



.to infinity and beyond

Bruce Potts reveals 10 ways to develop inspirational learning and teaching...

There are two questions we need to answer if we are to provide children with worthwhile and meaningful learning experiences which they enjoy.

They are:

- *How do children learn most effectively?*
- *How do I provide learning experiences that will enable them to learn effectively?*

Of course, learning and teaching is not quite that simple because there are so many other variables which affect children's ability to learn in the classroom – their home background, physical health, motivational levels, whether they had a good night's sleep, who they sit with, the time of day and so on. However, once we accept that, there are certain things we can do to ensure that our children get the best out of their learning experiences with us.

Generally speaking, children learn most effectively when:

- Their physiological needs are met
- Their emotional needs are met
- The learning tasks are interactive, multi-sensory, fun and relevant
- Learning is in bite sized chunks

The following 10 tips look to address all of these points, and will lay the foundations for many outstanding lessons. ▶

If you want to find out more about how to teach outstanding lessons or you'd like to explore some of these ideas through INSET in your own school, you can contact Bruce on bruce_bp@hotmail.com

If you don't hook the children in at the start of a lesson it's pretty unlikely you'll be able to do it later!

1 Are you sitting comfortably?

The optimum learning temperature for an average primary classroom is between 16°C and 20°C. Any warmer or colder and children begin to find it difficult to concentrate. Keep a thermometer in your classroom so that you can monitor the temperature and respond if it is incorrect for the activity you're doing. Try not to set the classroom temperature for your comfort!

Our brains benefit from being well oxygenated, and we can best do this by increasing the heart rate and getting blood pumping round the body. Brains function best in the 30/40 mins following exercise, so try starting every lesson with a two minute energy burst. Alternatively, see if you can arrange the timetable so that you never have two sedentary lessons in a row. Make sure they are punctuated by something active, i.e. PE, dance, DT, playtime.

2 Keep them happy

I talked in my last article (Raising Boys' Achievement) about how important it is to create an emotionally supportive environment in the classroom. Here are another couple of ideas you might want to try.

- Experiment with pieces of music to celebrate the achievement of an individual – try *Simply the Best* by Tina Turner (prepare it in advance so that it starts playing at the words '... simply the best'). Play it as a surprise to the individual after you have stopped the whole class from what they were doing so everyone can share the moment!

- For younger children, keep a few badges (which you've already made) which read 'Ask Me What I Did?' When a child has done something that is remarkable (for that child) they are allowed to have the badge and wear it for half a day, all around the school. Every adult (or child if you think that's appropriate) who sees a child with the badge on has to stop and ask them what they did. Children love sharing their amazing achievements with you.

3 Let's do it!

It was educationalist John Holt who told us in the sixties that 'Children learn by doing it – there is no other way.' Try to ensure that your children learn 'by doing it' and having first hand learning experiences as frequently as you can. Be imaginative and creative in applying this principle every time you plan a lesson. For example, if you're going to teach a lesson on the properties of triangles, take children out into the playground and give groups of three a long piece of knicker elastic. Each trio can then be arranged as the points of a triangle with the elastic stretched around them to form the sides.

4 The total sensory experience

If you want a child to write a poem about a waterfall then you're likely to get a wonderful result if they can see, hear, touch, feel, smell and experience everything about a waterfall by actually being there. The results will never be the same if they just look at pictures of waterfalls in a book! What proportion of all your children's learning experiences are multi-sensory?

5 I like that!

Learning should be fun, so make every effort to create lessons which are enjoyable for all your children. Try planning lessons which are interactive, involving role play, learning outside the classroom and humour. For example, 19th September each year is International Talk Like a Pirate Day. Have a whole day where everything you do has a pirate theme. Maybe you could spend the day in role as a pirate captain? Go to www.talklikeapirate.com for ideas. And don't forget, fun for some children may be completing a whole page of sums – its different for everyone.

6 Why do we have to do this, Miss?

Children often fail to see the relevance of what they have to do in the classroom so consider this at the planning stage – think carefully how you can make the learning relevant for your children. Use real life anecdotes, situations or examples to make your point.

7 On your marks...

It's very difficult to motivate children once the lesson is under way if the lesson starter was uninteresting and made them feel 'This is boring.' Spend most of your planning time on creating really imaginative lesson starters. Use music, DVDs, bring artefacts in, go outside, use 'Feely Bags' or puppets (go to thepuppetcompany.com for amazing puppets) or use role play. In short - be creative and use your imagination. If you don't hook children in at the start of a lesson it's pretty unlikely you'll be able to do it later!

8 Bite sized chunks

A one hour lesson can seem interminably long to a child so fool them a little by splitting the lesson into chunks of ten or fifteen minutes. Once the lesson is under way remind them what's coming next as you go along.

9 Intervention and feedback

The best way to ensure you're providing real differentiation and challenge is with quality intervention. The inspirational teacher



doesn't sit at a desk and let the children get on with it without engaging with them. She is moving around the classroom all the time, intervening where necessary, challenging and moving children on as appropriate, giving feedback while children are working and praising and encouraging their efforts. This quality intervention should be a direct reflection of the learning intention and success criteria agreed at the start of the lesson.

10 And finally...

When you get to the plenary at the end of your lesson, the temptation is to call the children together and talk at them for a few minutes before they leave the room. The problem is you may be talking but they may not be listening, because as soon as you've finished they can do something they're really interested in, i.e. playtime, lunchtime or go home. Try to make your plenaries:

- Short (between two and five minutes)
- To the point
- Summarise the key learning points
- Interactive
- Involve all the children
- Leave children on a high

Do this by developing plenaries which may be in the form of a:

- Quiz
- Pair and share activity
- Presentation to the group/class
- Timed challenge
- Knowledge snowball, where each child takes it in turn to share one thing they've learned in today's lesson
- News report, where each table group produce a short news report on what happened here today

These ten tips hardly scratch the surface of everything you can do to make teaching and learning effective for your children but I hope it gives you some ideas to try with your children.