

Hold that THOUGHT

Phil Beadle – English teacher – has some rather subject-specific advice on surviving the INSET day from hell...

Yet again, you've made the schoolboy error of sliding voluntarily through the swing doors marked 'Tomorrow isn't really a 'proper' work day. You don't have to get up. Another four hours in the pub won't kill you. And as long as you get five hours' sleep ... sure, you'll be absolutely fine'.

And, of course, yet again, those same swing doors have spat you out, brittle and shivering, and you're now on the other side of the bare five hours' kip; you've awoken, breath smelling like nail varnish, eyes with the clarity of seagull droppings, to confront the full horror of your fate: a whole day's CPD – a full English inferno, bored brainless by the witterings of the witless.

You fall off the bus and attempt to load up on Lucozade before stumbling in to sit on a blue plastic chair at the back, as far away from the eyes of management as possible, dumping yourself next to Kev, who is in much the same state as you and smells dimly of kebab. You exchange grim eye rolls, exhaling profanities of self-pity.

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"He reads, he clicks. He reads, he clicks. 50 seconds in and already the repetition is disappearing you into a whirlpool of desolation..."

Trevor, the more ambitious of the two assistant heads, who drives a Hyundai (but still goes to rock festivals), rises to place himself behind a tired, oak lectern that, sardonic and mute, has witnessed hundreds like him come and hundreds like him go.

He brandishes a clicker, holding it insouciantly like a stubby, circumcised tool. He clicks. A slide appears. The background design you recognise instantly as being 'supernova'; it projects the image of its user as 'thrusting'. He clicks again, and mindless verbiage from some old Ofsted report or other appears within oversized quotation marks. He reads it aloud, clicks again. Mindless verbiage from some old Ofsted report... He reads, he clicks. He reads. He clicks. 50 seconds in and already the repetition is disappearing you into a whirlpool of desolation.

He is due to speak for ninety minutes about why you shouldn't be talking in lessons, and has printed seventy-two slides out. He intends to read every one of them to you.

You drift off into a whole other landscape, and start calculating how much money you are earning per second he is talking. It helps, briefly.

Snapping out of it (and noting briefly that Trevor isn't in any hurry at all to stop talking), you glance across towards the maths department. Slowly, it dawns: though they are clearly less hungover than you, they are somehow are in a state more completely, more perfectly, desolate. You search for that part at the back of your throbbing head that contains the thoughts and a dim realisation pixelates: they always look like this on CPD days. They always look totally bored. Always. And totally.

The still-thinking part of your brain lurches into an epiphany. None of it ever applies to them. Not ever. AfL?

"Tick and cross, mate." Literacy across the curriculum? "Totally different language, guv." Multiple intelligences? "We've got our own." Speaking and listening? "Shushing and doing hard sums." Expectations? "What can I tell you? It's a hard subject."

They are all sitting with their chins on their hands, glazed eyes disappeared into the front of their skulls. Just like they always do.

Next time you stay too long in the pub the night before CPD and then have to suffer for hours listening to someone solemnly intoning about "populating targets", spare a thought for the maths department. They are in a worse state of abject ennui even than you; none of it ever applies to them, they are desperate for the comfort break... and half of them don't even drink!

With thanks to Mr S and Mr P

PHIL IS RUNNING THREE INTENSIVE DAY COURSES – 'OUTSTANDING LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM' – TOWARDS THE END OF 2012 (EXETER, 30TH NOV; LONDON, 11TH DEC; MANCHESTER, 13TH DEC). FIND OUT MORE AT [HTTP://TINYURL.COM/BP6KH2O](http://tinyurl.com/bp6kh2o).

