in creating outstanding learning experiences, not within the walls of their own classrooms, not restricted even to the college environment, but using the community in which the learning will ultimately make a productive impact. Outstanding teachers ultimately create outstanding citizens and as Inspectors it is a privilege to observe this creative life enhancing process. I have never walked out of an outstanding lesson without a great big smile on my face!

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