

What's Your Problem?

Reflective Practice to Lead Change



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“But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.”

George Orwell

We all know the power that our words can have on our students and colleagues but how often do we stop to think about the power of our words upon ourselves? Take the title of this article and the word, “problem.” Where did that take you? Did you picture your worst class? Your pile of marking, your failing departments, your demanding parents or that one child that you cannot get through to? Did your heart sink at the “problem” the issue, difficulty, trouble or complication? Each of these labels create a sinking feeling, a wall or barrier that must be overcome. The obstacle is merely a metaphor, created by the language you have chosen to surround it with.

Taking time to stop and reflect upon anything can help us to overcome that which seems impossible. Let's reflect upon our use of language and observe the impact that this could have upon our practice. Let's discard the word “problem” from our vocabulary and replace it with “project.” Now look again at that parent, child, colleague or work to be done. Look at it as your project. Did you feel that? Did you feel the energy change from such a small difference? The word problem conjures the wall. The word project creates a sense of purpose. It makes me want to run for my big paper and markers to get started on the idea storm! A project has a desired outcome and it is up to you to design the routes that take you there. You learn upon the way, set deadlines and mini goals to lead you to success.

Spot the difference in these two scenarios:

It's Friday afternoon; Lucy arrives at work, coffee in hand and pile of problems waiting on her desk. She has three classes of books to mark ready for the book scrutiny next week, her first lesson is 9Z5 with a class full of problem children and she has to fill out her performance management document before she leaves today.

It's Friday afternoon; Lucy arrives at work ready to face the three main projects of the day. 9Z5 are her first priority. They have been working on routines as

they enter the room. She then has three classes who are ready for a progress check; this is great timing for the book scrutiny next week. Finally, her performance management document will be completed. She hopes that this final component can be linked to the ongoing project with 9Z5, supporting their progress even further.

Is your self-talk more like Lucy one or Lucy two? Do you walk into a desk full of problems or a series of projects that you are working on? What difference could

changing your self-talk to Lucy two's "project," "priority," "component," way of looking at the day ahead have upon your motivation? The work exists, the battle remains but you can learn to enjoy the battle by seeing it as a project to reflect upon and move forward with. Reflection can create changes that help us, not to eradicate difficulties in our lives, that is impossible. It can help us to face new hurdles as they arise. A reflective practitioner does not panic in the face of an unruly class, a failing teacher, a bad set of results or whatever else might blindside the fearful. They stop, take a breath and plan for success. They lead the change through their positive, reflective practice.

To lead change in education, we need to avoid the culture of racing forwards without ever taking time to stop and reflect. We need to recognise the reality that, when one project ends, another will be created in its place. There is no such thing as smooth sailing. We need to learn to navigate the rough seas through attitude and experience. Where are we? Where do we want to be? How are we going to get there? Reflecting upon our word choices is such a small change that can make a huge difference to our attitude, outcomes and motivation. Your reflections do not have to stop there...

Lisa Jane Ashes' bio in brief:

Lisa believes many schools don't produce 'a fully rounded end product' because they fail to co-ordinate learning across all departments. She has therefore made it her mission to transform how teachers can acquire a more whole school approach to education. Lisa has developed teams of advanced practitioners in Ghana and is now using her strategies to create a culture of continual self-improvement in Nepal. She is passionate about such projects and about using her expertise to develop coaching programmes for schools. In her latest book 'Manglish', she considers how English and Maths can be creatively brought together and offers practical ideas and strategies for improving literacy and numeracy throughout the whole school. Her other published books include: 'There is another way - the second big book of independent thinking', and 'Don't change the light bulbs — a compendium of expertise from the UK's most switched-on educators'.

For more information on this or other Veema consultants please get in touch.

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