

COMMON TOPICS IN COACHING

A one-pager summarising six common topics that arise in teacher coaching and CPD, as shared by Tom Sherrington 2022 blog, which is available to read in full here: [🔗](#)



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WALKTHRU_s

INCLUSIVE
QUESTIONING

MODELLING
& CFU

LADDER OF
DIFFICULTY

TASKS v
LEARNING

RETRIEVAL
ROUTINES

ASSERTIVE
INSISTENCE

Tom says, 'I watch a lot of lessons in lots of schools and colleges and, although contexts vary and teachers vary, the issues that arise are really very common. This isn't that surprising really – but it does mean that we ought to be able to anticipate the issues as part of a CPD process'. Here are Tom's six most common topics:

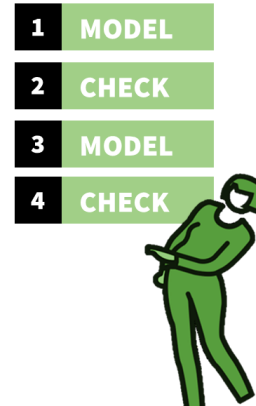
1 INCLUSIVE QUESTIONING

The key issue is finding a good mix of techniques that help to involve all students in thinking and then give the teacher a good sample of responses, without letting just a few students dominate. It's very common for some students to be disconnected from questioning processes and teachers often find it hard to involve the least confident – worried about their self-esteem if they get things wrong – or the least engaged students. A common pitfall is an over-reliance on just one or two answers, as if they represent the whole class, rather than a deliberate sample of many students.



2 MODELLING & CFU

Teachers face a challenge in balancing the time and thinking given to modelling and the process of checking whether students have understood so that they can all now do things themselves. Nearly always, the really hard part is that some students succeed whilst others still struggle. Very often solutions lie in breaking things down into smaller steps, interspersing our inputs with some practice of the sub-steps and some checks for understanding, generally being more explicit about students succeeding with more repetition and a longer hand-over period in the *I Do, We Do, You Do* flow.



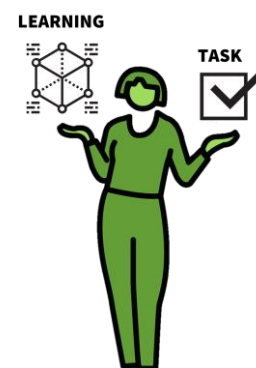
3 THE LADDER OF DIFFICULTY

It's so important that teachers have a sense of what the ladder of difficulty looks like in their subject, recognising that students won't all progress at the same rate. Difficulty is a mix of inherent conceptual complexity dictated by the tasks and questions, moving from rehearsal to fluency with the capacity to explain and then to undertake more synoptic tasks, applying knowledge to new situations. The key is first to know what an incremental ladder of difficulty looks like in the subject and then to have good resources and activities to support students to climb it step by step.



4 TASKS v LEARNING

It's just so easy to assume that when students are doing things and producing work in their books, that they must be learning. There's a risk that we extrapolate from that to indicate their underlying understanding, only to discover later that they don't really understand things as well as we'd like. The main solution lies in constantly questioning this – to avoid making the assumption. Tasks are needed for learning to develop – but we then need processes for checking understanding; for checking the learning. We need students to understand this about themselves.



5 RETRIEVAL ROUTINES

A challenge for teachers is ensuring that retrieval practice is actually working. Questions that arise include the nature of the material and how students can study it; knowing how well the students did; how to organise the process of learning from the test: how much to re-teach, how much time to give it in the flow of lessons, when to accept that we might have to return to it later. It's essential not to assume that simply running the routines is enough, over-emphasising correctness and high success rates such that weaker students mask the difficulties they are experiencing.



6 ASSERTIVE INSISTENCE

Another common area for discussion is behaviour management. This is often related to the need to switch between modes of questioning: pair-share, whiteboards, cold calling – and teachers' challenges in securing full engagement at each phase. It's quite common for teachers not to follow through on the things they ask students to do and it's worth exploring what inhibits their insistence. Teachers might need encouragement to embrace a warm-strict spirit, being more consistently assertive in securing appropriate student responses to a request whilst keeping things positive.

