

Every once in a while, teacher trainers come across a book that makes them think: 'This is just the book I have been waiting for. That is the way I felt when I first laid eyes on *Putting the Human Centre Stage: practical theatre techniques to develop teacher presence, rapport and a positive classroom community*.

Plenty of books have already been published on group dynamics, interpersonal skills, communication skills and teacher development. But this book brings all these useful angles together in a framework that is best summarised in the author's emphasis on "how to **be** rather than what to do in the classroom." (p.9). In doing so, it also highlights the importance of what are largely *hidden* skills and opens them up to consideration and practice.

The basic assumption on which the book rests and that permeates it is that teaching is viewed as *performance art* and that much of what a teacher does requires in-the-moment improvisation and decision-making. This is certainly supported by the author's own grounding in theatre work as well as his expertise as an educational researcher and practitioner.

The book's structure actually mirrors this coming together of different strands of expertise. Chapter 1 provides a welcome road-map for the reader explaining briefly why the book was written and who it is for. This makes sense because the book is an excellent resource for trainers and trainee teachers but should also be of interest to other in-service providers and, in the guiding hand of an experienced teacher, even to school students.

Chapter 2 shows very succinctly how various fields of study have informed the thinking behind and the make-up of the book. It is a nice theoretical distillation covering, for example, recent learning theories, neuro-linguistic programming, flow theory as well as insights from theatre and improvisation training. Here the author has also provided helpful suggestions for further reading.

Intriguingly called *The ghosts behind the blackboard*, Chapter 3 provides a fascinating glimpse into a range of teacher personas who, in different ways and through different school subjects, left a mark on their students. These short descriptions are little gems because, based on personal memories and reflections of students, they conjure up vivid images of what made these teachers memorable. Added to this are more examples of teacher (self)perceptions that research into teacher qualities has revealed. All of this serves to highlight the vital importance of teacher *presence*, the unique psychological atmosphere that gets created by tone of voice, body movements, eye-contact and the way the space of a classroom is used.

The second part of the book takes up most of the space and is called what it is - *Activities*. It starts with a simple coding system, whereby 36 training activities are numerically matched to 5 thematic categories, i.e. the *classroom as community*, *teacher presence and interpersonal skills*, *the teacher's voice* and *teacher status*. A user-friendly table also allows trainers or workshop leaders to fast-check which activities match their particular session needs. For each activity, information in terms of *timing*, *aims* and *materials* activity is kept to an absolute minimum but the *procedure* is described in useful detail. Short and snappy, these descriptions show a good feel for the reality of training because they are phrased as instructional DOs, i.e. *Ask... Move ... Tell...etc*. Some descriptions also include *tips* that are meant to help users make the most of an activity and ideas for how to embed them in a trusting trainer-trainee relationship.

For all these reasons, I hope this excellent book becomes a staple resource in many teacher preparation programmes but I also recommend it wholeheartedly to anyone involved in helping people to develop their full spectrum of communicative and social skills.

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