



Jane Sherlock suggests some practical steps that all teachers might find useful...

We all have memories of our own school days and inspiring teachers. It may have been one of those teachers who provided you with the motivation and model to become a teacher.

We should not underestimate the role, importance and significance of great teachers in our lives and in our society. While passion for teaching cannot be learnt there are other skills and knowledge which can be developed and shared to improve our own classroom landscape and management.

Who remembers a great teacher from school?

There has been some interesting research which reveals the attributes of effective teaching. Experts like Steve Dinham and Wayne Sawyer have identified key characteristics of effective teachers and you will not necessarily be surprised what that reveals:

- They know their subject;
- They are passionate about what they teach;
- They have an extensive repertoire of teaching and learning strategies;
- They respect and like students;
- They have a good sense of humour;
- They work hard;
- They are flexible and fair;
- They work as part of a team.

What is interesting is that when you survey students about what they prefer you find a fascinating correlation. They want:

- Teachers who respect them;
- Teachers who are friendly, approachable and willing to listen;
- Teachers who encourage them and help them to succeed;
- Teachers who are knowledgeable in their teaching areas;
- Lessons delivered with knowledge, interest and organisation;
- Classroom management that is effective and genuine.

So how do we ensure that we are in this category where students will remember us and indeed be inspired to pursue the thrill and joys of learning?

It is important to consider what is effective teaching.

The gauge of effectiveness is when our lessons are successful, worthwhile, valuable, productive, constructive, and indeed we produce the desired or intended result. So ask yourself **what is your intended result** at the end of each unit and indeed in each lesson? This can be a powerful lens to reflect on our lessons, units of work and relationships with our students.

It is essential that we know what we want to achieve, how we are going to do that and above all, why do we want our students involved in this learning.



If we engage our students there will not only be fewer classroom management challenges but there will be better and more effective teaching happening. We need to engage through our lesson's content, the range of teaching strategies and resources we use and understanding how we can develop our students' skills to ensure they can be transferred to non-school environments. If students want to learn and can learn in your classroom this is the first step to successful classroom management where we create a positive learning environment where everything is accessible and transparent.

Above all we want our students to feel valued as students of your teaching and as future citizens and life-long learners.

Let's not lose sight of the genuine and at times overwhelming challenges of day to day teaching. These range from the number of classes we might have in one day, the size of the class, teaching across varied KLAs, promises of help, too many rooms, the school culture, technology failing, lack of time, disengaged children, keeping up with the administrative tasks and having a life beyond school.

Let's consider some of the ways we can achieve this ...

The three key factors are what you do before you go into the classroom, what you do in the classroom and what happens after.

Organisation, structure and order are not everyone's natural state but they will help you stay sane and healthy. Above all, students like to think their teacher knows what is going on -- they will forgive idiosyncrasies only for a short time and if your lack of organisation impacts on them, your authority will be diminished.

It is important to have your own plan aside from the school calendar and faculty or stage schedule

Consider where you are going for the year. Then look at the semester, the term, the week, the day, the lesson.

This sounds really simple. A plan and an overview will increase your enjoyment of the job, will engage your students and we all know that means fewer classroom management issues. This could be the difference between a great day and let's find another job! It will also ensure more genuine learning in your classroom. You need to plan every lesson and be organised. Also, you need to plan when you are not in the classroom so that your time just doesn't disappear and it is another long night or working weekend.

Electronic calendars are valuable but I recommend a wall calendar such as the free one from the Teachers Mutual Bank -- a copy in your classroom and one in the staffroom. As soon as you receive the first dates for the next school year insert as many key dates as possible -- reports due, athletics carnival, parent interviews, assessment dates. Also include significant personal dates from your own life. Check the calendar before you set tasks for students to submit.

Give yourself a clear run of time so that you don't have a major class task at the same time as a half yearly exam to mark or an assessment task or stage programs to register when you had planned your



birthday celebration. A visual representation of the term and the year will help students see what is ahead.

You will have more control and less stress if you plan. It will also help you to return student work promptly which is a benefit for students and for yourself.

A **day book** is critical and while some schools and faculties are going paperless, there will always be a place for a day book or chronicle. It is the incidental elements in a teacher's hectic working life that an electronic system does not capture so well: the quick notes to self, a passing observation of a child who has not had their book for the past week, a few words of praise for some previously recalcitrant students, a reminder what to be doing in your RFF.

One of the critical factors which has a direct correlation to student engagement is our own unit of work tailored to the needs and interests of our own class.

The quality of your units will shape the quality of your lessons which in turn will lead to greater engagement and more effective teaching and thus improved outcomes for your students and you. Students deserve a lesson you would want to have had yourself or want your own child to have.

In the busyness of school the practicalities of what to teach and how to teach often take priority but it is very important not to forget why you are teaching something.

Before designing a unit you need to ask:

- **Why is this important?**
- **Why are we doing this?**

This then helps us consider our own beliefs about learning and teaching and what we think are the nature and purpose of our subject in the school curriculum. This will in turn enhance students' capacity as life-long learners and as creative and confident thinkers.

Engagement is all about being interested and feeling competent and confident, the very preconditions of mastery and achievement.

Before embarking on creating your unit of work consider these two questions:

- What do you **want** your students to learn, gain, understand or realize throughout this unit and by its end?
- What do your students **need** to learn, gain, understand or realise throughout this unit and by its end?

Can you see the difference? Once you have decided what your intention and purpose is write a short paragraph or dot points which could become the unit's focus for the class as introductory notes or a chart or homepage to an electronic document. Revisit this intention throughout the unit and check for mid-point understanding and progress and then reinforce and reward.



Ask yourself:

1. Is this unit culminating in a significant assessment task where specific skills, knowledge or concepts will be assessed?
2. Is this unit a building block to future units in future years or stages?
3. Is this unit part of the school's assessment and reporting process and will it impact on a student's class placement or progress report?

Allocate time to the structure and length of each unit. How many lessons in the unit? How many hours in a week? How many weeks? What other school events are scheduled at this time? Where do you want to be by end of week 1, 3, 5?

Be realistic in your planning. Don't be too ambitious but have high expectations. Within the unit incorporate a range of teaching and learning strategies and a range of student tasks with choices as well as different ways into the content and skills. Deploying variety and surprise to tap into student curiosity is effective. Try to achieve something tangible each lesson. Each lesson should be an entity on its own but part of the wider unit.

Design lessons which deliver the syllabus, suit your class's interests and their ability levels. Be sure that you are aware of the literacy levels of your students so that you do not lose them because they cannot cope with the demands of the reading or the instructions.

Think of the different paths to the same destination -- a quiz, mindmap, review, narrative, analytical critical response, newspaper article, imaginative re-creation, visual representation. Mixing up our lesson structures provides for variety and will address different learning styles. Be sure to recap to the unit's intention and if there is a significant end point task be mindful of including strategies and processes to ensure your students are prepared and confident for this task.

The content and skills within the formal assessment tasks should not be a surprise (nor a shock) and if you embed them in the unit students will feel comfortable and confident. Have you incorporated a range of resources to tap into the diversity and interests of the children in your class? Is there too much? Have you considered the Quality Teaching program in lessons? Have you embedded opportunities and skills for ICT?

In creating your units consider how you will help your students make connections with the content and the skills of the unit and their own wider world. Connection and significance are keys to engagement.

Research in this area reveals that teachers contributed markedly to student achievement when they:

- incorporated **student perspectives** into instruction;
- promoted **autonomy** and **responsibility**;
- provided **instructional opportunities** to support **higher level thinking**;
- applied instruction to **real-life applications**.

Think about the significance of literature. Human behaviour does not change very much and books and plays and poems and stories give us a window into our behaviour as well as other places and other times. Geography and Science and Mathematics help us understand how the world works. History is



vital in helping us to understand why we acted as we did at a particular time and how those actions have impacted on the present and the future. The Arts help us to make sense of ourselves as humans along with our emotions and passions; what gives us pleasure and helps us to make sense of the world in a different way. Practical subjects are always embedded in significance -- their project. We often find disengaged students find genuine interest and engagement in the practical subjects.

We so often start our unit with a bang and end with a whimper!

Think about the ending of your unit like a good story or film. It should be satisfying, clear and resolve the key questions. Leave time to link the end of the unit to the beginning. Has there been progress/achievement/enlightenment/ learning? Consider student reflection: Until we looked at WW1, I had no idea...or This reading session today has shown me... or The maths we did today helped to ...

Back to the syllabus

Our syllabus is a significant document and we need to consult it in our unit writing to refresh and remind ourselves of content and skills. Do you have your own hard copy of each syllabus you need? A virtual copy is invaluable for cutting and pasting outcomes and content but a quick reference needs a hard copy.

Effective teaching is about what you do in the classroom

Consider the link between effective teaching, engaged students and classroom management? Is it about control? Having power over our students?

Effective teaching is very much about the rigour of our lessons and the relationships we have with our students.

How do your lessons enable as many students as possible learn and achieve? Are you building their capacity and their independence as learners?

Each lesson needs a clear structure and like that good book or film it needs a clear exposition that establishes the direction for the rest of the lesson. The opening of a lesson has a huge impact on the success of the rest of the lesson in classroom management and effective teaching. If your school requires a roll to be marked think about doing that once the class is on task. Have an agenda for the lesson in a public space and consult that agenda not only for your own organisation and pace and for students to see the direction.

It is valuable to have a task for students to do as soon as they arrive. It might be a recap to the previous lesson, a mindmap, a reflection or a short quiz. Be sure to have resources for previously absent students so that you reduce their opportunities to undermine your lesson. Have a folder of task sheets or samples from previous lessons for absentees so that they do not take control of the lesson. Give them a task and tell them you will help them in a few moments and suggest to them how they can catch up via



Edmodo, Moodle, folder of tasks or information sheets. This may not be as appropriate for very young children.

Consider the pace and the progress of the lesson midway and later consider if you had a strong and clear ending or did the lesson just suddenly finish because the time was up?

Be sure to build a classroom culture of mutual respect and positive interaction

Thank students both privately and publicly for their contribution, attitude and involvement. It is important that your students know that you have high expectations and that positive behaviour is the culture of your classroom; that praise, reinforcement and celebrating achievement are common features of your classroom regardless of the age and the ability levels of the students.

Don't wait for the assessment task or test before you reward success. Consider acknowledging progress or understanding along the path. Share your students' success with other students, teachers, parents and the wider community.

Scaffolding for end point tasks is crucial and is part of the culture of assessment as learning. There should not be secret teachers' business or secret markers' methods. Transparency and consistency should be your mantra. Share with your students ways on how best to succeed. Share the end point task. If you are in practical subjects you can display past projects or if it is an assessment show previous samples. It is like your favourite recipe book -- you want your dish to look just like the pictures on your journey to creating it.

Build relationships with your students by being supportive and creating a positive classroom climate. Choose resources to suit your class's interests and consider a range of resources for variety and also for engagement. Use narrative to engage and illustrate and have a repertoire of management techniques when the wheels fall off. Have plenty of material for every lesson and be prepared to dump what you are doing and move on and mix up the lesson.

Expect your students to write frequently but do not feel you must read and correct everything they do. Instead, decide what you are looking for in a specific piece that you could collect and mark so that both you and the students know what you are looking for. Mark their work promptly and return with feedback, awards and positive reinforcement. Collecting work early and often gives you valuable insight to the child's skills.

Consider the difference between note-taking and note-making and assist students with these skills and be sure to check those notes for progress and clarity. If using Edmodo and Moodle and blogs encourage contribution.

Be sure that your students belong to your classroom. Understanding, acceptance, relationships and connections within the classroom are important in building a positive classroom culture. Know your students and what their interests are and how you can tap into these interests to make connections as they learn. Show interest in a student as a person and try to be positive about some feature of them.



Talk to them alone and be genuine in your concern and interest. You are not their friend but be friendly. Smile. Avoid sarcasm. Avoid shouting.-

The key is to know the person behind the student. A student presenting with no equipment, books or uniform could be just the tip of many issues. You might be the only one who has provided them with a pen. Or a smile. Indeed, welfare and learning are not separate but part of the whole package so seek help or information from the range of people in your school on the welfare team. Ring home with a genuine interest before the problems escalate.

What you do after the lesson will contribute to effective teaching

Honest reflection of your lessons and sharing successes and failures with your colleagues are important. Seek advice and ideas from your colleagues. Consider the type of feedback you will give to your students at the next lesson.

What counts in my lessons? Do I accomplish what I set out to teach? How do I know? Is it evidenced in the talk of the classroom?

Do I use assessment information to guide my practice? Do I plan for learning opportunities where the purposes for the learning are clear and well-defined?

How do I introduce the main learning goals of the lesson? Is the new learning made explicit? Do I share with students the specific nature of the task, the rationale for learning and its value to their learning?

Do my students “get it”?

Finally:

You cannot control the wider, rigid school environment like bell times, lesson length, assessment schedules, playground duty but you can control what happens in your own classroom. Personalise your classroom environment with your tone, energy and personality. Have some fun, vary the routine. Vary your lunchtime routine. Seek out some different colleagues or locations, go for a walk, find a quiet place and read or listen to the radio or your favourite music on your iPod. Beware of low -level burnout before it intensifies. Otherwise you lose enthusiasm, energy and fulfillment. Enjoy this wonderful profession.

You can make a world of difference

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