

Project Based Learning in a Secure Setting: How can this be further improved?

Background

There is a wealth of research that suggests Project Based Learning is "...Effective in building deep content understanding, raising academic achievement and encouraging student motivation to Learn".*

Having now developed and implemented five PBL pathways, we wished to review how to further improve our practice and provision.

* Buck Institute for Education, 2009

Aims

To analyse students' and teachers' feedback on PBL Pathways.

To identify the Continuing Professional Development needs of staff and how they wish to be supported in further developing their practice.

To discover students' and teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of lesson length.

Data Collection and Analysis

25 student end of pathway feedback questionnaires were collated and analysed.

14 members of staff completed questionnaires that were collated and analysed.

Qualitative data was also collected from the results of formal and informal lesson observations, staff feedback in the questionnaires, staff verbal feedback and shadowing learners.

Findings and recommendations were drawn from the thematic analysis of the data.

Findings

From Student Questionnaires:

- 20% of students do find the 90 minute lessons too long.
- 36% of students find the Literacy element of the projects the least enjoyable.
- 27% of students feel that their reading, writing and numeracy skills have not necessarily improved after completing the PBL pathways.
- Students would like even more extension work and Level Three Qualifications to be on offer.

From Staff Questionnaires:

- Level 2 is the highest level of qualification for 36% of staff in English/literacy and 86% of staff in Maths/numeracy.
- 100% of staff agree that collaboration with colleagues supports them in maintaining and improving teaching and learning quality in the PBL pathways
- Significant proportion of staff do not feel that they have a deep understanding of Functional Skills and the Core Curriculum, and do not feel totally confident in embedding these into their lessons.
- A significant number of staff do not fully understand their collective responsibility for the development of the students' Literacy, Numeracy and IT skills; though the majority of teachers do understand their collective responsibility for their students social skills development.
- Not all teachers feel confident teaching the gifted learners and the learners with SEN.
- All staff believe that there is value in classroom displays, yet a number of staff responded that they do not maintain displays related to their area of responsibility, nor relating to the work of their current cohort of students.
- Results demonstrated that there is a need for a greater variety of learning activities to be deployed by teachers, rather than relying on the same methods for the entirety of the PBL pathway.
- 88% would like to be more creative in their teaching.
- 75% of staff do not feel there are sufficient resources, yet had very few suggestions of resources that would be welcomed.

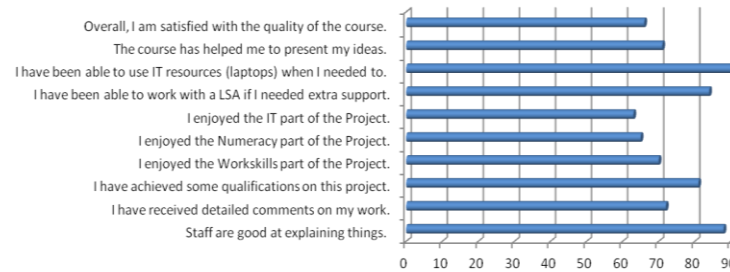
From Qualitative Sources:

- Not all opportunities for exploiting Literacy and Numeracy are being fully utilised by staff; PBL may have embedded these skills so effectively that staff need refocusing on these.
- Teachers need to have an expanded repertoire of starter and plenary activities to draw upon.

Moving Forward



The Positives of Student Feedback About PBL



Project Researcher

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Recommendations

- 1) Further "Upskilling of staff" – Accessible CPD programme to be developed, encompassing all areas identified as needing focus.
- 2) Recognition that some teachers need supporting to develop the students' Literacy, Numeracy, IT and Social Skills development.
- 3) To work in partnership with Prison to reduce the length of sessions.
- 4) Investigate additional resources to enhance the PBL pathways.
- 5) Improve opportunities for staff collaboration – with weekly workshops led by the staff.
- 6) To encourage staff to increase the prominence of displays, for all curriculum areas and classrooms.
- 7) Further increase range of Level Three qualification.

Strengths of the project: The design of the project ensured that we focused on the students and teachers actual experience of PBL.

Limitations of the project: This was a small-scale project due to the size of the Department and the number of students that were still available to complete the questionnaires.



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