

HOW TO MAKE YOUR LESSONS OUTSTANDING

At Hourglass we are very aware that an outstanding lesson is rather like “Beauty”; - Very much in the eye of the beholder. However we hope that some of the ideas contained below might help you to ensure that you have considered many different ways of presenting your lesson in the very best light.

Award-winning teacher Kelly Wood gives her personal guide to creating captivating lessons.

These are Kelly’s views and may be of value to you:

Kelly Wood is Assistant Head at Southdale C of E Junior school in West Yorkshire and she won the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust Award for ‘Outstanding New Teacher of the Year’ in 2010. Here Kelly shares some of her top tips for making your lessons outstanding.

Give students ownership

I believe that giving children more ownership of their learning is vital if you want them to have a deeper level of engagement with an understanding of their education.

The Mantle of the Expert approach; <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/> developed by West Yorkshire teacher Dorothy Heathcote is a fantastic way to do this. It involves children becoming ‘experts’ and leading their own learning. Not only does this bring about higher levels of engagement, but it also allows children to be independent and, for some, more productive.

At our school, Southdale CofE Junior in West Yorkshire , the children were set the challenge of creating a Second World War museum for our local community. They were given the freedom to decide which aspects of the topic they would like to research and present in the museum (with strategic nudges from me, of course, to ensure coverage, progression and continuity).

In effect, what they came up with was the plan for the term, so they had huge ownership of the teaching and learning. Of course, the risk was that the outcomes of the learning would not be as good but, with subtle management, the results were much better than expected. We had elements of history communicated through poetry, discussions, descriptions, art, dance and role play.

The Royal British Legion visited as special guests and the museum was a great success. Feedback from parents confirmed that taking a risk and allowing the children to lead the learning was indeed worth it. Outstanding teachers should always be on the lookout for these kinds of creative learning experiences.

Understanding pupils

For me, this is at the heart of high-performing schools. Knowing what ignites your children's imaginations and motivation to learn should be at the centre of every learning experience. Building on the children's interest is the key to high levels of engagement and to finding ways to hook them into learning.

Films, video games, visuals, drama and even face paint are great ways to add a sprinkle of excitement to lessons and make the children feel valued as learners. Building positive interactions with the children

based on mutual respect and understanding helps to secure a teacher-pupil relationship that creates a climate of high expectation.

At our school, the pupils used their creative skills to make rainforest animal masks, which were then worn during rainforest-inspired dances. This captured the children's imagination, developed their creative talents and helped to enhance the overall effect of the dance routines.

Time management

A good work-life balance is something we all strive for. Teaching becomes such a huge part of your life that it can become all-consuming. However, the most important aspect of time management must be how we manage the teaching and learning experiences themselves.

Pace is a huge element of outstanding lessons. If you are aiming to use the time effectively, you must ensure that the children have the opportunity to work collaboratively and independently. Allowing the children to "do" from the very beginning of the learning experience sets the right pace for the lesson.

Read more on adding pace and purpose to your lessons ;

<http://newteachers.tes.co.uk/news/introducing-pace-and-purpose-your-lessons/45867>

Sense of humour

At Southdale we have a team of people who are not afraid to laugh at themselves. During our celebration of World Book Day the staff dressed up as book characters, including our headteacher who wore a Little Red Riding Hood costume.

Adding an extra dimension to lessons can be achieved by dressing up and becoming a character. During one lesson where the children were recreating the atmosphere of the past, I burst into the classroom as a victim of the Blitz, with fake blood dripping from my leg and face, wearing authentic clothes and acting distressed. The children were captivated and the outcomes of learning were way beyond my expectations, purely because of their levels of engagement.

Target setting

We teach in an education system that is heavily based on targets and, therefore, whether we like it or not, they have to be a part of the teaching and learning experience. Fully understanding what each level looks like helps you to ensure that the teaching and learning is pitched at the right difficulty in every subject.

Involving the children in this process helps to ensure that they take responsibility for their learning - and that they aim high. Target setting must be specific, personalised and manageable.

At Southdale, we involve the children in every aspect of assessing, monitoring and target setting to ensure that they have ownership of their learning. And not just in the core subjects. This has helped to raise standards in foundation subjects especially and allows us, as practitioners, to clearly demonstrate the progress and value that has been added across the curriculum.

Shock and Awe

Magical moments in the classroom can really allow the children to develop their sense of wonder about the world. So it is worth planning ways to include them. Science is a great context for this as it allows the children to test ideas as scientists themselves and, sometimes, be surprised by what happens.

Resources I like to use include the Magic Science materials produced by Dr Mark; <http://www.dr-mark.co.uk/> which include great ideas that challenge children's thinking and illustrate fantastic practical activities to use in the classroom.

Read more brilliant ideas for spicing up science lessons ; <http://newteachers.tes.co.uk/news/brilliant-ideas-science-tried-and-tested-tips-lessons/45544>

New Experiences

Because every lesson counts, it is important to plan for new experiences using new ideas. Building on children's talents and interests is a great way to make sure every learning moment is used.

At Southdale, we try to ensure the children have a wealth of experiences, which often tend to spark new talents and passions. New ideas also relate to learning outside the classroom. We invest a huge amount of time in educational visits, trying to bring learning to life. This includes: excursions to museums and the theatre; days in the life of the Tudors, Romans and Victorians; and even a trip to Barcelona to develop children's understanding of European culture and their Spanish-speaking skills.

The Open Futures; <http://www.openfutures.com/> Grow It, Cook It, Film It, Ask It project also equips our pupils with real-life skills to prepare them for the future (some of them can garden, cook and bake better than me). It is these lessons that the children remember and they certainly help to raise aspirations.

Developing pupil voice can also help to ensure that children are fit for their future. The Investor in Pupils award; <http://www.investorsinpupils.org.uk/> is a great way to strengthen pupil voice and contribution to the strategic direction of the school. It has helped us to create secure behaviour systems - a priority for the revised Ofsted framework - and has formalised how we celebrate success and achievements. It has also helped to strengthen classroom systems and give children responsibility.

Be inspiring

We all like to feel inspired and energised to learn and achieve more. Ensuring that the curriculum is inspiring requires a good deal of creativity. This can be achieved through the use of video and other media, and alternative teaching styles.

Tim Rylands' website; <http://www.timrylands.com/> is a fantastic resource for inspirational ways to use ICT. I have used the Myst Exile series - which makes a computer game the stimulus for writing - over a number of years. And not only do children fully immerse themselves in the fictional worlds, but the high quality of their writing demonstrates how high levels of engagement can lead to impressive achievements.

G is for grounded

I have been lucky to work with a great team all striving for the same goal - to make the best possible difference for each child, every day.

This requires hard work, drive, motivation and inspiration. Yet, whatever is going on at school, it should always be grounded in a simple question: "Is this helping to raise standards for the children?"

Having an understanding of this mindset will help to ensure that achievement is high. Yes, "all-singing, all-dancing" lessons help to create a climate of enthusiasm and excitement - but there are also times when it is appropriate for children to "get their head down" and work independently.

While we teach in a system heavily based on testing, we must ensure that we strike the balance between creative learning opportunities and teaching test technique. Learning does not always have to be "fun". It must allow the children to develop as learners. After all, some aspects of the curriculum will never be seen as entertaining. However, it is our job to deliver them creatively to ensure that the children learn - and learn well.