Having Fun and Raising Standards

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Abstract

So much of our Education system in England has been directed at raising standards specifically in English and Mathematics in recent years, to the detriment of other areas that previously featured in schools.

Evidence of progress, the setting of targets, assessment and inspection has been the order of the day. Gradually the "fun" elements of school have been eroded. Enjoyment in learning certainly appears to have taken a back seat at the expense of striving to achieve improved standards.

The reaction of our children to the introduction of an increasing amount of ICT through the school seemed to have captured everyone's imagination. However, it was our caretaker who inspired this paper. I was confronted after the first day back at school with "My granddaughter loves coming to school no. She says we don't work in the computer room, we just have fun!!"

Keywords: Effective pedagogies, standards, learning processes, research, project based learning.

1 Introduction

I would like to think that we have not only managed to have fun and raise standards, but that we have the evidence to show for it through a range of different mediums. We used ICT as the constant factor to drive each initiative.

The SAT results at Sandilands for the past two years at Key Stage 2 (ages 7–11) have been poor in Literacy and Numeracy—despite a range of initiatives being planned, implemented and evaluated. ICT was recognised by the Headteacher as a weakness of the school. As part of Manchester's School Improvement Team (MSITT), I was attached to Sandilands Junior School (7–11 year olds) in September 2000—and asked to help establish and develop ICT through the school.

2 Some of Our Achievements

Initially I was classroom based, although since September 2001 the school bought me out of MSITT (now known as Manchester's Intervention Programme) and my role has primarily been to lead and co-ordinate ICT throughout the school. The key factor has been ICT, the driving force to implement a range of initiatives. These initiatives were carefully thought through as part of our vision for ICT and included:

> establishing and developing an ever expanding ICT network;
>
> managing to gain greater kudos with parents, children, colleagues and governors;
>
> empowering colleagues to have greater confidence in their own ability to use/utilise ICT;
>
> attracting, engaging and inspiring children throughout the school, including those with challenging behaviour and disaffected children;
>
> positively altering patterns of behaviour towards school and learning;
>
> impacting directly and raising standards in Literacy and Numeracy.

Evidence for the successes we have achieved includes:

> The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) recognised ICT as a strength of the school—with ICT becoming a centre for excellence within the local area.
>
> I have acquired Advanced Skills Teacher status
>
> Two of my colleagues at Sandilands are currently applying for and awaiting assessment for the Fast-rack and Advanced Skills Teacher programmes.
>
> The school has applied to the DfES for Leading Aspect Award in ICT.
>
> We are being programmed and funded by Manchester LEA to host courses for teachers in ICT.
>
> Schools from our own and surrounding LEAs send teachers to observe how we utilise/teach ICT throughout the school.
>
> Involvement in a range of DfES and LEA funded initiatives.
>
> Excellence in Cities and Wythenshawe Education Action Zone (WyEAZ) funding to develop our ICT through the school.

Use of DfES laptops to support subject areas in the classroom and the ICT suite.

Award of four Tesco computers through their voucher scheme.

Being awarded a DfES bursary to attend the last IFIP 3.5 conference.

An invitation to be a Key Informant school as part of the MMU evaluation of the DfES funded GridClub project, a project that has broken down the barriers between home and school, impacting positively on attitudes to learning and school whilst also raising standards particularly in Literacy.

An invitation for our school to be evaluated by Lancaster University on the impact that SchoolNet Global has across the curriculum.

Building our own template driven school web-site that provides children, colleagues and parents with ownership of the site.

As a result of the success of our programme in ICT—children successfully being introduced to initiatives such as Accelerated Maths and Accelerated Reading (a commercially produced computer-based target setting, pupil monitoring and tracking assessment programme).

We will shortly be piloting and evaluating *Espresso*—for other schools in our Education Action Zone to consider using.

Children accessing safe Internet sites and developing skills needed to build their own web pages/sites.

Children being nominated for BETT and Tesco awards for their achievements in ICT.

Children becoming more confident and having greater self esteem.

Children, through our fully networked ICT suite and within classrooms, continually expanding their own ICT portfolios within class and individual folders containing work files saved and improved through their school career.

3 Areas that Have Moved Children Forward

As children learn in so many different ways, we decided to concentrate our efforts on a number of different strategies. Those strategies include developing a vision for effective hardware that allows access to the items listed below:

We started with 6 PCs, and now have 26 Pcs, an interactive whiteboard and 2 PCs in every classroom and building;

The network—own class areas and own folders within that area;

The formal structure—planned programmes of work linked to the QCA guidelines;

The informal structure—the other programmes on every child's desktop that include:

Dazzle (art programme—which I have developed into a package of some 12 sessions)

Maths games (DfES programmes as well as *Maths Explorer)*
Starspell
Junior storywriter
Blackcat (incorporating word processing, spreadsheets and databases)
Office 97 (incorporating *Word, Publisher, PowerPoint and Excel*)
Crystal Rainforest (adventure game)
Microsoft Logo (programming)
Accelerated Reader and *Accelerated Maths* (Renaissance Learning)

The Internet:

Millenniumschools (www.milleniumschools.co.uk)

GridClub and other researched websites ONLY (www.girlclub.com)

Think.com (www.think.com)

Schoolnet Global (www. schoolnetglobal.co.uk)

Northwest learning grid including world book on-line (www.nwlg.org.uk)

Espresso (www. espresso.co.uk)

4 So Where To Next?

We are working in partnership with the research model set up by Manchester Metropolitan University. We hope to see:

E-Learning resources (ELRs) such as PCs, digital cameras, camcorders, scanners etc. use their potential to transform the learning process so that pupils take control of knowledge and can use it creatively.

Transformative learning depends on the development of pedagogical practices, grounded in research knowledge, that integrate ELRs with teaching and learning in innovative ways.

These new pedagogical practices can only be developed with the close involvement of teachers and pupils committed to experimenting with innovative strategies.

Research and development work in assessment practices, grounded in research knowledge, must be an integral part of the development of innovative pedagogies with ICT.

Collaborative research between university researchers, teachers, classroom assistants, pupils, school leaders and parents will be the most effective way of achieving these changes and will also contribute to developing the professional knowledge and status of teachers.

5 On a Practical Level

Our next project aims to ensure work done on the computer is more effective, while having fun and raising standards, than the more traditional way. I am planning to work with our two Year 5 classes in their Literacy Hour. My aim is to improve standards in Literacy by using ICT

activities to extend reading, writing, speaking and listening. I intend to use two strategies:

1.1 Using Think.com

I am planning for children to visit my own, specific children's pages and everyone else's pages to view and respond to articles, conversations, debates, brainstorms, hotseats, video clips, music, animations and graphics.

The goal is to encourage children to read and respond to recent material presented in an interactive media format. I aim to focus upon the programme of study for the Year 5 Literacy Hour and plan cooperatively and collaboratively with Year 5 colleagues. The emphasis will be to replace traditionally taught reading, writing, speaking and listening activities using the *Think.com* medium to engage, interest, involve, stimulate and develop each literacy strand.

Examples of planning will include demonstrating how to create a page and download items onto it that will encourage other children to visit and respond to each of the various aspects described above.

I am hoping that our children will be breaking down the barriers between home and school by continuing to establish, build and improve their pages in lunch time and after school clubs as well as at home. Due to the asynchronous nature of the items within their pages, they are likely to engage and encourage responses from children in their own class, partner schools and other children on-line both within the UK and across the world.

1.2 Using Powerpoint to Create Storyboards and Video Camcorders to Create Video Sequences

I plan to structure sessions so that groups of children create their own ideas and then discuss how each idea can create a power-point "storyboard" presentation – ensuring thought is given to:

who is going to be the target audience;

the theme for the film, and whether there is to be a clear beginning, middle and end, as well as a twist in the tale.

Children will decide which is likely to be the most "workable" idea as well as creating an order for the ideas.

I am planning for children to work cooperatively and collaboratively in order to decide who is to direct, produce, cast, film and edit films, making up to 2 minute film clips at first hand. The team will also need to decide who is to add sound and titles, as well as any narrative(s) with the aim of producing a completed project.

The final aspect will be for the team to view, discuss, evaluate and edit/alter the clip(s) as appropriate in order to improve upon the presentation and the likely impact to their audiences. Each completed film project will be shared with a variety of audiences both in our school as well as in our partner schools in United Kingdom, Germany, United States, New Zealand and Kenya.

6 E-learning

I think there is much to think about when Professor Stephen Heppell (from Ultralab and designer of *Think.com*) says:

It isn't delivering knowledge, it isn't building 'teaching machines', it isn't edutainment, it isn't doing what we did before but cheaper.

But it is the opportunity for children to explore new expertises, take new risks, develop new collaborations, gain new understandings…

It is about creativity not productivity…

It is also about multiple media and multiple learning styles, together with the opportunity to change the mix to suit the context, the learners, their predispositions and their entitlements.

Comfortingly it is also about allowing teachers to do what they entered the profession to do: inspire, lead and delight children whilst rejoicing in their rapid progression.

Much of what he says has been incorporated into the *Think.com* site, allowing children to access a safe web-site (closely policed by teachers and mediators) at a variety of levels and at the same time being made more aware of the potential dangers at large within the vast internet space.

7 Upward Spirals

… And here's where the really good bit is. I guess by virtue of each of the initiatives we have been/are involved in we have moved into "upward spirals." In other words, the more we have achieved, the more recognition we have received for what we have been involved in. Although there is always hard work to be carried out (but we would be working hard anyway, just not necessarily in that direction) due to our enthusiasm and recognition we are then asked to become involved in other projects. And so it goes on … and so the upward spirals continue … with further bids in the pipeline for taking on new initiatives, fellowships, scholarships, research awards, partnerships, sponsorship and prizes. The most recent include:

an invitation to take children to visit the House of Commons with our local MP as part of our ICT work;

a joint Miranda Net scholarship award each of £2000 to myself and a colleague to train as e-facilitators and carry out a small scale Action Research Project;

a BT Award of £5000 to focus on ICT impacting directly into the classroom to improve Literacy standards.

References

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Blackcat (1999): Birmingham, Sherston Press

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Junior Storywriter (1999): Manchester Granada Learning,

Maths Games (2000): London, Department for Education and Skills DfES.

Microsoft Logo (2000): Microsoft Corporation USA.

Office 97 (1997): incorporating *Word, Publisher*, *PowerPoint and Excel*. Microsoft Corporation, USA .

Starspell (1999): Manchester, Granada Learning.

A: raised my standards so impossibly high so that I can never enjoy romance in fiction the same way ever again. B: taught me that to make my celebrity crush fall in love with me I need to drink sixteen glasses of champagne and pole dance. copperpatina. He acknowledges they have their faults they have to work on, but he recognizes the positive effect Bakugou and Midoriya have! And when Aizawa said he 'can't wait to see what they'll do' I just freakin went "Goddamn it, Aizawa, FUCKING SAME!!!" He's rooting for Bakugou and Midoriya, the two shining stars of his class, and DAMN IT, SO AM I!! Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. The government agency reports directly to Parliament and is independent and impartial. Ofsted inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people, and those providing education and skills for learners of all ages. Effective inspection is a key tool in raising standards and improving lives – and therefore it lies at the heart of Ofsted's ethos and activities. Being able to gather information intelligently and share it efficiently is essential if Ofsted's inspectors are to promote, monitor and report on how schools, colleges, children's homes, local authorities and early childhood provision raise standards and improve lives. It also doesn't stop there.