

GUEST COLUMN – December 2023

The Working Classroom: How to make school work for working-class students

Matt Bromley and Andy Griffith

Excellence in any context is a judicious mix of high intention, sincere effort and intelligent execution. This is an excellent book: very well referenced, analytical, packed with stories and providing a commanding compendium of practical ideas for the classroom. The section on speaking, reading and writing is as succinct and authoritative as any teacher could wish for.

The experienced authors assert that ‘much of this book has been written in anger...angered at how unequal our society has become’. They channel their anger skilfully in producing a text to support teachers and leaders make a particular difference for ‘the forgotten third’ in our schools. It is fifty years since I first entered a Brixton primary classroom - it is inspiring to read Matt Bromley’s and Andy Griffith’s contemporary, compelling narrative about changing children’s lives.

Roy Blatchford

ADAPTIVE TEACHING APPROACHES: DO MORE FOR THOSE WHO START WITH LESS

Once we have designed an ambitious curriculum which is broad and balanced, planned and sequenced, and offered it - with equality - to all students, we need to ensure that all students can access that curriculum and achieve.

It starts with equality. Equality is about giving all young people – irrespective of their backgrounds, starting points, and additional and different needs – access to the same curriculum. To do otherwise is to deepen existing differences and disadvantages. In practice, equality means not dumbing down or reducing the curriculum for some students.

But equality isn’t enough. Not all students start from the same point, and thus to offer the same diet to all is to perpetuate existing differences. So, we start with equality but then we ensure equity. We achieve equity by doing more for those who start with less. We support those students who struggle to access our curriculum by using adaptive teaching approaches and additional intervention strategies.

The crucial point to remember here, though, is that the adaptations we make should not be open-ended; to continue to adapt the curriculum and our teaching throughout a student's schooling is to perpetuate learned helplessness and to prevent students from becoming independent and competing fairly with their peers. Rather, adaptations should be reduced over time and students should be helped to become more independent.

The sixth and final step of designing our core curriculum is to diminish disadvantage because we have to accept that not all students start from the same point, and that some will require more support and more time to reach their destination. We diminish disadvantage by closing the gap between disadvantaged students and their peers.

This can be achieved, in part, by identifying the academic barriers that each student faces, then choosing appropriate strategies to support them to overcome those barriers. Intervention strategies work best when they are short term, intensive, focused and tailored. What is more, there is no substitute for high-quality teaching, and so improving teacher and teaching quality must always take precedence. We will come back to this later in the chapter.

We can also help to diminish disadvantage by better understanding the effects of disadvantage. One such effect, though by no means the only one, is a lack of knowledge and cultural capital. One of the most tangible forms that cultural capital takes in practice is vocabulary, and so our curriculum should be a means of explicitly teaching vocabulary - what we might call the language of and for learning - to equip students with the tools they need to access the curriculum and achieve.

One effective way of ensuring equity - of helping all students to access the same ambitious curriculum - is adaptive teaching.....

Extract taken from **pages 112-113** from the newly published [*The Working Classroom: How to make school work for working-class students*](#), written by Matt Bromley and Andy Griffith and published by Crown House Publishing.