

THE ART OF BEING A

BRILLIANT TEACHER



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AND ANDY COPE



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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------------|
| <i>Foreword by Richard Gerver</i> | <i>iii</i> |
| <i>The Warmest of Welcomes</i> | <i>1</i> |
| 1 Spaghetti Junction | 5 |
| 2 Zombie Apocalypse | 17 |
| 3 Climate Change | 33 |
| 4 Let the Force Be With You | 55 |
| 5 The Devil's in the Detail | 87 |
| 6 Rules of Engagement | 113 |
| 7 Have You Got Your Discipline Yet? | 141 |
| 8 The Class from Hell | 169 |
| 9 And Finally | 199 |
| <i>About the Authors</i> | <i>205</i> |

Chapter 6

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

We are confronted with insurmountable opportunities.

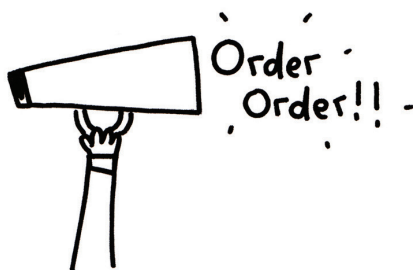
Walt Kelly

In a Nutshell

This chapter covers the basics of classroom engagement. Where do you stand? How should you speak? What's the best way to challenge latecomers? How should you call the register? As we saw in Chapter 5, it's very difficult to recover if things begin badly so we will focus on starters to get you off to a flyer. Yoof culture gets a big mention and we give oodles of examples of what you should be playing on Radio WiiFM (What's in it For Me). All good things must come to an end, and so must your world class lessons. You started with a bang, engaged them in the middle and are going to finish with a flourish! We sign this chapter off with a fanfare of plenaries and Thanks. What's not to like?

Yes, we spent the whole of the last chapter describing what to consider *before* you have even started the formal part of the lesson: the 7 Ps! But we are convinced that it is attention to the little things that makes the big things come right. So, let us assume that the pupils have arrived to find a room which is orderly and shows all the hallmarks of a teacher who knows what they are doing.¹ The next thing to consider is kick-starting the learning, as well as dealing with the essential business of the class.

Order, order!



Every good lesson should have something to engage the attention of the children as soon as they arrive. More about this later, but if they have a wholesome activity which will lead them into their learning on

1 It seems almost too obvious to mention it, but what is the state of your classroom desk? We preach to our pupils the virtues of good organisation on a daily basis, so what are they to conclude if our desk is in a state of chaos? A colleague once asked a particularly shambolic deputy head for a copy of the clubs list for his class, to which she replied, 'I think you'll find one on my desk!' The problem was locating her desk under the mountains of accumulated paperwork, never mind the aforementioned clubs list. Not good!

arrival then you have more time and space to do the necessary business as well. Remember, the aim of this book is to give you top tips which will make life easier and help you to enjoy your job more. You will feel frazzled enough without the stress that comes from being disorganised!

First, think about where you want to be in the classroom. Do you feel more in control sitting or standing? Where should you sit or stand? Some teachers like to be centre stage, others prefer to be to one side so the kids can see the board. Whatever you decide, can you see the kids, all of them, including the ones you particularly want to see? They don't always have to see you, but they need to know you can always see them.

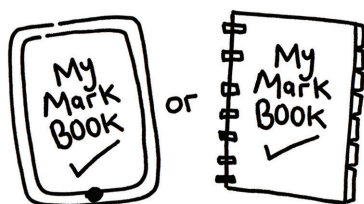
What about calling for order at the beginning of a class? Your voice is a precious asset, and one of the things which can cause most stress to it is calling for order, so establish recognised conventions. We have seen teachers who raise one hand in the air, others who use little bells or squeazy whistles and others have luminous toys which they hold up as a signal for everyone to be quiet. Another very effective technique is a rhythmic tapping sound, made for instance with a pen or ruler, where the rhythm slows gradually until it stops. Or you could try the broken record technique where you say quite quietly, 'Emma, are you ready now? Emma, are you ready now? Emma, are you ready now?' until Emma complies. When she does, thank her and make light of it. She'll be more in tune next time.

Thinking inside the box

In our offices and classrooms we have way too much compliance and way too little engagement. The former might get you through the day, but only the latter will get you through the night.

Daniel Pink

You may well be a form or class tutor or perhaps work in a school where an official register is taken electronically every lesson. This is more likely to be in the secondary sector but not exclusively. The registers for the morning and afternoon sessions are official documents, so it is absolutely essential that they are completed accurately, otherwise you run the risk of creating unwanted safeguarding issues.



A well-organised record or mark-book is an essential tool for an efficient teacher. (Apologies if you think we are teaching you how to suck eggs, but we have come

across too many who haven't thought about these things.) First, make sure you have all the names listed with correct spellings. Names grow ever more bizarre (how many different ways are there of spelling Jayden or Aimee?), yet parents still expect you to get it right!

Once these basics are in place, you have a decision to make about what to include in your mark-book. Whether it is electronic or good old-fashioned columns of information, it is an indispensable tool for you and should contain as much available information about each child as possible. It is then invaluable to you as you move around the school, attending meetings or teaching in different areas, and particularly at parents' evenings when it can be your greatest asset.

So here goes as to what information we think you should record:

- ◆ Attendance, so that you know which pupils were present when. Nothing will derail a lesson more quickly than a prolonged battle with a child who hasn't produced a piece of work and is claiming they were not there for that lesson. Equally, nothing disarms professional slackers more readily than to realise that Sir/Miss has got their finger right on the button. Hand in hand with attendance, in a code that you can understand, keep a record of who has completed what specific pieces of work.
- ◆ Special educational needs and medical information. Invent your own code to remind you of the important information you need to retain (e.g. who needs the toilet often/urgently, who has serious medical conditions of which you should be aware) and other factors that you need to keep an eye on.

Do this in code in case another pupil has a peer at your register, because the privacy of every child is paramount.

- ◆ Each child's current and target levels, as well as a battery of other data, such as reading age, spelling age, cognitive ability scores and so on. You need to organise this so that it is accessible and useful to you.

In addition, you might wish to note down which kids are eligible for free school meals or have received allocated funding, such as the pupil premium. You need these marked in such a way that you can track their progress as these kids are some of the most vulnerable to underachievement, and the earlier you spot the need for some form of intervention the better.

Don't feel you have to call the register at the outset of the lesson. We have seen many brilliant teachers set the class going on a task and then quite unobtrusively do the register so that hardly anyone notices. Calling the register can also waste a great deal of time which could otherwise be used for learning. Even if the class are working while you call the register, subconsciously they are all waiting for their name. If you do call it out, here's a tip: don't always start with the As and work your way to the Ws. You can win some friends among the Wilsons, Woodruffs and Woolmans of this world by starting at their end of the alphabet sometimes. The Allens and Armstrongs will like the change as well!

How should children respond to the register? The convention of your school should guide you, but whatever the suggested routine is, 'Yeah' or 'Yo' is never to be recommended because it sounds slovenly and

disrespectful. While they are in our charge, one of the fundamental requirements of our stewardship of young people is to prepare them for the grown-up world, and that means showing respect for the person in charge; in other words, good manners. We particularly like to hear responses designed to be answers to questions the teacher has set, because this makes the register part of the learning. To do this, set a question (perhaps a starter) with many possible answers – for example, ‘Think of reasons why it might be dangerous to go into space. When I call your name try to give me an answer that nobody else has said.’

Latecomers! There can be few more frustrating things, especially with a difficult class, than to get the lesson underway, only to hear that knock at the door and glancing up to see someone, or worse, more than one, coming in late. The best tip is to get them in and settle them down as quickly and as calmly as you can, if possible carrying on your teaching while you are doing so.² When there is an opportunity to do so, go over to the latecomers and find out why they were late and make clear what your position is with regard to punctuality. You could also do this at the end of the lesson. In this way you have signalled to the miscreants that you are not a soft touch, but equally they have not caused any significant disruption to the class. The important thing is not to make a fuss, as it interrupts the learning for everyone.

2 We call this ‘overlapping’. We have resisted the temptation to stereotype the fact that female teachers are able to multi-task whereas male teachers might struggle. Suffice to say, if your male other half is reading the paper, he can’t hear you!

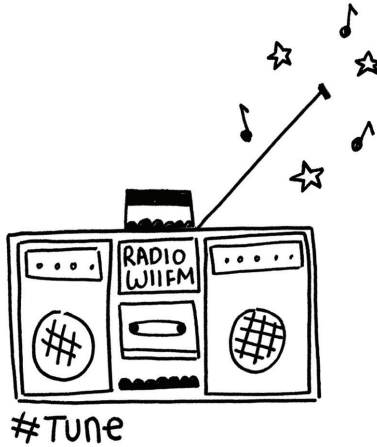
Thinking inside the box

We heard a painful story about a teacher who had an Ofsted inspector, clipboard and pen in hand, hovering at the back of their classroom. Thirty minutes into the lesson and a latecomer barged through the door muttering, 'Sorry I'm late, Sir.' Unsure of how to handle it, the teacher replied, 'No problem. You've not missed anything.' Ouch.

One of the basics which brilliant teachers master as soon as possible is learning the kids' names. A seating plan can help enormously. Giving out books, folders or files is also an ideal opportunity to learn the names of your pupils, and it is also a brilliant chance to have a mini-conversation with each one. There is more on this in Chapter 7, but trust us, finding a moment for each individual is a really useful tool in your armoury. Your students will want to learn from you much more if they think they are important to you, so those little snippets of information about who has a new puppy, which football or rugby team they support or how their sister's new baby is doing are all dynamite in your cache of tools to get the kids on board.

On the right wavelength

What is the radio station that every young learner is tuned into? Radio WiiiFM (What's in it For Me?). What is there in your lesson that is going to give answers to the questions, 'Why should I behave for him/her?', 'Why should I work in this lesson?', 'What is there in it for me?'



We often find ourselves desperately trying to force a syllabus onto children which they really aren't interested in and don't want to buy into, leading to the inevitable question, 'Why do we have to learn this, Miss?' You answer, in exasperated tones, 'Because it's on the syllabus and it might crop up in the exam.' And, of course, we've immediately doomed the subject as being irrelevant to anything other than a school examination. The kids roll their eyes and you spend an hour force-feeding them exam fodder.

Back to the kebab shop of Chapter 1 then. Those exam questions are still not on their menu, so if you want to keep them on board, you have to get the kids to buy into it. Start from the assumption that the pupils do not bring with them any intrinsic interest in what you are trying to teach them. So how do we make these things come alive for them?

First, think about their own 'kid culture'. What are they interested in? How can you connect with their world? Take football as an example. How could it be used in a lesson? Teaching about primary colours in a primary school classroom or colours in a foreign language could easily be linked with football teams. A little research would almost certainly reveal fixture lists for your local club that could enable you to explore where the opposing teams are from, either in the UK or Europe. This could also lend itself to numeracy work on distances or travel times, as could information about players' ages and birthdays. On the literacy front, it could lead to work on comparatives and superlatives (older, oldest, etc.).

One brilliant teacher we know started a series of lessons on *Romeo and Juliet* by waving £30 in front of the class (flashing the cash always catches their attention!). She asked them what they would rather do: spend it going to watch their local football team on a Saturday or going to Stratford to watch *Romeo and Juliet*. The reply was, of course, predictable, and exactly what she wanted. She followed it up with, 'So why will there be empty seats in the footie stadium on Saturday, while this play sells out night after night after night, over 400 years after it was written, when everyone knows the story? What is so special about it?' Total silence. So simple.

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW THE SECRETS OF BEING A BRILLIANT TEACHER, READ ON ...

Have you ever had a class who are angels for your colleagues but little devils as soon as they cross the threshold of your classroom? Or realised too late that your best-laid lesson plans were doomed from the start? Or had your energy and enthusiasm sapped by a mood-hoovering staffroom Grinch? Or felt the pressure of an impending Ofsted inspection? There are many real world challenges facing teachers but Andy, Gary and Chris have plenty of real world solutions to share, which are as entertaining as they are achievable.

A BRILLIANT BOOK FOR TEACHERS

'Here's a book for every school's staff library and maybe one that should be given to every new member of staff. It helps with positive attitudes, energy and ideas. The authors are brim full of all three and have an amazing capacity to make their enthusiasm infectious. Moreover it's a book to be dipped into by any teachers who find themselves flagging.'

**Sir Tim Brighouse, formerly
Commissioner for London Schools**

'Half an hour in the company of Andy Cope in person or in writing is better than a week in Mustique.'

Sir Anthony Seldon, Master, Wellington College



Gary Toward

Chris Henley

Andy Cope

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