

# The Five Ingredients of Outstanding Teaching

A new study has sought to identify the characteristics of excellent teaching and excellent teachers. Tony McAleavy looks at the five common traits of outstanding teaching.



## Respond and adapt

The first is the ability to respond and adapt planned lessons to meet the needs of the learners. All lessons observed were carefully planned, but the teachers were skilled enough to “improvise” where necessary, adjusting the lesson plan according to learner reactions while also maintaining focus on the planned learning outcomes.

## Subject and pedagogy

Excellent subject knowledge is another common characteristic among the best secondary school teachers. However, this isn’t just excellent knowledge of the subject in itself, it is a pedagogical subject knowledge that recognises how to engage students with the subject.

## Relating to students

This ties into the third common characteristic that was identified in school observations; teacher ability to relate to students. Excellent teachers come in many different forms but they all genuinely enjoy the company of young people. They recognise them as individual learners and are therefore able to make the subject feel relevant to what is going on in their lives.

## **Striking the right balance**

The two final characteristics relate to the balance of teacher input and independent learning, and pacing the lesson for both engagement and reflection. The profession has moved beyond the idea that great teaching should be “student-centred” and not “teacher-centred”. This is a false dichotomy.

The best teachers are able to strike an appropriate balance between opportunities to work independently, to use focused collaboration in groups or pairs and for direct input from the teacher. There is no “ideal” lesson formula, what is important is that the balance of activities works to achieve the learning outcomes.

Similarly there also needs to be a balance in the pace of the lesson, one that maintains energy but also allows time for reflection. Energetic and high-octane teaching can be impressive but there is a danger that opportunities for reflection – and hence learning – are missed in the pursuit of pace.

## **Supporting great teaching**

Our report concludes with practical comments on how schools can assist great teaching. To allow all teachers to develop their practice and introduce all of these characteristics into their teaching there needs to be a supporting whole-school culture. To kick-start an emphasis on excellent teaching a school requires purposeful leadership aimed at motivating and engaging all staff. Once the focus on excellent teaching is well-established and accepted, the school leaders can look to a more devolved leadership model, delegating responsibility for overseeing teaching standards down and giving individual teachers more responsibility. [www.sec-ed.co.uk](http://www.sec-ed.co.uk)

