

Ysgol Glan Gele



Research Report YGG2017/1

Following the publication of the Furlong Report 'Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers' (2015) and The Donaldson Report 'Successful Futures' (2015) staff in Ysgol Glan Gele were keen to re-engage in action research which had been a key feature of the school during the era of the General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW) bursaries. During this period (2001-2010) we had successfully researched a variety of aspects of pedagogy and curriculum innovation and staff had become 'research engaged' and developed valuable skills. Senior leaders felt that the school had become 'research poor' and that younger members of staff had very little understanding of 'knowledge mobilisation' or experience of relevant action research. We resolved that evidence-informed practice would become a priority feature of our CPD to ensure we had 'high quality teachers with a sound understanding of the 'why' and 'how' of teaching as well as the 'what'.' (Donaldson 2015: 58). Fortunately, our Consortia GWE (Programme was led by Eithne Hughes) decided to commission CUREE (Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education) to work with schools across North Wales in order to upskill staff in valuable research skills and protocols. During 2016-17 CUREE launched and supported a programme aimed at developing self-sustaining capacity for research and evidence-informed school improvement amongst a cohort of 30 Leads and Challenge Advisers. Ysgol Glan Gele was one of these schools. All staff were involved but Laura Martin our Deputy head was designated our in-school champion. Ysgol Glan Gele is also a Pioneer School for Welsh Government.

Context

Ysgol Glan Gele is an infant school situated in Abergele, in Conwy local authority. There are 295 pupils on roll, aged between three and seven, organised into 11 classes and a nursery class. Around 28% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is above the average for Wales. The school has identified about 30% of its pupils as having additional learning needs. Very few pupils use English as an additional language and almost all come from English speaking homes. The school has a transient population due to the nature of the area.

Background

For our enquiry we decided to explore the impact of specific, individual feedback on more reluctant learners in FP2 (Year 2) aged 6 and 7 years. One of our School Development Plan priorities for 16-17 was to develop Growth Mindset amongst the school population. As a school we had examined various strategies and research documents in order to develop and improve the Growth Mindset and wellbeing of our pupils. This enquiry linked well with this priority and as a Foundation Phase school resilience is something we are always looking to improve and develop. Our research focused on a small sample of FP2 pupils who were of average cognitive ability but who were identified by the class teacher as 'just doing enough and never putting in as much effort as I would like.'

Starting Point

As previously stated, Growth Mindset was a priority for the school during 16-17 and was being led by three members of the teaching staff but was a whole school initiative. Thus, the selected children were involved in a variety of Growth Mindset lessons and activities from September 2016 and, as a staff, we had started to see attitudes to learning and approaches change.

Following observations by teaching assistants and the class teacher it was felt that this particular group of pupils were not fulfilling their potential across the curriculum. Staff took part in professional dialogue to ascertain why this was the case and what could we do about it. Each of the pupils in the targeted group were of average or above average ability, they all had the potential to end the year with an Outcome 5 or 6 in Language Literacy and

Communication, Mathematical Development and Personal and Social Development. They had varying degrees of support from home in terms of their school work.

Initially, the class teacher spent time with teaching assistants discussing how they interacted and fed back to these pupils and what the impact of their feedback on standards was. In addition the class teacher, also the school Deputy, carried out Mathematics observations across the school as part of her curriculum responsibilities. During these observations she had a secondary focus and also spent time recording the praise and feedback given to pupils by staff across the school. How personal was it? How did the praise move learning forward? Staff were at the time unaware of the second focus of the observation. This provided a valuable baseline.

It was clear from these observations that overall as a staff, a majority were mainly providing low level feedback with much of what was said being “well done”, “fantastic”, “good girl” etc. There was little focus on specific praise to move learning forward during the session. There were also some very good examples of quality feedback but these were in the minority. We then had a whole school staff meeting to discuss the evaluation of these observations. Following discussions with staff it was clear that they all felt that the feedback and praise that they gave to pupils was more focused and individual than it was in reality! Many staff members were very surprised by the findings and we all resolved to improve and raise the quality of our feedback in order to improve pupil wellbeing, motivation and outcomes.

We also sent questionnaires home to the parents of the targeted group to find out their thoughts on what motivated their children.

As a starting point we photocopied examples of writing from the target pupils to use as a baseline in the hope that attainment in this area would be significantly improved after providing quality focused feedback (beyond average improvement over time had everything stayed the same). This was going to be our measure of the impact of this research project.

A short while into the project the class teacher spent time facilitating a series of group discussions with the targeted learners over several weeks. From these interactions it was apparent that pupils were very aware that they didn't always put enough effort into their work and the majority felt that distractions from their peers were to blame for this! They all knew how to overcome these distractions, from our work on Growth Mindset, and two learners reported that during recent weeks they had started to remove themselves from distractions. During a discussion on the feedback and praise they receive from adults they were all very clear that they would much prefer feedback that told them very specifically what they had done well and all were keen for suggestions on how to improve. Rewards were all discussed favourably and learners felt that instant reward for their efforts was a positive thing and would make them feel good about their work and efforts.

Teaching and learning processes

Following on from initial discussions, observations and parent feedback the class teacher spent time engaged in research into effective feedback and praise and found many interesting articles. From this she was able to focus her thinking much more around the term ‘encouragement’ and the importance of specific feedback. She decided to produce visual prompts for all staff in her class to use which would act as reminders when staff were working with individuals. She produced two posters, one about the importance of encouragement and another entitled ‘Feedback Must Dos’.

During the last three months of the Summer Term the teacher spent more time with the selected individuals ensuring they were now able to recognise the aspects of their work or effort that she was pleased with along with reasons why and how their work could be improved further. This was very much a collaborative approach with the learner's views at the forefront. Furthermore, the class teacher and teaching assistants ensured they spent time praising the efforts of the pupils during lessons and activities and also consciously rewarded these learners more immediately.

Impact

The targeted learners have all shown an improved attitude to learning (especially the girls) and all are spending more time completing tasks. The quality of their written work has improved. All attained average or above average outcomes at the end of the assessment period in June. All of the learners were more aware of what they had done well and were able to explain areas of their work that needed to be improved. All staff in the class had noted changed attitudes in this group and levels of motivation. The effort they put into their work increased and all were clearly pleased to be receiving more immediate rewards. Wellbeing had improved. This also had a positive impact on the rest of the class who also benefited from an improved quality of feedback and more specific encouragement. The posters that the class teacher produced proved to be beneficial in terms of reminding staff to be more specific and focused to ensure improved outcomes. Staff feedback is now a more focused tool to develop our learners. From discussions with learners it is clear that they feel more valued and are more confident in terms of understanding how they can improve their work. They liked the fact that they know what they are doing well and are becoming very effective at identifying how to improve aspects of their work themselves.

Evidence

In the first instance we collected evidence of work produced without a drive on feedback. We then used later pieces of work to measure impact. We also created questionnaires for parents and spent time with the children gauging their thoughts and ideas on the feedback they receive and the effort that they put into their work.

Further Reading

Teaching Tomorrows Teachers – The Furlong Report John Furlong – Oxford March 2015

<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/publications/wagreviews/teaching-tomorrows-teachers/?lang=en>

Successful Futures - Graham Donaldson February 2015

<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/curriculuminwales/curriculum-for-wales-curriculum-for-life/?lang=en>

Encouragement is more effective than praise – Childcare, 8th September 2015

<http://articles.extension.org/pages/25701/encouragement-is-more-effective-than-praise-in-guiding-childrens-behavior>

Effective Praise – Leah Davies M.Ed www.kellybear.com

Examples of Constructive Praise and Encouraging Comments – Daniel T. Willingham www.parentingscience.com

The effects of praise: What scientific studies reveal – www.parentingscience.com

Understood – The Power of Praise – Amanda Morin (At a glance) www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/empowering-your-child/celebrating-successes/ways-praise-can-empower-kids-learning-issues

Encouraging and praising children – www.kidsmatter.edu.au

Curee Report (<http://learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/140214-curee-leaflet-en.pdf>)

Future Progress

Improving the quality of feedback will be a whole school priority in 2017-18. We will feedback our micro- research findings to all staff during the first month of the new term. The posters produced as part of the project will be used in all classrooms as a tool to remind staff how to ensure their feedback is always focused and of high quality to ensure it impacts on pupil progress. The in school Champion has created a questionnaire for staff to gauge their thoughts on their use of feedback with their learners. Peer observations will be used across the school to ensure we learn from each other. This will be used to develop training and coaching across the school. The school will also be involved in a Shirley Clarke research team in 2018 local consortia- GWE.

Contact

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