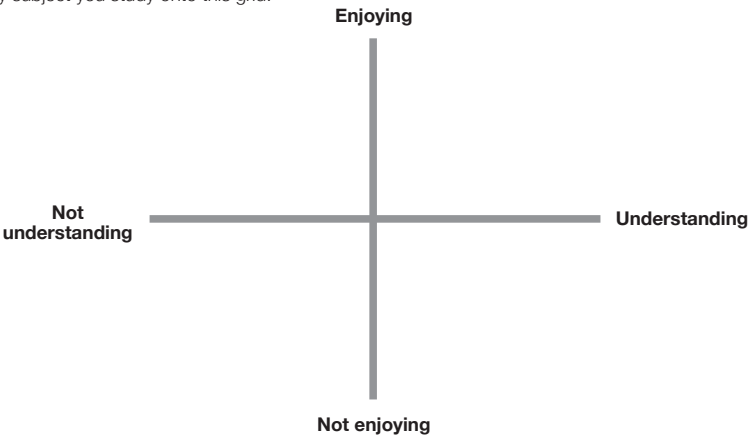


22. Systems Activity: The Bottom Left

Sometimes the number of jobs you have to do can be overwhelming. Teachers are making demands from all angles and it's difficult to know where to start. The trouble with listing jobs is that a list doesn't allow you to see the bigger picture; you can't assess the progress of whole projects, you can only pick off small individual tasks.

Using a matrix or a grid helps you to assess the status of entire subjects. And once you've got a good sense of how an entire subject is going, you can use your time much more effectively, targeting your energy where it's most needed.

Put every subject you study onto this grid:



Once you've made these decisions and placed these projects as dots or crosses on the grid, make notes under each dot explaining the reasons why you've positioned it there. Then have a look at the projects in the bottom left of the grid.

The Terror of the Bottom Left!

Many pupils will subconsciously avoid the subjects in the bottom left because even the thought of them feels uncomfortable. They might lower the standards they expect of themselves in those subjects, work less hard at them or try to ignore them altogether. But they're not going to go away. By spending some time on them now you could avoid a real crisis later on in the year.

Let's examine the subjects closest to – or in – the bottom left quadrant. We've given you enough space here to deal with three or four problem subjects! For each of your bottom left subjects make a note of:

- » One task you could do that will push the dot further to the right.

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» One task you could do that will push the dot further upwards.

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It might be speaking to a teacher, borrowing some missing work, attending an after-school class, speaking to a pupil who's better at it than you, finishing reading a textbook or redoing a rushed piece of homework. Consider the fourteen suggestions in Looking Under the Rocks (page XX) for inspiration!

Good prioritisation means knowing *why you're doing what you're doing*. This task will help you to focus on your weaknesses.

Final Thoughts

Here's the problem with to-do lists. No matter how you prioritise your list, all the tasks there still take up the same amount of physical space (a line of A4 paper), and so end up taking the same amount of mental space.

But not all tasks are equally important.

Any associated with subjects that are currently in the top right quadrant, where you're understanding and enjoying the work, are a little less important than the tasks associated with the bottom left.

Have a look at the tasks you've got for subjects in the top right quadrant. Is there any way you can complete these tasks more quickly and efficiently? Any small corners you can cut? Any favours you can call in or people you can ask for help? (See the Network Audit, page XX for more on this...) Your aim is to buy yourself some time by working super-efficiently in the subjects that are currently going well.

Scribble some possible ideas here:

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Now you've potentially saved yourself some time, which task in the bottom left quadrant needs the most work?

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Use this saved time to get started on it now!