

Confessions of a Middle-Aged Teacher

Eric Wareham, *Leiston Community High School, a Middle Aged, Assistant Headteacher and a re-enthused classroom teacher.*

My name is Eric Wareham and I'm 46 years old. I have been teaching for 22 years and 5 months. Can't really believe it, I still feel young. Rather than being just a teacher, I'm now the experienced Assistant Headteacher. I've been at three schools: starting as a science teacher at a 11-16 years 1600 mixed comprehensive in the middle of the fens for 8 years, moving as Head of Science to a rural Norfolk, middle class 11-16 years comprehensive of 500 students for 7 years, and finally to a school of 660 students, 14-18 years, mixed comprehensive, in a rural socially deprived coastal area of Suffolk .

Teaching and Learning has always been central to my enjoyment of teaching - it seems obvious but has not been the case with some of the colleagues I've worked with over the years. I suppose you could call me an extrovert – my mother insists my being a star sign of Leo has an influence with my success with students. I have always enjoyed the banter with students and I enjoy bringing Science to life with funny anecdotes (well I think they are!).

Over the last 22 years, if things have profoundly changed, it has been mostly down to my change in responsibilities. As an Assistant Headteacher, my teaching commitment has been reduced. I now have a 54% commitment – teaching Y10 and Y11. Also, I seem to have gravitated towards the lower end of the ability spectrum with regard to the students I teach. Recently, my Head of Science took my only top set away from me after one year! I suppose, this could be seen in a negative light but I prefer

to see it as a positive approach to my experience and success with lower sets. Lower sets are a challenge but one which I enjoy and the students seem to like me – or so they and the SENCO say.

Before being an 'Ass Head', I was a Head of Science so I was always very interested in my subject and making it accessible and enjoyable to students but I was never the 'nerdy' scientist – I knew where to draw the line – I liked the 'pop' approach. Over the last few years, in truth, my responsibilities have tended to make me drift away from a clear focussed approach to teaching, relying more on my wit and experience to deliver, hopefully, an engaging lesson. But the lack of time to focus on lessons during the day, being 'on-call' during my free lessons, dealing with Safeguarding issues - has its toll. Lack of a fresh and invigorated approach, too many lessons developed on the hoof, and too much book work - at times.

I was always interested in improving my lessons and embracing new ideas for teaching and an opportunity came for me to take responsibility for 'Teaching and Learning' at my present school and to make this area my own – vision, aims, methods, success criteria, etc. My approach and thoughts developed from following the NPQH and a friend/colleague with whom I shared this journey of personal development. They both had a profound effect on my vision of teaching and learning, helping me to focus on a plan of action for my school. This plan was linked to the incorporation of the TEEP Model. Having researched it through various articles, ideas from

Derek Wise and his Cramlington Learning Village, heard from TEEP practitioners, and seeing TEEP in situ, I was convinced that this was the framework that would support the improvement and development of Teaching & Learning at my school.

The biggest revelation and reinvigoration to me as a science teacher, has been my engagement with the first part of the TEEP Learning Cycle: 'Prepare for Learning' and especially the Entry Activities and the physical environment. This simple change to the start of my lessons and my teaching room's environment has had a profound effect on my own emotional approach to the lesson AND also on my students. No longer do they hang around with reluctance outside my lab door. The music I put on together with the PowerPoint of images that introduce the theme of the lesson, have changed their response. They are eager to get started and are asking questions immediately. I try to make the music current , relying on my elder daughter to supply 'with it' tracks, etc to which my students can relate.

One of the first 'Prepare for Learning' steps was a slide show and music to introduce 'Nuclear Radiation' to a set 3 Year 10 group – notorious for their lack of focus and interest. The images were of the very first uses of X-rays, the dangers through burns and bombs (such as Hiroshima) and their positive use in medicine. The sound track was an old 70's song by Ultavox (before the New Romantic period) called 'I want to be a Machine' – an obscure and weird song that fitted the mood of wonder I wanted to put over:

At the same time, as a Senior Teacher with a lower teaching

commitment, the lack of a permanent base is accepted as collateral damage. It doesn't help, though. My recent engagement with TEEP has made me more bullish towards the environment of the room in which I now teach most of my lessons - but not all. I have taken over the classroom – displays of work are up, they are fresh, student orientated and link directly to the work we complete in lessons. Benches are grouped together around the service pods rather than in rows. The posters are more like signposts and reflect, relevantly, the students work. This has had a profound impact on the atmosphere and 'feel' of the room. Even without students in, it is evident that work is going on that is current and immediate. One of the biggest impacts on my teaching has been the Digital Projector linked to the internet. I enjoy using 'YouTube' to find relevant short video clips to 'hook' the students and producing PowerPoint's that have my learning objectives/outcomes pre-written with the focus on Higher Order Thinking Skills.

If anything has had a profound effect on my recent approach to teaching and learning, it has been TEEP. ***It's not just theory – it's effective, common sense, and modelling of good practice.*** I could go on and on about how good it is, BUT I've got to finish this so that I can plan my lessons for next week.

Now, I need some new music tracks to hook my Year 10's – I like 'Titchy Spider's' song with Eric Turner - 'Written in the Stars' - for work on the Universe Oh! I can hear my daughter saying it's "TINCHEY STRYDER, Dad! NOT 'Titchy Spider'!" Well , I'm nearly in touch - init! ■