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## Using researchers to explore the impact of a new thinking curriculum on learning amongst Year 7 and 8 students in Year 2 of its' implementation Julie Roberts Anita Bath and Jonathan Parkinson

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### Background

This paper describes how groups of researchers involving both teachers and students are being used to explore the impact of a new Thinking Curriculum which was implemented across a school from September 08. The need for this new model was identified after teachers and senior leaders became concerned that students increasingly lacked the ability to work independently. This was an issue also identified by the schools involved in the 8 Schools project (DfES 2007). Whilst the development of independent learning is complex, the work of Black and Wiliam work (1998), Harrison (2008) suggests that formative assessment is a useful vehicle for developing such learning behaviours. Three key elements underpinning formative assessment have been identified: interaction between teachers and pupils; stimulus and support for students to take active responsibility for their own learning; and collaborative learning (Harrison, 2008). Building on these principles, a cross subject steering group of staff developed the idea of a tool-kit consisting of four distinct modules all designed to develop students' ability to become more effective learners (Bath, 2009). In the light of research carried out in the first year the delivery model has been changed from a short, weekly discrete lesson to a bi-weekly 100 minute lesson. These input lessons are followed by infusion through subject areas; success will depend upon effective transfer which will only occur if the new learning developed through lessons is practised through subject areas.

### Research Questions

- What are the implications for integrating and embedding a teaching methodology across a whole school?
- How does the school change to 100 mins lessons make a difference to pupil understanding and application of the Thinking Curriculum?
- How effective is the year 8 new programme in building upon and developing the students' skills from year 7?
- Are the tools continuing to be used across the subjects to reinforce learning?
- What evidence is there of the students becoming more autonomous learners?
- What contexts support and assist students and teachers to learn and apply these new skills?

### Methods

The researchers were trained throughout the year in a range of methodologies. In the first year, teams of student researchers, based on Year 8 students and lead by a sixth former, after suitable training, were asked to investigate whether or not Year 7 pupils were using the thinking toolkit [Bath 2009]. During the second year the teams have been expanded to include teams of Year 8 pupils, some of the original Year 9 researchers, sixth formers and 3 teams of teachers engaged in Action Research.

Qualitative data will be gathered from pupil and teacher questionnaires and interviews, lesson observations, naturalistic and systematic observations, video recording and work sampling. Alongside the work of the student researchers, teachers are also undertaking a concurrent research project to assess the impact on learning from their perspective and so conclusions from both will be compared. Lesson observation, questionnaires and interviews were primarily used to gather data as well as extensive work sampling

To ascertain how students are able to transfer these thinking curriculum skills into new contexts, data will be collected the summative project which takes place at the end of the Summer term for two days. This provides students with an opportunity to see how they can apply the skills they have learnt over the past year can support them in this project. Data collected from here will be compared to the quality of the work last year to see whether there has been any progression in their acquisition of these skills.

The student researchers are going into Year 7 and 8 Thinking Curriculum lessons. The Year 8 researchers are looking at Year 7 lessons and evaluating the impact of the change to 100 minute lessons and the extent to which the new Year 7 pupils are using the Thinking Toolkit. The Year 9 researchers are looking at the extent to which pupils in Year 8 are using the toolkit and comparing it to the data that they gathered on its' use when the same pupils were in year 7.

This project builds upon work already undertaken by the school to develop teachers as researchers (Durrant and Holden, 2006) and last year's first attempt to include students in this approach. .

### **Research findings**

Currently secondary schools nationally are being asked to integrated personalised, learning and thinking skills throughout the schools curriculum (PLTS). The paper discusses the ways in which the school has developed it's own version of skills for an effective learners and what structures and processes are required to gain whole school wide uptake. It will provide some insight into the structures and processes which support students to develop these skills as well as strategies employed to maintain momentum in the continued rollout of the Thinking Curriculum when competing educational priorities

The student research will provide a deeper understanding of the perceptions of students for the new curriculum. An analysis of the data gathered will also provide information on how the thinking toolkit has supported the development of more independent learners based on formative assessment principles identified above.

The research is disseminated to schools across the country through existing Leading Edge and Training school partnerships and also at the school's Annual Teaching and Learning Conference.

### **References**

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