



My moments...

Stewart Shovlin picks out some highlights from his experience of classroom life over the years

THE MOMENT I...

...knew for sure I was in the right job

To be honest, I'm never 100% sure I'm in the 'right' job – and I suppose that's what keeps me on my toes. When I was coming to the end of my degree course, going into teaching was the last thing I'd considered. I thought classes of 30-odd hormonal teenagers would eat me alive, and that I just didn't know enough to be put on a pedestal at the front of a classroom. I'd applied for a PGCE course fully anticipating a rejection, thinking that a 'no' would force me to figure out what I really ought to be doing with my life. It wasn't to be. Fast-forward eight years, and I'm still in the classroom. However hard the job is – and it feels like it gets harder all the time – there's not much that compares to the buzz you get when you sense you might be making a difference, however small, to a student's life. I'm not talking Dead Poets Society-level transformation; it's enough for me for a student to realise not all poetry is 'boring', or that apostrophes aren't the punctuation equivalent of hundreds and thousands on a cupcake, or that the common complaint that the English language is deteriorating is almost as old as the language itself.

... learned an important lesson myself

The best piece of teaching advice I've ever been given is this: pick your battles. While enforcing school rules is obviously important, it's crucial to be pragmatic. In my first few years of teaching, it often felt like I spent more lesson time chastising students than actually teaching them anything. The moment this came to a head was when I heard the words 'I've got my GCSEs' come out of my own mouth. I was horrified; I'd become a caricature. Now, I don't try to tackle every minor infraction all of the time. I certainly don't see them as tacit attacks on me. Instead, I try to remember what my own school experience was like – how arbitrary rules seemed, how unforgiving many teachers were in enforcing them – and focus instead on the

FACT FILE

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THE BEST BIT:

WORKING WITH STUDENTS WHO NEVER CEASE TO MAKE ME LAUGH

THE WORST BIT:

HAVING MORE WORK TO DO THAN TIME IN THE DAY IN WHICH TO DO IT

STEWART SHOVLIN WAS NAMED MIDLANDS TEACHER OF THE YEAR IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL AT THE 2012 TEACHING AWARDS. FIND OUT MORE AT TEACHINGAWARDS.COM

lesson's work. It's far easier – and better in the long run – to deal with a student not in uniform, or one who's arrived a few minutes late, at the end of the lesson when they're not in the spotlight and a gentle 'don't-do-that-again' is unlikely to turn into a confrontation.

... can't think about without laughing

This particular incident is one that haunts me, and I can't decide whether or not I find it funny or mortifying or a horrible combination of the two. A new student was going to be joining one of my Year 11 classes the following lesson. He'd arrived in Leicestershire from somewhere far away, and I knew that he'd be feeling a little awkward for a while until he'd settled in. With this in mind, I gave my class a little lecture on the importance of welcoming the new student with open arms. The next lesson arrives, and I've duly forgotten about the new student. I see a young man at the back of my room, and assume he's from another class and is trying to wind me up. 'Get out of my classroom!' I snap at him, realising – as his face registers a mix of confusion, terror, and hatred of me – that he is the new boy I'd implored the group to welcome. I don't think he ever forgave me.

... wish an Ofsted inspector had seen

Few things instil in me more dread than the arrival of an Ofsted inspection team. The key markers of a good lesson – the interaction, the humour, the sense of shared purpose – all seem to be stifled the moment an inspector opens the door. Your students know you're being judged, and so do you – and the artificiality of it all can be crippling. I become hypercritical and agonise over the finest detail of every lesson. Often, the more agonising I do, the less successful the lessons become. I doubt I'm the only teacher who feels this way. I sometimes wonder if we'd be better off if Ofsted inspectors wore Harry Potter-style invisibility cloaks to conduct their observations. The classes might be a little noisier, the lesson structure a little looser, the mood a little lighter – but they'd be a true reflection of what happens in the classroom every lesson, every day.