

The Functionally Fluent

Teacher



A practical toolkit for focusing your energy on the connections that enhance teaching and learning

JOHN CATT

THE FUNCTIONALLY FLUENT TEACHER

STEVE WILLSHAW



Together we unlock every learner's unique potential

At Hachette Learning (formerly Hodder Education), there's one thing we're certain about. No two students learn the same way. That's why our approach to teaching begins by recognising the needs of individuals first.

Our mission is to allow every learner to fulfil their unique potential by empowering those who teach them. From our expert teaching and learning resources to our digital educational tools that make learning easier and more accessible for all, we provide solutions designed to maximise the impact of learning for every teacher, parent and student.

Aligned to our parent company, Hachette Livre, founded in 1826, we pride ourselves on being a learning solutions provider with a global footprint.

www.hachettelearning.com

Although every effort has been made to ensure that website addresses are correct at time of going to press, Hachette Learning cannot be held responsible for the content of any website mentioned in this book. It is sometimes possible to find a relocated web page by typing in the address of the home page for a website in the URL window of your browser.

Hachette UK's policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in well-managed forests and other controlled sources. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

To order, please visit www.HachetteLearning.com or contact Customer Service at education@hachette.co.uk / +44 (0)1235 827827.

ISBN: 978 1 0360 0753 9

© Steve Willshaw 2026

First published in 2026 by

Hachette Learning (a trading division of Hodder & Stoughton Limited),

An Hachette UK Company

Carmelite House

50 Victoria Embankment

London EC4Y 0DZ

www.HachetteLearning.com

The authorised representative in the EEA is Hachette Ireland, 8 Castlecourt Centre, Dublin 15, D15 XTP3, Ireland (email: info@hbgi.ie)

Impression number 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Year 2030 2029 2028 2027 2026

All rights reserved. Apart from any use permitted under UK copyright law, no part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or held within any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher or under licence from the Copyright Licensing Agency Limited. Further details of such licences (for reprographic reproduction) may be obtained from the Copyright Licensing Agency Limited, www.cla.co.uk

Illustrations by DC Graphic Design Ltd.

Typeset in the UK.

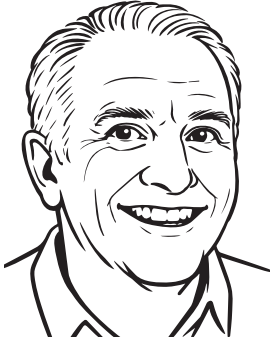
Printed in the UK.

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.



*To Ruth, Tom, Joe and Ben –
for the support, love and humour you bring to my life every day.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Steve Willshaw, with a career spanning over 35 years in the education sector, has a wide range of experience to draw upon. He devoted two decades to teaching secondary English, first in Tower Hamlets and later in Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire, where he was head of English in two large comprehensives. Then, as a senior school-improvement consultant in Lincolnshire, education officer in Guernsey and multi-academy trust subject lead for English, Steve spent an additional 15 years steering educational institutions towards greater achievements and higher standards. He was a trustee of the National Association for Advisers in English, is Chair of the National Baccalaureate Trust and records interviews on a wide range of educational topics for Myatt and Co. Since 2021, he has been the UK Connector for Functional Fluency International, bringing together and growing the network. Steve is a licensed TUFF® provider and trained Get on the Mat® facilitator, has an ILM Level 7 qualification in Executive Coaching and Mentoring and is an accredited Practitioner with EMCC Global. He now works as a freelance educational consultant and executive coach.

REVIEWS

There are many reasons to consider the quality of interactions, ways of working and culture within our settings. One of the most important is that we can have all the results in the world, but if pupils and staff experience conditions as stifling and highly pressurised, then we have to ask ourselves whether it's really worth it. An alternative is to argue that high standards and humane, joyful organisations are not mutually exclusive. Functional Fluency has the potential to be a powerful tool to achieve the latter. Steve Willshaw has written a book that draws together the research and the threads of the TIFF model and shown, through examples and practitioner insights, the difference that such an intentional approach can make. Highly recommend.

Mary Myatt, founder Myatt & Co and The Teachers' Collection

Some books make you think, some books change how you behave; this book does both! Steve weaves anecdotal narrative with the powerful Functional Fluency modelling. It's impossible to read without applying to yourself wholeheartedly. In education there is a tension between doing your best and being your best. As you read and learn more about Functional Fluency and yourself, you can notice, modify and adapt behaviours to form more effective relationships with colleagues and what is arguably the most powerful profession in the world!

Rachel Higginson, keynote speaker, trust and school development facilitator, curriculum designer and the curator of the Finding my Voice approach

What if there is another way? Another way to navigate with energy through the relationships, complexities, uncertainties, stresses and strains and, yes, victories, that are part and parcel of the fabric of life within educational communities? With this book, Steve Willshaw shows us, using classroom 'chalk-face' experiences and examples, that there is another way that works, and how, by using a menu (Functional Fluency) we can heighten our individual and collective awareness and understanding of what's going on in our reality, whether that be as a pupil or principal, and choose behaviours that help us and those around us to thrive, not just survive. This is not just another book!

Ian Dunnett, coach, mediator, trainer, facilitator, owner – Ian Dunnett Coaching

CONTENTS

Introduction	viii
Functional Fluency and me	xi
About this book	xii
A note on the text	xiv
The Certified Functionally Fluent Teacher Programme	xv
Chapter 1: The blueprint for a thriving school: an introduction to Functional Fluency	1
Chapter 2: The heart of the matter: building the relationships that transform learning	35
Chapter 3: Making learning flow: the art and science of a Functionally Fluent classroom	61
Chapter 4: Beyond the classroom door: creating a thriving staff culture	91
Chapter 5: Leading the way: how to build a Functionally Fluent school culture	113
Chapter 6: Building bridges: partnering with parents and carers for pupil success	145
Chapter 7: From individuals to institution: embedding Functional Fluency across your school	159
Chapter 8: More than a school: creating the society we need, one classroom at a time	185
Appendix: The Certified Functional Fluency Teacher Programme	215
References	220
Acknowledgements	224

INTRODUCTION

In the bustling, sometimes chaotic, world of the school on the hill, there was a headteacher named Rhys. Rhys was a good man, dedicated to his school; but, since taking on the role, he had carried a silent, heavy cloak – the burden of imposter syndrome. He felt he had to fight every fire himself, fearing that delegating would make him seem lazy or, worse, reveal his perceived inadequacies. His days were a whirlwind of unmanaged diary commitments, impromptu pop-ins from staff and the constant feeling that he alone was responsible for the school's fortunes. He wrestled with worries, convinced he always needed to provide all the answers and personally address every problem.

Rhys had taken on an underperforming school and, through sheer grit, he had undeniably moved it to a better position. Yet, even with this success, a quiet voice in his head whispered that it wasn't enough, that he hadn't truly earned his place. His PA, Diane, saw his struggles firsthand. He'd **try** to delegate but, often, the job would land back on his plate. His diary was a battlefield of double-bookings – a testament to his struggle to set boundaries.

Then came the turning point. Rhys embarked on a journey of Functional Fluency coaching with me as his guide. It wasn't a quick fix, but a gradual unfolding; a shedding of the old skin. Over three or four years, he began to understand himself and, crucially, his imposter syndrome, not as a weakness to be hidden, but as a part of him that, ironically, had propelled him to do things differently. He started to talk about it openly, even with pride. As his coach, I saw this as a monumental step; a true embracing of his authentic self.

I helped him see the power of Accounting in decision-making – the rational, fact-based approach that wasn't about having all the answers, but about clear, objective thought. He learned to balance Structuring – the organised, planned approach to his day and tasks – with Nurturing – showing genuine care and support for his team. This wasn't about being soft; it was about building trust and creating an environment where others felt empowered. And we discussed the importance of allowing his authentic, Cooperative and Spontaneous strengths

to manifest themselves. Every session, I could see the gears turning and the subtle shifts in his perspective this enabled.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, Rhys started to change. Diane noticed it. He began to manage his diary with purpose, encouraging staff to book appointments, creating space for planned, controlled discussions. The double-bookings became a rarity. More important, he was truly trying to empower others; to delegate 'with purpose' so that the team was truly 'achieving together': the school motto. He continued to live up to one of his favourite mantras from New Zealand rugby, that no one is above 'cleaning the sheds', showing humility and solidarity – but the shift was undeniable.

Martin, Rhys's chair of governors, saw it too. Rhys was becoming 'much more chilled'. He was starting to 'appreciate delegation rather than having to fight every fire himself'. He was trusting his team, becoming 'aware of his strengths and weaknesses' and 'putting trust in others to sort things out'. He was even switching off, finding that crucial balance between work and the rest of life. When Ofsted came knocking, a moment that would once have sent Rhys into a flurry of activity, he was 'fully prepared and organised' and able to 'lead the team with efficiency'. Rhys himself reflected positively on our sessions with Martin, which was incredibly gratifying.

Rhys, at last, was learning to 'recognise his achievements and progress'. The heavy cloak of imposter syndrome hadn't vanished entirely, but it no longer defined him. He had found a new way of leading; one rooted in collaboration, trust and a deep understanding of his own contribution within the collective. The school on the hill, once underperforming, was now thriving: not because Rhys was working harder, but because he had learned to lead smarter by modelling Functional Fluency. He had learned that true leadership wasn't about having all the answers, but about building a team where everyone contributed, where worries were shared and where delegation wasn't a sign of laziness, but a demonstration of shared purpose and collective strength.

Witnessing Rhys's journey has been a testament to the power of Functional Fluency. It has been a privilege to be his coach, seeing him evolve into a more confident and effective leader. When leaders like Rhys consciously model Accounting in decision-making; balance Structuring with Nurturing in their interactions; and utilise Cooperative and Spontaneous modes effectively, they provide a consistent and powerful template for their teams. This lived example is often the most potent catalyst for embedding Functionally Fluent practices throughout the school culture, moving beyond theoretical understanding to tangible behavioural change.

Yet, even with these profound changes, I often found myself with a bittersweet feeling. I am immensely pleased with the progress, but I also know, with absolute certainty, that there is so much more potential for leaders like Rhys to harness within their schools.

Schools are built on communication and are full to bursting point with relationships – not all of them constructive. If a school community – from the leadership to the teachers, teaching assistants, administrative staff, pupils and parents – can become more Functionally Fluent, even just to a small degree, I know that the benefits to the lives of everyone who makes up that community will be enormous. Functional Fluency should be implicit in the way teachers and pupils communicate and how the school encourages pupils to relate to each other. Functional Fluency supports school vision and values and provides a clear way in which these otherwise abstract concepts can be lived out. It also provides a common language with which to talk about relationships, helping to develop congruence between the ways schools and families approach helping their young people to grow up.

This ongoing realisation – this quiet frustration with the untapped possibilities – is precisely why I was compelled to write this book: to share the transformative power of Functional Fluency and empower more teachers and leaders to use it to help themselves and, most important of all, their pupils, to reach their fullest potential.

FUNCTIONAL FLUENCY AND ME

My Functional Fluency journey began in 2011. I was part of a group of school-improvement consultants who were trained by Dr Susannah Temple, the creator of TIFF (the Temple Index of Functional Fluency). I was struck by the model's potent combination of simplicity and complexity. My own TIFF feedback taught me about my tendency towards *placating* and Marshmallowing, which I continue to work on daily. To bring this model to life in this book, I have had to consciously release my *imaginative* and *creative* capacities, such as they are, and try to resist my tendency towards *inhibited* behaviour. The model has played a huge role in my personal development, and I hope I have done it justice.

Learning from Susannah was a privilege. It was remarkable to witness the measured way she talked about Functional Fluency and to experience her inspirational approach to training. Since then, I've worked with headteachers individually, senior leaders, groups of head teachers, heads of departments, department teams, human-resources teams and pastoral and administrative teams, always aiming to replicate the calm yet challenging approach Susannah modelled.

I am confident these individuals and teams have gained insight from this process. However, the full potential benefits of Functional Fluency for teachers and schools, as a fundamental way of understanding human behaviour that can guide us all towards more effective behaviour choices, remains unfulfilled. This book, the next stage in my Functional Fluency journey, is an attempt to explain this potential.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

The book's chapters explore the Functionally Fluent teacher's relationship with the key stakeholders in any school: pupils, other teachers, leadership, parents and carers, governors and other outside agencies. The aim is to demonstrate how Functional Fluency can help teachers to use their finite time and energy more effectively so that all parties benefit. Chapter 1, an introduction to Functional Fluency, is key to understanding the rest of the book, so I would advise all readers to start there.

With the 2025 Ofsted framework placing a renewed emphasis on **inclusion**, school leaders are rightly asking **how** to build a culture where every pupil and staff member feels valued and can thrive. Policies and posters are not enough. True inclusion is forged in the quality of our daily interactions. This book argues that Functional Fluency provides the essential 'operating system' for these interactions – a shared language and a practical toolkit to move beyond well-intentioned ideals to the lived reality of an inclusive community.

The book blends theoretical discussion of the educational application of Functional Fluency with insights from practitioners who are using Functional Fluency in their work in education right now across the UK and beyond. You'll discover, through their experiences, how Functional Fluency has played a role in their own educational journeys and helped them to deal with the dilemmas the profession throws up.

Alongside these insights are practical examples of the model in action, numbered 1 to 21. Based on common classroom situations, these ground the theory in chalkface reality, demonstrating how Functional Fluency provides a clear roadmap to navigate such challenges. Each has a common format, starting with the 'situation', followed by 'immediate thoughts and feelings'. You could stop at this stage and think about what a Functionally Fluent response to this situation might entail. Or you could discuss the example in a team meeting or as an element of your Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Then, compare your ideas with those given in the next two sections of the example: 'pause: choice' and 'Functionally Fluent response'.

Functional Fluency in action is further illustrated through scenarios featuring the fictional Meadowbank Middle School, its headteacher Pat Harrison and other characters, including young teacher Chris Andrews, who is keen to learn about and apply the model.

The journey concludes with audits and other tools that schools can use to gauge their progress towards becoming a Functionally Fluent school.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

Throughout the book, I reference Functional Fluency itself and the behaviour modes with a capital letter (Accounting), and identify the behavioural descriptors using italics (*alert*). The only exception to this is quotations, where I maintain the original emphasis. The linking of real-world behaviour to descriptors in the model is not an exact science, and you may disagree with my analysis of what is going on in the examples. However, the real benefit is that a discussion about behaviour has started and, by openly discussing our behaviour choices, we can build mutual understanding.

Functional Fluency International trains people to use its tools. Those who complete this training are referred to in this book as licensed TIFF providers or Get on the Mat facilitators. Collectively I refer to both groups as Functional Fluency professionals. Details of all training, including new training programmes to become an accredited user of the Functional Fluency Team Scan, can be found on the Functional Fluency International website at <https://functionalfluency.com/training-programs>

THE CERTIFIED FUNCTIONALLY FLUENT TEACHER PROGRAMME

It is with an optimistic and ambitious mindset that I present the Certified Functional Fluency Teacher Programme (CFFTP). It is designed as a series of activities that build knowledge of Functional Fluency, which collectively constitute a qualification that teachers can work towards and then carry with them throughout their careers.

Certification by Functional Fluency International involves completing:

- the TIFF questionnaire, including a feedback session with a TIFF provider
- the Introduction to Functional Fluency course
- a Get on the Mat session
- a training session on the use of the 12 Functional Fluency lesson outlines
- a Learning to Question course.

More details on each element are provided in the Appendix.

I hope you find inspiration and insight on your Functional Fluency journey. There is much to gain, and I look forward to meeting you at some point as our Certified Functional Fluency Teacher community grows.

CHAPTER 2

THE HEART OF THE MATTER: BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIPS THAT TRANSFORM LEARNING

During breaktime at Meadowbank Middle School, a disagreement erupts between two Year 7 pupils about whose football to use for their breaktime kickabout. Chris Andrews, who has been thinking about what Pat Harrison said on the INSET day about Functional Fluency and choice, speaks to them, listens to both sides and points out to the pupils that there are other behaviour choices they could have picked, other than arguing and almost starting a fight, that would have enabled them both to be happy. He guides them towards an agreed way forward, involving using the balls on alternate days.

Observing all this from a discrete distance, headteacher Pat Harrison is delighted and joins the discussion, praising everyone for using Cooperative and Structuring behaviour to prevent a serious incident.

How would a Functionally Fluent teacher engage with pupils?

The most important relationships in any school are those between the teachers and the pupils. They set the tone and determine the quality of learning. Too often, teachers and leaders spend their time and energy managing behavioural issues that undermine these crucial connections. Redirecting that energy towards learning helps a school thrive and makes life less stressful for everyone involved. The stakes could not be higher.

Cracking the code: understanding the teenage brain through Functional Fluency

Recent neuroscience, powerfully summarised by Sarah-Jane Blakemore in *Inventing Ourselves* (2018), reveals that the adolescent brain undergoes far

more change than previously understood. It actively prunes synapses and shifts the balance of its grey and white matter. These changes help explain behaviours common to teenagers: intense self-consciousness and self-concern, increased risk-taking and a remarkable capacity for new learning. Blakemore argues these traits are not flaws, but necessary parts of the journey to adulthood.

Does this distinct neurological phase require a different behavioural model? No. Functional Fluency remains the ideal framework. It describes a state where a person responds effectively to their environment, making well-judged choices that benefit themselves and others. While no one achieves this state perfectly all the time, the model provides an unwavering ideal to strive for. An adolescent's tendency towards risky behaviour doesn't invalidate the model any more than an adult's tendency to be judgemental does.

Functional Fluency acts as a Rosetta Stone, creating a common language for different generations to discuss behaviour. It serves as an objective reference point from which mutual understanding and personal growth can emerge. The model provides a map for self-regulation, helping both adults and adolescents negotiate the fine line between effective and ineffective choices. We can explicitly teach young people to use the Accounting Framework to make thoughtful decisions, improving their self-regulation, resulting in better academic outcomes and strengthening the community.

As Laurence Steinberg notes in *Age of Opportunity* (2014), 'we should pay less attention to trying to change teenagers and more to try and change the settings in which they spend their time'. Functional Fluency provides the tool to structure those settings. Steinberg points out that adolescents need authoritative parenting (and teaching) that is warm, firm and supportive – precisely the approaches the model champions. Promoting self-regulation does more to reduce substance abuse, unprotected sex and reckless driving than conventional education on those topics. It also equips students with the skills to succeed in higher education, where adult supervision is minimal.

Adolescence is a time of peak brain plasticity. It is a unique opportunity to establish the behavioural practices that enable young people to become Functionally Fluent adults. To do this effectively, we must first understand a core human need that is especially acute during these years: the need for recognition and connection. This fundamental drive for social validation is the psychological currency of the classroom. Transactional Analysis (TA) gives us a powerful term for this unit of recognition: the 'stroke'.

Strokes: the unseen currency of the classroom

Functional Fluency has developed from TA, which posits that human beings ‘need to relate to people in order to become fully human’ (Temple, 2016). In TA, the unit of this relational attention is the *stroke*. Educationalist Geoff Barton has often cited his concern about pupils who can go through a whole school day without having any interaction with an adult, receiving zero strokes. Such pupils, whether they are avoiding interaction or simply being overlooked, will struggle to develop into well-adjusted adults.

Strokes break down into four types.

Table 2 Stroke types

	Conditional	Unconditional
Positive	Approval + ‘That was a great answer because...’	Acceptance ++ ‘Good to see you today’
Negative	Disapproval – ‘You need to read the text more carefully’	Rejection – – ‘You are the worst class I’ve ever taught’

All people need strokes to survive. Many get a lot of positive strokes at home, but others do not and arrive in school ‘stroke starved’. If, during the school day, they continue to be ignored, they soon demand attention by acting in ways that elicit negative strokes. This, as Temple (2016) points out, is not a trivial matter but actually all about survival, going back to prehistory when ‘if a child wasn’t noticed at all, if no one had an eye on it, then it might have actually got eaten up or left behind’.

Observe any classroom, and the stroke-starved pupils quickly become apparent. They are the ones demanding attention by arriving late, shouting out or disrupting others. As their Functionally Fluent teacher, you must find ways to satisfy their need for strokes without derailing the lesson. A simple greeting by name at the door (an unconditional positive stroke) is a start. If this is backed up by conditional, positive strokes, such as ‘I hear you worked really hard in science yesterday’, which acknowledge the pupil’s effort and demonstrate that the school values it, this has an even stronger impact.

As Karen Pratt (2021) points out, the behaviour that receives strokes is the behaviour you encourage. If you provide mainly unconditional negative strokes, your classes quickly become discouraged, and their behaviour worsens. This is why practices such as the ‘meet and greet’ are so effective: they ensure that all

pupils start off the lesson with a positive, unconditional stroke, encouraging the kind of cooperative behaviour from which learning flows.

As they grow up, people 'develop a stroke filter which will filter out the types of strokes that don't fit their accustomed ratio' (Pratt, 2021). This explains why some pupils respond badly to praise. We must know our pupils well enough to 'package strokes in a way that will impact them' (Pratt, 2021). In Functional Fluency terms, we could think about strokes in relation to the five golden modes of behaviour. Positive strokes are likely to involve Structuring and Nurturing, though, if used to excess, this could fall into Marshmallowing behaviour, when pupils see through too many insincere or 'plastic' strokes (Pratt, 2021). Negative strokes are likely to be Dominating mode behaviour.

As teachers, we must use Accounting behaviour to determine the diet of strokes that our classes need to survive and thrive. Getting this right encourages the Spontaneous and Cooperative mode responses that establish a productive learning atmosphere. As Temple (2016) writes, 'It is hard for anyone to feel motivated and benevolent without enough positive strokes'. Just as teachers need to consider the stroke economy for their pupils, so leaders need to think about the one they create for their teachers. In both cases, they must avoid 'game playing', where people seek negative strokes to gain attention. The stroke provider needs to resist being pulled into negativity by carefully evaluating the situation and with by judiciously using the tools in the Accounting toolbox (see pages 16–17 for details). As groups, teachers and pupils need to develop a healthy stroke economy as a vital step towards creating a Functionally Fluent community.

Beyond disruption: understanding the unmet need

Example 1 Coping with a disruptive pupil

Situation

The behaviour of a specific pupil is really annoying you. He talks incessantly while you are trying to explain things to the class; he fidgets and disrupts your flow of thought; and asks annoying questions all the time (*immature*). You are finding it increasingly difficult not to lose your temper as soon as you see this pupil (*anxious, rebellious*).

Pupil:



Immediate thoughts and feelings

This situation is making you dread these lessons. Your teaching is beginning to suffer and the rest of the class are starting to notice and become resentful.

You:



Pause: choice

You realise that this is probably all about strokes. The pupil is not receiving enough positive strokes at home, perhaps because his parents work long hours. This lack of attention drives the pupil to demand attention, and the easiest way to do this is to behave badly – he has learned how to do this because he has had a lot of practice!

You:



Functionally Fluent response

You consider (Accounting) a range of strategies (warm personal greeting, front-row seat, attention from a TA, several check-ins each lesson) that will ensure that this pupil gets attention without having to behave badly (*encouraging*). You explain to the child that you want him to learn and that you know he can achieve (*encouraging*) but that there are limits to what you will tolerate (*firm*). You may decide to refer the pupil to his form teacher who can talk to him about strategies to reduce disruptive behaviour. The relationship begins to improve as the pupil realises there are productive ways to gain the attention he needs.

You:



Pupil:



Key learning

This scenario demonstrates how using Accounting to understand a pupil's need for strokes can prevent reactive behaviour and lead to a more constructive outcome.

From classroom to community: building a culture of safety and trust

Just as managing the stroke economy is vital for individual relationships, the collective trust within a school is crucial for learning. This brings us to the importance of building a Functionally Fluent community – a concept powerfully underscored by trauma expert Bessel van der Kolk.

In his seminal work *The Body Keeps the Score*, van der Kolk (2014) writes: ‘People can learn to control and change their behaviour, but only if they feel safe enough to experiment with new solutions’. Functional Fluency is built on this very idea: because our behaviour is a choice, we can learn to change it. The model provides a road map for positive change and a safe structure that encourages community members to try new ways of behaving, giving them the strength to resist peer pressure or established norms.

Van der Kolk argues that, for traumatised children, we must not cut the very activities that build safety and help them escape fight-or-flight states: ‘chorus, physical education, recess, and anything else that involves movement, play, and other forms of joyful engagement’. Schools are full of anxious pupils (and teachers). The Functional Fluency model and the TIFF profile make this anxiety visible, bringing it into the open for discussion. While telling an anxious person not to be anxious is useless, so is hiding the feeling. Through its physicality – for example the act of standing on a mat on a floor mat – Functional Fluency connects the head, heart and gut. It validates our feelings as the first step towards understanding the behaviours that stem from them.

Van der Kolk captures the reality of the English educational landscape when he asks what our schools would look like if they cultivated ‘cooperation, self regulation, perseverance, and concentration (as opposed to focusing on passing tests)’. Functional Fluency champions exactly these behaviours:

- Accounting is a synonym for self-regulation.
- Cooperation is a key positive mode.
- *Curiosity*, part of the Spontaneous mode, is the foundation of learning.
- Perseverance and concentration emerge from a healthy balance of Structuring and Nurturing within the environment.

In recent years, school leaders have sometimes neglected community building because external agencies cannot easily measure it. Yet, the metrics these agencies *can* measure – such as test scores – depend on these ineffable qualities. Pupils and teachers who belong to a supportive community, one they

trust to treat them fairly, focus more effectively on their work. As van der Kolk (2014) puts it, 'Children and adults will do anything for people they trust'. The trust that a Functional Fluency approach fosters may be hard to quantify, but that makes it all the more important to cultivate. It yields far-reaching benefits for everything from academic achievement to diversity and inclusion.

Safety first: how the nervous system shapes learning (the polyvagal connection)

In *Our Polyvagal World*, Stephen and Seth Porges (2023) define polyvagal theory (PVT) in a single sentence: 'How safe we feel is crucial to our physical and mental health and happiness.'

PVT centres on the vagus nerve, named from the Latin for 'wandering' because it connects to our major organs. This extensive network allows our entire body to feel and respond to threats. When our environment signals safety, we enter a receptive state, ready to learn. In Functional Fluency terms, we can use Spontaneous and Cooperative behaviour to socialise productively.

Our sense of safety matters deeply. Unfortunately, school safeguarding practices, such as high railings, can, ironically, increase feelings of threat. PVT suggests we absorb these signals automatically through a process called **neuroception**. If our body senses a threat – using ancient predator-evasion circuits – our autonomic nervous system can trigger a **fight-or-flight** state, making learning difficult. It can also send us into a **shutdown** state: an echo of our ancestors playing dead to survive. PVT posits we have no conscious control over these states; our autonomic nervous system chooses for us.

Table 3 The Polyvagal Ladder (Dana, 2018)

State	PVT term	Behaviour
Top (green)	Ventral vagal	Safe, social and able to learn (homeostasis)
Middle (yellow)	Sympathetic	Fight or flight; focused on safety not learning
Bottom (red)	Dorsal vagal	Shutdown; frozen and unresponsive

Our state directly impacts our ability to respond. In fight-or-flight or shutdown, we cannot think as clearly as when we are in a calm state of homeostasis. In shutdown, tiny muscles in our ears even adapt to filter out the pitch of human speech, making us more attuned to low, threatening sounds. The pupil with their head on the desk may literally not be able to hear you properly.

A Functionally Fluent teacher must use Accounting to assess a pupil's state. By asking 'Is this defiance, or a "fight" response triggered by feeling unsafe?', the

teacher can choose behaviours that help guide the pupil back to homeostasis. One key tool is prosody: the sing-song, varied tone of voice that calms our nervous system. A stressed trainee teacher often defaults to a flat monotone, which pupils can neuroceptively register as a threat, undermining learning. Again, the Functionally Fluent teacher uses Accounting to become conscious of their own state and its impact on the class.

This process of using our own calm state to soothe another person is called 'co-regulation'. It is how we form the productive social bonds essential for human functioning. A teacher who remains calm when facing a dysregulated pupil can initiate co-regulation, using 'golden' mode behaviours, including Accounting, to de-escalate the situation rather than inflame it.

Here lies the crucial link between the two models. PVT describes the autonomic nervous system, where unconscious **neuroception** determines our state. Functional Fluency addresses the somatic nervous system, where conscious *Accounting* has the ability, if we choose to use it, to determine our voluntary behaviour. This is a crucial distinction with important implications for educators.

A Functionally Fluent teacher can use their knowledge of PVT as a critical factor in their Accounting process. This understanding helps them to distinguish between pupils who are wilfully misbehaving and those who are in an uncontrollable vagal state. This helps teachers by informing a more compassionate and effective response. We must remember that the foundation of learning is safety. None of us can accurately predict how we will react in traumatic situations until we experience them, and this should encourage us to think carefully about the causes of dysregulated pupil behaviour and how to reduce it. By using the Accounting Framework to co-regulate with pupils, teachers can create an environment where everyone feels secure enough to learn, connect and thrive.

Tools for every learner: adapting your approach for neurodiversity

A key test of any school's commitment to inclusion is how it supports its neurodivergent pupils. The strategies in Table 4 demonstrate how the Functional Fluency model can be adapted to create a truly inclusive classroom where every learning style is understood and valued. Practices that support neurodivergent students often benefit everyone and, here, the Functional Fluency mat is a particularly powerful tool. By making thinking visual and providing a common language for behaviour, it helps people articulate differing perspectives, build empathy and resolve conflict.

Table 4 outlines practical strategies for using Functional Fluency and TIFF effectively with neurodivergent individuals.

Table 4 Functional Fluency and neurodiversity

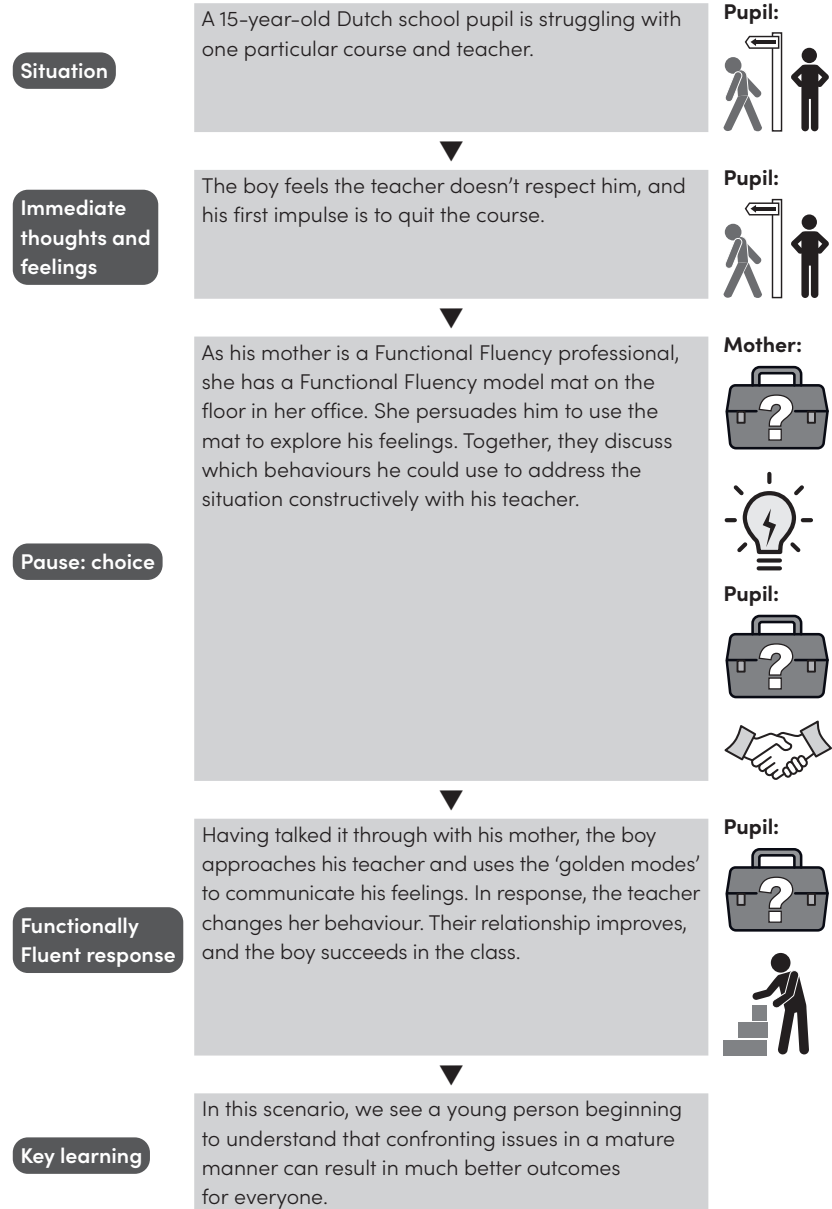
Factors	Considerations
Sensory needs	Consult the school's SENDCo about pupils' specific sensory needs in advance. Discuss allowances for helpful behaviours, such as using fidget tools, to ensure they don't interfere with others' concentration.
Contracting	Establish a strong bond of trust before the session. All parties must know what will happen and why. Clearly define the rules of confidentiality to create psychological safety.
Language	Use concise, literal language, avoiding metaphors that could confuse. Check for understanding by asking in multiple ways, such as 'How have you understood this?' or 'How is this working for you?' Using the term 'neurotypical' can be useful, as it indicates that everyone has a label.
Tailored feedback	Tailor all feedback to the pupils' specific needs and communication styles. Discuss these preferences during the initial contracting phase.
Attention span	Recognise that this work can be draining, especially for neurodivergent pupils. Timetable sessions thoughtfully – perhaps at the end of the day – to avoid leaving pupils unable to focus in their next lesson.
Co-creation	Ensure all parties are fully present and focused. Functional Fluency is a co-creative process where everyone contributes their Accounting energy to make the session productive.
Environment	Create an environment that is 'safe enough' for everyone. Small actions such as doodling or fidgeting may aid focus, even if they look like inattention. Allow for movement and provide such sensory objects as velvet cushions, visual timers or stress balls. Meet the person where they are.
Signals	Establish pre-arranged, simple signals that a pupil can use to communicate their needs without having to find complex words. Examples include a physical gesture (closing a book or moving an object) to show they feel unsafe, or a phrase such as 'Too many words' if they feel overwhelmed.
Pupil perspective	Actively seek feedback from neurodivergent pupils about their experience with Functional Fluency. Use their insights to improve and adapt future sessions.

Case study: using the Functional Fluency mat

To see Functional Fluency in action, let's look at a case study from TIFF provider Beatrijs Dijkman. In a 2024 *Transactional Analysis podcast*, she described using

the Functional Fluency mat to help her 15-year-old son navigate a difficult relationship with a teacher. Example 2 breaks down the situation and the successful outcome.

Example 2 A breakthrough on the mat: a case study in communication



The principles of adapting Functional Fluency for different needs, including neurodiversity, are best understood through real-world application. The following insights from practitioners Simphiwe Mahlanyana and Liz Jackson provide powerful case studies of how to use these concepts to improve pupils' lives in diverse educational settings.

Functional Fluency in Action

Simphiwe Mahlanyana: Functional Fluency in a South African school

Functional Fluency, comprehensive sexuality education and gender-based violence programmes

Simphiwe Mahlanyana, also known as Sim, is from Kwa-Langa, Cape Town's first township in South Africa. Sim is a coach and youth facilitator.

Since becoming a licensed Functional Fluency professional in September 2019, he has been an integral part of Functional Fluency International, providing support in administration, marketing and web services. Sim is a passionate believer in the efficacy of Functional Fluency and TIFF in both his personal and professional life. His current focuses include working with teenagers to understand their behaviour and helping rehabilitated drug and alcohol abusers reintegrate into their communities.

Sim presented a plan to start using Functional Fluency in a school in South Africa, where he was already working as a freelancer delivering comprehensive sexuality-education courses and programmes to counter gender-based violence. He had observed the pupils' behaviour in this school, which was set up to cater for young people who had been expelled from other mainstream schools. He felt that there was a clear need for Functional Fluency education to help them to think about and moderate their behaviour. He was already using Functional Fluency language and approaches in an implicit way within these programmes, and the headteacher had noticed a clear behavioural improvement in the pupils, especially the boys, and so asked for a more direct approach. The headteacher had big plans for Functional Fluency, including wanting to set aside a Functional Fluency room where pupils who were sent out of classes could come to discuss their behaviour with Sim. Unfortunately, at the time, the school did not have the finances to make this happen. However,



Sim went into the school for three hours a week on a voluntary basis to work with pupils and help them to see that the golden behaviours of the Functional Fluency model could help everyone to thrive.

As a result of hearing about Sim's work and about Functional Fluency through Sim's cousin, a parent approached Sim to see whether he would be willing to work directly with her 16-year-old daughter whose behaviour was causing the mother increasing concern. This gave rise to the idea of individual interventions with young people using Functional Fluency. The daughter had become increasingly depressed, silent and isolated at home, and there were also issues of bullying at school that had led to a change of schools.

Sim spent about 45 minutes talking to the girl, exploring her situation; then he explained the Functional Fluency model and how completing a TIFF might be beneficial. She responded well to this pitch (which was clearly very different in tone and approach from a Functional Fluency pitch to an adult CEO, for example). After she had completed the 108-item TIFF questionnaire, Sim held a feedback session, which lasted two hours, where he made it clear that he is not a counsellor. The girl had already had several negative experiences of counsellors who, she felt, were all siding with her mother. During the feedback session, two major root causes of the girl's depression became clear through Sim's coaching approach, which was to allow the discussion to follow a course dictated by the girl's own curiosities about the TIFF profile results. Using the Get on the Mat approach, the girl was able to explore her own behavioural choices and begin to consider the impact of these on others. These approaches revealed that the girl had not spoken to her mother properly for around four years. The mother was both shocked and delighted to receive a letter of apology from her daughter – testament to the impact of Sim's work.

It is clear that Functional Fluency and TIFF provided a route through to the problems at the heart of this girl's behaviour, suggesting that there is huge potential for using TIFF in one-to-one interventions with pupils who are experiencing a range of difficulties. In particular, the feedback session enabled the girl to unpick her relationship with her mother and the actions that she was taking that contributed to the issues. The girl was also able to use the model to interpret both her own and her mother's behaviour in insightful ways. The relationship between the mother and daughter improved as a direct result, to the extent that the mother offered to pay Sim double for his work.

Sim also worked with another 16-year-old girl from a very privileged background. The focus here was on helping both the mother and daughter to break out of a pattern of Marshmallowing behaviour that had established a damaging degree of dependence between them. They realised that this situation needed to change if the daughter was going to be able to transition successfully to university. Together, Sim and the girl spent a lot of time focusing on increasing Accounting behaviour to help her become more in touch with reality.

The common factor in both situations was the way in which Marshmallowing on the part of the mother made it difficult for her child to grow up in appropriate ways, leaving both girls incapable of coping properly with the adult world to which they were increasingly being exposed. In a South African context there are a range of additional issues, with parents who live in the cities unwilling to allow their children to visit their relatives in the townships, even though the parents themselves were born and brought up there.

As he talked about the gender-based violence project work, it became clear that the situations Sim was hearing about and attempting to address were perhaps more extreme than those facing most UK schools. There is, nevertheless, a distinct similarity in the attitudes of the boys that he described and the toxic masculinity exhibited by many boys in the UK. Sim referenced how Susannah Temple, the author of TUFF, created the model to understand better the behaviour of young people in schools; this is a strong justification for his use of the model with groups to investigate and then break the cycle of bullying. He has been working with them to develop roleplays that explore, in a safe and structured way, the behaviours involved in bullying, then helping them to examine the behaviours through the lens of the Functional Fluency model. Group members who have taken on the role of observers use the model to suggest which types of behaviour would have resulted in better outcomes for all concerned, in a direct parallel with the example situations of this book. This is particularly useful as a means of exploring issues around sexual consent; a difficult area within current gender politics.

When the adolescent boys Sim was working with saw the model, they expressed the idea that, to have a successful relationship, men needed to use Dominating behaviour towards women, as opposed to the golden behaviour modes. This clearly demonstrates the amount of work that still needs to be done in this area. While Functional Fluency has not solved this issue, it has

at least brought it out into the open, providing everyone with some shared language to use when talking about it and forcing these young men to see the reality of their beliefs laid bare. Hopefully, this is a necessary first stage on the path towards developing more equal relationships between the sexes.

A colleague of Sim's runs the comprehensive sexuality-education programme with groups of teenage girls. When individual girls in this group outline specific problems, this colleague often refers them on to Sim for one-to-one work using Functional Fluency. Sometimes, this involves working with the parents to explore the behaviour of both the parents and the child, and to explore complex issues that include abuse, pornography, sex addiction and gambling. Where appropriate, referrals are made to specialist therapists.

Finally, Sim reported on the way the teachers in the school he works in see him as a calming influence. What is clear is the need for Functional Fluency training for teachers so that they can begin to move away from the reactive way in which they are tending to behave, and towards the more thoughtful and responsive type of behaviour that Sim exemplifies. Hopefully we will soon have a cohort of Certified Functional Fluency Teachers in South Africa to take this work forward.

Functional Fluency in Action

Liz Jackson: Functional Fluency in English schools

Liz Jackson is a teacher, coach and counsellor who has used Functional Fluency in all elements of her professional life.

In her classroom-teaching role, Liz has taught Year 9 pupils personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) modules on TA, which have included the teaching of Functional Fluency. The work has included practical elements, such as giving groups of pupils laminated versions of the Functional Fluency model, cut up into sections, which they discuss and use to re-create the model. This activity generates much useful discussion about the thinking that lies behind it.



Liz facilitates exploration of the three top-level concepts of the model:

- How we use our behaviour on behalf of ourselves to realise our own individuality
- How we take on responsibility for others and ourselves by being in charge
- How we notice and evaluate reality in ourselves and others, in the moment, so that we can make effective behaviour choices through a process we call Accounting.

With this understanding of the model, Liz presents scenarios to Year 11 pupils for them to consider in pairs. These are situations that relate to their own experiences, such as dealing with conflict around option choices, when the pupil and their parents or carers have different ideas about the best way forward. The task is to decide which blend of the golden modes they would use to handle a particular situation. This generates a lot of high-level discussion as they begin to recognise that there isn't a 'one size fits all' answer and that it depends on each person's unique situation and the different personalities involved.

Liz explains:

'In working in one-to-one situations, I particularly use the Control and Care elements of the model to help students reflect on how best to manage themselves, as well as when they are in a role of being in charge of others. For example, one A-level student had a coping strategy of staying off school whenever things got difficult in life and when she felt overwhelmed by all the revision she needed to do. She led a chaotic lifestyle and felt a real failure. Using Accounting mode, I invited her to think about how her current strategy was helping her achieve success in her exams and whether we could explore alternatives. She began experimenting with the Structuring mode, and came up with a plan to create a revision timetable, which was realistic and incorporated regular breaks (Nurturing herself) and doing fun activities such as going outdoors for a run (Spontaneous mode). Fuelled by this success, she went on to use Functional Fluency to change her eating habits and sleep habits too. It was clear from comments she made that she was finding the framework of the model useful, for example she said "Liz, I set my alarm and started work early today. I wanted to stay under my duvet, but I didn't Marshmallow myself like I used to!" I was delighted when she messaged me months later, thanking me and letting me know about her exam success and university offer.'

The pupils consider ways in which Functional Fluency can help individuals make behavioural choices from which everyone can benefit. This approach demonstrates to pupils how Functional Fluency can have practical implications in their own lives, helping them to navigate some of the issues they inevitably face as they grow up. It also functions as a reinforcement of their understanding of the model, helping them to remember and internalise it more fully so that they begin to apply it in their own lives without having to consult a copy of the model. This approach, with its emphasis on repeatedly returning to the model so that pupils may forget it and then be reminded of it again – thus gaining a deeper understanding – fits with what we know from Ebbinghaus (1913) about the role of forgetting in learning.

Liz has also used Functional Fluency in one-to-one work with a school refuser and her mother. An extensive series of sessions involved both mother and daughter completing a TIFF questionnaire. Liz helped the pupil to see the need to engage in a higher level of Accounting to develop greater awareness of the reality of her own situation and to recognise that social anxiety rather than physical illness was at the root of her school refusal. In parallel, the mother came to realise that she was putting too much of her time and energy into Marshmallowing behaviour, when what her daughter needed was Structuring and more effective use of strokes as a means of demonstrating love and deepening the mother–daughter relationship. Subsequently, the pupil was able to increase her school attendance considerably and go on to take up a place in the local sixth-form college.

In a school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, Liz used Functional Fluency with the staff team. All the staff were taught the Functional Fluency model as part of their work on an introductory TA course (TA101), and all went on to complete their own TIFF and to have a feedback session to explore their results with Liz. Here, contracting was particularly important to counter defensive ideas on the part of some staff who were concerned about issues of confidentiality. Once this clarity had been established, staff were pleased to have the chance to focus on themselves for a block of time. Many of them took up the opportunity to engage in a follow-up telephone consultation with Liz to check in on progress against the action plan they had co-created during the original feedback session. This work highlighted how exhausted many of the staff were. They were devoting too much of their time and energy to doing things for the pupils, and did not know when to stop and instead direct their energy into appropriate levels of self-care. Again, reassurance around privacy was required during the contracting phase, but the staff took the process as a huge positive stroke. It encouraged

an increased emphasis on Spontaneous behaviour, freeing up the staff to enjoy playing with the pupils without feeling guilty about it, as well as encouraging more Spontaneous behaviour in their lives outside school. Figure 7 is an attempt to capture some of this complexity diagrammatically.

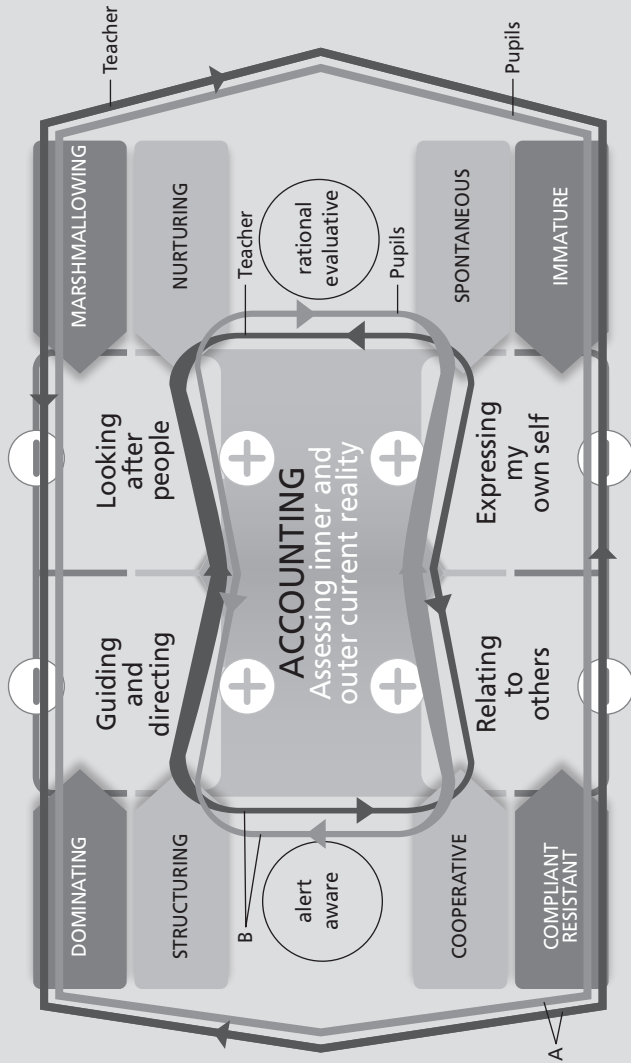


Figure 7 Non-Functionally Fluent (A) and Functionally Fluent (B) teaching and learning

In her school-governor role, Liz has introduced her governor colleagues to Functional Fluency with an emphasis on wellbeing. She has run Get on the Mat sessions for the school's staff so that teachers gain an understanding of the model and how it can help guide them towards making behaviour decisions from which everyone can benefit.

This case study shows the wide range of ways in which one person can use Functional Fluency across their professional work to help in a variety of situations: as a teaching resource to help pupils regulate their behaviour and build a sense of community; as a targeted intervention with individual pupils with specific behaviour issues; and as an approach to address wider staff wellbeing issues across a school.

To illustrate how the concepts covered in this chapter are relevant, let's explore some common situations in schools.

The art of balance: combining care and control

One of the key insights of Functional Fluency is that, for our behaviour to be effective, we need to have a balance between the amount of time and energy we put into guiding and directing ourselves and others and the amount of time and energy we put into looking after ourselves and others.

A key question is 'How do I manifest authority when I am in charge?' (Temple, 2015). There is a very clear link here with the profession of teaching: the quintessential 'role that carries authority'. And at this top level, before we get into the value-laden aspect of what constitutes effective and less effective behaviour, it is important to realise that, to be effective in the implementation of authority to help others to grow (such a fundamental aspect of any teacher's role), we need to find an effective balance between controlling others and caring for others.

In terms of the effective modes of Functionally Fluent behaviour, this means that we need to balance the energy that we are putting into Structuring things for ourselves and others and Nurturing ourselves and others. If this key balance is missing, we find that our teaching work becomes far more difficult. If we set ourselves harsh limitations and do not allow time for rest and recuperation, we are in danger of burning out before we get to the end of term. By worrying too much about things, we are wasting energy questioning ourselves and judging ourselves and others in unhelpful ways, draining away energy that we could use more positively for supporting and nurturing ourselves and others.

Equally, if we put all our efforts into trying to look after our form group and do not provide them with enough structure and clarity, we soon find that they are

taking advantage of this situation. This is because too much Nurturing, without a counter-balancing quantity of Structuring, is perceived as Marshmallowing. We have all witnessed teachers who focus too much on providing support for their classes without clear rules. This frequently descends into chaos. Nurturing intent has tipped over into Marshmallowing reality. Similarly, too much Structuring, whether for self or others, without an equivalent focus on Nurturing, often creates an impression of Dominating, and the result is often a Compliant / Resistant or Immature reaction. We have all worked for leaders who dictate tasks without sufficient acknowledgement of team needs. The result is often resentment – what is intended as Structuring is experienced as Dominating behaviour.

Finding the right balance between care and control is rarely easy. The following examples explore how the Functional Fluency model can help us understand and resolve the situations where that balance is lost.

Example 3 Nurturing without Structuring

Situation

The class is not listening to you. You cannot understand this as, since you met them, you have been keen to encourage them, listen to their issues and make it clear that you are interested in them as individuals. What more do you have to do?

You:



Pupils:



Immediate thoughts and feelings

You are frustrated because you are putting a great deal of time and effort into Nurturing, in the form of *encouragement, understanding and cherishing*. But the more you try to Nurture this group, the more they take advantage of your good nature. The class feel that you are not Structuring things for them sufficiently and thus that your behaviour is Marshmallowing rather than Nurturing. You feel upset that all this positive energy on your part is being met by negativity. You feel as though you will soon snap and resort to shouting at them (*blaming, punitive*) as you blame them for the deterioration of the teaching relationship.

Pupils' perception:



Your perception:



You:



Pause: choice

You pause and ask yourself some key questions (*enquiring*). Using the Accounting toolbox, you become *aware* and acknowledge what is happening, internally. You realise that you are caring for this class in ways that aren't working. As a result, you are putting up with too much and your patience is wearing very thin.

You:

What you perceive to be Nurturing behaviour is taken by the class as a sign of weakness. They want you to Care about them, but they also need you to Structure learning for them so that they understand where the boundaries are and can feel confident that you are in control. Through Accounting, you realise that you need a more effective balance between Nurturing and Structuring.

**Functionally
Fluent response**

You clarify with the class that you want the best for them (*encouraging*), that you are interested in them (*empathic*) but that **you** are in control and will set consistent boundaries (*firm*) and implement them fairly (*consistent*).

You:

Because you are now balancing Nurturing with Structuring, the class learn that you are in control. They no longer feel that you are Marshmallowing them and they are comfortable to learn. Through Accounting, you have ensured that your own internal theatre does not take over.

Pupils:**Key learning**

Here we see that effective relationships with classes depend on the balance between the time and energy we put into Nurturing and Structuring.

Example 4 Structuring but no Nurturing

Situation

The class are not responding to you. You cannot understand this, as you have established a set of very strict behaviour expectations that have ensured a calm atmosphere in the classroom. Why are they still so reluctant to contribute the thoughtful, expressive responses that you are looking for?

Your perception:



Pupils' perception:



Pupils:



Immediate thoughts and feelings

Your main emotion when you took on this class was fear (*anxious*). You wanted to appear strong and in control and so you established very tight rules about how they should enter the class and where and how they should sit during your lessons (*punitive*). Now you feel that the lessons are difficult to manage because the pupils are unresponsive and lack enthusiasm for your subject (Compliant / Resistant).

You:



You pause and ask yourself some questions (*enquiring*). Why did you come into teaching in the first place? You recall it was because of your love for your subject and because of a couple of inspirational teachers when you were at school. You then realise that, because of your fear of being perceived by your colleagues or school leadership as weak or lacking in control, you have implemented a classroom-management approach that lacks basic humanity. You have established a pattern of alternating between Compliant / Resistant and Dominating behaviour, which is draining your energy and not working. You thought that the strict systems you insisted on would provide a structure where your pupils could flourish but, by using the Accounting toolbox, you now realise that they experience this approach as Dominating. You begin to understand that what is required here, as in all effective human interactions, is an effective balance of Structuring and Nurturing behaviour. You also recognise the underlying fear of being seen as weak or ineffective by others that has driven you to these choices.

Pause: choice

You:



You clarify with the class that you want the best for them (*encouraging*), that you are interested in them and that you value their contributions (*empathic*), as it is through trying out ideas that the whole class will make progress. You suggest a method that will incentivise pupils to answer questions thoughtfully, such as 'no hands up' or using a random name generator, and ask them for their ideas on how to make this work. You continue this dialogue over the coming weeks to demonstrate that you are serious. Because you are now balancing Structuring with Nurturing, the class learn that you want the best for them. They no longer perceive you as using Dominating behaviour towards them, and they feel comfortable to contribute thoughtfully to the lessons.

**Functionally
Fluent response**

You:



Pupils:



Again, we see that effective relationships with classes depend on a balance between the time and energy we put into Structuring and into Nurturing.

Key learning

Example 5 The Functionally Fluent form teacher

Situation

Leadership has initiated a new policy that has an impact on your form group.

You:



Immediate thoughts and feelings

You can see that there are implications of this change that the class are likely to dislike. You really don't want to have to tell them about it as you are worried about how they will react (anxious).

You:



Pupils:



Pause: choice

As you arrive at the classroom, you employ your Accounting energy to be alert to the group's mood. They are unsettled about something. You get them in and ask some questions to find out what the problem is (Accounting / Spontaneous). The issue turns out to be about a homework task set by another teacher and a disagreement over the deadline. You tell the class that you will ask the relevant teacher to clear this up when you see her at break time and that you will let them know the outcome after lunch (Structuring).

You:



Functionally Fluent response

Using Accounting, rather than reacting, to respond to the group has settled them down well and they are now in a receptive mood to listen to your announcement about the new policy. You explain the implications and the rationale behind the change (Structuring / Nurturing). The class are not pleased but they appreciate the way you have told them about it, and they reciprocate your Cooperative approach. You agree to try out the new policy for two weeks and that you will then discuss it with them and feed back their thoughts to leadership.

You:



Pupils:



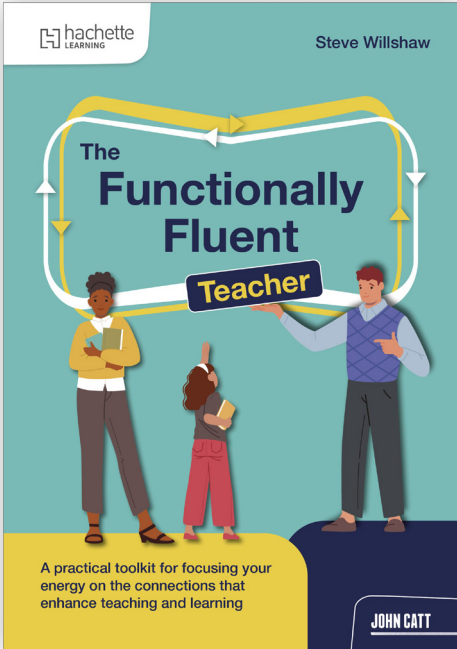
Key learning

Here, we see the importance of being flexible and not ploughing on with tasks when there are other things going on that need addressing first. Psychological safety is a vital pre-requisite for Cooperative behaviour.

Language

Ultimately, the goal of applying these strategies – from understanding adolescent self-regulation to managing strokes and building community – is to embed Functional Fluency so deeply that it becomes a tool pupils themselves use to navigate their world. When you hear a pupil say ‘Stop Marshmallowing me!’, you’re hearing more than just new vocabulary; you are witnessing a culture shift in real time. You are seeing young people armed not just with academic knowledge, but with the tools for self-awareness, emotional regulation and mutual respect. This shared language transforms the classroom from a simple place of instruction into a community of practice, where every interaction is an opportunity for growth. It is this foundation of relational trust that allows learning itself truly to flow: a dynamic we will explore next.

The teaching of Functional Fluency is addressed directly in the Certified Functional Fluency Teacher Appendix. The Certification involves training to teach the 12 lesson outlines, which are designed to be taught at the start of each key stage. Using repetition in this way builds understanding and recognition. This is further reinforced if teachers and leaders reference the language and concepts of Functional Fluency in their day-to-day encounters with pupils, parents and colleagues. The examples cited in this book give plenty of ideas of how to do this.



The Functionally Fluent Teacher

Publishing on
15th May 2026

ISBN: 9781036007539

[Buy from Hachette Learning](#)

[Buy from Amazon](#)