

It is almost a cliché to say that 'Science is all around us' but I am sure these words have crossed our lips at some time or other.

Whether the audience was young children, older students or adult colleagues, we probably used the phrase in some way to emphasise the importance and relevance of science in our everyday lives. We can even remember how, on occasions, some students picked up the idea and responded with examples of which they were aware.

Unfortunately, we can probably also recall that there was no outward sign from many of the students that they recognised this thing called 'Science' that was supposed to be all around them. We are all probably familiar with this kind of situation and are constantly trying to find ways in which we can engage our students with science in some form.

Just recently, I was in a school chatting informally with a group of students aged between 13 and 17 about their science lessons and what changes they would like to see. Their responses were fairly typical of those that have been reported elsewhere, including the wish for more practical work, fewer facts to 'learn' and more time to discuss some of the issues. Again, not untypical of other discussions, the word 'relevant' kept coming up. 'The curriculum should be more relevant to us' was a general consensus of opinion. This seemed to bring the conversation to a satisfactory conclusion until someone asked the question what did 'relevant' mean in this context.

This led to a further phase in the discussion which became quite heated, especially when it became more obvious that 'relevant' meant different things to different individuals. For some of these students it meant the work should be 'applied', e.g. the need to understand the chemistry of polymers as a basis for new materials. For others it was the need for some 'personal link' such as knowing someone who had a heart defect as a stimulus to find out more about the structure and function of the heart. Other points made were the discussion of 'ethical issues', hearing about a recent discovery or of a person. A few of the students insisted that for them some things were relevant simply because they found them fascinating.

This conversation reminded me yet again of the

challenge we face in getting students to engage with science and left me with several things to think about, but two points in particular. The first is that many young people are interested in science and willing to discuss the ideas and issues, if we can provide them with the opportunity and it is seen to be 'relevant'. There is the rub, which leads me to the second point I was left with: a reminder that, if we try to make the curriculum more 'relevant' (e.g. with the revised specifications for GCSE resulting in the changes to the key stage 4 programme of study in England or the plans to revise the curriculum in Scotland), we must build in flexibility to allow, if possible, for the content to be made 'relevant' to all pupils in their terms. Unless we do this, we will simply end up with another 'one size fits all' situation and still have many of the problems we face today.

One approach which can be exploited to help find the 'relevance' and engage students with science is through using 'science in the news'. The lead articles in the issue provide some insights into how this might be done. In their article, Ruth Jarman and Billy McClune explain their work on empowering '*students to engage critically with Science in the News*'. While Tony Sherborne and Marianne Cutler describe UPD8 Live! and in Primary Focus the new Primary UPD8. Anna Grayson provides a very interesting perspective on the issue of science in the news from the point of view of a journalist. Reading this article helps in terms of understanding why some things appear the way they do in the newspapers, but also echoes some of the points made by Jarman and McClune. It is through a better understanding of approaches such as those outlined in these articles that we can engage our students with science and help them find their own 'relevance' in it. As Jarman and McClune conclude, '*We know that exploring Science in the News can enliven and enrich our teaching. We also believe that, by equipping young people, even in a small way, to engage critically with science in the news, we are preparing them better for their future – for living and learning in a media-saturated society*' – and recognise the science that is all around them.

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