

# FIND YOUR KEFI!

*The power of positive energy in the classroom*

Imagine you are stepping off a ferry onto the jetty of an enchanting Greek island dotted with blue and white buildings and surrounded by a sparkling sea. A string of blue and white flags dance in the breeze to the sounds of bouzouki music. Your host greets you with an exuberant 'Kalimera' (good morning) and 'Yassou', a multi-purpose greeting that can mean 'hello', 'goodbye' or 'cheers'. You have feelings of joy and excitement, and experience a surge of energy in anticipation of exciting times ahead ... Greeks have a name for this feeling of joy—they call it 'kefi'. Kefi can be simply defined as a 'zest for life'—and I'm sure you'll agree that kefi is a great attribute for teachers.

The kefi we 'experienced' as we stepped off the ferry was created by a combination of the anticipation of the trip, the stimulating environment and the positive energy generated by the exuberance of our host. This combination put us in a positive frame of mind and helped create a sense of excitement.

So what can educators learn from our visit to a Greek islands? If you want to build a positive classrooms and schools you need to find your kefi! As the key motivational source for our students, we need to ensure that we have kefi when we greet our students in the morning and say goodbye in the afternoon. We also need to create kefi learning environments that build anticipation and generate excitement.

## THE POWER OF KEFI

### Emotional Contagion

A key aspect of the power of kefi is related to the phenomenon of emotional contagion. This refers to the fact that people are affected by the emotional energy of those with whom they come in contact. You will have come across people who 'light up the room' and, conversely, others who have a negative impact. Some believe that our body actually emits positive or negative vibrations that are sensed by others. If we are positive and joyful as teachers, our students are much more likely to be positive and joyful as well. *Find your kefi and create good vibrations!*

### Neural pathways

Another reason to find your kefi is that, as teachers, we are responsible for many of the neural pathways that trigger the thoughts and emotions of our students. A neural pathway is a thought pattern that instantly occurs through a certain stimulus. For example, the smell of cabbage for some people triggers a feeling of 'yuck'; for others, hearing a song that was played at a funeral creates feelings of sadness or melancholy; and for many kids the sound of a Mr Whippy® van triggers excitement and desire—and perhaps for their parents, 'Oh no, money and sugar'. Think about your actions during the day and the neural pathways you may be triggering, both good and bad. What negative triggers can you eliminate and what positive ones can you activate with kefi behaviour? *Find your kefi and trigger positive neural pathways!*

### The priming effect

In his book *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell discusses how we can manipulate mindsets through certain interventions. He presents research that involved two groups of people going for a job interview. One group were greeted by a surly, unhelpful host just prior to the interview and the other

**David Koutsoukis** takes us on a journey to the Greek islands to give us a simple formula for developing a classroom culture of positivity, enthusiasm and passion. OPA!



by a friendly and helpful one. You guessed it—the second group did way better in the interviews. Gladwell called this interaction with the host an example of 'priming'—one group had positive priming and the other negative.

As educators we can strategically 'prime' our students to have positive mindsets by how we look, what we do, what we say and how we say it—and also by the way we set up the classroom environment. I call this impact 'The priming effect'. How could you prime your students when you first meet them in the morning? *Find your kefi and have a positive priming effect!*

## HOW TO FIND YOUR KEFI

The following list will give you a range of ideas and strategies to help you find and keep your kefi. They are, of course, just ideas, and not all will suit. Pick out the ideas that resonate with you and stick with the ones that work. To find and keep your kefi, you need to identify your kefi catalysts (activities that trigger positive neural pathways in your brain). Once you know your kefi catalysts you can use them to fill your 'kefi cup' when you need to.



- Have a kefi ritual or affirmation; e.g. click your fingers and say, 'I've got kefi!'
- Pick an energising tune as your kefi song. Play it when you need to find your kefi.
- Wear a kefi wristband to remind you to find your kefi.
- Read your favourite kefi quotes.
- Get some kefi rays—sunshine increases your serotonin levels.
- Find a kefi colleague—someone at work you can have a laugh with.
- Do your kefi dance. The default kefi dance is (of course) 'Zorba the Greek'—don't forget to click your fingers!

And two points to note:

- Be enthusiastic, but stay calm—too much emotion (positive or negative) drains your kefi cup.
- Conserve your kefi—mental energy is a finite resource, so don't use it up too early (and have some left for when you go home to your family).

## HOW TO SNAP OUT OF IFEK (negative thinking)

I believe there are only two emotional states teachers should have; you either have your kefi or you need to find it! I call the emotional state of not having kefi 'IFEK' (get it?). People with IFEK are not nice to be around, so if you feel the dark clouds of negativity starting to appear, try some of these strategies:

- If possible, move away from whatever is having a negative impact.
- Improve your posture. Stand or sit up straight with your shoulders back.
- Change your facial expression. Smile—and if you find that difficult, clench a pen in your teeth sideways across your mouth, as this triggers the same endorphin release as smiling.
- Lower your voice and speak more slowly—ever wondered why DJs have low, slow voices? They have a hypnotic effect.
- Slow down your breathing and use deep breaths to get oxygen into your lungs (and thereby into your brain).
- Turn off frustration by going for a brisk walk or a run.
- Create an anchoring action that signifies a release of negative emotions; e.g. flick your hands and say, 'Let it go'.
- Tapping (EFT). Tap acupressure points to release tension. For more information visit <[www.eftdownunder.com](http://www.eftdownunder.com)>.
- Act 'as if'. Call on your best acting skills and 'act the part' of how you would like to feel. You may not win an Oscar, but you will eventually feel closer to the feeling you are acting.

- Shout OPA!—the Greek exclamation of joy—and clap your hands in the air like you are smashing plates (like a happy Greek!).

## HOW TO BE A KEFI CREATOR

As teachers, we need to be kefi creators, not kefi crushers. Once we have found our own kefi, we need to help others find theirs. When our students have kefi, they are better learners and much more fun to be around. There are hundreds of ways to create kefi in the classroom; here are just a few.

### Kefi music

Play music with a good beat and positive suggestions in the lyrics as students come into class; for example:

- 'I'm into something good' – Herman's Hermits
- 'Like it like that' – Guy Sebastian
- 'Good vibrations' – Beach Boys
- 'Beautiful Sunday' – Daniel Boone
- 'I gotta feeling' – Black Eyed Peas

### Kefi greetings

Demonstrate kefi with an exuberant greeting to start the day.

- 'Good moooooorning everyone!' (like *Good morning Vietnam*). Students repeat to teacher.
- Teacher asks 'How are we all this morning?' Students shout 'Faaaaaaantastic!'
- Teacher says 'I hope you have lovely day everyone'. Students repeat to teacher.
- Teacher asks 'Who lives in a pineapple under the sea?' Students shout 'SpongeBob SquarePants™!'
- Teacher asks 'Can we do this?' Students shout 'Yes we can!'

### Kefi proclamations

Use kefi proclamations to create positive frames. This is a subliminal technique called an embedded command.

- This is going to be a sensational day!
- Gotta feeling... that today's gonna be a good, good day!
- This lesson is going to be so much fun!
- This class is awesome!
- You guys are amazing!

### Kefi words

Use kefi words to praise students and describe activities. Notice the difference between 'That was good', and 'That was sensational/brilliant/fantastic/awesome/magic!'

These are just a few ideas to get you started. Why not start your own kefi collection of activities to create kefi in your classroom.

*And as we leave our enlightening Greek island...*

I hope this article encourages you to find your kefi. Remember the powerful impact you can have by being a kefi creator and the damage you can do by being a kefi crusher. Prime your students with kefi and you'll be 'picking up good vibrations' in your classroom.

And as we walk past the blue and white flags and step back onto the ferry, I'd like you to stretch your arms out wide like Zorba the Greek, and click your fingers as you say:

'I've got kefi!' (click)

Point two fingers forward and say 'You've got kefi!' (click)

Put your hands in the air and say 'We've all got kefi!' (click)

Shout 'OPA!' (clap twice)

*May your kefi be with you!*

David Koutsoukis is the author of numerous books and resources for educators including the *Behaviour management toolkit*, *Why you click with some people and others drive you crazy!* and the *Six kinds of best values education program*. He speaks at conferences, seminars and workshops throughout Australia and the Asia-Pacific region. For more information and free downloads to help you find your kefi, visit: <[www.findyourkefi.com](http://www.findyourkefi.com)>