

Building self-awareness

Educational consultant and trainer **Susannah Temple** describes how the 'functional fluency' tool she has developed can help teachers and school leaders improve their communication and relationship habits

When we use positive and flexible ways of responding to each other, our communication is likely to be more effective. We all have a range of behavioural tendencies and habits to draw on. Moment by moment, it can be hard to choose the right ones. It is an art as well as a skill. The more, though, that we are aware of our tendencies, and understand them, the easier it is to develop more effective communication.

Functional fluency

During my work over the years in schools and teacher education, I have coined the term 'functional fluency' to indicate what makes for effective interpersonal communication. I mean by this a seamless integration of a wide range of effective ways of behaving that supports the ability to build positive relationships. Just as when we can speak a language fluently, such integration demonstrates flexibility, range and balance as well as actual skill.

My model provides a map of positive and negative behavioural modes. The model is to help people recognise and reinforce their effectiveness so that they can expand and enrich it in creative ways, without focusing on faults and negativity.

The index

This work led me to create a personal development tool called the Temple Index of Functional Fluency (TIFF)². It is designed to stimulate the insights and understanding that support and encourage self-awareness as a basis for positive behavioural change.

The functional fluency model is based on three categories of human existence and functioning. These are: growing up, surviving and raising the next generation. These three categories are divided firstly into five elements and then into the nine modes of behaviour of the full model. These are all shown in the diagram.

The five central modes are the ingredients for blending into effective use of energy on behalf of both self and others. The four outer, negative modes often interfere with interpersonal effectiveness. No single score has any meaning. It is the patterns, balances and ratios of the scores that are relevant.

The design and process of doing the TIFF questionnaire emphasises appreciation of the positive. The style is empathic and encouraging, accepting the fact that no one is perfect and that we all have good and bad days. Everyone scores on all the modes, creating a unique profile to be explored through the feedback dialogue, in which the functional fluency model is used to help make sense of the scoring patterns, which show how someone is inclined to use their energy.

Often TIFF provides evidence of habits and tendencies of which the person is only dimly aware. This is where having the model to work from is both comforting and enlightening. The transparency of the scoring method and the openness of the process support active reflection during feedback on how and why someone has a particular scoring pattern. Curiosity and insight chase each other in the process of gaining valuable self-awareness.

For instance, some people have not realised that care can be harmful. One secondary year head realised that she had been wearing herself out by doing too much for her pupils rather than helping them to help themselves. Teachers frequently assume that being strict means being negative and authoritarian. They are relieved to realise that they can operate control through structuring, which is firm, inspiring and empowering. Teachers also find it useful to differentiate between cooperative and compliant, helping children to be assertive and resilient rather than submissive and placating. This is important in the prevention of bullying.

The main tool of any teacher in building classroom relationships is his or her own self. This means that personal development for teachers is synonymous with professional development. Self-awareness is the key factor: that is where TIFF can help.

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References

- 1 Temple S. (1999) 'Functional Fluency for educational transactional analysts' *Transactional Analysis Journal* Vol. 29, No. 3, pp 164-174.
- 2 Temple S. (2002) *The Development of a Transactional Analysis Psychometric Tool for Enhancing Functional Fluency* PhD Thesis (unpublished). University of Plymouth, UK.

