



A Little-Known Teaching Strategy That Makes Learning Easier

By Michael Linsin on April 28, 2018

I've spent many years observing teachers.

And there is an odd phenomenon I've noticed among a large percentage.

When teaching what they believe to be difficult content, almost without fail, they'll **pause** and let students know that it's difficult.

"Listen up, because what comes next can be hard to understand."

"This isn't easy to learn, so I need your full attention."

"You're going to have to really concentrate to get this."

They do this because they think that if they give a heads up, then their students will bear down and try harder to understand.

They'll better focus on the instruction and grasp the material.

But it isn't true.

In fact, highlighting difficult content does the opposite. When you tell students that something is hard, when you label it as hard, then it *becomes* hard.

It becomes exactly what you say it is.

The result is that a large portion of your class, perhaps even everyone to some degree, is going to struggle. And if you paint an entire topic or subject with a broad brush, then they may struggle for some time.

Sadly, students who are behind academically are the most affected. The second they hear you say that something is difficult, they check out. They think, “There’s no way I’m going to get this, so why bother?”

Furthermore, every time you place a seed of doubt in the minds of your students, you rattle their confidence. You cause them to question their ability to learn.

So what’s the solution?

Well, the most obvious solution is to simply stop doing it. Teach everything with the same detail, attention, and **enthusiasm** and refuse to question or doubt, even in your own mind, the ability of your students to understand it.

In this way, your words, tone, and body language will reflect your belief in them. Your students, in turn, will naturally assume that they can learn whatever it is you’re teaching.

They’ll assume that if they can understand one theory, problem, or concept, for example, then they can learn the next one and the one after that and the one after that.

Knowing that they can is half the battle.

But there is one more thing you can do that has a unique way of engendering strong academic confidence. It’s a strategy, or learning hack, that takes this idea a step further.

Just as calling something difficult makes it difficult, calling something doable makes it doable. In other words, if you pretend it’s easy, then it becomes easy.

“Check this out and you’ll get it, no problem.”

“You can do this, simple as can be.”

“Let me show you the easy way.”

Now, it's important to point out that the strategy only works if your **instruction is up to snuff**. It must be clear, detailed, in precise steps (if applicable), and focused like a laser on *one thing*. In other words, it must indeed be doable.

If it isn't, then you aren't ready to teach it.

One of the secrets to great teaching, and galloping progress, is to guide your students from one success to the next, all day every day. The confidence this brings about in students, and the learning and improvement that develops, can be truly transformational.

Our job as teachers, if we're to do it well, is to make what is complex, simple. Many teachers, and schools for that matter, mistake the mandate for more rigor to mean just the opposite.

More rigor doesn't mean struggling to understand our instruction. It means that we should continually push the envelope on what our students can do (i.e. more, faster, and higher quality work).

Several years ago, a teacher approached me and asked, "So what is this Linsin method? My students keep telling me that they want to learn math using your method. What are you doing differently?"

"Nothing," I answered. "I just tell them it's easy."

When you make your lessons clear and compelling, and communicate to your students that they really can do it, they'll be blown away by what they accomplish. Their families will be blown away.

Everyone will be blown away but you, who *knows* your students are able to learn anything if they only follow your good instruction.

And believe that they can.