Evaluation of Learning Away

Hypothesis 5: Teachers’ pedagogical skills

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High quality residential learning programmes can enable school staff to significantly widen and develop their pedagogical skills and repertoire and apply these back in schools to positive and sustained effect.

Background

Pedagogy refers to the teaching skills teachers use and the activities these skills generate to enable students to learn the knowledge and skills related to different subject areas. Research shows the pedagogical approaches which are most effective in promoting learning and in particular highlights that the more students are involved as active participants in their own learning, the better they do.

This student-centred approach contrasts sharply with the traditional teacher-directed approach (sometimes referred to as didactic or transmission teaching) where the teacher is viewed as the font of all knowledge and where that knowledge is passed from teacher to student. With a teacher-directed approach, teachers do most of the talking and students work, mostly individually, on tasks provided by the teacher, such as worksheets and text book exercises. With a student-centred approach students take a much more active role, engaging in discussion with their teacher and peers. Just as research highlights effective pedagogy, it also shows how teachers can best develop their professional skills. Experimentation with new approaches, support from specialists, and the use of tools all play an important role in effective continuing professional development (CPD).

Programme-wide outcomes related to staff development of pedagogical skills

The residentials provided an opportunity for staff to experiment with several effective pedagogical approaches, in particular those that emphasised the active role of students. Approaches used by clusters included:

- student consultation and the use of pupil voice
- enquiry and problem-solving
- group work / co-operative learning

1 For example see ‘Improving pupil learning by enhancing participation’ – ‘Research for Teachers’ anthology: www.gtce.org.uk/documents/publicationpdfs/pupil_part_ppedg0310.pdf


All of these strategies put the teacher in the position of learning alongside their students, and help to foster students’ independence and sense of control over their own learning⁶. Several clusters also used strategies to:

- build on students’ prior learning
- make connections between the curriculum and real world

The wider evidence base shows that building on prior learning and making connections with the real world are important aspects of effective pedagogy and linked with positive outcomes for learners.

In several clusters there was evidence of teachers applying / or planning to apply the pedagogical approaches that they had experimented with on residential trips, back in school.

**Experimentation with pedagogical approaches**

*Student consultation and the use of pupil voice*

Teachers in several clusters used the residentials to develop their practice in consulting students and using pupil voice. They involved students in planning for and making decisions about their residentials.

In Burley, Walney and East EAZ, teachers ran sessions with children to plan the activities for their residentials. In South Hetton, at the beginning of the term, teachers gave their children a topic, for example, World War II, and asked them to think about what they already knew about it and what they would like to learn about. Merging several ideas around WWII with residential learning opportunities, the class came up with the idea of the evacuation trip where they would be able to visit the steam railway, stay overnight, and go to the open-air museum, Eden Camp. Consulting their Year 2 students about what they would like to do on their one-night residential resulted in Christ Church teachers organising a night time walk, and involving the children in hunting for fossils (which they had made at school prior to the visit) and a dinosaur bones dig (involving various sizes of dog chews). Teachers at Walney involved their primary pupils in the co-design of their residential learning experience at a number of levels, including determining and assessing the skills they need for successful transition, and designing a residential that would support the development and assessment of these skills. Students and staff worked in parallel and together to construct a programme of activities.

Teachers at Samuel Whitbread College encouraged and supported their students to work as a team to plan and organise a residential experience that they as sports lovers would enjoy. The students were responsible for deciding on the venue, costs, transport, communications with parents, and activities and tasks during the residentials. All of the content of the programme was decided by the students.

Sometimes, teachers provided student voice opportunities in the form of reflecting on their learning at the end of the residential. During the Thomas Tallis cluster business residential, the teachers

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⁵ See for example, Swan, M. (2006) *Collaborative learning in mathematics: A challenge to our beliefs and practices*. National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC) and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE).

⁶ For a more detailed explanation of these strategies see ‘Improving pupil learning by enhancing participation’ - Research for Teachers’ Anthology: [www.gtce.org.uk/documents/publicationpdfs/pupil_part_ppedg0310.pdf](http://www.gtce.org.uk/documents/publicationpdfs/pupil_part_ppedg0310.pdf)
involved the young people in self-assessing their confidence and skills in the subject area covered by the residential, and tracking their progress. The students completed a questionnaire reporting their perceived levels of skills before and after the residential. Most of the clusters found out their students’ feelings before and after the residential using an evaluation tool they had been provided with. Many asked their students to rank photographs they or their teachers had taken on the residential to find out their students’ views on aspects of the learning environment e.g. where learning had been greatest, etc.

Thomas Tallis cluster was keen to place students at the centre of constructing and carrying forward their residential experiences. This was seen as a way of raising achievement through increased motivation and engagement.

The cluster schools decided to use the Mango Model as a way of giving their students greater voice. This model involves students and staff working together to form a community where students take an active role in decision making and take responsibility for themselves.

Teachers used the residential to introduce students to the model which uses home and council groups to structure their involvement. The teachers organised ‘home groups’ of 5 or 6 students who worked as a group to discuss their views about an issue. Leaders from each group then came together in the council group to agree a collective decision which the group abided by. Teachers planned activities that involved the students in using the model. For the secondary school residential, teachers gave students a particularly active role in determining the evening ‘leisure’ activities. Students designed and ran the programme of evening events.

Teachers from the primary school and special school facilitated students in using the model to decide on aspects of their stay, such as what time they went to bed. A teacher from the special school highlighted his role in ensuring that all students contributed to the discussion. Teachers and centre staff also encouraged their students to participate actively in making decisions about their learning. For example, students from the primary school were set the task of making a shelter. They worked in groups to design and build their shelter. This included making decisions about how to modify their designs when things didn’t work out as they had expected. For instance, in one group a student came up with a different idea about how the roof should be constructed. This was accepted by the group and used to make their shelter. Staff highlighted how they took a more facilitative role and encouraged students to take responsibility for their learning.

Enquiry and problem-solving
Teachers in several clusters used the residentials to develop a problem-solving approach. They designed activities for students which tended to be physical or practical in nature. For example, at Walney the teachers and students designed a challenge where teams had to get from one space to another on horizontal stilts by pulling ropes. At East EAZ, students were given the problem of removing 10 ‘bombs’ from a danger area. The team of 10 were given a hook attached to 10 strings. Each student had to hold a piece of string and help manoeuvre the hook to pick up a bomb and place it in the safe zone.
Several clusters noticed that the nature of learning during the problem-solving activity was different when it took place on the residential. Staff took a more facilitative role and gave students the time to approach activities at their own pace and find their own way to complete the task. Since the design of the tasks mean it was not always necessary for students to produce an output as such teachers felt able to relax and let students work things out for themselves.

**Group work / co-operative learning**

The residentials enabled many teachers to develop their practice in relation to group work. For example, at the Thomas Tallis business residential, teachers planned a number of ‘Apprentice’ group activities (based on the TV programme) for their Year 12 students. The tasks included budgeting, designing, and market research activities. The teachers asked the students to work in groups to decide how they would approach the task. The students were expected to carry out their plans and take responsibility for modifying them as they went along. Teachers highlighted the way in which they stood back and let the students follow through ideas. After each task, teachers organised debrief sessions so students could reflect on how the group had approached the tasks.

Some staff devoted a substantial amount of time and effort to developing students’ reasoning skills through dialogue and debate during the residentials. Staff at East EAZ, for example, divided the children into groups, asking them to present one side of an argument about building a new estate on the green belt area.

**Building on prior learning**

Some clusters particularly developed their practice in building on students’ existing knowledge and understanding. In several clusters teachers consulted students about what they already knew and what they would like to find out prior to the residential (South Hetton, Walney and East EAZ). Burley cluster specifically set out to build cumulatively on the learning that was taking place during the residential. Staff used photos of the children and what they had seen and done the previous day in a PowerPoint presentation to summarise learning and experiences so far. Family support workers at Newall Green consulted the students’ teachers to ensure that the residential experiences built on the students’ prior learning. They found out what the young people were studying at the time they went on the residentials so that they could support each student to apply and develop their knowledge and skills whilst away. They used the information to plan practical activities and challenges for the residential programme.

**Making connections between the curriculum and the real world**

The teachers in several clusters used the residentials to develop practice which made connections between the curriculum and the real world through the introduction of a thematic and integrated curriculum. In one of South Hetton’s residentials teachers planned activities which involved the students in studying rivers, bridges, and the water cycle during and after the residential. The learning spanned geography, design technology, and science. The teachers also designed the residential to fuel much literacy and ICT work afterwards. For example, the students were asked to write a letter to the Centre Director (literacy recount) and researched Middleton-in-Teesdale to find out about the surrounding area and attractions (internet usage, including safe use). The cluster viewed the residential as the key driver of the theme as it enabled learning to build on students’ first hand, out-of-school experiences.
The schools in the Christ Church cluster set about developing practice so that teachers made greater use of cross-curricular links and also enabled the students to have more voice and control over their learning.

At Lander Road Primary, each teacher explored a ‘creative topic’ per term, for example, Magic Mirrors, Bones, Food Glorious Food, and Under the Sea. The teachers shared their planning with each other to ensure all curriculum areas were covered and planned the residential activities so that they would reinforce the topic for that term.

Staff at Christ Church Primary used the ‘Mantle of the Expert’ as a teaching model in order for the students to act in a role and give purpose to the learning. For example, the Year 2 teachers planned activities which involved the students in taking the role of a company of environmentalists who looked after animals in danger. They were told that there was a newly discovered creature at the venue which was very important to scientists, but the local residents (parents in role) were having problems with the creature and some were even killing it. Along with solving the many moral dilemmas the scenario presented, the students were tasked with many science-based activities set around researching the creature such as investigating nocturnal animals and mini beasts (after establishing that these were the creature’s food). The teachers also planned residential activities which spanned other areas of the curriculum such as drawing imaginary creatures from collected evidence (art); researching the location using Google Earth (geography); writing a letter to local residents persuading them that the animal is not a pest and expressing their own views (literacy); and taking part in a ‘confidence’ course designed to test their skills and bravery (PE).

**Evidence of staff applying pedagogical approaches back at school**

Having been on a residential, staff generally saw the potential for increasing their use of outdoor learning opportunities at school:

‘I’ve realised I can bring outdoor learning concepts into the classroom, for example, the class can look at birds using binoculars’. (Teacher, Christ Church)

But teachers also further developed their use of effective pedagogical approaches which placed students in an active role. South Hetton noted that the teachers developed skills in giving students more experiential learning. Some clusters highlighted how the pedagogical approaches were then applied back at school.

Having developed their understanding of student voice, Thomas Tallis cluster leaders noted that staff used aspects of the practice of involving students in decision-making from the residential in lessons they taught back at school. For example, one teacher involved students in making decisions about the casting for a play in drama. Another encouraged students to reflect on decisions they had made as part of their Duke of Edinburgh training. One member of staff found that it helped him to implement a more enquiry-based curriculum in ICT (called Tallis Lab). In Tallis Lab lessons, teachers gave Year 7, 8 and 9 students more control over their learning and empowered them to make decisions about how they approached tasks.

The Newall Green teachers were so impressed with the students’ successes and levels of engagement while on the residential that they decided to introduce more practical and context-
based learning opportunities, similar to those the students had experienced during the residentials, to their classroom teaching e.g. comparing prices on food and ingredients in different supermarkets in mathematics.

Following their residential experience, staff from the Walney cluster started to embed their residential practice into their day-to-day activity. For example, four teachers were re-writing their school’s approach to group work to ensure they were building interdependent and independent learning skills as the residential, and especially the evaluation activities, made them realise their existing strategies were not as effective as they could be.

Some staff also highlighted how they intended to further develop their practice back at school. So Walney staff aimed to increase the amount of student voice in day-to-day feedback following reflection about the residential. Teachers at Christ Church noted that they would be giving students ‘more opportunities to think for themselves and solve problems and challenges’.

**Common features in the clusters’ approaches to developing staff pedagogical skills**

The ways in which clusters used residentials to develop pedagogy varied. For many clusters they gave teachers an opportunity to experience using a particular approach which they could continue back at school. In some clusters the development was more explicitly planned, with residentials being used to engage staff in identified teaching approaches and their related activities. Many clusters found that the residentials helped them identify aspects of pedagogy which they wanted to develop.

**Experiencing a particular approach**

Whilst many of the clusters, particularly during the first year of the programme, did not specifically plan for teachers’ pedagogical development, the residentials provided the perfect conditions for teachers to use student-centred approaches; and having tried them, they frequently wanted to continue using the same approaches back in school afterwards.

**Planned development of an identified approach**

Some clusters used the residential experiences specifically as an opportunity to engage teachers with new ways of teaching, intending that the teachers would then integrate the new approaches into their classroom practice. For instance, South Hetton and Christ Church both set about supporting their staff in introducing a thematic and integrated curriculum. In Christ Church’s case, the cluster was keen to further enhance the creative curriculum that they had been developing with support from a ‘Creative Partnerships’ consultant. These clusters provided non-contact time to enable staff to work together to plan for the residential, in the hope that they would learn from each other and use each other’s existing knowledge and skills to their advantage. One cluster (Thomas Tallis) provided explicit training in a new teaching approach (the Mango model) which placed students at the centre of constructing and carrying forward their learning experiences. The staff experienced the Mango model at the residential centre for a night and a day themselves before taking their students away, which helped them to understand the value of actively involving students in making decisions and how to construct the process.
Identifying aspects of pedagogy for future development
Reflecting together on the data generated by the evaluation tools after the residentials helped many clusters to see areas of their practice which they would benefit from developing. For example:

- visual images were used\(^7\) to help students to articulate their feelings on issues such as working with people they didn’t know;
- students used photos of different learning environments to reflect on the learning environments they felt would motivate them to learn; and
- staff used ‘research taster activities’\(^8\) to reflect and record student interactions in relation to group work and dialogue.

Teachers commented on how they enjoyed carrying out the research and the conversations with children that the evaluation tools had sparked. They commented on how the tools often revealed surprises, such as the need for much more thoughtful planning of group tasks and activities.

Attending PHF-run CPD events (conferences and workshops) gave cluster staff important opportunities to work together, reflect on their plans, and prioritise their own learning and development.

Reflecting on the data they had collected about group work activities caused the Burley cluster to develop their practice in this area. Burley had selected an eco-centre as the venue for their sustainability-themed Learning Away programme. Each school worked closely with the centre staff before the residential to select learning activities from those on offer and tailor them to suit their students and plan for their delivery. During the residential, staff typically observed eco-centre staff delivering activities to groups of children in the morning, then led the activities themselves in the afternoon with different groups of children.

Providing children with opportunities for working together was highlighted by teachers, parents and children as an important and valuable feature of the residential. But they also felt the tasks and activities could be further enhanced to make residential learning truly collaborative and interdependent.

Using the tools that had been provided to help them observe the children working together helped the staff to see weaknesses in relation to student group work (both on the residential and in school) which they worked on in the second year. As a consequence, the staff identified a progression in group working skills which they could use to monitor their students’ development. For example, at an early level, students using collaboration skills would be able to share ideas and listen to other people. At a later level they would be able to change their ideas after listening to someone else’s viewpoint. When planning in the second year of the programme, staff noted opportunities to develop these skills both on the residential and in the classroom.

At the same time, the cluster leaders proposed:
- a tightening of the learning objectives to include the skills to be developed as well as knowledge, and the development of tools that would support them in doing this; and

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• improving staff ownership of their Learning Away programme by becoming more involved in activities facilitated by the eco-centre staff, which they had previously only observed.

The cluster recognised the importance of staff evaluating their work and learning from their experiences and sought to incorporate evaluation activities before and after the residential. For example, staff were encouraged to think about each activity in terms of the skills that were being developed by it. So, if the activity was meant to develop collaboration, teachers were asked to consider whether it had it been designed in such a way that it would challenge the children to collaborate.

Possible explanations for the outcomes

The residential provided teachers with a perfect opportunity for experimenting with their practice. The importance of such experimentation for teachers’ professional development was highlighted by three systematic reviews of CPD9. One model of teacher development highlights the interplay between teachers’ beliefs, pedagogic knowledge and practices10. These influence and are influenced by student responses. The residential enabled teachers to experiment with new teaching practices and observe their students’ responses to these. This would have informed their beliefs about learning and pedagogic knowledge so helping them to further develop their practice.

In some clusters the teachers also received support via training in new approaches by specialists (e.g. Thomas Tallis) or were able to work alongside them. School staff also provided support for each other when planning for and facilitating the residential. Evidence from studies included in the three systematic reviews of CPD showed the importance of teachers working together to support and sustain the development of their own and their colleagues’ practice, and at the same time being able to draw on specialist support. A fourth systematic review of CPD11 highlighted the important role that specialists can play in introducing teachers to new knowledge and approaches and

supporting teachers in using their new knowledge to develop their skills and make changes to their practice.

There was some evidence of teachers benefiting from reflecting together on data they had gathered. This helped them to identify elements of practice (e.g. group work) which could be further developed and ways in which this could be done. A systematic review of CPD highlighted the importance of teachers collaborating over the development of new practices rather than simply reflecting on existing practices\(^\text{12}\). Tools provided for the clusters helped them to collect and reflect on data. Some clusters also developed their own tools (e.g. the Burley groupwork progression framework). A recent international review of research\(^\text{13}\) found that selecting, developing, and using tools in professional learning was likely to lead to better outcomes for both staff and students. The kinds of tools which the researchers found to be most effective included progression frameworks showing learners’ developing levels of understanding in a particular subject and standards frameworks against which teachers can assess their own and their learners’ levels of performance. The review found that such tools, when used for staff professional development and for informing and monitoring curriculum development, can help ensure that the new practice or adapted curriculum is grounded in data about young people’s performance and is likely to be effective in achieving better outcomes.

Conclusions

The clusters provided a range of evidence that during residencies staff used a number of pedagogical approaches which research has shown to be effective in promoting learning. Staff particularly developed student-centred practices where they took a more facilitative role. This is particularly noteworthy as the wider evidence base demonstrates that stepping back and letting students work things out for themselves can be difficult for teachers\(^\text{14}\). There was some evidence of clusters applying and intending to apply the pedagogic approaches back at school. As yet, clusters had not collected extensive evidence of the impact of the application of these approaches in school.

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