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Chaos To Control

4 Truths You Can Apply Right
Now In Your Classroom To
Reduce Stress And Increase
Learning

INTRODUCTION

It was just a few minutes into lab, and things were already a mess- confusing directions that, once we finally figured them out, didn't even work. A complete disaster.

Bad experiences like this are what cause some teachers to stop doing labs and hands-on activities. If this kind of chaos is your normal, or worse, if you've completely given up everything but worksheets, and you're tired of it all, there's hope.

This book is about restoring that hope and how to consistently do lessons that are meaningful and fun. You'll learn 4 truths that, if you apply, will show you how to discover your teaching gifts and use them effectively, no matter who you are.

Before you become too suspicious, let me first say this will not be short and easy. Saying that would be a lie because that's not the way any of this works, and you already know that. The rewards will come after lots of hard work, frustration, and even some risk. And the more of those you endure, the better the rewards get.

What rewards? Rewards like being able to consistently go into your lessons confident and excited, with meaningful and fun learning happening. Yes, it's possible.

How do I know? Have you ever noticed that when you walk by certain classrooms, students are always well behaved and on-task, and when you walk by others, it's the opposite. That tells me good teaching is not an accident; there's a method to it.

Tired of the way things are? Wondering when things in your classroom will change? Answer- when you decide they will.

If you're ready to start moving in that direction, then keep reading. Here comes Truth I.

Truth I. Get your mind in gear

"If you aim for nothing you'll hit it every time." Those words spoken by Zig Ziglar are pure gold. Translation for teachers- if you go into your school day unprepared, then you're allowing your day to be driven by impulse, chance, and emotion. And that's a perfect recipe for disaster (remember my lab experience?). The result of lack of preparation has to be chaos and fear. Without a plan you're not in control, so the day happens *to* you because you're just reacting. Poor planning does equal poor results. Zig was right.

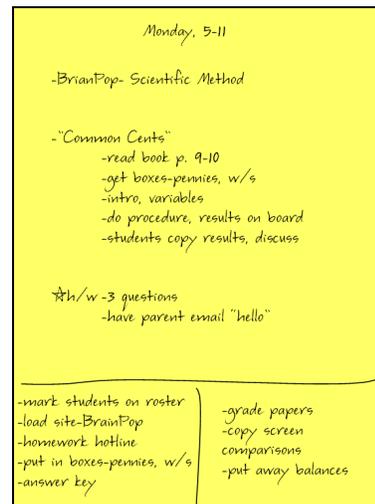
Oppositely, good planning = good results. So the simple solution is for you to just plan better, right? Um, sure... But what exactly does that *mean*? You're guessing probably something complicated and boring, right? Not exactly.

Try this: Before school tomorrow morning, get a blank sheet of yellow paper and write down what you're going to do during your lesson, from beginning to end. You'll think of big, obvious things, but you'll also remember some of those little things to do and say that can really make or break a lesson. Also write down at the bottom of the sheet all those pesky to-do's swirling in your mind. Now relax because now your mind can focus and actually work. *(Tap the image for more information.)*

After spending 10 minutes planning your day you'll be confident, prepared, and ready for (just about) anything. No joke.

Almost too simple, but it just *works*. After 20 years of teaching, I still begin every single day doing this. Why? Because I know that **those are the 10 most**

important minutes all day at school. Everyone, including your students, benefits because of it.



[Click this image for more info.](#)

Truth II. Try New Things (quit pretending and discover your own gifts)

Despite the title of this section, don't worry- you won't have to go far from your comfort zone. I completely understand that what works well for one person probably won't work well for others, because we're all gifted differently. (If you turn that around, it also means you can do things effortlessly that others only wish they could do.)

You're not going to discover your teaching strengths by just thinking and wishing. You've got to actually try new things. But do yourself and favor and keep your new attempts small and simple, even if you're really excited.

Also, be fair to yourself and only try just one new thing at a time so that it can have all your attention. Dividing your focus between lots of new things will hinder all of them.

So, if all you ever do is worksheets with your students, try a demonstration that cannot possibly go wrong, like dropping a ball on a table. (Ok- if you mess that up, go back to worksheets-only.)

And if you're scared of trying something like a certain lab- no big deal; don't do it! Scale the lab back, and just do the hands-on part of it as a demonstration for your class. Something is better than nothing, right? It doesn't matter what it is, just try something new. That represents a step (small, but still a step) in the right direction. Then take another, and another, and another.

Will every new experience be perfect? Of course not. You're trying new things out to see *if* they work; if you already knew that, then you wouldn't be doing this. So be patient with yourself and your students because the results will vary.

And speaking of results, each experience will give you more clues as to who you are, and you'll get better at predicting activities that work.

Truth III. Keep Doing What Works

Now that you're trying new things, how will you know if something's worth keeping? Look for two things:

1. Students are learning (as in, they fully understand a targeted objective), and
2. It's enjoyable

First, the learning. We all know what learning is, but it can be difficult to measure. Don't assume that excitement in your classroom always equals great learning. Your main objective can get lost if your students have too much to think about. You've got to be very intentional; no wandering allowed. Go into the lesson with laser focus on the one specific thing, above all others, you want every one of your students to learn well. Just one (which ties back into Truth I- doing good planning).

Second, the enjoyment. Some of the best days you'll have as a teacher are those in which your students are learning meaningful things while the method is enjoyable to everyone, including you. There are 1,000 ways to effectively teach any idea. So after each "kind" of lesson, see how it feels to you. What were you comfortable with (or not)?

So there's no misunderstanding, "enjoyable" does not necessarily mean fun. Your goal here is not to have a party every day in class. Students "enjoy" classrooms that are orderly, systematic, and respectful, even if all they're doing that day is book questions.

Truth IV Stop Doing What Doesn't Work

You're busy, so how do you make room for all these new lesson attempts? You'll have enough if you stop doing things that don't work.

This step might be the hardest because it requires honest self-analysis. You've got to be able to ask yourself things like- "Why do I do things this way?" and answer it for what it really is. (Be prepared- we usually don't have good reasons for doing much of anything we do.)

A personal example- the way I used to start class wasn't working. I had no routine, no real hook to get things going with. A typical start for me was, after a few minutes of commotion we'd eventually get things going. So I tried something new- wrote a vocab. word on the board and explained to my students that they would now come in, write this word down, open their book to find it, write down 2 facts about it, and then share what they'd found. Afterwards I realized that doing this was better than not doing this, because they were coming in with immediate purpose, a better tone was set, and books were already opened without my asking, so it became part of our daily routine.

Think of everything you do as being in a basket, and your basket is always full. If you're going to add something to your basket, something else has to come out to make room for it. Not only that, what you're also trying to do here is "trade up", so that what goes in the basket is worth more than what comes out. That's how improvement happens. You're replacing less-effective activities for more effective ones.

CONCLUSION

Summary- Let's look at the 4 truths together:

- I. Plan well
- II. Try new things
- III. Keep doing what works
- IV. Stop what doesn't

Can you see a flow, how the 4 parts works together? That's actually a powerful 4-some! What if that described you?

What if you planned better, tried new things, and replaced what doesn't work with what does, and we checked back on you in 6 months; wouldn't you like to be there already? In your world things would more often work the way they're supposed to; more deep, genuine learning would occur; your classroom would be more relaxed; you'd enjoy what you do more; and your students would more enjoy coming to your room.

Would life be perfect? Of course not, but you'll be in a better place. Even if you did all this for 100 years, you'd still be improving. But each step takes you closer towards where you want to be, and further away from where you don't want to be. This is gradual. You cannot start in total chaos and end up with a well behaved, high-performing class tomorrow. Remember our talk earlier about rewards? You've now put in the work, frustration, and risk; now it's time to reap the sweet rewards that follow.

Finally, some really good news- the only thing holding you back from all this is yourself. Really. Think about it- what's stopping you from doing any of this? It's your classroom, and you're still in control of most of what happens inside those 4 walls.

It's time.

About the author- For 20 years William Wilkinson has created a welcoming, consistent, and meaningful learning environment that all students could learn from and enjoy, regardless of previous education success or failure, individual interests and abilities, and future path. His best science lessons are available at InteractiveScienceTeacher.com.