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FROM THE EDITOR

“Welcome...”



Wandering around the Bett Show last month (see teachwire.net/edtech for our reporting from the event), I found myself marvelling some of the extraordinary edtech on display, while at the same time reflecting on how certain aspects of the tech industry and education profession seem to be intractably at odds with each other.

In tech, the name of the game is *disruption*. Being first to market with a seismic, paradigm-shifting product category that tilts the world on its axis, forces established industries to reinvent themselves and gets consumers salivating (while hopefully earning assorted entrepreneurs, investors and shareholders lots of money in the process).

Education is...not like that. At least not the kind that works well. The learning we do in our formative years must be consistent and skilfully managed. Teaching professionals are no strangers to disruption, of course – let’s see how well a Silicon Valley executive copes with a class of recalcitrant 13-year-olds – but it’s not exactly encouraged. Yes, the taught curriculum will need updating from time to time to reflect new forms of knowledge and awareness, but it’s a delicate process.

Changes in government policies and regulations can have a far-reaching impact on young people’s education – but we only get to find out what that impact really entails several years’ hence. Education is no place for a ‘move fast and break things’ philosophy. (Though neither, arguably, is a globe-spanning online communications and media platform, but I digress).

Lest these sentiments become *too* Eeyore-ish, I should clarify that some of the sights at Bett 2024 – manipulable 3D renders of human hearts popping out of laptop screens, science labs rendered entirely in virtual space, literacy interventions delivered by artificial intelligence – were genuinely remarkable. The possibilities and potential benefits for today’s learners and their children seem almost limitless.

The kicker is that we can’t understate the importance of those two words – *possibilities* and *potential*. The tech industry has worked hard over the past two decades to condition us all to the idea of what transformative change looks like. It’s whizzy. It’s revolutionary. It means things will never be the same again.

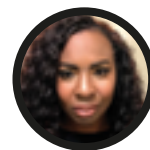
There may some agitating for similar levels of dynamism, reactivity and nimbleness from the teaching profession, but what experience should have taught us by now is that education is like an oil tanker. Big and important, yet fragile and very hard to manoeuvre.

There are certainly some short-term changes and reforms one could make (cough, more funding, cough), and teachers and leaders are nothing if not restless innovators when it comes to their classroom practice and whole school vision. But ultimately, the tech industry could probably benefit from being more like the education profession than the other way round.

Enjoy the issue,

Callum Fauser
callum.fauser@theteachco.com

On board this issue:



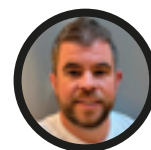
Nikki Cunningham-Smith is an assistant headteacher



David Voisin is a head of MFL



Aisling Stewart is a head of science



Andy Lewis is a director of RE



Hannah Day is a head of art, media and film



Rob Wraith is head of learning technology and digital learning at NCG

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 UK Government

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Exciting prizes to be won!

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If you want to see your science students realise their full potential, start organising regular meetings with your maths department, advises Daniel Harvey

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The stress-busting breath exercise that can help you prepare for that next difficult class; what every educator needs to know about the process of teaching EAL learners; and the teacher's guide to harnessing, developing and maintaining students' working memory

teach SECONDARY

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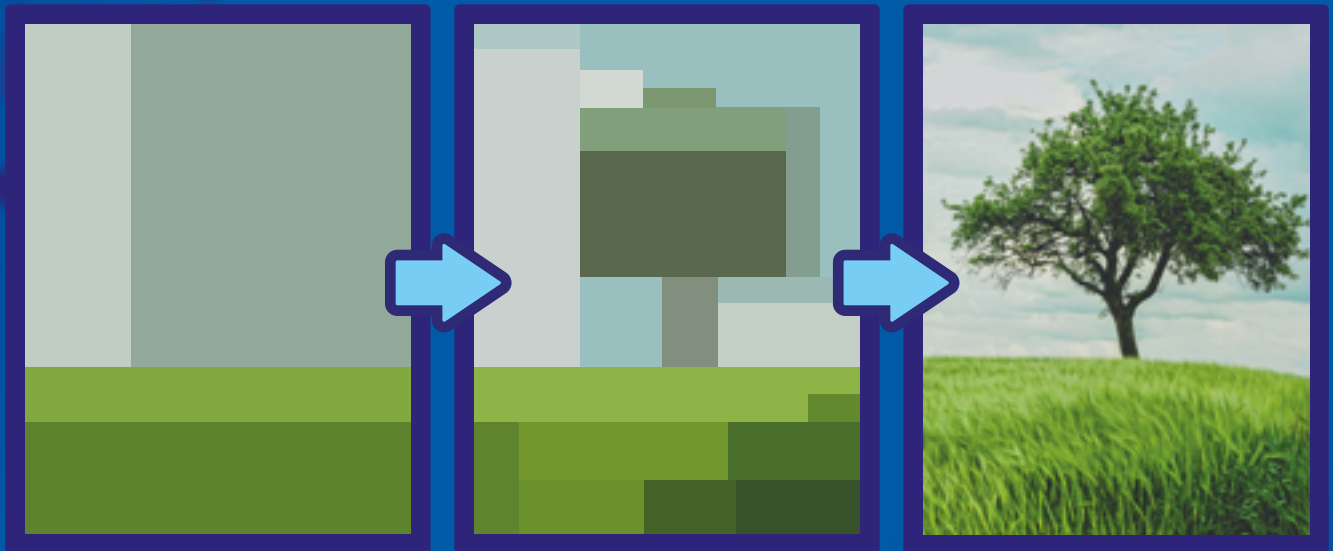
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The newsletter

Teach Secondary's digest of the latest goings-on in the profession...

The UNINFORMED teacher's guide to...

PALWORLD

Palworld is a game for PC and Xbox which, as the kids would have it, is 'blowing up right now'. The premise is that you're a 'collector' forced to make do on a rugged island, scavenging for items to survive – but you're not alone. With you in this inhospitable environment are a hundred different varieties of 'Pals' – small to medium sized creatures that can be taught to hunt, protect encampments and battle other Pals. One tames these Pals with the aid of 'Spheres' – and the more you play, the greater the compulsion to 'Catch 'em all'...

Yes, the Pokémon comparisons have been flying around this thing from the moment of its release in January, but it deviates from Nintendo's 'collect cute creatures and make them fight each other' formula in some important ways. For one thing, the Pals you collect can be armed – as in, given guns.

If the notion of 'Pikachu, but with a Magnum' isn't sufficiently alluring/off-putting, there's also some thinly-veiled satire (the island is additionally home to several organised gangs and Pal liberation activists) and a complex in-game economy, the implications of which soon start to get a bit icky if you think about it for any length of time...



DO SAY

"A cutesy factory farm sim, you say?"

Where do I sign up?"



DON'T SAY

"I can't see Ryan Reynolds doing the movie spin-off..."



BEAT THE BUDGET



What's on offer?

A lesson plan, tutor time activities, a themed assembly and assorted promotional materials to aid fundraising by schools in support of this year's Red Nose Day, organised by Comic Relief.

How might teachers use the resources?

The resources can be used as extensively or as sparingly as schools prefer. There are ideas



for fundraising and posters, as well as a free quiz and puzzle pack, plus as a full one-hour KS3 PSHE/English

lesson for those wanting to explore the background of Comic Relief's work in more depth.

Where is it available?

comicroelief.com/secondary

What are we talking about?

Red Nose Day 2024

Who is it for?

KS3

WHAT THEY SAID

"As a fellow headteacher, I was shocked and saddened by the death of Ruth Perry. As the new Chief Inspector, I am determined to do everything in my power to prevent such tragedies in the future. We accept the Coroner's findings and have responded to the recommendations of her report in full."

Sir Martyn Oliver, Ofsted HMCI, responding to the 'Prevention of Future Deaths' report issued by HM Coroner

Think of a number...

2,679

The number of permanent exclusions at state secondary schools over the 2022-23 autumn term – up from 1,847 the previous year

Source: DfE

28%

of parents agree with the notion that the pandemic has shown it's not essential for children to attend school every day

Source: 'The Missing Link' report on student absence by The Centre for Social Justice

18

The minimum age requirement for the government's recently announced New Teacher Degree Apprenticeship, which will see trainees posted in classrooms

Source: DfE

ONE FOR THE WALL

"To save man from the morass of propaganda, in my opinion, is one of the chief aims of education"

Martin Luther King Jr.



Action on absence

The government has announced a series of new measures aimed at tackling persistent absence among school students. These include increasing the number of attendance hubs – knowledge and information sharing centres run by schools with consistently high levels of attendance – from 14 to 32, and expanding its attendance mentor pilot programme with an investment of ‘up to’ £15 million over three years.

The attendance mentor pilot programme is currently being piloted in Middlesbrough, Doncaster, Knowsley, Salford, and Stoke on Trent, in partnership with Barnardo’s, providing one-to-one support to persistently absent pupils and their families. The extra investment will see trained attendance mentors assigned to a further 10 areas from September this year.

Commenting on the announcement, Children’s Commissioner Rachel De Souza said “I am hopeful that these measures will arm local authorities and schools with real-time information about school absence rates and provide vital support for children who face barriers to attending school.”

Leora Cruddas CBE, chief executive at the Confederation of School Trusts, meanwhile noted that “CST supports the government’s campaign to improve school attendance... However, this will not be enough to fix the crisis. The issues around school attendance are much more complex than perhaps they were prior to the pandemic, owing to a rise in mental ill health, a breakdown in support services, and the number of young people now living in poverty or destitution...What we certainly need is a cross-government strategy and a cross-government commitment to child poverty reduction, and we don’t yet have that.”

SAVE THE DATE

SPEECHES AND CORRESPONDENCE

Forget the media-friendly soundbites – what else was in those announcements and letters you missed?



THE SPEECH:

Gillian Keegan delivers keynote at Bett 2024

WHO? Gillian Keegan, Secretary of State for Education

WHERE? Bett 2024, ExCeL Centre, London

WHEN? 24th January 2024

We’re working closely with many countries to share best practice when it comes to bringing AI and education closer together.

One example is Estonia. They’re introducing a model whereby teachers set the strategy, students set their preferences and AI will do the planning and measuring to deliver a bespoke learning path for each student. The students get personalised feedback to improve their learning, and the teachers get diagnostics to help them understand how their pupils are performing and where they can improve.

Last month, I spoke with students at Claverham and Heathfield community colleges about how they’re using technology in the classroom and what AI might mean for their education. They talked to me about how to use tools like ChatGPT to help with their revision (and not just do their homework quickly). They spoke about the need to use the technology safely.

I left feeling reassured that our young people are willing to embrace the changes that AI will make to the classroom, but that they’re also aware of the challenges it might bring.

I also want to reassure those of you who think that AI, or any other technology, is somehow going to replace our brilliant teachers. It is not. No technology can replace them.

It’s about giving them the confidence they need to succeed.

THE RESPONSE:

ASCL comments on ChatGPT trials in schools

FROM? Rob Robson, ASCL’s lead on artificial intelligence

REGARDING? An announcement by The Education Endowment Foundation that it will be trialling the use of ChatGPT for lesson planning purposes

WHEN? 31st January 2024



“Artificial intelligence is being integrated into the lives of teachers, leaders and students, enhancing lesson planning and potentially extending its influence to assessments in the future – a development we welcome.

However, it is important to acknowledge that AI, while valuable, will not be the remedy for the current workload crisis faced by the teaching profession. At the core of this crisis lie profound challenges related to recruitment and retention, issues that no amount of AI can address.”

15-16 MARCH 2024 Education @ Dyslexia Show 2024 | 1 MAY 2024 The Schools & Academies Show | 13/27 JUNE 2024 Eastern/Northern Education Shows

15-16 MARCH 2024

Education @ Dyslexia Show 2024
NEC Birmingham
dyslexia.show/education

The Dyslexia Show is a major exhibition dedicated to dyslexia and neurodiversity aimed at individuals, employers, parents and educators. For the latter group, Education @ Dyslexia Show will feature an extensive line-up of CPD seminars led by expert speakers, along with plenty of opportunities for sharing SEND advice and best practice with school leaders and teachers from around the industry.

1 MAY 2024

The Schools & Academies Show
ExCeL London
schoolsandacademiesshow.co.uk

Over 180 education suppliers will be in attendance at this event for school leaders and MAT staff, showing off a plethora of products and services intended support educational planning and operations, alongside a series of presentations discussing the latest education trends and policy developments. Of course, there’ll also be CPD opportunities aplenty, via an extensive series of workshops and training sessions.

13/27 JUNE 2024

Eastern/Northern Education Shows
Newmarket Racecourse/Bolton Stadium Hotel
easterneducationshow.uk/
northerneducationshow.uk

June sees a pair of events taking place at either end of the country, both aimed at school leadership and senior administration staff. At the Eastern Education Show and Northern Education show, attendees will get to see talks from the likes of Adele Bates, Rav Wilding (Eastern), Michael Rosen and Dr Pooky Knightsmith (Northern), and take in a series of illuminating sessions on a range of topics.



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Get Into Film

**LITTLE MISS
SUNSHINE
(2006, 101
MINUTES, 15)**

**CURRICULUM
LINKS:**
Film studies,
psychology



Loveable 7-year-old Olive dreams of winning a beauty pageant – and within her dysfunctional family, her dream is the one bright spot. Her fellow family members, all of whom harbour dark secrets or major issues, duly pile into a broken-down van and drive across the USA to help Olive realise her goal.

While never being less than incredibly funny, this big-hearted film also manages to demonstrate that throughout even the darkest times and in the most troubled situations, the bond of family remains one of life's greatest gifts.

Discussion questions:

- What do you think the film has to say about winning and losing? How important is this to the overarching themes of the film?
- How would you describe the family dynamic in the film? What are some of the personality traits that each individual family member has?
- What aspects of neurodiversity do you think are explored in *Little Miss Sunshine*? What positives are born from some characters' neurodiversity?

Head online to intofilm.org to stream this film for free on Into Film+; for further film suggestions and resources to support your SEND, ASN and ALN provision, head to intofilm.org/theme/35



Retweets

Who's been saying what on Twitter this month?

Vic Goddard @vicgoddard

The lack of people wishing to train to be a teacher next year is soul destroying. 'Growing our own' has been the only way we've managed and with that disappearing what happens next? Schools offering a higher rate of pay than recommended with public money? Classes of 50?

Graham Chatterley @grahamchatterley2

If you are bragging about turning a school around, but your exclusion figures are sky high and you are sending parents elsewhere, you haven't turned anything around, you've taken a massive shortcut. If you cherry pick your students, of course results go up.

Follow us via @teachsecondary – and let us know what you're thinking

TEACHER TALES

True stories from the education chalkface

Find the creak

To help combat the boredom of exam invigilation, our team of invigilators created a game in which we took it in turns to attempt navigating our way through the hundred-plus exam desks, from one end of the hall to the other, while causing as few floorboards to creak as possible.

Participants in the game who were observing would carefully record the route taken, before it was time for the next person to embark on a new route, trying their best to avoid the creaks and groans of the hall's ancient wooden floor and thus earn themselves a lower 'creak' score.

Needless to say, as responsible education professionals, we made certain that this fun diversion didn't detract from our ability to

ensure the relevant exams were invigilated appropriately, as per expectations...

Route recalculation

Once, whilst leading a parental tour of the school, I marched into a woodwork room and witnessed a harassed, white-coated master running in circles around a workbench shouting, "Oi, come here, ginger!" I quickly closed the door before anyone had a chance to enter, remarking "Best not disturb – test going on..."

Have a memorable true school tale or anecdote of your own? Share the details, and find more amusing stories, at schoolhumour.co.uk

A FEW MINUTES OF DESIGN

#28 ONE OBJECT 100 WAYS

A Few Minutes of Design ONE OBJECT 100 WAYS



Draw as many uses as you can think of for the object shown below.

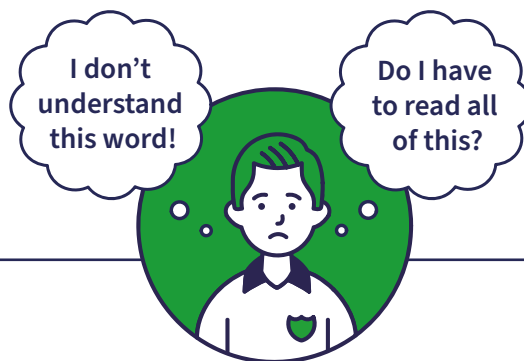
What qualities, or properties, does the object have? How else could these properties be used?

You can multiply the basic unit, add materials, cut the object, reshape it or otherwise modify it. You just need to make good use of the shape, size and properties of the material.

Concerned about fluency, stamina, and comprehension in **KS3/4**?

Dreambox Reading Plus is an adaptive online reading development programme designed to teach students to be proficient readers whilst saving teachers time.

Does this sound like some of your students?

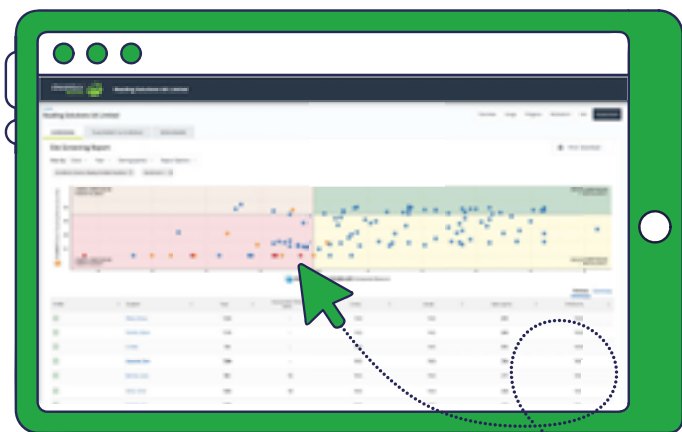


Y8 student Harry:

- Struggles with his reading stamina.
- Has poor vocabulary knowledge.
- Has difficulties comprehending complex texts.

Reading Plus helps students like Harry to access the KS3 curriculum by:

- Improving their reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
- Increasing motivation and reading for pleasure.
- Providing a vast range of informative, fiction, and non-fiction texts.
- Identifying learning gaps using in-built assessments and targeting them with bespoke interventions and high-quality resources.



"Reading Plus has helped students be better prepared for KS4. Thanks to the improvement in reading skills the programme has provided, the development of their skills will provide greater access to the KS4 curriculum."

Alison Jacobson,

Literacy Teacher, Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy

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a free pilot.



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WHY I LOVE...

Julia Holder, head of Apollo at Haybrook College, shares how their partnership with Academy21's online provision has been a recipe for success

ABOUT US:

Apollo at Haybrook College is an alternative provision that supports young people who have self-excluded for a variety of reasons



TALKING ABOUT: ACADEMY21'S ONLINE ALTERNATIVE PROVISION AND SUPPORT



“How do you work in partnership with Academy21 to support your students?”

We've worked with Academy21 for over 10 years. They deliver online alternative provision in our core subjects across KS3 and KS4, with all classes taught live online by qualified, subject specialist teachers. Academy21 is very flexible and accommodating in scheduling lessons within our timetable, and all their teachers have experience working with anxious and withdrawn young people like our pupils.

Apollo students join Academy21's lessons for GCSE English, maths, and science in the morning, then participate in music, sport, art, and vocational classes with us in the afternoon. It's this combination of academic study and confidence-building activities that we feel helps students to make strong progress, apply for colleges, and move into the wider world of work.

“The content of the lessons is excellent”

We quality assure the lessons and listen in, and what we've seen has been brilliant, so we're very pleased with it. All subjects are supplemented with a library of learning materials, including interactive activities for each student's learning pathway, tailored to each of our student's learning needs.

The great thing about Academy21 is that it can be used to support students studying at home, or within inclusion or



Contact:
web: [academy21.co.uk/alternative-provision](https://www.academy21.co.uk/alternative-provision)
email: contact@academy21.co.uk
phone: 0800 208 8210

specialist units on-site.

At Apollo, we've set up a dedicated quiet, nurturing space within the college to support anxious learners in rebuilding their confidence and working towards reintegration.

“What are the benefits of partnering with an online alternative provider?”

With the online alternative provision available from Academy21, we can access everything that we need. From the reports, we can see how much each young person has engaged, understood, and interacted. We have seen some very positive outcomes for our students; many have gained excellent results and moved on to further education, and then university.

We have worked with Academy21 for years now, so we are very happy with what they have developed. Ultimately, I think Academy21 represents good value for money, provides good teaching and produces great results.

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- Suitable for a range of uses including on-site, hybrid, short, and long-term

The case for powerful KNOWLEDGE

Toby Marshall ponders what the seemingly imminent change of leadership at Westminster might mean for the last remaining vestiges of Michael Gove's far-reaching education reforms...

Nothing is certain in politics. Yet, as I write these words, two things do seem relatively likely. One is that the next General Election will be held no later than 28th January 2025, because electoral law says so. The second is that after enduring many long years of Tory misrule, the British people finally seem to have had enough of their executive.

So where does that leave teachers? Should we welcome a now perhaps inevitable Labour Party victory? And is it fair to say that *everything* the Conservatives did to English state education was bad?

Vital asset

I've worked in schools occasionally, but for most of the past 20+ years I've taught A Level film studies in East London's further education colleges. I pick up on young peoples' education where local school teachers leave off.

I'm also a parent who has raised three children, all of whom have attended English state schools, and am pleased to say that they've benefited greatly from the patient work of their teachers. Most importantly, I'm a citizen who, like many others, sees state education as a vitally important national asset.

Schools are uniquely responsible for systematically engaging the young, in what the poet and critic Matthew Arnold once

described as '*The best that has been thought and said*'. No other institution performs this role, and at their best, state schools will regularly deliver on this duty.

The Gove revolution

Some years ago, the English academic Michael Young began to think through the role of the modern school. It might be argued that he gave some sociological heft to

justifying a radical, knowledge-oriented shift in school curriculum policy. Some advocates of this new policy direction went so far as to call this the 'Gove revolution'.

I remember the debates of the period well, and while I supported this 'knowledge turn' in education policy, I found Gove's style of argument often juvenile and counterproductive – especially when describing

then, and still agree now, with Gove's overarching arguments. His most significant achievement, in my view, was to lead the fifth full rewrite of the English National Curriculum, originally introduced back in 1988.

The latest version of the document makes clear that all students within English state-funded schools are entitled to access bodies of powerful academic knowledge, and that providing access to this knowledge should be the primary focus of teachers' work.

Following Gove's dismissal, English state education policy under the post-2015 Conservative government continued to be

“There's been a growing focus on moral and political issues, at expense of knowledge”

Arnold's position.

Young's best known work, the book *Bringing Knowledge Back In*, was published in 2009. It saw Young argue that schools did more than merely socialise the young, and ought to be seen as specialised epistemic institutions. The primary role of schools, he maintained, wasn't to directly serve the needs of either the economy or politics, but rather to provide the young with access to what he described as 'powerful knowledge'.

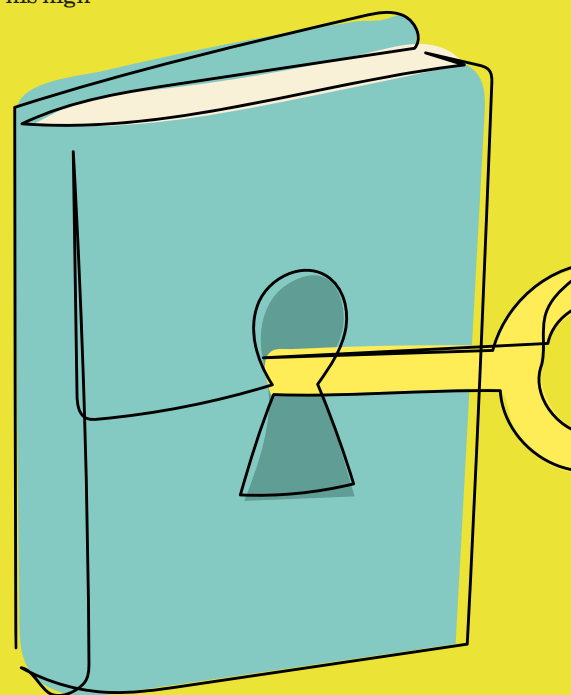
Soon after the book's publication, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats formed the 2010 coalition government, with Michael Gove appointed as Secretary of State for Education. For a time, Gove and his team drew on Young's ideas as a way of

those with whom he had educational disagreements as 'The Blob'. Such language wasn't becoming of his high office.

Curriculum concerns

Four years into Gove's tenure, all the major teaching unions passed motions of no confidence in him, prompting the then Prime Minister, David Cameron to move him on. A key lesson here is that you don't win arguments for change by insulting those who must deliver it.

Ultimately, however, I agreed



focused on knowledge for a while. 2019 saw the introduction of the new English Baccalaureate performance measure, encouraging pupils to study a range of traditional, knowledge-oriented, academic subjects up to 16, including English language, literature, maths, science and geography or history, as well as an ancient or a modern foreign language. All this seems educationally sound to me.

At the same time, a new Education Inspection Framework directed Ofsted inspectors to focus in particular on the curriculum, and on how well teachers' structuring and sequencing of curriculum subjects fostered the acquisition of knowledge.

I remember being inspected under this framework myself, and having a useful discussion with a lead inspector (and former English teacher) about how I'd decided to sequence knowledge within my film classes. It was a productive conversation that required me to justify my organisation of knowledge for students, to somebody sensitive to the

particularities of my subject.

Cultural implications

Sadly, however, in recent years we've seen England's education policy start to drift. Under successive Conservative governments there's been a growing focus on moral and political issues, at expense of knowledge. The most

notable curriculum change I can identify in this period has been the introduction of a new, mandatory curriculum subject called Relationships, Sex and Health Education – a 'subject' which, to me, appears devoid of any actual knowledge content, and instead resembles an exercise in state-sanctioned moral and political indoctrination.

Opinions of the earlier knowledge turn in English education policy remain divided. Progressivist critics argue that Gove's policy stance was old-fashioned, nostalgic, too focused on traditional subjects and attacked teachers' professionalism by dictating what they should teach.

Some traditionalists meanwhile view Gove's reforms as having failed to address the core problem – that state school teachers are implacably hostile to academic knowledge.

I'm not convinced by either criticism. It might be culturally (if not politically) conservative to suggest there are bodies of valuable knowledge from the past to which every generation should be entitled – yet the cultural implications of this position are, in fact, radical, as it's only through engagement with established knowledge that successive generations can innovate intellectually.

Nor do I see state school teachers as 'implacably hostile to knowledge', or comparable to an unthinking 'blob'. The young people that join my classes each year have generally been well educated by their former teachers and are hungry to learn new things. That suggests that at least *something* is working within the English state school system.

Counter-revolutionaries?

Yet as of now, in 2024, it appears many are once again

seeking to challenge the position of academic knowledge within compulsory state education.

A recent report from the (unelected) House of Lords' cross-party Education for 11-16 Year Olds Committee, for example, states that education "*Now prioritises a restricted programme of academic learning, delivered through a narrow set of subjects and teaching styles*". It also claims that it was told, "*repeatedly that this approach fails to take account of wider societal and economic shifts.*" (see bit.ly/ts131-N2)

If, as now seems very likely indeed, Labour is soon elected into office, it has made clear that it intends to counter Gove's revolution. The party's recently published its 'Let's Get Britain's Future Back' mission document (see bit.ly/ts132-TP1), which argues for a broadening of the school curriculum, the adoption of a more vocational focus and introducing content that "Reflects the issues and diversities of our society so that ... every child is represented."

I'd argue that the interests of every English child would be best met by providing them with access to powerful knowledge.

In this election, I therefore won't be voting Tory, as they've made a mess of my country. And I won't be voting Labour either, since in broad terms they're proposing more of the same.

I believe that both the Lords Committee and Labour are wrong to devalue academic education, though unlike Gove, I intend to voice my opposition to their mistaken ideas respectfully, in the forthcoming election.

Those who devalue traditional forms of academic knowledge within education are acting from a legitimate, yet mistaken educational perspective. With knowledge being once more pushed out

IN BRIEF

What's the issue?

The 'knowledge-oriented' curriculum reforms of the early 2010s have had demonstrable staying power, but a growing number of voices are now calling for what remains of those changes to be undone.

What's being said?

Progressivists argue that said reforms have diminished teacher autonomy and perpetuated old-fashioned ideas of what a 'good' education is, while many traditionalists continue to hold certain (misplaced) assumptions around teachers' militancy.

What's really happening?

Both sides fail to properly recognise the radical, genuinely transformative impact that tried and trusted knowledge handed down through successive generations can have on young people's learning.

The takeaway

If, as seems likely, a new Labour government is elected to power and scrubs away what remains of Gove's reforms, the case for a knowledge-rich curriculum will need to be fought for – because the political winds don't change the fundamental benefits it can bestow.

of our political discussions of education, its defenders will need to fight hard to bring it back in. The Tories are political toast, and quite right too – but the case for knowledge must be renewed.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Toby Marshall is an A Level film studies teacher



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Discoveries and DECEPTIONS

Harry Madgwick and **Kirstin Mulholland** highlight the pitfalls educators should be wary of when weighing up the worth of education research

Educators and leaders are increasingly turning to research evidence to help identify promising approaches and practices that have the potential to make a difference to pupils and communities.

However, we know from our experiences of working in schools and teacher professional development that while many products and resources are now badged as being developed based on ‘evidence’, finding the time to access, engage with and actively question said research evidence can be extremely difficult.

Leaders are liable to be bombarded with information regarding programmes and resources that make all manner of impressive claims



– often courtesy of companies and organisations with a vested interest in selling those very same products or services.

So, when faced with the vast quantities of evidence available, how do we know

which sources are trustworthy and relevant to the problems we are trying to solve?

The Education Endowment Foundation’s concise guide to using research evidence (see bit.ly/ts132-EEF1)

includes information on what research evidence is – and is not – as well as the advantages and potential limitations inherent to different types of research.

We hope the guide is able to help those involved in school improvement, and in the design and delivery of teacher development, to better reflect upon the role research evidence can play in educational outcomes and CPD activities. Above all, we hope it will prompt educators to consider what kind of evidence they’re using, as well as *why* they’re using it, and the ways in which it ought to be applied.

This way, we can harness the collective knowledge of what has worked in the past to make a meaningful difference to teaching and learning in future.

EDUCATION RESEARCH - A USER’S GUIDE



Build up a rich evidence picture

When looking at any area of research, it’s important to always consider multiple studies from a range of sources so that you can identify any common themes and trends. Try to avoid ‘cherry picking’ research that confirms your existing beliefs, and instead take a broader view of the evidence base. Drawing from systematic reviews and meta-analyses that combine multiple previously published studies can help with this. For an example, see the EEF’s guidance reports, evidence reviews and Teaching and Learning Toolkit (bit.ly/ts126-EEFTK).



Look for variation in findings

Remember that the devil really is in the detail. When engaging with research evidence, be watchful for any variations in findings across different studies and what the reasons behind those variations might be. For example, are there any groups of pupils for whom a given approach seems more, or indeed less successful? If so, why?



Focus on the ‘how’ – not just the ‘what’

Look carefully at how a specific approach has been implemented before

deciding on whether the elements that make that approach effective could be usefully applied to your context. The EEF’s Implementation guidance report provides some practical recommendations that may be useful when engaging with such questions (bit.ly/ts132-EEF2).



Maintain criticality

Be open to new ideas, while at same time adopting a critical approach to any claims you see being made. Look out for warning signs, such as claims which seem too good to be true, or vaguely referenced, non-cited mentions of ‘impact’.

The EEF concise guide contains a list of red flags to mindful of when it comes to the reliability of evidence, which can be remembered using the mnemonic CLAIMS: Conclusions, Limitations, Applicability, Independence, Methods and Sample size.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Harry Madgwick is the EEF’s research and policy manager; Kirstin Mulholland is its senior associate for school engagement and evidence use – for more information, visit educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk

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David Voisin is a head of MFL

DICTIONARY DEEP DIVE

Join **David Voisin** as he continues to take a rich, and sometimes surprising journey through the points at which literacy, language and vocabulary intersect...

PARDON MY FRENCH

Have you ever wondered where the shout for help, 'mayday', comes from? It's a phonological and anglicised version of the French 'venez m'aider' (come and help me). It immediately calls to mind the word 'aid', as in 'first aid' – an expression first coined by a British radio officer in London, most likely due to its phonological simplicity – hence its subsequent use and practicality in air combat situations.



LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

When discussing grammar, teachers will sometimes resort to simplistic language, such as 'describing words' or 'doing words'. Linguists will use the term 'modify', rather than 'describe' when explaining the nature and function of words, so that an adjective *modifies* a noun. It's often said that adverbs 'modify' a verb, which is sometimes true, but not the whole story. An adverb can also modify an adjective, or indeed another adverb. For example, 'The singer is **very** talented' – the adverb 'very' here modifying the adjective 'talented'.

Additionally, adverbs can modify a whole clause – as 'additionally' does in this very sentence. Watch out for words that can be adjectives or adverbs: 'This problem is **hard** (adjective). He worked **hard** (adverb) on the problem. He **hardly** (adverb) saw any issues.'

TEACHING TIP:

LANGUAGE MATTERS, BUT SO DO STORIES

In his 1922 book *English for the English*, the primary teacher and early school inspector George Sampson wrote that "Every teacher in English is a teacher of English".

He was making the point that it's incumbent upon us all to model rich language to our students – but from a certain perspective, we could derive from this the rather stern injunction that the *quality* and *variety* of language we teach is entirely predicated on our own verbal ability.

However, not all teachers feel particularly eloquent or expert in their use of language. This dictum thus surely runs the risk of leaving some feeling left out – or does it?

When it comes to vocabulary instruction, it's important to remember that it's not just *what* you teach that matters, but also *how* and *when* you teach it.

The American psychologist and education specialist Daniel T. Willingham has previously pointed out that stories are exceptionally powerful tools for improving memory – so it follows that being a talented raconteur may well prove to be a valuable skill when engaged in vocabulary instruction.

Teachers will typically approach this activity while thinking about the scripted instruction of Tier 2 or Tier 3 words, and pondering whether to make use of pre-planned resources, such as the Frayer model. And yet, the best and most memorable vocabulary lessons can often emerge naturally from impromptu class conversations and quirky anecdotes shared by personable and passionate teachers.

Steven Pinker once observed that "Language allows us to shape events in other people's heads". In a similar vein, stories can help us to engrave a better grasp of language into students' memories.

SAME ROOT, DIFFERENT WORDS



Exorbitant literally means 'eye (orbit) popping out'



An **exothermic** reaction will bring out heat



An **exoskeleton** is a skeleton located outside the body



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THE
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GALLERY

With the number of students persistently absent from school continuing to climb, we've seen a stark lack of effective responses and honest reflection on the part of policymakers



Melissa Benn

As we enter this election year, the government – backed by some influential media voices – is routinely asserting that its education reforms have been the stand-out success of the last 14 years.

Few on the ground appear to agree, however, with many pointing to a system in decline and disarray. Crumbling buildings, serious teacher shortages, an ongoing crisis in SEND, Ofsted under near-constant siege – and to that list we can now add worryingly high levels of pupil absenteeism.

Bridget Phillipson, the shadow Secretary of State for Education, recently highlighted this issue during a big policy speech, in which she described current levels of pupil absence as a 'disaster', and the numbers involved as, "Frankly, terrifying."

According to figures from late 2022, one in five children are persistently absent. In some schools, more than half of the children are missing a day every fortnight (see bit.ly/ts132-MB1). So what's going on?

Many have identified the pandemic as a principal cause – a period in which the established contract between families and schools broke down. Many more people now work from home, and some parents may still be allowing their children to stay at home, for a whole host of reasons, just as they did during COVID.

Education to alienation

Financial pressures surely also play a part in some cases, with families unable to afford uniforms or even food, leaving children ashamed to go into school. Undiagnosed and unsupported SEND is another major factor to have emerged.

But could there be yet another, perhaps even deeper

reason for the rocketing rates of pupil desertion from formal education? Maybe the changes brought in from 2010 onwards, which gave rise to a crammed, yet arid curriculum, constant testing and a catastrophic decline in arts subjects? Have we checked whether instead of educating an increasingly high percentage of young people, we've actually been alienating them?

Long before the pandemic, the organisation Square Peg (teamsquarepeg.org) was calling attention to the problem of school refusal, citing a widespread chronic lack of special needs support and a school curriculum unsuitable for many children.

Already anxious school refusers are often made even more anxious by threats from schools and LAs. Instead of being supported to manage the home-school transition, children are often told that they could be held responsible for their parents being fined or prosecuted. Rather than face legal action, some parents then feel compelled to give up work in order to home school their children, with devastating financial consequences.

Changing the language

Whatever the reasons behind school refusal, parental punishment isn't the answer. Instead, we

need greater sensitivity from the government to the many-layered impact of poverty.

We also need to see a shift in how politicians discuss education. Nearly all will seek refuge in stale rhetoric around 'driving up standards', not to mention those other old favourites: 'ambition' and 'aspiration.'

These terms are fine, as far as they go – but when did you last hear a Minister or MP talk about the central importance of 'engagement' or even 'enjoyment' in education, or the changes that may be needed to restore those qualities to the classroom experience?

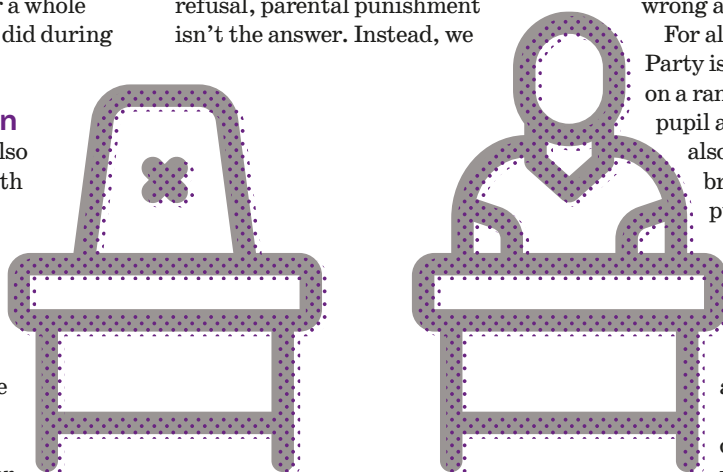
After nearly 15 years in power, the Conservatives aren't likely to now shift their vocabulary, nor honestly acknowledge their role in the many problems schools are now facing. The pandemic has become an easy alibi for everything, from the widening of the attainment gap to those growing levels of pupil absence.

Ears to the ground

Opposition parties are obliged to similarly employ that conventional, media-friendly vocabulary around standards and ambition, but they have their ears closer to the ground and a more accurate sense of what's going wrong and why.

For all its famed caution, the Labour Party is now calling out the government on a range of issues in education, and pupil absenteeism in particular. It's also starting to edge towards a broader vocabulary concerning the purpose and practice of contemporary schooling, with Bridget Phillipson lambasting the 'joylessness' of our current system as one significant cause for pupils' absence.

Complex as the absenteeism crisis clearly is, this is at least a welcome start.



Melissa Benn (@Melissa_Benn) is the author of *Life Lessons: The Case for a National Education Service*, and is a Visiting Professor at York St John university



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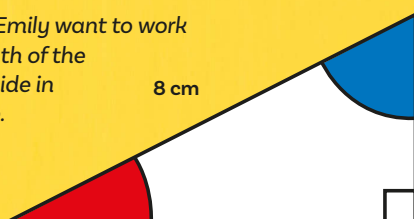
TRIGONOMETRY IN RIGHT-ANGLED TRIANGLES

Students often muddle up the different sides when doing trigonometry in right-angled triangles, says **Colin Foster**

In this lesson, students explore the relationships between the acute angles and the relevant sides in right-angled triangles

THE DIFFICULTY

Shaun and Emily want to work out the length of the **horizontal** side in this triangle.



What kind of triangle is it?

Right-angled.

Which side is the horizontal side?

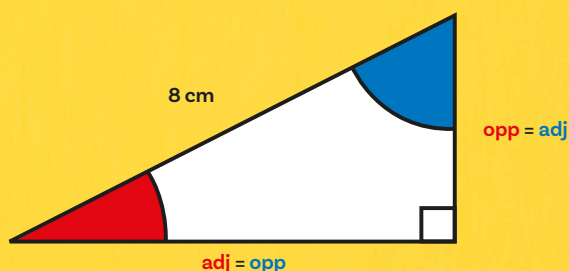
The one at the bottom.

Shaun says he needs to know the size of the **red** angle to work it out. Emily says she needs to know the size of the **blue** angle to work it out. Who is right?

In fact, either angle can be used, depending on whether they use **cosine** (red angle) or **sine** (blue angle).

THE SOLUTION

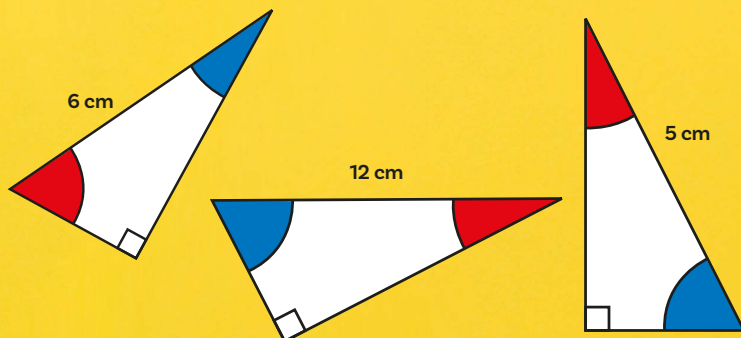
What are the coloured labels on this diagram showing?



These labels are showing that:

- the **horizontal** side is **adjacent** to the **red** angle and **opposite** to the **blue** angle.
- the **vertical** side is **adjacent** to the **blue** angle and **opposite** to the **red** angle.

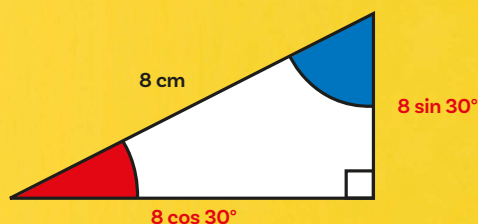
Write **adj** and **adj** and **opp** and **opp** on the sides of these triangles:



Estimate possible values for the sizes of the **red** and **blue** angles in Shaun and Emily's triangles.

Go with whatever sensible sizes are suggested (e.g. **red** = 30°, **blue** = 60°).

Here is what Shaun wrote, using the **red** angle:



What did Emily write, using the **blue** angle?

Emily wrote **8 sin 60°** on the horizontal side and **8 cos 60°** on the vertical side.

This helps students to see that, in general, $\sin(90^\circ - x) = \cos x$ and $\cos(90^\circ - x) = \sin x$, so there are always two ways to find each side.

Do the same thing for the three other triangles given above.

Checking for understanding

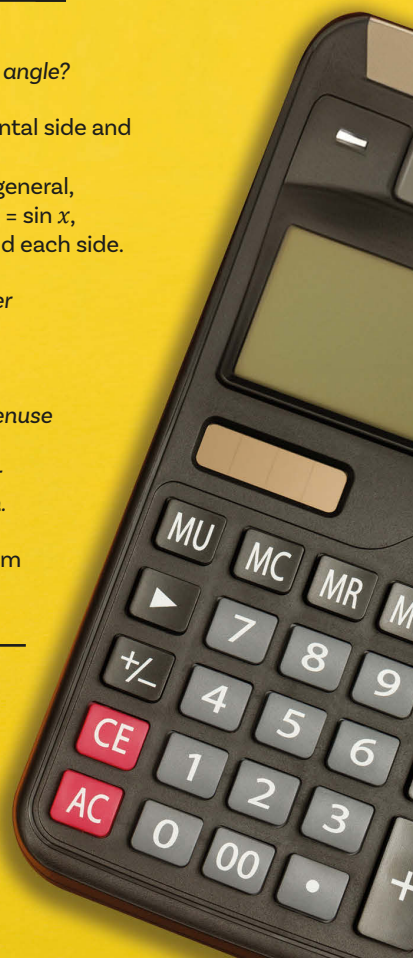
A right-angled triangle has a hypotenuse of 10 cm and one of its angles 35°.

Find the lengths of **both** of the other sides in **two different ways** for each.

The answers are 5.74 cm and 8.19 cm (correct to 2 decimal places).



Colin Foster (@colinfoster77) is a Reader in Mathematics Education in the Department of Mathematics Education at Loughborough University. He has written many books and articles for mathematics teachers. foster77.co.uk, blog.foster77.co.uk



Observing WITHOUT SEEING

Matt Tiplin unpacks why the traditional lesson observation model has serious issues, and why a new approach is urgently needed...

As a former MAT senior leader and geography teacher, I've carried out dozens of lesson observations and been the subject of dozens more. I know what a stressful experience it can be, whichever side of the clipboard you're on.

Over time, I've learnt that it isn't possible to assess teaching quality within an isolated period of 10, 20 or 40 minutes. Nor is it possible to reduce the magical mysteries of teaching to a series of ticks on a checklist.

I've further learnt that the most effective lesson observations are those that recognise how complex and nuanced teaching can be, and which place more value on the experiences of our teachers. That said, there is still some road left to travel if we want lesson observations to become genuine training opportunities, rather than simply something to be ticked off a list.

One-offs don't work

The cartoonist George Evans once observed that, *"Every student can learn – just not on the same day, or in the same way,"* and he was right. Children can and do learn in different ways and at different rates, thus ensuring that their learning won't always follow a predictable path, but will rather fluctuate.

They might advance through periods of rapid understanding, or experience

a series of setbacks that affect their behaviour and confidence. But if pupil progress isn't linear, how can it be right to then assess the impact a teacher is having on their learning in only one day or period?

In my experience, traditional lesson observations don't accurately

capture what happens in classrooms daily. And yet, they will typically be founded on the assumption that just because one lesson has gone well – or not gone well – the outcome for all the other lessons and other sets of pupils will be the same.

How pupils respond to a lesson can also be influenced by a range of factors that aren't always in the gift of the teacher to control. What if, for instance, several pupils don't have enough money for lunch, before attending an observed PE lesson in the afternoon? The pupils may well exhibit drops in concentration and energy that will be beyond the teacher's control, however engaging the lesson might otherwise be. Observe the same lesson on a Monday morning first period, and it will likely be a different story.

In my experience, judgements of teaching practice based on a specific moment in time, without any deeper knowledge of the class, can release the hounds in the wrong direction. A more effective approach is to instead encourage *self-reflection*, where teachers can decide on areas for development themselves.

These areas could be identified by, for example,

videoing and reviewing their own lessons using camera technology – something I've advocated for some time among the schools I work with.

A shared focus

What's the point of a lesson observation? I ask that not to be facetious, but because as a busy senior leader juggling multiple tasks, there were times when I genuinely lost sight of the reason. Having to multitask when time was short sometimes meant that lesson observations could inadvertently morph into opportunities to work through my own endless to-do list.

As a result, there would be occasions when my goals and motivations for the lesson observation didn't directly align with the teacher's. This

made it difficult to provide meaningful feedback, thus unintentionally leaving valued colleagues feeling short-changed in terms of their CPD.

That's why it's essential to have a conversation before the observation and agree on what it is you're coming to observe. One or two objectives is the perfect balance – any more, and confusion will quickly set in. Once the objectives have been agreed on, focus only on them and *nothing else*.

This can be tricky if, for example, you witness poor pupil behaviour – but if you've already agreed that you'll only be observing how, say, the lesson is constructed, that's what you must stick to. Failing to do so risks an erosion of trust.

Reduced autonomy

Adopting a top-down approach to lesson observations reduces teachers' autonomy in



deciding which areas to focus on for their professional development, based on their prior experience and knowledge of both their subject and the class in question.

I've found that time is better spent enabling colleagues to focus on the areas they know from experience will deliver better pupil outcomes, rather than forcing changes in their focus to better reflect what SLT has decided should be the priority.

Take whole school literacy for example – does it make sense to apply that focus in PE, art or music observations, when said subjects involve markedly less writing and reading?

Let's take PE. In the best-case scenario, the teacher will interpret the objective as 'developing students' knowledge of subject-specific terminology'. This could be evidenced in a game of football, as students call to one another to support

positioning and understand strategic play.

The observer will then 'hook' onto this 'evidence' of school-wide literacy throughout their subject-specific observation, thus showing how pupils can articulate what they have learnt in the subject.

The problem is that in this scenario *no-one* benefits,

only reinforcing the view that lesson observations are a fruitless exercise in time wasting.

Opinion and perspective

It's admittedly hard to not observe lessons through the lens of your own experience. As a geography teacher, I decided to teach my students using a video-based lesson during an Ofsted inspection,

prompting some consternation from my headteacher at the time.

However, to ensure I achieved the desired outcome I created a set of worksheets for the students to work from, with some low, medium, and high order questions, so that they could think through and use these to interrogate the video,

rather than passively watch it. I subsequently received some great feedback from the inspector.

Henceforth, this approach informed my opinion of what an effective, enquiry-based lesson should look like, and continued to influence my judgements when I later observed lessons myself as a senior leader.

Now apply this thinking to a non-humanities subject like maths, where outcomes are typically more black and white. If the maths teacher's approach didn't reflect what I thought constituted a good Q&A style, did that mean they were wrong and needed further development? It took me a while to unpack this question as a member of SLT, approaching it as I was from the perspective of having previously geography, where there's always something new to uncover.

This experience taught me that *how* we observe is informed by our own experiences and opinions – in ways that can generate well-meaning, but fundamentally inaccurate lesson observation narratives.

Press reset

Despite lesson observations often forming part of the fabric of school life, they don't always achieve their intended purpose – which is

IMPROVE YOUR OBSERVATIONS

- ▶ Shorter, more frequent observations will provide better insights into your school's teaching and learning than one-off termly events
- ▶ Beware of hooking onto false proxies for progress; a student may read a passage fluently, but is this a true indicator of their understanding of key concepts?
- ▶ Easily identified criteria, such as group work or teacher-led questions, might tick a few boxes, but they rarely provide much insight into pupils' learning or the quality of teaching
- ▶ Don't try to shoehorn in evidence of school-wide priorities into your lesson observations; this risks making teachers jump through hoops to meet said priorities, rather than focusing on what works best for their pupils

to support teachers' professional development and ensure that pupils receive the best possible learning experience.

From my own experience I've found that removing the barrier of hierarchy and fostering a culture of self-reflection, where teachers can take ownership over their own development, is a much more effective way of supporting staff and maximising outcomes for students.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Tiplin is a former senior school leader and Ofsted inspector, and currently chair of governors at a community primary school and the vice president of ONVU Learning



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In the wake of Ruth Perry's death, Ofsted has publicly declared its intention to carry out school inspections differently – yet it seems far from clear whether the regulator has actually learned the right lessons...

Natasha Devon



At the start of January 2024, it was announced that Ofsted would be suspending its inspections (although not in early years settings, for reasons unclear), pending completion of mental health training for its inspectors.

This move followed the high profile and tragic death last year of Ruth Perry – a headteacher whose suicide was deemed by senior coroner Heidi Connor to be at least in part the result of a negative Ofsted ruling her primary school had received.

Systemic issues

Inspectors attended a half day online mental health seminar later that month, which included awareness training provided by Mental Health First Aid England. Inspections then resumed before the month was out, alongside what was – rather condescendingly – dubbed the 'Big Listen', whereby Ofsted sought feedback from educators and parents on how it could improve.

Look, I'm all for more people receiving mental health first aid training. Indeed, I'm the co-founder of a campaign called Where's Your Head At (wheresyourheadat.org), which calls for parity between mental health and physical first aid provision within all workplaces. Where correctly applied, I have no doubt that the skills delegates learn on such courses have the power to save lives.

And yet, I can't help but feel that there's been more than a hint of gimmickry surrounding this exercise, coinciding as it did with the arrival of new HMCI, Sir Martyn Oliver. And it's not just me – NEU general secretary Daniel Kebede told *The Guardian*, "Ofsted is prioritising fanfare for the new chief inspector over the wellbeing of school staff."

It's all infuriatingly symptomatic of

the 'firefight the symptom, rather than address the cause' strategy I've often observed when organisations attempt to tackle mental health concerns.

In her report, Heidi Connor noted that Ofsted's role in Perry's death couldn't be attributed to the actions of any one individual inspector – which would suggest that the issues involved were systemic, rather than interpersonal. The real problem is the way in which Ofsted operates. No amount of training inspectors in spotting symptoms of mental ill health among staff during visits (however sensible this is, generally) will manage to address that.

Punitive ineffectuality

To anyone working in education, this will come as no surprise. Since Michael Gove's sweeping reforms starting in 2010, Ofsted has become ever more punitive, yet less effective in fulfilling the role for which it was ostensibly created – namely holding schools to account in a transparent way. Instead, it's helped contribute to a worsening of

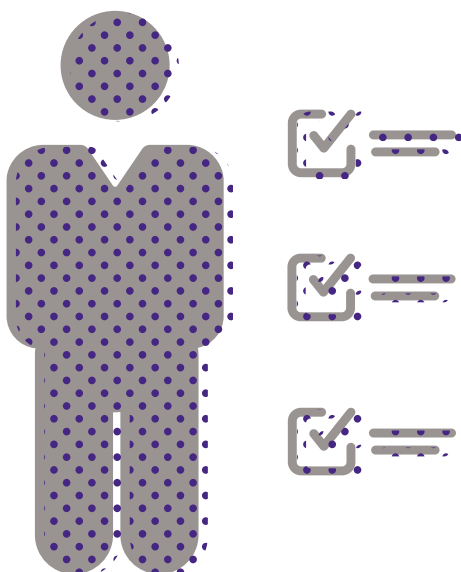
staff morale and wellbeing across the teaching profession.

Whilst researching this column, I invited school staff to contact me anonymously if Ofsted had ever negatively impacted their mental health. I was inundated with responses. Staff consistently cited the same concerns, namely:

- The length of time leading up to possible inspections, causing them to hang over schools like a dark cloud, sometimes for up to months on end
- SLTs making unreasonable demands in the run-up to inspections, amid insinuations that 'Ofsted will be looking for this'
- No one knowing if such demands are legitimate, given the inspection framework's lack of consistency. The same actions earning praise in one school can be overlooked or even criticised in another.
- A persistent sense that that inspectors are there to 'catch teachers out', rather than help them improve.
- A teacher's entire job being summed up in a one-word grading, with all the high stakes that accompany that (Ruth Perry was reportedly worried about the impact of her school's Ofsted rating on house prices in the local area).

One school governor additionally told me that inspectors had failed to take into account the extra pressures schools faced as a result of the near total decimation of external social and health services in some local areas, as well as COVID.

In light of all this, as former Ofsted Inspector Julie Price-Grimshaw told me on my LBC show, "Having a smiling assassin isn't going to make a difference."



THE **WOW** FACTOR

Step into the fascinating world of STEM careers at *Technicians: The David Sainsbury Gallery* at the Science Museum, London



Recreating the workplaces of technicians across multiple sectors – health science, creative arts, manufacturing and renewable energy – your class will get hands-on with interactive exhibits that simulate technical, job-related tasks. The Science Museum has collaborated with Marvel Studios, the NHS, the National Grid and others to create this unique careers gallery. Your pupils will experience what it's like to create visual effects on a blockbuster film set, analyse blood samples in a medical laboratory, fix a fault on a wind turbine and much more.

**SCIENCE
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info@sciencemuseumgroup.ac.uk

www.sciencemuseum.org.uk



TECHNICIANS' GALLERY

At the *Technicians* gallery, your class will learn how technicians work behind the scenes to save lives, make energy greener, provide entertainment, create everyday items we couldn't live without and much more. They'll have the chance to operate a robotic arm, solve technical problems on top of a wind turbine and assist with the creation of lifesaving medicine.

MEET AN EMPLOYEE

KS3 and KS4 groups can also book places on a free hands-on workshop. These are held in the *Technicians* gallery, and will give pupils the chance to meet real-life technicians and ask them lots of questions. The workshop will help your pupils to see how they can use their existing skills to become problem solvers and make a difference.

CAREERS TRAILS

To support your visit, the Science Museum has created a fun, careers-themed activity trail that will help lead your pupils around the museum. Pupils will get to explore '*Medicine: The Wellcome Galleries*' and '*Mathematics: The Winton Gallery*' – where they will be able to learn how real-life technicians have helped to design and build the world around us.

GATSBY BENCHMARKS

A visit to the gallery will support productive careers conversations with young people by offering an informal, yet educational encounter with a huge range of technical career pathways. A visit could also support efforts at meeting Gatsby's Good Career Guidance benchmarks, by providing students with opportunities to experience workplace environments.

THE TS GUIDE TO... CAREERS

As school leavers prepare to enter a highly volatile and competitive jobs market, how are educators faring in making sure they're adequately prepared?

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IN FIGURES: WHAT ARE STUDENTS' AMBITIONS WHEN THEY LEAVE SCHOOL?

68%

of young people say that they plan on studying at university.

6%

are currently engaged in an apprenticeship scheme

60%

of young people say they changed their career plans as a result of the pandemic

Source: 'Post-18 opportunities and aspirations' briefing by the COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities (COSMO) study involving 11,523 young people

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bit.ly/132special1

LET'S EMPOWER STUDENTS

Samantha Stanley and Lindsey Geraghty explain how cohorts can be encouraged to be more ambitious in their career choices

bit.ly/132special2

EVERGREEN EXPERTISE

Forget the 'jobs that don't yet exist' and concentrate on teaching the soft skills employers will always want, advises Jordi Alborch

bit.ly/132special3

Choose your DESTINATION

Students will usually be supported in taking the first steps along their preferred career path – but what can schools do to help them decide on what their career ambitions actually are?

We recently had the privilege of discussing careers and future work trends with 300 high schoolers in Vienna. Despite them having spent most of their lives in an idyllic suburb of the city, the audience was surprisingly well-informed about world events. Indeed, they demonstrated great passion around issues such as climate, justice, equality, and fairness.

At the same time, however, they were naïve about the world of business, anxious regarding their prospects for a good career and worried about meeting lofty expectations.

Understand your starting point.

We began our advice by presenting some context. One of the most important ingredients for a successful career is to think through how current trends concerning economic, political and social change are likely to influence the future of work, so we set out the following four key observations:

1. The speed of life and pace of change are accelerating

Some time ago, we attended a conference hosted by BP for some of its most senior leaders. After stepping on stage, the event's keynote speaker slowly scanned the room before calmly remarking, *'Note this moment – this will be slowest day of the rest of your life.'*

We live in an increasingly digital world characterised

by an ever-accelerating pace of change, but rather than fighting it we should embrace it. Workplace processes are no longer linear, but now encompass 'everything, everywhere, all at once.' Negative judgements around the pervasiveness of multitasking and the 'invasive' nature of social media are wide of the mark. Generation Z has intuitively figured this out for themselves – much to the disapproval of their parents.

2. Sources of learning are now much more diverse

It's the most amazing experience to talk to a waiter in a remote peninsula of Colombia about Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, but that's how the world operates these days. Some people might not have fresh water or individual showers, but they do have smartphones that enable access to the cumulative wisdom of all

humanity. Education has been democratised. This single reality will change the world.

3. New careers and income opportunities are emerging all the time

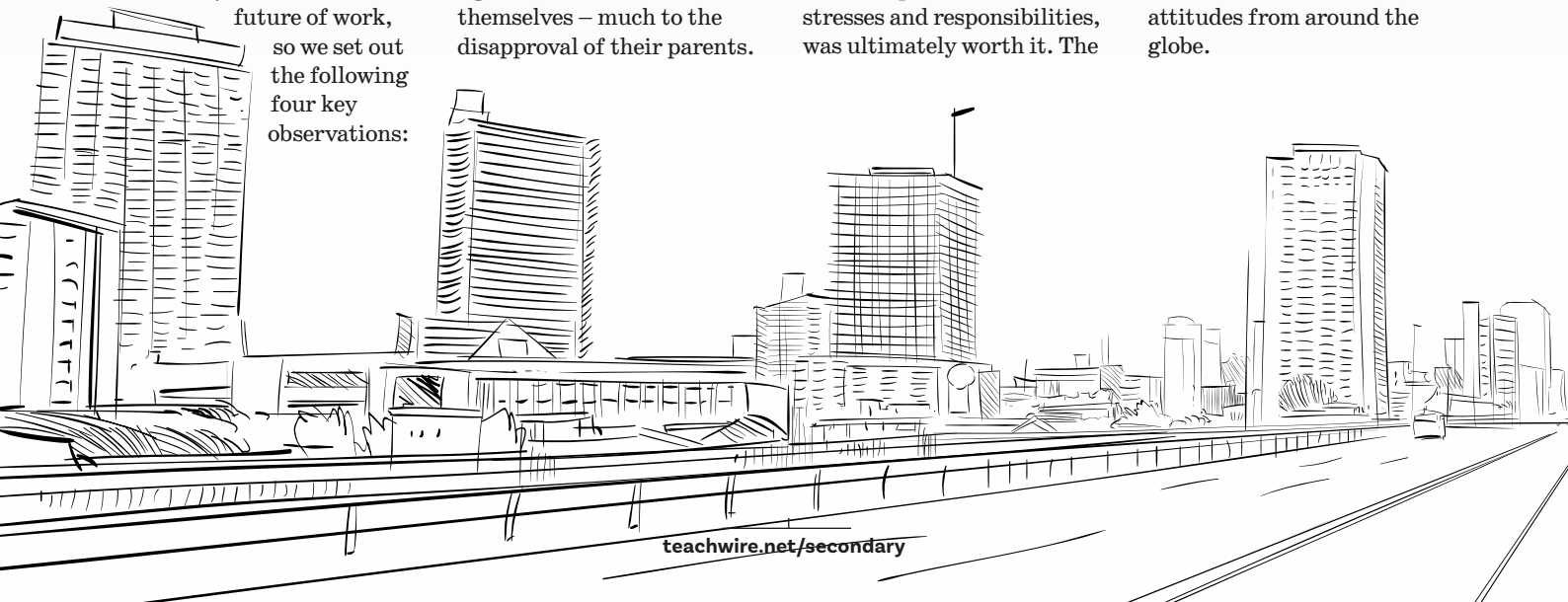
A young serial entrepreneur recently complained to us that you can earn a better living nowadays as a Tik-Tok influencer, worrying aloud about whether business ownership, with all its stresses and responsibilities, was ultimately worth it. The

truth, however, is that doing anything well requires perseverance, sacrifice and dedication. When something's done well, it only appears easy to those looking on.

He also pointed out the diversity of career choices that had been available to him, compared to now. 50 years ago, many would race to secure places on the best corporate graduate programs. Today, most of the college graduates we talk to are seeking introductions to venture capital firms. Young people shouldn't limit their ambitions to just the traditional corporate career paths of old.

4. The concepts of a global mindset and global citizenship have become more mainstream

Have you noticed how many shows on Netflix are set in Asian, European or Latin American countries? It's indicative of how now, more than ever, people are familiar and happy to engage with diverse ways of living, customs, traditions, and attitudes from around the globe.



There's a collective appreciation that in many ways, life as teen in Korea, Colombia, Mexico or Nigeria isn't all that different to what it's like in the West. There are still pressures around fitting in; parents who don't understand you; sudden swings between feelings of helplessness and invincibility. Moreover, it's about first love, and often about acquiring less binary views of identity and sexuality.

Stoking the imagination.

Against this backdrop, we recognise the eternal challenges awaiting people starting out on their careers. The transition from school to professional life presents the daunting prospect of having to personally reinvent yourself. We should never underestimate just how hard it can be for students to leap from the comfortable routine of full-time education into the scary unknown world of business.

Consequently, we have designed three exercises to help students embrace the contemporary context, while demystifying the world of business.

Exercise 1: The MACRO – Cause and Contribution

We want to encourage engagement on consequential issues. The idea here is to ask students to scan newspapers, internet sources and information from their local community to identify those

problems they feel are most in need of attention – whether they be global, local, collective or individual issues. We then ask them to suggest a contribution they can imagine making, however modest, towards solving the problem.

- Ask students to maintain a weekly journal
- Have them create two columns, headed 'Cause' and 'Contribution'
- Give them an opportunity each week to explain and receive feedback on their journal entries

This exercise can be undertaken over a month or a much longer period. Its power lies in creating an iterative process of discovery between students' identification of issues, and subsequent debates with their classmates, teachers, or even an outside business mentor as to how they might be able to refine their ideas.

Desired Outcome: Creating a list of potential career destinations and points of entry

Exercise 2: The MICRO – Trying things on for size

We can often overlook what opportunities there are for students to undertake careers activities now, in parallel with their schoolwork. Those who find the transition from school to professional life the easiest tend to be those who didn't wait for a starting gun.

Challenge your students to complete ONE of the following tasks over a 3- to 6-month period:

- Volunteer for an NGO
- Participate in a scholastic business plan competition
- Pursue a job shadowing placement in a profession of interest
- Solve a business problem for their family

It's essential that this exercise be carefully supervised to ensure oversight through the selection, participation and any post-completion closure.

Desired Outcome: A reinforcing of the power to be had in doing things in parallel, and development of resilience in response to the often mundane realities of work

Exercise 3: The PRACTICAL – How do you find and evaluate jobs?

The single biggest assumption we would seek to challenge is that the process of finding a job is somehow intuitive and easy. It isn't, and it's not.

Consequently, the one crucial exercise we recommend for all students is to help them understand how to use the following sources to identify and then pursue potential job opportunities. The assignment can be to set aside a week to review and explore each possibility in a classroom setting, or to ask students to form teams and research one source each, before giving a class presentation.

- **LinkedIn:** Increasingly the most powerful online marketplace for jobs, self-promotion and networking
- **Professional networks:** All major professions have organisations with programs designed to help kids start careers
- **Youth development NGOs:** We have worked with the AFS Youth Assembly, but there are others. These organisations provide incredible opportunities for scholarships, networking and work experience.
- **Apprenticeship programs:** Major government-supported programs that are focused on helping students launch their careers
- **Personal networking:** Often, the best career opportunities will emerge from inspirations and connections we already have; helping students to identify them and overcome any hesitation in accessing them is hugely important

Desired outcome: Demystify the process of identifying job opportunities and accessing them



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Helmut Schuster is the former Group HR Director of BP PLC; David Oxley is a management consultant and specialist in organisational change; their co-authored book, *A Career Carol: A Tale of Professional Nightmares and How to Navigate Them* (£8.99, Austin Macauley Publishers), is available now



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Apply EARLY

Nikki Cunningham-Smith explains why careers education can, and indeed should be making regular appearances in the timetables of KS3 students...

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” “A fireman.” “A vet.” “A space cowboy that rides a dinosaur.”

Children are asked this question from a young age, and however unrealistic the response, the sky’s the limit. They’re role-playing from the age of 2, acting out their possible futures with outfits in imagination spaces. Their passions can quickly become fixations, though the ability to name every carnivorous dinosaur doesn’t necessarily equate to a future as palaeontologist or museum curator... but should it?

Breaking it down

As they progress through school, students will typically be expected to focus ever more on their academic prospects. Occasional PSHE sessions aside, the extent to which students think about their future careers will very much hinge on whether their school considers that to be a priority. And if not, they often won’t – at least until they hit 16, at which point they’ll suddenly be inundated and potentially overwhelmed with information.

Would it not be better instead for pupils to have their careers education exist as a golden thread running throughout their time in school? In an age when services such as Connexions have been cut, many students would benefit from a curriculum that prescribes a certain amount of real world contextualisation with regards to their lessons, and more knowledge of how to actually operate as grown adults. It would certainly

their make careers education more meaningful.

Students already get a taste of this kind of ‘real-life experience’ in lessons supported by school trips. What might initially seem like a fun trip to Harry Potter World will get broken down into multiple areas themed around employment and mapped to lesson content. Set and costume design? D&T and textiles. Promotion and marketing? Business studies. Visual effects creation? Computing and media production. Box office figures and budgets? Maths and business studies. The writing of the script? English and drama.

Organic decisions

There are other reasons to consider bolstering your pre-KS4 careers provision. The start of KS4 can be a fraught period in students’ lives, not least because of the important decisions they’ll

be making around their GCSE options. It can cause some students to become anxious, and if there isn’t a strong support system at home to help direct them, they can end up choosing subjects to which they’re not ideally suited.

If, however, those considerations can be built in earlier on at KS3 and regularly revisited, they’re more likely to have a stronger sense of direction come Y10, reach decisions that feel more organic and less forced, and be better placed to bring their intrinsic interests and engagement to bear on those subjects that really interest them.

You can also make the options before them feel more real by having them meet people who once sat in the same classroom chairs as them. If you can arrange a school visit from alumni who have gone on to pursue

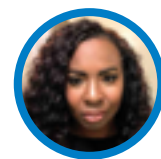
careers that your students have shown an interest in, the impact can be especially pronounced in Y8 and Y9.

Non-linear progression

At the same time, young people should be made aware that career progression isn’t always linear. Life situations can result in career gaps and breaks, whether it’s having children or being made redundant. Introducing students to this reality may well reduce their chances of experiencing career anxiety as adults, and prevent them from being too risk averse in the short term.

We want them to feel that they can seize as many opportunities, and pursue as many different options as they can. If something doesn’t work out, they can always try something else. The notion that you don’t have to necessarily stick to one career for life may also make their futures feel more interesting.

Moreover, if pupils were aware from Y7 of non-university routes such as degree apprenticeships, supported internships, traineeships or starting their own business, teachers could actively expand the scope of their ambitions and career horizons from the very inception of their secondary education journey.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nikki Cunningham-Smith is an assistant headteacher based in Gloucestershire



8 steps to success

Debby Elley highlights some supportive steps teachers and careers advisors can take when helping neurodivergent students enter the world of further study or work

According to the Office for National Statistics, 78% of autistic people are not in work. Let's imagine what it would be like for over three quarters of the non-autistic population to be unemployed. What would the impact of that be, both for them personally and for society as a whole?

At the moment, we're casually discarding the economic potential of an entire demographic. Careers advisors need to be passionate about helping to redress this balance not just for autistic students, but for the neurodivergent cohort as a whole.

Yes, there's much to be done when it comes to educating employers – but working with youngsters early on to address their distinct needs will be of considerable help.

1. Know your student

Before any kind of careers support is provided to students with autism, conversations should be had with the school's SENCo and students' form tutors. Don't overlook parents and carers, as they'll be invaluable in helping you to form a good picture of the sort of help required.

Ask the pupil how they would prefer their advice sessions to be run. I'm aware of one careers advisor who positions chairs so that autistic pupils can look out of the window and keeps fidget items on her desk. She also offers a 'walking and talking' option, where the lack of face to face contact, combined with movement, can

stimulate real discussion. With autistic pupils, providing them with choices can help give a sense of control and reduce anxiety.

2. Draw up a contract

Some youngsters are used to feigning knowledge in order to avoid feeling foolish. To begin with, make an informal contract to establish trust. Explain that you don't expect them to know much about what they haven't yet experienced, that no question is too silly to ask, and that they can be honest about their hopes and fears for the future, including any perceived obstacles. In

present the reasons for it to be. Using the same gentle approach, you can have discussions that would otherwise be challenging to process, and help them acquire key knowledge they may be missing.

4. 'Here's one I did earlier...'

Your autistic students may not be aware of the best language and approach to use when writing a CV or attending an interview. Doing either of those things requires them to imagine how they will come across from the perspective of a third party; a form of '3D

retain auditory information – particularly when the topic is unfamiliar.

Some careers-related topics can be effectively explored through the use of card games, either individually or as a group. Rather than just talking about the steps needed to secure work experience placements, for instance, you could write each step on a card and ask pupils to decide in which order they should be tackled. For youngsters who struggle to plan tasks systematically, this kind of exercise can be especially beneficial.

The same technique can also be used when analysing a student's priorities. Starting with a hierarchy of needs defined by them, write each

“How do you plan for a future you can't picture? What if a job ends up involving too much pressure?”

return, you'll be able to help them plan some meaningful steps forward.

3. Adopt a non-threatening approach

Non-threatening approaches clear the way for students to admit to gaps in their knowledge. *'Do you know what a CV is?'* is rather confrontational. Instead, use softer approaches that avoid sounding like tests: *'Lots of people think they might know what a CV is, but they aren't quite sure...'* Admitting your own fallibility can sometimes help, too. For instance, *'When I was younger, I hadn't got a clue about...'*

Never assume that a student will already be aware of why something may be important, and instead

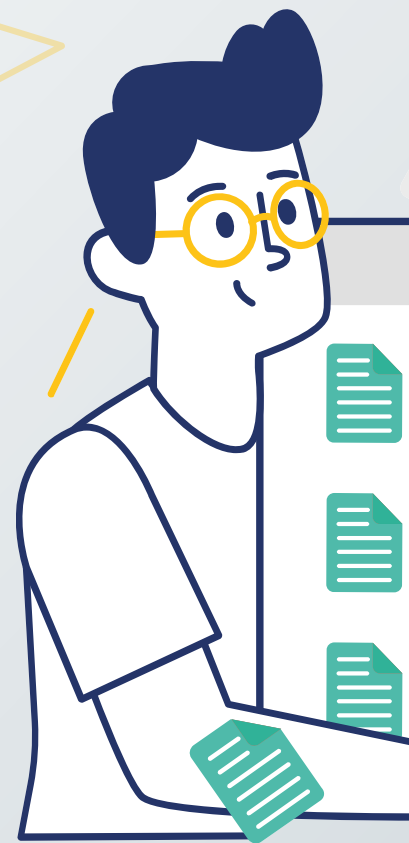
thinking' that may be a fundamental challenge for them.

Solid visuals work far better than abstract concepts, so create some example CVs that incorporate their hobbies and dreams and really go to town on imagining what a *poorly presented* CV might look like, so that they know what to avoid. Make it fun!

To help them understand the purpose behind self-presentation, you could ask them to watch a favourite TV advert while observing how key messages are used to engage potential buyers.

5. Use concrete tools

Many pupils with SEND can find abstract concepts difficult, and will struggle to



one on a card and then place them on a surface to rate them from, say, 1 to 5. Via this method, you can help a young person form a better idea of what to focus on when searching for work, and areas where they could perhaps compromise if needed.

Other ways of working could include making 'like' and a 'dislike' card piles for various work-related tasks, or using 'true' or 'false' questions to gauge environmental workplace preferences. Simple binary choices are less challenging than open-ended discussions.

6. Learn how to learn

It's worth investing some time in teaching skills related to researching jobs, and showing students how to find out more about certain aspects of a role that may be important to them.

Avoid making assumptions about what kinds of careers may be suitable for them. A common misconception is that people with autism lack imagination, which can sometimes discourage

interest in the creative industries, but it's simply not the case.

7. Tackle the big unknowns

For most students, the unknown future can be intimidating. For neurodivergent students, this wariness can become all-consuming. How do you plan for a future you can't picture? What if a job ends up involving too much pressure?

Careers advisors can't pretend this isn't the case, so they need to work with it. Arranging for students to talk with neurodivergent young adults – maybe even past pupils – currently in work or studying at university can be extremely reassuring.

The law protects disabled people at work, which students should be made aware of. At the same time, however, the ability to self-advocate in a way that preserves workplace harmony is a skill that can't be underestimated. Ask

students to think about how they might express their own needs, and have them practise doing so within the school environment.

Just as they did when first starting secondary school, pupils will need clarity as to who can help them in the workplace if they require adjustments, and how to go about approaching them.

Successful work experience placements can be a real confidence boost, but they need to be carefully planned and supported and incorporate predictable routines.

Try connecting with local workplaces that youngsters might already have positive associations with, and remember that hours of work experience, rather than days, will give them time to recover from the novel experiences they'll have had.

Local organisations that help disabled people into work may be able to provide free work experience support for those with EHCPs, too, though these will generally require a social worker's referral, so it's best to start planning early.

8. Help them expand on their ideas

Literal thinkers can benefit greatly from help with expanding their ideas on how they can use their skills.

For example, some youngsters might fixate on being a 'games tester', because that's the only job they know of that relates to their favourite hobby. Testing is, of course, a skill that can be used outside of the gaming industry in multiple occupations. And if games is your thing, there are naturally hundreds of other roles in that industry besides being a tester.

Once you've managed to identify what your pupil sees as obstacles, you can suggest ways for how these might be overcome. The increased adoption of hybrid working in recent years presents

WHAT ABOUT FURTHER EDUCATION?

- Families should consider selecting a further education college with smaller class sizes in preparation for higher education
- Universities now often have dedicated departments that will support students with disabilities during initial tours and throughout their time as undergraduates
- Visiting students should have opportunities to sit in on relevant classes during open days
- The Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) can make a huge difference at university; a team will assess a student's needs in depth and can provide mentoring and tutoring support, as well as a range of learning and planning apps

many opportunities for those who might prefer to work within their own home environment.

More than anything else, looking at job descriptions, visiting workplaces and observing people at work will be invaluable. The more concrete an idea can be, the easier it then becomes for students to picture themselves in that position.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Debby Elley is the co-founder of AuKids magazine and co-author, with Gareth D. Morewood, of *Championing Your Autistic Teen at Secondary School*; her new book, *Just the Job! – A Light-Hearted Guide to Office Life for the Autistic Employee*, co-authored with Maura Campbell, is out in June 2024, published by Jessica Kingsley



Uni? No thanks...

As adults, we know that uni isn't necessarily the 'be-all and end-all' of our students' post-school plans, notes Hannah Day – but has anyone told them that?

Increasingly, I'm seeing our smarter and more engaged students wanting to go from college directly into work. The reasons can vary, but they all face the same problem. Unlike the UCAS route, which gives you one form for over 65,000 courses, those looking at work and apprenticeships are faced with a different application process for each option they choose to pursue.

As colleges, how should we therefore go about making sure we offer relevant support that can help our work-focused students navigate these varied paths?

Prepare the student

When talking to some ex-students who took the work route, several came back with a common observation – that they felt uni had been presented to them as *the* option, with little mention of anything else.

I knew that we had, in fact, talked to them about the full range of options available, which made me wonder words such as 'apprenticeship' are fully understood. We may need to do better at laying out students' possible post-school routes, but that will only be valuable if we clearly explain what each one actually means.

Next, we need to prepare students more fully with the practical elements of their applications. Uni students routinely have their personal statements read and re-read until they're precisely presented celebratory accounts. Are other students' CVs and covering

letters given the same level of focus?

You may be able to stream students into different tutor groups depending on the routes they have selected, but this is tricky for the many who won't have made up their minds – so ideally, you'll need to prepare for both options.

Either way, lay out a given program as best as you can, ensuring that students complete not just the basics but also receive personalised careers advice, guidance on

to uni, but now she is so happy, and can see I made the right choice."

As teachers, we tend to be the products of a university education and can often be 'uni snobs' (previously guilty). However, I know now that university is only better if it's the right choice for the student. I've worked hard to overcome my own biases, and will actively help parents, when needed, to do the same.

One simple way is to celebrate our non-uni alumni as much as those with letters

well-organised and relevant programme in place, we'll be able to more fully demonstrate the value that all routes have, and encourage greater confidence in parents, whichever route their child chooses.

Prepare the workplace

This area is so much bigger than our own institutions – one that calls for a mix of both attitudes and policy.

As someone specialising in creative education, one reason I've found the 'work route' hard to grapple with is the frequent lack of obvious links and opportunities – which to me, makes no sense. Website designers, effective social media managers, illustrators and graphic designers continue to be in high demand, making these roles ripe for work-based training.

For now, however, the only local option open to my students remains digital marketing. Despite government promises, the creative industries are still a hugely underdeveloped area within the field of apprenticeships.

If you're the teacher of an academic course, be clear as to what jobs can emerge from your area of

"As teachers, we tend to be the products of a university education and can often be 'uni snobs'"

how to search for jobs online and mock interview practice. Remember that they will additionally need help with how to present themselves and interact professionally. Explain what initial information will be most important to know when they enter a new workplace, what to do if they're unsure when in a working environment, and the roles played by mentors and unions.

What may be obvious to us will be all new to them.

Prepare the parents (and ourselves)

One ex-student I spoke to wished that the college had communicated with her parents and allayed her mother's concerns: "*My grandad has been to Oxford; mum thought I wasn't going to go anywhere if I didn't go*

after their names. Do you know of any ex-students with notable accomplishments achieved via a vocational route? Could they be persuaded to engage with the school, and inform and inspire your next set of leavers?

These steps will help us to better prepare our students. With a

CASE STUDY 1: Had Davies, Self-Employed

Studied

Photography, fine art and graphic communication A Levels, 2018-2020

Career path

Founded his own Had Davies clothing and accessories business while still at college

Why not university?

"I went to uni for one week, but returned due to COVID leading to uncertainty around studio access. I knew I didn't want to go, but had had no advice on freelancing and didn't know what else to do."

What made you opt for university initially?

"Everyone I knew was going to uni. I didn't know there was another option. If you want to do arts, the pathways are very limited where I live."

What do you wish college had done to better support you?

"Let me know that a non-uni route is a viable option. Options were either 'go to uni' or 'do an apprenticeship'. Neither were right for me. A job with opportunities was what I would have liked. Something that offered career routes through experience. I didn't know that being self-employed was something I wanted to do, but lockdown

while I was still at college gave me so much time to work on my business. I found out what I wanted to do while I was doing it."

Non-uni highlight so far

"Seeing my original pieces selling in both John Lewis and Battersea Power Station."

Your personal top tip?

Don't worry about what everyone else is doing. Plus, online courses are a great – and more affordable – way to keep learning new skills.

For more information, visit haddavies.co.uk

CASE STUDY 2: Amelia Sayce, apprenticeship

Studied

Graphic communication, English literature and sociology A Levels, 2020-2023

Career path

Digital marketing apprenticeship, The Den Kit Company

Why not university?

"I'm a practical person, learning through doing. I completed some initial research into uni, as no one mentioned apprenticeships, but I knew I wanted to work."

Do you feel you made the right choice?

"Yes, definitely. I visited a friend who's at uni, and met people there doing the same thing as me, but not enjoying it – and not getting paid to do it."

What do you wish college had done to better support you?

"It was only because my tutor talked about apprenticeships that I started looking into them. I'd have liked college to have given me more input with CV writing and what's expected at job interviews. I also wish they'd talked to us about how pay works, and the paying of tax and pension contributions."

Non-uni highlight so far?

"The independence – being given design tasks for marketing and then seeing them online. I helped design the Christmas newsletter which was sent out to people working in PR."

Your personal top tip?

"Get in touch with the training place first, even if they don't have any jobs advertised. They can work with you to find the right placement."

For more information, visit thedenkitco.com



study and work back from there. Are there any related apprenticeships students could pursue? Who are your local providers, and how can you work better with them?

One route we've found to be successful for us is to make links with small local businesses who want college leavers they can train. While this doesn't provide formal qualifications, it echoes the old apprenticeships model and can work very well.

We've built relationships with a number of local businesses via our annual careers day. Students get to take part in initial meetings with businesses that are relaxed, but have previously resulted in employers later asking students to formally apply for work.

Irrespective of whichever approaches may be right for your school and students, the key is to not see work as a second-class route, but rather as the high value option it is.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hannah Day is head of art, media and film at Ludlow College

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Challenging TIMES

Steve Chalke reflects on how schools ought to respond to the personal and emotional impact of contemporary conflicts and warfare

It can be difficult for us all, particularly children and young people, to comprehend the harm, suffering, pain and challenges of bringing peace to the Middle East. Our 54 Oasis schools and 32,000 students are a diverse family of many faiths, cultures and backgrounds, with different traditions and experiences. What's happening in Israel and Gaza – as well as in Ukraine and elsewhere – can have repercussions for them, their families and friends.

As school leaders, it's our responsibility to take on difficult challenges and never brush under the carpet what's happening in the world. Over recent months, we've had to respond to children's fears and anxieties concerning war, at the same time as helping them understand important messages of peace and reconciliation, rooted in the

clear belief that there is always a different way open to us all that can end division and hate and build peace.

Learning and reflection

It's never enough to just talk to children about 'peace'. We must encourage them to both believe in it and work at it. We remind children that we must build peace with those who we might disagree with, and with those whose cultures, perspectives and opinions can be very different to our own – but this can require courage.

As part of these efforts, we've developed a 'Stop Hate! Build Peace!' resource pack to help our teachers deliver learning and reflection opportunities in response to current global conflicts and violence via assemblies, class discussion and other activities.

Before the 2023 Christmas holidays we held a peace vigil in which all our schools took part, where we remembered those who have been robbed of their lives through war in Israel, Gaza, Ukraine, Russia and elsewhere around the world – including as a result of the hate and violence we sometimes see in our own country and communities.

Standing together

The 'Stop Hate! Build Peace!' resources are age-appropriate to different cohorts, and take into consideration the context of each school and local community. We

encourage our teaching staff to use their professional judgement when deciding the level at which to pitch the resources and accompanying ideas.

Our priority is to ensure all of our children can stand together against hate, and find ways to stop hate through the building of relationships across divides and instigating initiatives that promote peace.

I believe our role in schools is to facilitate a deeper understanding of – and constructive response to – the conflict between Israel and Palestine, and encourage a spiritually reflective response.

We make sure our teachers have advice to share with students when the news makes them feel anxious or overwhelmed. We remind them that sometimes, the things we hear and see in the news can be distressing, but that there is also still much good news in the world.

We tell students that it's perfectly normal to feel distressed, and that many others feel the same way, but that we can also help one another when we're struggling.

We encourage our students to tell their teacher or another trusted adult if they've heard or seen something that makes them feel sad, worried, or upset. We remind them that it's important to consider where the 'news' we're seeing is

coming from – and whether it's from a trusted source.

A sense of hope

We also remind students that there are always things we can do to help us feel calmer and happier – be it reading a book, riding a bike, drawing, socialising with friends, baking a cake, or even simply thinking about things that make them happy.

We want our resources to elicit empathy, compassion and a deep sense of hope among our students. We want to turn their initial emotional reactions towards violent conflict into positive actions, and develop in them a commitment to challenging injustice and building communities of peace, hope and inclusion.

Dr Martin Luther King said, "*Hate will never drive out hate; only love will do that.*" It's a belief we embrace at Oasis, and one we observe across our schools and communities, as we seek to support our students and school staff through these challenging times.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Chalke is the founder of Oasis Academy Trust, which runs 54 schools across England; his book, *A Manifesto for Hope: 9 Principles for Transforming The Lives of Young People and Their Families* (£12.99, SPCK Publishing) is available now

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3 things we've learnt about ...

TEACHERS' HOPES THIS ELECTION YEAR

An election year promises a new direction where education policy is concerned – so what would teachers like to see prioritised?

1

The teachers' manifesto

There's an election due in 2024, which means we'll hear various ideas from the different parties about how the education system needs to change over the coming months – but what do teachers think?

Teacher Tapp regularly polls over 10,000 teachers to build a picture of the reforms they'd like to see on the ground. After the past few years it's little surprise that over half of secondary teachers feel that school funding should be the government's top priority, though recruitment also weighs heavily on their minds. Both areas are closely linked, but with the latest recruitment targets for secondary teachers missed yet again, recruitment stands apart as an urgent issue on its own.

Secondary teachers also want to see a focus on behaviour, with several teachers reporting that behaviour is at its worst for years – particularly outside of the classroom.

2

Parties' policies ranked

Last year, Teacher Tapp took 15 of Labour's published policies, asked teachers to rank them and found a surprising amount of agreement over which they welcomed the most. The three most popular policies all concerned improvements to mental health support provision, including the appointment of more mental health professionals in schools. Also popular is Labour's policy of replacing single-word Ofsted grades with a 'balanced scorecard'.

Policies that secondary teachers seem less enthusiastic about include retention payments to ECTs – which came in last – and the continuing requirement for all children to follow the National Curriculum.

The other main parties have published some education policies of their own, but so far not enough to conduct a similar exercise. Once they do, however, we'll be giving them the same treatment.

3

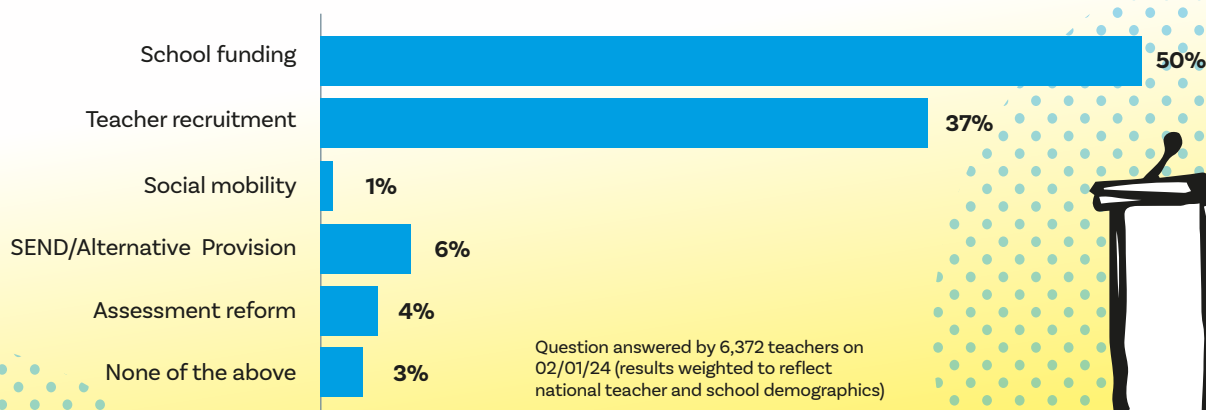
What about curriculum reform?

Labour's plan to review the National Curriculum and existing assessment arrangements is notable for only placing 8th, with policies such as introducing an annual per-teacher training entitlement (6th) and ending VAT and rates exemptions for private education providers (7th) both proving more popular.

Several other Teacher Tapp polls have shown that reforming assessment simply isn't seen as a current priority by most teachers. This may go some way to explaining why the Conservatives' proposed introduction of a new Advanced British Standard has had such a cool reception. The concept may not be a bad one in principle, but there are more pressing issues to attend to.

Primary teachers are, though, more in favour of assessment reform – which is perhaps not unexpected, since primary schools must now manage voluntary tests for 7-year-olds, mandatory phonics and online multiplication checks.

IF YOU WERE EDUCATION SECRETARY, WHAT WOULD BE YOUR TOP PRIORITY IN 2024?



For more snappy insights like this, and to be part of the panel, please join in via the free Teacher Tapp app available to download for iOS and Android. You will learn something new every day.



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TECH IN ACTION

Cyber Explorers

Government-led initiative transforms cyber security education through engaging gamified learning platform

START HERE

The UK Government is committed to building a skilled and diverse cyber workforce for an industry experiencing exponential growth. Between the ages of 11 to 14, young people really can aspire to be anything they want to be. The only certainty is that the careers of the future will demand digital skills.

With a vision to fill the cyber security skills gap and inspire future talent, Cyber Explorers – an initiative led by the UK Government – was launched in 2022. It's an immersive, gamified learning experience that offers free access to engaging cyber scenarios, challenges and missions based on real-world events students could face in their future careers.

This fun learning programme equips students with skills, knowledge, and importantly, the inspiration to pursue computer science courses at KS4, opening up a range of opportunities for further training and employment. The future safety of our nation is in their hands!



HOW IT WAS MADE

Cyber Explorers is the result of a creative collaboration between cyber security experts and industry professionals, with valuable input from students and teachers, and has been expertly designed and built by the tech training company, QA. It's an innovative platform, adaptable to both classroom and at-home self-paced learning, that provides comprehensive lesson plans filled with lively discussion topics, online quizzes and engaging offline activities that cater to diverse learning styles.

Divided into entry-level 'Challenges' and more advanced 'Missions', it aligns with KS3 National Curriculum in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and S2/S3 in Scotland. The setting in Cyber City, where students team up with the Cyber Ranger to thwart Herbert the Hacker, while seeking to earn Cyber Squad status by demonstrating their contribution to a safer world.

The programme also includes free one-hour virtual activity workshops facilitated by the Cyber Explorers Team, enabling schools to further inspire and engage their learners.

THE IMPACT IT'S HAD

More than 70,000 students from around 2,500 schools across the country have already signed up to Cyber Explorers. As Karen Morris, a Y8 teacher at Stroud High School observes, "The Cyber Explorers platform has provided a way for us to teach cyber skills to our Year 8 students in an engaging and creative way. The fact that this platform is so good, yet free is just fantastic!"

Cyber Explorers is a great free resource for your teaching toolkit and helps get students interested in GSCE Computer Sciences as a GCSE subject.



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THE PLATFORM

Cyber Explorers is a free cyber security learning platform for 11- to 14-year-olds – find out more at cyberexplorers.co.uk



THE CHALLENGE

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Take part in an exciting mission by entering the Cyber Explorers Cup 2024! Students aged 11 to 14 can save Cyber City from cyber threats by decoding Herbert the Hacker's ominous plan. Teams of four will compete in an hour-long challenge to take the title of Champion for their country, with exciting prizes to be won.

The competition runs from 4th to 8th March 2023, with entries closing on 29th February – so get your team ready, and enter at cyberexplorers.co.uk/cup-2024

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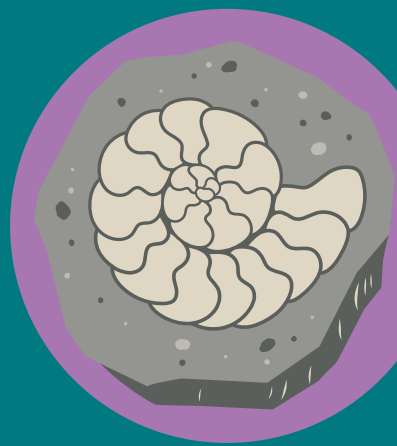
Adam is a Science teacher and Lead Practitioner at The Totteridge Academy in North London. He is also Education Director of Carousel Learning, an innovative online learning platform aimed at improving student retention and reducing teacher workload.



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Springboard KS3 Science



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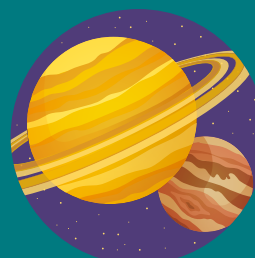
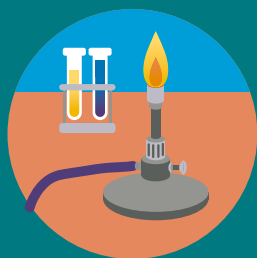
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Brilliant titles for you and your students to explore



The Artist's Journey: The Travels That Inspired the Artistic Greats

(Travis Elborough, White Lion, £20)

Most books about a selection of artists organise their material in chronological order, or by school classification. This one instead presents 30 different artists spanning multiple centuries in alphabetical order, resulting in delightful transitions from one chapter to the next when read in order, or a good book for random dips. Elborough's central premise is that artists' travels have always influenced their art – albeit more obviously in some cases than others. Either way, the biographical details herein are very interesting indeed, with photographs of the locations mentioned and samples of the artists' work bringing each chapter to life. It's a pity that there's no information on where the cited works can be viewed, but there is at least a comprehensive index and bibliography.

Reviewed by Terry Freedman (see bit.ly/Eclecticism for more details)



Iterate: The Secret to Innovation in Schools

(Justin Reich, Jossey-Bass, £24.99)

Having endured some fairly dreadful 'initiatives' in my time, delivered from on high with the directive to 'make it work', I approached *Iterate* with some trepidation. However, aside from one unfortunate acronym that would likely be a source of some derision in British schools (the author is American), my fears proved to be unfounded. The book sets out several routes to innovation, emphasising how it needs to be both teacher-centred and responsive. Reich shows us numerous examples of teacher- and department-led innovation, some of which could be attempted relatively quickly, given sufficient SLT support, such as providing time and cover. Reich may be an MIT professor, but he's evidently sensitive to the many pressures teachers face. In *Iterate*, he's produced a highly readable guide to prompting positive change in small ways, while involving both students and teachers in the evaluation process.

Reviewed by Terry Freedman



The Book at War: Libraries and Readers in an Age of Conflict

(Andrew Pettigree, Profile, £12.99)

A title perhaps more at home in your school library than a specific department. That's because *The Book at War* is a fascinating study of how books and other reading matter have variously influenced politics, propaganda and history over time, making it a useful starting point for discussion around issues such as free speech. Among its intriguing, lesser-known facts is the detail that picture postcards with military themes, rather than beaches, have been used in other countries as tools of persuasion. Closer to home, there's some thoughtful exploration of the historically symbiotic relationship between British newspapers and the country's publishing industry, and interesting analysis of how the work of war poets such as Wilfred Owen came to prominence after WWI, contrasted with popularity of gung-ho wartime texts for younger readers, such as *The Boy's Own Paper*. Highly recommended.

Reviewed by Terry Freedman

ON THE RADAR

Outstanding School Leadership**(Peter Hughes, Bloomsbury, £19.99)**

For those unfamiliar with Hughes' credentials, he's the current CEO of the Hackney-based Mossbourne Federation, having worked as a maths teacher earlier in his career. As a writer, Hughes is nothing if not honest – extremely forthcoming with regards to what he perceives as his own personal and professional foibles, and even opens up the floor to include passages written by his workplace colleagues.

While the book hits some of the bases you'd expect – the school mission, teaching and learning and relationships all receive dedicated chapters – its substance draws heavily on Hughes' own biographical background and experiences. Born in Australia, and having experienced a challenging itinerant childhood that he describes with a disarming frankness, Hughes' personal history is perhaps more eventful than most.

Crucially, however, he uses those tales and anecdotes to illuminate compelling parallels and contrasts between then and now. Authorities in New South Wales allowed teaching professionals to take 12-month sabbaticals for pursuing new opportunities elsewhere – maybe there's something to be said for such a system? His account of relocating to the UK is a springboard for a thoughtful discussion of attitudes towards forward planning and managing risk. It all adds up to a 'leadership guide' that grapples with big questions and big challenges (Ofsted, behaviour, social justice) in an admirably novel and eminently readable way.

Read our extended interview with Peter Hughes via bit.ly/ts132-OTS



Meet the author

LAURA WOOD

Your latest book returns to the characters and setting of *The Agency for Scandal* – is it a standalone sequel, or now part of an ongoing series?

When I conceived of the first book, I didn't approach it as a series – I was just really excited about the idea. Once I started writing it, it became one of the nicest first drafts I've done, as all these characters felt really 'there' from the start, and I could immediately see a thousand different offshoots. Having not planned it as a series, it feels like there's now enough organically generated material to turn it into one.

Your earlier YA novels took place in the 1920s and 1930s, but the *Scandal* series is set in Victorian England – what drew you to that particular period?

It's an era I find fascinating, and really interesting to explore in YA fiction. I've been thinking a lot about how the moment we're living in now – a time of profoundly accelerated change, in all areas of our lives – is almost a mirror of the Victorian period. Young people in Victorian England were similarly witnessing dramatic transformations, for which they had barely had any frame of reference.

We often conceive of the Victorian era as being quite traditional, when it was actually a time of almost frightening revolution and change, which seems like something that today's teens could really relate to.

How did your prior studies and research around the novel inform your portrayal of the book's narrator, Mari?

If you're writing historical fiction about women and the world those women occupy, it's important to look at the historical context.

The reality for women of that period, in terms of the legal structure, was shocking. In the grand scheme of things, the 1850s really weren't that long ago – and yet women weren't legally considered to be individual human beings. Knowing how bad things were helps us better understand the world and situation we're in now, and why.

That said, I'm also interested in how that human experience of being a teenager is very timeless, in some ways. It's something that anchors the writing of these books – they're historical fiction, but because they portray 17- and 18-year-olds, there's a focus on that moment when you're on the cusp of adulthood and what it means.

When you read 19th century diary entries and letters written by teenagers, it's funny how tonally familiar and relatable the content is to what teenagers think about and experience for themselves today.

**Spencer Edwards: Emperor of the Galaxy****(Alex Prior, Troubador Publishing, £9.99)**

When The Galactic Council of Inhabited Worlds is unable to appoint a new Galactic Emperor thanks to manoeuvrings by the warlike Zylaxxians, they resort to selecting a random sentient being via hyper-advanced AI. One problem – the chosen subject is 14-year-old Earthbound human Spencer Edwards, whose biggest concern right now is an impending date with Amy Heartly he really doesn't want to mess up... Prior is fairly well-travelled himself (if not quite at interplanetary scale), having previously been a director based at Elstree Studios, a university lecturer and latterly a school headteacher. Different elements of that varied career would seem to have fed in to this book, which juxtaposes widescreen, cinematic world-building with the nicely-drawn quotidian life of our likeable, yet defiantly average protagonist. There's humour in its telling, but as a YA novel, it's more enjoyable space romp than *Hitchhiker's*-equ absurdism.

**A Season for Scandal****(Laura Wood, Scholastic, £8.99)**

In Wood's previous historical YA novel, *The Agency for Scandal*, readers were introduced to The Aviary – a clandestine, all-female organisation established in the late 19th century with the purpose of blackmailing men on behalf of women wronged by those men. In this follow-up (though familiarity with the earlier title isn't required) we meet Mari – a young woman overseeing her family's florist business. When her home and livelihood becomes threatened by a corrupt landlord, she turns to The Aviary for help – only to find herself subsequently joining its ranks and embarking on a wild and unpredictable assignment of her own. Amid the sweeping plot and breezy prose of *A Season for Scandal*, Wood gives us a feisty, free-spirited protagonist we want to root for, a compelling cast of supporting characters, and a page-turning adventure that deftly balances period detail with narrative events that speak to modern concerns.



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Through the READING GLASS

If your students are unable to see books as alluring windows into amazing worlds, it may be that someone or something is blocking their view, writes **Luke Palmer**...

To hear some people talk, it's as though they think there should be a red panic button in every English classroom. *'This child doesn't read,'* it would say. Pressing it would scramble a squad of Kevlar-clad teacher-interventionists, who would abseil into the classroom, extract the child in question and whisk them by Chinook to a purpose-built facility.

Said child would then return to their learning – a mere day or two later, so efficient would this program be – fully reformed and eager. All would be assured of their future success, having now become that most exquisite of things – *someone who reads for pleasure.*

Reflective mirrors

Research has repeatedly shown that reading for pleasure is a leading indicator of future success, with those who regularly read outside of school performing better on almost every testable parameter there is.

It's such a boon that Ofsted now looks for evidence of reading for pleasure in schools, thus prompting schools to try and provide precisely that. Yet last autumn saw the National Literacy Trust report its lowest ever numbers for levels of reading enjoyment among young people, with boys and students receiving FSM faring worst.

Things seem bleak. Maybe



those panic buttons need to be bigger. Or maybe it's all those interventions that are actually the problem...

In an oft-quoted essay dating from 1990, US school librarian Rudine Sims Bishop describes the pleasures of reading (see bit.ly/ts132-rfp1). Books, she says, can be windows onto unfamiliar worlds, or sliding doors we can walk through. They can also be mirrors, reflecting versions of ourselves back at us "as part of the larger human experience".

To succeed, young people need to feel that they're valued – and what better way to feel that value than to see yourself reflected as a vital force, in a complete world held between the covers of a book? This is the importance of reading; it instils and cements our place in the world, while allowing us to explore and empathise with the places of others.

Too many noses

The problem, however, is that the glass is fragile. When too many noses are pressed against a window, the smears obscure the view. If you keep pushing against a mirror, it will crack.

Since the publication of my first novel for young people in 2021, I've had the privilege to visit many schools up and down the country – and contrary to apparent trends, loads of young people want to talk to me about books.

It helps that I'm an unfamiliar face. The students I visit want to talk to me more than those I teach, but it's always the students who tell me, *'I don't usually read books, but...'* that are my favourite to talk to.

Show them the horizon

I write about characters who rarely do the right thing. In my novel *Grow*, Josh is a 'good kid' groomed into

far-right extremism following the tragic death of a parent. *Play* follows four young men pushing at the boundaries of their masculinity, breaking things to see how they work.

Back when I was a schoolboy, I'd respond to anything teachers and parents claimed was 'good for me' with antipathy. Reading for pleasure isn't an 'additional learning experience', nor an 'investment in the future'. It's certainly not something that should smell like work. It's something complete, in and of itself.

The NLT report says that 'supportive environments' can encourage young people's reading habits. We must, of course, equip young people with the tools to decode texts at every opportunity – but 'supportive' cuts both ways. If we really want to promote reading for pleasure in schools, then we need only show them the wide horizon of glass skyscrapers that are out there.

After that, if we really feel that we must accompany them, then we should allow ourselves to be led to the windows that young people choose for themselves.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Luke Palmer is an author, poet and English teacher; his latest YA novel, *Play*, is available now (£8.99, Firefly Press)

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See it, say it, SORTED

Let's stop pushing ourselves to write feedback no one ever reads and instead embrace a smarter, more verbal approach to marking, says **Gordon Cairns**

To the surprise of no one familiar with the sight of a stack of marking on the kitchen table after a day's teaching, a 2018 DfE report on staff retention found that a key reason for teachers leaving the profession was workload issues – and particularly the volume of marking.

The report quoted one exasperated former science teacher as saying, "*There were ridiculous marking schemes, eight coloured pens and five symbols; it took me three hours a day to get through all the marking.*"

Grades and substance

Yet despite all the time and effort frequently invested in writing comments on students' work, experienced teachers are all too aware of the weaknesses surrounding this specific form of feedback.

How often have you highlighted an area to improve on in your comments, only to see the same mistake appear in the next piece of work? Or had a student complain that comments you stayed up late to write are as indecipherable as Egyptian hieroglyphics?

More recent research suggests little has changed. One study found that if an answer paper has both feedback and a specific grade on it, even the most carefully crafted list of next steps will be overlooked by the recipient, who will instead fixate on the number or letter beside it, thus ignoring the most important aspect of the assessment – *what they should learn from it.*

Time for a revolution?

However, it seems a revolution in time management may be starting to take hold in classrooms across the country. Savvy teachers are realising that capturing recorded voice notes via mobile apps – Showbie being one example – has the potential to free up hours of their precious time throughout the working week.

While there have yet to be any formal studies into this approach at the secondary phase, the benefits would appear to extend beyond just the obvious time savings. Students seem to often respond more positively to the individualised nature of verbal feedback compared to written comments,

regardless of how personally that written message to them may have been framed.

Research conducted among higher education students has, however, found that recorded audio feedback helps to create a more personal and authentic connection with learners; connections that can be more

developmental than prescriptive.

The same study further found that students frequently prefer the more informal nature of audio feedback, thus building a positive pastoral relationship between tutor and student, whilst also boosting students' sense of being cared for, encouraging them in their learning and helping to improve their levels of confidence and self-esteem. It's not too much of a stretch to assume that school students are likely to experience similar pastoral benefits of their own.

Pain-free privacy

That said, one key advantage of written feedback is the natural pause between the submission of work and its subsequent return. Receiving feedback immediately can be emotionally overwhelming, especially if a student is highly invested in their

work, irrespective of whether the feedback is good or bad (since some students simply don't

like being praised in front of their classmates). Recorded messages, on the other hand, can be listened to in private, in a way that may even reduce the chances that a student responds negatively.

If you need any further convincing, consider how it's often easier to amend mistakes in verbal comments by simply re-recording messages, rather than erasing and rewriting them.

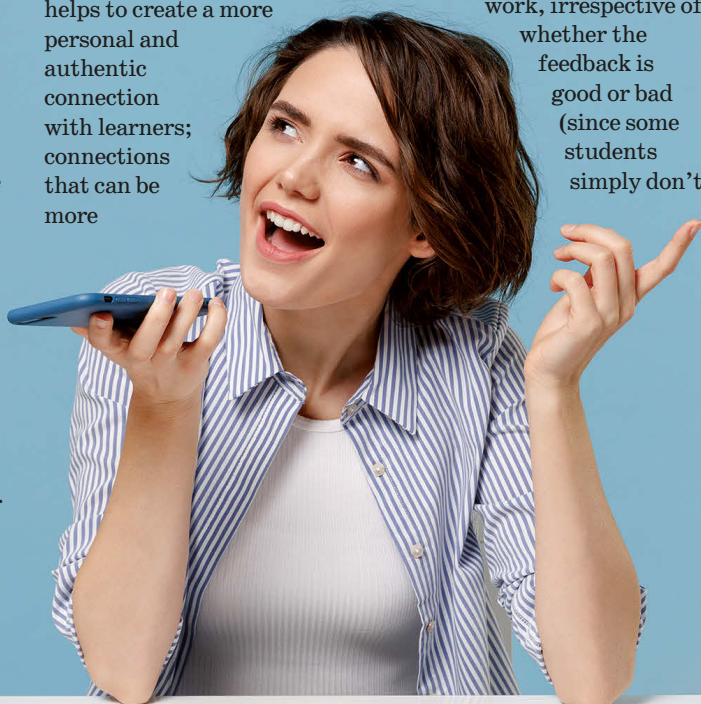
Moreover, Victorians who could afford washing machines soon found themselves with more time on their hands – hands that tended to be *less sore*. Many readers will know that there's nothing quite like the pain between the fingers caused by holding a pen for too long, and this too could be alleviated by adopting audio feedback methods.

If and when more teachers start to embrace audio recordings as a viable form of feedback, who knows what it might lead to? With any luck, a reduction in the number of teachers currently leaving the profession.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gordon Cairns is an English and forest school teacher who works in a unit for secondary pupils with ASD; he also writes about education, society, cycling and football for a number of publications



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For schools, WITH SCHOOLS

Alessandro Capozzi explains why the key to making online alternative provision work well is to adopt a partnership model

Online alternative provision is increasingly on the minds of leaders up and down the country, driven by a growing number of students with additional needs, alarming teacher recruitment figures and post-pandemic shifts in the attitudes of parents towards their children's schooling.

We can chart a marked increase in the use of non state-funded AP over the last five years. The 2023 National Behaviour Survey notes that significant numbers of teachers and leaders feel that the external support they receive is '*not timely at all*'. Then, of course, there are the 21.2% of students who were persistently absent from school across the 2022/23 academic year.

Timely and impactful

According to the school leaders we regularly speak with, the regional and national responses to these issues are as you'd expect – workload taskforces, the launching of 'attendance hubs', the development of new SEND and AP improvement plans. These are all welcome, but unlikely to be prompt enough to solve the immediate capacity crisis in AP. What's needed are quality, timely and impactful solutions – but where can schools turn to?

Academy21 is an AP provider that has successfully delivered live teaching with fully qualified teachers for over a decade, with a consistent theme at its



core – that of partnership. We know that developing in-house online provision entails significant challenges – not least due to stretched staff, high levels of risk and considerable set-up costs.

Partnering, however, lets you to tap into established outside expertise, flexibility and capacity in order to meet your needs. So let's examine what effective partnerships look like in practice.

Trust and Consultation

First off, they amount to more than simply transactional exchanges. Truly effective partnerships are relational, based on a shared vision and trust between school and provider.

At Academy21, this starts with transparent conversations rooted in a school's needs. Before any enrolments, we'll first discuss how the school envisages online AP working for them. We'll then prepare a programme tailored to each

child, so that the school's leadership can see how online AP will fit in around any existing constraints and prior goals.

It's important to choose an online AP provider that can sustain multiple options for students – whether those be varied timetables, different contract options, the need for an especially broad curriculum or any other requirements. Schools need the certainty of knowing they can offer genuinely best-in-class support for the duration of a child's placement, with the capacity to add more students at a later stage if needs be.

Transition and quality

Student voice surveys tell us that 9 in 10 students feel more confident in their learning now that they're with Academy21. We achieve this by carefully planning a smooth transition of students' learning into the online space.

Our teachers are all highly trained, fully qualified and have a deep understanding of how to settle students and make online pedagogies work. Academy21's robust enrolment process further ensures that teachers are fully aware of every student's needs, and includes live student inductions. We can even provide support for students considering their post-school destinations, and show them the steps needed to go about making their future plans a reality.

We seek to further strengthen our partnerships by regularly inviting schools to quality assess our provision, and by providing access to lesson-by-lesson judgements on students' understanding.

Schools also receive attendance updates, half-termly school reports and access to a host of other monitoring tools. Everything is recorded, which can play an important role in your school's comprehensive safeguarding efforts. Appropriate oversight, combined with an awareness among students of how they can expect to be monitored, can be a powerful motivator for improvement.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alessandro Capozzi is executive headteacher at Academy21; for more information, visit academy21.co.uk

The power of FRAMING

How we talk about and present certain tasks will shape how students perceive them – and in turn, how well they'll take to them, observes **Colin Foster**...

When I was training to teach, registers still existed in paper form and had to be physically carried to the school reception after form time.

I can recall watching one teacher take their register at the start of the day. After she'd finished, she looked around the classroom and asked, *"Who's sitting nice and straight?"* Everyone immediately assumed an even straighter posture than they'd had already. *"Arun, you're sitting nicely. You can take the register back."* Arun fist-pumped – *"Yes!"* – and with a spring in his step, gladly took the register from the teacher and hurried off to reception.

The following day, I observed the class next door at the same time of day. After taking the register, this teacher similarly looked around the classroom. *"Ryan, you're talking. Take the register to reception."* Ryan protested – *"Oh, miss!"* – but the teacher insisted. The other children laughed as he got up, took the register from the teacher with his fingertips as if barely wanting to touch the thing, and reluctantly slunk off down the corridor.

I gather that some days, the register was found to have been dropped on the way, or else not left where it should have been. Further punishments would then have to be deployed to address these little protests against the system.

Socially constructed

How could the same, simple job of returning the register be a reward in one class and a punishment in the class next door?

We could say that the job was 'socially constructed' in different ways between those two adjacent classrooms. After all, what is a register, really? Just a folder of papers. But it becomes a big deal – for better, or for worse – because of how it's viewed by the community. The job of taking back the register becomes either desirable or undesirable, depending on how we talk about it. On how it is *framed*.

I believe that the same principle applies to many

as cleaning and tidying up the classroom, are tasks that other students might have well volunteered to do for fun. I remember one child who loved being given gloves and tools to scrape chewing gum off desks. But if certain tasks become labelled as 'detention activities', it naturally follows that no one's going to want to do them any more.

Positives into negatives

If we're not careful, we can poison the well by turning things children may like to do – or at least, not mind doing all that much – into tasks they most certainly *don't* want to do. This is a

"The tasks a teacher might employ in a detention can be tasks other students might volunteer to do for fun"

things that happen in school. Is it a privilege to hand out the textbooks or a chore? When the teacher asks a student to help rearrange the classroom furniture, is this perceived as showing how responsible the teacher believes the student to be, and therefore a way of contributing to everyone's learning? Or just something annoying that keeps them from enjoying their break time, to which they feel entitled?

I've often noticed that the same tasks a teacher might employ in a detention, such

particular danger whenever reading or writing is used as a punishment. I once saw a deputy head knock on the maths department's office and ask for some 'really boring maths questions' for a naughty student to complete in isolation. The head of maths quickly sent him packing, empty-handed, telling him that there's no such thing as 'boring maths', before muttering that *'Maths isn't a punishment'*.

Similar issues can arise when physical exercises are used as punishments. All

that these practices do is teach students that they shouldn't want to write, or do mathematics, or run, or be helpful. These things are obviously *bad*, because



they're used as *punishments*.

Framing can therefore be our enemy, but it can also be our friend. It will operate regardless, but we can make it either work for us or against us.

The economist and Nobel Laureate, Richard Thaler, and Harvard Law School professor, Cass Sunstein, were the originators of Nudge Theory – the idea that by shaping an environment, you can influence the choices people will make. Not via heavy-handed, oppressive control, but rather by 'nudging' people in the direction you want them to go, through the manipulation

of 'choice architecture'.

Make it really, really easy for people to do the thing you *want* them to do, and make it really, really difficult for them to do the thing you *don't* want them to do. And then let them choose.

Subtle wording

Framing can be very subtle, to the point where students may not even notice you're doing it. Even another teacher observing your lesson may be none the wiser. What you're doing is using framing to shape the school environment and nudge your students towards ultimately positive, as opposed to

negative outcomes.

For example – you cold-call a student with a question, and they reply with "*Dunno.*" Do we frame this as them simply not knowing and then move on? Or do we instead verbally imply that they're not ready yet to give us an answer, and will thus return to them shortly for another chance, once they've had a little more thinking time?

Someone hasn't completed some homework. We could frame this as, '*That means you have to come back here at break time and do it.*' Or, we could go with '*I'm going to help you catch that up here with me at break today.*' The wording is subtly different, so much so that it's barely

noticeable, but alterations like this, repeated across the thousands of typically brief interactions teachers have with their students each day, can determine the framing for your own specific culture of '*The way we do things round here*'.

Helping ourselves

Framing can also be a way to address attitudes, as well as behaviours. What's the opposite of someone who loves maths? The obvious answer might be 'someone who hates maths' – but how can we frame this differently? What about, 'Someone who doesn't *yet* love maths', or 'Someone who needs to help to see why maths could become a subject they love'? These framings both assume some degree of malleability, rather than fixedness, in attitudes that will leave room for growth.

Different framings can even help us teachers to do better ourselves. Someone once advised me of what to do when you forget a student's name. The natural thing is to say, "*Sorry, I've forgotten your name...*" but that's something of a dead end. The student tells you their name again, and you try once more to remember it.

The better advice is to instead say, "*Sorry, I'm trying to remember your name.*" It's surprising how often just this little switch, and the extra time it provides, can genuinely help me to remember the name, when I'm not telling myself that it's irretrievably 'forgotten'.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Colin Foster (@colinfoster77) is a Reader in Mathematics Education in the Department of Mathematics Education at Loughborough University, and has written many books and articles for teachers; find out more at foster77.co.uk



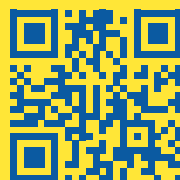
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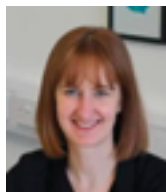
Exam season comes around faster than you think, so make sure you're prepared to help them prepare. Our unique blend of teacher-led revision and instructor-led activities will allow your students to maintain focus and energy levels, and ultimately face exam season with confidence.

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ASK THE EXPERT

School-wide Vocabulary Instruction



Lexonik's Sarah Ledger explains how to successfully implement vocabulary instruction and ensure it becomes a 'classroom habit'



- 1 SEIZE EVERY OPPORTUNITY**
Encourage your students to always question their base-level understanding of words or vocabulary they already know, and apply this to the challenge or query they're facing. We need them to grapple with reading discovery, and be presented with opportunities for vocabulary development every day, across all classes and school settings.

- 2 CONNECT, QUESTION, CROSS-CHECK**
Improving students' reading will require them to improve their vocabulary, so be a champion for connecting, questioning, and cross-checking. If, for example, students know the word 'chronology' refers to the study of time, ask them

what's meant by 'chronic pain.' If they say, 'bad pain', query this – "How can it be 'bad pain' if we know 'chron' is linked to time?" We need students to experience 'desirable difficulty' because it's during struggle that we learn.

- 3 EXPLORE MORPHEMIC ANALYSIS**
The majority of the English Language is made up of morphemes – small units within words that hold their own meaning. If we can increase our knowledge of morphemes, then it follows that we can *decode the meaning of any word*. This is where Lexonik Vocabulary Plus (bit.ly/ts132-Lex1) is especially effective.

- 4 INVOLVE STUDENTS IN SELECTING CORE WORDS**

In any subject or topic, there will be certain pivotal keywords. What are they, and what level of comprehension is required to understand them? Involve students in listing these 'priority words', and get them comfortable with analysing their own knowledge gaps. Ensure that your students can interpret specialist vocabulary early on in the unit, curriculum or Key Stage, as this will allow for further exploration related to synonyms and inferences.

At a glance

- Get students questioning and connecting
- Bring vocabulary learning into everything
- Identify solutions to empower teaching

For more information, visit lexonik.co.uk or email enquiries@lexonik.co.uk

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CHECKING IN ON WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE WORLD OF STEM, WE FIND THAT CODING DRAWS ON A GREATER SET OF SKILLS THAN ONE MIGHT ASSUME, AND HEAR WHY THERE OUGHT TO BE MORE REGULAR MEETINGS BETWEEN YOUR MATHS AND SCIENCE DEPARTMENTS...

Who can you work with, and in what ways, to improve outcomes in STEM subjects?

THE AGENDA:

58 CODING CONTAINS MULTITUDES

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We hear how an ambitious inter-school partnership initiative helped one school in the North East bolster its already extensive science offer



Coding contains MULTITUDES

Pay attention, arts and humanities teachers – if you believe coding has nothing at all to do with your practice, think again, says **Rob Wraith**...

Coding is everywhere. It governs how our mobile devices, smartwatches and cars operate. It's what drives our websites, analyses our shopping habits and brings our smart TVs to life. So prevalent has it become that we don't even realise when we're interacting with it.

Code is, after all, the word we use to describe any set of instructions that contain rules for completing certain actions or outcomes. These instructions will typically be written in a programming language such as Java, Python or C#, and deployed in ways that enable our digital technologies to function.

Command creativity

Coding is also fun. Really, it is. The act of writing code can provide a genuine sense of achievement when you succeed in bringing together a set of commands in order to perform a task and remove the need for manual intervention in future.

What's more, this creative aspect of coding can encourage the development of essential skills and attributes that can be readily utilised and developed in the context of other subjects – such as problem solving, skills of analysis, patience and confidence.

Before looking at a few practical examples and how they can be applied, it should be noted that there are some all-purpose concepts arising from coding that are fast becoming essential areas of knowledge for navigating the

wider world. Whatever your particular specialism or field of interest, it behoves us all to develop at least some understanding of data privacy, cybersecurity, digital rights and the wider societal implications of technological advances. The more well-versed we can be in these areas, the more likely it is we'll see the development of robust regulations to ensure that the products of coding are informed by ethical considerations.

So with that said, how can the knowledge and practice we learn from other subjects be usefully applied in the context of coding lessons?

Rules and circumstances

The writing of code to simulate a process will inevitably help you better understand the field that process is part of. Take the water cycle, for example – a core component of secondary phase geography. There are four main parts in the water cycle – evaporation, convection, precipitation and collection. Each of these is a specific action or outcome, but before they can be completed, a certain set of rules and circumstances have to met first.

The same principles apply to coding.

Utilising knowledge and practices gained in other subjects, and integrating these into coding lessons can significantly enhance the overall learning experience, provide additional support to students, and build valuable teaching and learning links across different curriculum subjects.

Here, I will break down some working examples of this that you may be able use in your own delivery.

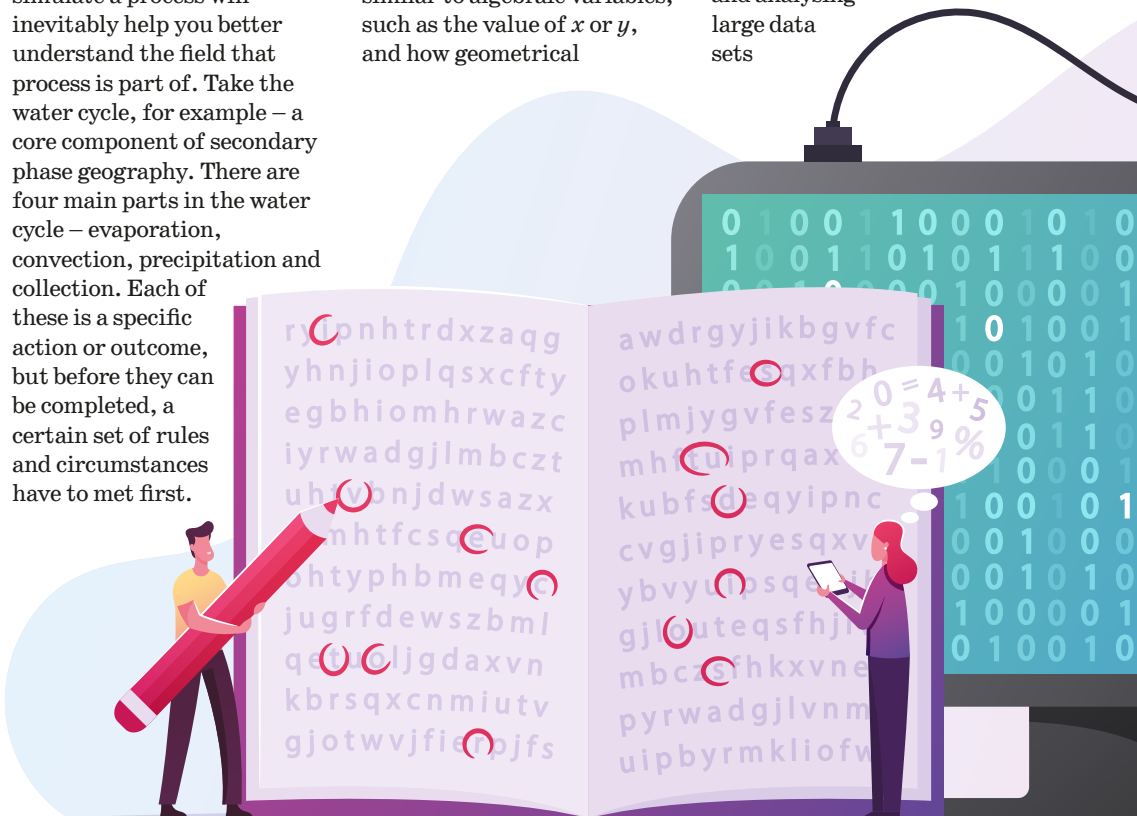
Different disciplines

Mathematics: Use mathematical concepts like algebra, geometry, or statistics to illustrate coding principles. Explain how variables in coding are similar to algebraic variables, such as the value of x or y , and how geometrical

concepts relate to the design and positioning of characters in games, as well as the calculation of trajectories to ensure that they're realistic.

Art and Design: Focus on using colour theory, balance and aesthetics. This could be linked to frontend web and app development and user interface/experience principles. Reference could be made to the hex numbers used to identify shades, as these are utilised in code to select and render colours.

Science: When teaching simulations or data analysis we can refer to scientific theories and phenomena. These can help to show how coding is used in modelling and analysing large data sets



to predict real-world scenarios, outcomes and events. A grasp of the scientific language commonly employed in modelling will support students in better understanding the outcomes presented.

MFL: Comparing coding languages to spoken languages can be a big help when explaining the syntax used within coding. Coding languages differ in the same way spoken languages do, in that both can refer to the same objects and functions using different terms and 'vocabulary'. This analogy can extend to grammatical differences between languages too, since programming syntax will similarly vary between one coding language and another.

Physical Education:

Common coding concepts, such as algorithms, are now used more than ever in sports training to better understand the impact of injuries or illness on performance, and to hone in on specific areas for potential development.

Creative arts: Holding down the strings on a guitar to play chords can be compared to coding logic through examples such as 'if' statements. *If* a particular number of strings are held down and those strings are played, multiple notes will sound. We can also teach coding through music composition or the act of creating digital art. There are coding platforms available that will enable students to bring musical instruments together, control them and create music using programming commands.

Business and economics:

We can explain how coding across a number of different applications can be utilised for business analytics. The code used to analyse data from market research can support the development of new applications designed to solve identified business problems. The code used to create websites can be made to gather information about a business' target audience and geographical location.

Environmental studies:

Coding expertise within the context of sustainability projects is set to become a highly prized and sought-

after skill. We can demonstrate just how important it is via lesson activities involving sensors of the type that authorities might use to monitor heat, wind or water levels, and how these can be made to trigger environmental defences. You could also reference key figures in the field of environmental science, and explore their use of coding and applications to simulate climate patterns, predict weather changes and analyse the impact of human activities on the Earth's ecosystems.

An interconnected discipline

By highlighting interdisciplinary connections in this way, we can make coding lessons more engaging and relevant to other areas of our students' lives. This will surely help them better appreciate just how important and powerful coding can be, and gain a greater understanding of how interconnected the discipline is with many other subjects and fields of study.

We want our students to develop a deeper understanding of coding itself, but at the same time we should encourage them to think critically and creatively. Reinforcing the many different ways in which coding cuts across subjects could well encourage a new generation of multidisciplinary programmers who possess an in-depth knowledge of, say, art history or geography, as well as the ability to combine that knowledge with skills in coding in all manner of imaginative and unpredictable ways.

We should try to regularly include these interdisciplinary connections in our lessons where we can – or at least often enough for them to become an established part of our standard pedagogy. This will encourage our students to take greater ownership of

CROSS-COMPATIBLE

Five ways to include other subject knowledge and practice into coding lessons.

1. Mathematics

Include mathematical concepts such as sequences, patterns and operations within your delivery via various coding exercises

2. Science

Demonstrate how coding is used in scientific research, data analysis and simulations to model scientific phenomena and analyse experimental data

3. Languages

Discuss the translation of human intentions into machine-readable code, similar to how translating between different languages bridges the gap between language and coding

4. Environmental studies

Demonstrate how sensors are designed to trigger the running of code to perform specific actions when pre-set thresholds are met

5. UI/UX Design:

Deliver coding in the context of user interfaces and user experiences, demonstrating how code can be used to highlight suggested items based on a user's previous activities

their learning, and start feeling comfortable with the idea of applying various coding practices to seemingly unrelated everyday scenarios.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rob Wraith is head of learning technology and digital learning at NCG – a group of seven colleges across the UK; for more information, visit ncgpro.co.uk





Free secondary resources to celebrate #BSW24

British Science Week 2024 is coming up very soon on 8-17 March, and this year is extra special – it's the Week's 30th anniversary!

To celebrate, the British Science Association (who run British Science Week) have released **four completely free activity packs**, including a pack designed specifically for secondary school students.

The activities in the packs are all themed around 'Time', a broad topic that covers lots of fascinating areas of science - from thinking about how we tell time, how animals and nature evolve, how our understanding of science has changed over the years, and what the world might look like in the future!

So, what's inside?

You'll find lots of low-resource activities that let students approach science in all sorts of fun ways. 'How common is my journey to school?', created in partnership with Sustrans, asks students to investigate how their peers travel to school, and think about how we can make walking or cycling more attractive!

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A great leap FORWARD

Daniel Harvey looks at why having your maths and science teams in alignment is essential for those students pursuing the highest science grades

Morecambe and Wise. French and Saunders. Taylor and Clough. Or for the more contemporary-minded, Mitchell and Webb.

There have been many famous double acts whose complimentary talents and skills made their output far more than the sum of their individual elements. And in a similar vein, I'd argue that science departments will see the most success when their taught curriculum is built around scientific concepts that rely heavily on mathematical formulas.

Leveraging expertise

Positive outcomes in topics ranging from forces, electricity and waves, to quantitative chemistry, microscopy and estimation/sampling, call for teaching based on simple problem steps, which avoids straining cognitive load by building on students' existing knowledge of maths.

Then there are those other tricky-to-navigate areas, such as the drawing and

annotating of graphs, rounding of answers to decimal places or sig figs, and working with standard form maths. A heightened focus on curriculum development – across both planned and taught curriculums – should see your science and maths teams meeting regularly to work out the details, language and steps needed to maximise student confidence and success.

This should be recognised as an important part of science curriculum planning – one that hinges on leveraging the existing knowledge and expertise of a school's maths teaching for its science department.

Cart before horse

I can still recall how, when a bold new KS3 'waves' topic was introduced, the ensuing wave speed equations gave our students plenty of problems to solve. However, problems soon emerged in that our students were unfamiliar with standard form numbers. This meant all the prepared problems and work on electromagnetic waves couldn't be used, since

the students weren't due to be learning about standard form in maths for another couple of months.

I was therefore pleased when recently talking to a newly arrived science colleague at my school – he teaches physics, I teach chemistry – keen to discuss my approach to maths teaching. He told me that he wouldn't be using triangles to teach the rearranging of formulas. 'Excellent,' I thought. It's such a 90s way of teaching, and fails to help students achieve fluency, since they end up having to remember the triangle rather than the formula itself.

My colleague went on to explain that the simplest way of teaching students how to solve physics equations is through substituting values and then slowly resolving the resulting maths sum – thus producing a more recognisable maths problem for the students to then solve.

Clarity and consistency

The exchange drove home to me how the way in which maths is utilised and taught by a school's science team shouldn't be left to chance. The very best science teams will instead look to standardise their approach to teaching maths within each science discipline.

In physics, students will need to practice identifying relevant formula, and be taught how to check if units need converting before numbers are placed into equations for resolution.

With so many non-specialist physics teachers currently teaching physics in combined science GCSE, this clarity and consistency is more important than ever if students are to learn the

best methods.

As a chemistry teacher, I'm always struck by how maths students will be provided with an equation sheet, while chemistry students have to memorise the equations they'll need. Recall of those equations is therefore critical, so from talking to maths colleagues, I've started to incorporate their approach to helping students achieve mathematical fluency in my own teaching.

Ultimately, the expertise of experienced chemistry, biology and physics teachers ought to be harnessed and explicitly shared, so that every member of the science team can benefit from this collective wisdom. It should be written down, recorded and rehearsed together – ideally in concert with the school's maths team, so that easy pitfalls (lack of a consistent timeline for key concepts, confusion around certain language and terms) can be avoided.

Maths colleagues can also help their science counterparts by demonstrating how many problems students should be presented with before achieving concept success – and not just as a one-off exercise. As schools gradually move towards adopting coherent numeracy policies, effective interdepartmental collaborations will be vital in making them work in practice.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel Harvey is a GCSE and A Level science teacher and lead on behaviour, pastoral and school culture at an inner city academy



Helping hands

We hear how an ambitious inter-school partnership initiative helped one school in the North East bolster its already extensive science offer

Here at St Leonard's Catholic School, we attribute our success in science to the holistic approach we take to the subject. We don't demand an 'exam factory' mentality of our students, but we do believe in equipping them with all the attributes they'll need to enter STEM fields.

As a department, we have agreed 'non-negotiables' with regards to our curriculum, teaching and learning principles. We don't see our curriculum as the contents of a textbook, an exam board specification list or a series of subject content points on the National Curriculum. It needs to go above and beyond that.

'Science capital'

Our results have always been driven by the ability of our staff to deliver an ambitious curriculum, with further continuity provided by extracurricular clubs that have developed over time. These include our KS3 Science Club, KS4 Mini Bio Society, Sixth form Chemistry, Biology and Medical societies, as well as our Physics Surgery. We also run additional A Level mentoring sessions and reading groups, which have helped to boost students' engagement with science subjects and encourage excellent uptake at A Level.

Our department's aim has always been to 'Provide the best science experience, to

produce the best future scientists.' To achieve that, we've sought to develop our students into great scientists who:

- Think scientifically
- Possess a scientific skill set
- Can apply logic to real-life scenarios
- Transfer their science skills across other subjects
- Can ask insightful questions
- Demonstrate enthusiasm for the natural world
- Are keen to know more

We've seen sustained academic success over the past five years, but still recognise the importance of regularly evaluating what we do and seeking out areas for improvement – particularly in relation to changes across the educational or employment landscape.

Following a recent audit of our curriculum, teaching and learning principles, we felt it wise to enrich our STEM opportunities with a focus on

“We don't see our curriculum as the content of a textbook, an exam board specification list or a series of subject content points”

careers guidance. This initially led us to review our understanding of the Gatsby benchmarks and 'science capital'.

The term 'cultural capital' was originally coined by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who described it as *“The cultural knowledge that serves as currency that helps*

us navigate culture and alters our experiences and the opportunities available to us.”

Building on that notion, 'science capital' could be summarised as the knowledge, attitude, skills and experiences our students develop over the time they spend with us.

As a department we're confident that we're able to deliver on the following areas:

'What you know' – through our challenging curriculum and regular use of Rosenshine's principles and effective recall strategies
'How you think' – via cognitive and metacognitive approaches in our T&L practice, promotion of growth mindsets and igniting of students' curiosity

'What you do' – through our delivery of disciplinary knowledge, teaching the skills required by scientists to hypothesise and problem solve, and by giving

pupils as many opportunities to experience practical science as possible.

There has, however, been a key piece of the puzzle missing – namely *'Who you know'*, which has proved to be a difficult component to fulfil here in the North East

of England, where science-based opportunities and experiences are somewhat limited. Or so we thought.

Unmissable opportunity

Our efforts to address this gap is what first led us to become involved with an ENTHUSE Partnership. Since September 2022, St Leonard's has been the lead school for the ENTHUSE Partnership within our trust, the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, under the direction of its director of science, Rob Swinney [see panel].

ENTHUSE Partnerships are collaborations between eight to ten schools or colleges, supported by £25,000 of funding over two years. Each Partnership involves drawing up a tailored two-year action plan that typically includes teacher CPD combining residential, local and online courses; free curated and quality-assured resources; engagement with STEM Ambassadors to inspire young people; and the development of STEM clubs to further engage young people and improve their practical skills.

We've endeavoured to invite local STEM providers who can give us better insights into the learning and networking

space sector at the event, there to present to and work alongside our students. As one of our students, Zachary Bremner, remarked afterwards, *"Space camp was really interesting and insightful. My favourite part was meeting enthusiastic representatives of the space industry. I intend to contact Lockheed Martin and Viasat with a view to*

work experience. My career aspirations to enter the space industry were consolidated by this camp."

Another of our students, Katy Hill, said *"I loved it! My favourite part was going to Sunderland University to look at different robots and learn how they're used in space. It helped me learn more about the space sector and what jobs are available to me, and I'm happy that I made some good friends who share my interests and are doing the same A Levels as me."*

Rewarding and inspiring

As a department, we've sought to utilise the

professional CPD available via the ENTHUSE partnership including:

- 'Stretch and Challenge in Science' department CPD
- Attending the Secondary Science Teaching and Learning conference in York
- Developing health and safety awareness among our science teachers

STEM ambassadors attending our school career events have also gone on to provide further CPD at our ENTHUSE meetings. It was they who introduced us to the annual STEM Fest event, which some of our triple science students attended last July and found to be a rewarding and inspiring experience.

This year we're hoping to participate in STEM Learning's Research Placements and Experiences programme. The opportunities are certainly there, once you know where to look.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Aisling Stewart is head of science at St Leonard's Catholic School in Durham

opportunities as and when they arise.

The Space Camp 2023 event was held over five days during half term at Sunderland University campus, as a joint venture between The National Space Academy, and sponsors Lockheed Martin and Viasat. It provided our students with an immersive experience themed around space activity, and opened up whole new vistas for them – significantly boosting their technical and academic understanding, while also highlighting potential pathways for career progression in the UK space sector and other civil and military space-related domains.

There were a range of high-profile guest speakers and representatives of the

opportunities on our own doorstep. Josh Minto, from the RTC STEM ambassadors hub in particular, has been consistently willing to attend and share some local STEM leads.

When he told us about Space Camp 2023, we felt it was a 'science capital' opportunity not to be missed. It's well-documented that the north east of England is currently experiencing a STEM skills workforce gap, making it vital for our young scientists to be introduced to and involved in such

GET IT TOGETHER

Rob Swinney explains more about the ENTHUSE Partnerships and how they work...



How did the Science Hub Learning Partnership come into being and what does it do?

For many years, Cardinal Hume Catholic School has run one of the highest performing Computing Hubs in the country on behalf of STEM Learning. We felt we could emulate this success across other subjects, and accepted the Science Learning Partnership contract in the summer term of 2022.

The SLP provides high impact, quality

assured science CPD for teachers at all experience levels and bespoke school-to-school support, while also leading ENTHUSE Partnerships, which bring schools together as clusters to work on specific aims.

To what extent have the goals and approaches adopted by the Science Hub changed or evolved over time?

The teacher recruitment and retention crisis has hit science departments particularly hard. Where once it was difficult to hire a qualified physics teacher, the problem now persists across all three sciences. Schools are having to adapt, and so the SLP has come to focus on delivering subject knowledge enhancement courses to upskill non-specialists to fill gaps, or allow science

teachers to deliver across specialisms. We also now provide courses to support ECTs, assist their development and keep them in the profession.

Can you point to any specific examples of impact or outcomes as a direct result of the SLP's work?

We've worked with numerous schools across the North East, many of which have subsequently had Ofsted inspections with deep dives in science, and we're proud that every one of them achieved at least a Good rating. Our ENTHUSE partnerships have provided CPD to staff, introduced them to novel ways of teaching science and provided a whole host of resources for them use in schools – from air pressure rocket launchers, to steamboats and inflatable flying sharks.

What's New?

Our pick of the latest solutions and innovations for secondary education

1

Building skills

Academy21 works in partnership with schools, LAs, pupil referral units and others to ensure that students receive the best support possible. At KS3, our Skills Builder courses are designed to provide the knowledge and skills students need to progress onto their GCSEs.

At KS4, many of our subjects can be studied for one or two years depending on need; to those for whom GCSEs aren't appropriate, we can offer a range of functional skills courses. We can accept students right up to the end of the term, with no cut-off point, which means Y11s can be placed at any time throughout the year.

Learn about our full range of provision by visiting academy21.co.uk or email contact@academy21.co.uk to get started.



4



High-quality history

Do you want to improve your history provision using a structured and tested framework? Look no further than the Historical Association Quality Mark. It's the perfect way to develop, evaluate and gain recognition for the achievements of your staff and pupils, while creating a legacy of high-quality history at your school.

The Historical Association also offers a range of CPD courses alongside the Quality Mark to support teachers in making a lasting difference to your standards of history provision. For more information, visit history.org.uk/go/quality

2

Actionable assessments

Do you have a clear understanding of your students' wellbeing? The Cambridge Wellbeing Check provides insight into your students' feelings, helping you to assess their wellbeing and improve your teaching with actionable reports.

The Wellbeing Check is a simple, digital, student-led assessment that takes about 20 minutes. The reports help teachers see a complete picture



of wellbeing at individual, class and whole-school levels.

Highly commended in the 2023 Teach Secondary Awards, the Wellbeing Check is now available for £1 per student and can be administered multiple times throughout the academic year. To find out more, visit cem.org/wellbeing or contact Suzanne Tipping via suzanne.tipping@cambridge.org.

3

Get that freedom feeling

Join over 9,000 schools, academies and trusts in the UK that have embraced the freedom feeling.

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5



Cyber saviours

Could your students be the ones to keep our nation safe in the future? Cyber Explorers, a UK government initiative, offers a free, engaging platform to help 11- to 14-year-olds develop cyber security skills in a gamified learning experience.

Launched to address the UK's cyber skills gap, it equips students with essential digital skills while fostering their interest in GCSE computer science and cyber security careers.

Suitable for in-class or at-home online learning, this free resource for schools inspires students to choose computer studies and open their eyes to careers full of opportunities, which will truly be in demand!

Register your explorers at cyberexplorers.co.uk

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READING PLUS

6 Reading Solutions

In the ever-evolving landscape of educational technology, adaptation is paramount. Ian Fitzpatrick, MD of Reading Solutions UK, endeavours to ensure the edtech company – home to the online reading programme Reading Plus – can adapt to meet the education sector's changing conditions.

Our latest advancements are happening under DreamBox Learning; the leading education technology provider that pioneered intelligent adaptive learning. Reading Plus was acquired in 2021 by DreamBox, following its expansion into the English language arts market, thus becoming the only dual-discipline solution rated 'Strong' in mathematics and reading by Johns Hopkins' Evidence for ESSA website (evidenceforessa.org).

Following this acquisition, Reading Solutions UK has unveiled a refreshed Reading Plus logo – providing the same excellent service with a new look. Join us in shaping the future of education with Reading Plus, where literacy isn't just taught – it's transformed. Find out more at readingsolutionsuk.co.uk

Technicians: The David Sainsbury Gallery

Visit the Science Museum in London and step into the fascinating world of STEM careers at *Technicians: The David Sainsbury Gallery*. Recreating the workplaces of technicians across multiple sectors – health science, creative arts, manufacturing, and renewable energy – your group will get hands-on with interactive exhibits that simulate job-related tasks.

Students will experience what it's like to be a lighting technician on the *Black Panther* film set from Marvel Studios, explore the problems faced by wind turbine technicians, and discover how NHS pharmacy technicians make life-saving medicines. Groups can also book free 'Meet an Employee' workshops, where they will participate in activities and Q&A sessions with real-life technicians. Book your free visit at sciencemuseum.org.uk/groups.



8 CPD from the Science Museum Group

The Science Museum Group (SMG) Academy leads CPD training courses for teachers both online and in-person, to support them in their professional development. All courses are shaped and informed by evidence from extensive academic research, covering topics that range from encouraging classroom

discussion to leading your own Exploration and Discovery Club.

The courses provide great opportunities for developing your skills, networking with teachers and obtaining new learning resources for use in the classroom. In-person courses are delivered from the Group's world-leading museums in London, Manchester, and York, with all courses offered free of charge to UK-based teachers, thanks to funding from SMG Academy partners. Browse the courses and book your place at learning.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/academy

9



Transform with creativity

Nine out of 10 teachers say that Artsmark's world-leading training boosts teachers' skills and confidence. Music, performing arts and other creative activities are vital in schools.

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10



Leap into phonics

Lexonik is here to help school leaders who are seeking to improve phonics in their schools. Lexonik Leap is a fast-acting, effective face-to-face literacy intervention that's ideal for learners with standardised scores of less than 85 or EAL learners. Rapidly progressing reading, spelling and oracy, Lexonik Leap is a flexible 6-step intervention, complete with a paperless diagnostic assessment that ensures learners are met at the point of need. The diagnostic does the evaluation heavy lifting, meaning there's no need to start from step 1 if your learners already possess the skills for step 3.

Contact Lexonik today to close the phonics gap at your school – visit lexonik.co.uk, email enquiries@lexonik.co.uk or contact 01642 42 42 98.

Bring some 'KAPOW!' TO THE CURRICULUM

Comics are a much more versatile teaching tool than you might think, says **Lucy Starbuck Braidley**

With homegrown comic artists like Jamie

Smart flying off the booksellers' shelves, it's easy to see that comics and their chunkier counterparts, graphic novels, are experiencing a renaissance amongst readers in schools across the UK. So how can teachers harness this excitement for the form and have it usefully impact upon their curriculum?

Something for everyone

As a starting point, get some comics into class and see what's out there that interests your cohort. If you aren't sure, ask the students themselves – you're bound to have at least one budding comics fan in your class who's just bursting to share the joy of their reading passion with their peers.

Comics are a brilliant way to support less engaged

readers in developing a love of story and greater confidence in their independent reading. Many students will find comics' combinations of words and images a satisfying way of accessing stories independently – but comics shouldn't just be reserved for less engaged readers. They cover all genres and challenge levels, and should therefore be available as an option for everyone's reading diet – even that of teachers!

Since the launch of the government's latest Reading Framework in July 2023, the importance of a reading for pleasure pedagogy has been placed firmly alongside phonics as a key part of a

school's reading provision.

Building a comics and graphic novel collection into your wider book stock is a great way to start making use of this fun, accessible and compelling medium. Weekly or monthly subscriptions to certain comic titles and the anticipation they generate can help build a sense of excitement around your library and reading spaces. These will often present great value for money too, since the copies may well be passed around different classes multiple times.

From manga stories for younger readers, through to well-known series from the likes of Marvel and DC, there's a huge range of titles

out there that will both entertain and challenge all levels of reader.

Say it loud!

Comics' reliance on dialogue provides an ideal opportunity develop students' understanding of how well-written dialogue can be used to both develop character and move the action forward in a scene.

Observe some famous comic duos – Calvin and Hobbes, Tintin and Haddock, Batman and Robin. If you looked only at their dialogue, would you be able to tell who was speaking? How has each character's identity been shown in their speech? This line of questioning can stimulate some powerful discussions and help demystify for students what it is that 'good writers' do.

Alternatively, you can flip that task and prepare a comics page with all speech balloons blanked out. Ask the group to complete the

“Silent comics can open a world of complex and subtle narratives to a much broader range of children”

speech, thinking about both character and what's happening in each panel. These tasks can be more challenging than you'd expect, and provide a great segue into developing the quality of dialogue in prose writing.

A space for silence

In recent years, wordless picture books have become widely used in primary classrooms, reminding us that the importance of developing an appreciation of visual literacy and its role in reading and writing shouldn't be underestimated. The comic equivalent of a wordless picturebook, the silent comic can be another interesting avenue by which to explore the richness of visual narratives.

Silent comics can open up a world of complex and subtle narratives to a much broader range of children. Though obviously far easier to access, the level of discussion that can be garnered from some visual texts has the potential to be quite in-depth and high-level. Without the barriers written words can sometimes create, discussions can focus on the richness of the material, the intent of the creator and motivations of characters.

For a good starting point, take a look at works such as Gustavo Duarte's *Monsters*, or Peter Van Den Ende's

stunning comic *The Wanderer*. They're a stark contrast in styles, but both titles truly excel at silent storytelling.

Comics in the wider curriculum

Across the curriculum, graphic narratives can serve as a great tool for both acquiring and demonstrating knowledge. Various studies working with different age groups have shown that material presented in comic form has the potential to boost levels of engagement and information retention when compared to reading standard texts.

As such, there's been a marked growth in non-fiction comic titles primarily intended to support use of the form across the foundation subjects. Titles like Emma Reynold's *Drawn to Change the World* and Mike Barfield and Jess Bradleys' *A Poo, a Gnu and You* series, are just two examples of comics being used to convey complex non-fiction information in an accessible and memorable way to very young readers.

For older cohorts, the creation of non-fiction comics in order to demonstrate subject knowledge can provide classes and extracurricular groups with an interesting challenge. Elements of history, science and

geography will all lend themselves well to being depicted via sequences of words anchored to specific images. In fact, you may find yourself surprised at just how many details in students' pictures demonstrate subject understanding.

Students may, for example, pick up wider historical contexts contained within illustrations, or find themselves able to capably demonstrate complex or even abstract concepts via sequences between panels.

These ideas are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to using the medium of comics for curriculum purposes. Comics cover all genres. They can be silly and anarchic or deeply poetic. They can present complicated information in accessible forms, or be highly complex texts themselves. Their versatility and range offers huge potential for educators.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lucy Starbuck Braidley is the producer and host of Comic Boom - The Comics in Education Podcast and is senior programme manager for Reading for Enjoyment at The National Literacy Trust.

JUST FOR FUN

- ▶ Comics clubs and dedicated 'writing for pleasure' time, whether in or outside of school, can provide great 'reading for pleasure' opportunities
- ▶ Comics can be used as a hook for bringing groups of students together in collaborative creative projects, providing a way of involving children who don't typically see themselves as writers, or artists in the process.
- ▶ Embrace students' eagerness to further explore existing characters from their favourite books, games and TV shows. When writing for pleasure, give them opportunities to draw from stories and pastimes they love and exercise their creativity. If they're feeling overwhelmed by the need to come with ideas, they don't have to start from scratch. The freedom to reinvent characters or storylines from existing stories and combine them in inventive mashups is a well-established part of comics' history, and can be another way of breaking down barriers that might put students off creative writing.

Course CORRECTION

Andy Lewis examines some criticisms from Ofsted concerning the quality of RE provision, and weighs up the question of whether the subject is fit for purpose...

*There was a subject,
That had a little place,
Right in the middle of the basic curriculum.
When it was good,
It was very good indeed,
But when it was bad it was HORRID.*

– ‘There was a little subject called RE’ by Andy Lewis, adapted from an original poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

When Ofsted published its latest Annual Report on 23rd November 2023 (see bit.ly/ts132-RE1), RE teachers’ various online networks were quick to notice the negative headlines their subject had apparently generated. It was painful to read of ‘extensive weaknesses’ in its teaching. *“In too many primary and secondary schools,”* the report said, RE was of *“a poor quality and not fit for purpose”* – before adding that this was leaving pupils *“ill-equipped for some of the complexities of contemporary society.”*

Those words hurt, but they didn’t come as a complete surprise.

Postcode lottery

I’ve been an RE teacher for 18 years, and it’s a subject I’ve loved since my own GCSE and A Level. I’ve worked locally and nationally to help promote the subject and its development as a discipline. I love teaching RE, and do believe it’s one of the most important subjects on the curriculum.

However, the sad reality is that there is indeed some substance to Ofsted’s findings. Fiona Moss, CEO of the National Association of Teachers of Religious

Education, recently described RE as being a ‘postcode lottery’ – only for Ofsted to then later confirm that the provision students receive does depend on their school. For some, the RE provision in their school is excellent. For others, it’s of poor quality, or barely even included on their timetable.

It’s important to understand the subject’s unique position within the curriculum. RE is a legal entitlement for all pupils on the roll of every school, unless they’ve been withdrawn by their parents. It can be found in what’s known as the ‘basic curriculum’, which includes the 12 KS3/4 National Curriculum subject areas, as well as RSHE. Unlike other those other subjects, however, there’s no national set of standards for RE. Instead, the subject is set and overseen in a range of different ways.

Creating complexity

In maintained community, foundation and voluntary schools without a religious character, RE is taught in accordance with the Local Agreed Syllabus (LAS). This is reviewed every five years by the Standing Advisory Council on

Religious Education (SACRE), which every local education authority has to appoint.

Academies and free schools must teach RE in accordance with the requirements set by a LAS, as well as the law. As the wording of Education Act 1996 puts it, they must ensure that what they teach, *“Reflects the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.”*

Academies can opt to use the LAS, and many do, but bigger MATs will often develop their own. In foundation and voluntary controlled schools with a religious character, RE must

be taught according to the Agreed Syllabus, unless parents request RE in accordance with the trust deed of the school. In voluntary aided schools, RE must be taught in accordance with the trust deed. This means, for example, that a Catholic school will follow the Religious Education Directory (RED) set by the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales.

It soon becomes clear that the challenge of simply clarifying *what should be taught in RE* has created complexity that many believe directly contributes to the mixed quality of provision we’ve seen. It’s certainly hard to argue that the system more broadly is currently fit for purpose.



Scared of the deep?

One interesting criticism of the Ofsted report is that only 5% of subject ‘deep dives’ are focused on RE.

Understanding the rationale for why RE was picked during those inspections might shed some light on why that proportion seems so low. Did the inspectors not see RE on the curriculum model? Was it absent from the school’s website?

What many within the RE community have found is that inspectors often lack the confidence and expertise to fully investigate RE and understand its place within curriculum. Schools with a religious character moreover have their RE inspected separately, creating another potential complication with Ofsted’s dataset.

Ofsted published its last RE Research Review in May 2021 (see bit.ly/ts132-RE2), so as an organisation it evidently has a clear idea of what it believes makes for ‘good RE’. Some believed at the time that this review

shouldn’t have been conducted, due to that aforementioned complexity – but it was, and as such, inspectors ought to be confident in completing ‘deep dives’ into the subject as part of their regular inspections.

Ongoing concerns

This was far from the only official document aimed at improving standards of RE provision. As far back as 2013, the Religious Education Council of

worldviews. It also came with a non-statutory National Curriculum framework attached (see bit.ly/ts132-RE4).

2015 then saw reforms to both GCSE and A Level, as well as the first version of the Rt. Hon. Charles Clarke and Professor Linda Woodhead MBE’s pamphlet, titled ‘A new settlement: religion and belief in schools’ (bit.ly/ts132-RE5), which called for a national RE curriculum. The RE Council, together with

Given that RE is an area of the curriculum where ‘Big Questions’ can come up – the meaning of life, issues of suffering, the possibility of life after death, ethical and moral dilemmas – it seems self-evident that a proficient level of training, knowledge and expertise will always deliver better outcomes.

Changing the world

It’s indisputable that there are many amazing RE teachers and leaders out there achieving great things, as well as a lot of well-intentioned people who’d love to help deliver better RE, but lack the resources, space and time to do so. Yet it’s also impossible to deny that in some schools, the subject is perennially neglected and considered a low priority.

If, as Ofsted’s Annual Report concludes, this means students will be, “ill-equipped for some of the complexities of contemporary society” then it should concern us all. In just the last few months we’ve seen huge rises in both antisemitism and Islamophobia, compounded by a news cycle fuelled by social media-driven sensationalism.

RE might not have all the answers, but it does give young people a set of tools with which to navigate and make their own decisions about the world they live in. To change the world, you need to understand the world – and I know that good RE can play a big part in precisely that.

“The challenge of simply clarifying what should be taught in RE has created complexity”

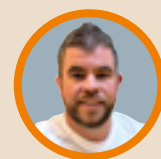
England and Wales published its ‘Review of Religious Education in England’ (see bit.ly/ts132-RE3), making frequent use the phrase ‘religions and worldviews’, which has since been used in various forms in recognition of the growing number and influence of those with non-religious

NATRE and RE Today Services, later published a ‘State of the nation’ report in 2017 (bit.ly/ts132-RE6), which signalled then that the quality of RE provision was already highly variable and largely dependent on individual schools. People have known for a while that RE is in need of support.

Where are the teachers?

Yet one of the real problems lies in the shortage of teachers. In 2023, just 44% of the required number of RE teachers were recruited into ITT – down from 76% in 2022. This cuts to the very heart of the issue, in that too often, those delivering RE lessons aren’t specialists.

At secondary, this can mean that RE will be regularly taught by anyone ‘under allocation’. At primary, it can result in RE being led across the school by someone with little understanding of the subject, or indeed little interest.



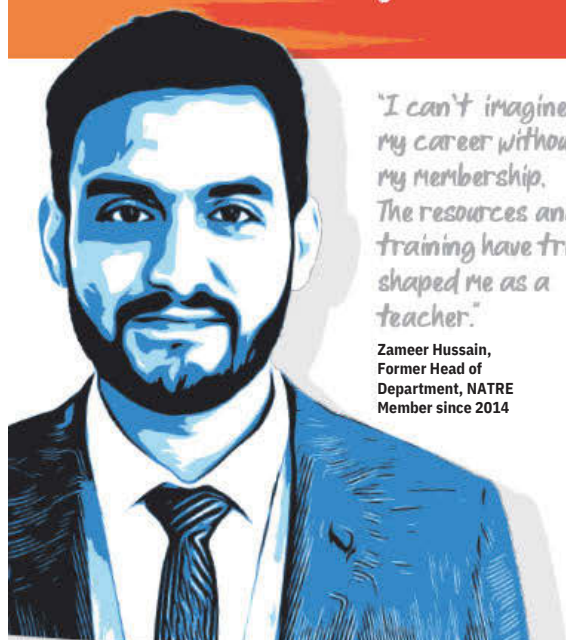
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Lewis is director of RE at St Bonaventure’s, East London; follow him at [@andylewis_re](https://twitter.com/andylewis_re) or visit mrlewisre.co.uk

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Q&A

“We need to rethink exam preparation”

Dr John Allan explains why enabling students to lose themselves in the outdoors can ignite their capacity to learn



30 SECOND BRIEFING

For over 40 years, Kingswood has been harnessing and perfecting the power of outdoor adventure education. Across 11 UK locations, our highly-trained instructors deliver curriculum-linked residential experiences designed to encourage confidence, resilience and life skills, meaning that the impact lasts well beyond the end of the trip and into their personal, academic and professional lives.

How has the student experience changed?

More than ever before, an enormous amount of information is at the fingertips of school children who are expected to filter and process attention-grabbing material to become successful in assessment situations. Many young learners need to become competent not only in how to retain information, but also in how they can self-regulate their behaviours to properly understand it, and then use it in exams. Learners in ‘revision mode’ prior to taking their GCSEs need to prepare well to optimise their performance.

What is the challenge we face?

Although we understand the significant importance of this period in a young person’s life, exam preparation should not involve constant cramming in uniform settings without any complimentary, purposeful stimulation. The human brain will switch off when exposed to long, lacklustre, and overly controlled activities. It will also struggle to take in information from multiple sources at the same time. Despite popular assertions, the human brain cannot multitask effectively.

What’s the solution?

Varied events in short, deliberately spaced cycles – which are responsive to enquiring minds, and which use relevant, meaningful stimuli to ignite emotions such as



laughter, incredulity and even mild apprehension – will often generate much more meaningful learning.

How does OAE come into play?

Outdoor activities in natural spaces are known to deliver these sorts of experiences, generating a range of beneficial psychological, social and physical skills which underpin our health and well-being. Nature exposure and the freedom to play is recognised as integral to young people’s learning, particularly on tasks requiring focus, working memory and collaborations with others – all transferable skill sets that aid revision.

More importantly, immersion within nature-based activities enables young people to become



ABOUT JOHN:
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refreshed, focus their attention and regulate emotions, which take a pounding during exam preparatory periods. We may believe that incessant screen staring or note take-taking with background music is enabling effective understanding and retention of information, but it is, in fact, counterproductive to good learning.

Can students afford the break from study time?

Absolutely. Don’t be misled into thinking that time away from revision is wasteful and will negatively affect their abilities to acquire desired or predicted grades. Neuroscience tells us that the most impactful forms of learning are those which intersperse organised chunks of learning with interruptions for inspiring experiences with others, or quiet time. This process allows new material to be absorbed as new brain cells are created and neural pathways are strengthened. Exposure to the outdoors is built upon these principles, and will heighten their chances of success.

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- + Ask about our subsidised NCS experiences for teens, designed to help their transition to adulthood

A safe space in THE MAELSTROM

Pete Wharmby explains why more steps must be taken to improve autistic students' experience of secondary education

Teaching is a very stressful job. I taught English for 15 years, four of them as head of department, so I feel I know a little about how corrosive that endless stress can be.

Deadlines, marking loads, classroom management – there's a lot to focus on, and barely any time to get anything done. This is, of course, a well-established aspect of adult life within the education system. But what about the students?

Reduce the stressors

It's interesting to me that whenever autistic students are discussed by teachers, SENCOs and even parents, the issue of stress doesn't come up much. If it does, it's often in the context of the 'stress' these young people cause to 'us adults' in the situation. Yet the reality of being autistic means that autistic students are likely to be extraordinarily stressed, all the time – perhaps in ways that even the most stressed teacher couldn't comprehend.

I was diagnosed as autistic back in 2017, and have spent my time since then trying to communicate to the world what it's like to be autistic, and how the world could perhaps meet us halfway and improve our lives.

Right now, the statistics aren't good. Autistic people

are four times more likely to develop depression (bit.ly/ts132-A1), and autistic young people are 28 times more likely to think about or attempt suicide (bit.ly/ts132-A2). Part of that is the result of high levels of unsustainable stress taking its toll across the lifespan. Unfortunately, this all starts

students typically feel will stem from a variety of sources, three of which we'll examine here.

Firstly, autistic sensory sensitivity means that we're constantly bombarded by unnecessary sensory information that fills our mental bandwidth. The ticking of clocks, the smell of

perfume, busy displays on walls – these all contribute to our stress levels rocketing up. To get an insight into how this might feel, imagine trying to work diligently in a nightclub or a busy building site.

We're also stressed by communication. The way we autistic people communicate is different to the non-autistic. We are direct, clear, unadorned speakers who avoid ambiguity and find eye contact difficult. We don't tend to notice 'unwritten rules' or hierarchies.

Unfortunately, this natural style of ours is almost universally frowned upon by the non-autistic majority, so we learn early on that we must pretend and communicate in the 'neurotypical' way. We call this process 'masking' – an intensely exhausting masquerade that we're forced to endure. Since these communications aren't natural to us, we struggle, get things wrong and are criticised. All the time.

Finally, we find it difficult to switch tasks in the ways you might be used to. It takes us longer and requires advance warning – rather like how a motorway will signpost junctions far ahead of time.

This is, in part, due to our

“We're great at establishing a deep focus and getting absorbed by tasks; the payoff is needing more time when switching tasks”

at a young age, and the impact of the school environment can't be overstated.

It's so important that secondary schools do all they can to reduce the stress their autistic students experience every day. Luckily, this can be startlingly straightforward – so long as staff have a good understanding of what autism actually is, and are willing to make small changes to the way they run their classrooms.

An exhausting masquerade

Let's start with where all that stress is coming from. The stress that autistic



monotropic brains (bit.ly/ts132-A3). We're great at establishing a deep focus and getting absorbed by tasks, but the payoff is that we need more time when switching to a new task. Something which is obviously very important within a school setting.

All of this, and so much more, can contribute to the extreme stress most autistic students feel. So what can be done?

Sensory audits

One of the first things any school should do for autistic students is what's called a sensory audit, whereby an individual's unique sensory profile can be established, since no two autistic people's sensory experiences are the same.

I'm personally sensitive to sound and touch (including temperature), and have little sensitivity to taste. For other autistic people, these details will be very different. Knowledge of what's likely to cause distress is vital when adapting an environment; arranging a chat with the student, their family and friends can help you start to map out where their unique sensitivities lie.

The benefit of this is twofold. Firstly, it allows for reasonable adjustments to be made. Is the student better off sitting by a window with cool air and natural light? Do they struggle with the scratchy fabric of school shirts? Will teachers need to moderate their use of aftershave and room fragrances? Rather than attempting to apply the same adjustments to every autistic student, make it individualised, and thus

more efficient.

Secondly, it means that where adaptations *can't* be made, you at least you know that their stress levels are likely to be higher around that sensory input. During a school trip's coach journeys, for example, it's near impossible to moderate sound levels. Allowing a student to use ear defenders is great, but so is simply knowing that this student might be feeling a little fragile after the journey, and speaking with them on arrival to see if they need a quiet spot to sit down for a moment.

Simply knowing is one of the most powerful factors of change in all this. A compassionate, understanding word of support is valuable in and of itself.

Time and space

When it comes to communication, the best way to reduce stress is to streamline the whole process in an effort to avoid stressful overthinking. Communicate with autistic students in the clearest, least ambiguous way you can.

That means avoiding stock phrases, exaggerations and vagueness. Don't say 'Write as much as you can,' as this will create anxiety ('How much CAN I write?!'). Instead, say 'Write 20 lines' or specify a full page.

Don't tell them off for misbehaving, but state clearly what it is they've done wrong and what the

consequences will be (and be prepared to justify yourself, since many autistic people abhor injustice).

For older students, put things in writing via email as much as you can and don't hint at things. State plainly what's required and when it's required by. If you actually mean 'Get it to me tomorrow,' then say so. Avoid qualifying that with 'If you can, get it to me tomorrow'.

Finally, to avoid the stress of instant transitions between tasks, issue plenty of warnings, just like those recognisable to motorway users: 'Your change of task is approaching in 10 minutes, 5 minutes, 3...2...1...' Allow the students time and space to switch tasks, or even let them carry on with whatever they're absorbed in, if you can.

All this is only the beginning. There are a thousand more things I could recommend, but behind them all is the need to understand the autistic experience, and do whatever you can to reduce stress levels.

Just like every other human being on the planet, an autistic student can't perform at their best when they're stressed beyond their capacity. Schools are uniquely, if inadvertently designed to create stress for autistic people – so be a safe space in the maelstrom and promote autistic wellbeing.

GENERAL IDEAS FOR SENSORY ADAPTATION

- ▶ Reduce the number of displays in classrooms
- ▶ Provide quiet spaces during break and lunchtimes
- ▶ Allow the use of ear defenders
- ▶ Allow the use of sunglasses indoors
- ▶ Let students write with paper 'padding' beneath their work if they feel they need it
- ▶ Don't enforce eye contact – it's extremely intense for most autistic people, and we hate it!
- ▶ Issue targeted advance warnings ahead of fire drills
- ▶ Be flexible with school uniform garments that may cause texture and/or temperature difficulties
- ▶ Remember that alexithymia can affect some autistic students, who may not be able to identify the source of their discomfort or the effect it is having on them.
- ▶ A big part of autistic masking is the perceived need to hide our own discomfort, knowing that no one else will take it seriously. Break that cycle!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pete Wharmby is an author, speaker and tutor whose books *Untypical* (2023, HarperCollins) and *What I Want to Talk About* (2022, Jessica Kingsley Publishers) are available now; for more information, visit petewharmby.com

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LEARNING LAB

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- + EAL support strategies
- + Have you read your school's behaviour policy?
- + Why you shouldn't ditch those textbooks just yet
- + The edtech trends set to shape 2024
- + Working memory essentials
- + Could the creative arts boost your students' STEM outcomes?

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Thinking about...

STRESS

With exam season always looming, seemingly endless amounts of marking to be done and lessons needing to be planned, it's hardly surprising that many teachers can often find themselves feeling overwhelmed. This inevitably leads to stress and anxiety – and no one can be expected to reach their full teaching potential under those conditions.

But you don't need to let stress get the better of you. By incorporating a quick and easy-to-master breathing technique into your daily routine, you can override those stressful symptoms, bring positivity back into your classroom and remain calm during those difficult school days.

You only need five minutes to feel the benefits, and can practise using the technique while sitting in an upright position on a sturdy chair, cross-legged on the floor or standing with your feet shoulder-width apart. If you want to get the most out of the exercise it's best to not slouch, so avoid using softer furniture such as sofas or beanbags.

Once you've found a comfortable, quiet place and adopted a position that suits you, it's important to begin by doing some light stretching first. Slowly stretch your arms up to the ceiling and then bring them back down again. You might want to also

roll your shoulders a few times to help loosen them up further. You're now ready to try a breath technique that will reset your stress system.

Inhale through your nose for three seconds, allowing your belly expand, and then release. Now, suspend the breath for seven seconds before taking three seconds to slowly exhale. Repeat this process at least five times.

Don't worry if you can't hold for the full seven seconds on your first try. As you continue, your body will relax as your stress system begins to reset, and you'll soon start to find that the whole process becomes easier. For best results, try taking three minutes out of your day to repeat the process with your eyes closed. Once you've completed the process, remain sitting with your eyes closed for a further two minutes.

With this quick and handy breathing technique in your back pocket, you'll be well-equipped to enter your classroom with an air of calm confidence, ready to tackle any difficulties that might spring up throughout the day. Try sharing this technique with your colleagues, or perhaps even your students, and who knows – over time, you might well start to see a shift in your school's general atmosphere...



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carolyn Cowan is a London-based psychotherapist and breathwork teacher; find out more about Carolyn and her work by visiting carolyncowan.com

CLOSE-UP ON... ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE



EAL is by no means a homogeneous category of learners. It includes children from different linguistic backgrounds with varying needs and levels of exposure to English.

With the number of EAL children in UK schools having risen considerably in recent years, many teachers have found themselves faced with the challenge of needing to assess their written work in a way that takes into account their potential disadvantages, compared to their non-EAL peers. So what do those comparisons between EAL and non-EAL learners look like in practice? What will be the likely impacts of these be on their writing? Before adopting fair writing assessment practices for EAL learners, we must first understand the linguistic obstacles they face.

Research has shown that the barriers presented to EAL learners include, most obviously, a lower English vocabulary compared to their monolingual peers, which can affect their ability to produce cohesive texts or creatively extend topics with sufficiently developed ideas. Producing

a cohesive text, after all, requires a student to effectively coordinate information at word, sentence and text level.

Oftentimes, it will be evident in their writing (more so than in their speech) that through drawing on their own linguistic repertoire, EAL learners may structure their sentences according to their first language and struggle to organise their ideas into paragraphs.

Certain genres may also prove to be more challenging for them to approach than others, because their texts are governed by culture-specific norms with which they may be unfamiliar. Finally, first language interference and a lack of previous exposure to English can lead to grammatical inaccuracies – perhaps the most frequent challenge of all for EAL learners.

MEANING OVER SYNTAX

That said, if we're to be truly inclusive while assessing our EAL learners' writing, then it's crucial that we prioritise our evaluation of *effective communication of meaning* over grammatical accuracy

and perfect syntax.

We also need to prioritise our assessing of their English proficiency levels over their abilities in other subjects, and frequently acknowledge the progress they're making in learning English by mapping their written work against an EAL writing development continuum, with clear descriptors of how our learners are expected to perform at each level. This could be used for both summative and ongoing formative assessment of their writing performance in class.

Finally, adopting a more scaffolded approach to assessment that draws on visual aids, prompt questions or the breaking down of complex tasks into smaller, more manageable steps will constitute great evidence of differentiation in assessment.

If you're looking for a robust English proficiency assessment tool, AssessEP by Across Cultures will assess all four language skills, while providing you with detailed performance indicators to help assess your learners' skills at all levels and a way of aligning of the results to other EAL frameworks (e.g. BELL, CEFR).

DO THIS READ THE RULES

Exercise better class control with these tips from Robin Launder...

Your school's behaviour policy. Have you read it? Recently? Do you know what it contains? It might not be the most stimulating document, but there's a good chance it'll do most, if not all of the following:

- Specify what is and isn't acceptable student behaviour
- Explain what to do if misbehaviour happens
- Outline what sanctions you can impose (and those you can't)
- Underlines your right to implement said sanctions
- Share behaviour management strategies

Follow it to the letter, and you'll be working in solidarity with your colleagues. By following it yourself, it's more likely that your colleagues will do too, so that they're working in solidarity with you.

Behaviour management is a team business. The closer we teachers follow the behaviour policy, the more likely it is that our students will act in accordance with it.

Robin Launder is a behaviour management consultant and speaker; find more tips in his weekly Better Behaviour online course – for more details, visit behaviourbuddy.co.uk

MARTHA GIANNAKAKI IS EAL SPECIALIST WITH LEARNING VILLAGE BY ACROSS CULTURES; FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT AXCULTURES.COM/ONLINE-LEARNING

30,000

The number of primary pupils with high attainment in maths who go on to achieve a Grade 6 or lower in the subject at GCSE

Source: Survey of Y6-Y9s by the recently launched education charity Axiom Maths (axiommaths.com)

A team of neuroscientists based at Columbia University's Teachers College in New York have published a study that identifies notable differences in 10- to 12-year-olds' comprehension of text presented via physical print material, versus text presented digitally and rendered on a screen.

59 middle-school students were tasked with reading passages in both digital and print formats and making single-word semantic judgements about each, while their brain activity was recorded. Analysis of the participants' N400 brain activity – which forms part of the brain's natural response to words and other visual, auditory and olfactory stimuli – appeared to show, as the study's abstract puts it, 'Deeper reading of text passages that were presented in print, and shallower reading of texts presented digitally.'

The full study notes that the situation isn't entirely black and white, with some prior experiments having observed faster reading speeds of digital compared to print, while others found the opposite. Observations of faster reading times for digital text do, however, appear to tally with lower rates of comprehension accuracy. More pertinently for TS readers, though, is an aside within the study that children seem to have fared significantly better in exams after studying with the aid of paper-based learning and revision materials compared to digital equivalents.

The team's research paper, 'Middle-schoolers' reading and processing depth in response to digital and print media: An N400 study' can be read in full via bit.ly/ts132-LL1

YOUR GUIDE TO...

THE DIGITAL TRENDS OF 2024



Pearson's Les Hopper highlights the notable edtech developments that educators can expect to see over the coming year...

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Alongside national initiatives and experimentation within companies like Pearson, many secondary schools are taking steps to better understand AI and how to manage it. Leaders at Denbigh High School and Chiltern Learning Trust, for example, have implemented an AI Steering Group to support staff and ensure that learners use AI safely, strategically and impactfully. Others are now teaching students 'Prompt Craft', experimenting with creating online quizzes and developing joint marking initiatives.

Here at Pearson, we recently announced our Pearson Edexcel EPQ:AI, which will allow A level students to study the role and ethics of AI, critically analyse trending tools like ChatGPT and build key skills for the future.

INCREASED STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The number of students taking GCSE computer science is on the rise, and teachers report seeing ever more interest among students for using tech in class and utilising skills such as touch typing. 91% of learners we surveyed said they were actively preparing to spend their futures in a digital world, with some calling for 'Better training in programming and AI' and 'More computer-based lessons.'

INNOVATIVE ASSESSMENTS

We're witnessing growing support for on-screen exam options among both students and teachers. Last year saw a 47% uplift in the number of on-screen Pearson Edexcel GCSE and International GCSE exams that were taken, so it follows that we can expect to see more on-screen exam options become available year on year.

We've also piloted remote invigilation for high-stakes assessment – something never previously attempted at scale. Big changes are clearly taking place, but it's vital that those changes only occur with robust systemic integrity and security measures in place. In the meantime, we'll continue working with teachers, students and regulators to explore how, where and when technologies can enhance assessments, and become a realistic option for all.

PERSONALISATION AND UNLOCKING ACCESS

One in three teachers in our Pearson School Report stated that new technologies have improved engagement and accessibility for learners with SEND. The aforementioned remote invigilation pilot saw 150 learners – some with SEND, anxiety and health issues – sit their exams from home and other remote locations last summer, thus widening access to formally assessed qualifications for students who might otherwise have been unable to achieve their potential.

LES HOPPER LEADS ON PRODUCTS, SERVICES AND SUPPORTING DIGITAL INNOVATION AT PEARSON. THE 2023 PEARSON SCHOOL REPORT CAN BE DOWNLOADED VIA [BIT.LY/TS132-LL5](https://bit.ly/ts132-LL5); FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [BIT.LY/TS132-LL6](https://bit.ly/ts132-LL6)

53%

of children who have previously used generative AI say that they have seen peers use the technology in negative ways (e.g. for deceptive images, falsifying homework, etc.)

Source: Survey of over 4,000 young people, parents and carers by Censuswide commissioned by the UK Safer Internet Centre

Need to know

The National Foundation for Educational Research has carried out an evidence review (see bit.ly/ts132-LL3) examining the factors that are supporting and obstructing the formation of a more diverse teaching workforce. The NFER's findings indicate that people of colour are over-represented among applications for ITT courses, but see lower acceptance rates compared to white applicants.

Those making it past the initial stage then report experiencing proportionately high levels of isolation, and relatively little in the way of support from tutors and mentors that specifically addresses the diversity issues and racism they may well face over the course of their subsequent teaching careers.

The review identifies the main barriers preventing teachers of colour from advancing into leadership and headship roles as being a general lack of encouragement, racism and colleagues holding preconceptions based on their culture and/or faith.

Veteran teachers of colour are quoted within the review as having experienced an 'invisible glass ceiling.'

According to Jack Worth, the NFER's School Workforce Lead, "Concerns about the low representation of people of colour in the teaching workforce are not new, but the issue persists, despite policy commitments to address it.

Evidence shows there has been an increase in people of colour applying for ITT in the past decade, but retention and promotion gaps have widened.

"There needs to be support and encouragement of career progression for teachers of colour, with a firm commitment from senior leaders to provide career advancement opportunities."



THE LOWDOWN ON... WORKING MEMORY AND LEARNING

You can think of working memory as a mental notebook, the place where we hold information for short periods of time – even just a few seconds – while we carry out other relevant mental activities.

Working memory is important in everyday life and for many school and college activities. From following instructions, to learning how to read and recalling mathematical rules or historical facts, it's the very foundation upon which learning is built. As learners progress, it becomes increasingly crucial for more complex tasks, such as comprehension and analysis, not to mention time management, setting and working towards goals and regulating behaviour.

BARRIERS TO WORKING MEMORY

Some learners will find the process of developing their working memory more challenging than others. They may, for example, be distracted by competing thoughts, feelings of anxiety or even the learning environment itself. We all have personal limits as to how much information we can hold in our working memory. As a result, tasks that may be comfortably within one learner's capability will present significant challenges for another.

Where working memory is poor, cognitive overload can mean learners struggle to remember instructions or understand the detail of tasks. They might lose track of, or fail to complete activities. Almost always, poor working memory leads to poor academic progress.

Typically, learners with poor working memory...

- Are well-adjusted socially
- Are reserved in group activities, rarely volunteering answers
- Behave as if they haven't paid attention
- Frequently lose their place in complicated tasks that they may then abandon

- Make 'less than expected' academic progress, especially in reading and mathematics
- Are considered to have short attention spans and be easily distracted.

SUPPORT OPTIONS

While there's no single reliable intervention strategy, much can be done to support learners with poor working memory. Try to create a culture in which learners feel at ease requesting the information they need – even when it's being repeated or needs to be broken down further.

At the planning stage, anticipate and reduce potentially difficult working memory demands. Try shortening sentences that need to be written, or reducing the number of items learners need to remember.

Make learning meaningful through scaffolding. Recalling, recapping and retrieving will bridge the gap between old learning and new. At the same time, break complex tasks down into a series of smaller, more manageable steps. You can also use memory aids, such as spelling lists, topic mats and graphic organisers, to support recall and minimise stress on working memory. Finally, provide regular opportunities for learners to practice and apply their developing skills.

The theme of Memory for Learning is further explored in a new online SEND CPD unit from Whole School SEND and Real Group as part of the Universal Services programme, which is funded until 2025 by the DfE. Free to access, the unit is one of 20 that will be released over the course of the programme to help practitioners explore commonly observed barriers to learning in classrooms and other environments regardless of age, label or area of need. For more, visit wholeschoolsend.org.uk/page/online-cpd-units

AMANDA WRIGHT IS HEAD OF WHOLE SCHOOL SEND, HAVING JOINED IN 2018 AS A REGIONAL SEND LEADER; PRIOR TO THIS, SHE WORKED IN MAINSTREAM EDUCATION FOR 20 YEARS AND HAS EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE AS A SENCO AND SENIOR LEADER



On the radar

Innovative thinking

Two years ago, Young Vic Theatre and Royal Holloway, University of London began work on INNOVATE – a collaborative research project aimed at exploring how creativity and arts disciplines could help bring about new approaches to teaching across various curriculum subjects. With the research findings now in, the Royal Holloway team has announced that embedding arts practice and activities rooted in creativity across subjects such as maths and science was indeed able to boost student confidence and rates of participation, while also encouraging deeper levels of reflection and making students' learning experiences more enjoyable.

The project saw Y7 and Y8 teachers at two partner schools – South Bank University Academy and Dunraven School in Lambeth and Southwark – work with 12 multi-disciplinary artists and an advisory panel of educational and cultural experts throughout the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years. Some examples of the practice that emerged included using basketball to teach film skills, teaching numeracy with the aid of cookery, and improving English-speaking skills via activities that saw students create video game characters.

The project's final report (see bit.ly/ts132-LL4) states that teachers observed

increased confidence among previously reticent students, and that adopting a more creative approach to the teaching of non-arts subjects produced deeper levels of reflection from students regarding the topics at hand.

According to Nicholas Hargreaves, assistant head at Dunraven School, "After the dark, insular days of COVID-19, INNOVATE got teachers talking and working together again and provided them with the opportunity to step back and look at their practice through the eyes of an expert in a different field. This brought new perspectives, new ideas and the opportunity to create together."

TRENDING

Our pick of the recent resources and launches teachers might find useful...

STUDY WITH BRIAN

The Royal Society has uploaded some new entries in its 'Brian Cox School Experiment' video series. The latest batch tackles three topics – genome editing, machine learning and ocean acidification – via a trio of videos for each, examining the area's research trends, industry applications and a relevant classroom experiment. bit.ly/ts132-LL2

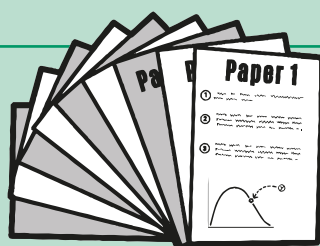
POSITIVE PARTNERSHIP

The NSPCC has partnered with the US-based parental media advice organisation Common Sense Media, with a view to rolling out education programmes aimed at improving schools' digital literacy provision and developing children and young people's awareness of harms enabled through technologies such as generative AI. The partnership will commence in the coming weeks with the piloting of digital citizenship and literacy classes at schools across South Wales.

STUDENT STUDY TIPS

STRUCTURING REVISION

SOME POINTERS TO PASS ON AS EXAMS SEASON LOOMS...



3

RECALL, RECALL

Don't forget that one of the most effective ways of embedding learning into long term memory is through regular testing – what teachers call 'retrieval practice'

1 STAY ON TIME

Each revision session you plan needs to run to time. Stick to your timings and set a timer for each session so you don't waste a minute of your timetable.



2 MIX IT UP

Your revision session should use different forms of media. The more you mix it up, the more stimulated and responsive you'll remain. Try switching between, for example, working at a computer, listening to podcasts, reading physical books and creating revision cards.



4 THE EARLY BIRD

Commencing your revision timetable early will enable you to cover areas multiple times before the examination. Start sooner, get more done.



5 SNACKING IS ALLOWED

Snacking whilst revising is allowed, though if that's not your thing, be sure to have some food and drink during your scheduled breaks. We all need energy for revision.



ZEPH BENNETT IS A PE TEACHER AND SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT LEADER WITH 25 YEARS' TEACHING EXPERIENCE; YOU CAN FIND MORE OF HIS EDUCATIONAL ILLUSTRATIONS BY FOLLOWING @PEGEEKSCORNER

Got a great learning idea? Email editor@teachsecondary.com or tweet us at [@teachsecondary](https://twitter.com/teachsecondary)

ENGLISH

Reading Plus

An online platform that provides valuable insights into students' reading abilities and can help them become more efficient and enthusiastic readers over time



AT A GLANCE

- A web-based reading platform
- Designed to help readers become more efficient and effective
- Adaptive intelligence matches learners to texts and continues to do so throughout
- Huge range of fiction and non-fiction texts
- Online nature makes it easily accessible for students and teachers alike

REVIEW BY ADAM RICHES



Reading interventions are among the most complex activities in a secondary setting to get right. If you're in need of a programme that's proven successful at improving the reading abilities of young people, look no further than Reading Plus.

I've seen the power of Reading Plus first-hand in numerous settings, in terms of improving reading ability and more importantly, reading confidence. It remains one of the select few ways in which I've seen reading develop across a school, with almost zero cost in terms of time and workload for classroom teachers. Reading Plus gets young people reading in a way that builds self-efficacy and maturity.

The platform has a simple aim – to develop more accomplished readers. It does this by being essentially bespoke to each individual user. Upon logging in for the first time, learners undertake an initial baseline test which matches them to one of 14 levels aligned to their reading ability.

Each level has 70 to 80 fiction and non-fiction texts assigned to it. After each reading activity, the algorithm selects the most appropriate text for students to tackle next, based on live data. This makes the program hugely efficient at responding to learning needs, while requiring no input from teachers with respect to marking or assessment.

Reading Plus actually makes children read *better*. The platform's 'guided window' feature trains learners in how fast they

ought to read with the aid of a moving box, thus reducing both the extraneous load for readers as they encounter new pages and any temptation they might have to skip ahead. What's more, it gradually speeds up, stretching readers to increase their words per minute reading rate over time.

In this way, Reading Plus encourages the building of visual skills, getting readers to develop their reading muscles and train their eyes in moving effectively and efficiently when scanning words – a particularly helpful feature for weaker readers and EAL learners who may be used to reading from right to left.

Reading Plus is also designed to build vocabulary confidence and expose learners to a plethora of different words. To that end, its highly accessible and engaging vocabulary section boasts 2,500 words.

Automated reading programs are, however, often criticised for their non-individualist, one-to-one humanistic input. Here, however, teachers are easily able to effectively target and intervene with learners as they progress. Data concerning each student's fluency, words per minute, accuracy and comprehension is readily available via a highly functional and navigable interface, thus keeping teachers informed as to precisely what each learner is struggling with in a matter of seconds, rather than through laborious marking.

teach SECONDARY

VERDICT

- ✓ Impressive assessment facilities to ensure reading material is pitched at appropriate levels for each learner
- ✓ A huge range of texts that ensures learners will be exposed to many different types of reading
- ✓ Online functionality and usability that's second to none
- ✓ Contains content applicable for use at KS1 through to KS4

PICK UP IF...

...you are looking for an all-inclusive reading package that enables tailored reading experiences for all learners.

For more details visit www.readingsolutionsuk.co.uk

ENGLISH

Reimagine Key Stage 3 Shakespeare

A comprehensive set of lesson plans for teaching classic Shakespeare plays – one for each year of KS3

AT A GLANCE

- Written by experienced classroom practitioners
- Covers three separate plays in detail
- Provides thoughtfully mapped-out lesson sequences
- Includes full lesson plans alongside other teaching resources
- Relates these classic works to present-day issues

REVIEW BY MIKE DAVIES

Who can deny the majesty of Shakespeare's writing? No one – it's not allowed. But whether you love him or only grudgingly respect him, he's got to be taught.

As a KS3 teacher, however, a significant hurdle remains. How to bring Shakespeare into the classroom in a way that will fire your students' imaginations while meeting the demands of the curriculum?

You could always study the plays yourself, of course; poring over scripts and spending hours filleting them in ways you hope will inspire your youngsters and do justice to his genius. Or you could do yourself a huge favour by drawing on the expertise and passion of people who have done most of the legwork for you – in this case, Jo Heathcote and Hannah Appleton. I know which option I'd choose.

Reimagine Key Stage 3 Shakespeare provides all you need to deliver a carefully plotted-lesson sequence for a whole play in each year of KS3. Y7 get to enjoy the magic of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. For Y8, there's the drama of *The Merchant of Venice*, while Y9 get to unpick the passion and tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Each work is addressed as a six-week project. As you'd hope and expect, the detailed lesson plans draw on carefully chosen extracts as a vehicle for developing key skills such as comprehension, inference and character

analysis. Themes are explored, and the beauty and craft of the Bard's language is highlighted and examined with all due reverence, but in a way that students should be able to relate to.

All this is further enriched by the inclusion of many suggestions for thought-provoking class discussions. I particularly like how each project builds towards tasks that challenge students to apply what they have learnt in stimulating and imaginative ways.

I know that long ago, when I was experiencing Shakespeare for the first time myself, I would have thoroughly enjoyed relating his themes to contemporary issues of the day – which in 2023 can include climate change. If that also meant writing my own speeches, drafting scripts for documentaries or creating my own podcast, then so much the better (not that anyone would have known what a 'podcast' was back then...)

Also worth noting is the impressive quantity of lesson essentials that are provided for you in the form of downloadable extracts, PowerPoint presentations and worksheets – all further accessible via editable formats, should you so desire.

Any teacher of literature will surely see this resource as both a pleasure and a mercy. Because indeed, as Portia so rightly tells us, '*The quality of mercy is not strain'd...*'



teach SECONDARY

VERDICT

- ✓ Brings Shakespeare's works to life
- ✓ Students will enjoy the imaginative and engaging suggested activities
- ✓ Accessible and approachable, while at the same time being respectful of the source material
- ✓ Can help to reduce elements of teacher workload

PICK UP IF...

You want to teach Shakespeare's works in detail, in a way that's both inspiring and relatable for KS3 students.

Priced at £100; find out more at collins.co.uk/ReimagineKS3English



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Lawson is a former secondary teacher, now serving as a foundation governor while running a tutoring service, and author of the book **The Successful (Less Stressful) Student** (Outskirts Press, £11.95); find out more at prep4successnow.wordpress.com or follow @johninpompano



THE LAST WORD

"Teach with infectious enthusiasm"



Teachers must be specialists, but also passionate advocates, writes John Lawson – because if you don't outwardly love your subject, why should anyone else?

For A-grade teachers, some knowledge is useful to know and some is essential. Allow me to share one such essential that most teachers I meet don't seem aware of. It came from an epiphany I wish had transpired years earlier, as it stirred my soul and instantly reshaped my pedagogical philosophy from then on.

It's an astute insight that I owe to Parker J Palmer, whose marvellous book *The Courage to Teach* is a must-read. In it, Palmer underlines the crucial importance of love, passion, power and authority, and explains how all are crucial areas that will result in teachers either thriving or floundering.

The insight is this: *students learn best from those who teach with infectious enthusiasm and authority.*

Forceful, not forced

Authority is what makes our teaching ultimately land. It stems from the essence of who we are, what we value and the hard-earned knowledge we dare to share.

Take Sir David Attenborough, for example. What makes him such an outstanding teacher isn't just supreme mastery of his material, but the fact that he's also overflowing with gentle and infectious passion.

His carefully crafted and confidently delivered 'lesson plans' are his greatest asset. He loves sharing secrets about a world that he treasures. Attenborough purrs over a mighty lion's hunting prowess and power, but is also audibly delighted when their gazelle prey succeed in escaping the menu.

It's a remarkable skill – being able to marvel at nature's teleological powers of provision, while simultaneously questioning its deontological brutality. His lessons are forceful, but never forced. However noble a subject might be, forcing it down an audience's throat demonstrates a lack of respect and will only induce resistance. We can woo, but we may not ravish!

Attenborough invites us into his world in the manner of someone who believes we'll be just as captivated by its sights and sounds as he is. Confidence is attractive and reassuring. We usually can't see them, but we can almost picture his eyes sparkling over the course of narration. The subtext of his every utterance may as well be, *'Come closer, this is incredible.'*

Authentic power

A distinctive hallmark of stellar teachers is that they rarely need to enforce many rules. When students enjoy what we have

to share, they'll almost intuitively disavow unacceptable conduct.

Similarly, viewers aren't compelled to watch *Planet Earth III*; we make space for it, and sit back to enjoy a compelling spectacle. Sir David merely shows up on time with an engaging lesson plan that he proceeds to present before millions of attentive students (or viewers).

Authentic power over an audience will come from a speaker's authority, which starts in the heart and mind before working its way out to other hearts and minds.

We don't have to be experts to know when we're in the presence of an authoritative speaker. They will be sure of themselves without being cocksure. Attenborough has spent a lifetime immersing himself in a reverential study of the natural world. Teachers need to do the same. If we aren't in love with, and passionate about our subjects, why should anyone else be?

Lives transformed

Power is an external force that works from the outside in. Every teacher is granted some of this power, but teens can still make disruptive fireworks out of it, if that's all we have to offer. Threats and sanctions may briefly silence children and create frangible compliance, but these are poor substitutes for impassioned apologetics.

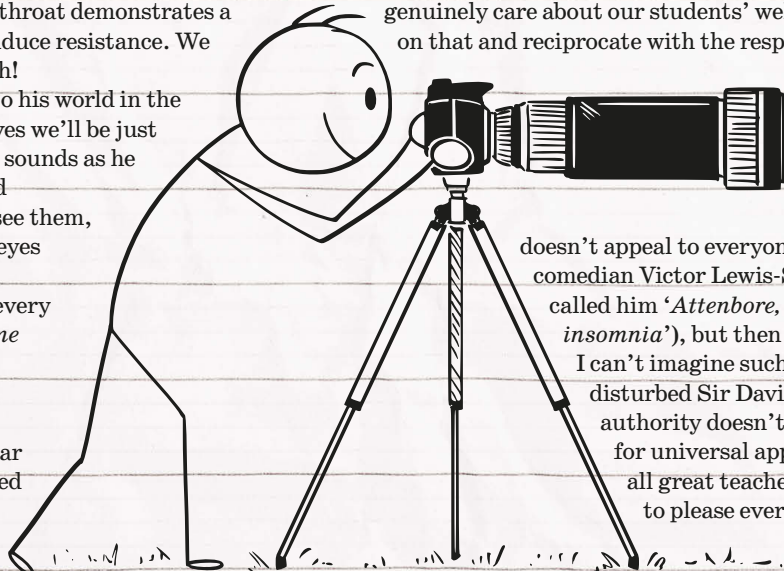
The moment we give off the merest hint of compulsion, spite or autocracy, our students will instantly switch off or become agitated. Authoritarians resist the call to service that all teachers must honour.

Teenagers enjoy the company of those teachers who can unleash the power of stories over arid theory. When we genuinely care about our students' wellbeing, they'll pick up on that and reciprocate with the respect we deserve in turn.

They will listen, and through cultivating those listening skills, their lives will be transformed.

Attenborough doesn't appeal to everyone, of course (The late comedian Victor Lewis-Smith once cruelly called him *'Attenbore, the BBC's cure for insomnia'*), but then nor does any teacher.

I can't imagine such barbs have ever disturbed Sir David's sleep, since his authority doesn't depend on a craving for universal approval. He knows, as do all great teachers, that it's impossible to please everyone.



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