



GATvision

Eastern Region Gifted & Talented Partnership



Our fourth regional newsletter is jointly funded by Excellence East and the ERGATP, reflecting our commitment to working in partnership to support schools across the region. It explores the characteristics of excellent provision for G&T learners, and includes the perspectives of primary, secondary and post 16 students from schools across the region.

This newsletter also provides information on regional events and opportunities. These and other regional resources are available on the Excellence East website at www.excellenceeast.org.uk

Learning in Partnership...

The Art of the Possible

The Wroxham School is a one form entry primary school with nursery in Potters Bar. Although this school was in special measures in 2003, all children at The Wroxham School are judged by Ofsted to be making outstanding progress (February 2006, March 2009). This brief article describes the learning partnerships that have developed over the past six years and insists that 'more of the same' and 'tried and tested methods' are not the optimum way to achieve results.

Our school has engaged in a whole school research study with the University of Cambridge 2006-8 which we aim to publish next year. The research centres around our school wide approach to teaching without a fixed ability mindset. Classes at Wroxham are not grouped by ability and children are taught to self assess their learning and to become independent learners. Children and teachers are not motivated by performance based targets but by the sense that the future is in the making. Classes work with their teachers to plan and review thematic approaches to learning and children are offered a wide range of choice in their studies.

The school is very creative and celebrates all areas of the curriculum. Children are encouraged to talk about their learning from their earliest days in school and to engage in dialogue with their peers and their teaching team regarding next steps in learning. Individual and class blogs provide another way of reflecting on outcomes and sharing ideas. This year our Year 6 children have individual blogs which can be accessed by home, the teaching team and Ela McSorley, QCA. We aim to explore the issues surrounding transition between Year 6 and Year 7 through this project.

We have presented evidence to the Rose Review and the Alexander Review about creative approaches to curriculum planning. We teach a broad and balanced curriculum and take

the best of the Primary Strategy framework whilst ensuring that we are continually building upon previous learning and making links to other areas of the curriculum. At present, classes are studying themes such as flight, inventions, saving the planet, the universe, France and journeys. We offer a wide range of opportunities for outdoor learning and provide a weekly forest school experience for many of our children.

Almost all of our staff are engaged in a course of study and we also host local network learning meetings. We believe that teaching teams need to show that they are highly motivated to learn, in order that they in turn can provide irresistible learning experiences for children and families.

The outcome of this way of working is that each individual child and adult feels that there is no ceiling on their achievement. The 'boffin' culture that was evident six years ago has been replaced by a vibrancy and excitement about school that means it is 'cool' to try your best. During our recent inspection I noticed Claire, a Year 6 pupil, making copious notes whilst her teacher was introducing the lesson. When I talked to her about her writing she explained that she liked to record the ideas so that she could turn back to them when she was engaged in the next task. Claire's notes were purely for her, she was behaving as a lifelong learner and was employing the strategies she knew would help her later in the session. As Paul, Y5, explained: *'No one can stop you learning really'*.

We have replaced labels with children. Simple isn't it?

Alison Peacock
HEADTEACHER

References:

Hart, S. et al (2004) 'Learning without Limits' Open University Press

For further information please see www.wroxham.herts.sch.uk



What does excellent provision look like?



A conference held at Villiers Park Educational Trust on 3 December 2008 gave a group of twenty post-16 students from a diverse range of schools and colleges the opportunity to reflect on their everyday classroom provision.

During the day participants were provided with background information about the Gifted and Talented agenda before reflecting on what they felt was needed to make their classroom learning experience outstanding.



It was evident that there were huge similarities of opinion about what works best, irrespective of the subjects studied or the type of educational establishment they attend.

Students identified seven features that could make a lesson an outstanding experience in terms of challenge and interest. We believe that the seven features that the students identified are relevant to all schools and age groups.

1 Setting the context

Context helps set the scene when covering a new topic and gives us an idea of when and where information will be useful in the future. It can also be used to link subjects together. We feel that it is likely to stimulate a higher level of interest if we understand the purpose of what we are learning – it prevents us dismissing something as irrelevant. We appreciate the danger of detracting from the syllabus and would welcome a reduction in its size to allow time for explaining the context. If this is not an option, it is still possible to cover context in a relatively short time bearing in mind the impact this can have on motivation.

2 Project work

We refer here to creative exercises that involve perhaps only a small amount of lesson time, but the scope to continue if we want outside of the classroom. Projects spark interest in a topic, encourage research, and give the opportunity for those who are interested to delve into a topic in far greater depth. We recognise potential problems such as students going off track and if part of a group activity, one person doing far more than their fair share. To get round this, teacher supervision needs to be carefully structured.

3 A lingering thought-provoking idea

At the end of a class we would like the teacher to present a (non-compulsory) open-ended question that requires consideration beyond the classroom. Ideas can be taken up in the next lesson with students volunteering to provide answers. We recognise that this idea is reliant on student interest and

might suffer from lack of take-up. However, interest from the whole class could be sparked by those students that do take up the challenge. Perhaps teachers could become actively involved in the 'extra' work themselves.

4 Enthusiastic Teachers

We assume that all teachers are enthusiastic, but how should this show itself in the eyes of the students? We look for a teacher who has prepared the lesson well, who takes an interest in each individual, and who conveys their subject in a way that is both educational and entertaining. An enthusiastic teacher encourages enthusiasm amongst their students. It would help if teachers were given more freedom to personalise their lessons, including scope to give their own opinions. We recognise that the wider working environment might influence teacher enthusiasm.

5 Challenging Lessons

We all agreed that this was essential and we attempted to identify what the phrase means. It is when the content goes further than the syllabus with students pushed beyond their usual limits. Quite possibly unconventional ideas will have been introduced. The lessons should be structured but unpredictable and if they are successful they will have kept the students interested throughout. The key constraints might be that fellow students are unable to keep up or feel alienated. If challenging work can't be provided for some students within a class, maybe there should be separate classes for the more able or smaller classes or perhaps higher level lessons should take place outside of school.

6 Discussion and Presentations

We enjoy the opportunity to give opinions. More students are likely to be involved if at least sometimes the discussions take place in small groups rather than for the whole class. Teaching time could be saved if each group is given a different aspect to cover and feeds back to others. We think that this type of opportunity to teach others improves understanding and in general, active learning results in better recall. Potential dangers include students not working together effectively, but if teachers set up the groups carefully, give clear instructions, and impose time restrictions for each task, then it can be successful.

7 Relationships

It is important for a teacher to get to know the members of their class. This will allow them to tailor work to suit each individual's interests and abilities. From our point of view, it would make teachers more approachable, earn respect, and help to create a friendly atmosphere. This in turn would make it more comfortable for us to ask questions.

There is a danger within such an environment of boundaries becoming blurred and discipline suffering. However, if teachers act professionally, avoiding favouritism and bias, perhaps by allocating equal time to each student, this threat can be overcome.

Villiers Park Educational Trust has been organising courses for high ability students and their teachers for over forty years and is recognised as a national expert in provision for able post-16 students. For further information about this article, including a short film, and the opportunities that Villiers Park Educational Trust provides, please see www.villierspark.org.uk

NEW POST-16 PUBLICATION

Developing Provision for Very Able post-16 Students

This is a new G&T handbook from Villiers Park Educational Trust, published by Optimus and available from May 2009. Further details can be obtained from *Villiers Park Educational Trust*. Tel: 01223 872601

Learning at Lealands - The Student Perspective

This report stems from two one-hour discussion sessions with a range of Gifted and Talented students from Year 7 to Year 11. The students were asked to describe situations where they felt their learning experience had either been positive or negative. They were also asked to reflect on what had determined the positive or negative dimension. From these groups a series of key points emerged.

Positive subjects regardless of age of student were Drama, PE and Technology. In all cases the key element which differentiated the learning experience was the 'active dimension' to lessons. Whilst it could be argued this appears an obvious observation considering the nature of the subjects highlighted it is equally important to note that when more academic subjects (History) were cited it was also because staff provided 'active' learning opportunities. The students all wanted to feel they were involved in the lesson and had some control over their own learning.

All of the students wanted to be 'challenged'. They respected staff who provided them with the chance to explore topics, debate ideas and provide them with data or information which took them out of their comfort zone, whilst still providing them with the belief they "COULD SUCCEED". It was especially important for them to feel their opinions and ideas were valued and accepted. The older students wanted to be treated as adults; they respected those staff that could control groups with a light hand and humour.

There is a common perception that students dislike long in-depth studies. However, a wide cross section of the students expressed the view that being given time to develop work in detail and time to finish work was especially important. They saw the latter as the key to success and a positive learning experience. Indeed one of the main criticisms of Technology [a subject rated highly] was the heavy focus on "planning". The majority of students reflected on the short time allowed for focused subjects during a technology carousel – the main example cited by several students was a "Waistcoat" project which was so heavily dependent on the design work few ever managed to move onto the making element of the course.

Similarly older students felt they may gain more from the learning experience if they were given clearer guidance on what they needed to do to achieve the highest grades. They wanted earlier access to the marking criteria. Once provided with the mark schemes they spoke of feeling more confident and having higher aspirations – of knowing where the bar is!

Key Points

- Active Learning opportunities
- Time to explore work in depth
- Time to complete projects
- Challenge
- Having continuity of staff
- Being able to work with other "like minded" or equal ability students
- Being given the opportunity to pit themselves against students from other schools
- Having their opinions valued
- Not being forced to learn with everyone else
- Discussions
- Knowing staff had HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Negative Points

- Book work
- Note taking
- Silent Reading
- Copying
- Needless repetition of work
- Cover teachers
- Not being allowed to discuss and reflect.

With thanks to Lealands High School, Luton for this article. For further information contact Linda Prestidge at linda.prestidge@luton.gov.uk

ERGATP Fourth Regional Conference

Tuesday 13th October 2009

Newmarket Race Course Conference Centre 9.30am-3.30pm

G&T: Developing Independent Learners



Keynote Speakers

John West-Burnham & Barry Hymer



Selection of workshops for all phases

Further details including programme, workshops and costs have been sent to your school and are also available from Nahid Ahmed at Nahid.Ahmed@luton.gov.uk or 01582 531100 and at www.excellenceeast.org

GT OPPORTUNITIES FUND



The Partnership has set aside a limited amount of funding to enable pupils to participate in specific opportunities which they would otherwise be unable to attend.

The grant (maximum £500 per pupil) is only for those unable to obtain financial support from other sources.

Parents/carers of young people of school age may obtain further information and an application form from the Regional Administrator. Award of the grant is discretionary and is decided by the Executive Management Group on a termly basis. A supporting statement from the school is required for each application.

Contact Nahid Ahmed, Regional Administrator for further details. Tel: 01582 531100. Email: Nahid.Ahmed@luton.gov.uk

Outreach Opportunity for Schools and Colleges in the Eastern Region

Motivational Master Class

Eugene Matthias, President of the Magic Club of Great Britain with guest speaker Derek Redmond

Following the success of the first Motivational Master Class at Churchill College in January 2009, ERGATP has secured a commitment from Derek Redmond and Eugene Matthias to provide a limited number of repeat events in schools and colleges throughout the region.

The day is led by Eugene Matthias who uses elements of magic to develop such themes as the five keys to success, overcoming the impossible and self-belief. Derek Redmond, British Olympic 400m Gold Medalist uses the same themes to describe his life experience and his international career.

The event can be tailored to all age groups from upper primary to A level students and is suitable for up to 300 pupils at a time. For further details including fees please contact Eugene Matthias info@themagicclub.com, 01234 750393 or 07730111111.

ERGATP Key Contacts

Linda Prestidge - Chair - 01582 531107

Nahid Ahmed - Administrator - 01582 531100

Look out for the ERGATP link on the new Excellence East website!



Raising Aspirations

The history of Braintree has been one of pride in its industry and local business. However, since their decline and closure over the last 50 years the people of the town have in many cases struggled to raise their aspirations in respect to future prosperity, university and education beyond 16 years of age.

Having identified student aspirations as a major issue, senior staff at Alec Hunter Humanities College set about developing projects to raise the profile of Able, Gifted and Talented. The team has been led by Nicola Hills, assistant head teacher, whose clear vision, passion and determination has helped the college to improve this area of activity from unsatisfactory to good in just a year.

At a recent management meeting to review progress of the AGT cohort at the college, Nicola identified the following key factors in this success:

- A whole school approach to Able Gifted and Talented. Staff are aware of which students are AGT, making the students themselves aware. Students now expect challenging work.
- Staff are aware of the importance of differentiation.
- Staff are given the list of students, including their photographs.
- Staff training sessions have been provided, supported by the local authority.
- Monitoring of lessons to see if tasks were set for AGT has been a focus for Heads of Department and the leadership group. This has included conversations with students.
- The work of the senior team with those they line manage.
- A second member of staff working alongside Nicola.
- The support of the local authority eg. Training, meetings.

For further information please contact **Nicola Hills**, Alec Hunter Humanities College at alechunter@essex.sch.uk



Excellence East Contact Details

Joanna Taylor - University of Cambridge - jt389@admin.cam.ac.uk

Natalie Bailey - UEA - natalie.bailey@uea.ac.uk

Website - www.excellenceeast.org.uk