



Spring Issue (1)

2017-18

Dubai College

Research Newsletter

*'No research without
action, no action without
research'*

(Kurt Lewin, 1946, 36)

Greetings everyone! This newsletter is intended to inform you about action research taking place at Dubai College. This year over 20 staff have taken on action research projects in order to test, innovate and enhance their practice in their chosen subject area or pastoral focus. In 2017-2018, project areas are wide-ranging and include *the use of audio feedback in marking, student engagement and motivation, design thinking in collaborative creativity, peer assessment, development of questioning skills, Harkness pedagogy, exploration of GCSE subject choices, homework, well-being, and evaluation of online apps.*

What is Action Research?

Action research is a powerful tool in education for transforming practice. Through action research, teachers *reflect* upon their practice, *design* and *implement* changes, and finally *evaluate* such actions in order to improve learning in their situations. Action Research has the potential to empower teachers, increase learning outcomes for students, and create a school culture of reflectivity, and fluidity. Traditionally educational research has been done by academic researchers in a university, studying what takes place in school, but from an 'outsider' perspective. Action research gives teachers the 'right to research' (Appadurai, 2006, 102). Teachers have 'insider knowledge' of their own context, their own students, and therefore bring unique perspectives to the research. Furthermore, teachers can also be participants in their own research.



*'Research is creating new
knowledge'*

(Neil Armstrong, 2015, 4)

Featured Teacher Projects

Within this and subsequent newsletters, you will be given an insight into current action research projects taking place at Dubai College. In addition to this we will also explore pertinent issues and relevant research. Here are a few of the research projects that have been taking place:

Peer Assessment: Stuart Forsythe



For my action research project, I have chosen to investigate the use of peer assessment as a means to more effective marking and student feedback. Throughout my twelve years of teaching, I have noticed that the quality of peer feedback has been generally poor as students tend to simply write vague comments such as "very good". In order to alleviate this, I have realised that I will need to train students over a period of time to improve the way in which they are giving feedback. I decided to start off by marketing the idea to them and explaining the value of peer assessment and how it would enable them to have effective and regular feedback as well as enabling the final teacher feedback to be more focused on developing the application aspect of their skills. I used a pseudo-code style sheet with clear guidance on how to mark their peers' work and this sheet has evolved over time with use. So far, I have completed two of the three intended cycles and my initial findings suggest strongly that peer improvement has significantly improved; my student feedback surveys have shown that they welcome this process and clearly understand some of the benefits therein.

Sixth form tutoring: Rachael Maguire



I have decided to explore how different approaches to Tuesday tutor time affects pupil engagement and experience. Finding the optimum balance between directed and non-directed tutor activities is something I intend to research in order to inform tutor time planning.

For this study, I have decided upon a number of steps which include: an initial questionnaire to the Sixth Form about their experience of tutor period, a randomly selected focus group to discuss tutor periods and trial tutor period lessons with two forms. My findings from the questionnaire and focus group will inform my construction of a series of tutor sessions where I will be a participant observer.

After this, in conjunction with the tutors and pupil feedback, we will co-construct the next session. In my role as Head of Year 12, I hope that my findings can help feed into the pastoral care provision at school during this time of development.

Tutoring is, rightfully, quite individual therefore the intention of the research is to support and inform the already excellent practice of colleagues.

Learning to fail: Gulshan Malik



My action research project is looking at the value of teaching students to learn from failure. I am focusing on a Year 9 set 4 group because there are always a few who feel they should be in one of the higher sets to be able to study the GCSE accelerated course. Through careful questioning and training of the students, I have been investigating if it is beneficial to allow them to fail in order to make them more resilient, or does this actually damage their confidence in their abilities? I have assigned a couple of tasks and questions with very little support and scaffolding in a unit of work to see how successful they are in accessing the learning and then carrying out a questionnaire and survey to see what the students' views were on these tasks.

Collaboration and student leadership: Alan Crawford



My action research project sets to explore collaboration and student leadership as a way of developing creativity in musical composition at GCSE level. By creating and trialing a specific unit of study with Year 10 students making use of a 'design thinking' pedagogical approach, and focusing upon their key areas of study 'Musical Fusions', I seek to discover more about the ways in which students work with each other and how they most effectively incubate, develop and refine ideas. Burnard's (2012) Musical Creativities in Practice theoretical model is used to understand creativities in this context. Through a cycle of planning, teaching, participating, observing, recording, interviewing and reviewing, data will be collected, coded and analysed in order to produce findings. I acknowledge the interpretive nature of this study which is affected by my own understanding and position and I intend to be reflexively acknowledge at all times such leanings and counterbalance these through sustained reliance upon the student voice as well as investigator and methodological triangulation as well as participant verification.

Learning from Research

Lucy Crehan Talk @Dubai College



Lucy Crehan, a former teacher and international education consultant, shared her stories and research findings from her travels of the ‘top-performing’ education systems in six countries on four continents at Dubai College last month. In documenting her teaching odyssey across the globe, Lucy linked her experiences to key strands in educational theory and research, giving deep insights into both the culture and practices in a range of key jurisdictions and illuminating major educational discussions of curriculum and assessment. Some of the points that really resonated from the talk are as follows:

- Peer observations as part of lesson study: this involves collaborative planning time where colleagues are able to plan together and then co-observe to evaluate the lesson
- High expectations of all students and all ability ranges
- Not setting students by ability
- Peer tutoring where older students volunteer to help support younger students in their free time
- High quality CPD and professional learning communities
- Making students aware of how they think, which was described as cognitive activation
- Quality teacher instruction and questioning

If you liked what you read, Lucy has written an interesting piece of research on teacher motivation for UNESCO:

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002462/246252e.pdf>

‘Four influential paradigms of teacher professionalism: the effective teacher, the reflective teacher, the enquiring teacher and the transformative teacher’
(Menter et al, 2010, 23)

Research Partnership

Oxford Deanery Partnership

Dubai College has formed a partnership with Oxford University’s Education Department, we are in the final stages of becoming an Associate Member of the Oxford Education Deanery (www.educationdeanery.ox.ac.uk). This partnership will be of benefit through contributing to teachers’ continuing professional development and helping us to engage in and with research. We will be able to avail of the expertise of the faculty there, gain access to resources and get further support for the action research we undertake at Dubai College. We are also looking into opportunities for Dubai College teachers to be able to undertake the Oxford *MSc in Learning and Teaching*. There will be further details about all of this in the coming months.

Sharing Research

At Dubai College, we feel strongly that research should be shared and that it should be used to *inform* practice. This is not just an academic exercise nor something which we do in order to appear clever. We are a school community that is open to change and research can have a profound impact on school priorities for planning for learning, teaching, curriculum, and assessment. We hope that engagement with research and the process of undertaking it, will lead to more sharing, collaboration and creating a dialogue about learning as well as the improved performance of our students over time.

ACTION RESEARCH INSET

To mark the end of the end of the Action Research 2017-18 cycle, we plan to hold a staff INSET day celebrating the teacher-research projects that have been completed over the year, as well as thinking about how to use research to inform our practices. We will also consider how as a school we might make effective use of existing research into teaching and learning. Our INSET day will take place on Sunday 27th of May.

RESEARCH COMPENDIUM

Before the end of the summer term, we plan to publish a compendium to include all the action research projects undertaken in this academic year. This journal will

‘Understanding Learning and Teaching in the Classroom through a process of systematic, critical inquiry made public’

(Stenhouse, 1975, 67)

also detail other specific research undertaken by staff members and will include a forward by Dr Trevor Mutton, from the Department of Education at Oxford University.

The title of this publication is **Third Space**. Coined by Indian/ American sociologist, Professor Homi Bhabha (2004), in this context the term ‘third space’ represents how we as teachers take time out to reflect upon our practice as well as the space we find ourselves in the nexus of theory, practice and action.

We will share this publication through our website and other social media channels. Watch this space!

ResearchED

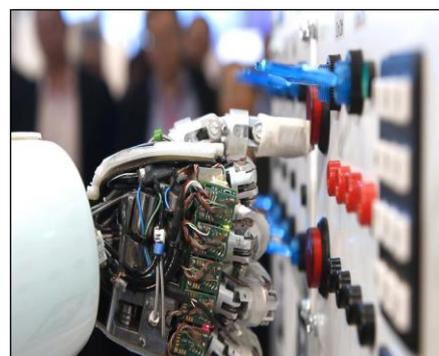
Planning ahead, Dubai College will host the Middle East’s first ever *ResearchEd* event in May 2019. ResearchEd (<https://researched.org.uk>) is a movement begun by teacher Tom Bennett which aims to raise research literacy, bring teachers together across schools, promote collaboration, increase awareness, promote research and explore what works.

This event will have a number of keynote presentations and workshops by teachers as well as other regional educational professionals.

Research focused on Learning, Teaching & Innovation

With an increased expectation to use digital technology in the classroom, we have chosen two pieces that throw light on the issues. The first is a great article from The Headmaster in the National that explores the impact on schools and students. <https://www.thenational.ae/opinion/comment/are-we-really-giving-our-students-the-clarity-they-deserve-1.711349>

The second is an excellent article by Jose Picardo, Deputy Head at Hampshire Collegiate School, who has written many articles about the use of technology and its role in benefiting learning, rather than being tokenistic. His article below



explores how technology and digital pedagogy can enhance assessment and feedback.

HOW TO DO IT: USING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

JOSÉ PICARDO



Nothing polarises a staffroom discussion more than technology. The moment interactive whiteboards, virtual learning environments or mobile devices are brought into the fray, we're revealed as either gimmicky evangelists of the new, or chalk-stained Luddites. While there is limited research to suggest that greater use of technology will unequivocally result in improved educational outcomes, there does appear to be a correlation between the effective use of technology and improved outcomes (Higgins et al., 2013). The role of technology in supporting the processes and practices involved in effective teaching and learning needs to be more clearly identified.

According to Koehler and Mishra (2009), technology, pedagogy and content knowledge represent three bodies of expertise that can interact to produce the understanding needed to use technological tools well in the classroom. In short, they found teachers are most effective when they develop skills in using technology in addition to subject knowledge and understanding of pedagogy. I have found that technology can support better teaching and learning, but it depends on how it is used. Technology needs to be included in pedagogy, not considered in isolation, and teachers and students need to be supported in developing its use to support effective pedagogical practice. With this in mind, let's look at technology in relation to two of the pillars of good practice in teaching: assessment and feedback

Frequent assessment for better retention

Tests are used to determine how well a student has learnt the required material (summative assessment) and to inform future teaching and learning (formative

assessment). Often, tests tend to be formal and are often high-stakes end-of-unit or end-of-module tests and end-of-year exams. However, frequent low-stakes tests are effective at helping with learning because frequent retrieval practice, through the use of flashcards, for example, helps students commit something to memory more permanently (Roediger, McDaniel and Brown, 2014). Given this, teachers would be wise to consider incorporating frequent, relatively informal retrieval practice through low-stakes testing and quizzing to help learning – and the implications of this for the use of technology to support learning are significant.

There are many software packages and digital publishing tools that facilitate the inclusion of frequent retrieval practice opportunities. Even if the resources we are using are primarily paper-based, teachers can create or curate web pages that learners can use to self-test and self-determine where they are in their learning and how to improve. Testing yourself is easier than ever these days, with a multitude of smartphone and tablet apps as well as web tools that allow learners to create their own flashcards and quizzes that can be used and reused as part of a revision routine. Good examples include Quizlet, an online learning tool that lets users create flashcards, and Kahoot, a game-based learning platform that can be used to generate quizzes.

Feedback as collaboration

Explaining to students where they are, where they need to be and how to get there is key to effective feedback (William and Leahy, 2015). To ensure the impact of feedback is positive, it should be accurate and clear, with specific guidance on how to improve. Though feedback can take many forms, marking is one of the most common – but the workload associated with traditional marking is problematic. Technology can be used to ameliorate the marking load while improving the timeliness and efficacy of feedback. Small but powerful tweaks to our policies and practice would allow us to deliver feedback to a whole class rather than to individual students. This is much less time-consuming and arguably as effective as individual ‘what-went-wells’ and ‘even-better-ifs’ for every student.

Teachers would still need to look through their students’ work, but instead of feeding back individually, they would look for and make a note of common misconceptions. Then, using screen or voice recording technology, the teacher could record herself highlighting what students have been good at, what they need to be better at and how to be better at it. This feedback could be delivered during a lesson without needing to use any technology, but if you do use digital technology to record it – and this would take as long as marking and writing feedback for one exercise book – you can then make it available so that students can access your advice at any point throughout the course.

With tools such as Google for Education or Microsoft Office 365, students can share their work with teachers. When both teachers and students can edit the

work, the valuable drafting and redrafting process that would otherwise take a few lessons to achieve can be accomplished much more rapidly. Giving feedback becomes a kind of collaborative modelling.

So when it comes to adopting technology, the old adage applies: it ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it. Technology use can indeed be a bit gimmicky, but only if you make it so, because nothing engages a class better than expertise in teaching, and nothing is more likely to contribute to students' distraction than the lack of it.

References

Appadurai, A. (2006) The Right to Research, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 4, 2, 167-177

Burnard, P. (2012) *Musical Creativities in Practice*, Oxford: OUP

Bhabha, Homi (2004) *The Location of Culture*, Abingdon: Routledge

Crehan, L. (2016) *Cleverlands*, Unbound

Higgins S., Katsipataki M., Kokotsaki D., Coleman R., Major L.E. and Coe R. (2013) *The Sutton Trust-Education Endowment Foundation Teaching and Learning Toolkit*, London: Education Endowment Foundation. Available at: www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit (accessed 22 August 2017)

Koehler M. and Mishra P. (2009) What is Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge(TPACK), *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 9, 1, 60-70

Menter I. et al. (2010) *Literature Review on Teacher Education in the 21st Century*, The Scottish Government, Edinburgh, UK

Roediger H.L, McDaniel M.A. and Brown P.C. (2014) *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press

Stenhouse, L. (1975) *Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*, London: Heinemann

William D. and Leahy S. (2015) *Embedding Formative Assessment*, 1st edition, . West Palm Beach, FL: Learning Sciences