# 500

## TIPS

## *for*
## TEACHERS

**SALLY BROWN,
CAROLYN EARLAM
& PHIL RACE**

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### *Second Edition*

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**Publisher's Note**
The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint
but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent

# Contents

# Our aims in this book

This book is designed to be a useful compendium of sound and practical ideas to help classroom teachers in secondary schools to do the job to the best of their ability, particularly but not exclusively those who are new to the profession. It is primarily aimed at secondary school teachers who are extremely busy simply keeping up with their work, and whose time for reading the literature on teaching and learning is limited, but who may welcome ready-to-use practical suggestions on a wide range of their everyday activities.

There were over 500 tips in the first edition of this book. In this the second edition, there are now nearly 700! We have strengthened the first section by adding a set of tips on 'Strategies for raising achievement' in line with current thinking about the need to enable all pupils to achieve their full potential. A companion volume to this book is *500 Tips for School Improvement* (Helen Horne and Sally Brown) which takes these issues further. The most significant addition in this edition is an extensive final chapter, comprising 13 new sets of suggestions addressing the well-identified need to ensure that information and communications technologies are incorporated appropriately into all areas of the curriculum. The 'National Grid for Learning' in the UK will provide exciting opportunities to enable widest possible access to the technologies which will underpin every aspect of our lives in the future.

Although those who work with younger children may find elements of this book helpful, *500 Tips for Primary Teachers* in the same format is likely to contain suggestions that are even more relevant to them. While many of the tips are also transferable to further and higher education, other books in this series such as *500 Tips for Further and Continuing Education Lecturers* and *500 Tips for Tutors* are more closely focused on their respective areas of the profession.

## Please don't read this book cover to cover!

This book is designed to be dipped into, with readers selecting those areas that are of most interest to them. We have assembled 65 sets of tips, each set intended to be relatively complete in itself. We have grouped the sets under seven main headings, although sometimes these divisions have been rather arbitrary, with some sets being perfectly capable of being sited in two or more categories. However, as this is a book for grazing on rather than devouring whole, we don't consider that problematic. We hope, however, that the contents pages and chapter titles will help you to find quickly those parts of the book that could be of most immediate value to you.

# This book does not aim to cover everything!

Obviously a book of hints and tips is meant to support, and not replace, the broad learning achieved by teachers on properly accredited training programmes. This book is designed to be a handy supplement to such programmes. Furthermore, we know from our own work that many of the most valuable and important lessons are learned only by practice, having a go at things, and trial and error, rather than reading what has already been written about them, or hearing experienced people tell us about them. Experienced teachers are bound to have learned innumerable wrinkles of their own from their practice, but we hope that they will find useful food for thought in this book amidst all sorts of suggestions that they have already developed for themselves. Newly qualified teachers, however, we hope will find this book a useful companion to them in their first year or two of practice, helping them to handle each new situation as they meet it.

# Acknowledgements

# Chapter 1    Techniques for effective teaching and classroom management

This section contains some advice on some basic techniques of teaching, particularly on interaction with pupils. This is perhaps one of the most difficult areas on which to give advice, because the way we work with children tends to be a very personal thing. Techniques that work with one teacher can sometimes prove to be completely useless to another, and it is really important to develop your own style, with which you feel comfortable. People tend to talk about 'natural authority' as though it were something that one is either born with or not, but in reality everyone has good days and bad days. The principal advantages of being an experienced teacher include that you have learned not to take unpleasant experience too seriously and you can learn from mistakes. In this chapter, we aim to share some very practical tips on teaching techniques. If you have already passed the stage of needing such suggestions, please pass on to later chapters of the book.

# 1

# Meeting a class for the first time

There is no second chance to make a good first impression! First impressions are crucial in any work with people and none more so than with new pupils. The old adage 'don't smile until Christmas' held a grain of truth – it's always easier to loosen up later than it is to start to lay down the law once your class has decided you're soft!

1 **Don't forget to introduce yourself** – and spell your name out on the blackboard if necessary. Pupils in Primary School usually know their teachers quite well, and see the same teachers for a greater proportion of the time than in secondary education. It can be quite stressful for pupils to start a new school, or a new year, in which they may encounter 20 new teachers in the space of a week.

2 **State clearly what you expect of your pupils** – what they can and cannot do in the classroom. Establish a few simple rules of behaviour and always stick to them. You may also wish to invite from pupils their own suggestions for additional groundrules.

3 **Learn your pupils' names as quickly as you can** – any instruction is much more effective if directed to an individual. Your work will also be more effective if you never forget that your class is made up of individuals, and know them as such.

4 **Help pupils to learn each others' names** if they don't know them already. One way of doing this is to form them into a large circle, and ask each pupil to say (for example) 'my name is Cheryl, and this is my friend Mark, and this is Clive, and ...' seeing who can say the most names. This helps you learn their names too!

5　**Help pupils to get to know each other** (at the same time helping you to get to know them). For example, conduct a class round along the lines of 'My name is Jean, my favourite thing in the world is pizza, and my pet hate is spiders'.

6　**Show your pupils where they're heading.** Give your pupils a clear idea of what they will be doing in the next few weeks and why they are doing it. Help them to see how your work with them fits in with the syllabus, National Curriculum programmes of study and so on.

7　**Make sure your pupils know how they will be assessed.** Which pieces of work are more important for assessment, which areas are revision of material they have already covered? Emphasize the need for them to look after their own work and take responsibility for their own progress, especially where there is continuous assessment.

8　Use the first lessons to **find out what pupils already know** about the subject and build on this in your planning. You could make this into a quiz or get them to write something which is personal to them which will help you get to know them.

9　**Explain which resources are available for pupils to use;** which they can access themselves and which resources are to be obtained from the teacher, or in the library or resource centre. Encourage pupils to take responsibility for the resources in their classroom, for example keeping an eye on the numbers of rulers, rubbers, and so on, ensuring that the stock lasts all year.

10　**React firmly if any of your rules of behaviour are transgressed.** This is especially important in the first few weeks. Show the class that you notice everything that is going on and are not willing to ignore anything. Name the pupil who has done something you don't like, but be aware of individual personalities and notice if what you say is having an extreme effect on anyone. You may need to tread carefully with pupils who feel insecure or nervous. Don't be drawn into arguments; when you know pupils better you can be more flexible.

# 2

# Gaining attention and settling a class down

Nice as it would be if all pupils were sitting quietly, ready to learn, and attentive at all times, this is not the nature of the young of the human species! Here are some tips to overcome human nature – but remember that different things work for different people, so find your own styles.

1   **Try doing nothing first.** Stand there, very still, absolutely quiet. The pupils closest will notice, and the word will gradually spread. Give it a moment or two before you decide that another tactic is needed!

2   **Don't shout (yet)!** If all is not quiet, avoid the instinct to shout 'be quiet' at the top of your voice! Start a quiet conversation with two or three pupils who already look ready to listen to you.

3   **Take advantage of human curiosity.** It sometimes pays to whisper! Human nature includes not wishing to miss anything. Whisper to those closest to you, and many of the rest will stop talking and listen.

4   **Drop a non-attender in it!** Ask a question to those who are already listening, but end with the name of someone you know has not been paying attention. Watch as all eyes turn to this pupil, the effect of someone being found out by their peers not to have been listening.

5   **Have ways of making pupils listen.** Start with something that needs careful listening – for example a tape-recording or video played back quite quietly.

6   **People love praise.** Praise those who are paying attention, particularly if they don't normally, rather than grumbling at those pupils who are not yet paying attention.

7   **Begin with a task.** Start a session with something for pupils to do. Have printed instructions on handout materials, or write them on the blackboard in advance.

8   **Select some targets.** Pick on some 'known' live-wires in the class by name, giving them particular tasks to do at the start of a lesson, as leaders of groups of pupils.

9   **Don't take chaos as a personal affront.** Don't regard initial chaos as disrespect to you. Regard it as human nature, and natural until something interesting comes up.

10  **Few want to be left out of some fun!** If you can do this (we're not good at it!) start a lesson by very quietly saying something really amusing to those who have already 'settled down'. The rest will soon become eager to be included in this.

# 3

# Coping with interruptions

'If only I could just get on with my teaching!'– how often have we thought this. When we're interrupted, it's natural to feel emotions including anger and frustration. However, at these times, all eyes tend to be on us – not least to see how we react. The following suggestions may help you deal with interruptions with dignity.

1   **Accept that you are in fact being interrupted.** Trying to carry on as though the source of the interruption was unnoticed tends to do more harm than good, as most pupils will probably be concentrating on the interruption, and how you react, rather than on what you had been saying or doing just before the event.

2   **Keep track of where you were.** Make a mental note of exactly what you were doing just before an interruption, so that when you have dealt with it, you can pick up the threads without having to say 'now, where was I?' Also, check whether there are connections between things you do and the probability of interruptions.

3   **Accept that some interruptions will be important and necessary.** When this is so, make sure that anyone responsible for the interruption is not criticized or made to feel embarrassed.

4   **Be patient with colleagues.** Be particularly careful when interrupted by a colleague or other member of staff. Even if the interruption is unwelcome and unnecessary, it is best to have a quiet word with the person concerned later, rather than let any frustration be noticed by your pupils.

5   **Turn interruptions into positive learning experiences.** When possible, draw useful learning points from interruptions by pupils. The more they feel that their interruptions are taken notice of, the more likely they are to avoid making unnecessary ones.

6    **Keep individual feelings for individuals.** When a particular pupil is making too many interruptions, try to have a private word later, rather than a public show of annoyance.

7    **Have something to do ready for anyone who interrupts.** Have a list of relevant questions about the topic of the day, so that anyone who interrupts can be put on the spot if necessary with a question to answer. This can work well at discouraging interruptions!

8    **Watch your distance.** Move up close to anyone who has made an unwelcome interruption. Pupils are much less brave when you're standing over them than when you're at the other end of the room.

9    **Look for the causes of interruptions.** If there are frequent interruptions, it could be that pupils are tired of listening, and need to be given something definite to get on with. Avoid the 'I've started, so I'll finish' approach.

10    **Learn from colleagues.** When you have the chance, observe how colleagues cope with interruptions. The more techniques you have at your disposal, the more versatile your approach becomes.

# 4

# Learning names

You will know yourself how irritating it is when people forget your own name. Calling someone by name makes any message you wish to communicate all the stronger and more personal. However, we often seem to have a whole bunch of new names to tackle at once: the following suggestions may help you with this task. There will always be some names that are very hard to remember, but it's worth making the effort: you may be the only person who does learn such names.

1 **Let pupils decide their names!** Ask your pupils to tell you the version of their name they wish to be known by and attempt to call them by it unless it is too daft for you to cope with. Michael might hate being called Mick, but Salim might prefer Sal.

2 **Be careful with nicknames.** Be cautious about using nicknames that seem innocuous enough to us, but cause the class to fall about hysterically every time you use it. It may well be that you are unwittingly being drawn into using an unknown (to you) vulgar expression!

3 **Address questions to named pupils.** To help you to get to know some names, choose people from the class list to answer (easy) questions and bit by bit memorize the respondents' names.

4 **Make a map of the names.** Use a seating plan to note names of pupils next to where they are sitting and try to encourage them to sit there for the first few lessons until you are more familiar with the class.

5 **Once you've got them, use them.** Once you know some names, use them every time you speak to those pupils (without letting them feel they are being picked on!).

6   **Make names visual.** Some pupils will be happy to wear name labels for the first few days of a session, or you could use folded cardboard name labels on the desk: remember to get them to write their names in really large letters.

7   **One step at a time!** Concentrate on first names for the first part of the school year, and pick up the surnames as you go on.

8   **Take care with the repetitions.** Find out any pupils who share a first name and learn these first, once you have learned the three Matthews, two Traceys and four Alis you have made a good start!

9   **Make sure you have their names right.** Check you are using the correct names for pupils and encourage them to correct you if you get them wrong. Also check out how to pronounce unfamiliar names. It's dreadful to find out at the end of the year that you have been getting one wrong from the beginning.

10  **Be persistent.** Don't expect to learn all the names all at once: build up gradually over the weeks. Don't be too hard on yourself if you never master all of the names, especially if you teach lots of different groups. But do your best: pupils do tend to be critical of teachers who don't make an effort to learn names.

# 5

# Avoiding disruption in your class

This is an area a great deal easier to write about than to follow through – but we all keep battling against the unpredictability of the human factor!

1   **Establish a few, clear rules for behaviour in your class.** If possible involve the pupils in the development of these rules. The more ownership you can allow them to feel regarding the rules, the more likely they are to at least try to follow them.

2   **Reward good behaviour immediately with positive feedback** – a smile or a few words of praise or encouragement. Try also to ensure that you are quick to reward the good behaviour of any pupils who are often guilty of bad behaviour – they may really respond to some positive feedback.

3   **Deal with any misdemeanours before they become major incidents.** Often, it is best to deal with minor incidents as privately as you can. Public confrontations arouse too much interest!

4   **Establish what the sanctions will be for transgressing the rules.** Ensure that such sanctions are reasonable and practicable.

5   **Avoid unreasonable expectations of pupils – but don't demean them either.** Ensure that the level of the work you set is suitable for all the individuals within the group, and that pupils experiencing difficulties have manageable targets. Direct the emphasis of your comments towards the work or lack of it. This involves getting to know what each pupil is capable of, and setting realistic targets.

6   **Look for signals.** Be adaptable – change the pace or content of a lesson as soon as you realize it is not working well. Changing approach on the basis of feedback you receive is a strength, not a weakness!