

21ST CENTURY LEARNING ALLIANCE
TEACHER FELLOWSHIP
UPDATE REPORT

Bowland High School
Mountain Climbing for Beginners
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Initial proposal

The original focus of our investigation was to target a small group of underachieving boys in Year 9 and attempt to increase their rate of progression through key stage 3 - at the end of key stage 2, the group either achieved a level 3 or were working well below the level of the test.

Historically, the analysis of key stages 3 and 4 data within our department reveals underachievement particularly in boys' writing. From further analysis of the key stages 3 and 4 data, we noticed that lower ability pupils tend to make slower and/or less progress than the more able and we wanted to improve this section of the cohort. In addition, we also considered the results of the school's PASS survey: whether our pupils were motivated, engaged and comfortable with their own learning journey. This took into account key aspects of pupils' emotional response to their education as a whole, such as: attitude to learning, to teachers and to school in general. The findings revealed that amongst responses were: low self regard; poor response to the curriculum; low general work ethic and preparedness for learning; and very low perceived learning confidence.

Conversely, the survey highlighted that the majority of pupils had a good regard for and attitude towards teachers, confirming the assumption that pupils would engage with the project and work collaboratively with teaching staff to create their own unique and personalised curriculum.

Using technology

In order to achieve our aims, we set out to use Promethean's ActivExpression Pods to increase engagement and enthusiasm with learning and to offer pupils a more interactive learning experience. These learner response systems had been loaned to the department by Promethean and had, therefore, been trialled briefly with a group of more able pupils that provided us with very fruitful feedback.

Another aim of our investigation called for the need to tailor the current curriculum to increase engagement and enthusiasm within the subject. Using the ActivExpression pods we asked the group which topics they would like to study in English.

From the results of this questionnaire we developed new programmes of study for the group to deliver the national curriculum content and also meet learners' social and emotional needs, whilst encouraging pupils to become independent learners, creative thinkers and effective participators in classroom activities. Finally, we intended that pupils make two levels of progress from key stage 2 to key stage 3 results to provide concrete evidence of clear progression.

Moving the project on...

After meeting with the 21st Century Learning Alliance and our e-mentor Marilyn Leask, we made some amendments to our original objectives: providing a greater focus on the interest of the pupils and not specifically on the attainment of the group. In order to increase engagement and motivation, our e-mentor had suggested giving pupils a ‘real’ audience for their writing.

In order to extend pupils’ experiences outside their own social and cultural context, we therefore, made links with pupils from Eaglecrest School in Colorado. We also felt it would be beneficial to organise visits from inspirational speakers, with links to the pupils’ interest areas but again outside their own prior knowledge, in order to broaden the range and depth of their life experiences.




Inspiring and motivating

The visit from Dave Sutcliffe, international rock climber and film maker, proved to have the desired effect in terms of ensuring that the pupils were inspired and motivated, as highlighted by the pupil quotes below.





Pupil voice

We used the learning response systems to gather data regard how enthused and engaged pupils felt after the visit, the results are as follows:





In response to the question: What did you find enjoyable about having an outside speaker?

-  “Because he’s done so many incredible things in life, I could listen to him all day.”
-  “It was good. I learnt a lot. I may try it in the future, but not a bridge jump!”
-  “To have someone talking about their hobby.”



In response the question: Thinking about your experience of meeting Dave, what did you learn from yesterday’s lesson?

-  “As Dave said: “You have to persevere.””
-  “He said: “If you like a sport and you are good at it, you should give it your all and try your best.””
-  “If I like something, try as hard as I can.”
-  “Try different hobbies.”

In response to the question: How would you benefit from having more outside speakers in your lesson?

-  “Learning more about people.”
-  “To know how people be the best they can and live their lives by doing sport.”
-  “We would get to know lots about different things.”
-  “We get to know more about the outside [sic: world] than you do in lessons.”

In response to the question: Is there anything that would have improved yesterday's visit by and outside speaker?

-  "Dave could have brought some gear in to set up the slack line."
-  "We could have had a longer lesson." (The lesson was already a double period, an hour and forty minutes long!)

Pupils' response using ActivExpression pods outside the classroom

As one of our beliefs is that it is always important to allow pupils to learn 'outside the classroom', we felt it of paramount importance to enable pupils to take advantage of visits to local places of the group's interest, a trip to Gazegill - a local organic farm, is organised for early Spring. Pupils will use video (hand-held cameras) and an editing software package on the Apple Macs in school to create short films to promote the farm.

Collecting evidence



Pupils completed a questionnaire about their use of technology both at home and in school. We found that, through an ActivExpression questionnaire, most agreed that they were learning whilst using handheld technology in school.

However, we felt this number could be much improved through the implementation of the new programme of study and more regular use of the ActivExpression pods. In a preliminary session using the pods pupils worked through a slide show in order to collect their opinion on 'a new school uniform.' The group was able to share their thoughts anonymously and discuss the ideas immediately. The speed of this allowed for pace and a frank exchange of ideas without the fear of turn taking and the embarrassment of inaccuracies in named feedback. After completing preparation for a written assessment using 'the pods' and as part of the groundwork for the next scheme of work it was important that the data was collected to ascertain how the group had benefited from using the technology and also how these lessons could be improved to further develop the use of the pods.






Evaluation so far...

Although the pods have not always been straightforward to use and there have been slight compatibility issues in software, these were quickly overcome and the positive results of pupils being engaged and motivated in lesson far out-weigh the original drawbacks. Early findings from the research project show that pupils are indeed enjoying using the pupil response system technology.







When asked: What do you enjoy most about using the pods? The responses were:

-  "Because texting is easier than writing on paper."
-  "Because they are brilliant, and you are learning."

How could I make your lessons better by using the pods? Most said:

-  "I don't know."
-  "Nothing." Some said:
-  "You could use the pods more."
-  "You could speed it up a bit."
-  "Play with them like games."

Where next?

-  Continued implementation of new programme of study.
-  Evaluate our original investigation aims.
-  Collect final data from pupils.
-  New PASS Survey to be carried out in the New Year.
-  Whole cohort evaluation on teaching and learning in English.
-  INSET for whole staff with invitations to secondary practitioners within local schools.

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