

Out of the Box Tools for when the Lesson Plans Aren't Working Out

Because we all know sometimes they don't!

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By Chris Parsons, Author of A Little Spark



It happens to the best of us... we plan something we think is great for our children or students. We spend hours (or maybe even days) working out the lesson plan. It has everything: excitement, learning opportunity, critical thinking, fun. But then the unthinkable happens, and the lesson falls flat. What do you do then? Here are a few ideas for ways to think out of the box when your lesson plan just doesn't work.

Go outside

Sometimes there's nothing wrong with the lesson; students just get antsy for one reason or another. In this instance, a change in venue is sometimes enough to get things back on track.

Let your students wiggle

As a parent of (formerly) small children, I've seen my share of kids who need nothing more than a few minutes to "get the wiggles out." Find a fun song (YouTube is a great source) and let your students dance and shake for a few minutes.

Pull out the art supplies

There are few things kids like more than art. Pull out some finger paints and a roll of paper and let your students go to town. Give them a set topic (the lesson you've planned, maybe?) or let them run wild. But give them time to get their fingers messy.

Let the students become the teacher

Take a quick break yourself and assign one of the students to be the teacher. Give them 10 minutes to teach the subject in question as best as they understand it. Resist the urge to step in and make corrections. Let the student run the show for the full time. You can always go back and ask, "What did Suzie get right or wrong when she was teaching?" at the end.

Keep a class pet

This will not only give you a place to focus distracted students when your lesson plans are going wrong, but also teach your students empathy and care of other creatures.

Make a diary with your students

There are lots of tutorials online for creating books. Take a few minutes with your students to make books from scratch and then use those books as a diary. Instruct your students to write a short entry (age dependent) on what they've learned in the haywire lesson. Collect the diaries so you have them on hand for the future, and read students' entries later during your grading time — you might be surprised at what they've retained in the lesson you thought was a flop. Optional: give your students a prompt for their entry (i.e. "write a poem about our lesson").

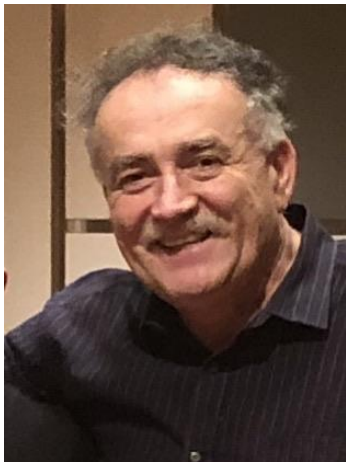
Use feedback from the students to refocus plan the lesson

When all else fails, ask your students what it is about the lesson that's falling flat. It's possible (likely, even) that they'll have different insight than you about what's gone wrong. Use their feedback to refocus today's lesson, but also keep it in mind when writing future lessons. If a majority of your students say they don't like your cheesy poems on the Revolutionary War, maybe leave them out when it's time to teach the Civil War.

There's no law saying that you have to teach every single thing you've planned on a specific subject. You probably have to teach the subject (state regulations and all), but within a topic, teachers have a lot of leeway. What's most important is that your students are learning – not how it's happening.

Happy Teaching!

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Chris Parsons grew up in the small fishing village of Flatrock, Newfoundland where he was surrounded by storytellers. When he became a father, he began creating his own children's stories, and soon he was sharing them with a wider audience. Over time, his audience grew up, but he continued to create his stories and colorful characters mostly for his own enjoyment. Today, Chris lives in Dallas where, together with his wife, Kathleen, daughter, Maggie and son, Kealan, they share a love for all of God's creatures. *A Little Spark* is his first book. For more information, please visit bethatspark.com.