



Chapter 1

Starting well: An opportunity for madness or serenity

Learning involves trying in a focused and strategic manner. It is not a spectator sport. Learning almost always involves challenge. Finding ways to make challenges worthwhile is the art of student engagement.

Our brains are such greedy users of our energy that most of us like to conserve effort. Unless there is something new or exciting with considerable survival value going on, we tend to wander off. States of unfocused reverie are great for calm, creative insights, but effective learners have to be active participants in the process.

This is why the role of a teacher in a brain-aware classroom is a little like the conductor or arranger of a piece of music that engages the audience. How to raise or lower the tempo, where and when to place the crescendo, and where to position the refrain, are all essential. This is using neuroscience to intersect with the art of teaching.

Introduction

A matador walks out to confront an enraged bull. The sun beats mercilessly down. The crowd yells support mixed with derision.

A netball player shifts her balance from one foot to the other. Delicately poised, she tenses her body to shoot for a vital goal. The jeering and cheering from the crowd are deafening.

A pilot flies over enemy territory, weaving and avoiding flak, and prepares for a dogfight.

A teacher wanders to the front of a class of rabid, feral kids. It's Friday afternoon, lunchtime has been wet and tense, there's a howling wind, and a full moon is rising.

Ha! There are days when teaching makes facing enemy gunfire, charging bulls, and the major league sports look like a walk in the park.

Successful teaching is about swashbuckling, feigning, acting, and swaying the crowd. It'd be enough to make your average pirate pale and run in the other direction.

Guerrilla Tactics for Teachers is about achieving more with less energy expenditure and much, much less stress. It is a compilation of ideas that I have researched, over years. It is the secret knowledge of survival in a business that loses many great teachers to other careers when they decide it is too hard and walk away.

This book is written in tough uncompromising language because having a sustainable career as a teacher requires tough clear-headed decision-making. At times it also requires ruthless prioritisation.