

Student co-planners

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Published September 20, 2015

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Key Points

- A student leadership initiative to co-plan lessons with teachers
- In four years, 200 teachers from London schools have co-planned with students

Purpose

What were your reasons for doing this development work?

The Student Co-planners project grew out of a previous Student Leadership project in which students were carefully recruited and trained to observe lessons and provide teachers with constructive feedback with the aim of 'leaving the teacher feeling confident, competent and valued yet clear how to develop'.

Students themselves identified the value of planning lessons with teachers, particularly with trainees or with NQTs so they could have an input at the planning stage and help teachers to plan inter-active, differentiated, engaging learning rather than wait until the feedback stage to discuss how this might have been achieved.

The project also had the advantage of being far less threatening for teachers, many of whom found the student observations daunting. In addition, co-planning lessons with students had the potential to raise achievement by planning learning from the students' viewpoint.

Who were the identified target learners?

Students and teachers

What were your success criteria?

What did you do? (What success criteria did you use?)

The project was piloted with carefully selected students from the High Learning Potential register. They were identified by the Achievement Team Leader (Head of Year) and the project was outlined to them. Students who were interested in this were interviewed formally for the role, unpicking their motivation for wanting to co-plan lessons and to judge their sensitivity and communication skills.

Successful interviewees were then trained to prepare them to work in pairs, in partnership with teachers, understand confidentiality, and be able to provide

suggestions and feedback in a positive manner. This was in order to ensure the success of the project and to guarantee that it was both beneficial to students and an excellent use of teachers' time, leading to a real and positive impact on learning in the classroom.

The pilot was exceptionally successful and the Student Co-planners became embedded into the life of Parliament Hill School. The next step was to widen out the group of students trained to co-plan lessons to provide a more representative group, e.g. to include students with Special Educational Needs and students for whom English was an additional language.

There were already 14 Year 10 students and 16 Year 8 students successfully co-planning with teachers. Co-planning was integral to the Student Teacher and Newly Qualified Teacher programmes as well as being planned into several programmes the school runs across north London, e.g. Consolidating Outstanding and Strengthening Pedagogy.

Student Co-planners also ran excellent mini-workshops at Induction Day for new teachers on 'What makes a great Parliament Hill School Teacher?' and for Student Teachers on 'What makes a great teacher?' in SE1 and 'What makes a great lesson?' in SE2.

In the four years the project has been operating, just over 200 teachers from London schools had co-planned lessons with students. Without exception, teachers rated the experience as 'excellent', 'extremely useful', 'inspiring' or 'amazing to see how much students understand about learning'.

A brief summary of what was done this year:

This year, the project has been extended to include students with dual exceptionality (students with High learning Potential who have an additional learning need). The Achievement Team Leader for Year 7 identified 10 students who she felt would both benefit from being involved in the project and who would have a great deal to offer teachers. Learning needs ranged from autism, dyslexia, hearing impairment, EAL and selective mutism.

As before, the project was explained to students and they were invited to express an interest. All 10 students chose to go ahead and were trained in same way earlier students had been. The training morning included:

- Identifying what makes a great lesson
- The qualities and behaviours of a great co-planner, leading to a list of golden rules
- How to communicate difficult messages constructively and sensitively from a student's viewpoint
- Deconstructing a lesson to look at how the various components impact on learning and then suggesting a range of other learning strategies that could achieve the same outcome
- A practice at co-planning with volunteer teachers, working alongside experienced Year 8 or Year 10 co-planners

The new Year 7 co-planners were then paired up with older, experienced co-planners and assigned their first teacher. Pairs of students were responsible for contacting teachers to set a time to co-plan, making the project more manageable for the Project Leader who simply had to compile a list of teachers ready to co-plan and inform them of the assigned students.

For the remainder of the first year, the Year 7 students continued to co-plan alongside older students and will go on to co-plan without their support in Year 8.

What specific teaching resources did you use?

Outcomes and Impact

What has been the impact on pupil learning and teaching?

- Over 200 teachers have co-planned lessons with students, some have co-planned entire Schemes of Learning together.
- 24 teachers have co-planned with the year 7 co-planners. All evaluations indicate that this had been 'excellent', helping to ensure that students' diverse learning needs were better met. A visiting NQT co-planned an entire Year 7 Physics Scheme of Learning in an hour!
- Students worked with teachers on reviewing the transition Year 7 SoL, created in 2014 to significantly increase the challenge in the first term at secondary school.
- Departments are co-planning for the new national curriculum specifications with students.
- Comparison of lesson plans before and after co-planning indicates that students create learning activities which are differentiated, interactive and engaging.
- Student teachers and teachers who need support report an improvement in engagement in co-planned lessons.
- Student teachers and NQTs report that the project has enabled them to plan from a student viewpoint, helping them to view students as partners in learning who bring a wealth of experiences and knowledge rather than being a mass to be managed and filled with knowledge.

An external review, prior to including the Year 7 group, indicated that the project had had a positive impact on students in terms of confidence, communication with adults and in their belief in their ability to positively impact on the world around them. An NQT commented, "Consulting students this way on lesson planning makes a really big difference on a day to day basis." Students reported that they had noticed, "... a lot more engagement, particularly from some of the weaker pupils or pupils who are likely to get disengaged and misbehave." Another student commented, "Teachers like [hearing] what you say. It has to be quite practical, though, as they can't do everything."

Evidence of impact on pupil learning and teaching/leadership

A teacher commented, "The students actually save me time; in 15-20 minutes they can plan and differentiate a whole lesson".

All students and teachers agreed they would recommend this project to other schools, "Oh totally because students know what students want."

Year 7 students report being excited and proud to be chosen, already feeling more confident, particularly in speaking with adults. One parent contacted the school to say how delighted she was for her daughter, who had struggled with communication at primary school, to have been given the opportunity and how it had made her more outgoing and raised her self-esteem.