



Teaching and Learning Hub Newsletter

Achieving our T&L Vision:

Ensuring that the needs of all learners are met through effective teaching strategies for large class sizes

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Background:

In the previous academic year (2017-2018) a staff Teaching and Learning (T&L) working party reviewed the key principles of T&L at King's: what did we really think would make the biggest positive difference to our students at this particular school. After consultation the Golden Threads were agreed and translated into a new lesson evaluation focus to hold ourselves accountable.

This Teaching and Learning Hub was focused on exploring and sharing good practice which would ensure pupils are experiencing lessons which meet our stated key principles of Teaching and Learning. Particular emphasis is being placed on how these practices can be employed to ensure students are engaged and actively learning in all classes, including those with full classrooms.

Focus on the Golden Threads

We examined and discuss two of the aspects of the 'Golden Threads' on the Lesson Observation Form: Learning Environment (Student Wellbeing) and Planning for Learning. These are 2 areas that need to be considered carefully for large teaching groups. Members of this group selected areas to research further and collate some tips, strategies and feedback from trials in lessons in a range of subjects.

Learning Environment: The Flexible Classroom - J Baldaro

"Adapting the learning environment to the context of the lesson and learners' needs (including the effective use of other adults, seating and resources)."

Seating Plans

Whether you use a hand-written seating plan or an Excel/Word/PowerPoint version, it's useful to change it at least termly. Year 7 students often are initially seated in alphabetical order as it makes learning names easier but spare a moment for Andrew Able who spends the whole of his first year at Kings sitting next to Betty Bo!

There are several strategies for seating (girl/boy; less/more able; similar ability; flight path; box in the disruptive student) but whichever plan you adopt there will inevitably be students who are less accessible to you by virtue of where they are sat in the room. These are the students sat at the back of the class or around the fringes – in my room alongside the radiators and walls. Therefore, when you change seating plans you might collapse the students from the back to the front and the students from the fringes into the middle. Give each of the students in your class an equal share of your attention.

Consider changing the seating arrangements for different activities – a little bit of planning can avoid extra work for teachers, for example could you do group work with tables pushed together for back-to-back lessons and then get your form to put the tables back?

Refresh your seating plans regularly and make sure the students sit where they should (especially during cover lessons). Also, consider changing the seating plan when you need to make a statement or have an impact, for example perhaps the arrival of a new or trainee teacher or following the changeover of students after a set change.

Use of Whiteboards

Whiteboards around the walls are an incredibly effective teaching asset. Consider placing whiteboards around unused wall spaces and then getting students to work 'at the wall'. It's really easy to spot mistakes, students find it easier to peer-assess and comment on others' work, and pupils can easily wipe out work that they're not satisfied with. A simple alternative to fixed white boards is to stick mini whiteboards to the walls with Blu Tack (other adhesives are available!).

Allied to whiteboards is to allow students to write on the desks using board markers. They love the freedom of being able to do this and it's much easier for the teacher to comment on (and correct) work done on the table. I've done this with classes from Year 7 right up to Year 13. Take a photo of the tables if you need to keep it for assessment.

Visualizers

Visualizers are a low-cost, high impact teaching resource. Maths Department use them extensively but they have a role in many other subject areas. Here are some ideas:

- Share example of pupils' work by inviting students to comment on what was good or perhaps to try and spot a mistake that a particular student couldn't find – 30 eyes on a problem and it doesn't take long to correct any work (done sensitively);
- Tricky 'skill of hand' teaching such as compass constructions and using a protractor (maths), reading an Ordnance Survey map (geography) or a pencil/brush stroke (art) can be quickly shown to a class without having students crowd around a desk or using 'clunky' PowerPoint animations;
- Reduce photocopying by showing questions from text books or articles. No need to 'cut and paste' into a worksheet. Freeze the screen if needed so you can then use your PC.
- Model answers and solutions by writing them out under the visualiser in front of the students (a return to 'old school' university lecture theatre teaching methods) but very effective and requiring much less preparation.

Questioning

Encourage students to face the person they are talking to. When asking a question of a student consider moving to the opposite side of the classroom: this makes them project their voice when answering your question.

Encouraging students to take risks and make mistakes

In maths (but most likely in other subjects as well) it can be incredibly difficult to spot and correct misconceptions and mistakes (especially when those misconceptions are engrained or well-established). A good way to get students to be open about making mistakes is to encourage them to tell you when they've got stuff wrong.

One way to do this is to play the 'who's got the perfect wrong answer game' which works like this: Ask a question which you know will expose a classic mistake or misconception (for maths this might be thinking that adding fractions involves adding the numerators and then then adding the denominators). Write down the 'perfect wrong answer' on a bit of paper, fold it in half and give the paper to an unsuspecting student. Ask the question of the class and then invite students to guess what I might have written on the folded paper. The student then unfolded the paper to reveal what many of the students will have hopefully predicted. Those that have made the mistake feel less embarrassed about having made it. Then ask which students have got the 'perfect wrong answer' – misconception exposed, bravo!

Learning Environment: Passion and Enthusiasm - M Smith

“Being infectiously passionate, enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the subject and learning.”

Research shows that the best **teachers** are passionate about **teaching**. They are intensely curious about the world and love learning new things. They are also driven by a deep desire to **teach** and help others. These **teachers** give their heart and soul to their work, and to the students they **teach**.

One area where a teacher can show passion for teaching is through their classroom.

When students go into a classroom for the first time they need to find it a safe, welcoming and inviting place. Students need to be comfortable and ready to learn. They will feel at home, not because of cartoonish posters and motivational sayings taped up on every wall, but because the classroom is clean, bright and open.

Passionate teachers cultivate students' curiosity and interest in learning.

Fried (2001) supporting this idea states that there is a strong connection between passionate teaching and the quality of student learning and explains the reasons as:

- If students know that teachers get immersed in their subjects and sets high standards for students, they take their studies more seriously. At this point, teaching ceases to be a job done by force, and turns into an inspiration for students;
- There is little chance of building a relationship based on respect and trust between teacher and student unless a collaborative learning environment and willingness to take risks are not created;
- Students will not be motivated to learn as long as they do not have a clear idea of how to apply things they have learnt to their own lives.

Fried (2001) goes onto list ten basic characteristics of a passionate teacher:

1. Likes working with young people, and takes an interest in knowledge and ideas;
2. That a student's lack knowledge and skill cannot be excuses to decrease his feeling of compassion for them;
3. Cares about students;
4. Is aware of world issues, and current events in the classroom and effectively reflects them in his works at school;
5. Is serious and has sense of humour;
6. Tolerates absurd and meaningless things that students exhibit in their behaviours but at the same time critical and very attentive to manners that students must have;
7. Avoids condemning ideas of unpopular and young people and attempts to create a culture of mutual respect;
8. Endeavours to establish and maintain a learning environment where students can learn from their mistakes;
9. Takes his missions seriously and reflects his ideas and beliefs clearly.

Planning for Learning: Activities for large class sizes - K Hopkins

“Motivating learners by planning meaningful activities and using engaging resources, including homework.”

The below activities are designed to be used with large classes. With a background of teaching Latin, English and History some of these activities are inevitably designed for subjects where there is a ‘narrative’ element but I hope that the majority of activities will be applicable and useful to you.

1. Storyboarding a section of a text. Students have to sum up in normally 6 to 8 boxes a section of a story. They then need to provide captions of each scene and can also add in quotes if relevant. Good for either showing their understanding of what happens but can also be used with A level classes where language analysis is the focus to get them to look at techniques used by the writer. Can be differentiated through how much support is provided by either giving students complete choice or providing questions/line references to support weaker students. This can be done either as a group activity or individually. Students may be concerned about their drawing ability but should be encouraged that this is about a visual representation rather than a perfect piece of art!
2. Card sorts. Can be used to test understanding of key concepts as a ‘match up’ or as a way of constructing structured sentences/paragraphs etc. We have used this in Classics to help students with constructing English to Latin sentences. Students are given a large variety of vocabulary and they then put together as many sentences as they can, making it open and creative. MFL department have made great use of Tarsia for supporting learning of vocabulary. Students can also create their own card sorts. Could this be applied to formulae and equations in Science/Maths?
3. Bingo. Students find this engaging and it can be used to test understanding of key concepts. Give students a list of words/concepts to select from and then read out words. Using vocabulary as an example they write down Latin words and then you read out the English. Using a programme which will randomly select for you also makes clear that it is random chance and there is no favouritism, if you have access to this (Latin has an online vocabulary tester that can be used for this).
4. Dice. Different sides of the dice are allocated to different questions, meanings of words, concepts etc to create an element of random chance. Students will then get multiple options. Can be simple with only one question allocated to each side or more complex with the students rolling multiple times, i.e. to construct a sentence they have to roll to find out which vocabulary they will use, which tense of verb etc. - credit to Fiona Hopkins for this idea!
5. Poster work. Students given success criteria and then work in groups to recap a topic area. Students enjoy the opportunity to be creative while recapping in an active way. Can be differentiated by giving different groups different topics dependent on ability.
6. Mini whiteboards. Multiple applications – particularly good for quiz style questions. Students hold up their boards allowing you to quickly see who understands. Works well if you make it competitive and get them to keep score of how many they are getting right.
7. Last person standing. All students stand up. Ask them questions in order, if they don’t know the answer they sit down. Last person standing wins.
8. Jigsawing. Students complete one section of a task in a group. Then either they number themselves in their group to create new subgroups or use ‘one astray’. Good for involvement of all students as they have to feedback on their section.
9. Debates. Split class into two sides and give them time to prepare. Use a speaking tool to ensure everyone gets the chance to speak. Can also get students to ‘vote with their feet’ at start and end to see how views change.
10. Newspaper articles. Gives students opportunity to reflect on the perspective of different characters, show understanding of character, events and can also be used to develop written communication.