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Overview

Green means . . . go!

RED VERSUS GREEN: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Imagine the scene. It's 8:00 a.m. and the beginning of a typical high-school history class. As usual, students are instructed to open their books to a certain page and get ready to take notes. After a few minutes, where the teacher struggles to keep discipline, most students have their books open at the proper place, and the teacher begins to talk about the Second World War. For an hour, a group of yawning, disinterested students wish they were somewhere else. The conscientious grudgingly take notes; others stare out of the window. When class ends, few—if any—of the students will recall much of the material from the lesson.

Welcome to "Red Light" teaching: the traditional, lecture-saturated educational approach that STOPS students from learning—an approach that dampens students' enthusiasm for education and makes some actually dread going to school. Sadly, in the majority of our schools, this is how learning is being presented to many young minds (Jensen, 2005).

This book contends it doesn't have to be this way and offers teachers an alternative approach, currently being pioneered all over the world, identified by this book as "Green Light" teaching. Green Light teachers are armed with a host of new strategies that re-START, empower, and ignite the learning process. In a Green Light classroom, students are excited about learning; cognition and recall improves dramatically; and teachers have far fewer discipline issues. In a Green Light school, students look forward to lessons; learning takes place in an atmosphere of laughter and excitement; and every class exceeds its testing targets.

Importantly, because Green Light teaching incorporates emotions, drama, art, and music, students who learn in a Green Light classroom don't just master lessons; they also discover and expand their creativity. In an age where employers want people who "can think intuitively, who are imaginative and innovative, who can communicate well" (Robinson, 2001), developing students' creativity may be just as important as teaching academic skills.

Is this just wishful thinking, a hopeful delusion? No—this is REAL! As this book proves, courageous teachers from all over the world are already using Green Light teaching—and getting astonishing results. They are proving every day, over and over, that *every* student can achieve outstanding results . . . if they are taught properly!

RED LIGHT TEACHERS

Here's a real life example of a Red Light teacher (who, for obvious reasons, will remain anonymous). This particular Red Light teacher has been teaching high school for more than two decades and would describe himself as a very good teacher. He knows his content; he has organized his lessons and prepared his worksheets. But his lesson plans incorporate only ONE

Figure 1.1 Red Light Teaching, Green Light Teaching

<i>Red Light Teaching</i>	<i>Green Light Teaching</i>
Traditional, one-way teaching strategies	Unconventional, interactive strategies
Students are expected to sit quietly and only listen to the teacher	Students are involved in the learning process
Learning occurs through listening, repeating, reading, and writing	Learning occurs through listening, repeating, reading, writing, moving, drawing, singing, social interaction, emotional engagement, creativity, novelty, pictures, and drama
Students are often bored, undisciplined, and unmotivated	Students are engaged, attentive, and self-motivated and take responsibility for their own learning
Lessons are tailored to and dictated by the subject matter	Lessons are tailored to the students and dictated by their interests and priorities

mode of instruction (lecturing), ONE cognition strategy (completing worksheets), and ONE assessment method (written tests).

He doesn't take into account the needs of the majority of kids in his classroom who find it hard to learn from just listening, reading, and writing. He gives no thought to visual or kinesthetic learners. He doesn't use music or novelty to engage reluctant learners and encode strong memories. He doesn't embed cognition through drama, drawing, or social interaction. He doesn't adapt his content to what is current, significant, or of interest to his students (Tate, 2002), and he doesn't teach them how to *remember* that content.

He believes that if he says it, they will know it. From his point of view, how well they do on the test is entirely up to them: they can choose either to learn the material or not. It has never occurred to him that many of his students don't know *how* to learn effectively. He thinks the bell curve tests results he gets each year reflect his students' inability to learn—not his inability to teach.

Red Light teachers like this often speak with the certainty of ignorance. They know it all, because they've been there, they've been around, and they've learned all they'll ever need to know about teaching. But these teachers are frequently using strategies that are 20, 30, or even 100 years old! Perhaps these strategies were once entirely appropriate teaching techniques; perhaps they weren't. Regardless, they are no longer fit for use in today's classrooms, with today's students (Willis, 2005).

Most teachers recognize the truth of this, at least subconsciously. Recently, this author witnessed a school attempting to initiate some faculty development. To improve understanding of a typical student's experience of school, teachers were asked to "shadow" students for an entire day. The teachers rebelled, saying they didn't want to "sit through all those 'boring' classes." WHAT? Shouldn't this be a sign that things must change? If teachers themselves think the classes are too boring to sit through, what must the students think?

GREEN LIGHT TEACHERS

By stark contrast, Green Light teachers realize that how *they* learned at school—sitting still and listening to the teacher—didn't really work for them and certainly isn't working with today's students. Instead, they adjust their strategies to match the fast, exciting, interactive world their students live in (Sousa, 2002).

Following the simple, yet revolutionary, belief that outstanding results are truly possible for *every* student, Green Light teachers choose from a range of dynamic new teaching strategies and consciously plan lessons

based on what engages their students and suits their learning styles. In this approach, seven year olds pick up French vocabulary in a drawing game; teenagers make up and perform rap songs to remember facts about ocean strata; kids turn their own hands into a map of Alaska; and nine year olds “jump” spelling words on a life-size alphabet grid.

Green Light teachers get astonishing results—and not just in terms of getting *every* kid to pass the test. They also turn reluctant learners into excited students who go home and enthuse to their amazed parents about the cool things they learned at school. They give shy, barely articulate English students the confidence to chatter with fluency in a second language. They allow high school students to rediscover the enthusiasm for learning they came into the world with (Schiefele, 1991).

Green Light teachers know that students only learn if they enjoy their education and are completely involved in it, so these teachers make learning fun and empower students to create their own learning strategies and succeed (Robinson, 2001). In fact, the overarching objective of every Green Light teacher is to give their students as many chances as possible, every day, in every way, to *realize and celebrate their own brilliance*.

In a Green Light classroom, *every* child can achieve outstanding results; students who fail in Red Light classrooms can discover the value and excitement of being a successful learner. For these students in particular, Green Light teaching is a beacon of hope. Showing them they can learn almost anything restores their sense of self-worth and gives them confidence in their ability to achieve. Little wonder Green Light teachers rarely have discipline issues.

GREEN LIGHT STRATEGIES: THE FOUNDATION

Before we examine the nine strategies presented in this book, a note of clarification is needed:

These are not the only ideas teachers could use to move away from Red Light teaching—there are many more.

The following strategies were simply chosen to give teachers a manageable foundation from which to begin designing and delivering lessons that align with the Green Light philosophy. They are as follows:

- **Memory** Pegs, association, body location, acrostics, and rhyming
- **Connections** Creating meaning; allowing students to own the material

- **Movement** Physically engaging students in the learning process
- **Novelty** Harnessing something *different* to capture students' attention
- **Tone** Music, chants, and teacher's tonal changes and pauses
- **Emotion** Using laughter and surprise to fire curiosity and excitement
- **Socialization** Student-to-student discussions, processing, and debriefs
- **Drama** Theatrics, storytelling, and students' acting the learning out
- **Visuals** Posters, mind maps, doodles, and drawing

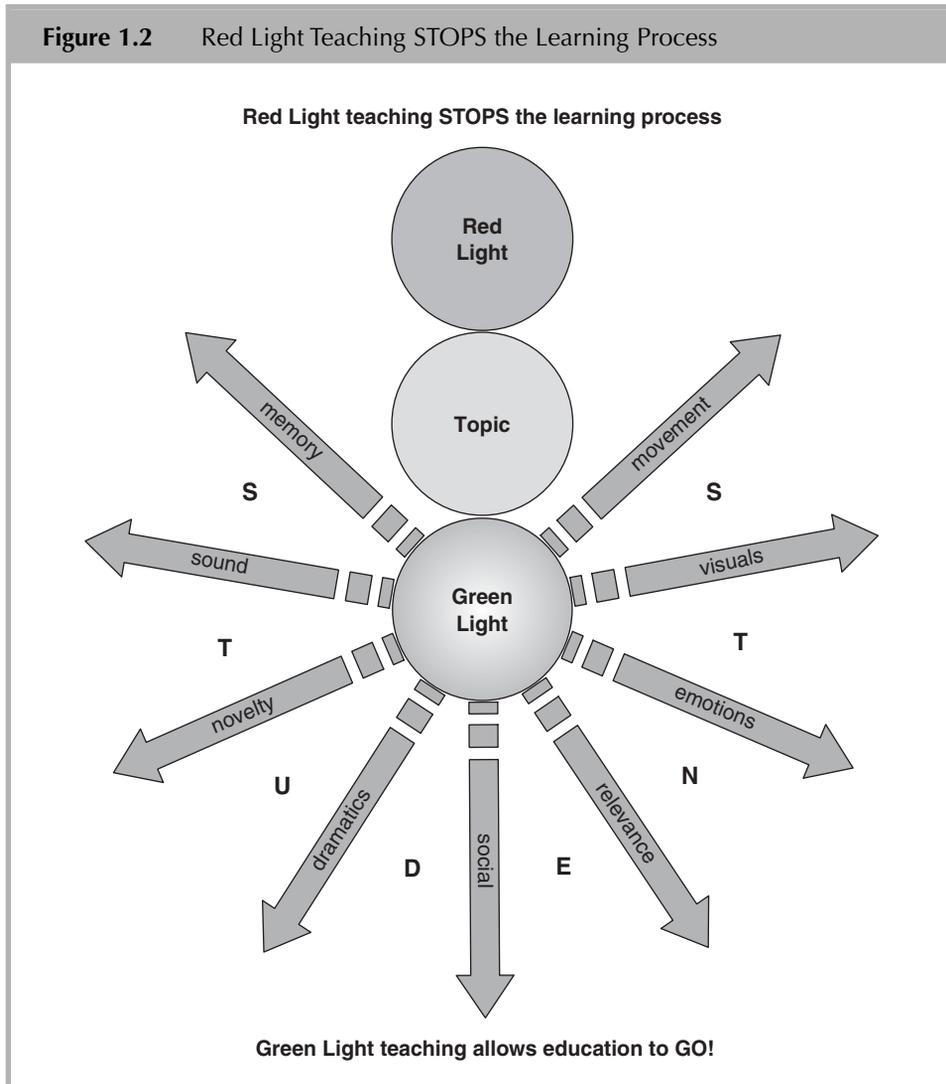
You may ask, "But where did these strategies come from? Did they come from academic research? Are they pulled from theoretical papers?" No. In fact, although they are backed up by educational and psychological research, they are based on *action-research* evidence. Over 200 Green Light teachers were originally consulted in writing this book. As they sent in sample lessons describing what they considered to be Green Light teaching, these nine strategies emerged consistently across every age range and discipline.

The point is: this is not just theory; this is real. The lessons that illustrate the following chapters are drawn from actual classroom experiences. Students throughout the world are benefiting from these techniques every day—just as, tomorrow, yours could too.

How to Use the Strategies

Like any type of teaching, the starting place for Green Light instruction is the topic. However, notice how, as shown by its position in the yellow circle of the stoplight diagram (see Figure 1.2 on page 6), we must approach our topic with caution. In this case, the caution is because, as we start to plan a lesson, we must consider two issues: not just the topic, but also our students. In Green Light teaching, we design every lesson so it best offers the *students* the chance of understanding and remembering it.

To achieve this, rather than remaining static in the Red Light circle with the same, repetitive strategies, we need to instead move down into the Green Light circle, where there are a multitude of possible strategies to engage students in the lesson. The rays bursting out of the Green Light circle remind us to ask ourselves: Could there be any chance for movement, for the use of music, for a specific memory strategy? Has a relevant connection been created, and if not, is it an important issue to address given the nature of this topic? The answers to questions like these will help us design more dynamic and effective lessons.



Here are some other important ideas to bear in mind when using the strategies:

Select With Care

Green Light teaching is *not* about using all the strategies in every lesson we present. Don't try to force them into your lesson plan. That said, it's very difficult to use only one of these concepts in isolation, because employing one seems to naturally open the door to another. So don't be surprised if you find yourself weaving many of the concepts together, like threads in an educational tapestry. It doesn't matter whether you use one thread or all of them. If your lesson works—if your students enjoy, recall, and apply it—then you chose correctly.

Every Learning Situation Is Different

For every lesson, Green Light teachers consider how best to get the material across to *this* group of students, on *this* day, at *this* time. A strategy that works in the morning might not fit in the afternoon. One that is effective on a Monday might not generate the same level of student interest on a Friday. Another that works with one group of students might not fit at all for another group. This doesn't necessarily mean that we have to throw away a previously successful lesson plan. It just means that we must be aware when students lose focus, and have a host of strategies in our repertoire to re-energize the group and find new ways for them to connect with the material.

It's Not Just Entertainment

A Red Light teacher recently stated, "I'm not here to entertain the students!" However, upon hearing those words, a Green Light teacher responded with an important distinction, saying, "True, I'm not here to entertain either. However, I am here to *engage*, and sometimes engagement requires entertainment." That wonderful line sums up much of the intention of these strategies. While students may indeed be much more *entertained* in a Green Light classroom, this is merely a positive side effect. If students are entertained and engaged, they will apply themselves more fully to the learning process. In other words, entertaining teaching results in higher levels of engagement—opening the door to higher levels of learning.

There Are No Absolutes

For all its benefits, Green Light teaching is not the single best way to teach all material. Lessons are never completely one or the other, simply green or red. There are usually opportunities to weave "shades of green" into many aspects of teaching. For example, there will certainly be times where lecture—by itself a Red Light approach—may in fact be the most efficient method of delivering a limited amount of content. In this situation, merely providing students a hint of green—perhaps by occasionally allowing them to talk with other students to process the information—may be enough. At the opposite end of the spectrum, it is also certainly true that not all lessons should be BRIGHT GREEN—meaning wild, radical, unique, and bizarre. Sometimes a simple twist in the lesson—a shading of green—may suffice.

Green Light Teaching Is Easier on Teachers

Red Light teachers often imagine that traditional instruction is easier than using Green Light strategies. However, this is an illusion. Since students are frequently bored, Red Light teachers often encounter higher levels of disciplinary issues. Moreover, because many students in a Red Light classroom

don't learn the necessary material, subject matter needs to be reviewed again and again. Perhaps most importantly, in teaching the same old way, year after year, Red Light teachers themselves can become bored or burnt out—some even dread coming to school themselves. Red Light teaching is definitely the lazy way to approach teaching, but in the long run it is not easy.

Green Light Teaching Works for Students of All Ages

Because some Green Light strategies, such as movement or music, are already used quite commonly by early primary teachers, it's easy to fall into the trap of imagining that these techniques are only appropriate for younger students. Not so! All of these strategies—appropriately adapted for the sophistication of the students—are relevant for learners of any age. In fact, it could be argued that, as older students lose their innate enthusiasm for learning and become cynical and disillusioned about education, they need Green Light strategies more than ever.

No One Wants to Be a Red Light Teacher!

Few teachers head eagerly for school in the anticipation that today will be the day they totally bore their students to death! Most teachers would much rather use strategies that ignite students' interest in the classroom. The problem is that many teachers aren't aware of Green Light techniques, and even those who are don't feel they have "permission" to use them, because they're not "mainstream." One of the objectives of this book is to address both of those issues. The more teachers who embrace Green Light teaching—who dare to be different and creative—the more other teachers will become aware there is an alternative, and the more acceptable Green Light teaching will become. So don't keep the strategies in this book to yourself. If you find something that works, share it with your colleagues. Don't just be a Green Light classroom; be a Green Light school!

Hope for the Future of Education

Red Light classrooms are frequently caricatured hilariously in movies such as *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* or *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. Yet, as audiences laugh at these over-the-top depictions of a boring classroom, there is often an undercurrent of discomfort in the laughter at the scenes of failed education. This is because many of us have been there and experienced the reality of those moments ourselves—and we know that little may have changed.

Why is it, as we "move past" school, that many adults choose to forget, or deem as inevitable, the learning experiences we did *not* enjoy? If they didn't work for us, why do we imagine that those archaic learning styles are appropriate for the dynamic, hyperspace-invading current generation?

Why, when there is overwhelming evidence that we are not reaching our students in the ways needed to help them become involved, contributing members of society, do we continue to do the same things we've always done, over and over and over?

As teachers, we should be laughing happily at those movies, safe in the knowledge that the education system they portray is no longer real. We should be able to say, "Thank goodness that's not the way things are in the classroom anymore!" But we can't, because that's exactly the way it is in the majority of classrooms.

Yet there is always hope. As Green Light teachers, we have the opportunity to change the way we teach the next generation. We can use Green Light strategies to create dynamic learning environments for both students *and* teachers. We can draw learners in with excitement and enthusiasm. We can make our schools places students can't wait to get to and are sad to leave behind.

And we don't even have to blaze the trail. The teachers whose lessons illustrate this book are already doing it—and in the process they are illuminating the lives of thousands of students. All we have to do is open our minds to the possibilities of Green Light teaching and dare to follow them. If we are to truly believe that *every* student can achieve outstanding results, then we need to actively seek out the strategies and techniques—both large and small—that can make this axiom the literal, everyday truth in every classroom.

**SUCCESSFUL TEACHING MEANS
AWAKENING EACH STUDENT'S
CREATIVITY, CURIOSITY
AND LOVE OF LEARNING**

