

TEACHING & LEARNING JOURNAL - EDITION 3

(Re-)Learning to Love my Subject

Heather McCollin, Science

Introduction – losing the spark

Why am I a Science teacher? Why out of all the things I may have done, did I choose to share knowledge about science with young people? Because I loved science and wanted others to appreciate it too. However, somewhere down the line, I became just a Science Teacher and no longer a science fan. This is a problem because without the passion necessary to be the latter, I can never be effective at the former. I have become disengaged with my subject, undoubtedly due to the pressures surrounding the routine priorities of the job and so I no longer enjoy the thing I am here to do; the part of the job where the joy should – and once did - reside.

If I do not engage with my subject, how can I expect my students to? No matter how enthusiastically I reply to the regular question “Why do we have to learn this, Miss?” can I really fool them if I’ve stopped believing?

Increased effectiveness in my lessons can only come from a renewed enquiry into my subject, and what better way to do this than to invest time and effort into engaging our pupils with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths). Therefore, this year, in a bid to raise the profile of Science both within my own classroom as well as throughout the wider Westbourne community, I invited our students into National Science Week.

Westbourne Science Week

As many will be aware, British Science Week¹ is an annual celebration of all things STEM. Run by the British Science Association, this ten-day event provides a platform to stimulate and support the general public, STEM professionals, science communicators and teachers to produce and participate in entertaining and engaging events and activities. This year, that is what I set out to do at Westbourne.

The theme of this year’s Science Week was “Our Diverse Planet” which offered scope to cover many different aspects of Science. With the support of my fabulous colleagues, I organised a programme, which included a VT quiz, after school “screenings” of the latest David Attenborough documentary series Seven Worlds One Planet, a poster competition (with finalists entered into the national competition) and themed learning for all KS3 classes. My favourite part was running the “Super fast STEM Club” at lunch times where we conducted a series of short, fun, standalone investigations throughout the week.



Above – Super Fast STEM Club: Sugar Snakes; Lava Lunacy; Desert Island Challenge; Walking on Custard

Below – Postcards home were sent to all participating students

Right – Science Week posters were on display throughout the academy



Working with students through lunch times and after school for the whole week on top of our regular workload was exhausting but exhilarating. For the first time in a long time, I went home and looked forward to the start of the next day. I didn’t remain switched on all evening working out how to squeeze the essential jobs into the time left over from less important priorities. Instead, I was buzzing with enthusiasm and ready start work and do it all over again. Watching the children truly enjoying their Science: asking their own questions and finding out the answers by simply having a go and seeing what happened. Seeing students arriving with smiles wondering what they might get to see or try out today. Meeting students I had not taught and having them bring their friends along for the next day and the next and next. *This* is why I wanted to be a Science teacher. *This* is what I want to see in my students: the awe and wonder and the “botheredness”².

Organising Science Week at Westbourne has reminded me what teaching should feel like. It has encouraged me that children can still be hooked in by the everyday magic that surrounds them in the form of Science: my chosen subject. It has made me want to spark that interest for them, the same way my schoolteachers did for me. During the Lockdown period, I have been making plans for a regular STEM club and looking into trips and events that we could run, and I am hopeful that the engagement in Science at Westbourne will grow; starting with me!

Into the future - STEM Engagement at Westbourne

Looking ahead, I would love to work with other departments to drive forward STEM within the academy. Could we develop a cross-curricular approach by means of collaborative learning within the curriculum as well as providing extra-curricular activities? Perhaps we could run joint projects with Food Tech where students cook and then explore the science behind their creation. Alternatively, in Maths, looking at number sequences and investigating the importance of the Fibonacci sequence throughout the natural world. The possibilities are endless and limited only by our own enthusiasm as educators. Now I have finally rediscovered mine I can’t wait for our next Science Week running from 5th – 14th March 2021. See you there. I’ll be the one waving the flag for Science.

<https://www.britishscienceweek.org/>

<https://www.independentthinking.co.uk/associates/hywel-roberts/> & ATT ILL Conference 6/7/20