

Organised chaos

In my first few years of teaching, I had a very clear idea as to how I was meant to be successful in the classroom: me at the front teaching, leading; pupils listening and learning. However, here at the RGS the dynamic and energetic boys that we teach do not learn as well when confined to a chair and kept in silence.

In my NQT year I was given a very valuable piece of advice, which has stuck with me ever since. I was assured that it was ok to have a time in each lesson when you take a back seat and allow the pupils to learn independently. In my first year of teaching, this for me could only be silent, individual work as it was the one way I was confident that the work would be completed to a satisfactory standard. As the years have gone on and I have grown in confidence and have built up a strong rapport with my classes, I now realise what this member of staff meant. He did not mean that 'silence is golden', what he meant was that I should allow the pupils to take responsibility for their learning and not to rely solely on me.

Due to the pressures of exam results teachers find it increasingly difficult to relinquish control over their pupils as it is imperative that they cover the subject matter thoroughly. This need for control can mean that lessons become prescriptive and very much teacher-led so that the information can be passed on but not necessarily fully understood. By no means am I saying that we should have no teacher-led lessons as the information has to be delivered somehow, however what I do want to emphasise is the active learning element of a lesson. This was all brought home to me after going on a course called 'Pimp Your Lesson'. No, we were not led into room covered in leopard print and rap music, much to my dismay, but what was clear from the start was that lessons need a bit of glitz and glamour to catch the pupils' imagination and in turn, inspire and motivate them to learn.

Gone are the days where an outstanding lesson is assumed to be a quiet one. Ofsted now calls for 'resilient, confident and independent' learners. Easier said than done. These three things are difficult to separate and essentially must become part of a culture in your teaching. The course did not stress their ideals through Ofsted's but promoted innovative teaching ideas which were predominantly pupil-led in order to facilitate the aforementioned qualities of a successful learner.

For instance, when delivering content heavy lessons why not divide all the information onto cue cards and have the pupils teach each other the content. Once this is done you can have a group discussion on what they now know about the topic. Suddenly, every pupil is out of their seat; every pupil has a job; and every pupil is confident they can answer at least one question on the new topic. I'm sorry teacher, but you will no longer be the centre of attention. Yes, there will be noise and movement but you too will be confident in the knowledge that they are completing a task and learning in an enjoyable way.

So next time you are struggling to come up with an inspired way of teaching the use of the pluperfect tense or the periodic table, why not have a look at 'Pimp Your Lesson' by Isabella Wallace and Leah Kirkman and adorn your teaching with some pedagogical pimpage!

