

# CHAPTER 1

## HOW TO 'SPARKLE' IN THE CLASSROOM

### Chapter overview

The aims of the chapter are to:

1. Introduce a variety of strategies managing the entrance of learners to classrooms.
2. Examine a range of starter, plenary and end activities suitable for teenage learners.
3. Explore the use of source materials for stimulating lesson activities.
4. Provide a range of activities that capture and sustain teenage interest in your subject.



### Problem-solving

In this chapter, we consider how to capture the interest of a teenage audience in your subject area. As teachers, authors and ex-teenagers, we recognize the difficulties in engaging and sustaining the interest of many young people who find the learning activities they experience in schools and colleges mundane and/or far removed from their own interests and passions. This chapter offers a range of activities designed to ignite the creativity and imagination of teenage learners. We

passionately believe that teaching and engaging teenagers is one of the most rewarding and exciting experiences within the teaching profession. We also acknowledge that teenagers can be the most demanding and critical of audiences. But once motivated, these young people can provide never-ending streams of creativity and imagination, and allow the teacher to conduct, rather than dictate, the conditions in which young people learn best. We hope that the ideas in this and the following chapters enable you to become conductor rather than dictator, making you and your subject sparkle in the eyes of teenage learners.

## Context

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Understanding what we mean by ‘motivation’ can be problematic. Definitions differ depending on who/what we are trying to motivate (for example, adults/children/animals/individuals/groups), which theories/concepts we are deploying when discussing it (for example, psychological/sociological), and what sort of institution (for example, a school, college or place of work). Some writers argue that adults have four significant reward systems: money, usefulness, status and the gratitude or approval of those we live with (Marland, 1993). However this is of little significance to teenagers where few such rewards are possible within the school or college they attend. Motivation can take many forms. For example it can be ‘intrinsic’ to the teenager (that is, stems from within via their interests, values, desires, and so on) or ‘extrinsic’ (that is, stems from outside in the variety of ways they can be rewarded, coerced, threatened, and so on). Maslow’s (1987) hierarchy of needs (physiological, safety, love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization) is a motivational theory in psychology that provides a useful evaluation framework for teachers when reviewing and planning the efficacy of their lessons. His theory argues that while people aim to meet basic needs, they seek to meet successively higher needs in the form of a hierarchy. The implication for teachers is that successful learning can only take place if all of Maslow’s ‘needs’ can be fulfilled by the learner. While there are many other theories that we touch upon elsewhere (Kidd and Czerniawski, 2010) it is worth considering Maslow’s theory when thinking about how best to engage and motivate teenage learners.

## Toolbox

### Managing entrances of learners to classrooms

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How often do young people enter classrooms with little sense of purpose, curiosity or excitement? By combining a welcoming environment with a purposeful

approach to the facilitation of tasks, teenagers will quickly get the message that not only do you care about them as individuals but that you are also passionate about how much they can achieve in the small amount of time they are with you.

### Best practice – entering the classroom

Entering the classroom is a key moment to capture learners right from the start. Practitioners have found it useful to consider:

- Rules for learners outside the classroom (for example, lining up; gender separation; with/without bags, in silence).
- Classroom layout (for example, positioning of tables/workspaces, chairs, desk).
- Classroom environment (for example, lighting, plants, heating, wall displays, music playing in background, ventilation).
- Location of teacher (for example, by the open door greeting students, at the front of classroom ready to issue instructions).
- Starter activity (for example, on desks as students walk in; activity projected on smart board).



#### Idea 1.1

##### Young Sherlock

Get your learners to line up quietly outside the classroom/workshop and tell them there are 10 visible clues placed around the room. Their job is to write down the clues and guess what the topic of the lesson is going to be. Alternatively give them each an envelope with a simple observational task in it (for example, write down 10 items they have seen today related to their subject).



#### Idea 1.2

##### Don't blame the DJ

Raise expectations of what is to come in the lesson by handing each learner an envelope in the corridor with a task in it. Inform them that they must complete the task before the end of the music they hear on entrance to the classroom. The first one to complete the task gets to choose the music played in the next lesson.



### Idea 1.3

#### Total recall

Put a complex picture on the board that relates to the lesson you are about to teach and ask learners to remember as many features as possible from the picture (you could also offer a 'prize' for the best memory). Remove the picture and get learners in 2 minutes of silence to write down as many elements of the picture that they can recall. Use these elements to launch your lesson.

### Best practice – first impressions

Practitioners have found it effective to consider:

- The importance of 'first impressions', that is, warm greetings from teacher to learners, classroom layout, quality of resources, room lighting, and so on.
- Familiarity with classroom equipment, for example, knowing how to turn on/off video/DVD/audio equipment, ease of use with all elements of information and communication technology (ICT) and so on.
- The importance of eye contact, physical posture and body language when teaching.
- The balance between classroom persona and corridor persona, that is, the importance in engaging students out of the classroom in a friendly and enthusiastic way regardless of what may/may not have happened in class.



### Idea 1.4

#### Mini-whiteboard magic!

Make in advance a class set of mini-whiteboards (laminated A4 white card, place this in a wallet and add a marker pen). Have these on the tables as learners enter your classroom. Get them to draw a pictorial representation of a key concept related to your subject. The person sitting next to them then has to guess what that key concept is.



### **Idea 1.5** **Sorted!**

Immediately establish competition as an element of your classroom practice by placing a 'group performance chart' on the wall of your classroom. Split the class into groups of four or five students, giving each group a specific table to sit at. In some of your lessons start off by giving each group a task in an envelope (for example, organizing cards in order of significance; chronological order; theoretical similarity). The first group to correctly complete the task gets a star placed on their performance chart. The group that progresses furthest by half-term wins a prize from you.

## **Exciting ways to start lessons**

Have you ever stopped to wonder how many classes start in exactly the same way? Learners copy down aims and objectives, teachers call out the register, learners are given any important notices, and so on. Is it any wonder that some young people are not 'bovered' about turning up for the first few minutes of a lesson, that is, they know there will be nothing particularly special that they have missed. Successful motivation will have your learners rushing to your lesson in the belief that they might be missing something special. Starts to all of your lessons need to capture learners' imaginations and set up high expectations for teachers and learners alike. The following ideas should help you achieve this.



### **Idea 1.6** **Google Earth tour**

You will need computers in your classroom for this but it's worth it! Using Google Earth/Street tour, get learners in pairs or threes to carry out an 'e' expedition somewhere where they might never have been (for example, the forests of Borneo, the inner-slums of Mexico). Get each group to work on a different theme/destination/concept depending on what is appropriate for your subject. Learners report back to the class what the outcomes were. This works beautifully as both a starter and a main class activity.

**Idea 1.7****Quiz ball**

A fun way to start lessons and get everyone on board: buy a juggling ball (or scrunch up a piece of paper) and throw it to a learner, asking them a question related to the lesson you previously taught. If/when they answer the question correctly they can throw the ball to another classmate and ask them a new question, and so on. This helps create a really snappy pace at the start – essential for those ‘sparkling’ learning atmospheres.

**Idea 1.8****Question master**

Each learner is asked to write down, in complete silence, five questions related to the previous lesson to which they know the answers. They can use their notes/books and so on, but they must know the answers. They can then either test each other in their pairs/groups or you can choose one group to randomly fire questions at other class members (you can always choose a different group each week). Make this more fun by getting them to pretend there is an imaginary buzzer which they must hit before answering.

**Idea 1.9****Jigsaw puzzle**

Make a quick jigsaw puzzle (simply cut up laminated images from magazines/newspapers or photocopied from your textbook). Provide each group/pair with a set and get learners to complete this as quickly as possible. Make sure that the completed image contains within it key concepts associated with your subject. Learners then have to guess what the concepts are and/or what the theme of today’s lesson is.



### Idea 1.10 Diamond-9

This tried and tested starter is easy to re-create. Using Word or Publisher on your computer, create nine squares that can fit together in the shape of a diamond. In each square produce a contestable statement. Laminate each set and place in an envelope. Learners in pairs or groups of three are asked to rank statements in a diamond shape according to if they agree/disagree with them.

## Plenaries and ends to lessons

What is the difference between activities described as 'plenaries' and those described as 'ends'? Quite often a plenary can be the opportunity to summarize, recap or evaluate a particular section of your lesson before moving on to the next phase of the lesson. This means that they are more than just joins between activities but, rather, activities in their own right. 'Ends' are 'plenaries' that come at the end of a lesson and are an opportunity for teachers to evaluate how successfully the aims and objectives of the lesson have been met. Plenaries can actually occur at any time in the lesson – and usually follow on from a task before the class moves on to something else. In this way plenaries are recaps that help aid transitions in your sequences of events. The following activities can be used for both 'plenaries' and 'ends'.



### Reflection point

Remember – plenaries are themselves *reflection points* for learners and teachers alike! These key moments distil learning and offer the opportunity for learners to 'take stock' and crystallize the learning journey. Plenaries offer teachers key opportunities to receive feedback on learning, to assess learning and to provide clarity on future instructions, direction and facilitation. Plenaries, therefore, through engaging learners in reflection, enable teachers and learners to connect the various segments of the lesson together in one continuous story.

**Idea 1.11****Speed dating**

Arrange the room in the fashion of a speed-dating scenario, that is, one long line of tables with chairs arranged so that two people will always be seated opposite each other. Make sure that you have five or six themes that you wish learners to discuss. Call out the first theme and give the class two minutes to discuss before blowing a whistle. Keep one side of the class seated in the same seats but make sure all the others move down one person. Launch your second theme and continue until you have used all your themes.

**Idea 1.12****Mad Hatter**

Ask learners to write one question on a piece of paper and scrunch it up, putting it into a hat that you have brought to the lesson. Shake the hat around and then ask each student to take one question out of the hat. Each has to read out the question and answer it.

**Idea 1.13****Last one standing**

All members of the class stand up. Each learner has to think of one fact they have learnt in the lesson and after successfully telling the class they can then sit down (or leave the class, depending on if plenary or end).

**Idea 1.14****Don't mention it**

Learners choose, from a bag, a term they have learnt during the lesson. They should attempt to describe, in a maximum of 30 seconds, the term to the other members of the class without using the word itself. Learners put their hand up as soon as they know the answer.



### Best practice – that personal touch!

Practitioners have found it effective to consider:

- How important it is to remember a particular hobby or interest that a learner may have. This offers invaluable opportunities as learners enter your class (or as you pass them in the corridor) to enquire after their interest, raising their esteem before your lesson starts.
- The importance of lighting and ventilation during any lesson. Classrooms need to be well lit and airy places for attention spans to be maximized.
- The importance of use of names. Try to avoid referring to a class as 'year 9s' and, whenever possible, use learners' first names. This is a powerful classroom management tool and makes pupils feel that you are interested in them and not just your subject.
- The importance of having a task on the board or the tables as learners enter the classroom as a way of immediately engaging them in your lesson.



#### Idea 1.15 Who am I?

Split the class into groups of four or five learners. Each group is given a set of Post-it notes. Each member of the group writes the name of a famous person related to the subject taught and sticks it on the forehead of the person next to them. That group member is allowed up to 20 questions to find out the name of the person stuck to their head.



#### Idea 1.16 Cubism?

Create or get hold of a large cube or very large dice that you can write on. On each side write a generic question (for example, one thing I learnt today? One key concept I learnt today?). Create enough die for each group. Let the members of the group roll the dice in turn and answer the questions.

## Using source materials for stimulating activities

To what extent does your subject rely on the ability of learners to work with sources (for example, photographs, statistics, diary extracts, letters)? All too often, many learners have little opportunity to develop the range of skills required for examiners to award the maximum marks available. Using a variety of different sources can make subjects come alive to students, motivating them in your subject. The following ideas offer suggestions as to how this might be achieved.



### Idea 1.17

#### Chain of events

Split the class into groups giving each group a separate image to look at. Groups decide what led up to and what follows the particular event depicted in the picture. This can be written down or fed back to the class as a whole. A variation of this can be done by stopping a DVD at a particular point and asking each group to predict what happens next.



### Idea 1.18

#### Speech bubbles

As with Idea 1.17 above, each group is given an image to look at but with people present in each photograph. Prepare some blank speech bubbles (you can laminate both the picture and the bubbles) and get each group to write appropriate quotations in the bubbles and place them on the photographs. Each group then reads out their comments to the class, justifying why they have chosen those words.

### Best practice – sparkling in the classroom

When trying to be a dynamic classroom performer providing a sparkling classroom atmosphere, you should consider:

- The energy and enthusiasm that you convey about your subject and your learners.
- The impact of the classroom environment that learners walk into.
- How up to date you are with recent developments in your subject area/s.
- How you make your subject relevant to lives of teenage learners.
- How approachable you are to learners facing difficulties with your subject.

**Idea 1.19****Hold the front page!**

Using Publisher, design a mock-up front page for a newspaper and include in it a series of photographs related to your subject but leave blank any copy that might have been inserted. Tell learners that the stories to go with the photographs have been wiped from the computer by accident and that the paper cannot go to print until they write new stories to match the photographs.

**Idea 1.20****Foreign correspondent!**

Split the class up into groups of four or five learners. On each table provide a range of source-based resources (for example, photographs, letters, newspaper clippings). Each table represents a different country. Each group is to send one of its 'foreign correspondents' to each table and by using 'how, why, where, when, who' they are to return to their group with a story about the country in question. The homework or follow-up activity is to design a mock-up newspaper coverage of the countries being investigated.

**Reflection point**

To what extent are teachers and their learners restricted by their own 'comfort zones'? Many teachers worry about trying out new ideas with classes they are not used to teaching. Similarly many learners groan when teachers try out new table arrangements, seating strategies or new activities. None of this need worry you if right from the very first lesson you experiment with new ideas that capture and sustain the interest of learners. They will quickly associate your lessons with purposeful learning, fun and curiosity, and will be open to all sorts of ideas. Stay with habit and your ability to bring about their enhanced learning will be severely restricted.

**Idea 1.21****Connective ping-pong!**

Holding a ping-pong ball in your hand, make a statement related to your subject and finish that statement with a connective (for example, 'however', 'on the other

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hand') and throw the ball to a learner. The learner who catches the ball must continue with another related statement that ends with a connective before throwing the ball to another student, and so on.



### **Idea 1.22** **Film clips**

It pays dividends if you invest the time to collect a range of film clips that relate to your subject area. This is a wonderful way of launching a new subject, theme or concept. Make sure it's dramatic and maintain interest by stopping the clip within a minute of running it to fire questions at named learners. Frame the questions in ways that highlight what learners need to be looking for when watching the clip.

## **Questions for professional development**

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1. Do you keep any sort of professional journal? Many trainee teachers do this when learning to become teachers and then give this up once qualified. Journals provide valuable opportunities to reflect on new resources and teaching strategies.
2. Are you a member of a teaching association? Find out which is associated with your subject and join as soon as you can. You will quickly get to know other enthusiastic teachers of your subject, access their resources and gain from their experience of teaching.
3. How quickly can you become a subject examiner? You will be surprised how soon you can do this after qualification, so contact your examination board. Benefits include access to excellent resources, examination-skills training and contact with the people who actually write the examinations your learners will sit.
4. What budget is available from your institution for training? The sooner you can find this out, the greater the opportunity for you to attend outside subject-based training and network with other enthusiastic teachers of your subject.

## Checklist: building your toolbox

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- Never use the same activities over and over again. Devise a checklist of activities you use and want to use, and aim to introduce a new one every week.
- Make sure that you use a range of resources (even textbooks can vary enormously in the sorts of activities they offer to learners).
- When creating handouts, make sure that you fully utilize your ICT abilities, for example, borders, boxes, speech bubbles can make a huge difference to the ways in which learners respond to handouts and worksheets.
- Try, whenever possible, to use different coloured paper for handouts. Visually this can make a difference to how resources appear on tables and can provide quick information to teachers about which task learners are working on.
- Make sure you have a watch or visible clock in the classroom. Good timing/pace are essential requirements for motivating teenagers. Keep lessons moving and never stay on one activity for too long.
- Do not underestimate the power of your own voice. Shouting is never a good idea but your voice needs to convey authority, enthusiasm, energy and expectation. Audio-record your lesson, focusing on pitch, speed of instruction and tone. Listen to the quality and clarity of your instructions and note any improvements you need to make.
- Teacher mobility around the classroom is essential, so experiment with seating/tables etc and make sure that you can move around easily. This ease of movement will subtly convey to learners your authority and confidence.

## Chapter links

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The ideas in this chapter relate closely with those also explored in Chapters 2, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 12.

## Further reading



Galton, M., Steward, S., Hargreaves, L., Page C. and Pell, A. (2009) *Motivating Your Secondary Class*. London: Sage.

Although this book is targeting secondary school teachers it contains some fabulous ideas that are transferable to older learners.

Kidd, W., Czerniawski, G. (2010) *Successful Teaching 14–19: Theory, Practice and Reflection*. London: Sage.

This book provides the policy background and theoretical ideas that inform many of our teaching and learning ideas.