

THE ART OF BEING A

★ BRILLIANT
CLASSROOM
ASSISTANT



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AND ANDY COPE



Crown House Publishing Limited
www.crownhouse.co.uk

Published by
Crown House Publishing
Crown Buildings, Bancyfelin, Carmarthen, Wales, SA33 5ND, UK
www.crownhouse.co.uk
and
Crown House Publishing Company LLC
6 Trowbridge Drive, Suite 5, Bethel, CT 06801-2858, USA
www.crownhousepublishing.com

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First published 2016.

Edited by Andy Cope

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British Library of Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

Print ISBN 978-178583022-8
Mobi ISBN 978-178583057-0
ePub ISBN 978-178583058-7
ePDF ISBN 978-178583059-4

LCCN 2015953562

Printed and bound in the UK by
Gomer Press, Llandysul, Ceredigion

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following people: Professor Ann Buchanan, St Hilda's College, University of Oxford; Professor Charles Desforges OBE, University of Exeter; Geoff Hannan, educationalist, writer and broadcaster; Professor David Hargreaves, Wolfson College, University of Cambridge; Professor Steve Higgins, Durham University; David Hyner, Stretch Development; Bill Morris, director of the Education Improvement Partnership, Leicester; Professor Steve Strand, University of Oxford; and Gary Wilson, freelance consultant.

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WHY YOU MATTER
AND WHY YOU
SHOULD READ THIS
BOOK, BY TWO
PEOPLE WHO ARE
WELL WORTH
LISTENING TO

**Foreword by
Shonette Bason-Wood**

I'm old enough now (eek!) to remember a time before we had fabulous teaching assistants and brilliant classroom assistants. They were the bad old days when the teacher was expected to do everything in classrooms full to the brim.

I will always remember the first time I ever had a classroom assistant. I wasn't alone any more - hooray! A head chef can't function without the sous chef - and it's the same in the modern

classroom. We simply need properly trained, totally brilliant classroom and teaching assistants to share the ever increasing load.



Working with children demands dedication, commitment and superhero powers. Adults who turn up every day of the school year and work with the interests of the children first and foremost in their minds are, to me, truly brilliant. At the drop of a hat, a superb classroom assistant might cover another staff member's absence, take an extra playground or dinner duty and still help out at the disco on a school night. Phew!

In my opinion, teaching assistants are the most undervalued resource in education. Ask any teacher if they would rather have an interactive

whiteboard or another adult to support them, and I bet every single one would opt for the fellow human being.

The job is exhausting. Very often there isn't a moment in the school day for a cuppa (or a wee!), and sometimes people forget to say thank you. This book is designed to inspire and invigorate you, but most of all it's a reminder of how crucial you are. *You* impact on individual pupil learning, and the classroom climate and help to reduce teacher stress. *You* make a real difference - in fact, *you* are a life changer. Thank you.

(Shonette is an early years teacher and internationally renowned speaker. Her work is showcased at www.shonettebasonwood.com.)

Foreword by David Taylor

When Andy asked me to write this foreword, I said yes without hesitation.

And then I hesitated.

Three challenges came to mind - a lack of time, talent and education - and, on that last point alone, who am I to write the foreword to a book for classroom assistants, often the unsung heroes in our schools, society and communities,

who work tirelessly alongside our wonderful teachers to help young people fulfil their potential?

Then I thought, 'well, who actually bothers to read the forewords in books?' So, if these words ever actually get published, I urge you to skip them - after all, Andy, Chris and Gary are such brilliant storytellers, share so many practical how-tos and have that rare gift of making each and every reader feel the book has been written just for them - you'll want to get on with reading the book.

And more - this truly unique book is so much more than its title - it is a guide, a bible - that when applied will transform our education system - academic and beyond - because it inspires, empowers and gives permission to all who read it, to unlock and unleash the strengths, talents and passions in themselves, and in everyone else. This book deserves to be in every classroom, in every school in the world.

Andy is very kind about my books, saying that *The Naked Leader Experience* changed his life. Thank you, Andy. With this book, you, Gary and Chris will change lives every single day, every single hour and in every single second.

(David Taylor is an internationally renowned author, speaker and Prince's Trust guru. His work is showcased at www.nakedleader.com.)

AN OPENING THOUGHT

As a society we have fallen prey to what Larry Dossey calls 'time-sickness' - the belief that 'time is getting away ... and that you must pedal faster and faster to keep up'.¹ On this speeding treadmill, we have become hungry for information and fearful of missing out - beautifully text-languaged as 'FOMO'. As we skim and graze, picking up one piece of entertaining information before moving on to the next in hasty bursts, we have become addicted to trivia.



1 Larry Dossey, *Space, Time and Medicine* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 1982), pp. 50-51.

We've learned to do this. As Sir Ken Robinson acknowledges, if you're over the age of 25, technology is your second language, something you've picked up as you've gone along. For today's children, however, technology is their first language.² They are totally fluent in 'iPad' and 'Xbox'. Information is openly accessible and speed is the new intelligence.

Thinking aloud, we wonder whether children may lose the ability to seek the stillness that connects them to who they are, and instead find themselves engulfed in boredom and/or loneliness. We wonder whether the constant churn of trivia and their addiction to superficial information will keep young people from attending to relationships. Might the impatience and anxiety that speed entails diminish their gratitude and empathy? Will their desire to know about everything result in them knowing nothing? These are huge questions and, in our lifetimes, we may never get to know the answers.

Social science suggests that our brains did not evolve to operate instinctively in today's complex world. Humans are resilient and we will adapt. But the world is moving faster than our brains can adapt so we are playing catch-up. Speed frees up time but, ask yourself, what do

2 Ken Robinson, Bring On the Learning Revolution! *TED.com* (May 2010). Transcript available at: https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_bring_on_the_revolution/transcript?language=en.

you do with that extra time? There's a strong likelihood that you invest that saved time in more fast stuff. Is that wise? We are living life fast but are we living it well?

This book is partly about your profession but it is entirely about *you*. The lessons of engagement, positivity and relationships are not just for the classroom, they extend across all domains of your life.

We're hoping that you might therefore consider slowing down, just a tad. Because thinking time, and in particular stillness, is an increasingly rare commodity. There's a likelihood that you will feel compelled to race through this book, impatiently skimming for useful nuggets. If this is the case, you will have neither the time nor the mental space to make proper sense of the information or sustain it through deeper thought.

Our plea is to chew on it rather than swallow it whole.

Bon appétit!



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REGISTRATION

Now, you can't accuse us of skimming the surface for this book. We've consulted far and wide, even to the extent of unearthing pearls from the Wiki-goldmine of everything. So here's a stunning fact: the Catholic Church has appointed a patron saint for just about everything (even parts of your body!). Here are a few of our faves: St Fiacre is the patron saint of haemorrhoids, Thomas of Green is the patron saint of 'sensitive knees' and, in a moment of marketing enlightenment, Aspren is the patron saint of headaches. Yes, really (does Wikipedia ever lie?). Simon of Trent is the patron saint of kidnap victims. Somewhat deliciously, there is also a patron saint of failures, Birgitta of Sweden, who presumably failed to impress Ofsted on more than one occasion.

The salient point of all these shenanigans is that most occupations have been given a patron. So, for example, St Elmo is supposed to look over all those who work at great heights and Anthony the Abbot is the guardian of gravediggers. Teachers are greedy - they have two: John Baptist de la Salle and St Catherine. There is literally an A (Adrian of Nicomedia, saint of arms dealers) to Z (Zita, saint of domestic servants) of dead saints, each allocated to an occupation.

If you scour the list you'll find that every occupation has a nominated guardian whom those who decide such things deem fit and proper enough to be looking after their well-being. That is, except one. So who is it that either doesn't need looking after or is not worthy of being bestowed with a patron? Classroom assistants, that's who. So, if there's nobody 'up there' cheering you on, you might need to find the resources within yourself.

Before the off, a very quick word about style and substance. If you are expecting a learned tome full of academia with a considered critique of the effectiveness of government policy since 1870, this is not the book for you. But if you want a book that is easy to read on the sun-kissed deckchairs of Skegness during your well-earned summer holidays, or a book you can dip into for a quick dose of inspiration and some nifty ideas you could use in the classroom tomorrow, you are probably in the right zone.

We are big believers in what we call 'the magpie technique'. Magpies are birds which steal from other birds' nests. In education, by and large, teachers and other classroom assistants are not too precious about their ideas - it is an open forum in which there is a natural exchange of expertise. We learn by watching others and discussing ideas with them. If someone else is getting stellar results, then why not have a peek

at what they're doing and make it work for you? That's what we've done, so this book represents some of the best ideas and techniques we've come across on our travels. We will occasionally throw in a quote, anecdote or big thought that needs highlighting and, in retro-style, we've brought thinking back *inside* the box. Oh, and there's a whole load of top tips too.

So buckle up and safety goggles on - here's our guide to being brilliant. Our job is to make you smile, make you think and make you want to be the very best classroom assistant you can possibly be.

We're proud to have you aboard.

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW THE SECRETS OF BEING A BRILLIANT CLASSROOM ASSISTANT, READ ON ...

There are many different names for folk who support and create learning in and beyond the classroom: teaching assistants, learning support assistants, cover supervisors, mentors, learning partners - the list goes on. The title doesn't matter but the quality of support, interaction and learning does. Based on the authors' combined 70 plus years of experience, *The Art of Being a Brilliant Classroom Assistant* is packed full of creative tips, techniques and strategies for anyone who has the crucial role of supporting kids' learning.

It doesn't matter whether it's inspiration or new ideas you want - this book has a plethora of both. It may challenge your thinking, it may persuade you to do something different, but above all it will put you in serious danger of being brilliant at what you do.

A BRILLIANT BOOK FOR CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS

"In *The Art of Being a Brilliant Classroom Assistant* Andy and his gang have identified the priceless treasures that are the classroom assistants in our schools. Full of nuggets and gems this book will make a proper difference and make their brilliance sparkle! Awesome."

**Liz Miles, Principal, Silverdale Primary Academy,
The Hastings Academies Trust**

"I absolutely love this book: it is a must for all teaching assistants to have! It's full of brilliance, with lots of tips and knowledge. There are fantastic tips and pick-me-ups for a quick pat on the back or boost of confidence."

Julie Westbury, Teaching Assistant, Maun Infant and Nursery School



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