

# Utilising coaching to enhance teaching practice

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## Introduction

Are you passionate about delivering a great learning experience to those you teach? Are you ambitious but concerned about burning out? Do you need some space and time to gain clarity, develop your practice and explore how you can be of service to your participants, your colleagues and your loved ones, while not losing yourself in the process? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then you may find this chapter helpful. This chapter aims to provide the 'air and space and light and time' for educators to reflect upon and to challenge their practices. It will provide an in-depth look at a few select tools to help teaching and training professionals articulate their purpose, craft a teaching identity and philosophy, and get the most out of training received. There will be a focus on self-care throughout.

To teach well we must know ourselves, be authentic and inspire others with our passion and continued desire to learn. We must recognise when work is done well. We must support each other, sharing information and working collegiately and collaboratively. As we move to a world where increasingly roles are being replaced by automation, we need to focus on what makes us individual, personalised humans (Gleeson, 2018). I have shared my own experiences in the spirit of being vulnerable and 'walking my talk'. I am sharing my beliefs and the rationale behind my practice, as well as the experiences and techniques I have picked up over the extent of my career. My intention is that this chapter will encourage others to develop teaching practices for the benefit of our students and our workplaces while not burning out in the process. As I share my background, philosophy and approaches I would invite you to be considering yours at the same time before we come on to the practical exercises.

## My background

I come from a working-class small Yorkshire mining town. I was the first in my family to go to university: my dad being a miner and my mum a housewife. They left school before completing their qualifications and university was not part of the common vernacular. In my local town there

was an inverted snobbery for those who liked reading – something I was obsessed with at that age. Teachers were regarded as not knowing what it is like to work in ‘the real world’. Despite this, and because I was inspired by my English teachers, I went on to believe I could be an English teacher too. Navigating college was challenging as I had to prove I deserved a place there otherwise I should have been ‘out there earning’ and bringing back money to the family household. As it was, I worked part-time in a factory and then hospitality while I studied and gave up a percentage for my ‘bed and board’.

At school, I remember vividly being given a classroom activity after reading the screenplay ‘Our Day Out’ by Willy Russell where we debated who we agreed with – the teacher who wanted to educate the children on the day out or the one who wanted them to enjoy themselves because they would be unlikely to have much fun in their lives due to being destined for the factories. I chose the former (although I had thought they could be combined) and feeling a strange mixture of rage, disappointment and powerlessness that children were written off educationally because they came from a lower working-class background. Not many in my class agreed, leading again to feelings of not belonging and isolation. When I arrived at university to read English, I became convinced of the ability for anyone to develop and flourish given the right opportunity. I strongly believe in the power of education to transform a person’s mindset, opportunities and lifestyle.

Like others from working class backgrounds (Johansson & Jones, 2019), I struggled to find my voice as an interloper. We struggle with believing we have anything of value to contribute as we try to find the balance between fitting in and not betraying our roots (Johansson & Jones, 2019). The times I have encountered a passion for a subject is when I have been encouraged to use mine and not be shamed for it. One encounter of this was in a module at University where the lecturers used Socratic questioning techniques to discuss our thoughts on Norse mythology. As a result, I gained top marks in this subject and, if finances had not turned me a different way, I would have carried on further study in this area – highlighting, for me at least, the power of relinquishing perceived ideas of identity and finding a voice. To this end, through my roles and underpinned by my teaching philosophy, I have continued to encourage work on reflection, identities (individual, social, and digital) and the creation of support networks to enable others to find and use theirs.

## My teaching philosophy

My approaches to coaching, education and wellbeing align in my teaching philosophy. I believe we need to be continually developing our whole self to best serve others. This means recognising and bringing our whole self to our practice. It means encouraging others to do so too in a union of mind, body and spirit (Hanh & Weare, 2017). My teaching philosophy centres on four core values - fairness, growth, determination and caring:

- Fairness - I strive for a fair and democratic education that does not take place solely in the classroom and that takes place wherever, and for how long, we wish it to.
- Growth - I am an advocate for continual lifelong learning that suits the place and time we find ourselves in.
- Determination – I provide strategies which enable resilience. We can be overwhelmed by huge shifts in our circumstances and/or perspectives so I focus on what is present, on what we can control, and on the little tweaks we can make to keep on developing while also accepting our current situation.
- Caring – I care about and respect individuals and their hopes and dreams; I care about society and our place within it; and I care about the environment and our impact upon it. I try to have a ‘tread gently’ aspect to what I do. This means I try to make considerate choices at every level from the use of words when providing feedback, to being gently persistent when coaching.

I strive for a fair and democratic education that does not take place solely in the classroom and that takes place wherever, and for how long, we wish it to. I am an advocate for continual lifelong learning that suits the place and time we find ourselves in. For me, the most important parts of my teaching, training and coaching are caring and the development of potential. I care that those I have interacted with go away having received something of value, having increased in their learning and grown in some way. Learning creates a shift; a change in a person's thoughts, perceptions and actions. This impacts on those around them. I believe that everyone should have the opportunity to develop their potential and that if people could improve what they do, even by 10%, this would improve the world we live in. This idea of care brings self-care in too – for years I over exhausted myself trying to be all things to all people. It was only when I

committed to discovering who I truly was and caring for my own wellbeing that I started to become a better teacher.

Underpinned by my philosophy, my teaching comprises content, space and time. Content in terms of up to date pedagogy, frameworks and initiatives. I create space by providing thinking activities, group activities and writing retreats to hone skills such as critical thinking, teamwork and independent learning. This space helps to form connections: connections between ideas and connections between people. Physical space is utilised to aid connection and participation so everyone is recognised and seen. In the virtual space, the focus is the same, which one of the many reasons my sessions are mostly synchronous. I give my time to participants: I am prepared, fully present and enthusiastic, I am the first one in the door welcoming people and the last one out saying goodbye. My materials and activities are carefully thought out and planned. This shows I take both them and myself seriously and value their precious time. Like Palmer, I 'project the condition of my soul onto my students' (2017, p. 1). In an environment where people are constantly busy, I provide a grounding, a calmness and an opportunity to make gentle shifts in direction and thoughts.

So far this states what I expect of myself. Part of my teaching philosophy also entails what I expect of others. In my teaching and in my coaching, I expect my participants to produce content. Everyone's presence and voice are valued (hooks, 1994 p. 8). By creating an open community like this there is risk and vulnerability on part of everyone in the room. As hooks states, there needs to be some deconstruction of classroom dynamics, i.e. that it is not solely the lecturer responsible for them. I aim to do this by starting off all my modules with the principles of respectful enquiry (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2016). These emphasise the need to hear everybody's stories, to contribute and be aware of one's own responses to what is occurring in the room. Participants are encouraged to keep journals and, as part of their assessment, are required to create educational autobiographies, teaching philosophies and reflective accounts of their experience on the programme (via reports and professional conversations and their practice. They are required to be present for each other, finding a world beyond themselves (Hanh, 2017). If education is to be the practice of freedom (Freire, 1976) then participation and presence are vital for its success. Indeed, consequently, I tend to call those attending my teaching sessions, participants rather than students. As Freire says - "*whatever the perspective through which we appreciate authentic educational practice – gnoseologic, aesthetic, ethical, practical - its process implies hope*" (1997, p.107).

## Why I use a coaching approach

I take a coaching approach because it gives control back to the student or member of staff in front of me. In a time where news of academic stress and lack trust in management seems to be at an all-time high (O'Brien & Guiney, 2019; Erickson et al, 2020), coaching can give a sense of autonomy and chance to feel in control once more (ILM, 2018). It enables people to realise what they can and cannot control and reflect and engage with their teaching practices for the benefits of those they teach (ILM, 2018; Kosiorek & Thompson, 2018). It enables staff to realise their potential (ILM, 2018). They discover answers they already have, articulate them and become more confident (ILM, 2018) Coaching 'emphasises reflection, self-analysis and self-evaluation' which assists educators in considering their teaching practices. This is empowering and means they are more likely to take responsibility and put their thoughts into actions (Devine et al, 2013). I find coaching outside is particularly helpful in aiding reflection.

When I used to be an HE in FE librarian, I would teach on the education courses which were mainly made up of women returning to work after taking time out looking after their children. Their children had left home and a significant number of the women had experienced relationship breakdowns. I never asked them this but they wanted to tell me (the plight of librarian face!). For them, being in the classroom was a rebellious act (hooks, 1994). They were bringing their whole self and by acknowledging that whole self they found the confidence to put their energies and motivation more fully into their studies rather than tip toing round the fringes. This experience galvanised my approach and encouraged me to learn more and continue in this way.

My approach leads to positive and engaging conversations. Participants change from nervous and unsure to motivated and determined. One person I supported in this way said "One of the aspects I found particularly useful in underpinning my professional development was the ability to become reflective on my teaching approach. This reflective process helped me develop a teaching strategy for different student groups". Another said "Thank you for coaching me earlier this year. It's made a huge difference to how I sort out my priorities at work". Another academic client left me a recommendation on LinkedIn stating "it was no surprise to me that I walked away with a sense of optimism, resolve and feeling very much in the moment". In my role as an Academic Practice lecturer, this approach has proven successful in that staff leave feeling

motivated and have remained engaged for longer. Time will tell if this comes through in the submission phase of although interest in applying is up a massive 340% since I started using this approach. Time will tell how many submit as we are not yet at that stage.

### **What my coaching approach looks like in practice**

I take a coaching approach in my workshops and in my 1-1s with participants. In practice, this looks like a combination of active listening, open questions, summarising, reflecting, and clarifying. It starts with me asking the participant what they want to achieve by the end of the session. It continues with not letting them become distracted by tangents; I maintain a structure while they produce the content. It ends with ensuring they leave with a clear plan of action at the end with realistic and defined next steps; for example, this could be places they need to search more literature, more conversations they need to have or even just blocking diary time to chunk aspects of their work.

At the beginning of my accreditation workshops, I ask participants where they are and where they want to be. We then look at their purpose for participating using the Seven Whys activity (outlined below) and we do some written goal setting. Writing, rather than thinking about them, helps to avoid rumination and increases the likelihood of them being met (Morisano et al 2010; Latham & Locke 2007; Locke & Latham 1990). This goal setting involves: a clearly defined goal, a date they want to achieve the goal by, a list of what they need to do between now and then, what support will be there along the way, what challenges there might be (this usually gets a laugh) and what might be put in place to mitigate these. Finally, I ask them to choose from a scale of 1-6 how committed they are (Van Nieuwerburgh, 2014).

My mini writing retreats start off with a Charles Bukowski poem about creativity, followed by introductions - including a few words about the goals and progress participants are working towards. These retreats take place monthly as a 'time and space bound gathering' at my current institution (Sword, 2017 p.133). They are variable in size due to being of a 'drop-in' nature. Sometimes those who know each other closely turn up and sometimes it is a group of disparate individuals who have never met. They each have their individual goals and deadlines. Out of the options Sword (2017) offers around process, the ones I have selected mean the retreats are intended to be reflective (participants discuss challenges), supportive (participants help each other with self-doubt), productivity

focussed (participants come together to make progress on their own work) and inspirational (participants cheer each other on). In alignment with my values and philosophy, the underpinning motive is support – support from myself asking goal-orientated coaching question and providing the time and space, as well as support from each other to keep on track of their writing goals. An agreed amount of time is decided upon, usually an intensive pomodoro lasting about 20-25 minutes interspersed with breaks before embarking on a few more iterations of the same before finally returning to the group to discuss progress made and the next steps (Cirrilo, 2019).

My 1-1s are more intense. They take place over a six-month period and I use various coaching tools and techniques to help the person define a goal, accept their current reality, what has been tried before, their purpose and motivation behind the goal and various options they could try. These sessions tend to focus less on academic practice and more on facilitation activities such as getting organised, work-life balance, managing their line manager, and communication skills. Achieving and maintaining focus is a constant theme. Many of us will have experienced a question from a student who really needs something different than what they initially asked for: it is much the same in coaching. Those being coached come with an issue in mind and, after some unpicking, it tends to be something else keeping them stuck – confidence, fear, motivation etc. While these issues may not seem directly linked to pedagogy, I believe in being able to bring the whole self to work. Understandably we may show different aspects of ourselves in personal and professional settings; however, we are one person. There is much discussion of how academic departments should not silo and the benefits of bringing together subjects in an interdisciplinary manner (Carayol & Thi, 2005; Nissani, 1997; Barry et al 2008). There is also much lamenting that students do not apply what they have learned in one module across others (Rodeiro & Nádas, 2010; Cox & King, 2006; Leask, 2014). Yet we often silo aspects of our personality and character and so do not lead by example. Is this something you have ever done? An organisational, parenting or technical skill we hold may have a tremendous impact in other areas of our practice.

Going forwards, information professionals and academic developers are best placed to use a coaching approach as we all want to create independent critical thinkers. Have you ever been asked ‘what would I do without you’ by grateful students and exhausted academics; perhaps our aim should be, ‘you supported me to help myself’. What do you think? While my activities may change, my approach will not as it is governed by

my values and teaching philosophy. I would encourage you as someone who cares about supporting and developing others and whose aim is to inspire students and create a rewarding experience to create a teaching philosophy, use self-coaching techniques and use a coaching approach in your practice.

***How to write a teaching philosophy by going 7 levels deep:***

Writing a teaching philosophy helps us to know ourselves. If we do not know ourselves, how can we know our students? We will see them through a glass darkly. When writing a teaching philosophy, it can be helpful to start thinking about our own experiences as learners. Here are some questions which may help you to get started:

Step 1 - autobiography:

- What were my teachers like?
- What did I like or dislike about them?
- What were my fears while I was learning?
- What impact did those fears have on my learning?
- Which ideas and topics have stayed in my memories because of the way someone taught me?

Step 2 – practicalities:

- What is teaching?
- What is learning?
- How does what we do in a classroom, lecture theatre, online space or in a 1-1 fit into those ideas?
- Whose theories do I most align my teaching with?

Step 3 – personal:

- Why am I a teacher?
- How did I get here?
- What do I want my legacy to be?
- What are my values?
- How do I express those values?

Identifying our values can help us to write a teaching philosophy. Ultimately, a teaching philosophy is an account of how we see our values



demonstrated in our support of learners. Brené Brown (2018) has a list of values on her website and choosing our top three can really help us to get a handle on our purpose. How do you think express your own core values? How do align your teaching with these values? You may wish to consider at this point whether your goals and values match those of your institutions, or even departments. Can you live with that and find meaning still?

Another useful exercise which may help with Step 3 of this activity is to think deeply about why you are in your chosen profession or role. When I say deeply - I mean seven levels deep! I use this exercise a lot with people working on their accreditation application. Having a clearly defined purpose can aid momentum when general motivation levels have dissipated (Locke & Latham 1990). It is a widely popularised activity found online building on Simon Sinek's book *Start with Why* (2011). It is called Seven Levels Deep and is accredited to an American business coach and consultant, Jo Stump, employed by author and real-estate investor Dean Graziosi to help him market his work. For all its showiness, it is a powerful exercise. It starts with the questions 'why do you want to do [insert activity, for example, the Senior Fellowship accreditation] and the answer might be – 'because I want to achieve credibility and validation for my work'. We then go 'another level deeper and ask of that answer - 'why do you want to do that?' and the answer this time might be 'because I want to remain employable in the field I am in', and so on. Why not give it a go?

It can get sticky about 4/5 levels in and I did hear of one university, to remain anonymous, where they do this publicly and it has, not surprisingly in my opinion, led to arguments. For me, it is a deeply personal exercise which should only be shared if wished to by the person undertaking it. It can strike at the very core of our identity and personality and lead to some tough questions being asked. The final two answers should provide you with a deep and truthful reason and purpose behind the choices you refer to in Level 1.

Level 1:

- Question: Why do I want to teach?
- Answer: I want to teach because I...

Level 2:

- Question: Why do I want to... (insert answer from Level 1)?
- Answer: I want to... because I...

Level 3:

- Question: Why do I want to... (insert answer from Level 2)?
- Answer: I want to... because I...

Level 4:

- Question: Why do I want to... (insert answer from Level 3)?
- Answer: I want to... because I...

Level 5:

- Question: Why do I want to... (insert answer from Level 4)?
- Answer: I want to... because I...

Level 6:

- Question: Why do I want to... (insert answer from Level 5)?
- Answer: I want to... because I...

Level 7:

- Question: Why do I want to... (insert answer from Level 6)?
- Answer: I want to... because I...

I remember crying for about twenty minutes the first reason I did it! Brené Brown, an advocate of expressing vulnerability to grow, informs us of our need to put down our armour, invite and inspect our vulnerabilities to flourish and be courageous (Brown, 2018). If we expect participants to show vulnerability and are unwilling to do so ourselves we are not practicing education as freedom. In that light, I share my personal experiences too, often first, to show that it is okay to do so. As a result, the

room becomes a place where both lecturer and student can become empowered to own those vulnerabilities. It can be awkward at first and lead to some wholehearted courageous conversations. The code of respectful enquiry, mentioned previously puts in place clear boundaries, also advocated by Brown (2010) prevents the class from becoming distracted and turning into a counselling session which could put participants at risk.

Now you have identified your values and purpose and created a teaching philosophy, it is time to consider how you can continue to use the tools of reflection to enhance your practice.

### **Reflection as part of learning.**

Reflection is a key part of pedagogy and developmental practice. As a tool it is common amongst teachers, coaches, trainers and counsellors – all those who help others learn (Candy et al, 1985). Ashwin (2015) describes the premise of reflective teaching ‘is to systematically reevaluate our teaching experiences to change our future teaching practices’. Dewey warns against teachers settling into routine thoughts and actions rather than intelligent ones and describes reflective practice as entailing ‘the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge’ (Dewey, 1933). Again, this idea of freedom prevails – for him, to make informed decisions leads to a form of emancipation (Dewey, 1933).

Rather than using the literature to back up our rationale, Schon (1984) advocates (with some criticism) the idea that it is tacit knowledge which is valued. He argues that with tacit knowledge we can reflect in action (in the middle of teaching) as well as after teaching (reflection on action) either on our own or with others. While some (Court, 1988; Clandinin & Connelly, 1989) seem to suggest that Schon is implying practitioners should ‘take a step out’ it can be argued that it is the opposite – that we remain completely present and can then react accordingly without sticking to a strict lesson plan (Munby & Russell, 1989). Munby (1989) sees this shift to being present and reflecting in action as reframing the way we see what is occurring in front of our eyes when we teach.

Building on this, Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) emphasize emotion as an element of reflective practice. Similarly, Cameron (1994) advocates the use of stream of conscious morning pages to reveal and manage emotion (morning pages are three pages of longhand, stream of consciousness

writing, done first thing in the morning) to reflect and restore a sense of safety, freedom, identity and power. Reframing is a commonly used term in coaching. It means ‘to change the way something is expressed or considered’ (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2020}; i.e. to look at the way we do something from a different perspective. Alongside utilising tools such as morning pages, reflective educators can choose to engage in communities of practice where they meet with other like-minded individuals interested in pedagogy and developing practice. Educators can choose to work with a coach who will be trained to ask questions which enable clients to reframe an issue.

A common approach to encourage reflection and therefore evolve our personal pedagogy is journaling – whether this takes place daily or after each teaching session is a matter of decision for the person writing. Why not have a go the next time you teach? Here are some questions you may wish to consider:

Journal questions:

- How am I ‘performing’ for students? To what extent does this create a barrier between myself and those I teach?
- How comfortable did participants feel asking questions in class? Did they all wait to the end to ask them? Is this important?
- How am I connecting with my subject?
- How am I connecting with my students? Which methods are working and which are not?
- What am I most afraid of in the classroom? (If this, is something that has happened, how did you deal with it? How would you deal with it?)
- What are my students afraid of and how is this manifesting itself in the teaching space. How important is this to my values and personal pedagogy?
- How can I seek to be courageous when teaching in an unsupportive and sometimes directly unhelpful environment? Which elements do I have control over?

Another way to reflect is to consider our ‘key gifts and strengths as a teacher’ (Palmer, 2017). How do these manifest themselves in the classroom? When things go well? And when they do not? Palmer asks us

to consider a moment when we start to get in trouble in a classroom situation but become mindful of the fact and can rectify the situation within time. He asks in relation to this, how can we 'live more gracefully within our limits' and what does this look like? I do not believe he is necessarily saying we should constrain our ambition, quite the opposite, I believe he is emphasising how important it is to know ourselves thoroughly and be mindful of our responses – linking once more to Schon's 'in action'.

While the above activity can take place within a group setting or as an individual, many of the activities mentioned are individual ones. While these have value it also important to reflect as part of a community. To have a mirror shone on us. For example, we may know something needs improving and it remains a constant irritation as we cannot identify it, and so we delay action. When we vocalise this or someone observes it they offer a different perspective to consider. This is how a coaching approach can help – rather than the community saying 'well, I would do it like this' they may frame it as 'have you considered...' or 'what's worked well so far'? Consider then, what does a healthy community mean to you. What does it look like? What type of people are in it? How do they listen? How do they seek information? How do we address the balance of trusting our own judgment and of relying too much on what the group agrees?

When participating in communities of practice, Palmer (2017) advocates carefully selecting physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual spaces where we are not distracted, where open and honest discussion can flourish safely and people are free to speak their truth while respecting others' truths. Where people are struggling with a particular issue he calls on the use of 'clearness committees'. These involve the rest of the group asking open, honest, no-judgmental questions and listening attentively. Participants are not permitted to provide advice. There are clear similarities between these and action learning sets where participants follow the same pattern and at no stage attempt to fix the individual or provide a solution (Alcock, 2017). There are many tips library and academic departments could take from this, indeed having sat at many a meeting as a subject liaison librarian where the same dominant voices prevail the listening skills would be the first to implement. But secondly, and very importantly, it removes the need to show that we know everything and have all the answers. Could you see a use for a clearness committee or action learning set in your own workplace? How might it help you develop your personal pedagogy?

We can use reflection as a powerful tool in teaching observations. Prior to and after we can have conversations using coaching style questions to discover their rationale and expectations of the person we are observing. As in the below activity:

When observing others ask yourself:

- Why did they do it in that particular way?
- Can I work out what their values are from what I am seeing?
- Which elements could I take to try out with my participants?
- What can I learn from this?
- Does their practice fit my own values and pedagogy?

When being observed, consider:

- What aspect would I like to be observed?
- Why did I do it in that particular way?
- What went well?
- What could I develop?
- Am I still expressing my own values?

We can reflect on elements which might work for us and what would not. We can be observed and use these coaching style questions to consider these ideas for our self – what went well, what could be improved, if I were to do the session again what would I do differently? Observations are a great way of reflecting as a community and creating a collegiate atmosphere with the common aim of providing the best environment possible to support learning.

This is not an exhaustive list of reflective activities, by any means, and there are many books and articles which go into greater detail into ones referred to. From my own experience, I would recommend finding a way that works for you. Try a range and be willing to let go of the ego. Often the answers are inside us and need a little help to coax them out; however, there will be times when we just do not have the awareness or experience to know them. This is when communities of practice and the creation of networks comes into its own through the use of Twitter chats, mentors, listserv lists and general discourse which can all help us to consider new ways of working,

## **Continual Professional Development (CPD) – turning ‘I should’ to ‘I could’**

Be honest, how often have you said, when attending a training session, ‘well that’s all lovely but it would not work with my students because they are more in number, lower in number, older, younger, or it would not work for me because...insert reason here?’ We can be quick to naysay. Like active listening in coaching, and lack of judgment (both self and of others) in mindfulness, developing a personal pedagogy involves non-judgment. We may feel external or even internal pressure to keep up, to include all the bells and whistles, and this can make us feel like we are not good enough. It helps us to put aside our concerns, niggles and judgment and consider what might work, what aspects of it could work. This slight shift from ‘I must’ or ‘I should’ to ‘I could’ or ‘I might’ can be powerful.

If we are to create a democratic educational environment, we are acknowledging that learning is not solely confined to the classroom (hooks, 1994 p41) and this applies to us as learners as well as to our participants. We can learn in a myriad of ways. Learning, as we know, is part of the real world and should not stop once we leave school, college or University. “Education is about healing and wholeness. It is about empowerment, liberation, transcendence, about renewing the vitality of life. It is about finding and claiming ourselves and our part in the world” (quoted in hooks, 2003). When we try to change the learning process, students get scared. Even academics may revert to a victim mode or passive student mode and then fit into either passivity or aggressiveness where they want to prove you wrong, rather than accepting we are team players all learning as we go. From my own experience teaching academics, I have received requests for a more didactic style of teaching. For example, for more sources to be handed to them, despite having citations provided and for formal lectures as if drawing, creativity and having fun are not part of learning (Walsh, 2018). Fear, it seems, plays a large part in reducing our ability to learn.

Palmer writes ‘good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher’ (Palmer, 2017 p.10). We all wish to know the correct tip or trick for dealing with a particularly troubling scenario or to improve our presentations, pacing or student participation. There is nothing wrong with this and it should be encouraged in our pursuit to reflect and develop. The mistake occurs when we either quickly condemn the idea or accept it wholeheartedly and then become disillusioned if it does not work straightaway. If a whole room of

educators tried the same tip with their students, we would see a wide variety of results. They may work; they may not. We know our students. Or do we? Whenever we are trying anything different we are still bringing our energy and enthusiasm to the class. What do think the atmosphere in the classroom would be like if we enter expecting it not to work? I am sure students could smell this! As a result, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. On the other hand, if we go in with an open mind and show that we are trying something new out, expressing vulnerability by doing so, magic may happen.

One way of striking a balance between trying out new approaches and dismissing them immediately is to consider what elements are within our control and which ones are out. For example, we may have been given access to a lecture room and feel there is little we can do to make it interactive; however, there are numerous activities one can do by raising hands, sign post-its, thinking activities, writing activities and that is before moving on to technology such as Poll Everywhere, Kahoot, videos, gifs etc.

***The sphere of influence activity.***

Step 1: Thinking of a specific issue, perhaps a training session or a situation you are in, draw a circle on a piece of paper.

Step 2: Using sticky notes, write down everything you can think of involved in the delivery of that session (preparation, resources, content etc) or concerns you have about the situation you are in and put in the circle. This is your circle of concern.

Step 3: Now put a smaller circle in the middle. Pick up each post-it and look at it. Move anything from the larger circle you have some form of control over, no matter how small. This is your sphere of influence.

What does that look like now? Do you find you have more that you can control than you first realised? If you cannot see anything you have control over, try delving deeper. For example, in a training session, what examples do you refer your participants to? How do you turn up to the session? How do you encourage engagement? By doing this exercise it should be just that little bit easier to focus on something you do want to develop



rather than becoming overwhelmed by everything seeming insurmountable.

A common trope I hear as an Academic Practice lecturer is that there is not enough time to teach all the content. Lecture rooms are packed full. This results in lecturers skimming content and only covering the basics, which get sparser and sparser over time. Ultimately doing a disservice to their students and causing frustration to their sense of self as they feel that they are not doing enough. Have you ever felt like this in your own teaching? Do you provide an overview or 'one stop shop' which participants can then investigate in their own time? Have you ever considered providing that 'shop-front' in a different format and then diving deep in to a subject with the idea that we 'see the shape of the whole while examining a part of it'? (Palmer, 2017 p.61) For your own learning, when participating in sessions could you hone in one aspect and focus on it deeply, considering all the ways you could use it – e.g. connecting with your users, or encouraging group discussion rather than trying to replicate something else someone has done.

We can despair in the cause of education as freedom when confronted by University systems structured in ways which dehumanise and do not take account of the whole self, ones that state 'be kind' while not showing any of this kindness themselves (hooks, 1994 p.48). Or we can find the subcultures of resistance where it still happens. Find bonds where you still can: across your institution, in professional associations, via social media. Ultimately, while it may sometimes seem that institutions are external forces and management are 'them' who do not understand, we may need to acknowledge that they are 'us'. Institutions are often a reflection of our own values and goals. If we find them completely misaligned this has the potential to lead to much unhappiness, unless we can reconcile other motivating factors - opportunity to connect with students, teach a course we love, flexibility so we can fulfil caring responsibilities, or pursue a much-loved hobby. In this we encourage our students to take responsibility too – they can determine the classroom dynamics, they are not being 'done to' even though they might not feel like that they have a choice.

### **Being present and incorporating self-care.**

The nature of our work means we need to be present, concentrated and focussed (hooks, 2003; Palmer, 2017). This takes a lot of energy and can be physically and mentally exhausting. Being present can mean different

things if we are teaching online, either asynchronously or synchronously, or face to face. When sharing that physical space with students, we connect with them, we meet their eyes and we move from around the desk to stand closer and then further away from them. We are our bodies as well as our minds and this is at its most obvious when sharing the same physical space. If we are short of stature or in a wheelchair, we may have to look up to them if they are standing, perhaps doing group work. If they are sat down we have an advantage over them height wise so this may influence our practice. Online, we find new ways of connecting through use of video, voice and regular contact. These are the times we need to be focussed, listening and paying attention to our students. It will be clear whether we are from our posture, our presentation, our ability to listen, and our voice. If we cannot do this ourselves then what hope do we have that they will do this in return.

The sector is beginning to realise that staff wellbeing is important and requires consideration, just as student wellbeing does. Staff are increasingly stressed due to increasing work demands, casualisation of working hours, introduction of the TEF, confusion over the Augur report, marketisation of higher education and the resulting increase in numbers, particularly of international students (Aronin & Smith, 2016; Kinman & Wray, 2013; Nixon et al, 2016; Woodall et al, 2014). Now we have the pandemic and the move to supporting students online through this. Universities UK has responded with Step Change – a framework which has been adapted to consider staff wellbeing as well as students. If we do not look after ourselves, our minds and our bodies then we risk burnout – we become disengaged and do ourselves and our students a disservice (McCormack & Cotter, 2013).

Staff wellbeing has not been considered a priority in the past and has led to strikes, particularly in UK universities (check strikes around world). The following diary excerpt from an academic during the 2018 UCU strikes noted that they been working continuously - that a weekend or evening not working was luxurious when it should be time spent with family, pursuing hobbies and resting. She states

What the strike made me realise that I was doing more conscious care work in my paid work – for students, colleagues, than I did for myself and my family. I was sick of them getting scraps of my frazzled time. I was sick – literally – and exhausted. The strike made me want to check back into my life – Vikki's diary, during the strike (Burton & Turbine, 2018)

While as individuals we may not have much power in the way of realigning structures of power or workloads, by going back to the circle of concern, we can recognise that there are aspects we can control to some extent. For example, I am recently in the fortunate position to be able to run my own courses (within Advance HE and government frameworks) with my own reading lists so I can incorporate notions of respectful enquiry, inclusivity, mindfulness and coaching into my classes. I believe lifelong learning is and should be a benefit to people and not at a cost to their wellbeing, hence my voluntary activities too. There are a multitude of other, well-proven ways to look after our mental health and avoid burnout; however, this is not the place to go into detail about them and I will only show my own examples.

I volunteer in the university's wellbeing team by providing bi-monthly face to face and online mindfulness classes. This combines my interest in wellbeing with continuous development. Kabat-Zinn describes mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way; on purpose and non-judgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment to moment" (2004, p.145). The support is open to anyone, regardless of experience or beliefs and they can go some way to help staff in regaining a sense of control. (Lennon & McDonough, 2018). Offering this support aligns with my philosophy of needing to develop our whole self to serve others. It is well-received; participants leave calmer, with relaxed faces, and they tell me they enjoy it, for example, one person remarked "it has helped me to clarify my thoughts and calm my mind which impacts on my approach towards others". The sessions focus on non-judgement and I end them with a loving kindness meditation. Loving kindness meditations help us to show compassion towards ourselves and others. I have taken this idea into past workshops, particularly those on Digital Identities and on Assessment and Feedback. In the former, I asked participants to consider their own reputation online and how they contribute to other people's. We discussed how they could use the Socratic Triple Filter Test before posting online: is it true; is it kind; is it necessary? In the Assessment and Feedback sessions I teach, I provide participants with activities where they reflect individually on the times they have received and give feedback, both negative and positive, before widening it out to the group.

These are all aspects we can control. We can be responsible for how we show up in the classroom and how we set an example for others. How do you think you currently show up? What do others say? How important is their opinion? Like many in the education sector, I struggle with perfectionism and self-doubt (Kinman & Wray, 2013) and yet this is just another way of casting judgement on ourselves and others (Brown, 2018)

and is something I work on. We need to recognise that, while being a teacher is part of our identity, we are more than that part. By recognising this we can start to look after the parts which are not seemingly linked to teaching and we can then more readily accept criticism about our approaches and practices – ‘It is not personal. It is just one part of our whole being’ (hooks, 1994)

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have considered the benefits of using a coaching approach to help support and develop both ourselves and those we support. We have started crafting a teaching identity and formulating a philosophy based on the outcomes of this. We have taken into consideration our values. We have considered how to select these values and we have undertaken an exercise to discover the real reasons we show up every morning. We have touched on how we can reflect on our professional practice and utilise development activities without feeling overwhelmed – using resources such as journaling, communities of practice, and the circle of concern activity to help us focus. We have considered aspects of self-care so we can show up, be present and use criticism without becoming too attached to it. The days of being a professional robot are over and people will increasingly be bringing their whole selves to work. Emotional intelligence, kindness and compassion will be paramount to look after ourselves as well as those we support. This will show up by finding a purpose behind the work we do, reflecting on it and seeking to continually learn. To do this we need to identify our own core values and identify how we embed them in our teaching. Once you have done that, you will have your own personal pedagogy. It now feels appropriate to ask in a chapter on coaching in teaching in the HE Sector, bearing in mind all you have read, what are your next three actions going to be?

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