

IN THE ZONE

helping children
rise to the challenge
of learning



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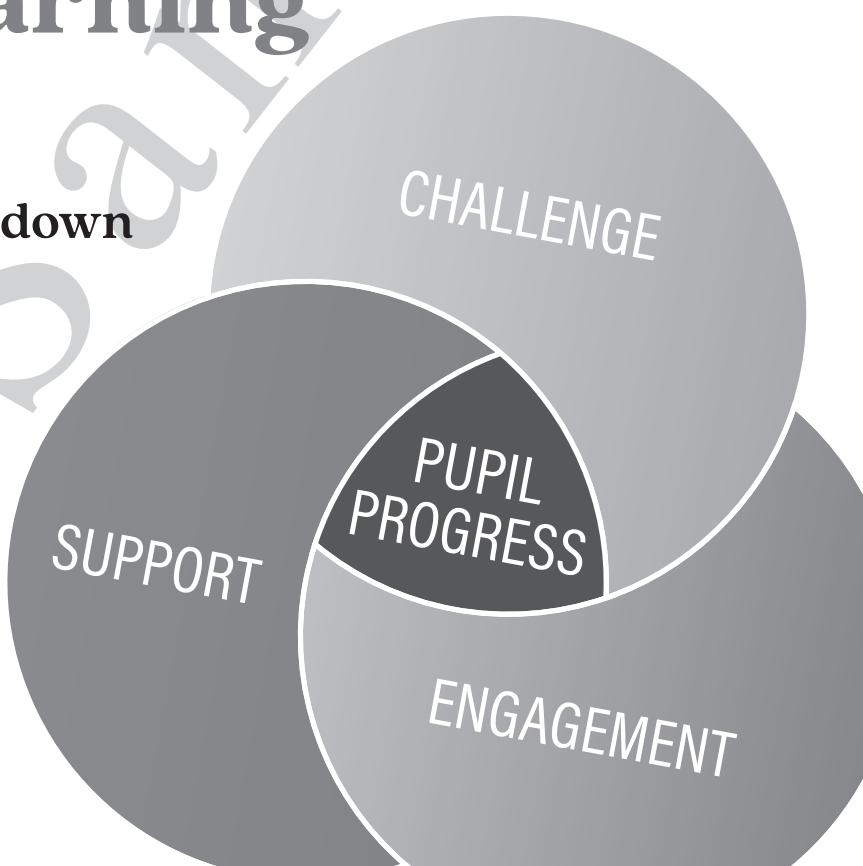
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IN THE ZONE

helping children rise to the challenge of learning

Mike Lansdown



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To the millions of teachers worldwide for their endless hard work and commitment to their pupils' learning.

Sample

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Sample

CONTENTS

- MEET THE AUTHOR - page viii
- INTRODUCTION - page 1
1. WHAT IS LEARNING? - page 3
2. THE ZONE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CHALLENGE - page 11
3. ATTITUDES TO LEARNING - page 20
4. FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT - page 38
5. MEMORY AND THE LEARNING BRAIN - page 50
6. THE TERROR OF ERROR - page 63
7. HOOK 'EM AND HOLD 'EM - page 72
8. CREATIVITY - page 80
9. FLOW - page 89
10. QUESTIONING - page 97
11. CHALLENGE AND POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH - page 115
- INDEX - page 126



MEET THE AUTHOR

MIKE LANSDOWN

I have a BSc and PGCE from the University College of Wales (Aberystwyth), an MA in Education from the Open University, and have nearly 40 years' experience as a teacher, both in the UK and abroad. I have taught learners aged three years-old to those drawing their pensions, and have been a secondary geography teacher, a teacher of English as a second (and foreign) language, an advisory teacher for assessment, and a headteacher of two Hertfordshire primary schools. Since retiring, I have worked for

Achievement for All as an achievement coach and am now a PGCE tutor and MA in Education supervisor at the University of Buckingham.

I am the author of *A Quick Guide to Meeting the Teachers' Standards Part 1* (also available from Critical Publishing) and an historical novel, *Adam's Lock*.

I am married with two grown-up children and live in Hertfordshire.

INTRODUCTION

I mean, there were words in my head, but just because you have words in your head it doesn't mean you're thinking, just like if you've got a pocket full of pennies it doesn't mean you're rich.

Jess, in *A Long Way Down* by Nick Hornby (2005, p 224)

In the preface to their book, *Creating Learning without Limits*, Swann et al (2012, p xiii) lament the trend in British education to adopt:

dehumanizing ways of conceptualizing learners, learning, progress and achievements [that] invite children and young people constantly to compare themselves with each other, rather than fostering a strong positive sense of themselves as competent, complex, creative people, each capable of playing a full part within a collaborative learning community.

These attitudes, they say, '*inevitably affect teachers' beliefs as well as their practices, especially those of beginning teachers*' (Swann et al, 2012, p xiii).

For some time, like many in the profession, I have been concerned that true learning has been sacrificed on the altar of standardised tests (at the heart of school accountability) and that thinking, as so eloquently suggested above by the character of Jess, was being substituted by stuffing pupils' heads with endless content, to be tested at a later date.

The 2018 first edition of *In the Zone* was written in response to this sense of disquiet and in the hope and belief that it might help young teachers resist the inexorable pull towards standardisation, and the constant focus on 'results'. Since then, there has been some positive movement towards regaining breadth in the curriculum and recognising the important place that creativity and imagination have in pupils' learning. This is reflected in a shift in Ofsted's 2019 inspection criteria and in recent pronouncements made by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMI), Amanda Spielman, who has encouraged schools towards the teaching of a broad, rich curriculum which builds rich, deep learning. While this inevitably involves schools in yet more alterations to a curriculum that appears never to have stayed still, I believe most in education view this as one of the more positive changes to have occurred in recent years.

Chapters 1 and 2 should be read first, as they set the scene for the rest of the book, but the remaining chapters may be read in any order. At the end of each chapter are two boxes: one containing reflective questions which will encourage you to act on what you have read, and a second which signposts you to related chapters.

In the Zone is not a 'how to teach' book. I have always believed that teaching and learning are too complex and too varied to be able to say (beyond the obviously damaging) definitively what should be considered 'good' and 'bad' pedagogic approaches in the classroom: what works well with one

class may fail disastrously with another; what bombs one year may go like a dream the next. The observations, research findings, ideas, suggestions and plans you will find in these pages are exactly what they are and will have no effect whatsoever unless lifted from the page and translated into concrete actions – with real pupils, in real classrooms. How to use these ideas, to transform theory into practice, is a matter of professional judgement about which only you, the classteacher, can decide. To adapt a quote from Alyson Owen (Editor, the Writers' & Artists' Yearbook 2016, p vi): '*They're all just ingredients. What matters is how you bake the cake: every decent teacher should have their own recipe, and the best find things to add to the mix*'.

To finish, Matthew Syed (2017) in an article about great sports coaches (*The Times*, 27 December) says this relation to teachers:

Academics found something else too. Great teachers have a number of attributes, such as deep subject knowledge and emotional intelligence, but one is more important than any other: they are voracious students... they are always looking to extend their knowledge of pedagogy, improve their skills, and develop fresh insights.

If by reading and acting upon some of the ideas contained in this book you are helped, even a little bit, along the path towards being a great teacher, then all of our efforts will have been worthwhile.

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INDEX

- Ackoff, R L 4
adults' expectations of children 27
aha-moment mistakes 66
Antony, M 65
assessment, mental health of learners and 119–20
assessment for learning (AfL) *see* formative assessment
Atkinson, Sue 22
attention spans, decreasing 73
attitudes to learning
 attainment, impact on 21
 confidence in learning 27
 evaluation of 35
 fostering positive 24
 mindfulness 32–5
 mindsets 27–31
 modelling attitudes 21
 perseverance 25
 recording 33, 35
 reflective 23
 Reflective Questions 36
 resilience 25–6
 response to curriculum demands 24–5
 self-regard 22–4
 sources of attitudes 21
 survey of 21–2
autonomy, learners' flow and 91, 94
- Beere, J 43
Bennett, N 99
Bjork, E L 57–8, 120
Bjork, R A 57–8, 120
Blanchard, Ken 41
Bleiman, B 110
blocking, interleaving *versus* 58
Bloom's Revised Taxonomy 94, 101–9
Booth, Carolyn 118
brain, formation of memories and 51–3
breathing, child's awareness of 35
Briceno, Eduardo 65
Bruner, Jerome 7, 16, 94
bullying 121
Burns, M 12, 15, 25, 27, 90, 94
- Caine, G 23
Caine, R N 23
Carey, Benedict 4, 13, 51, 57, 59
challenge
 assessing children and 15
 factors drawing in/repeling learners 13
 flow and 91
 formative assessment and 39
 key elements 12
 level of 13
 mistakes 66–7
 need for 12
 signs of children working in challenge zone 15
 stimulus, use of 13
 zone 12, 14–15
Chambers, M 25, 30, 90
child-centred educational views 7
children's interest *see* hooking and holding children's interest
children's involvement in formative assessment 41–4
choice, learners', flow and 91
chunking of information 53
Clarke, Shirley 39, 42–3
classical conditioning 6
classroom organisation, novel 74–5
closed questions 100
collaborative projects, frequency of 94
comfort zone 12–13
confidence in learning 27
constructivism 7
Costello, 32
creativity
 constraints on 82
 defined 81
 Disneyville example 84–5
 England compared to other countries 82
 examples of good practice 84–6
 features of 81
 Fire of London example 85
 in how knowledge is taught 83
 knowing your students 82–3
 non-creative activity 81
 p/i example 86

- Reflective Questions 87
shadow puppetry example 84
teaching as creative profession 81
- Cremin, Teresa 118
Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly 90–1, 94
Curran, Andrew 74
current learning, finding out and evaluating 40–1
curriculum
 broad and balanced, mental health and 117–19
 broadening of 1
 creativity in how taught 83
- Curwin, Richard 68
cyberbullying 121
- De Bono, Edward 7
Deary, Ian 116
deliberate practice 67
Desirable Difficulties 55, 57–8
Dewey, John 112
disbelief, suspension of 75
Disneyville example of creativity 84–5
Dorjee, D 32
Downs, J 119
Dweck, Carol 27–31
- educational theory 5–8
emotional intelligence 8
emotions
 memory and 60
 mistakes and 65
episodic memory 56–7
error *see* mistakes
exams, mental health of learners and 119–20
exercise, physical 24
expectations of children, adults' 27
expert visitors 76
- feedback
 giving 23
 marking 44–6
 self- and peer-assessment 41–4
 supporting future learning 41–2
 swift and positive, flow and 94
- Fields, R D 51
Fire of London example of creativity 85
Fisher, Robert 110–12
- fitness, physical 24
fixed mindsets 28–30
flexibility, mistakes and 68
flow
 attraction of 90
 autonomy, learners' 91, 94
 challenge match with ability 91
 choice, learners' 91, 94
 collaborative projects, frequency of 94
 creating conditions for 90–4
 educational thought and 90
 feedback, swift and positive 94
 learners in 90
 meaning of 90
 problem-solving activities, frequency of 94
 Reflective Questions 95
 relevance of activities to children's lives 94
- forgetting 59
- formative assessment
 current learning, finding out and evaluating 40–1
 determining level of challenge and 39
 feedback to support future learning 41
 main ingredients of 39–40
 marking 44–6
 observation of learners 39
 pupil involvement 41–4
 Reflective Questions 47
 stages of 40–1
- Foundation for Critical Thinking 98
Fried, Itzhak 53
- Gadsby, C 42–3
Gardner, Howard 7–8
generation-effect of use of tests 58
Gershon, M 30–1, 65, 67, 69
Ginsburg, J 54
Gladwell, Malcolm 67
Goleman, Daniel 8, 90–1, 94, 121
Gove, Michael 87
Greenberg, D 4
Griffiths, A 12, 15, 25, 27, 90, 94
growth mindsets 27–31
- Harai, Yuval 117–19
Hattie, J A C 15, 41–3, 82–3, 99
high stakes mistakes 65

- Hinds, Damien 118
hooking and holding children's interest
 attention spans, decreasing 73
 expert visitors 76
 horror 77
 need for 73
 novel organisation 74–5
 Reflective Questions 78
 shock 77
 suspension of disbelief 75
 unusual locations 75–6
 visitors 76
 Wow! factor 77
- Hornby, Nick 1
horror, use of in the classroom 77
Hymer, B 30
- insights, mistakes and 67–8
inspections, emphasis on teaching 4
intelligence
 emotional 8
 increase in 116
 multiple forms of 7–8
- interest, children's *see* hooking and holding children's interest
interleaving *versus* blocking 58
IQ tests 116
- Jarrett, C 54
Judkins, Rod 82
- Kahneman, Daniel 13, 90
Kim, Sungho 99
Klein, Gary 67–8
- Lawler, 32
learning
 current learning, finding out and evaluating 40–1
 defining 4–5
 educational theory 5–8
 long-term 57
 Reflective Questions 9
 see also attitudes to learning
learning objectives 39
lesson plans 39
Levitin, D 51–3, 60
- Lipman, Matthew 110
locations, unusual 75–6
Loewe, Alexandra 32–5
long-term learning 57
long-term memory 55, 57–8
Lucas, B 82
- Maats, H 65, 67
MacBlain, S 16
managerial questions 100
marking 44–6
Marzano, R 24
meditation 35
memory
 benefits of good 51
 chunking of information 53
 emotions and 60
 episodic 56–7
 forgetting 59
 formation of memories 51–3
 generation-effect of use of tests 58
 importance of 51
 important/non-important 54
 interleaving *versus* blocking 58
 long-term 55, 57–8
 long-term learning 57
 organisation of learning 56
 primacy of learning episode 59–60
 procedural knowledge 57
 recency of learning episode 59–60
 Reflective Questions 60
 rehearsal 54
 retention over time in learning episode 59
 self-testing 58
 semantic 55–7
 short-term 53–4
 short-term performance 57
 simple sentences 53
 spacing of study or practice 57
 varying conditions of practice 57
 working 53–4
- Zeigarnik Effect 60
mental health of learners 32–5
agencies supporting 122–3
broad and balanced curriculum 117–19
bullying 121

- causes of crisis in 116–17
comparison with other countries 117, 120
cyberbullying 121
deterioration in 116
factors affecting 117–22
Reflective Questions 123
schools' positive effects on children 122
social media 121–2
tests and exams 119–20
- metacognition 23
mindfulness 32–5
mindsets 27–31
Minkel, Justin 87
mistakes
 aha-moment 66
 beliefs about making 65
 classroom tips 69
 climate for learning in classroom 69
 closing learning gaps 67
 deliberate practice 67
 dislike of 64
 emotions and 65
 flexibility and 68
 high stakes 65
 insights and 67–8
 as negative 64
 positive attitude towards, changing to 64
risk-taking and 64, 68–9
safeguarding 64
sloppy 65
strategies to manage and capitalise on 67
stretch 66–7
types of 65–7
- modelling 17, 23
multi-sensory methods 17
multiple forms of intelligence 7–8
Myatt, M 13, 57, 98
- neuroscience, formation of memories and 51–3
novel organisation 74–5
- O'Brien, K 65, 67
observation of learners 39
open questions 101
operant conditioning 6
- organisation of learning 56
Owen, Alyson 1
- Palmer, Sue 116
panic zone 12, 15
Pardoe, D 25, 27
Pavlov, Ivan 6
peer-assessment 41–4, 94
peer-support 17
perseverance 25
Philosophy for Children (P4C) 110
physical health 24
pi example of creativity 86
Piaget, Jean 6–7
positive but balanced outlook 23
positive reinforcement 6
praise, giving 6
pre-questions 17
pre-teaching of vocabulary 17
primacy of learning episode 59–60
principles, reflection on own 23
problem-solving activities, frequency of 94
procedural knowledge 57
procedural questions 100
pseudo questions 99
pupil involvement in formative assessment 41–4
- questions/questioning
 Bloom's Revised Taxonomy 101–9
 by children 98, 102–10
 closed 100
 examples 102, 109–10
 learning and 98
 managerial 100
 open 101
 Philosophy for Children (P4C) 110
 pitching appropriately 99–100
 pre-questions 17
 procedural 100
 pseudo questions 99
 Reflective Questions 112–13
 Socratic questioning 110–12
 by teachers 98–9
- recency of learning episode 59–60
reflective attitude to learning 23

- Reflective Questions
attitudes to learning 36
challenge 18
creativity 87
flow 95
hooking and holding children's interest 78
learning 9
memory 60
mental health of learners 123
mistakes 70
questions/questioning 112–13
rehearsal 54
relaxation techniques 32–5
relevance of activities to children's lives 94
resilience 25–6
retention over time in learning episode 59
risk-taking, mistakes and 64, 68–9
Robinson, Ken 64, 81–2, 84, 98
Roche, Catherine 116
Rolle, Heather 68
Ryan, Will 39, 43, 81, 87
- safeguarding 64
scaffolding 7, 16–17, 112
self-assessment 41–4, 94
self-regard 22–4
self-testing 58
semantic memory 55–7
Sherrington, Tom 101
shock, use of in the classroom 77
short-term memory 53–4
short-term performance 57
Shultz, Kathryn 64
Six Hats approach 7
Skinner, B F 6
sloppy mistakes 65
social constructivism 7, 112
social media 121–2
Socratic questioning 110–12
spacing of study or practice 57
Speilman, Amanda 1, 58, 118
standard attainment tests (SATs) 119–20
standardisation, resistance to 1
stimulus, use of 13
stress reduction 32
- stretch 12
mistakes 66–7
see also challenge
successes, recording and enjoying 22
suspension of disbelief 75
Swann, M 1, 95
Swinson, R 65
Syed, Matthew 2
- talk-partners 17
tests
generation-effect of use of 58
mental health of learners and 119–20
self-testing 58
theory, educational 5–8
'things I don't know' booklets' 43
thinking skills, teaching 7
Tickell, Clare 41
- unusual locations 75–6
- values and principles, reflection on own 23
Verenikina, I 16
Vickery, 32
visitors to the classroom 76
vocabulary, pre-teaching 17
Vygotsky, Lev 7, 12, 16, 94, 112
- Wilczek, Frank 64
Wildman, Amanda 22, 30
Wiliam, Dylan 39, 41, 45
Willingham, D T 12, 51, 57–8
Wood, David 5
working memory 53–4
Wow! factor 77
- yoga techniques 35
- Zeigarnik Effect 60
Zone of Proximal Development 7, 12, 112
zones
challenge 12, 14–15
comfort 12–13
factors affecting challenge zone 14
panic 12, 15