Teaching Tips – a starting point

The need for Proper Planning and Routines

It all starts with proper planning.

***It all starts with proper planning and thinking ahead. Think to yourself – ‘What do I need the children to learn today in this lesson?’ ‘What are the key things that they will need to take away, the key building blocks to build future learning upon?’ ’What is it I am trying to achieve in this lesson that will help the pupils achieve our end goal?***

 But also think to yourself about what is foreseeable in terms of pupils behaviour, expectations, aspirations, disruptions and distractions to the lesson. For example - Halls that have multiple entrances into them where children or adults may pass through the space at any moment, offer ample opportunity for children to be easy distracted. How are you going to manage this? How do others manage it? Might you put out some cones or a line that marks where the children need to walk around the outside of the room as they pass through to their class? In some cases I have even seen adults walk right through the very centre of a class while they are working on mats or even on apparatus causing complete havoc! Try to mitigate this in your planning and thinking. Actually this is a whole school issue – travelling through the hall when classes are on PE – and as such should be addressed by all.

Think now to wherever you actually make contact with the children ready for their lesson. Wherever you start with your contact - start positive, but always ensure high expectations. Set your stall out first. It's easier to be firm and fair at the beginning than it is to try and introduce it if you have *not* been so firm and have not clamped down on low level disruptive behaviour or rudeness or aspects which you no longer deem to be appropriate - such as children talking over you while you are talking.

Expect the pupils to be quiet and purposeful as they change for PE or if they are listening to you as you're explaining what you want them to do next. Devise simple routines that will allow you to get the children to - for example, remove earrings. If you start at the beginning of the lesson by saying - ‘Oh good it's PE time now!’ and you yourself start to remove any jewellery, ear-rings etc. as you're speaking, the children see and perceive that you value this action and therefore are less likely to challenge it or to be awkward.

Ensure that they are listening to you at *all times* and make sure that they are aware that you expect them to listen to you but that you also will listen to them when they are asking you a question, or when they are answering a question, or if they feel nervous or anxious about any aspect of learning, of the task, or anything to do with the lesson. They will also need to be encouraged to listen to each other learning to value each other’s comments and observations etc.

Never try to talk over children or carry on talking whilst a pupil, or pupils, are talking. If they're making a noise - wait for them to be quiet so they can take onboard all the points that you are going to talk about and when explaining tasks or when explaining what's going on in the lesson, keep it short! Think carefully about how you're going to present the learning for that lesson and present it in small manageable chunks and wherever possible make these inter-connected. This helps to ensure (Cognitive Load Theory) that we are not overloading the pupils short-term memory but also, wherever possible, we are making strong links between what they have already learnt and what is in their short term memory now. Allowing retrieval of prior learning and connecting it, reinforcing that with concepts already learnt to help build more detailed schema and embed this into their long term memory.

Have routines for changing. Make sure the children know what you expect of them. Take it down to –

*‘Right we start with taking off our jumpers, folding those and putting them on the back of our chair. We then take off our shoes and socks, or tights, putting them underneath the chair.....etc.’*

This of course can particularly help children who may have an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) in terms of having a regular pattern of behaviour for changing. What you expect of them and the order in which to change. It may be that some children might just need that to be actually written down or better still, shown by using drawings to illustrate the sequence of their changing ready for PE.

So - what are you doing while the children are changing? Make sure that while they are changing you are reinforcing any acts of behaviour etc. that you want to see. You might be being upbeat and getting them ready for the lesson (but without over-exciting the children of course). You may be using the opportunity to recap things that you have done the previous lessons, for example –

*“Don't forget that last week we were working on our sequences and we were looking to put in a balance. Well this week you'll be delighted to know that we're going to be working on those balances again but we're going to be looking at adding in a jump!”*

Establish also what the children will need to do once they have finished changing, do they come and sit on the carpet, do they come and line up? What do they do next? What is the routine?

Many teachers share the learning objective for the lesson in the classroom. This can be very effective, particularly when wanting to use or make the most of whiteboards. Interactive whiteboards (IWB) to help convey what the lesson will be about but also more importantly to recap what they did before, to help set the children’s learning in context. The new Ofsted framework particularly wants to know how children and adults (the teachers) see the learning in sequence. How it is planned to build upon and into the next part of the learning - setting the building blocks & foundations for learning . The Interactive Whiteboard can provide you with this opportunity by being able to show photographs of the lesson that you had previously with the children, photos that were taken perhaps by a TA, perhaps by yourself, or perhaps by pupils. Pupils might be using iPads to look at their work, the quality of their performance and using the iPads as a tool to support their learning at the time. You can then harvest images for your own purpose! This learning can be enhanced by sharing again at the beginning of the next lesson to remind pupils of keywords for instance. The teacher might take a photo(s) and put it on the IWB and say –

*“What does this photograph show in terms of how Harry is balancing on top of the trestle? What was that word that we used when talking about that stretching of the arms, legs etc? Yes Sarah?”*

*“Extension?”*

*“Brilliant Sarah! Well done – yes Extension! This is what I want to see again this week every time you move and especially when you hold those balances......”*

Whatever it is that you share it upon, however it is that you actually share the learning objectives – always be very clear about what it is that children will be learning that lesson. For very young children, it will be something appropriately simple that will need to be conveyed. As children progressively get older and move up through the school the learning objectives will become more challenging, more progressive and more complex and it may be that you need just a little bit more time to explain what it is they'll be doing & how it links to the previous learning. Again, good teaching relies on you keeping this short and sharp because once you get into the lesson you can keep drip-feeding it almost like a broken record into the lesson. Remind the children *constantly* about what it is that you are looking for, what it is you expect them to be learning, why it is that they are learning this - for instance - **This Is Because** (TIBs) it fits in with how we construct or choreograph a dance motif,

*or a gymnastics sequence,*

*or This Is Because this will allow us to develop better control with our hockey stick,*

*or it will allow us to beat a defender in an invasion game.*

The use of video on the Interactive Whiteboard from such things as schemes of work like ‘Get Set 4 PE’ are incredibly useful and can be used at the beginning of a lesson for those learners who are particularly visually orientated in their learning preferences. They can of course, resources and facilities permitting be shown during the lesson as well to reinforce the learning. This allows the pupils to be able to see and hear about what it is they're going to be able to do. You can also use the video to draw out those key teaching points that you've already identified for the pupils during the lesson - but remember don't overload their brains. Cognitive load or short term memory requires that we have short sharp punchy learning objectives to help the children to learn – break the tasks down into manageable learning chunks to focus on ‘learning gains’.

Once the children are ready what's your ***routine***? Do the children line up quietly by the door? Do they line up in pairs? Do they line up boy / girl / boy / girl? Do you have two lines?

These may seem very basic questions but having a regular set of routines is very useful for children and also helps to re-establish discipline and strategies to help minimise low level disruptive behaviour. Start the lesson well. Do ensure that you reinforce movement through the school because many of the other children might be in their classes working as you walk past to go to the Hall, or to exit the building to go out onto the playground, or in some cases where schools have changing rooms, to move from your classroom down to changing rooms. I would urge teachers not to worry that if the pupils behaviour and the noise level are inappropriate that you stop - wait for them to get quieter and if they don’t / won't get quieter, then take them back to class. The vast majority of children do not like missing PE, it is a lesson that, on the whole, the majority of children look forward to. This ‘sanction’ of taking them back also re-establishes and reinforces your high expectations of their behaviour, their attitude and how they conduct themselves. It is worth setting these out at the beginning of any period of teaching with the children to make sure that they know what you expect of them and how you expect them to behave at all times.

Once at the entrance to the Hall again ensure you have a quiet line ready to go in because you want to start the lesson positively and purposefully. It is also recommended that you think about how you will start the lesson once you get through the doors.

As children enter the Hall, you could have a routine where they take off their shoes or socks ready for Gym or Dance. Consider - where do they place them? Do they place them under a bench? What if I'm going to use those benches in the actual lesson, for example gymnastics? Thinking about this now means that you won't have the situation later on when you want to move apparatus and get apparatus out from the walls and children have to then move and pick up all their shoes and socks etc. Therefore, do give some thought to where the children will take off their shoes and socks and dependent upon the size and space available to you this might need some consideration prior to the learning to establish regular routine that will work for you and the children in the context of your school. Once they've taken their shoes and socks off what next?

Think of ways that the children can be engaged in purposeful activity right from the get-go. This minimises opportunities for low level disruptive behaviour, reinforces the pace of the lesson and wastes the minimum amount of time. This time is valuable learning time!

Something I like to do when entering into the Hall is the second that the children start coming in to take off their shoes and socks in the hall, I put on a piece of lively up-tempo music and stand in the middle of the room doing some very, very, simple but effective aerobic-style movements. As the children take off their shoes and socks they quickly come straight out into the Hall, finding a safe space and join me by copying what I am doing in the middle of the Hall. The numbers start to grow quickly as the children take off their shoes and socks and join in on the ‘dance floor’ and we have an aerobics activity lesson starting that might be going for two to three minutes until all children are there. Before that I might ask an individual child to come and swap places with me. We will copy them as they think of some aerobic activities for their peers and the teacher to join in with. This will allow me to keep the children physically active for a sustained period of time to introduce such things as the types of muscles that we are using - for example as we are punching our arms up into the air – “now we're using our Deltoid muscles here in the shoulders to help us.”

With such activities as the above I can also use this as an opportunity to talk to children about their heart rate, breathing rates, why we sometimes go redder when we are physically active. We can also look at the amount of time that we are active for, increasing it gradually as we go through the term to say to the children –

*“Look, when we first started you were really tired and out of breath after just two or three minutes! Do you realise that you have now been going for seven minutes and you still look strong? Well done class!”*

You cannot rely on just one way of doing things because children will get bored of this overtime, so think of other activities to get the children active right from the very start.

Here’s another simple warm-up idea if you have lines outside on your playground, or if you have lines inside the Hall - or even if you don't! The very first person who is ready and has taken off their shoes and socks as they come out onto the ‘dance floor’ they become the ‘*leader*’. As children take off their shoes and socks they come out and join-in and follow the *leader* creating a snake or chain as the children now start to assemble & also follow the leader.

Children enjoy this activity and quickly take off their shoes and socks to join in. The leader has the opportunity to change what they do at the front, from the way they travel - maybe skipping, then tiptoe, walking, to side-stepping, to walking backwards. However they want under the teachers guidance and instruction. The teacher can then split the line at different places to introduce a new leader for another group to follow - *so we now have two groups*. Keep splitting the lines gradually and eventually you might get down to individual pairs with one following the other - partner A partner B. So within this warm-up activity we've now got children in pairs, ready perhaps to move on to the main part of the lesson very smoothly and very quickly, wasting as little time as possible but allowing the children to lead, to be led, to think of ideas and to move and copy. You can guide their movements to reflect the main learning activity.

Think prior to your lesson about your warm-up. How does it support and link directly to the main activity and the main learning for that lesson?

Every warm-up should reinforce the learning that you want the children to take away. In basketball for example, if the warm-up was about playing a chase and tag game and the main part of the lesson was about dribbling, can you see that there is a missed opportunity to enhance the learning and to maximise the time for the children to learn?

If this were me I would want the warm-up to have all 30 children in my class with a ball, bouncing it, practising and reinforcing the techniques of learning the dribble. This way 30 children are learning for the full 5-10 minutes of my warm-up activity. If this was a gymnastics lesson and I was expecting the children to be able to link ways of travelling, two jumps and turns, then I could use this and combine this in the warm-up; where the children will be travelling around the room at different speeds, perhaps using gear one or gear two or gear three (thinking about how cars work) adding in some jumps [1 foot to two feet, 2 feet to 1, 2 feet to 2 feet etc ] I might then even combine, depending on the age of the children, run, jump and turn in the air and land. Everything would always depend on the age of the children, their prior learning and what they are going to be learning that lesson but I hope you can see that the point we are making is that the warm-up and the learning objective for the lesson are linked.

Let's go back to that key question - what is it that pupils will learn in this lesson?

There is a current school of thought about ***teaching backwards***. What this means is that you always think about the end result and work your way backwards in terms of planning for the lesson. Being clear about what the pupils will learn at the end of it, what they would look like, what they would know and be able to do, is important in setting the steps along the way. Learning backwards can work for both the individual lesson and the sequence of lessons, for example, the 8 lessons that form a block of work for gymnastics in year 2 . By thinking about what the children will know and be able to do and show by the end of those eight lessons in year 2 will allow the teacher to plan back from that point to establish all the learning milestones along the way in order to be successful at learning all of the end expectations.

The clearer we are about the children’s learning the easier it is for us to explain that, to plan for it and to plan small achievable, measurable steps along the way; so that the children and us as the teacher can see that they are making the progress that we need them to make to achieve it. If we look at this through an analogy of perhaps, a bricklayer building a wall. In order to achieve the wall, for it to hold up a roof on a house for example, or to form a boundary for a house property, we know what we're looking for. We know what we're aiming to achieve. Before we can build the wall we need to lay firm foundations. We then need to build and lay the bricks, course by course, and we know that when laying bricks for example that we overlay them over the top of the rows underneath them. This is so that the wall is more structurally sound.

This applies to how we learn. Any gaps that we have in our learning ‘wall’, if we don't learn something properly or thoroughly or soundly, it means that when we go onto the next piece of learning (maybe too fast or too quickly) that those gaps in future learning develop as a result of the gaps in prior learning. The learning is less ‘stable’ or secure than perhaps it should be.

Throughout the lesson, keep noise levels low. Use your voice and share teaching points to help achieve lower levels of noise. It’s absolutely fine for children to talk, communicate and discuss their learning – high quality PE cannot be delivered in silence! If you set the children off on a task, don't then just retire to the back of the room or walk around the room quietly and in silence. Use your voice to project positive messages such as praise and reinforcement for things that you see that are going well. Regularly drip feed the learning, or key teaching points, like –

* “Don't forget what it is I'm looking for....”
* “Don't forget what we are focusing our attention on today......”
* “Don't forget how to perform that simple roll...”
* “Don't forget to keep your elbows wide when you make that chest pass!”

Make sure that the children are really clear about what it is they are learning. The clearer they are, the more likely they are to achieve it. Make sure you have broken down the steps of the learning into manageable chunks so that you can just introduce them quickly and simply. Look at your teaching points – keep them concise, succinct and simple.

 For example, in teaching the chest pass for netball or basketball type activities, we want the children to have their elbows wide and their fingers behind the ball. That they extend the arms quickly in a straight action towards the chest of their partner. Once we've got the children working on this, reinforcing it with regular – “don't forget high elbows!” - we could then stop the group once we are happy and have ascertained that the majority of the pupils have mastered this simple step and action. We can then introduce the next part of the action, the skill, the technique.

*“Now children we know that we need to keep the elbows wide, that we expand the arms quickly to send the ball in a nice straight line to the chest. This time as you do it, what I want you to do is to step forwards like so (demonstration) so that as you make that pass you're stepping into the pass to help the ball move faster and quicker. Let me show you that once more.”*

Look at the slide below taken from a webinar led by Hanna Miller – HMI and Subject Lead for PE (March 2021). Look at the way this slides supports what we have said about building blocks. Through this illustration I believe it is obvious to see that if a ‘block’ such as – ‘Defending when the ball is turned over’ is missing or insecure – this gap in learning could well lead to all that above it, collapsing.

The example shown is for an aspect of teaching Year 6 Netball skills and understanding.** *\*Acknowledgement – Ofsted, Hanna Miller – March 2021.*

 The use of demonstration is an effective and powerful tool to support learning . Modelling any action, modelling any behaviour can have a massive impact upon the ability for the children to take on board the learning. Make sure the children can always see your demonstration and be very clear about points that you're making, over-emphasise them if required. Check the children understand and then send them off to have a go as quickly as possible, meaning that you are only disrupting their learning, their practise, their ability to refine movements and actions for the minimum amount of time.

Always look for children who are really demonstrating what it is that you want them to do. This will allow you, for example, to quickly pause the class and say to all -

“Look how Harry is getting on with his chest pass. That's brilliant Harry! You've got your elbows nice and wide, you've got your hands behind the ball, and that the ball is going fast and quickly to your partner. You’re even stepping onto your right foot and sometimes your left foot too, as you make your pass. As a result the ball is going nice and straight between your chest and your partners chest. I wonder if you can be as clear as Harry is there with your chest pass? Off you go again let's see!”

So throughout the lesson use your WALT (We Are Learning To) or use your WILF (What I'm Looking For) and interject this with TIBs - ***This Is Because*** - this helps to set their learning in context and answer the key question of ‘***Why*** are we learning this?’

***A final thought*** – at the very beginning we talked about having high expectations, modelling these, facilitating these – expecting these.

Don’t blow it at the end by offering false praise simply in an attempt to finish positively!

What I mean by this is something that I have quite frankly seen too often. If the pupils have not responded well to your planned teaching, behaviour has not met expectations through the lesson and you have had to stoop, address it etc. Then don’t say was a ‘great lesson’ or say well done everyone as you potentially shoot yourself in the foot and undermine your high expectations. It’s okay to finish a lesson by recapping the learning, pulling it all together and saying that next lesson you need the pupils to be more focussed, or quieter and that you will try and ensure that the lesson you plan will help ensure that they can achieve the desired learning. Be honest – after all it’s the best policy – just don’t be negative or dwell too long it – “I know next lesson you will.........”

We hope that this conversational read has helped you to consider the importance of proper planning and the use of routines in your teaching.