

professional learning matters



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INTRODUCTION

Our annual student research conference was held at Loughborough University for the first time. This was a memorable day for the forty student researchers from Beauchamp College, Longslade Community College and John Cleveland College. David Middlewood, Researcher in Residence organised the tremendously successful programme ably assisted by Ian Abbott and Bob Smith, both of whom are senior lecturers at Warwick University. We would like to take this opportunity of publicly thanking them for giving so much of their time and making the day so informative and interesting. The students gained a valuable insight into the research process and thoroughly enjoyed the conference. Not only were the staff from the partner schools impressed by the students' enthusiasm and engagement but David and his colleagues were equally impressed by the students' wholehearted commitment as well as their considerable understanding of research practice. It was a pleasure to be a part of this brilliant day particularly as the venue was also superb. It was fascinating to witness the conversations regarding the diversity of topics which the students have undertaken and we look forward to publishing their findings and recommendations in the near future.

Our thanks as usual go to all our contributors and we wish all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Anne Pennington and Deborah Sims

Would you like to contribute?

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Does seating arrangement affect students' behaviour in lessons?

Anesha Mistry, Bhavik Rajani, Sonia Bola, Sri-Vani Raja (Year 12)

During our time at Beauchamp College we discovered that in most subjects the seating arrangements varied along with behaviour. We wanted to find out whether the two variables linked and if so how this could be improved. Before carrying out our research we visited Warwick University. The visit to Warwick University was very helpful as it helped us understand what was relevant for our observations.

The type of observation we decided to carry out was a naturalistic covert observation. The reason for doing this type of observation was because the situation is left in its natural state making it high in validity. Also by doing the observation covertly it avoids any ethical issues that may arise but we recorded data openly. However by doing a naturalistic covert observation we were aware there was a chance of demand characteristics. Before carrying out the observations we had decided that they would be unstructured. This was more likely to produce qualitative data rather than quantitative data and gave us more impressionistic and descriptive results.

The results that we recorded were done by time sampling. Data was recorded for 50 minutes which is equivalent to one lesson. This meant that any behaviour shown within this time was valid to our observation giving us a large sample of results.



Our observations took place in lessons of year 11 student, observing; English, Maths and Science. As there are many subjects to study at Beauchamp College we decided to stick to the required subject that all year 11 students must do. By choosing the required subjects it makes our research more valid as it would spread across year 10 as well. Overall we undertook 12 observations across the 3 faculties.

Example of observation

Subject: Biology

Year: 11

Classroom: Sc5

Table layout: Rows

Date: May 2010

When looking at the year 11 Biology class I could tell that most students talked to the other students along their row. This gave students more people to talk to as the rows are quite close together, it also gave students the opportunity to turn around and talk, but when observing not many students did actually do this. The work set for the students was sheet and board work. When board work was taking place pupils did not talk as the room is quite small and the student talking could be easily spotted by the teacher. The teacher's desk is placed at the front and on a platform making it easier for the teacher to gain the pupils attention; on the other hand this was also a disadvantage. The desk

is placed right in front of the students, blocking some students' view of the board. Every student's desk is facing towards the teacher and the board this means that their focus is on the front. When watching the pupils do sheet work they became easily distracted as there were many people around them to talk to, so it was hard for the students to keep their concentration and the teacher had to repeatedly remind them to focus.

Teachers view



Students view



Results of observation and conclusion

After observing the layouts in Maths, English and Science we concluded that there is not one layout that is ideal as a generic layout for all departments. We found that depending on the lesson content, different layouts were more suitable for different tasks. For board work and when the teacher is talking, columns with tables of two are most effective but it is better when rows are spaced out. For group work, grouped tables and horseshoe tables are good for student interaction, for

discussion work, horseshoe layouts are good for the whole class working together.

Even though each table layout is suitable for different lesson work, overall we found that the row layout seems to be the most effective for a greater variety of lessons and that the students' behaviour is at its best when seated in rows. We are also aware the behaviour is very difficult to measure and when students are talking, it is possible they are discussing the work.

Recommendations

The best solution would be for more spaces between desks and rows which would reduce the opportunity of talking between students and improve behaviour, although this is not always possible particularly in the smaller rooms. Also rooms could be changed around depending on each lesson plan which would help students work to their maximum potential. Seating arrangements should also enable all students to see the teacher and the tables should be placed so all students can see the board.

When asking around the departments each department recommended different layouts that work best.

English: When speaking to teachers from English they suggested that the table layout that works best for them is rows and horseshoe layout. Also it is preferable if they had computers.

Maths: When speaking to the maths department they suggested that the table of two work best overall.

"I prefer the tables to be spread out and in twos as it is easier to help students, I also prefer rows, but it's harder to get to students when needing help and it all depends on the room size".

Science: When speaking to the science department they said that a variety of layouts works for them depending on the lesson, but rows work best.

To what extent can specific drama techniques used in year 10 English lessons enhance student self-esteem?

Alex Petrie, Teacher of English.

Why carry out this research?

Recent national interest in education has focused on aiming to provide a personalised, creative education that caters for an individual's social and emotional requirements. At Beauchamp, we endeavour to nurture student's creative abilities and strive to provide an education that creates confidence in our learners, engenders positive relationships and fosters an emotionally literate environment.

As an English teacher, part of my role is to fulfil the statutory requirement of drama through English lessons. Despite the fact that some students don't opt to study drama, they are required to engage with some drama activities by law. As a graduate of English and Drama, I wanted to utilise the skills that I already have and develop a series of lessons that allowed students to be creative with drama.



My research was centred on whether these creative dramatic activities enhanced student self esteem and created a more positive 'emotionally literate' environment. I wondered if students might feel more confident about themselves as they learnt through drama to build stronger working relationships with their peers and develop an understanding of empathy.

What I did...

I carried out a self-esteem questionnaire with my students and established a self esteem score which enabled me to identify those students in my classes who may have been suffering from low self-esteem. I worked with my classes as a reflective practitioner, leading improvisation and other drama activities for a series of lessons. I also conducted semi-structured interviews and kept a lesson log book too which tracked student responses and allowed me to identify changes in behaviour. After a period of lessons I re-tested my students with the same self-esteem questionnaire in order to ascertain if

the fixed period of drama engagement had any impact on self esteem levels. I also conducted a questionnaire for my fellow English teachers in order to gain an understanding of their thoughts and attitudes towards the drama component of the GCSE course.

Findings...

Students enjoyed participating in drama; they loved the creative environment that the less structured lessons encouraged.

Students felt that the classroom environment prevented them from doing their best with drama activities and wanted a more flexible space in which to work.

Student self esteem levels did improve after engagement with drama activities and as a reflective practitioner I felt that the relationships within the class grew stronger and more positive.

Non drama specialist English teachers felt some anxiety about leading drama activities and felt that a more flexible space was needed. They also felt that more drama training would be beneficial.

An investigation into whether rewards given out by teachers have an effect on the attitudes of GCSE students

Nikita Pujara (13DAR)

The purpose of my research was to investigate whether or not rewards given out by teachers have an effect on the attitudes of GCSE students. Classroom rewards include a range of things, from stickers, certificates and chocolate, to simply verbal praise.

For this particular research, I chose to study Key Stage 4 Students due to the fact that as a 6th Form student, I feel we now have less of a 'teacher and student' relationship but rather an emphasis on individual study with the teacher acting as a figure of guidance and support when needed. GCSE students, regardless of their ability and social factors, are always encouraged by the school to be motivated and dedicated to their studies, as it is a government requirement for them to be in full time education up to the age of 16- being the responsibility of the school to ensure they gain the correct qualifications so they have some stability when it comes to decision making for their future.

In order to conduct research that was both rich in validity and reliability, I used the method of 'triangulation'; which includes using a number of different research methods in order to obtain a



wide range of both qualitative and quantitative data.

To begin with, I created a questionnaire consisting of both open and closed ended questions on the topic of rewards in the classroom. Using stratified random sampling, I then divided the questionnaires into a set for year 10 students and another for year 11 students. This enabled me to also see if there were differences when it came to factors such as age or the level of education students are at, and notice any differences in the way in which they are rewarded.

After analysing my data, I then decided to interview a number of teachers, in order to gain an insight on the rewards they provide to students, and why they choose these methods. I also asked about their observance of their chosen methods, and whether or not they felt certain methods have an impact on the learning of students.

My final research method was to carry out a number of covert observations in GCSE classrooms. I chose this particular method so that the Hawthorne effect was less likely to occur.

However, I still informed the teacher of my research purpose. From this, I was able to observe the reactions of students when they were rewarded, alongside their performance and attention after being rewarded.

Once I had collected and analysed all three sets of data, I was able to conclude my findings:

- Surprisingly, there were more year 11 students who said that receiving stickers from a teacher makes them want to collect more, than there were year 10's.
- Funnily, the students most common response for their preference of reward among both year 10 and 11 seemed to be 'food' or 'sweets' and in one case 'money'. Some also stated that they like receiving letters or emails home.
- When I asked students on their personal opinion, I unfortunately did not receive many greatly detailed answers. However, those who did reply came up with a number of ideas. Some stated that they find rewards important and effective because they make the subject seem more 'fun' and they make them look forward to going to the lesson. Some also went along the lines of rewards creating competition and making the class come together for example during group work. Some however argued that rewards do not have much impact, and in a few cases that rewards are always handed to the 'same people' or 'teachers pets'.

These findings then formed recommendations for teachers:

- Individual praising can be effective, but I personally feel that it should not be excessive, for example, to the point where the student feels embarrassed. If spoken to in a mature manner, I believe the student may benefit from the experience.
- 'Excellent' seems to be a winner among the majority, alongside 'good' and also 'yes' among older students. These words are short, and not over exaggerative. They are also not too

patronising, but instead create a sense of agreement, leading to maturity. 'Well done' is often used in primary schools, but year 10 students now feel as though they want to be treated as mature individuals, which can help them to develop.

- Year 10 students are more likely to want to be treated as mature individuals due to feeling older and more responsible having to undertake GCSE's. Year 11 students however may need extra 'fun' stimulation due to feeling slightly more pressure.
- In some cases, giving food and sweets may not always be an option, although they clearly do seem to have a great impact. Money on the other hand is rather unreasonable, but letters home is another reward which is regarded to have an impact, and should therefore be issued when needed.
- From these findings, I recommend that teachers continue with their current reward systems, but also keep in mind that some students may need a bit more motivation than others in order to receive rewards. Another option is to cut down on rewards, to make them appear less common and therefore more valuable.
- I believe all teachers should introduce progress charts for coursework, as by being visual reminders, they have shown a positive outcome overall when used.
- Letters are currently used, and should continue to be. However, due to the great impact and effect they have, I believe that they would be equally useful if issued for bad behaviour or a lack of progress.

Overall, I found participating in the Student Researchers Programme both interesting and stimulating, as I was able to choose my own topic and actually carry out the research on my own initiative. Most of all, this research may help improve an aspect of teaching or learning at Beauchamp, which is very satisfying to know. This experience has also helped improve my research, organisation, and presentation skills, which I'm sure, will be very useful.

Virtual Learning Environment

Nakul Rajani, Shyam Radia, Jaikishan Jogiya, Ayaz Manji (Year 13)



The purpose of our research was to see if the VLE was an effective method of learning in Beauchamp College.

We were also researching to see whether the VLE should be extended/improved/implemented more comprehensively across all faculties.

We have noticed that Beauchamp has a VLE (BOLL/MOODLE) but it is not used to its full extent in all faculties.

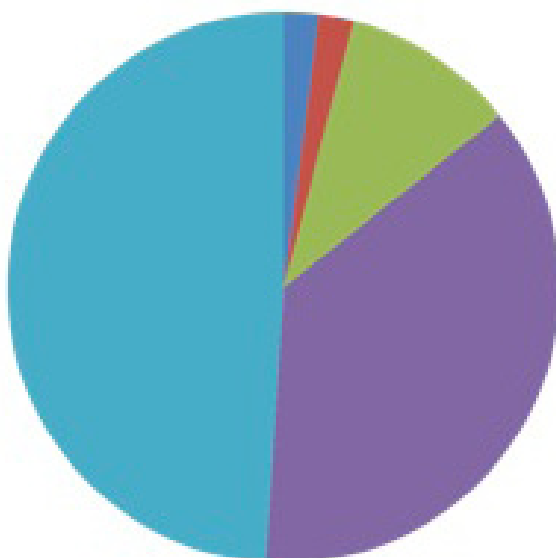
Methodologies

In order to gain both qualitative and quantitative data we have used primary and secondary resources:

Questionnaires

We gave out questionnaires to 40 sixth form students we asked each of them 10 questions. Our result for one of the questions is shown below.

“How often do you use the VLE?”



- More than once a day
- About once a day
- 2-3 times a week
- About once a week
- Less than once a week

Interviews

We interviewed some teachers who had a great influence on the VLE such as Mr Heppel. We discussed the uses of the VLE and the social effect of implementing it in all faculties.

Internet articles

We researched different versions of the VLE and how they are used.

Results

Our results showed that some faculties already use the VLE a lot (science) but other faculties do not appear to want to use it. This was sometimes because teachers/students did not feel comfortable using it. However when the VLE was used by students they found it an useful extra source of revision, on the other hand other students used it as an excuse to not do work.

Conclusion

In conclusion we decided that the primary and most efficient way to learn is in a classroom environment with a teacher and students, which included: face to face contact, group work and student teacher interaction. However another effective accompaniment to go with it is a VLE!

Recommendations that we would make are:

- VLE should be used as an extra source of homework/revision/learning source as it saves time and can be accessed from home
- All faculties should implement the VLE in their education system even if only for extreme cases (severe weather conditions, where the college is

forced to close)

- Training should be provided for all teachers/ staff if to be implemented in all faculties as they are able to share resources and lesson plan

To what extent are activities chosen for participation by year 12 students influenced by those undertaken in key stage 4

Elliot Wright, Teacher of P.E.

Rationale

The issue of physical inactivity levels and young people is a very relevant one in modern society. The ever publicised Playstations, Xbox and handheld devices such as Gameboys are readily available and an increasing trend. This coincides with a reported increased prevalence of obesity, coronary heart disease, diabetes and further heart conditions. These technological advances and the lifestyles adopted as a result are becoming ever easier to access and are constantly being reinforced and are more often being selected. The consequence of this is that people are less active and opting to take up a more sedentary lifestyle resulting in increased risks of obesity, heart disease and other physical and mental illnesses (Parker et al. 2009 & Epstein et al. 2001).

Research

The research looked at the current programme in year 11 core PE in which students select their own



activities to participate in, in an attempt to ensure continued participation following compulsory education and as a lifestyle habit. The study looked to gauge the thoughts of year 12 students who have been through this process in the form of a questionnaire and a focus group interview. They commented on the options method delivered in year 11 PE, the delivery style of staff and suggestions of further methods to improve this programme together with alternative activities.

Results

The findings showed that students were very much for the notion of selecting their own activities to participate in for a standard unit of work. They found that such a method gave students ownership and a sense of responsibility towards their lessons and as a result they increased the participation levels and also the quality of participation in their PE lessons. Students also mentioned they enjoyed the delivery style of staff teaching through the activity as opposed to practices and traditional drills

based, teacher driven lessons. Students tended to opt for easily accessible sports such as Football, Rounders and Badminton and sports that required less specialist skills, such as the former. Finally, students made suggestions for alternative activities such as Boxercise, Dodgeball and American football and other newer up-coming sports, as opposed to the more traditional sporting activities.

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