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WHEN IT COMES TO LESSON PLANNING, **TOM STARKEY IS A TRUE ARTIST – BUT IN THE CLASSROOM, EVERYONE’S A CRITIC...**



I’ve planned some world-class prize-winning lessons in my time let me tell you. Works of art that have made the most stoic and manly of the staffroom old guard openly weep at their transcendent pulchritude. Tomes that, in centuries to come, will be revered by humanity and used as the basis of entire civilisations. Engagement for Every Citizen and Proper and Just Differentiation for All (Including our Wise Robot Overseers) will become a catchy national slogan and everyone will be able to take time out of their day for the Two Minutes Reflection, a mass questioning of one’s motives coupled with a nice bit of public self-flagellation to keep the proles happy.

Yes, my lesson plans are that good. When Keats wrote ‘a thing of beauty is a joy forever’ I’m pretty sure he was almost definitely talking about them.

There’s only one thing that isn’t perfect when it comes to my lesson plans. And it sure ain’t the planning.

The thing is, when compared to

my lovingly crafted blue-prints, the actual lessons themselves look like those finger paintings done by monkeys. That’s ok though because afterwards I go back to my colour coded tick-boxes on the ‘things to think about for next time’ section and tick the ‘Forgot That Planning And Practice Are Different’ box with a swan-feathered quill.

There’s the rub. It’s what I feel is the greatest and most heart-breaking dichotomy to be found in teaching. Great planning doesn’t necessarily mean great lessons. Heart-breaking because (now come over here so I can whisper this as not to make my fellow educators deeply suspicious of me) I absolutely love planning. Yeah, I know! Love it. Love it right off. During planning, my lessons are the epitome of ordered epicness. The kids ask all the right questions, learn all the right things and everything is tickety-boo. In fact, some days, I wish that was all I had to do. I develop a wonderful lesson plan, make sure the chunks are gleaming, check the AfL is polished and the plenary is given a new coat of paint. The snow white

paper makes it sparkle like precious stones in the moonlight.

Then reality kicks in and the living and breathing class have the nerve to go and deviate from the bloody thing making it practically redundant within minutes. It’s akin to using the Dead Sea Scrolls to whack a particularly fat spider. Philistines.

If everyone would just do like the plan says then I’d guarantee an increase in learning by about a gazillion percent, all students would pass every one of their assessments, world peace would break out and there would be an immediate end to hunger, drought and televised karaoke contests.

But no. Everyone does not stick to the plan. They’re too busy with their fancy ‘minds of their own’ and their fandangled ‘free will’ to do anything as helpful as what I predict they should do at any given moment. In the perfect world the plan would be all I would ever need to become a teaching maestro.

This isn’t a perfect world.

It’s worse.

Things happen. Something you were sure would be interesting is dismissed out of hand without even the pretence of a glimmer of enthusiasm. Someone says something awful and fists are thrown. Hideous and disgusting name calling becomes screaming. You have to wade in to protect them rather than even consider trying to teach them anything you had prepared.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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It’s better.

Things happen. Someone says something wonderful. A massive insight that you hadn’t even remotely considered is uttered by a child who has shown nothing but disdain previously. There is unexpected fire and passion for something unaccounted for. They reach higher than you could have ever hoped for.

As much as it pains me to say it, you can’t plan for everything. Planning is an essential part of effective teaching and anyone who tries to tell you any different should be treated with massive amounts of suspicion. However, on the other hand, if you use your wonderful plans as a lifebuoy you will drown under a gargantuan swell of unpredictability. Sometimes you just have to go with the flow, man.

Nowadays I use a broader brush strokes when creating my masterpieces. They’ve become a little more abstract. There’s a little more space for interpretation. I’ve taken a little bit of inspiration from the monkeys. Because in the end what we’re trying to do is capture the essence of things, not nail them down.

And sometimes those monkey finger paintings go for thousands.

Thanks for reading.