

Science and Technology? Boring!

That is the reaction that most young people are automatically having at the mention of Science and Tech in the modern UK. Sad, but true. Less and less of us are intrigued and inspired by the amazing discoveries and breath-taking truths a knowledge of Science can so easily grant to anybody, less and less taking the subject to a higher level and reaping the numerous benefits.

This was one of the main reasons behind our visit, as a Year 9 Science and technology leaders group, to local primary schools around our school, Sawston Village College. In these visits, working in conjunction with Harry Marsh, we helped two Year 6 classes to construct large structures out of nothing but overhead projector plastic sheets, nuts and bolts. (In the strange case that you are actually interested in how we did it, we rolled up the sheets into tubes, then bolted them together in a special structure, similar-ish to a football: pentagons and hexagons.)

Our objective was to get the children enthused about Science and Technology from a young age, to increase the likelihood they would become interested in the subject, and also to practice their (and to a certain extent *our*) communication and co-operation skills, both important assets to have not only in science, but in infinite applications throughout the modern world. Occupying very much a side, guidance role, each of us was allocated a small group of the kids, our job being to gently nudge the year 6's in the right direction, generally allowing them to come up with their own ideas. We were afraid that this might be a bit of a marathon, if the students were as wild as we suspected!

However, we were very pleasantly surprised by how friendly, polite and reasonable the children were, having been prepared for regular yelling and fights about who got the next go with the stapler! Year 6 students aren't as different from us as we might first assume. There were of course *minor* disagreements about things like who did a certain job, or if someone was doing something wrong, but with subtle intervention early on, all arguments between students were quickly forgotten. Students that age seem to conveniently forget anything you don't want to remember, like what the heck they were arguing about! We were very pleased, as a group, that it turned out this way, having feared much less bearable behavior. ("But I *can't live* without that stapler!")

Also- Of course, young as they were- the students would from time to time drift a little off task, their attention spans a bit short. Our role, obviously, was to gently keep them focused. We found that the easiest way to do this was to tell some kind of joke to get their attention, then remind them of their task, but many of us were not sure we were up to this- not everybody's a first-class comedian. But it didn't matter! Primary school children will laugh at almost anything you do, as long as it is clearly meant to be funny. Be it a bad impression of something, a knock-knock joke or a silly comment, they will laugh at it. And this will make it easy to get them to listen to you, so you can smoothly get them back on track. No need to hire Paul Merton.

Our trip, in my opinion, was extremely successful in achieving it's objectives, as I think that in terms of enthusing the kids about Science and Tech, we did a pretty decent job. In addition, the kids seemed very pleased with their construction, large enough to hold about half their class at a time, and making it was great fun for them. We all enjoyed working with the year 6's, and I felt a touch nostalgic on the trip- I miss being small! Plus there's the fact that we definitely made them communicate and co-operate a lot, practicing those vital skills. And their teacher seemed happy we'd taken them off her hands for a while!

If you're thinking of taking a trip to a primary school at some point, or working with kids around that age at any point, **DON'T BE AFRAID!** They honestly aren't that bad, and will readily follow your lead if you play the right notes. They react very well to friendly, forward leaders, and

better to jokes, if you've got any on you! They will love you if you can make them laugh, and that's easy enough to do (If I could do it, so can you!). If arguments arise, jokily intervene (distraction tactics work well too), and offer to help if they're finding something difficult. But don't make the answer obvious, because it's their job to find it, however simple it might seem. And lastly, make room for the fact that they might not be the most intelligent of sorts, but be careful not to patronize.

Good luck!!!