

Unlocking Potential



The Lesson My Dad Taught Me

How Students Are Like Doors

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My dad has spent decades working in local government, most of that time as a CEO. In the last few years, he's shifted into consulting, helping leaders and organisations rethink the way they work. Throughout his career, he's collected countless lessons about people, leadership, and influence — and every now and then, he's passed those lessons on to me.

One of the simplest has stayed with me the longest. He said, *"Doors don't all open the same way. Some push, some pull. Some slide, some need a key. If you keep forcing a door the wrong way, you'll never get through. But if you stop and notice how it's meant to open, suddenly it becomes effortless."*

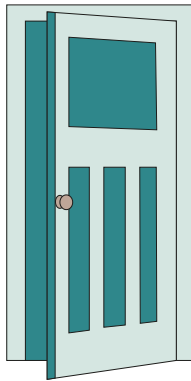
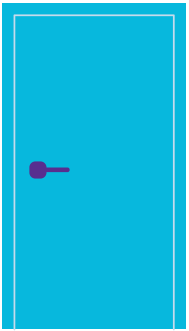
At the time, he was teaching me about leadership. His point was that people can't all be led the same way. What motivates one person might shut another down. What works for one team might frustrate another. Leadership, he explained, was about paying attention to how people "open."

Years later, I realised this lesson wasn't just about leadership. It was about teaching.

When the Analogy Came Back

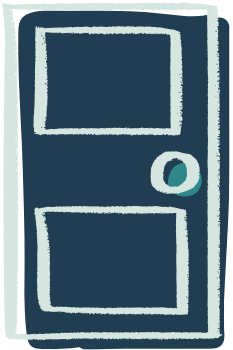
Standing in front of a classroom, I often found myself pushing on doors that were never meant to be pushed. A structured task that energised one student left another feeling paralysed. A big, enthusiastic pep talk would spark confidence in some and send others deeper into their shell.

That's when my dad's words came back to me. **Students are like doors.**



Some **push doors** thrive with clear structure and visible expectations.

Some **pull doors** need gentle encouragement, an invitation to step forward.



Some are **sliding doors**, quiet and understated, who slip into learning when given space and trust.

Some are **stuck doors**, held closed by fear, past experiences, or self-doubt. With patience, support, and the right kind of "oil," they, too, can be opened.

And some are **automatic doors** — they seem effortless, but only because the right environment and energy are already in place.

Trying to open all students the same way doesn't work. Just like a door, when you force it, you risk breaking it. **But when you pause, notice, and adjust, you find the way through — and what once felt impossible becomes almost effortless.**

Discovering Authentic Mixed Method Assessment

This realisation shifted not just my teaching, but the way I assessed students. For too long, assessment had felt like a single kind of key — one lock, one standard, one way of showing success. But if students are like doors, then why was I trying to unlock them all with the same tool?

That question led me to Authentic Mixed Method Assessment (AMMA). Instead of a one-size-fits-all exam or essay, I began designing assessments that offered multiple ways for students to demonstrate their learning.

AMMA

The specific indicators, evidence, and learning experiences that, together, provide a complete picture of performance used to inform the measurement of learning.

In **Drama**, one student might perform a monologue to show their understanding of character, while another submits a directorial vision with stage diagrams and annotations. Both are equally valid demonstrations of knowledge — just two different “doorways” into the same concept.

In **Visual Arts**, one student might create a resolved painting that communicates meaning, while another builds a digital collage or performance-based piece. The outcomes look different, but the depth of learning is the same.

For some, oral presentations became the key — a chance to articulate their thinking out loud rather than struggle to express it on paper. Others thrived with reflective journals, where their insights emerged in writing over time rather than in one high-pressure moment.

Just like doors, students needed different approaches. Some would only open when invited to show their creativity. Others thrived when structure and clarity were in place. By giving them choices — **by changing the way I tried to “open the door” — I discovered skills, passions, and understandings I might never have seen otherwise.**

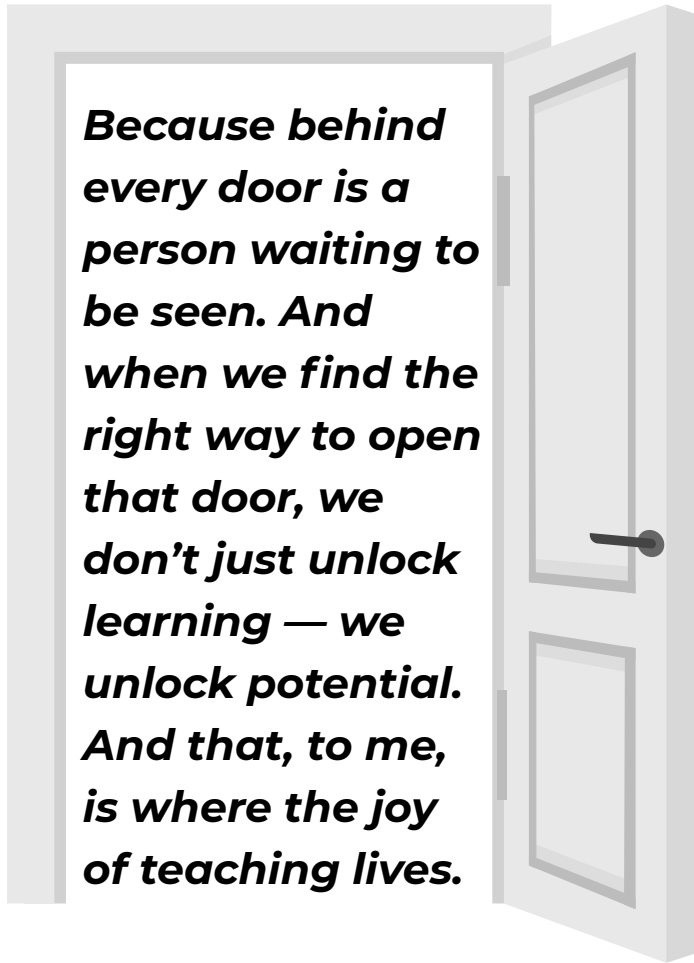
And the shift was powerful. What once felt like a battle — trying to “force the door” — began to feel almost effortless when I used the right approach.

Redefining Teaching

My dad was right about leadership — and I've come to see teaching in the same light. It isn't about having one method, one strategy, or one set of keys that fits everyone. It's about being attentive enough to notice how each student "opens" and flexible enough to adjust when your usual approach doesn't work.

Authentic Mixed Method Assessment gave me the keys. It reminded me that fairness isn't treating every student the same way — it's giving each of them the right way in.

But being a teacher isn't just about finding ways to open doors for students — it's also about making sure my own door is open. I've learned the importance of being accessible: having an "open door policy" that shows students they are welcome, valued, and safe to bring their ideas, struggles, and successes into the room. When my door is open, it signals trust. And trust is often the first step to unlocking potential.



Because behind every door is a person waiting to be seen. And when we find the right way to open that door, we don't just unlock learning — we unlock potential. And that, to me, is where the joy of teaching lives.



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