

HOW TO... make lessons MORE PRODUCTIVE



If you really want to boost children's productivity and progress, says **Chris Quigley**, take a step back and get them to do the hard work...



In your school, who goes home at the end of the week the most tired? Is it the teachers or the children? Teachers are always being asked to improve their teaching and most are willing to try, following all of the models of 'good practice' they can lay their hands on. Teachers have never had to work so hard, but are children making any better progress? Is it time to change our view of what constitutes great teaching? Instead of teachers doing more in lessons, is it time to get children doing more?

Of course, children doing more in itself won't raise standards. They need to be doing the right things. This is the difference between being occupied and being productive. Here are three steps to boosting children's productivity and progress in lessons.

1. Teach the right things
2. Get children doing most of the work
3. Organise classroom structures

1 Teach the right things

Just about all of the methods that teachers are told are 'good practice' are irrelevant unless we get what we are teaching right. For example, a common teaching method is to mark to the objective.

This is often referred to as focused, or quality, marking. Whilst many have adopted this method, few have asked the question, what is a learning objective? The question seems almost ridiculous. Everyone, surely, knows what a learning objective is, right? Not so. Here are a few 'objectives' I have seen in classrooms recently:

- To learn about the Great Fire of London
- To write a report about rivers
- To make a puppet

The problem is that it's unclear from these what children will actually learn. Things become even more unclear if we take our line of enquiry a step further and ask, which core subject disciplines will children acquire? Making a puppet is, as far as I remember, not a core subject discipline in

any of the National Curriculum subjects.

The big problem teachers face is the number of published schemes and strategies that have unclear learning objectives. Without clarity of the objective, we can't achieve high productivity. If we rephrased these objectives so that the focus becomes core subject disciplines, then we could



assess what it is children are learning. For example:

- **To learn about the Great Fire of London**
Becomes...
■ **Investigate using sources of evidence**
(Context: Samuel Pepys' diary account of the Great Fire of London)

Historians investigate sources of evidence. This is a core subject discipline that can be repeated time after time in different contexts.

- **To write a report about rivers**
Becomes...
■ **Group related information into paragraphs** (Context: a report about rivers)

Grouping related information into paragraphs is a core subject discipline for a writer. It begins at Level 2 of the National Curriculum, and by Level 5 children should use paragraphs to help their writing flow from one set of ideas to another.

- **To make a puppet**
Becomes...
■ **Use practical skills to make a product**
(Context: Measuring, marking, cutting and sewing fabric to make a puppet.)

Designers first learn practical skills and then apply them to the design process. In this example, children are learning to apply their previously learned skills to make a product. It just so happens to be a puppet, but it could be anything else.

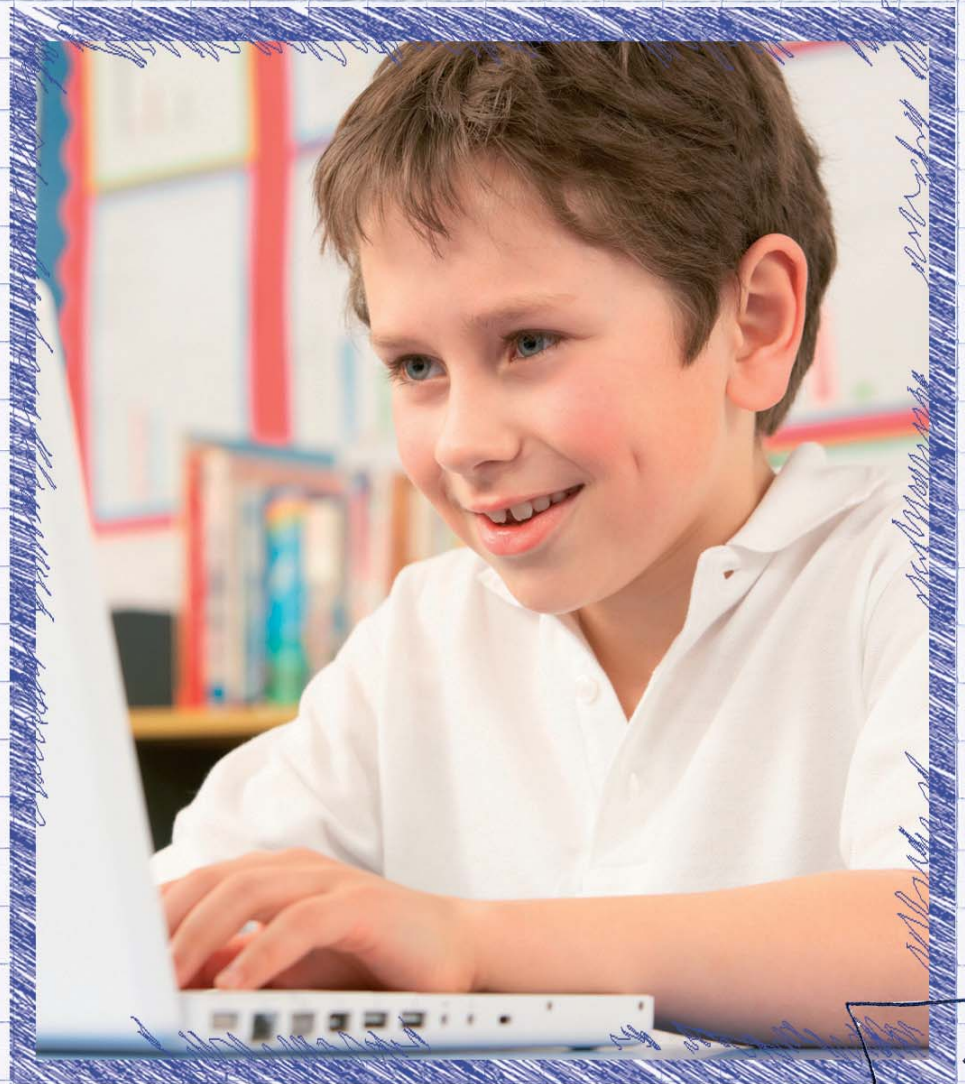
Once the right objective has been identified, it needs to be taught at the right level, at the right time and in the right way.

Instead of judging teachers on whether they have an objective and if they have met it and marked to it, we should be much more interested in whether it was the right objective to teach in the first place.

2 Get children to do most of the work

When I took up the post as headteacher of an inner city school in Newcastle upon Tyne, it was in the bottom one per cent of schools nationally for standards in writing. My research into what was needed to help raise standards took me to schools all over the country. I was particularly interested in looking at schools with standards in the top one per cent. What I found was that in these schools, children did more work in lessons than teachers. Moreover, it was the right work too. Objectives had the necessary clarity, were taught to the right level, at the right time and children spent 80 per cent of the lesson working in groups or individually.

This is when I discovered the 20–80



SCHOOL ROCKS!

rule. Teachers spent no more than 20 per cent of lessons in whole-class teaching activities. This allowed children to spend 80 per cent of their time in purposeful activity, either in a team or individually. It was hardly surprising that in these schools children were making rapid progress. That is not to say the teachers were not doing anything whilst their pupils were working. They were coaching, guiding, pushing, demanding and nurturing their pupils but, on balance, it was the children who were made to work the hardest.

Once I had discovered the 20–80 rule, I was keen to find out what the balance of pupil to teacher activity was in my school. It turned out we had exactly the same numbers... but the other way around. Teachers did 80 per cent of the input. That only left 20 per cent of the time for pupils to do anything. When this problem was viewed alongside the fact that we did not have the clarity of objective needed, I knew we

had a major problem. Not only were children just doing 20 per cent of the work, it was usually the wrong work too. No wonder we were in the bottom one per cent of schools for our standards. It was not until we got our children doing more of the right things that our standards started to rise.

It is not that teachers want to be the ones doing most of the work. It is just the way it is. This is because the focus of lesson observations is often on which teaching methods are used and whether objectives have been met. What we should be asking is, what is the point of inspiring children through the latest teaching methods if we are meeting the wrong objectives, and teachers have done most of the work?

Introductions to lessons are a great way to help children become productive from an early stage in the lesson. Try planning for lots of thinking and doing activities. Here are a few examples: ▶



- Children generate questions based on some source materials
- Observe and describe materials
- 'Top trump' information
- Draw something
- Summarise information

This early productivity in lessons helps to engage children. It is then easier to share the point of the lesson with your pupils.

TRY, FOR EXAMPLE:

- The reason we have just done... is because today we are going to... or,
- Now that you have found out... we are now going to...

By using these strategies, children have not only been productive in their thinking, they are more receptive to instruction. There are many effective ways to instruct pupils. Here are just a few of my favourites.

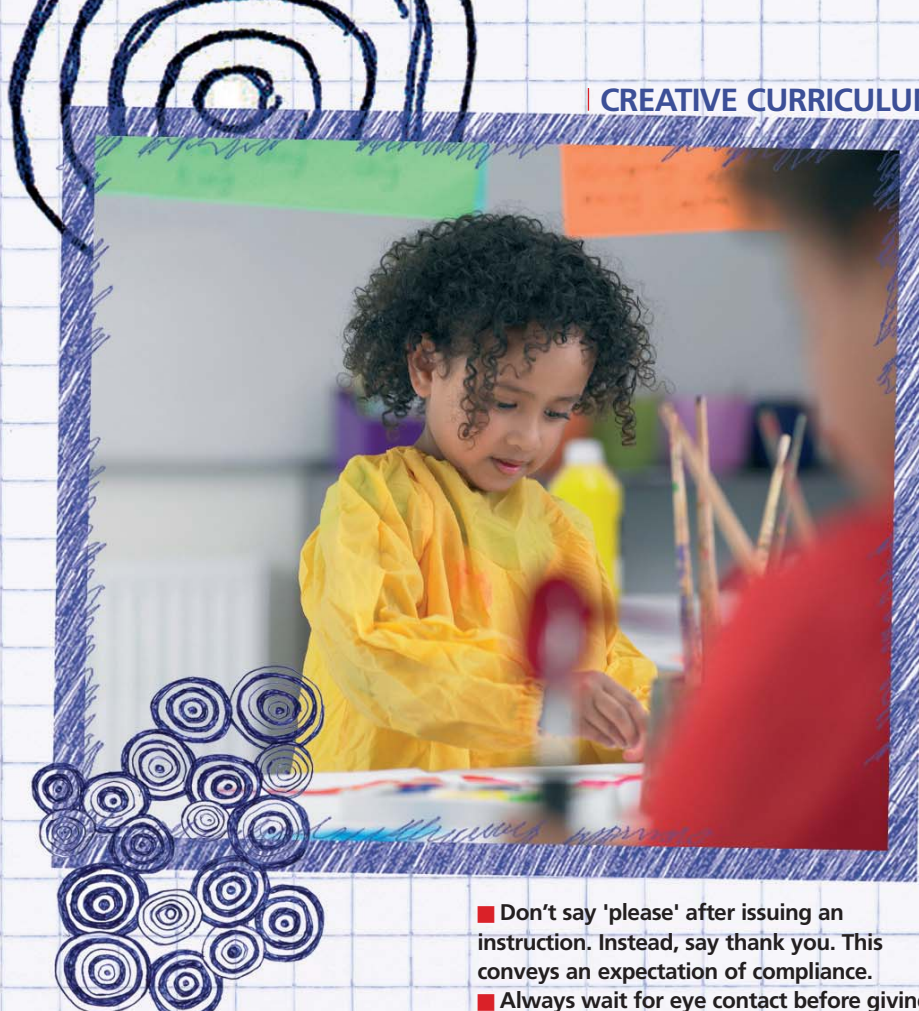
- Repeat after me (usually used in music but also very effective in other lessons)
- Here are the steps to follow (a process, or steps to success)
- Change one thing (a model used to make small changes)
- Templates (for example, a writing frame)

The next step is for children to show some mastery of what it is you have shown them. This can be at either a team or individual level. Again, it involves a high level of productivity. Team mastery is all about working together and providing support to each member of the group. Individual mastery is about personal accomplishment. The general rule here is: record everything. The only way children can really show accomplishment at anything is to show what they can do. If there is no recording of their accomplishments then it is almost impossible for the teacher to know how well children have done.

3 Organise classroom structures

One of the main reasons teachers tend to do more whole-class input is because no real learning structures are required. Keeping the class together means that teams do not have to be formed, resources are not an issue and children who misbehave are easier to control. High productivity, on the other hand, needs careful planning by teachers with excellent behaviour management skills.

Children's learning and social behaviour needs to be nurtured and managed if children are to be more productive. To provide structures for better learning, consider setting up teams to work collaboratively within lessons. Try techniques such as:



■ **Discussion tokens** (The rules are: first, you must use your token. This encourages those who don't like to speak. Second, once you have used your token, be quiet. This stops anyone dominating the discussion.)

If your children display poor social behaviour then it may be necessary to brush up on your behaviour management techniques. My favourites come in four categories:

- Rights and responsibilities
- Establishing routines
- Positive correction
- Consequences

Rights and responsibilities

Instead of having lots of rules, have a few rights. For example, the right to feel and be safe, the right to learn and the right to be treated with respect. Responsibility lies with everyone to protect these rights for everyone.

Establishing routines

If we don't establish the day-to-day routines for, say, group work, then we establish that there are no routines. This leads to a loss of learning time and also may result in more serious misbehaviours.

Positive correction

This is all about what we say, when we say it and how we say things to children. Some of my favourite techniques are:

- Instead of saying 'no', try 'when' followed by 'then'. (When you have finished your work, then you can change your book.)

■ Don't say 'please' after issuing an instruction. Instead, say thank you. This conveys an expectation of compliance.

■ Always wait for eye contact before giving an instruction. Otherwise, be prepared for the instruction to drift over the head of the child who remains oblivious to the instruction.

Consequences

This is all about planning. The more we consider proportional and fair consequences, the more likely we will be to keep calm and offer children a choice between getting on or choosing a consequence. The rule to obey here, though, is certainty rather than severity. If children are certain there will be a consequence, then this is more important than how severe it is.

Good behaviour is one of the keys to higher pupil productivity, but there is still very little training for teachers in this area.

In summary, raising standards is not about teachers doing more. It is about children doing more of the right things, at the right level, at the right time. It is about children thinking and doing, and it is about well-thought-out classroom structures that promote good learning and social behaviours.

Boost productivity

Chris Quigley has been a headteacher, a lead inspector and a trainer of inspectors. He now works with schools worldwide in helping to boost children's productivity. Chris' publication *Key Skills*, available at www.chrisquigley.co.uk, gives more information about lesson objectives. Chris' Power Learning conference is running at venues throughout the UK.

