



LeadingChange

Issue 08 Winter 14

TWENTY YEARS FROM NOW YOU WILL BE MORE
DISAPPOINTED BY THE THINGS THAT YOU
DIDN'T DO THAN BY THE ONES YOU DID DO.
SO THROW OFF THE BOWLINES.
SAIL AWAY FROM THE SAFE HARBOR.
CATCH THE TRADE WINDS IN YOUR SAILS.

EXPLORE
DREAM
DISCOVER

MARK TWAIN



Happy New Year and welcome to the 8th edition of Leading Change. We hope that the new term has got off to a good start.

The Leading Edge team have really enjoyed visiting many schools that are new to the programme in the last few months. We have seen so much interesting and innovative practice and will do our best to share some of it with you in coming months through this journal and the Achievement Show.

Bookings for the Achievement Show 2014 are now open, don't forget to book your discounted places at www.ssatuk.co.uk/achievementshow. We will be sending out full details of the programme shortly.

Thank you to all of the schools that have contributed articles to this edition – it is great to see the work of colleagues at all levels represented as well as a piece written by students. If you are happy to share an aspect of your work in a future edition, we would love to hear from you. Please email us at leading.edge@ssatuk.co.uk.

Best wishes
The Leading Edge team

New Year's Honours

Congratulations to:

- Haydn Evans, Headteacher of St John Cass's Foundation and Redcoat Church of England Secondary School and member of the Leading Edge steering group, who was awarded a CBE
- Gill Bal, Headteacher of Wembley High Technology College, who was awarded an OBE
- John Lonsdale, teacher of drama and director of Sandbach School Theatre, who was awarded an MBE.

Achievement Show 2014

Thursday 26 June 2014
Twickenham Stadium . London

Best and next practice nationally

With 10 learning zones, almost 100 school speakers and the opportunity to share practice with colleagues from all over the country, the Achievement Show is an event for the whole team.

This year's zones include:

- ▲ Teaching and learning
- ▲ Inspiring schools
- ▲ Inspiring departments
- ▲ English and literacy
- ▲ Maths

Visit www.ssatuk.co.uk/achievementshow for zone and speaker announcements, and further details about the day.

Leading Edge members are entitled to 3 discounted places. Claim yours now!

To find out all you need to know about booking and discounts please visit www.ssatuk.co.uk/achievementshow

#SSATACH14



I have been twice now and it is the best CPD that I have experienced in 12 years... the quick-fire nature of the Achievement Show means you can gain lots in just one day.

Co-headship: an emerging model of school leadership

Martyn Parker and Richard Pilgrim
Co-Headteachers
Charters School

Four years down the line, with the co-headship now permanent and the school community used to two captains at the helm, Richard and I are much more confident that the decision was the right one, not just for us, but for the school also.

When Marcia informed us in January 2009 of her intention to retire at the end of the academic year the school was very different from the school I had joined a decade earlier as deputy headteacher. Driven on by Marcia's inspirational leadership, the school had been rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted in 2006 and was a high achieving sports college with a second specialism in science and a rapidly expanding sixth form. The school's strong comprehensive ethos had been maintained as standards and opportunities increased for all students. It was an exciting decade for the school and Richard and I had enjoyed our role in the school's development. Typically generous to her closest colleagues, Marcia continually asserted to the governors that the success of Charters was down to the wider leadership of the school. Consequently as she took on an increasingly prominent national role working for the then DCSF, Richard and I received formal recognition for our enhanced role in deputising for Marcia more and more. It was fully expected, therefore, that Richard and I would throw our hats into the ring when the headship became available.

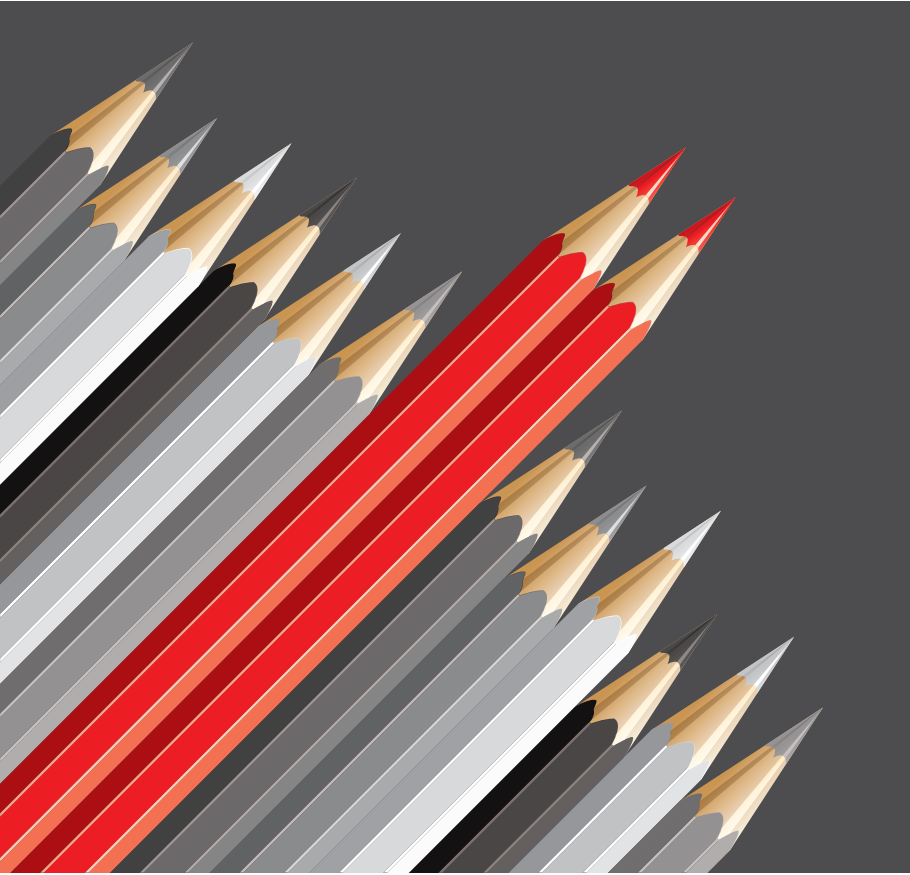
The only problem was that Richard and I knew what a big job it would be taking over from Marcia. The school had moved from good to outstanding during her tenure but more than that in 2006 we had been rated outstanding for every single inspection judgment – an inspection to trumpet, undoubtedly, but difficult to trump. Especially so when we all knew that yes the school was doing well but

there was still much to do in several areas. Her departure also coincided with the school's progress towards Trust status, an extensive programme of building works, an important new link with a school in South Africa... and well a range of developments that make school leadership interesting but, nevertheless, a prospect to give a new headteacher pause for thought.

Although Richard and I had developed a strong working relationship and were friends as well as colleagues we, nevertheless, had a rather tentative discussion about our thoughts post-Marcia. I was confident that he was a strong candidate to replace her and, as someone closely associated with the school's rise – he had only ever worked at Charters – I expected him to welcome the opportunity to make an application. I was dumbfounded, therefore, when he told me that he did not intend to apply for the headship. A young family, the long hours he was already working, the size and scope of the job... his reasons seemed spookily similar to mine and so that night I hatched the plan, after discussion with my wife, to propose a co-headship. Richard jumped at my suggestion as he had had very similar thoughts, as did Marcia when we broached it with her – a real surprise, as she seemed to epitomise the charismatic and single, sole leader model. From that point on the campaign was on... except it wasn't that simple as there were few examples of the type of co-headship we were proposing nor was there any legal basis for such a model. Yes there were job shares and administrative headteacher/teaching headteacher models, but very few were in the secondary sector.

When Richard Pilgrim and I offered the governors at Charters School in Sunningdale the opportunity to trial this model following the retirement of Dame Marcia Twelftree in the summer of 2009 we both saw it as a positive approach building upon the work of a much-admired headteacher; but at the back of both our minds there was a nagging suspicion that our offer could be seen as the product of tentativeness not innovation.

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Undaunted we discussed our plans with the senior leadership team who were all for it. This may have been because like everyone they were suspicious of change but it was also probably because of the collegiate approach Marcia had developed and a commitment to deliver the clear direction that had been mapped out for the school. Unfortunately, when we presented our proposal to the governors they were less sure, even though initially we were only proposing to trial the co-headship before they started the recruitment process. At this stage it was probably too much to ask the governors to try something so different when they hadn't even tried to replace Marcia. Fortune favoured the innovative, however, and when the first round of recruitment was unsuccessful, we were asked to trial the co-headship until a replacement was found.

The saga that led to our permanent appointment is too byzantine to report here but eventually the governors made our appointment as co-heads in March 2010. Nobody in the school community batted an eyelid at our innovative new leadership model because as the two

deputy headteachers with 37 years at the school between us we represented evolution. And that's fine because they knew that we never rested on our laurels and would continue to be forward looking and innovative.

As we run a two week timetable, the local authority's legal department advised each of us to take an alternate week when we were the nominated headteacher for any legal issues that might arise. Our contracts were calculated on the basis of half a headteacher's leadership pay range and half a deputy headteacher's range. We gave an assurance to the governors that in the event of one of us leaving the post prematurely for any reason all bets would be off and the governors would then be free to decide what model of leadership they would like to operate from thereon; the worst case scenario for Richard and I was that the one co-head left standing would have to revert to his deputy headteacher role. For accountability purposes, Richard and I have distinct and separate job descriptions from which the governors can draw shared and individual targets for us.

Therefore to answer the frequently asked question: what happens when there is a disagreement between you? (rare and most often a difference of emphasis rather than principle) – we refer back to our job descriptions and responsibilities to decide who has the final say.

It didn't take long for the first real test of our leadership to arrive. Ofsted came calling in November 2009 with a new framework, and as it was my week on I took the call. Amongst other areas of focus arising from the pre-inspection briefing it was agreed that the inspection team would look at the effectiveness of the co-headship. To say that the inspection was challenging is an understatement. It seems clear in retrospect that, as a supposedly flawless school, we were being used as a trial for the new, tougher framework.

The inspection took place at the height of the safeguarding debate in the national press and things did not run smoothly for us. For those working in the school it was clear that Charters was better than we were in 2006 but the inspection wasn't heading to that conclusion. Without the co-headship I know that I would have cracked under the pressures that this imposed. Once again, the saga was long and complex but eventually we received an outstanding judgment.

The inspection grades were not flawless as in 2006 but, on the whole, the report gave a clear indication of where the school was and what it needed to do.

Actually that's being far too balanced as in both our opinions some of the judgments were incomprehensible particularly relating to community cohesion and teaching and learning.

It was probably fair enough that our nascent partnership received a good rating but we were encouraged that the report stated: 'The school's two co-headteachers... are very highly regarded and valued by the school community. The skills of the co-headteachers complement each other well and staff are extremely supportive of the new leadership arrangements.'

The management of the message to our community coming out of the inspection was important and here the co-headship was vital as we thrashed out a nuanced response that was neither too defensive or too blasé. As already mentioned, however, it was the emotional support more than anything else that allowed us to maintain a buoyant attitude with the school community during the period when the inspection findings and judgment were uncertain.

That all seems a lifetime away now as we gear up for the financial challenges facing all schools. We have to say, however, that for both of us there have been no downsides to co-headship so far. Headteachers we know often complain about the loneliness of the job but that's not an issue for us. Staff and students are clear about our various responsibilities and use us appropriately. Of course such a system relies on good communication – our offices adjoin and we have a superb PA – and we trust each other's judgments. Richard is a physicist and I am an English teacher and, as a psychological test showed, we have different but complementary leadership skills. It helped that the school

has achieved its best examination performance year on year with very good outcomes (82% 5A*-C including English and maths in 2013) and strong value added scores and that our Kirkland Rowell survey provided clear evidence of improved outcomes in nearly all areas. Importantly we are both able to teach and for us this is crucial as we feel assured in leading the school's focus on teaching and learning. It means that we have a legitimate response of our own when staff let us know their views on for example something like the new reporting system, or the changes to the observation paperwork.

So yes perhaps the co-headship choice was partially based on reluctance by Richard and I to take on sole responsibility for Charters' future but we are happier and more self-confident operating a co-headship and that is surely a good thing for the school. No-one in the school community asks us about it anymore and we recently advised on the model to two experienced deputy headteachers at a local school who are trialling out co-headship following the retirement of a long serving headteacher.

Whilst co-headship has worked for us, we understand why many schools are reluctant to move away from what can be seen as the strong, clear leadership model. Nevertheless, at a time when there will be a tranche of headteachers retiring and many senior leaders wary of the skewed work-life balance experienced by many headteachers, perhaps it is time for some schools to look at something different.

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Readiness to Learn: Developing outstanding engagement in the classroom

Mike Humphries
Deputy Headteacher
Stourport High School

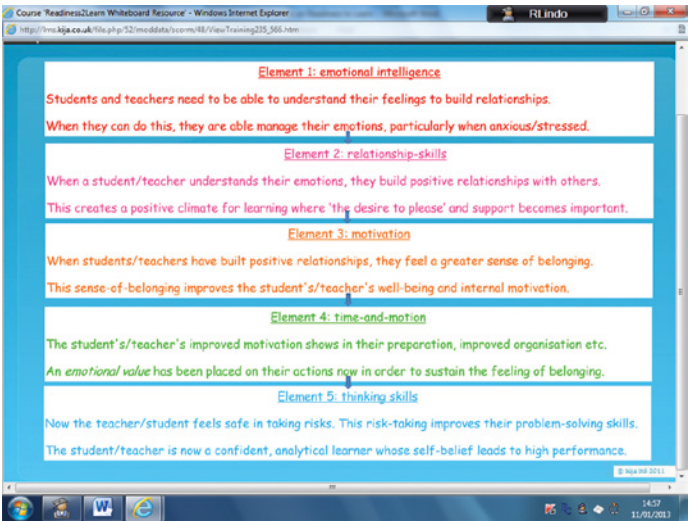
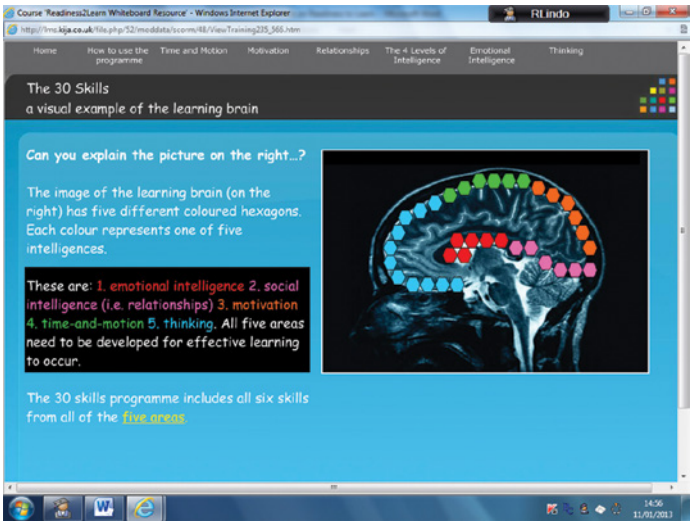
Emotional intelligence Relationships Motivation Time and motion Thinking

Empathy	Sensitivity	Sympathy	Dignity	Humility	Relativity
Listen	Praise	Gesture	Humour	Tone	Engage
Desire	Drive	Resilience	Stamina	Confidence	Pride
Organising	Arriving	Operating	Recording	Revising	Performing
Associate	Interrogate	Hypothesis	Categorise	Visualise	Hierarchy

‘Empathy’, ‘active listening’, ‘desire’, ‘tone’ and ‘gesture’ are familiar terms in lessons at Stourport High School – used by the students as much as the teachers. This is because, for the last six years, the school has used a ‘Readiness to Learn’ programme, which has helped students and parents to understand the set of skills, needed to become successful, independent learners. The programme is based around five ‘strands’ of skills (as displayed above). Each strand is in a specific order, beginning with ‘Emotional Intelligence’ (the red strand) and ending with ‘Thinking Skills’ (the blue strand).



The principle behind the five strands of learning is the idea that students need to have specific skills in place to be able to fully engage in lessons. Critically, many potential issues are pre-empted with the ‘Readiness to Learn’ programme as the majority of behaviour issues stem from students not having the necessary skills in place. The image of the learning brain (below) is a simple description of the five elements and how they work together to make students ‘learning ready’.



How is Readiness to Learn used in lessons...?

Readiness to Learn is used in lessons by the teacher deciding on the skill(s) needed for the group. The following steps are then implemented:

- the teacher displays the Readiness to Learn chart to the group (see example above)
- the teacher then asks the students to choose the skills they think are needed for the lesson to be successful
- once these skills have been agreed upon, the teacher then clicks on the relevant skill and shares the explanation of the skill with the group (see example 1).

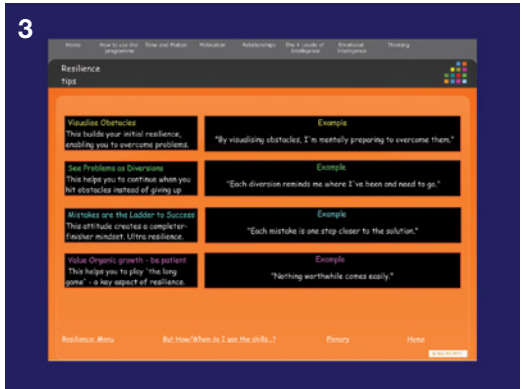
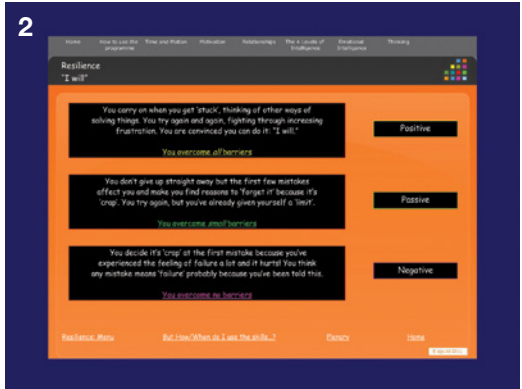
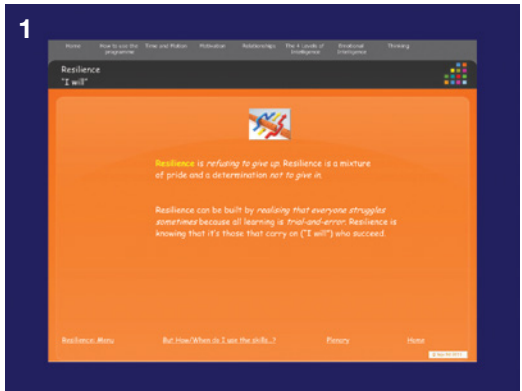
The teacher also shares ‘the 3 levels’ with the students to help them identify where they are and, critically, where they need to be (see example 2).

Finally, the teacher shares tips on how to use the skill in the lesson to support their students’ learning (see example 3).

How does Readiness to Learn impact on students’ learning?

The ‘Readiness to Learn’ programme provides teachers and students with a ‘map’ of essential skills for effective learning to occur. In addition, over time, it helps teachers to realise that learning is like ‘running two trains’ – train one is the subject and train two is the skills required to be successful in the subject.

It is only when both the subject and skills trains are running together that outstanding learning takes place. The Readiness to Learn programme is an evidence-based, tried-and-tested method of engaging, enabling, motivating and, ultimately, supporting students to become independent, confident, outstanding learners. What our teachers and students like is that it supports learning in an open and accessible way so, for example, if there’s a reminder needed about staying on task and working independently, the relevant material can be accessed very quickly and gone over with the students.



GPR: an alternative choice in the sixth form

Steve Wright
GPR Leader
Ford Pitt Grammar School

Students at Fort Pitt Grammar School (Chatham, Kent) have access to a wide range of A-level subjects in the sixth form. Some have also chosen to follow the Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives and Research (GPR) course. Our experience of this course has been overwhelmingly positive since we introduced it in 2009.

For a number of years, universities have expressed concern with regard to how prepared new undergraduates are for Higher Education. The two year Global Perspectives and Research course, incorporating a 4,500-5,000-word report in its second year, is one way, we believe, to prepare better our young people for university. Independent study is a key skill of the GPR course; the first year of the course ('Global Perspectives') lays the foundation for the Independent Research Report in year two. The Global Perspectives element can now be certificated as a freestanding one year 'Short' Course.

The specification from Cambridge International Examinations allows teachers a considerable degree of freedom. This is a skills-based course so the content can and will vary from year to year. The result is a flexible programme of study, capable of responding to world events and emerging issues as they happen. In this respect the course contains strong cross-curricular elements. It is not a case of following a set syllabus or over-prescribed content.

GPR develops skills of analysis, reflection, evaluation and communication. There is real engagement with contemporary issues and candidates are required to present their own perspective in addition to considering the views of others. So far, topics have been diverse and have included, amongst others:

- Artificial Intelligence*
- The Market in Human Organs*
- Climate Change*
- Online Communities*
- International Law*

Global issues will impact on the lives of current school students for decades to come and this course allows candidates to increase their awareness of topics they had perhaps not previously considered. Completing a report of up to 5,000 words on an academic topic of an individual's choice provides the opportunity to consider material which engages and interests in considerable depth.

Recent titles for the Independent Research Report at Fort Pitt have included:

- Is the search for the Higgs Boson worth it?*
- What are the global impacts of the economic development of China?*
- Has the traditional role of metaphysics declined in contemporary philosophy?*

Attainment is measured by 'Distinction', 'Merit' and 'Pass' awards, each one sub-divided into three. The top award of a 'Distinction 1' is above an A* award at A Level. The course is a real 'selling point': universities are accepting these qualifications as alternatives to an A-level and often in addition to A-level awards.



Fort Pitt students who have followed the GPR course have reflected on its relevance for study at Higher Education:

'Within two days of being here, I had to use my GPR and IRR skills. We had to use the database to access journals and use Google Scholar and the advanced search, all things I learnt through the GPR and IRR lessons. Also how to set out a bibliography and use footnotes. I'm way ahead of my peers.'

Fort Pitt student
(in her first year at university)

We feel that the GPR course has been a useful addition to our sixth form provision, supporting the development of wider independent research and study skills whilst increasing our students' confidence in their ability to cope with the H.E. course of their choice.

Good As You! Tackling homophobic language

Jenny Sutton Kirby
Associate Headteacher
Bradley Stoke Community School

Bradley Stoke Community School is a large, mixed, fairly new secondary school which is part of the Olympus Academy Trust. Based on the northern outskirts of Bristol, the school has maintained a very high attendance rate and a low exclusion rate since it opened.

Ofsted were very impressed with student behaviour and attitudes when they visited this year saying, "Students behaviour is outstanding and they feel very safe. They have an excellent understanding of the school's high expectations of behaviour and students' attitudes to others are first rate. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and ensures that students develop into highly informed and reflective young people."

In November 2012, as part of our National Anti-Bullying week focus, we asked our students to complete an on-line and anonymous survey about their own and others' language use in the school. As part of our self-evaluation cycle we felt that we needed to explore student attitudes to the use of homophobic language. Although this wasn't a noticeable problem, we were aware that the casual conversations about someone's pencil case, trainers or choice of hair style being "gay" needed to be addressed in a consistent way. This questionnaire also gave us the opportunity to explore whether other derogatory

language was seen as an issue by our students such as racist language and language about disability and ethnicity.

The survey results were then shared with all staff as part of an after school training session led by Susie Davis, our Director for Student Support. The session was split into two sections with session 1 being led by Jonathon Charlesworth, Director of EACH (Educational Action Challenging Homophobia) which explored attitudes to homophobia and why it matters to challenge them. Susie Davis and the PSHEE co-ordinator led session 2 where the results of the student survey were shared with staff. The results had been interesting as the general feedback from students was that they did sometimes hear homophobic language and that it was often directed towards students who weren't openly gay, lesbian or bisexual. Students were clear that they wanted us to challenge any words they heard. The punishments they suggested were very harsh, ranging from detentions being set to exclusion.

The training session with staff explored these issues further. There was a shared view that the use of homophobic language should be addressed in an educational and informative manner. Staff did not want to get into a cycle of punitive warnings and detentions, preferring instead to challenge the students through conversation and discussion and by asking students to reflect on the impact of their language choice.

We decided to design our own Bradley Stoke Community School "Good As You" t-shirts for a language focus week. The design featured a science and maths theme in order to chime with the LGBT focus for that year. Staff gathered for their normal Monday morning briefing and put on their t-shirts. We didn't give



students any warning – we just emerged on the corridors and in classrooms wearing the t-shirts. This approach caused quite a stir and certainly had an impact; conversations about the t-shirts and ideas broke out everywhere! The vast majority of staff wore their t-shirts every day as part of their normal work attire. Assemblies during this focus week also provided feedback to the students on their survey results and why being responsible with language really matters. Students then used tutor time to design a 'student language charter' and posters showing why it is important to use words in the right way – these are now up in every classroom.

'The school's openness and the strategies used to tackle harassment and educating students in the different forms of bullying are outstanding. One recent strategy involved all staff members wearing T-shirts highlighting homophobic bullying. The 'Good as You' shirts were highly effective in raising students' awareness of this form of bullying.'

Ofsted, April 2013

A good place on the Piazza Castello

Michael Bettles
Deputy Headteacher
Heathfield Community School

So, I was sat outside Baratti and Milanos on the Piazza Castello with Ian and Kim. It was early evening and already we each had in front of us a Bicerin (that heady concoction of espresso, gianndiuotto and milk) and some bits from the aperitivo buffets that the Torinese so love to eat before heading off to a restaurant for the serious and elegant business of the evening. We were sat under the marble arches of the baroque arcades that are one of the glories of Turin. The early evening sun was dappling the yellow stone and across the square we could see the Palazzo Madama, the edge of the Palazzo Reale and, in the distance, the Alps looked ever so slightly like white elephants.

We ordered another Bicerin each and looked across the tables to where Umberto Eco was enjoying a glass of Barbera with Italo Calvino. Ian glanced across and raised a glass to Umberto who acknowledged him before turning to Michael Caine who had joined them for an early evening Vermouth.

‘So, this must be the best of our international links?’ asked Ian, gesturing at the grandeur of the baroque splendour around him. ‘It must be this and our other Comenius projects. How many countries?’

Well certainly Norway, Latvia and Estonia...’ said Kim. ‘Not to mention Poland, Germany, Holland, the Czech Republic, Holland, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Croatia, Turkey, the Canary Islands...’

‘That’s still Spain,’ I said.

‘Shut up,’ said Kim. ‘The point is, that both staff and students have had amazing career and indeed life-expanding experiences. Team teaching art lessons in Latvia, discussing multiple intelligences with colleagues from Stuttgart and

Lima, Drama lessons about perceptions of gender with a class made up of English and Spanish students. Why, it’s possibly even more motivating than the opportunity to teach the EBacc....’

‘She’s right’ said Ian. ‘We’ve had countless opportunities for both staff and students through these superb Comenius projects – the professional development has been great and so many students and staff have made lasting friendships. The projects have developed an awareness amongst our students of other people and other cultures that we could not have done in any other way. The culmination of our current project will be when we host a conference at Heathfield with students and teachers from the Czech Republic, Holland, the Canary Islands and Italy....’

‘True,’ I said. ‘And for a school where 98% of the students are white UK heritage all of this international stuff is essential. By the way, is that Andrea Pirlo that has just sat down with Umberto? Shouldn’t he be at training? But don’t forget about Café Paramo – come on Ian, this was your brainchild.’

‘Oh, that silly old thing,’ he simpered modestly.

‘Café Paramo – what the bloody hell’s that?’ asked Michael Caine, who was eavesdropping as usual.

‘Well Michael,’ said Kim. ‘Thank you for your interest. It’s a unique project whereby Heathfield Community School, from the bustling metropolis of Taunton in Somerset buys, markets and sells the entire coffee harvest of a cooperative based in the Podoparcus mountains of Ecuador. How cool is that?’

‘As cool as driving a mini around the pavements of Turin?’



‘Cooler. Definitely. Although actually we don’t anymore because the cooperative received a better offer from Caffè Nero or somewhere, but we certainly did for a long time - from 2007. We now do the same with a harvest from the Dominican Republic. The coffee is sourced by a local coffee merchant, roasted and vacuum sealed in their factory and a parent agreed to provide us with the sticky labels.’

‘Our focus, therefore, was simply on designing the labels and associated merchandise (coffee mugs, t-shirts et al) and on marketing and selling the product. Then every penny that we make in profit goes back to support the education of the farmers’ children. Nor is this cultural imperialism – they have a product that we want (it is very good coffee) and we are prepared to pay a good price for it. That’s business.’

‘This has led, over time, to a whole-school project that has spread its tentacles out to so many areas of school life. It forms the basis for projects in Art and in English and next year there will be a whole-school multicultural focus on the Dominican Republic.’

‘And it has longevity: the illustrations that we have shown you here are the third generation of designs to be used for the labels.’

‘The students have a company with a board of directors and groups dedicated to design, marketing, international links and finance.’

‘Like most companies Café Paramo has had its ups and downs but the commitment and passion of the students and the teachers has pulled us through. Nor should we forget the unwavering support of our suppliers – Miles Coffee – and the fabulous product that the farmers provide us with.’

‘And there is, of course, the celebrity cachet that has come with the project. Students (not teachers) have been asked to give presentations at the Said Business School at Oxford University, Asia House in London and at Brunel University – where they (students not teachers) have met Michael Eavis, Colin Greenwood, the MD of the Fairtrade Foundation and Ragee Omaar. Next year their presentation will be in Sweden.’

‘Ragee Omaar?’ said Michael Caine. ‘No way – he’s a legend. Did you get his autograph?’

‘Actually,’ said Ian. ‘It must have been a great honour for all of those three to meet such committed and articulate students. Another Bicerin anyone?’

I looked up to see that Eco and Calvino had dragged Caine off to Parco Valentino for a scratch game of football – and they’d roped Primo Levi in to go in goal. Cunningly they’d waited until Pirlo had gone to the loo – he simply couldn’t meet the standard.

‘But look,’ said Kim. ‘The Education internships with students from America have also been a great success...’

‘And, once again, we think that this is something that we are the only ones doing – offering internships to students from a top liberal arts college in New England.’

‘But what is a liberal arts college Mike?’

‘Well Kim they tend to be small colleges in the US that focus on undergraduate study and they include in their ranks some of the most prestigious institutions in America – such as Bates College, which is where our interns come from.’

‘I for one have never heard of them,’ said Ian ferociously fiddling with a Gianduiotto. ‘I bet no-one famous ever went to one.’

‘Hmm...not unless you call Barack Obama, Hilary Clinton or Martin Luther King famous....’

‘I do.’

‘Good, so back to my point. The idea, once again is to help to open the eyes of our students to the wide world out there – and how exciting it all is! We started out a couple of years ago by offering internships in the performing arts (we have the Tacchi Morris Theatre complex on site) and one of our first interns from Bates was an African-American dancer from New York. How cool is that?’

‘Very.’

‘Indeed. Very. And the kids at Heathfield and at local primaries were amazed, entranced and motivated by her energy, enthusiasm and eminent hipsterishness. So we extended this last year to have not just Performing Arts interns but also general education interns and, once again, they brought a glimpse of a different world into our tiny corner of Somerset. This time the students came from Dallas, Chicago, Austin and Baltimore.’

The waiters were starting to put the chairs on the tables as we stood up and walked away from the café. The lights were still on inside the café and the lights and the glass and the fine wooden bar made it still a clean, well-lighted place. And, as we walked towards the high dome of the Mole Antonelliana, we were all thinking what good fun it all was and how from good fun can come very good learning...



‘It takes a great deal of courage to stand up and speak’: Oracy at Oxford Spires Academy

Helen Woolley
English Specialism Co-ordinator
Oxford Spires Academy



When Nicholas Soames congratulated Oxford Spires students for the standard of their speech, which enabled them to win the Churchill Public Speaking trophy, the great orator’s grandson left me lost for words. This victory represented the progress we had made as a ‘Talking School’ and was achieved by our pupils’ winning speech, rather fittingly on the Churchillian value of courage. Indeed if the Churchillian axiom that it takes ‘a great deal of courage to stand up and speak’ is true of students then it is surely true that for teachers ‘it takes a great deal of courage to sit down and listen.’

In 2010, staff at Oxford Spires initiated an action research project investigating the links between formalised discussion, debate and academic progress with a pilot group of year 7 students. Staff from the English, humanities and science departments planned lessons collaboratively and focused upon imparting key skills in a way that transcended the subject barriers inherent in a secondary school. Via this ‘Talking Schools’ approach, teachers worked to embed ideas of oracy, critical thinking and analysis to enable students to improve their oral competence and confidence. Students learnt about respecting other people’s opinions, ‘tracking’ the person who was speaking and viewing ideas in a holistic way thus enabling them to apply and transfer these skills across the curriculum.

These students made better than expected progress during the two terms of this pilot; particularly in English and humanities. In English, they made 2.8 sublevels of progress; compared with an average of 1.2 sublevels of progress being made in year 7 as a whole. In science they achieved 0.3 sublevels higher and in humanities the average progress was an impressive 3.8 sub levels compared against an average of 2.6. Whilst this empirical evidence highlighted their improved knowledge and skills, anecdotally staff also noted significant improvements in their ability to communicate ideas, to disagree with

arguments in a positive way and to recognise bias and challenge assumptions. This enthusiasm spilled out of lessons and into an embryonic Debate and Public Speaking Club. As we won prestigious competitions, such as the Oxford University’s Christ Church Jacobsthal Award and the Churchill Public Speaking Competition, more students decided that they wished to be award-winning orators. By 2012, I had to move the club to a larger venue to accommodate its swollen membership. Enthusiastic students even complained about the exam-induced hiatus in competitions in the summer term and demanded we host our own competition for Oxfordshire schools. ‘Spires Speaks’ welcomed judges from the Department for Education and Blenheim Palace and invited students to speak on the topic ‘What matters to me.’

“What matters to us at Oxford Spires is using our students’ oratorical abilities to further their progress both inside and outside of the curriculum because if this is what can be achieved by a small group of teachers collaborating over a short period of time, I excitedly await our students’ finest hour.”

In-class support at The Convent of Jesus and Mary Language College

Laura Normoyle
SEN Administrator
The Convent of Jesus & Mary Language College



Within our enhanced learning department we have a team of nine enhanced learning assistants covering a range of specialisms including EAL, SEN, high achievers and speech and language. Within our team we have developed a range of ways to approach in-class support whether it be focused on behaviour or learning. We identified the importance of visual stimuli when working with our pupils on the SEN register and decided to tackle this by providing each ELA with their own, personalised ‘EAL Pack’.

Each pack contains a personalised SEN register, small whiteboards, writing frames and resources. These packs are then filled with useful resources relating to the subjects and key stages supported by the particular member of staff. They are taken to every lesson, and are adjusted as the member of staff sees fit. Our resource library allows ELAs to add to their pack when needed.

The personalised SEN registers are particularly helpful in providing the staff with all the relevant information regarding specific needs and strategies for the pupils in each class. Notes are then added to the registers as seen fit, allowing us to discuss useful strategies with the team in weekly meetings. The use of small whiteboards in class has proved extremely useful in allowing us to communicate with a pupil without disturbing the lesson. One way that we use these boards is to prompt pupils with the keywords for the lessons, allowing them to form more articulate verbal and written answers. These boards also prove very useful for pupils with memory or motor issues, which prevent them from copying from the board at the same rate as their peers.

For our staff that support in maths, we have a range of resources that can be included in their packs, from counters for those of a basic level, through to equations for those in KS4. Decimal and negative number lines have also been

particularly helpful in providing our SEN pupils with a more visual approach to the topics.

For staff that support in English, we use a variety of writing frames, sentence starters and descriptive prompters. While allowing us to explain structure to pupils, these also provide us with tools that the pupils feel comfortable using on their own. Having a speech and language specialist in our department has also opened the door to a wide range of strategies when supporting written work, for which she has created resources to help implement these strategies.

For staff that support in other subjects we have a range of specialised resources. Many of these are created after an ELA sees a need from observing the lessons in which they provide support. These needs are then relayed to me, I then either source the materials, or design and produce personalised resources.

We have found that these packs allow our staff to support lessons more successfully without disturbing the teacher and the flow of the lessons. The personalisation allows each member of staff to adapt their method of support depending on subject and pupil. These packs prove invaluable in preparation and implementation of support, with the pupils responding positively to the opportunity to work with our enhanced learning assistants.

Transforming a design and technology department

Andy Loadman
Director of Area for design and technology
Grange Technology College

Grange Technology College is an 11-18 inner city school in Bradford. Attainment on entry is in the bottom 10% nationally, only 11% of students are at or above their chronological reading ages and CAT scores are significantly below the national average. In excess of 70% of students have English as an additional language.

In 2011 the design and technology (DT) department at Grange was in a delicate state. Long and short-term illness and maternity cover had taken its toll on the consistent approach to teaching and learning pupils respond to. Various supply staff did the best jobs they could but the quality of teaching still fell short. The department itself was a corridor to other subject areas so it was difficult to control the flow of pupils and create a stimulating effective display area. In truth the department was falling down and staff morale was at a low.

In these challenging times for the subject we explain how the department has transformed its profile from a poor performing department to a successful

one in three years. GCSE results over the past 3 years have moved from 32% - 51 % A* - C, Level 6+ has increased from 20% - 54%, numbers in 6th form have increased. Local universities and businesses are now contacting the department to offer work placements. Other departments are now copying the learning environments started in the department and the school is now looking at using the same format of the department digital magazine for their prospectus.

May 2011 saw the start of a true transformation for the department. A new school had been built and was ready to move into. DT had its own wing, big classrooms, lots of wall space and a new department. Staff had come back or had left so it was an opportunity for a new beginning. We as the management of DT, felt that we had a great opportunity to rebuild morale, bond and develop as a team. We started off by sharing the vision for the department in the form of a display in the department office. The plan was broken up into 4 key areas of teaching, learning, targets and collaboration. Everything we talked about in the department meetings or feedback from lesson observations was always linked back to this. Teachers were encouraged to add their own work to the wall for others to see. This was like our mission statement and was a clear visual reminder to all in the department, teachers and support staff, as to where we were going. The department began to buy into this vision.

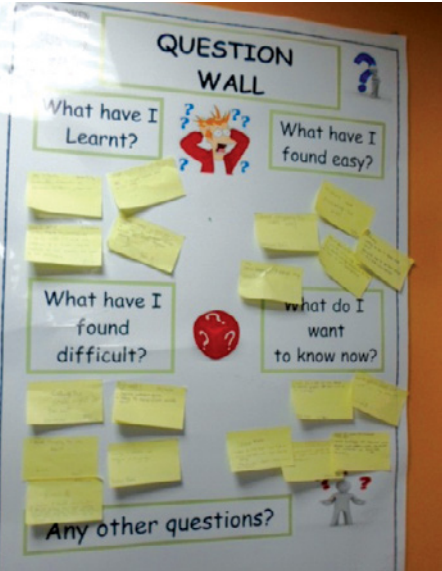
We now started to work on the other areas of the department such as the wall space in the corridors and classrooms. As we were in a new school we wanted to create a positive, vibrant learning environment for pupils and staff to use as part of their everyday teaching and learning experience. Posters were created based around SCAMPER, Thinking Hats

and PMI (Positive, Minus, Improvements) tools taken from the DT National Strategy material. Later other support tools such as DRS (Describe, Reflect, Speculate) were also developed and linked to Blooms Taxonomy, again displayed and used through teaching. These basic but key messages helped our pupils to structure their work and to develop their learning. We then decided to expand these successful environments into the corridors around the department so providing all passing traffic with a glimpse of what was happening in the classrooms, producing 'learning walls'.

It is very straightforward to make a display in DT as we all have interesting products to photograph. However we have also made sure that all 'pretty displays' contain the relevant information to aid a student's development such as levels, feedback, keywords, student reflection and not the 'neat nonsense' that sometimes fills department walls.

In department meetings teachers are encouraged to bring along a teaching and learning aid they could share with the rest of the department. Ten minutes was and still is always set aside for a 'Pass it on' session.

This brought the department together and supported the skill of sharing material; something as a DT department we are very good at in the classroom, but maybe not as good with each other. Again this was always brought back to the improvement plan and how it would help to develop teaching and learning. Samples of pupils' work are also regularly brought to the department meetings as well, to be shared firstly and then standardised and moderated so a consistent department view is given to staff as to what is required to produce good learning. This is then filtered down to pupils through the use of the learning walls again.



To ensure good teaching and learning was taking place in lessons we developed an informal 10 min walk through. We used a simple format called PMD, a development of the PMI idea. We would write down what was P, positive, about the lesson, what was M, missing, and what area they could D, develop further. Verbal feedback was given to the teacher as well as a copy of this sheet for their records. The teachers found this supportive rather than the threatening tool of a formal lesson observation. As a management team it gave us a great snapshot of how the department was really changing and blossoming into a dynamic and creative working environment. We firmly believe that a successful department looks at developing the skills of its teachers as well as its pupils. We have trusted them to develop their skills and their working environments and they have responded to this brilliantly.

All teachers in the department now have high expectation of all the pupils. Pupils also have high expectations of themselves. This has been shown and shared with others though the department magazine. We wanted to widen our audience and create a magazine that could be sent to a variety of different educators and businesses. The department magazine is an annual snapshot of what the pupils have produced in that year. We have sent this to our local primary schools, neighbouring secondary schools, local businesses and various teaching associations. It has been met with very positive praise which is a great boost for staff and as well as those students involved. Andy Mitchell, from the Design and Technology Association, wrote the foreword and we broke the magazine down into different sections, i.e. KS3, KS4 Product Design, Food Technology. Using 'Issuu', a free web based software that allows you to convert a PDF into an online magazine, i.e. the pages turn, we were able to provide an electronic version of the magazine so potentially reaching a wider audience and reduce printing costs, which means we can publish different versions throughout the year.



We, as a department, are all very proud of the work we have done over the last three years at Grange and have transformed the department and the subject to be one of the most successful in the school. We made a very conscious decision in 2011 to focus on the simple things and do them well. The rest we felt would fall into place, which it seems to be doing. The staff and students are engaged and challenged on a daily basis and enjoy attending their lessons which is evident in the work and results that are now being produced. The future for the subject still seems a little uncertain but we feel the department is in a much stronger place to take on these new challenges with a committed staff who are determined to succeed.

STARS

Adele Klitou
Director of Teaching , Learning
and Assessment
Holy Family Catholic School
and Sixth Form



Patrycja Kowalczyk, a year 9 student
and member of the STARS project,
explains the work that they have been
undertaking as student researchers

In order for students’ voices to be heard, Holy Family have introduced a Students as Researchers project, also known as the ‘STARS’ project, to improve the way the school works by hearing and recognising the opinion of pupils as well as staff members. In 2012, we started the project with a specific focus on low-level disruption. We conducted research on the Bethany room, which is our inclusion room. We wanted to find out why students were sent to the Bethany room and if more boys than girls were sent there. We also looked into subject areas and form time to analyse where there was more low-level disruption and why.

Firstly, the pupils who volunteered to be a part of STARS were trained on how to research and plan an investigation effectively. We then followed this up by preparing surveys and questionnaires and conducting focus groups with students and teachers. We were given a time period of approximately 8 weeks to collate our data and then we had a further session on how we could analyse it and draw conclusions from what we had collated. This really tested our time management as well as making us

consider and think about the validity of our research methods and outcomes. Once we had analysed our data and drawn our conclusions we were able to pinpoint a range of suggestions of how low level disruption could be addressed and how the Bethany Room could be used more effectively.

We shared the outcomes of our projects in a range of forums. We presented to the senior team, delivered training to staff through our internal programme and then came into school on an Inset day in June where we presented to the wider staff. We suggested that to make sure all students remain engaged, lessons should include a range of learning styles and that practical elements should be included in all lessons. We also found out that students were sent to the Bethany Room for a range of reasons and that some were more serious than others. We felt this is something that needed to change. As a result of this hard work and dedication the STARS pupils showed throughout this investigation and because of our feedback, we are now proud to say that the Bethany room in our school has changed dramatically into a much more positive place where students can finally realise how major or minor their actions were and have the chance to reflect on the consequences.

From our feedback about lessons the teachers developed a ‘teacher character’ outlining the characteristics that should feature in every lesson, which was presented to all staff and was put in the teacher’s planners. We then developed a student equivalent outlining the expectations of all students in our school. It was incredible to come back to school in September and find that our character (who we named SAM) was in all classrooms, the student journals and the school prospectus. In conclusion, we had a great facilitator Miss Chopra who guided us through the project and we are proud of the changes that the school have made. We wish to continue this project and have now become mentors to the new year 8 STARS group. The new cohort of students are looking at different areas so it’s really exciting to see what will happen, only this time we will give a chance for other pupils to be heard while we, as more experienced researchers will mentor them. Wish us luck.

STARS Testimonials

‘In my opinion, Students as Researchers/STARS Project has been a great and beneficial experience for my peers and I who participated in it. This project improved my skills as a researcher, which is a very valuable skill to have, as you need it throughout life. I can now proudly say that I have made a positive contribution in changing our school for the better. Thanks to the help of my peers who stood by me all the way, Students as Researchers/STARS Project enabled us to develop another skill - that is the ability to work well as a team. I would also like to thank Miss Chopra and Dr Stone because without them this would not have been possible. I am now able to include this as one of my achievements in my portfolio which will be included in my CV in the future. To show my appreciation to Dr Stone and Miss Chopra, I decided to assist and support the new members of Student as Researchers as a mentor, along with some of my peers. So they can learn and benefit from our experience and they will hopefully in the future be mentors themselves to the next generation of Student as Researchers/STARS Project.’

Anita-Rose Turay

‘Being a part of the STARS team was a very tremendous experience. I was able to step out of my comfort zone and work with different people who I didn’t know then, but are my friends now. I gained confidence and support from my teammates, which helped me present to the whole teaching staff and, surprisingly, the governing body. Being given an opportunity as prestigious as this enables me to speak up and give opinions, interview teachers and other members of staff, and trust the people I am working with. The feeling of being able to change something for the better of the school (the Bethany Room assignments and SAM) was really rewarding. Mentoring the next batch of year 8 researchers was not a chance but a choice – looking at them doing the work made me remember who I was a year ago and who I am now. I wouldn’t want to leave it for the world.’

Shania Essah Aurelio

A quiet revolution in religious education

Deborah Weston
Director of Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development
Mulberry School for Girls

Deborah is the Executive Officer for NATRE and the Company Secretary of the REC.

As the capacity of local authorities has diminished, many of the Standing Advisory Councils on RE (SACREs are the bodies responsible for this locally determined subject in each area), have found themselves inadequately resourced, in some cases to such an extent that they are unable to carry out their statutory duties to monitor provision for RE or to produce the vital local Agreed Syllabus. Very few local authority advisers, who previously would have managed and steered these groups remain in post, creating an even greater challenge for SACREs at their termly meetings.

It has been well reported that the exclusion of the subject from the humanities category of the English Baccalaureate and a range of other measures including the exclusion from the list of subjects that attract teacher training bursaries has resulted in some 'unintended' consequences for the provision for RE. Even the Secretary of State, addressing a Church of England seminar earlier this year said he believed that the compulsory nature of RE would be enough to safeguard the subject, irrespective of its exclusion from the EBacc. He admitted, 'RE has suffered as a result of my belief that the protection of it was sufficient and I don't think that I've done enough.'

To add insult to injury, despite a promise from the Secretary of State to the contrary, RE was not included in the programme to review the school curriculum.

In this context, the headlines from Ofsted's most recent report on religious education (2013)² came as no surprise. Included in the findings is the disturbing statement that, 'Weaknesses in provision for RE meant that too many pupils were leaving school with low levels of subject knowledge and understanding.'

There has been a quiet revolution brewing in the world of religious education. In the face of major changes to the educational systems in England, structures and systems that have supported the subject for more than half a century are becoming weakened, in some cases fatally. In some schools, this apparently 'compulsory' subject is disappearing off the timetable and teachers, especially those in the primary phase report feeling ill-equipped to deliver RE and ill-informed about where to find any source of support.

Faced with these challenges, the subject community led by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales³ (an umbrella body which serves as a forum for all those organisations with an interest and involvement in RE) decided to act. If the government would not conduct a review of the RE curriculum, they would have to do it themselves. They raised over £100,000 through charitable donations and their own efforts.

The RE subject review⁴ and a revised non-statutory National Framework for RE was launched in Westminster on Wednesday, 23rd October 2013. In the foreword to this publication, the Secretary of State; Michael Gove writes:

'All children need to acquire core knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices of the religions and worldviews which not only shape their history and culture but which guide their own development. The modern world needs young people who are sufficiently confident in their own beliefs and values that they can respect the religious and cultural differences of others, and contribute to a cohesive and compassionate society.'

The review makes six recommendations for structuring and sustaining RE in the 21st century spanning improvements to monitoring systems, an examination of the existing legal 'settlement' for the subject, arrangements for the training of teachers, improvements to assessment, the development of closer RE networks across the RE community and the promotion of coherence and progression between the 4-14 programmes of study and 14-19 examinations.



The REC plans to work with and through its member organisations to pursue these recommendations they have established an All Party Parliamentary Group⁵ chaired by Stephen Lloyd MP to support the subject and to conduct a number of high level enquiries including one into the training of and support for teachers of RE and most recently the contribution of RE to community relations, in partnership with the National Association of Teachers of RE, they are also developing work public relations to public understanding of the role and importance of RE.

Everywhere, green shoots are starting to appear. The RE Online website⁶ now provides teachers with a one-stop shop for exciting resources and information on all aspects of RE. The National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) is about to launch a new package for members⁷ which will include access to advisory support suitable for senior leaders and teachers of RE, together with its current package of a termly magazine, curriculum resource, access to local groups⁸ and a professional journal. There are short films available to explain RE to parents⁹ and some to exemplify great classroom ideas in action; ideal for training or staff meetings¹⁰. In collaboration with NATRE, the DfE has now published clear guidance on the provision

for RE in academies¹¹ dispelling some of the myths that previously surrounded the place of RE in this sector. An RE Quality Mark¹² has been well received by schools and after a successful pilot is now being rolled out around the country. Religious education now appears on the list of subject specialisms for specialist leaders in education and free conference for lead practitioners, SLEs and AST will take place at the end of January 2014¹³ with the hope that this group can train as REQM assessors and help to raise standards in partnership with local schools. The REC's 'Young Ambassadors for RE' scheme has enabled teams of secondary students to develop their public speaking skills whilst advocating for RE to audiences within their own schools and beyond, including to MPs.

A quiet revolution this may be but the change in approach in relation to subject leadership is quite significant. The experiences from RE demonstrate that the old adage is often true: 'If you want a job done properly, do it yourself!' This means that if you are aiming to raise standards in RE in your own school, it is probably not worth waiting for government initiatives; when people who really care about a subject work collaboratively with schools, some really exciting things can happen.

- 1 www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/10159937/Michael-Gove-quality-of-religious-education-has-dropped.html
- 2 www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/religious-education-realising-potential
- 3 <http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk>
- 4 <http://resubjectreview.recouncil.org.uk/re-review-report>
- 5 <http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/appg>
- 6 www.reonline.org.uk
- 7 www.natre.org.uk/join.php
- 8 www.natre.org.uk/localgroups.php
- 9 www.natre.org.uk/explore/video.php
- 10 www.natre.org.uk/good_learning
- 11 <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/r/re%20and%20collective%20worship%20in%20acads%20and%20fs%20qanda.pdf>
- 12 <http://reqm.org>
- 13 www.natre.org.uk/docstore/291213_Collab_outreach.pdf

Teaching Excellence Leading Learning: an innovative approach to sharing good practice at Oakgrove School

Chloe Boon
Teacher
Oakgrove School

Excellent teaching is at the heart of Oakgrove School and over the past few years several new initiatives have been introduced, enabling staff to share good practice across the entire curriculum. Outstanding teaching has always been important to ensure students are continually learning and progressing, but with Ofsted now having a particular focus on this area, the need to maintain excellent teaching and learning across all areas of the school is essential.

At Oakgrove, central to sharing our good practice in teaching and learning, are the differentiated programmes of professional development we run. The Teaching Excellence Leading Learning group (TELL) meet on a monthly basis and focus on sharing good teaching ideas and practice; as this group is available for all staff to join there are representatives from all subject areas, which allows teachers to discuss strategies across the curriculum and often leads to new and more innovative ways of teaching different topics. Another branch of this programme is the NQT TELL group, which is an opportunity for our NQTs to share their good practice, as well gaining new ideas from others they can embed in their own planning and classroom activities.

Discussions in the TELL group often highlight areas where staff need more support or particular development and this information informs our teaching and learning twilight sessions. In addition to this, Ofsted criteria, marking reviews and lesson observations are all methods of identifying where teachers need to develop their skills and good practice can be shared among staff to support those who need more guidance. Twilights are led by a variety of staff including subject leaders, our dedicated teaching and learning team and members of the TELL group. These sessions take on a variety of forms including carousels, whereby teachers work in small groups to try different activities themselves; market stalls where new teaching ideas are

introduced and discussed in a group of staff from different subject areas, to show how teaching strategies are transferable across the curriculum, and finally triads which involve staff working in small groups to develop new teaching methods, trial these and through observations of each other, assess how far these new approaches have been successful in the classroom.

Another approach to sharing good practice is through our 'Innovate' magazine, which is published twice every academic year and focuses on a particular theme, such as inspiring sixth form learners, literacy, assessment, progress and numeracy. A range of departments are keen to contribute articles as well as members of the TELL group. This is another useful way of sharing good practice across the school and the benefits of the magazine mean that the publication can be saved and referred to throughout the year.

As staff at Oakgrove we appreciate and value the benefits of sharing our good practice in teaching and learning, but we also recognise the importance of student feedback and this has led to the introduction of a student voice group consisting of 25 mixed ability year 9 students. Teachers meet weekly with the group and discuss different aspects of their learning. A recent focus has been on marking, and students have been asked to identify features of marking that are most beneficial to them.

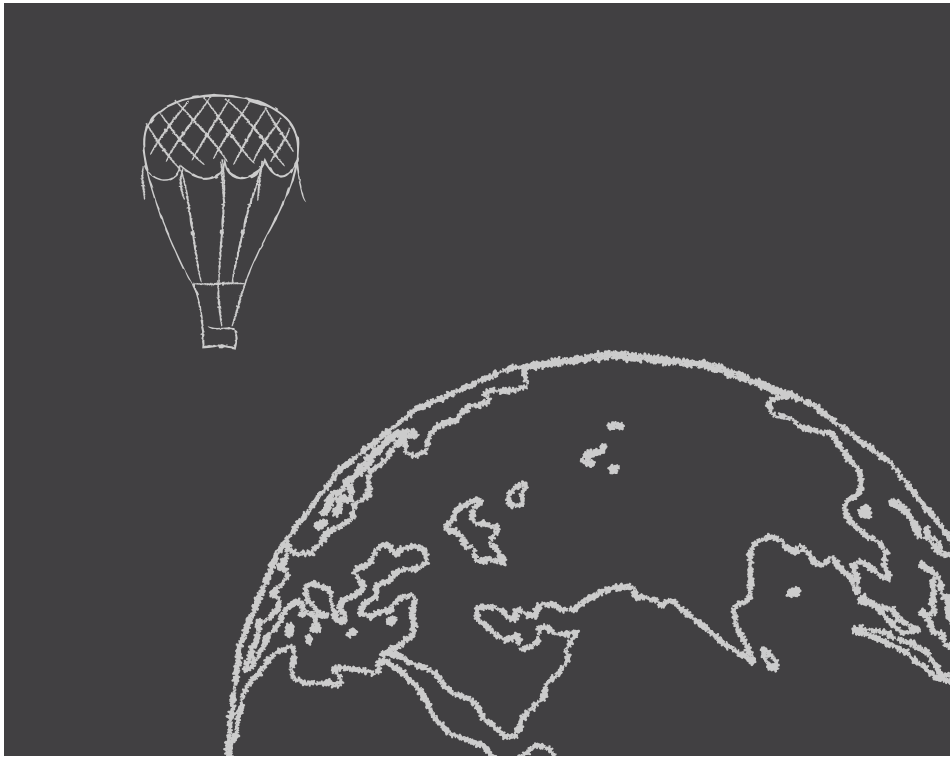


This research has led to a twilight session, which involves teachers considering what they believe are the most important elements when marking and this will be compared to what students have said. This should lead to some interesting discussions and will help staff to be more proactive with their marking, to ensure they provide the best feedback possible to help students improve their levels.

The range of opportunities for sharing our good practice in teaching and learning at Oakgrove are diverse and with the fast pace in which we work at school, staff value the chance to regularly reflect on their teaching methods. With our students today constantly changing and adapting to the modern world, it is important that our teaching in the classroom reflects this through relevant and innovative means, and most importantly always meets the needs of our learners to ensure maximum progress.

Improvement through innovation

Milton Bowers
Assistant Headteacher
Wood Green Academy



Wood Green Academy's recent Ofsted Report (2012) identified the Innovation Unit as a key strength of the school in raising and "developing the quality of teaching" in the school and contributing to raising the "quality of professional development" in creating an environment where discussion about 'learning' is highly valued.

The Innovation Unit (IU) is a group of teaching staff (full and associate members) committed to sharing good practice and developing cutting-edge teaching and learning strategies. The IU is made of 8 full members who put on weekly demo lessons, contribute to the sharing of good practice at the marketplace, contribute to the teaching and learning journal 'Edgewares' and undertake one video lesson per term under the 'lesson watch' system.

In addition to this the full members are expected to undertake a research project focussed around one of the Academy Improvement Plans main teaching and learning priority areas.

The role of associate members in the IU has been developed over the past year to include greater involvement in the marketplace demonstrations as well as having

the opportunity to contribute to lessons demonstrations on an 'ad hoc' basis. Associate membership is opened up to 'support staff' and we currently have three LSAs who focus on raising achievement in SEND as well as the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning in SEND

An abridged version of the research project produced by Sarah Boddison, a member of the Innovation Unit follows.

You can read more research projects, covering a range of subject areas on the Leading Edge website:
www.ssatuk.co.uk/ssat/support/achievement/leading-edge

Facilitating the development of creative, independent learning with a specific focus on listening skills in MFL

Sarah Boddison . Innovation Unit Project . Wood Green Academy

Research has often found that pupils put listening tasks far from the top of their list of most enjoyed modern foreign language activities. Based on the results of a pre-teaching questionnaire, a majority of pupils disclosed that they 'hated' or 'disliked' listening exercises, mainly due to the fact that they often take place under test-like conditions. Around a third of pupils said they have little confidence in their ability to succeed in such tasks and that listening to something only twice (which they do in practise for the GCSE formal exam) was often not enough to get a good and well-rounded understanding of the exercise. Around a third of pupils said that they frequently get bored or distracted whilst listening and this certainly supports my observations as a classroom teacher. Pupils often adopt a very passive approach to listening and can become despondent, as listening exercises can just be a case of ticking boxes or matching up letters with numbers. Modern foreign language learners do not seem to be actively engaging with listening (Nunan, 1989), an approach I was striving to achieve through this project.

The purpose of this project was to plan and implement a sequence of lessons using a range of activities designed to develop pupils' listening skills by making it a more active process. The project was designed to make pupils realise that, when used appropriately, listening exercises can be used as a vehicle to promote overall language learning, hopefully resulting in improved attainment levels across all skills. Raising achievement in the GCSE language listening exam has persistently been a

focus for intervention and as a classroom teacher; ways in which I can improve the percentage of pupils achieving their target grade in this skill has been a priority in recent years. Disappointing results in this skill have frequently caused pupils to miss out on their target grade.

Extensive research has been carried out on how to conduct listening exercises in language lessons. Chambers suggests that listening is neither a simple nor a passive activity. It's not just a matter of 'switching' on the ear and letting it happen, which is often what pupils and teachers think. We can draw from this that pupils often need 'warming up' to achieve their potential in listening, so, I tried to implement the idea of a "pre-listening activity" which will hopefully rouse curiosity and allow pupils to get an initial feel for the text. For example, lead-in tasks such as prediction of key words using thinking maps, playing word associations or discussing pictures, help to create a context for the listening exercise before the pupils start listening for detail. These strategies guide pupils into the activity slowly by hooking them into the theme and allowing them to focus firstly on the global meaning rather than the detail - how many people are talking? Are they male or female? What context are they in? What key words gave it away?

As Pachler and Field (2009) acknowledge, progression in a language does not only take place within one skill, rather, improvement in one will inevitably lead to progression in another. I drew from this that in order to promote listening skills in the classroom; I would not need to simply do listening exercises. I could incorporate

reading, writing and speaking exercises and as a result their listening skills would improve as well. For example, I included various writing tasks; short dictations, vocabulary tests, memory games, gap fills, find the hidden errors and pupils had to use their listening skills in order to succeed in these tasks. Miller (2002) and Turner (2002) both acknowledge that listening can not only be used in a communicative context where pupils are trying to understand spoken language, but that it can enhance other skills and can play a supportive role in enhancing learners' understanding of a foreign language as a whole. I aimed to provide an eclectic approach to language learning, primarily boosting listening but in turn improving everything else too.

In Fautley and Savage's work Teaching for Creativity (2007), the notion of learning in groups is discussed. They explore the notion of social constructivism, which asserts that the acquisition of knowledge can often be greater when working collaboratively rather than independently. I incorporated group activities into my sequence of lessons in which pupils can use group/pair activity in an attempt to improve their listening skills. In preparation for their speaking controlled assessment pupils were practising their oral presentation in pairs - where one pupil had to listen to the other's exam piece and offer words of improvement. Here, listening was used as a tool to support team working and memory skills enhancing exam confidence. Pupils also had the opportunity to watch a video in which they could later discuss their findings in groups.

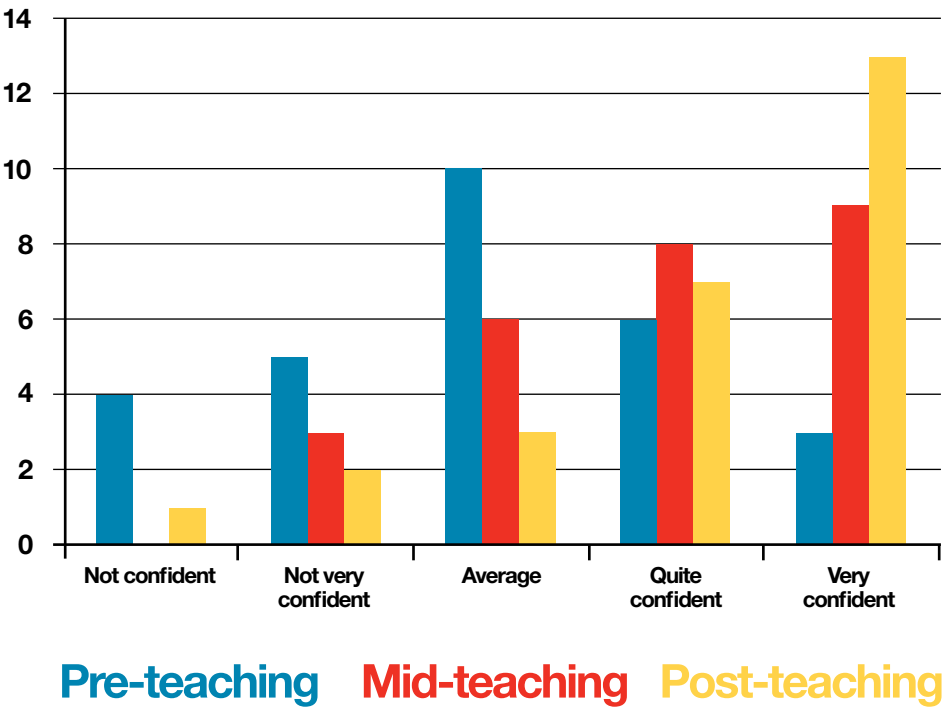
For some, group work is a desirable way of working and this is a strategy that can allow pupils to achieve more; being with others, can often boost pupils’ confidence and self-esteem. These group exercises took away the usual ‘test atmosphere’ which listening exercises take place in and allowed pupils to experience opportunities where they felt relaxed when listening to French.

Research has also suggested that listening is usually used as a source of formative assessment in that listening tests pupil’s knowledge at a certain point in time. For example, MFL teachers often teach 10 new words and then play a listening tape to see whether pupils have understood these 10 words. Hargreaves (2005) suggests that assessment for learning should take the form of pupils reflecting on their own learning. I tried to make assessment for learning pupil-centred so it acts in line with a whole school and department initiative and forces listening to be an active skill. I have included exercises where pupils use their listening skills merely as way of ‘checking’ their work. Listening would then provide them with a means of setting themselves targets to improve.

Overall these strategies really did work and I noticed a grand difference in a number of areas: confidence, motivation to listen, differentiation, behaviour and attainment. From my own observations and informal chats with the students, pupils appeared much more confident about tackling listening exercises and their mock GCSE paper than they were before, and I think this was due to how their experience of listening and practising listening changed.

Pupils relished the experience of staging and scaffolding listening activities. Almost every lesson I employed pre and post-listening activities which contextualised the main listening activity and this

A bar graph illustrating how pupils’ confidence levels have risen over time



strategy really worked. In lessons, I found that pupils really enjoyed predicting vocabulary and content as I set it up as a competition, this made pupils, in particular the boys, very eager to listen to the text to see how many words on their lists were mentioned. Pre and post listening activities also lent themselves well to differentiation and I feel I catered for all differing abilities in the class. They provided extra structure and support to the lower ability pupils who kept their list of words in front of them during the exercise to refer to and those of a higher ability were coerced into finding synonyms or antonyms for their predicted words. As all learners were sufficiently supported or challenged, I also found an improvement in behaviour. The pupils are a fairly well behaved class regardless, but I noticed a lot of the low level disruption from the higher ability pupils had disappeared

as they were now being constantly challenged or could see some improvement in their ability. This, in turn, led to a reduction in the amount of referrals that were written during this period in comparison to the first part of the course.

The second aim was that developing students’ listening skills would help their capabilities in the spoken and written forms of the language too. I used mini dictations in an attempt to enhance other areas of languages as well as listening and to some good effect.

Pupils’ written work (which was usually done as a post-listening task) became very accurate with fewer mistakes in comparison to exercises completed before this lesson sequence began.

Of course, this sudden growth in accuracy may be due to pupils naturally growing in confidence and knowledge as the course went on and they learnt more French.

There were problems with this approach. The majority of my activities focused heavily on grammar points, to the detriment of communication. Pupils, despite becoming accurate writers, were often reluctant to participate in class and use the target language. Although I planned to, I did not use enough target language and in future I will strive to maintain a more equal balance between that of grammar and communication.

Collaborative activities featured heavily in my sequence. Pupils practised simultaneous reading and listening in pairs in an attempt to develop sight/sound correspondence and pupils also completed listening exercises in pairs or in groups of 3. Group work seemed to boost motivation amongst pupils and also took away the ‘test like’ atmosphere surrounding listening activities that they were used to and anxious of. Pupils did report that they enjoyed working in groups and sometimes they learnt more from each other, as suggested by Fautley & Savage (20007) but to what extent they learnt from others first, as Vygotsky suggests is debatable. Many responded that they liked to listen to the extract, find the answer out on their own first and then simply use the other members of their group to confirm their original thoughts.

Throughout my sequence I strived to make assessment active and to provide opportunities for pupils to reflect. This included pupils’ peer marking the reconstruction of transcripts and the results of a walking dictation. Assessment as an active process did work in terms of boosting pupils’ self-confidence. Pupils, when peer marking, actively set each other targets for improvement;

which allowed pupils to begin to see small changes and improvements in their work. Engagement in peer assessment inevitably makes pupils more effective self-assessors, and this brings me to a major shortfall of my work. Despite allowing plenty of opportunities for peer assessment pupils did not look at their own work enough to self assess and this is something I would definitely improve on in future lessons in accordance with the whole school and department initiative.

In conclusion, after what I have found a difficult project, I have learned many lessons. Firstly, pupils become motivated and more likely to succeed when listening exercises are contextualised and they are equipped with both ‘declarative’ and ‘procedural’ knowledge, the knowledge of facts and the ‘tools for the job.’ Throughout the sequence pupils learned how to approach listening exercises and what strategies to employ whilst listening. As a developing teacher, I have learned that in order to develop a certain skill you cannot approach it in isolation. In other words, skills in modern foreign languages are interlinked and improving listening skills will require you, as a teacher, to not solely focus on listening exercises but those of other natures as well. I will definitely retain certain aspects of my practice such as contextualising listening exercises through pre and post listening activities, encouraging active assessment to improve motivation and confidence and to continue to use activities of other skills in order to develop listening. I don’t think pupils listening skills can be turned on their head in a matter of 8 lessons; I began to see improvements in attainment and attitude but I can develop them much more. Now these improvements have been identified, they can be used to inform my future practice and enable me to become a more effective teacher.

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