



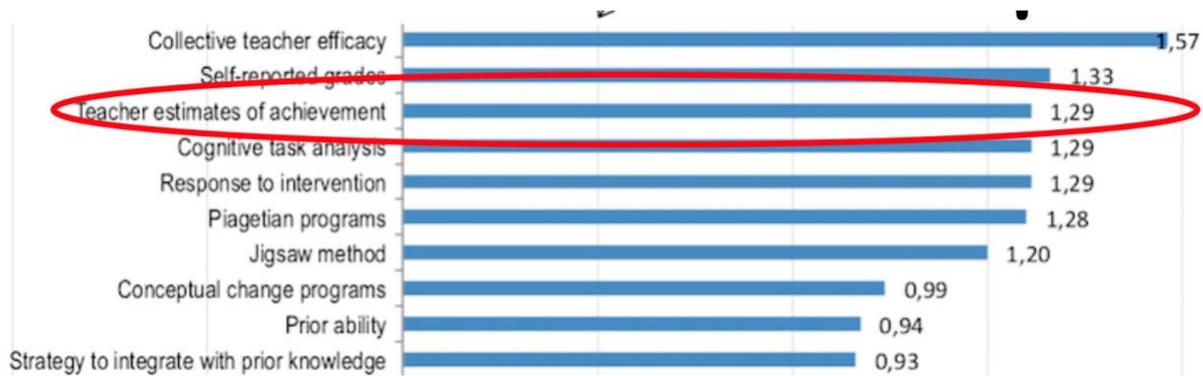
Flourishing Students: Does Your School Follow The Platinum Rule?

The Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”

The Platinum Rule: “Do unto others as they would want it done to them”

You Get What You Expect: Teacher Estimates and Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

Since the late 1960's research on teacher student relationships highlights an uncomfortable truth - teacher expectations of student performance (academic, motivation, and behaviour) can create a self-fulfilling prophecy. In general, teachers tend to spend more time providing guidance, encouragement, and feedback to students whom they predict will do well, these students tend to benefit from the extra attention, with assessment results reflecting the teachers' original prediction. The reverse is also true, where teachers predict that students will likely struggle regardless of the amount of extra support they receive, that support is often redirected elsewhere, and again the results conform to original expectations. When we look at more recent research, teacher estimates of student achievement continue to have a very large impact on student learning.



Teacher-Student Communication

So, if teacher expectations of student performance are so important in determining student success what influences a teacher's expectation and beliefs about a student?... While there are many factors involved, one of the main drivers of a teachers' expectations and beliefs about their students (and vice versa) relates to the quality and satisfaction they derive their teacher-student communication. And this is where personality and communication preferences between students and teachers can become either a blessing or a curse!

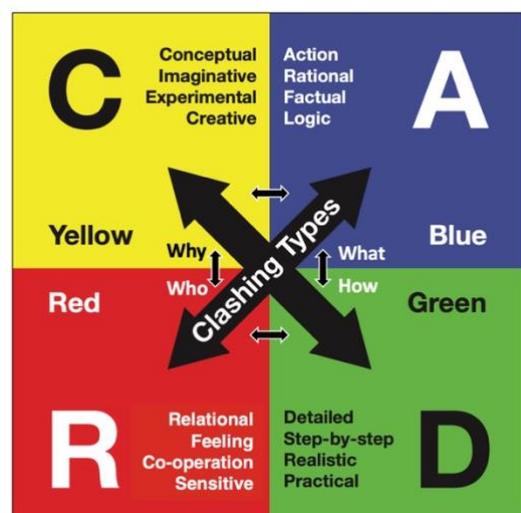
Teacher - Leader & Teaching Team Communication

Whilst we are currently focusing on the degree of alignment in personality and communication preferences between teachers and students it is also important to note that misalignments of this type are usually at the heart of conflicts within teams and between school leaders and staff (read more about this [HERE](#))

Understanding Individual Communication Preferences

There are countless frameworks to explain personality and communication preferences, however in order to keep it simple and real, we find it useful to consolidate and simplify all the various theories down into 4 important personality types reflected in the C.A.R.D. acronym (and link them to basic colours to keep things easy to remember).

The C.A.R.D. acronym stands for Concept (Yellow), Action (Blue), Relational (Red), and Detail (Green) which tends to be the most useful descriptors to understand individual differences and personality clashes. 'C' stands for Concept – the 'Why' people who perform at their best when they understand the 'big picture' and purpose behind the tasks they have to do. 'A' stands for Action – the 'What' people who perform at their best when they have immediately attainable 'next step' goals with the tasks they have to do. 'R' stands for Relational – the 'Who' people who perform at



their best when they feel validated and connected with others in completing their tasks. 'D' stands for Detail – the 'How' people who perform at their best when they understand the steps, processes and quality indicators associated with completing their tasks. When people are tired, stressed, and under pressure (typical day at school anyone?...) clashes most commonly (but not always) occur between the Concept and Detail type people who have opposing biases and between the Relational and Action type people who also have opposing biases.

The Golden Rule vs The Platinum Rule

The Golden Rule

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you...”

The Platinum Rule

“Do unto others as they would want it done unto them...”

When it comes to building strong relationships, many of us have been taught (and follow) the *Golden rule*: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. However, if we follow the Golden Rule to the letter in relation to communication preferences it is likely to only be effective if we share the same preference as the person we are communicating with (i.e., Yellow-Yellow, Blue-Blue, Red-Red, and Green-Green), and could very well lead to a communication disaster if we are communicating with someone who has a strong preference for a communication type that clashes with our own (as we'll see in the case studies below). So if we don't follow the Golden Rule what can take its place? Our advice is *The Platinum Rule*: “Do unto others as they would want it done to them”.

Teacher Student Relationships: Students' Flourishing at School

When it comes to 'Student's Flourishing', [we've previously discussed student wellbeing in the context of learning, particularly the important roles schools can play in boosting 'student self-efficacy' \(SSE\)](#). Interestingly of the four factors (Work Completion, Achievement, Help Seeking and Self-Motivation) that underpin SSE, Help Seeking and Self-Motivation are likely directly influenced by Teacher Student Relationships (As indicated in the table below). These two factors are also typically the lowest and yet are not typically dealt with in normal teaching and learning process, nor in student wellbeing programs. Therefore, it would be interesting to explore the relationship between Teacher Student Communications preferences, and Student Help Seeking and Self-Motivation.



	Completion	Achievement	Help Seeking	Motivation	SSE
Year 12	60.84	55.70	57.09	45.14	54.69
Year 11	63.81	59.43	56.67	42.22	55.53
Year 10	74.41	72.94	70.29	56.76	68.60
Year 9	72.32	60.87	57.11	50.26	60.14
Year 8	75.06	57.12	58.59	52.12	60.72
Year 7	83.57	74.05	75.95	71.90	76.37
TOTAL	71.67	63.35	62.62	53.07	62.68

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When Teacher-Student Communication Goes Wrong...

Case Study 1: Praise That Doesn't Hit The Mark...

Shannon looked unnerved as she recounted a recent interaction with a student...

"While I was in the middle of sharing my response to a difficult question one of my students had stayed behind after class to ask me, they suddenly said 'Ok, thank you for that – you've been incredibly helpful, and I very much appreciate you taking the time to talk with me!'

"They proceeded to close their laptop, grab their notes and folders and stood up, with a beaming smile, saying thank you once more before leaving the classroom. I was uneasy... I mean on one hand it was clear they felt good and clearly found the conversation useful... but on the other hand I felt like the best bits of the advice I was giving were missed as they wrapped up the conversation before, I had finished. Although they told me I was helpful, and they were grateful, I didn't find this quite as satisfying as I thought I would.... What I really wanted was to be able to finish what I was saying and then have them summarise and reflect – see and hear them actually grasp the benefits of what I was saying. If I'm honest, I wanted them to thank me for my 'insights' more than I simply wanted to be 'helpful' What's also concerning me is whether or not Cindy is actually listening and learning – I mean, now that I think about it, her response to me was quite superficial and I don't enjoy trying to explain things to students who don't listen properly"

Debrief: The Concept vs Relational Dilemma

Concept driven people want to be praised as 'insightful' while Relational people want to be praised as 'helpful'.

What really happened... Shannon, a concept driven teacher was in the middle of answering a complex question that Cindy one of her students had asked. When Cindy got the advice, she needed to solve the next step in her problem she enthusiastically thanked Shannon – accidentally cutting off the remaining bits of advice. Cindy, being highly relational followed the golden rule heaping on the ‘relationally’ driven praise she would like to receive herself which ultimately did not hit the mark for Shannon. Even worse, Cindy’s failure to summarise and reflect at the closure of the conversation (entirely reasonable and normal for her personality type) led Shannon to make negative judgements about Cindy’s character and capability....

Had Cindy followed the platinum rule she would have sized up Shannon as being more of a Concept driven person and the praise would have been more like “Wow that is so insightful and I can see the next steps of (specifically describe) much clearer now – thank you!”.

How many times has a scenario similar to the above happened? Potentially diminishing the goodwill between teachers and students. The issue of ineffective praise not only accidentally diminishes teacher perceptions of students but also students’ perceptions of teachers. Time and time again teachers follow the golden rule when praising students instead of following the platinum rule. The result is only the students of similar personality types feel warm and fuzzy about the praise – ultimately filling up their self-motivation tank to keep trying when the leaning becomes tough. The rest of the students dismiss the praise as hollow or false (they don’t really mean it.... They say it to everyone...) when sadly this is not the case at all....

Common Praise Interactions by Communication CARD Type (Colour)

Praise x Colour		How Praise is Heard by Receivers
Giver	Receiver	
Conceptual (Yellow)	Yellow	Very Positively
	Blue	Praise may be heard as unrelated to task, lacking depth, or too general in nature
	Green	
	Red	
Action (Blue)	Blue	Very Positively
	Yellow	Praise may be heard as insufficient, insincere, or too infrequent
	Green	
	Red	
Detailed (Green)	Green	Very Positively
	Yellow	Praise may be heard as overly detailed, paint by numbers, or lacking appreciation for any boarder context
	Blue	
	Red	
Relational (Red)	Red	Very Positively
	Yellow	Praise may be heard as over the top, avoidant of constructive improvement suggestions, or given too freely
	Blue	
	Green	

Case Study 2: Help Seeking That Fails to Inspire...

David was distraught...

"There's no way I'm going to put up my hand in class again! The other day we did a quick quiz, and the teacher asks for people to share their answers. As they did so he quickly yells out 'correct' or 'incorrect' to everyone and mine was wrong – I was so embarrassed in front of the whole class. He's always telling people to be more 'concise' with their answers and seems to want everybody to try to complete activities before stopping and asking questions. It just stresses me out always worrying that I'll get it wrong...."

Debrief: The Action vs Relational Dilemma

When being provided with feedback Relational Driven people don't want to feel singled out in a negative way, while Action oriented People want to provide concise feedback and move on to the next task.

What Really Happened...

This is pretty common - the teacher was trying to create an efficient classroom environment, treating people fairly (i.e., quizzing everyone), and encouraging responsibility for learning (giving immediate feedback following the task), but only in a way that would most appeal to students with an Action orientated personality type. David a Relationally oriented student felt 'put on the spot' and 'singled out' by the process (definitely not the teacher's intention). As a result, it is unlikely that David will reach out to this particular teacher for feedback in the future.

Had the teacher realized the mix of students' different communication preferences within the class and followed the platinum rule accordingly to adjust the process, things may have gone a little differently. The teacher could have scanned the room and quickly identified the Action Oriented students, called on them for answers, and then set them up with the next task. Then, the teacher could have checked in one on one with the relational oriented students like David, meeting them in their feedback comfort zone.

Although accidental, communication preference clashes around feedback similar to the above are all too common when teachers follow the golden rule instead of following the platinum rule. Again, the result is that only the students of similar personality types feel safe to ask for feedback – ultimately making them confident to request help when needed. The rest of the students hold back and continue to struggle in silence when they really don't need to.

Common Feedback Reactions By Communication Preference (Colour)

Feedback Dimension		How Feedback is Heard by Receivers
Giver	Receiver	
Conceptual (Yellow)	Yellow	Very Positively
	Blue	Feedback may be heard as high level, vague, or overly theoretical
	Green	
	Red	
Action (Blue)	Blue	Very Positively
	Yellow	Feedback may be heard as blunt, narrow focused, or overly critical
	Green	
	Red	
Detailed (Green)	Green	Very Positively
	Yellow	Feedback may be heard as nit-picking, overly technical, or overwhelming in depth
	Blue	
	Red	
Relational (Red)	Red	Very Positively
	Yellow	Feedback may be heard as sugar coated, overly positive, or Pollyanna
	Blue	
	Green	

Bringing it Together: Following The Platinum Rule

There is often wisdom in 'sage advice' but sometimes it can steer us in the wrong direction. As we've seen from our case studies if teachers only follow the 'Golden Rule' (*do unto others as you would have them do to you*) and don't account for the communication preferences of their students, they may inadvertently set up negative self-fulfilling prophecies, particularly around motivation, and help seeking behaviour. So, while the 'Golden Rule' sounds nice in theory, it is far better that teachers reach for the top shelf and follow the 'Platinum' rule (*do unto other as they would want it done unto them*) by matching the way they communicate to the preferences of their students. This is not as hard as it may seem once you have mastered the skills of CARD type communication preferences - the very same skills [that teams and leaders use to Leverage Diversity in High Performance Teams](#). (To increase your success further we've develop a quick reminder [tip sheet HERE](#)).

The ability of teachers and students to communicate effectively is crucial to setting positive expectations for learning. If every teacher in every classroom followed the Platinum Rule, we would create a positive self-fulfilling prophecy - ALL students would flourish because they would be hearing praise that was meaningful to them, and feel safe to ask for help when they needed it. They would believe that their own learning matters, that they have the ability to improve, and that their classroom teacher believed in them and was expecting them to succeed!

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