

Case Study 3: Staff and Pupil Programmes for Establishing Platforms for Effective Learning, Teaching and Creativity

Castlebrae Community High School, Edinburgh, City of Edinburgh

This case study outlines the approaches taken to develop and enhance creativity for both staff and pupils through the use of programmes that challenge conventional ways of working and thinking working towards a 'can do' approach and perseverance in relation to tasks.

Castlebrae Community High School serves the residential estates located in the south east of Edinburgh. Located in an area of social and economic priority the school has worked hard to establish a well-deserved reputation for commitment and quality in the service it provides to the community.

The school views the development of pupils' self-esteem as pivotal to the success of a variety of school initiatives geared to raising achievement and obtaining success. The management and staff have invested heavily in approaches to personal and social development that are concerned very much with developing thinking skills and confidence building.

Recently we have certainly seen a positive difference in our exam results and the leaver destinations of our pupils. Investing in the development of staff and the exploration of a range of teaching and learning skills and strategies has been worth the significant input of time and finances which we have made.

William Crosbie, Headteacher

Two of the strategies at work in the school, an S1–S4 pupils' personal and social education (PSE) programme and a related but separate staff development initiative, have been important developments in helping pupils develop a 'can do' state of mind and a willingness to persevere in their studies. A significant factor is the basing of the pupils' programme on the principles involved in the staff development programme so as to achieve a continuity of approach and philosophy.

For a number of pupils in the past it was easier simply to give up rather than overcome the significant personal and social hurdles which many had to overtake. We wanted to change that and help them to realise their ambitions and dreams.

Gordon Young, PT Guidance

Staff development

Over the past ten years or so the school has involved itself in training through an organisation called the Pacific Institute and their programme 'Investment in Excellence'. The headteacher, senior staff and all but a few of the teaching staff have undergone training with two of the staff now fully qualified as trainers.

All the management team went through this training first and now I feel that the critical mass of having big staff numbers going through the training is making a real difference. We now have more of a common language of ideas and understanding.

Mike Falconer, AHT

I offered to train as a facilitator because I feel that we focus on personal development and the individual. We offer something beyond the professional handout which takes you into ideas, values and common-sense strategies. You need this before you can get the wider group together as a group and go forward as a whole school.

Scarlett McGovern – English teacher and co-trainer
with Gordon Young on the staff training course

The principles underpinning the training involve staff in challenging their own ways of working and thinking with a view to developing strategies to better help themselves and pupils to change attitudes and improve attainment and creative thinking. Routines are explored, such as the 'define, transfer, plan and evaluate' (DTPE) approach to task realisation and positive thinking strategies.

The commitment of staff and the investment of school time and finance are significant and include a three-day intensive session over a weekend, on-the-job practice and team-building sessions with a further residential session, and a rounding-off day to consolidate learning. The course makes use of video resources and CDs for independent working as well as the taught sessions. Funding is drawn through the school's Education Action Plan Fund, the devolved staff development budget, sponsorship and support from Business–Community Connections, the local business support group.

It can cost about £200 per person for materials and there is the time element as well with the residential running over a weekend and further single-day sessions after that. We believe it is making a difference and that is why we established our own training team this year so that we can train people more easily and in greater numbers. In the past we could only afford to send a couple of folk a year to the externally mounted courses.

Gordon Young, PT Guidance

The principles and thinking of the staff training course have played a major part in shaping the revised PSE course for the pupils in S1–S4.

It seemed eminently sensible to build in the positive thinking and team-building principles used with the staff to the pupils' course so that there is continuity across our work with the children. We involve non-teaching staff in the training programme so that we can ensure common approaches and thinking wherever students come into contact with school staff at whatever level. This is a rolling and voluntary training programme which will develop further over time.

Gordon Young

Staff views are well focused in course evaluations.

It is important that all of us in the school have the same hopes and plans for the school and can freely discuss and implement them working together on the same strategies.

Principal teacher

If staff go through the course the personal development of the students will be improved. We are also encouraged to think positively and look forward with vision. As well as myself some of the auxiliary staff who work with me went on the training and we feel we can take things forward better as a team.

Principal teacher

The course helps us all to share a common vision for our school and to have the confidence and belief to carry it further.

Teacher

This will help to ensure that the pain of growth and change is easier to handle as a result of increased knowledge and understanding. The secret of this course for support staff is that we now think more positively in terms of 'Yes I can do that.' – The challenge is to plan when to do it to fit deadlines which are agreed.

Bursar

It helps us and the students to achieve more.

Classroom auxiliary

The pupils' programme (outlined in App. 1)

The current pupils' programme builds on the school's previous work in initiatives such as Thinking Skills, Investing in Excellence, The Learning Game, The Learning File and basic social education approaches. The Principal Teacher of Guidance, Gordon Young, developed the course in collaboration with colleagues. He was seconded for a term to consolidate the school's programme and draw the various components together in a course tailored for the needs of the pupils, which matches the range of learning and teaching approaches that the school is attempting to develop across the school. The consolidated course is in its second year of operation.

The rationale recognises:

- adolescence as a time when young people experience their highest degree of persuasibility in relation to the world around them
- concern about the number of young people turning to negative and self-destructive behaviour
- the need for the school to take an active role in enabling young people to cope in modern society by providing programmes that help them to raise their self-esteem and maximise their potential through developing learning confidence
- that many underachieve because of their lack of belief in their own academic potential
- the raising of educational standards will not be facilitated by the hard work of teachers alone
- that recent research shows that the 'intelligence quotient' for children is not fixed but variable.

The course identifies two main tasks to:

- teach learners to believe in themselves, and so make them want to learn and develop
- teach learners methods to help them develop their potential.

The course is therefore designed to raise self-esteem and maximise pupils' potential by:

- informing and empowering them
- developing their social skills
- promoting positive relationships
- developing their metacognitive skills
- developing their sense of enquiry
- developing a capability for independent thinking

- developing an ability to balance rights with responsibilities.

The programme recognises the existence of ‘important others’ for young people. These important others can be adults and the programme seeks to develop this by fostering a relationship with a member of staff with whom the pupils will be involved in curriculum, social events and school trips – a group tutor.

The students’ guidance teacher also has an involvement in the programme and the group tutor, Guidance teacher and student view themselves as members of a team all working towards the same ends. Teamwork characterises the approaches and may involve:

- team teaching
- small group work
- specialised sessions involving a specialist member of staff
- single-sex lessons (particularly when discussing attitudes to sex)
- invited input from the community
- input from organisations (Police, Fire, etc.).

The course builds on the recommendations of the 5–14 PSD guidelines and focuses in four main areas:

- self-awareness
- self-esteem
- interpersonal relationships
- independence and interdependence.

In order to give the students regular contact with one teacher the group tutor takes on the main role in the delivery of the course. The approach to staffing recognises that some teachers may not be comfortable teaching this type of course and it is deemed important that the following aspects of the instructor’s role should be considered in teacher selection.

- The teacher should genuinely like and respect young people. He/she should feel that students’ ideas are worth listening to.
- The teacher should have the ability to listen to young people and encourage them to express their ideas.
- The teacher should be sensitive to the feelings of others.
- The teacher should feel comfortable supporting the values of the course and serve as a positive role model for young adolescents.

As it is essential that the students get to know their guidance teacher, and *vice versa*. The guidance teacher teaches the team for at least one of the periods each week as well as making contact at registration when possible.

A member of the management team is in charge of the programme and is available as a specialist to come into some lessons as appropriate. Other members of staff may also be called in at appropriate times to support lesson presentation, for example ‘An Introduction to Positive Thinking’ by a member of staff trained by the Pacific Institute. The school tries to involve as many staff as possible, either directly or indirectly, so that it is viewed as a whole school course.

Pupils have responded very positively to the course and apply the lessons learnt in their daily lives and studies.

Target setting sessions are helpful. They help you identify what you are having problems with and also you can discuss how you can address these things. Targets are agreed between the teachers and us and include things like handing in homework on time, turning up for school and good behaviour.

We learn how to build up our confidence and speak up for ourselves and how to plan for the steps you need to take for where you want to go in life. We cover things like healthy living, and it's not just classwork but involves activities. For example we had a day where the HOT (local Health Opportunities Team) people come in and we had discussion sessions in groups to talk about drugs and sensible eating. It's good – and about the things you really face in life.

It gives you a chance to talk at your own level and make decisions for yourself. It is good to have the opportunity to talk about serious things with folk of your own age and have someone there to keep things on track.

The college day was cool. They treated you as an adult not a wee school bairn and you got a feeling what it really would be like.

It really helps you in your classes. Mr. Young has showed us how not to get flustered and not to think things like 'I cannae dae it'. I now think to myself that I can do it. We have been taught different methods in how to use your mind and to plan out the steps to tackle a problem.

It is good to be able to tell your folks about getting positive referrals from teachers – you know you have done well and it makes you feel good and want to do better.

I like this school. The relationships are good and you feel you are listened to. You can discuss problems with your work without it having to be a hassle.

From discussions with Marianne Peters and Rachel Lindsay, S3

The linking up of a staff development strategy – focusing on positive thinking, personal creativity and development – with a PSE approach built on the same philosophy has helped pupils to take better control of their learning and be well placed to tap their own creativity for personal advancement.

The training has helped me to analyse my teaching style closely and it certainly made a difference to the way I talk to myself about the students. This self-talk is very important and it alters the way I talk to the students directly. It makes you realise the important influence of even small comments made to pupils when you reflect on influences in your own past and career. You think not only of the 'put downs' but also the power of positive comment and praise.

Mike Falconer and Scarlett McGovern

The approach followed by Castlebrae has implications for the fostering of creativity and several important features can be discerned.

- Pupils are given opportunities to develop higher order skills and helped to value the learning and teaching opportunities that they have.
- Pupils are motivated to persevere with tasks, to explore ideas, consider their quality and apply solutions accordingly.

- Non-threatening and positive teaching approaches are used with an understanding that making mistakes is an important part of learning.
- Open-ended questions are set for pupils and they have responsibility for solutions.
- Pupils and staff receive regular feedback.
- Shared philosophy and strategy in teaching gives a consistent approach across the school.
- Management has taken the lead in developments and is explicit in its support for staff.
- Funding has been allocated to develop and implement strategies.
- A realistic approach has been taken to the development of an approach over time.
- Staff and pupils believe in the strategies that are being followed.

Appendix 1: Outline of pupils' PSE course

S1: first term

The first part of the programme is designed to create a safe, supportive environment. This is essential for the programme to be successful. The next stage is to look at how pupils have formed their beliefs and self-images and how the brain works. This is an essential part of the course where staff try to encourage the students to understand that they are able to improve their performance in all aspects of their lives if they want to. The introduction to the positive thinking framework at this stage is then presented as a tool that they can use to help achieve this desired improvement. The video *Chicken* is introduced at this time to demonstrate the effects of peer pressure and drug abuse and the students do a little research on the most common drugs, for example alcohol, cannabis and tobacco, and report their findings. This phase takes up to the October break.

The rest of the term is split between the use of the thinking framework 'basic skills' and the sex education programme 'Living and Growing'. This checks on the level of sex education the students have had from their various primary schools.

The term is rounded off with puzzles and a Christmas party.

By the end of term 1 the students should feel:

- comfortable in the class
- empowered with positive belief
- understand their responsibility to others and themselves.

S1: second term

The first five weeks are used to reinforce positive thinking and learning new ways to develop students' learning. This will consist of the notion of 'positive wizards', self-talk, and will reinforce the use of affirmations. In this phase students will learn about short- and long-term memory and how to use mind maps, mnemonics and memory practice. This is followed by the Brook sex education programme and by work on developing self-confidence.

The programme will help to enhance self-confidence by encouraging students to recognise personal strengths, develop communication skills and establish a caring, cooperative classroom atmosphere. The term will finish off with Fire Education.

By the end of term 2 the student should:

- feel able to use new techniques successfully
- believe in their ability to grow and succeed
- understand their body and its development.

S1: third term

One period each week is 'Learning to Think about Reading' and the importance of this to their future development. The other period is used to allow the students to put into practice the skills of making things happen. This involves 'Service Learning' and organising a class trip.

The session finishes with a review and work on the students' Record of Achievement.

By the end of term 3 the students should:

- believe in their ability to make things happen
- understand how to develop their skills
- have goals for the next session.

S2: first term

For one period each week the class will attend the library as a follow up to 'Learning to Think about Reading' and will develop library skills. The 'eight confidences' exercises will take place during the other PSE period. A section follows this on 'Emotions', which should take the class up to the October break.

After the break the class has input from the Health Opportunities Team on sex education. The rest of the term is taken up with positive thinking to include further work on the structure of the brain and how it works.

By the end of term 1 students should:

- be confident in the use of the library
- have reinforced their knowledge about positive thinking
- have increased basic understanding about how the brain is structured and how this knowledge can aid their learning.

S2: second term

After an introduction to study habits the main part of the term is devoted to course planning. After the choices are complete the rest of the term is devoted to understanding and developing positive peer relationships.

By the end of term 2 students should:

- know about good study habits and how to plan their study time
- have agreed with the school and their parents the most suitable courses to follow over the next two years
- know how to develop positive peer relationships and avoid negative influences and conflict.

S2: third term

The third term is devoted to drugs education.

By the end of term three students should:

- be able to make decisions for themselves
- know how to say 'no' if they are offered a drug
- be able to help a friend say 'no' if offered a drug
- know how to use their free time in a positive way.

S3 and S4

In S3 and S4 two periods per week are devoted to social education and PSD modules.

The remaining period is devoted to 'developing potential' and is structured as follows.

S3

S3 is devoted to reviewing the first two years of the course and setting goals for the short term as well as the long term. This target setting is done in collaboration with other staff and there are fortnightly monitoring sessions to ensure pupils stay on track. Pupils experience further work in careers and health education with input from outside providers and complete a life and work project. The life and work project involves contacting employers, arranging visits and interviews. Pupils are encouraged to take the initiative with staff acting as facilitators and advising on safe practice and contact. The classes also work on setting up a study diary that will be used throughout S3 and S4 and which can be used as part of the target group work. At the end of the year there are poster sessions where the pupils invite staff to hear of their work through mini-presentations, and view posters encompassing the outcomes. Other elements include a residential visit and a visit to a local college to get a feel for further education.

S4

S4 is devoted to furthering target group work and work experience and to building up for the exams. This includes a residential study weekend, a revision programme during the Easter holidays and a number of one-off events aimed at raising aspirations and self-confidence.

By the end of S3/S4 the students will:

- have clear targets not only for the short term but also for their future life
- have taken all their exams and be well on their way to develop their potential.