

THE LAZY TEACHER'S[®] HANDBOOK

New Edition

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Edited by Ian Gilbert



Independent Thinking Press

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Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Foreword to the New Edition	v
Foreword to the First Edition	ix
Introduction	1
1. Pass Notes	9
2. Old Fashioned Teaching with a Lazy Twist	19
3. The Lazy Approach to Lesson Outcomes	55
4. Structuring the Lazy Lesson	71
5. The Prepare Phase – Great Lazy Lesson Ideas	91
6. The Action Phase – Great Lazy Lesson Ideas	111
7. The Review Phase – Great Lazy Lesson Ideas	141
8. Marking, Assessment and Feedback RIP!	157
9. IT – the Lazy Teacher’s Friend	175
10. Lazy Language that Changes Everything	191
11. Differentiation Done the Lazy Way	211
12. Getting the Best from Teaching Assistants – the Lazy Way	227
13. The Lazy Tutor	239
Final Lazy Thoughts	251
Bibliography	255

Chapter 1

Pass Notes

The irony of asking a busy teacher to sit down and read a book is not lost on me. Nor is the emergence of so-called ‘book clubs’ – a monthly meeting of friends and neighbours, getting together, drinking wine and outdoing each other with organic snacks whilst all trying to sound vaguely articulate about the book. (Apart from the person who is only there for the wine and snorts a faux apologetic, ‘Anyone read a single page? I haven’t. More bubbles?’ with laughter during the opening ritual to every meeting.)

Hence, just as my knowledge of certain ‘classic’ exam texts was formed when I was at school, let me provide you with some ‘pass notes’ to this, ahem, classic book and the whole Lazy Way approach. This way, you can not only get going quickly with the approach in your classroom, but also hold your head high at the next meeting of your newly created staff educational book club. More lukewarm tea and broken biscuits anyone?

The Lazy Way pass notes – the three big principles

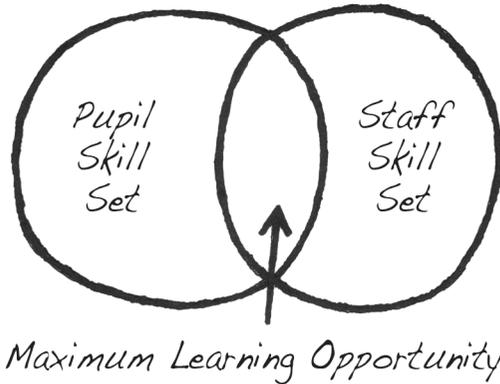
Principle 1: the zone of maximum learning opportunity

What teacher techniques are you brilliant at?

What teacher techniques are your students brilliant at responding to?

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Where the answers to those two questions overlap, that's where you start your teaching. Lots of progress, momentum, quick wins and most importantly Lazy Teaching and learning.



Just think about it, if you are brilliant at teacher talk but your class are not brilliant at teacher listening, then one half of the equation has to change. To plough on regardless is madness. Or 'traditional teaching' as the progressives like to call it.

Conversely, if you have 101 strategies for independent learning and effective group work but your students just see that as a sign of your inherent weakness and an opportunity to practise the student art of 'busy doing nothing' then again, one half of the equation has to change. To plough on is also madness. Or 'progressive teaching' as the traditionalists like to call it.

This is why you should always treat schemes of learning with an appropriate air of caution. They have their uses but, at their worst, they might expect you to teach in a way that you are not very good at and ask the students to learn in a way that just isn't right for them at that point. And I say 'at that point' because it is worth remembering that the zone of maximum learning opportunity is not fixed. Far from it. It grows constantly. So, always keep your

eyes open for how much it has grown, or worse, shrunk with every class you teach.

Principle 2: everything with a purpose (EWAP)

Let's begin with something I like to call the $x+$ factor. It's quite a simple equation really. If x is what the students bring to the lesson – their prior knowledge, understanding, ideas, thoughts, enthusiasm for the task ahead and the like – then $x+$ is what they should have once you have finished your initial teacher input, whatever form that takes. Otherwise your input has been pointless. And you very much need it to be pointful.

More often than not, getting that added value and turning x into $x+$ is simply about increasing participation and engagement as a result of your input. From passive to active. From asleep to alert. Successful classrooms do not come alive when you say, 'Off you go then' (which is often followed by the soul destroying, 'So what have we got to do, Sir?'). Successful classrooms are alive the moment students walk into them. If not before.

The two strategies below are worth adopting *so that* everything you do in the classroom is done with a purpose and you EWAP your teaching.

EWAP strategy number 1 – *so* and *that*

The brilliantly effortless work of Zoë Elder (long-time colleague and author of *Full on Learning*) comes to the fore here – it is the simple use of the two magic EWAP words, *so* and *that*.

'I am going to be talking to you for a few minutes this morning so that I can explain the three golden rules of decorating a room. I am doing this so that it will be much easier for you to write your manual on effective painting and decorating ...'

Instantly everything is EWAPed.

The Lazy Teacher's Handbook

There is clear structure and purpose to the teacher talk with the teacher demonstrating real clarity and planning in what they will be talking about: i.e. it is not simply a talk about a number of top tips for decorating.

And there is a real reason why the class would want to listen. You can elaborate on the reasons for the students (e.g. *so that* you have a chance of winning a top prize, achieving your personal best, getting out to play on time, avoiding catch-up homework ...) – you decide!

Remember too that the need to EWAP is not restricted to the first part of the lesson, when we might have traditionally addressed the student question of, ‘What’s in it for me (WIIFM)?’ The need to EWAP runs all the way through the lesson. ‘You will be practising class discussion *so that* ...’ ‘You will be giving four-minute presentations in teams of three *so that* ...’ You get the idea.

EWAP strategy number 2 – pre-expose the student task before the teacher stimulus

The old adage of ‘tell ‘em what you’re gonna tell ‘em’ holds true at the beginning of most lessons, but the Lazy Way dictates that it is also important to take some feedback about the task ahead up front. Pre-exposing students to the task they will be undertaking allows you to shape the opening teacher stimulus to better fit the needs and motivations of the class.

If you imagine a typical, possibly stereotypical, lesson it might start with a teacher launch stimulus, then the introduction of a student task, followed by some student task time. The remainder of the lesson then flips back and forth between the teacher and the class.

Yet such an approach misses an opportunity to:

- Find out what they already know so you are not wasting your time. No teacher likes to hear, ‘It’s not a problem, Sir, we did all this work before when we were in Year 4.’ Especially if it’s a Year 8 lesson. And you are being observed.

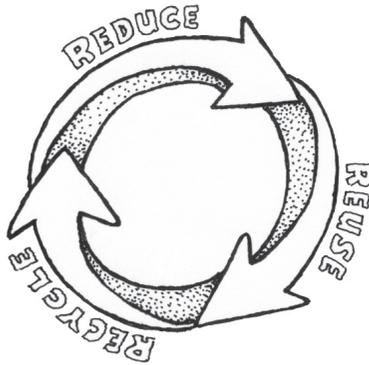
- Obtain questions from students about what they don't know but want or need to, which can help create a personalised and differentiated introduction to the lesson.
- Ensure students are focused on the task they are about to face and better equipped with what they need from your initial stimulus.

All of these benefits are lost if at the end of your opening input you utter, 'So what I now want you to do is ...' and go on to explain the task. After all, you wouldn't give someone directions without first telling them where you were going.

Principle 3: reduce, reuse, recycle

Being eco-friendly has gone from being a fad to becoming a necessity. The world's resources are running out. What's more, teachers are running out too. I don't mean running out in an end of term sort of way (although I am writing this with three days to go till the summer holidays start: my teacher 'grab bag' of passport, corkscrew, back-up corkscrew and a pair of Birkenstocks has been packed for over a week now). I mean running out in terms of scarcity, with more teachers than ever leaving this wonderful profession citing pressures of workload, stress, certain politicians and a general unhappiness with what the job has become.

So it seems to make sense to reuse some eco-principles to help keep the best resources (you) where they are most needed for the benefit of those who need them most (the students).



Reduce the range of pedagogical practices you offer to what you have found to be effective for that particular group. This saves lesson planning time and cuts back the amount of teaching to just what is actually needed.

Reuse what works for that group. No need to reinvent the wheel all the time. With the right task, the variety that is needed to stop things going stale ('Not another snowball exercise, Sir!') will come from the different topics you cover and the increasing difficulty of the work.

Recycle your ideas across the year groups, departments, faculties and whole school and ensure your colleagues do the same. Effectively, you are developing and sharing content-free lessons that colleagues can adopt, adapt and apply to their own discipline: ideas such as how to launch a new topic, class presentations, student 'doing time' (not students doing time), assessments, teacher talk and the like ...

A great example of this is the TeachMeet phenomenon that has swept the world of education in the last decade. If you haven't managed to get to one yet then please do try. They are, to continue my analogy, one massive recycling centre of educational ideas with teachers from all sorts of schools poring over them like hippies at a jumble sale. They can be open to teachers from the local area or just held internally in an individual school. What's more, you can take the principle – giving and sharing great teaching and learning

ideas – and embed it into your school meetings and staff briefings. Imagine that, at least one notice that every member of staff actually listens to each time.

One other benefit of teaching the Lazy Way, and letting the students know it, is that it forces teachers to name their different pedagogical approaches. Rather than hiding them behind the famed ‘walled garden’, children and students learn the behaviours, practices and outcomes associated with each named approach. You don’t announce the rules of a board game each time you play it and your classroom should be no different. In this way, you get to cut down on unnecessary teacher talk – explaining then re-explaining activities lesson after lesson along with the expectations associated with them – freeing up more time for the students to be getting on with the learning itself. Perfectly lazy teaching.

And that’s it. Pass notes covered. Three simple principles to the Lazy Way.

Organic thyme and aubergine quinoa-based amuse-bouches anyone?

Chapter 2

Old Fashioned Teaching with a Lazy Twist

There are as many different ways to be brilliant, but lazy, in the classroom as there are brilliant teachers. The Lazy Way does not seek to eliminate that element of diversity, far from it. Across a school there will be a whole range of teaching styles – right across the traditional–progressive spectrum. It is what makes schools such a rich and wonderful tapestry of human life and learning. And keeps a vast debate raging on Twitter and in the blogosphere.

This book may ignite the ‘how to teach’ debate on Twitter and elsewhere but it certainly won’t settle it. I hope that it will serve to drive up standards in all classrooms by asking questions about the nature of teaching and learning, about the role of the teacher and indeed that of the students. What it won’t solve is the traditional–progressive debate that has been raging since long before someone suggested replacing the Banda machine with a photocopier. The principles and philosophy behind the Lazy Way embrace all pedagogies from across the range and weave them together with one common lazy thread – what’s the least amount of time your lesson can be all about you and the most amount of time it can be all about the students?

In my experience, often the biggest challenge for teachers taking on board this approach is dragging themselves away from the safety net that is the seemingly innocent (trad) scheme of work/ (prog) scheme of learning. Whatever you call it, it is an innocuous-looking file, but you should be alert to the dangers that lurk within, especially when it seeks to dictate, oh-so nicely, the types of activities both you and the students are meant to be undertaking.

The Lazy Teacher's Handbook

Why the bee in my bonnet about this? Where do I start?

Firstly, does the pedagogy being demanded of you meet the skill set of both you and the class and therefore sit in the zone of maximum learning opportunity? (I bet you are glad you didn't skip the pass notes. If you did, see me, stay behind and read the previous chapter in your own time. It doesn't bother me, I have to be here all book.)

Secondly, it might be packed with teaching methods which may work well on paper or, dare I say it, in the past but are not best suited to the learners in front of you today, especially if it involves a series of paper-heavy and, worryingly, feedback-heavy worksheets. And in this budget-conscious, environmentally aware era where you have to save paper that could otherwise be used for the new multi-academy trust prospectus, you might therefore be wise to draw on my famous Photocopier Challenge – a quick test that decrees whether the suggested activity is heavy on ink but light on learning.

To use this test, simply go through the following six questions to decide if the proposed activity warrants you using up any of your photocopying credit:

1. What type of learning activity will this printing lead to?
2. How will the printed sheets enhance learning?
3. Will this printed sheet minimise the need for feedback and/or assessment?
4. Is everything on the sheet essential – e.g. is some of it merely instructional?
5. Do all students need one?
6. How could it have been done without any photocopying in the first place?

To encourage more teachers to save the planet and embrace the Lazy Way, you could even print out this list of questions and stick it on the wall near the machine. You will be amazed at how many

TRIED AND TESTED TECHNIQUES TO SHIFT THE EMPHASIS AWAY FROM THE TEACHING AND ONTO THE LEARNING

It's more than six years since the bestselling *Lazy Teacher's Handbook* was first published and Jim Smith's Lazy Teaching philosophy has moved on significantly in that time. This new revised edition details Jim's latest thinking on how to be the best lazy, but outstanding, teacher you can be.

Just when you thought you couldn't get any lazier as a teacher Jim returns with even more ideas to help us teachers become more effective in our classrooms.

Amjad Ali, Assistant Head Teacher, @ASTsupportAali

Essential reading for all trainee teachers and NQTs, and is a welcome tonic for experienced teachers looking for fresh approaches.

Jayne Prior, Senior Teaching Fellow and PGCE Programme Director, University of Bristol

The Lazy Teacher's Handbook will help you to help students become more effective, reflective and independent learners whilst helping you to retain the joy that comes from this privileged profession.

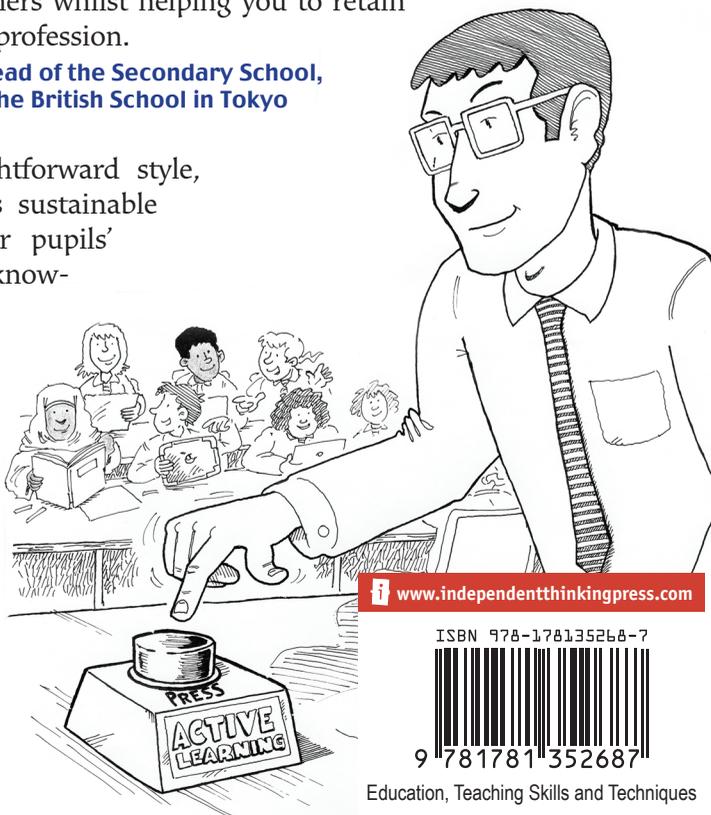
**Brian Platts, Head of the Secondary School,
The British School in Tokyo**

Jim Smith, in his amusing and straightforward style, encourages teachers to make their lives sustainable and their teaching, and crucially their pupils' learning, effective. Full of ideas and know-how for the classroom teacher.

**Stephen Tierney,
author of *Liminal Leadership***

Once again, Jim Smith has written a book that supports, excites and encourages thoughtful reflection.

**Clare Cantle, Head Teacher,
All Saints Catholic School**



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