

## 16 ways for managers to improve the teaching of their teaching teams

These ideas were developed at Leicester College by a team of Course Team Leaders led Jackie Rossa, with Geoff Petty as consultant. Having experienced a series of Geoff's staff development sessions the Course Team Leaders wanted to disseminate some teaching strategies to their teaching team, and to encourage them to experiment generally, but especially with new teaching methods known to work better than average.

You will need some concise descriptions of teaching strategies with a good research record to make use of most of the following methods. For example Teaching Without Talking on the active learning page of <http://geoffpetty.moonfruit.com>.

- '23 ways for Teaching without Talking' or 'Formative Teaching of Skills'
- Action Research Proposals from the same moonfruit site such as 'Tests and Quizzes to Find Faults and Fix'
- 'Teaching Today' Geoffrey Petty Nelson Thornes
- Suggestions from your staff
- Any other set of practical and effective teaching strategies that is concisely presented.

### 1. The first ten minutes

Reserve the first ten minutes of every meeting of your teaching team or department to learning and teaching. You could for example explain a new teaching method, or share good practice etc. This puts learning high on the agenda - literally, and makes sure it doesn't get squeezed off.

Consider asking team members to take it in turns to run these ten-minute sessions. Some of the following strategies could be carried out in these ten minutes, for example the next one 'Have a Go'.

Most meeting time is often used to disseminate information, but this could often be done more effectively in other ways. If you disseminate information by pigeonholes or e-mail, and require that people read this before your meetings you might be able to save meeting time to discuss learning. (Alternatively you could disseminate the information using the 'teaching without talking teaching methods and then discuss the method used!) Meeting time is precious - it could not be better spent than by talking about learning and teaching!?

Holy Cross Sixth Form College in Bury Greater Manchester has a 45 minute meeting every week solely for all subject teams to discuss learning and teaching. They have had this in place since about the year 2000.
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### 2. Have a go!

Explain a new teaching method. Or better still, use a new teaching method e.g. 'Jigsaw' from 'Teaching Without Talking' to explain other teaching methods, or to communicate vital new information to the meeting. Once the team have learned using the new method, or you have simply explained it, ask them to try it out with their classes. Agree a date by when they can have used it, and then share experiences on how it went.

### 3. Piloting

The *team leader* tries a new teaching strategy and then tells their team about it. "I've tried getting my students to self-assess their assignments and look what happened" The leader shares what worked, and what didn't. They ask for advice on how to do it better next time. Then they try the strategy again, taking the teams advice on how to do a better job. Once the leader has done this a few times others usually volunteer to try other strategies on behalf of the team and to report back their experiences. If there are no volunteers you could ask for them. They may need a collection of likely teaching strategies to try.

### 4. Swapshop

Each team member brings one thing they do that really works to the team meeting (anything!). Everyone has to take one thing away and try it with their classes, and then feed back their experiences to the next meeting

### 5. Cross team dissemination

This is the same as the swap shop, only two teams meet to share their different approaches. It could have a particular focus, such as Key Skills, or could be very general. The two teams do not necessarily need to be in similar curriculum areas.

### 6. Action Research

There are Action Research Proposals available on the action research page of Geoff Petty's website address given below. These are short summaries of best practice in areas of key importance for

achievement, derived from research reviews on the topic concerned. Action research follows on naturally from 2 to 5 above. <http://geoffpetty.moonfruit.com>

7. **'Discussion'**

The team discusses the teaching and learning problems they have on their courses. The leader asks for solutions. This is a very natural process and staff really appreciate the time spent on it. Try not to let it turn into a whinge session, though a whinge can sometimes be therapeutic! Try to keep the focus on how to do better in the future. Many teams do this informally over coffee, which may or may not be better than formalising the process by giving meeting time to it.

One approach is for team leaders to take it in turns to identify two or three issues that cause them difficulties, how they address them, and then ask the others at the meeting for ideas.

8. **Guerrilla Staff Development**

**Good News version:** Stop people in the corridor, loo, or staff-room, and tell them about a teaching strategy that someone else, or you, are making a success of. It works particularly well if this strategy is being used by someone else on their team.

**Bad News version:** Again stop someone, but this time complain about a difficulty you have been having with your teaching, and ask for advice, 'how do you overcome that problem?'. This approach encourages a blame-free culture and gives people permission to say what they have difficulty with. After four Bad News ear-bashings, you can ask the team member if they have any problems, or whether they are as perfect as they appear!

9. **Let's admit our failures together**

Informally as part of conversation or during a meeting, the leader of the team admits to difficulties, and to not knowing what they should have known either now, or in the recent past. He or she may also own up to something he/she doesn't understand or can't do now, and ask for help. Eventually others may also ask for help. If not after they have had four ear-bashings about your failures you could ask them about theirs.

9. **Peer observation**

This is observing to learn, not to criticise. The team observe each other teaching, but the focus is on what we can learn from the observation, not on judging the performance. What went well? What strategies did the teacher use that others could use? The observer could be asked to bring these positive points to the meeting.

10. **Active scheme of work**

The team discuss their different ways of teaching a specific topic on their scheme of work in turn. They agree the best way(s) and these are recorded on the Active Scheme of Work. This encourages team members to share handouts and other resources as well as activities and ideas, and to use the best active learning methods for each topic. See the document on this, if you don't have it it is available on the moonfruit site mentioned at the top of this document.

11. **Proactive action planning**

Most teams action plan reactively, that is they identify known difficulties and then tackle these. Proactive action planning means also adopting strategies that work well, regardless of difficulties. Such strategies can be found from the literature, best practice networks etc. The most appropriate, or most effective are chosen and included on the action plan. You may have other materials on Proactive Action Planning in your pack.

12. **Video teaching**

Modern video cameras are discreet, easy to use, and don't require high lighting levels. You can borrow them easily in any college and set it up on a shelf or tripod at the back of the room and video one of your lessons. There is no need for anyone else to see the video if you don't want them to. Videos give you an opportunity to see your teaching from the student's point of view. Arghhh!

13. **Ask the students**

Devise an evaluation form and ask the students to fill this in anonymously every month or two. It could be very simple such as:

*"The following is a list of teaching strategies I have used in the last four weeks, tick the ones you like best and cross the ones you like least, giving your reasons if you want to"*  
*"Give three things you like about my lessons."*  
*"Give two things that would improve my lessons."*

14. **Developmental Observation**

An observation is made, not with the intention of grading, but with the intention of improving the teaching. Developmental points are drawn up. The teacher explains what they feel they need support on. The observer identifies the good practice they have seen in order to pass this on to other teachers in the team.

#### **15. Personal Development Plan**

Perhaps after peer or developmental observations, the teacher draws up a Personal Development Plan. This is reviewed as part of appraisal.

#### **16. Weekly experiments**

Members of a teaching team each carry out one experiment a week for the term, and report back on how it went at meetings. The experiment could be a new teaching method, an assessment proforma, etc.

This works best after a staff development session where possible experiments are suggested. Alternatively Geoff's moonfruit site (active learning page) could be used to get ideas for what to try. The experiment might need to be tried more than once in different ways to make it work of course, these 'second goes' may sometimes 'count' as the weekly experiment.

#### **17. Spinning the bottle**

Participants write on a card their 'tough topic' - a topic that is boring, hard, or conceptually difficult for students or for teachers. they also write down why it is tough! - eg, student motivation, complexity, irrelevance to students etc. The cards are then put in the centre of the table

When the bottle is spun, this person's tough topic is explained along with it's difficulty and the others around the table offer solutions and ideas. Jackie Rossa told me that *"I have to tell you that the atmosphere was electric! The solutions were phenomenal and tutors said the ideas were really useful, they were all scribbling away- we had really creative solutions because people from other subject areas were able to think 'out of the box'. At this stage in the programme, we seem to have developed a culture of experimentation!"*

#### **Some of the issues that underpin the above strategies:**

- Only teachers can improve teaching, and teaching can only improve if teaching changes. So we must experiment, and encourage experimentation in others.
- There are many strategies that are known to 'add a grade' or more to every student's achievement. Many of these strategies are not often used, and others are not known at all. We use methods for historical and habitual reasons rather than because they work well.
- Staff Development by itself does not change teaching practice. Participants must be encouraged to try the ideas out, and they must then receive coaching to help them overcome difficulties if new practice is to be effectively embedded. (See my stuff on Joyce and Showers' research on INSET)
- When people use a new method it may not work well first time. It will often take concerted efforts to get the best out of a new method. This is greatly assisted by team discussion.
- We need to encourage experimentation in a value driven, blame free, and supportive culture. Not in a hierarchy driven, blaming and controlling culture. The deficit model: 'your retention<sup>1</sup> is bad so try this new approach' does not work well if at all.

If you have used these methods, or if you have any other methods for encouraging experimentation please let Geoff Petty know; [geoffpet@greenfields.u-net.com](mailto:geoffpet@greenfields.u-net.com)

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<sup>1</sup> Retention refers to pupils repeating a stage