

I heard what you said: Jeffrey Boakye

At a time when UK education is shaped by ongoing pressures around curriculum, with new programmes of study and examination requirements in the pipeline, increasing curriculum alignment in some trusts, and fewer specialist teachers, schools are also being asked to respond to a broader and more complex set of expectations: improving inclusion, supporting pupil wellbeing, strengthening curriculum quality and coherence, and addressing persistent challenges around teacher workload and retention.

Within this context, teachers often find themselves navigating competing demands. On one hand, there is a drive for consistency, structure, and reliability across schools and departments. On the other, there is growing recognition that effective teaching relies on relationships, professional judgement, and responsiveness to pupils as individuals, rather than simply as data points or cohorts.

This discussion with Jeffrey Boakye draws on his experiences, and offers a grounded exploration of teaching as a relational and human practice. In reflecting on his career in education, Jeffrey explores the tension between system expectations and classroom reality, particularly the extent to which teachers are able to bring their full selves into their practice while working within increasingly standardised structures. The conversation presents teaching as a craft shaped by identity, experience, emotion, and interaction, raising important questions about how teachers build relationships with pupils over time, how they respond to resistance and difference in the classroom, and how lived experience influences the way curriculum is interpreted and enacted.

It also touches on wider system influences, including long-standing reform narratives that have helped shape an education system increasingly focused on accountability, standardisation, and measurable outcomes. Against this backdrop, it invites reflection on whether current structures fully support the kind of flexible, relational, and adaptive teaching that many educators see as central to effective learning.

The discussion encourages a more nuanced question: how can schools hold both high expectations and human responsiveness, structure and authenticity, in ways that genuinely serve pupils and teachers?

Reflection questions:

For teachers

- How do I build relationships with pupils that go beyond behaviour management to genuine trust and understanding?
- In what ways do I bring my own identity, interests, and experiences into my teaching – and how does this shape pupil engagement?

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films for teachers and leaders

- How do I respond to resistance or disengagement in the classroom, and what might this tell me about the relationships I am building?
- To what extent do I create opportunities for pupils to connect their own lives and perspectives to what we are learning?
- How confident do I feel adapting lessons in response to what is happening in the room, rather than strictly following a plan?

For subject leaders

- How do we balance consistency in curriculum delivery with flexibility for teachers to respond to their classes?
- Where does our curriculum create space for dialogue, relevance, and pupil voice?
- How do we support teachers to develop relational practice alongside subject expertise?
- In what ways does our subject reflect and connect to the diverse experiences of our pupils?
- How do we evaluate the impact of our curriculum beyond exam outcomes alone?

For senior leaders

- How do our systems support both high standards and professional trust in teachers?
- To what extent do our accountability processes encourage authentic teaching, rather than performative practice?
- How do we recognise and value the relational aspects of teaching within our school culture?
- Are we creating an environment where staff feel able to take risks, reflect, and grow?
- How well does our school enable both staff and pupils to bring their full identities into the space?

For early career teachers and mentors

- How do we support new teachers to understand teaching as relational work, not just performance?
- What opportunities are there to explore the emotional and social complexities of teaching?
- How do we build confidence in adapting teaching, rather than relying solely on plans and scripts?
- What messages do we give about what 'good teaching' looks like in practice?
- How do mentoring relationships model openness, reflection, and authenticity?

For all school staff

- How do I contribute to a culture where relationships are central to learning?
- What do I do to recognise and value the experiences pupils bring into school each day?
- In what ways might our routines limit opportunities for pupil voice or expression?
- How do we balance consistency with flexibility and humanity in our daily practice?
- What is one small change I could make to help a pupil feel more seen and understood?