



Lloyd Bowen packs his toolbox for moving between classrooms and keeping the focus on learning...

Teaching feels just right when our students are engaged in learning and we feel we are inspiring young people to develop a lifelong love of learning. Seeing those 'light bulb' moments of understanding makes being a teacher a vocation that is deeply satisfying. Maximising learning time and ensuring the focus of all lessons is on learning is pivotal to achieving these magical moments. Of course, achieving this requires us to draw on the myriad of skills that only we, as teachers, possess. There are, however, a few simple organisational tricks that can allow us to focus on the learning rather than distractions.

A most useful tool is a teacher's toolbox. This is particularly true if you find yourself timetabled into several rooms every day, where every room is set up differently and some are well resourced whilst others are not so much. The sheer confidence that comes with knowing where your resources are is liberating for both you and your students. I would be lost without my toolbox. I always carry it with me. Yes, literally, a toolbox.

Teaching can be stressful particularly if we are caught short and underprepared. Small issues can compound into large ones yet can be fixed easily or avoided entirely if we are prepared. We tend to plan our lessons carefully to include a multitude of learning strategies and resources. Yet, sometimes our best prepared and most engaging lessons can end in disaster or disappointment. The toolbox is all about minimising the chances of a well prepared lesson escaping due to practical barriers.

Make it personal

Your toolbox will be tailored to your needs. I am an Industrial Arts teacher and my toolbox includes some subject specific objects that can be in short supply, such as drill bits, masking tape, a spare screw driver, coping saw blades and more. Your toolbox should also include other resources useful in any classroom such as pens and pencils, post-it notes, scissors, glue, a stapler, USBs and so on.

We all have students who come to school without a pen. We should encourage all students to be prepared and see the personal benefits that come from being well-organised. But sometimes they are not there yet. Your handy toolbox pens and pencils will allow all students to engage in learning with the rest of the class immediately rather than cause distraction as they hunt around their peers for a pen.

Cut transition problems

Every item in your tool box will help transition students between learning activities. Worksheets can cause a transition nightmare as students scramble to borrow the class's only glue stick. Your handy toolbox glue sticks and scissors will make this transition both easier and smoother. Other items might include seating plans (or a seating order if you move from room to room), printed rolls and laminated class rules.

Plan to make a note

Many students are very adept at getting us to do their work for them. A student who is not sure what to do or is not feeling confident will often need our support. Post-it notes allow us to explain and direct learning concisely. Their small size forces us to give the student enough explanation to start but not too much so as to take the joy of learning away from them. This strategy allows students to feel supported and to build their confidence so as to develop their own solutions.

Know your school

A toolbox is not the Tardis from science fiction's Dr. Who. Whilst we cannot fit in everything there are some key school specific items that are often helpful especially when we are new in a school. A copy of



bell times will allow us to know when to draw a good lesson to an end, ensuring learning time is maximised. Having merit awards on hand allows us to immediately reward a student's good work and school policy documents such as 'out of class passes' are incredibly useful.

Many readers may be thinking 'these items are all in my room'. And that is entirely the point. The toolbox is simply a portable teachers' drawer for those who work in many classrooms. A teacher's toolbox can be one achievable, organisational aid to assist in maximising learning time and your credibility with your class by limiting unnecessary barriers to a successful lesson and a good day at school.

Lloyd Bowen is a TAS teacher and Head Teacher - Teaching and Learning working at a comprehensive high school in southern Sydney. He has been teaching for over 10 years and has experience working as a Teacher Mentor in the Mount Druitt area where he had the good fortune of learning from dozens of expert teachers. He applies many of these hints and tips in his classroom practice and in his current role.