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—Mick Waters, Professor of Education, President of the Curriculum Foundation

“If you imbibe the essential principles Jim outlines in the book, you’ll find yourself with a great toolkit of pupil-proof teaching techniques which will make your teaching more easy and help you get better results.”

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Are you working when everyone else seems to be doing something more exciting? Maybe your marking could be done by someone else. Are you fed up with planning lessons? Why not get the students to plan them for you. Besides, personalised learning shouldn’t really involve thirty lesson plans!

This powerful book is packed full of easy-to-apply and highly effective strategies, strategies which Ofsted have rated as ‘outstanding’. What’s more, they all have the seal of approval of real students in real classrooms. In fact, many of them have been thought up by the students themselves, but that’s why Jim Smith is called The Lazy Teacher. So, next time someone says to you ‘get a life’, this book will make it possible.
THE LAZY TEACHER'S HANDBOOK

How Your Students Learn More When You Teach Less

Jim Smith

Edited by Ian Gilbert

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Chapter 4

GREAT IDEAS FOR LAZY LESSONS
Imagine the scene. It is your duty day and you have been tied up all through break with an incident involving a yoghurt and a pack of Pokémon cards. The bell went four minutes ago (and counting), and you know you have a Year 9 class waiting for you. When you finally get to your classroom, and a queue of restive-looking students, you remember that it is locked and the keys are in the staffroom. Returning a few minutes later, you are convinced that there are fewer students outside your room now than there were minutes before but you are too out of breath to care as you realise that your ‘new term – new you’ get fit pledge has not quite reached fruition. What’s more, your lesson plan is in the car, through your classroom window you can see the computer is showing the blue screen of death despite being fine just twenty minutes ago and the head has just turned up to do the observation you had cavalierly agreed to yesterday. Add to this the fact that their exercise books are still on the kitchen table after your pre-observation marking frenzy last night and even your favourite students are beginning to turn on you and are staring and pointing at the sweat running down your face. Whilst ‘crap’ is not necessarily a judgement that the head would use, her looks do nothing to persuade you that she is not thinking it.

Surprised though I was to pass that particular observation and survive into my second term of teaching, I am not convinced that the events described above are the worst that could happen. No, far more soul-sapping are those occasions where you spend your entire weekend planning an all-singing, all-dancing, full complement of whistles and bells lesson that should last at least three
weeks, only to have it sabotaged by the class who not only complete it in half a lesson (aided by Ricky falling off his chair and revealing where you had hidden the secret answer to question 5) but who also dismiss it as ‘boring’ and ‘stupid’ and why can’t they just go on the internet or play hangman instead. And to think I could have been the regional manager for Currys.

I will confess that those were just two cringe-worthy examples from my NQT year (although the low point was a reprimand from the head for being a little too enthusiastic in a snowball fight with the students and making the self-appointed ‘hard man’ of Year 11 cry).

While you may not have been told off by a teacher for snowballing since you were 10, I would suggest that the first two scenarios – or something very like them – have happened to you at some point. If they haven’t, don’t feel left out, they soon will. And when they do, embrace them in a Lazy Way. Some of our best teaching and the students’ best learning will happen when you have to think on your feet. There is an energy and enthusiasm that is generated by spontaneous lessons that you simply can’t write into a lesson plan, and sometimes ripping up the intended lesson and going with your gut feeling produces something far better than what you planned anyway.

The trick when doing things the Lazy Way is to capture those techniques you pulled out of the bag in a crisis and employ them in a systematic, less frantic manner. However, don’t think that being a Lazy Teacher excuses a lack of planning all of the time. Oxymoronic it may be, but ‘planned spontaneity’ is what we Lazy Teachers are looking for. After all, as Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, ‘Plans are nothing; planning is everything.’

Great ideas for lazy lessons, then, is a box of tricks you always call upon to get you out of a tight spot in an instant. By their very nature, they put pressure on the students to fill the gap where your teaching was supposed to be and, in doing so, prevent you filling the void with some good old fashioned ‘copy off the board’ work or regaling them with tales of your trip to Goa in the eighties.
Given a little thought, any of the ideas that follow can be extended or reduced to fit into any part of the lesson. For example, a starter activity may work at several points when you start a new ‘learning loop’ (see Chapter 3 to learn more about learning loops). Or it may perform equally well as part of a plenary, of which there could be, or should be, several. What follows is a series of ideas that are unique in that you can arrive anywhere, anytime with anybody and deliver outstanding learning, primarily because you are making the students think.

To give you an idea of how long they might make your students think for I have classified them into three sections depending on how much time they take up in a lesson. (Although feel free to reduce or extend that amount as you see fit. It’s down to you. Don’t make me do all the work!) Or, expressed another way, they are categorised by how much time you have got left to persuade the head teacher observing you that you are not ‘crap’ after all.

**Ten quick and lazy lesson ideas to have up your sleeve**

**Arrest me!**

This activity really makes people think. It also works just as well with adults as it does with students. Tell the students that they have just been arrested and charged with being an outstanding learner/member of the tutor group/member of the school/historian/mathematician. What five bits of evidence would the prosecutor use to convict them? If there is not enough evidence, set them a challenge to accumulate enough evidence by the next ‘court case’ in four weeks time. You might just see a different response in how they work.
Choose a letter/number

Ask the student to choose a letter from the alphabet and a number between one and ten. Then, based on their responses, get them to come up with the specified number of words that relate to the subject you are studying that all begin with that letter. For example, it might mean they have to come up with seven words beginning with ‘T’ that relate to war poetry or one word beginning with ‘Q’ that relates to sustainability – either way it will make them think and have fun.

Animal memories

Ask students to choose an animal from a farm or a zoo. Then ask students to write any words associated with your chosen topic that begin with the letters of the animal. For example, if a student chose ‘cat’ and you were studying the Romans, they might say Centurion Amphitheatre Tiles. If the students try to spoil the game by just using ‘dog’ or ‘rat’ give them Parastratiosphecomyia stratiosphemyioides* by way of punishment. It works every time.

Just a minute

Put students in pairs and give them a relevant topic. They have to see how long they can talk on that subject. Give your students some rehearsal time before showcasing different pairs in front of the whole class. Use non-performing students as an audience to pick up on any repetition, deviation or hesitation. As a slight twist, maybe it could be a minute of mime or drawing?

*You look it up.
Duck
Moose
Rii
FLY

Fjords!

LONGSHIPS!

Yjarlbad
THE BAD!

Dog!
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