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Chan, L. et al (2002) *Budapest Open Access Initiative*. New York: Open Society Institute.
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Embedding Information skills into the Year nine PSHE/ Citizenship curriculum at Malvern Girls' College: integrating learning styles with pupil research

**Rebecca Jones, Librarian, Malvern St James School (formally Malvern Girls' College), UK.
Email: library@malvernstjames.co.uk**

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to describe and reflect on an intervention, delivered within PSHE (Personal, Social and Health education) lessons, which had the aim of integrating the teaching of learning styles and information literacy within the curriculum. The project took place at Malvern Girls' College (now Malvern St James school), a secondary boarding school for girls. Firstly, the aims and rationale of the project are provided. The nature of the intervention, and the way in which learning styles, information literacy and pupil research projects were integrated, are discussed. Relevance to the PSHE curriculum and information literacy is explained. The paper concludes with a reflection on the positive outcomes from the project, and notes possible future developments.

Keywords

Information literacy; Schools; Learning styles; Teaching methods; Independent learning

1. Introduction

This article presents the results of a series of lessons that were delivered within PSHE (Personal, Social and Health education) lessons in order to integrate the teaching of learning styles and information literacy within the curriculum. Firstly, the aims and rationale of the project are provided. In the next section, entitled approaches to teaching and learning, how the project was conducted is described and its relevance to the PSHE curriculum and information literacy is explained. In this section how learning styles, information literacy and pupil research projects were integrated are discussed. The remaining sections focus on the conclusions that can be drawn from the project and also possible future developments. The project took place at Malvern Girls' College (now Malvern St James school), a secondary boarding school for girls, in the autumn term, 2005.

The rationale for the project was to design a series of lessons that provided year nine (aged 13/14) pupils with an opportunity to apply information literacy skills to a research task and deliver their findings to their peer group using a specific learning style. The Librarian in collaboration with the Head of PSHE devised a series of 4 sessions that would take place within the PSHE timetable. The intended outcomes and pupil experiences were discussed and from that a set of aims were developed.

The project aimed to:

- Enable pupils to practise and develop their Information Literacy skills.
- Enable pupils to learn about different Learning Styles.
- Cover a range of relevant topics from the Citizenship syllabus within a four week period.
- Encourage different ways of presenting information.
- Enable pupils to assess other groups' presentations.

Through the lessons we wanted to raise the pupils' knowledge of different learning styles and the fact that there are a range of specific techniques can be employed to learn and deliver information. We hoped that the pupils would be able to identify the learning styles that appealed to them and to discover techniques that they found useful. We also wanted to provide an experience that meant that pupils used the CHAMPS learning software in an interactive and meaningful way. CHAMPS software is distributed by Accelerated Learning Systems Ltd (<http://www.acceleratedlearning.com/>) and is explained in the next section. We felt that had they just been directed to browse through the program, that the lack of context would make this sort of activity meaningless.

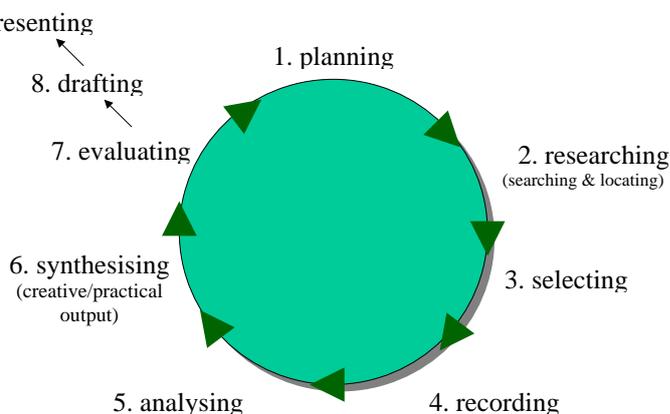
2. Approach to learning and teaching

The PSHE syllabus is delivered to form groups that consist of pupils of mixed ability from within the year group and each form contains approximately 16 pupils under the guidance of their form tutor. We decided that before the research started the Librarian would give a presentation to the whole year group on Independent Learning and Information Literacy to give them a theoretical basis and a context from which to work. In this session the Librarian presented the school's definition of Independent Learning:

“Independent learning is that learning in which the learner, in conjunction with relevant others, can make the decisions necessary to meet the learner's own learning needs.” (Kesten, 1987)

The Librarian introduced the Independent Learning cycle (**Figure 1**) and then explained how the cycle described the processes that are used when completing a piece of research. This cycle is referred to across the subject areas when Independent Learning is taking place and is often included in display work to highlight the different skills that pupils have used.

Figure 1: Independent Learning and Information Skills cycle.



Each process was described and pupils were asked for their thoughts, experiences and opinions on the different stages and how confident they felt undertaking research for themselves. This was an informal feedback process and pupils' comments were not recorded. This meant that the teacher could gain a quick picture of the general experience of the group. This process was important as it ensured that pupils understood what was expected from them in relation to undertaking research and that any tasks set were aimed at increasing their own skill levels. In previous years pupils had sometimes interpreted independent research as something they had to do because the teacher did not want to tell them the answers. We wanted to avoid this negative attitude and emphasise the positive outcomes of pupils undertaking a more active approach to their work. Finally pupils were told of the projects that they would encounter during the year that had been specifically designed to enable them to extend their IL skills.

For the PSHE sessions we decided to choose research topics from the Citizenship syllabus that were not currently covered within PSHE timetable. This meant that pupils would have the chance to engage with a wide range of subjects that otherwise would not have been included in the curriculum. Additional topics from existing PSHE lessons were then chosen on the basis of their interest level for pupils. The research questions were kept quite simple and required the pupils to retrieve facts and to express their opinion on the topic. As time was limited the pupils needed to conduct tightly focused research. Pupils were also provided with printed material on each topic to ensure that they did not use all their time searching for information, but could also engage in selecting and analysing ideas and arguments. The topics and some example focus questions are provided below. The topics were:

- Censorship
- Domestic Violence
- The future of the countryside
- Health
- Teenage Pregnancy
- Money

- Gambling
- Drugs
- Animal Rights

Censorship focus questions:

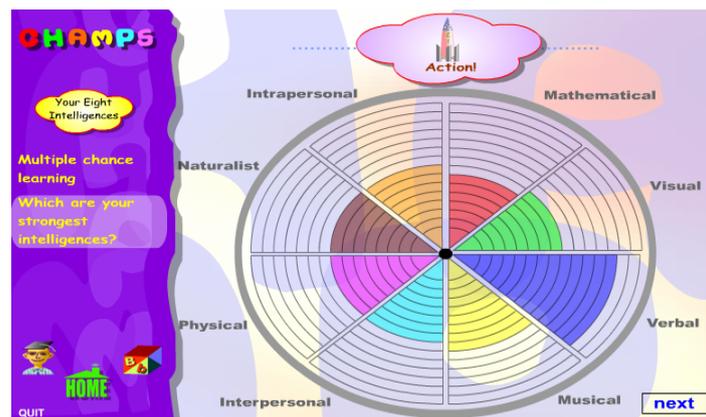
1. What does censorship mean?
2. Do you think that there should be any censorship laws?
3. Would you change the laws in any way?

Teenage Pregnancy focus questions:

1. Give some relevant facts about teenage pregnancy.
2. What are some of the problems facing teenage parents?
3. What do you think is the best way of lowering the teenage pregnancy rate?

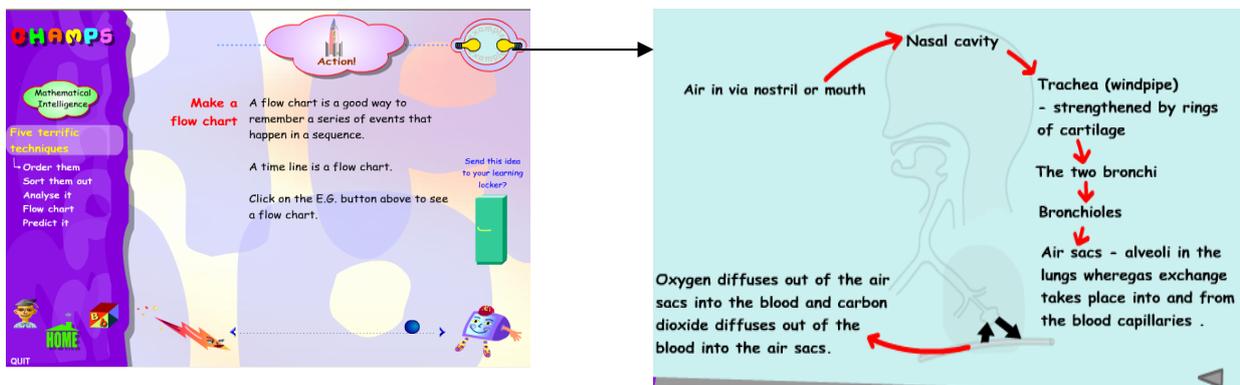
The CHAMPS software was an integral part of the lessons and provided a gateway to different learning styles and also techniques that suited each style. The software is designed to help students think about how they learn and deals with concepts that are backed up with examples and learning techniques. Each letter of the title has a specific meaning: **C**onfident to learn, **H**ome in on the facts, **A**ction, **M**emorise, **P**rove you know and **S**it back and think (CHAMPS). It was the Action part of the software that we wanted pupils to use. In this section the user is able to build up his/her intelligences profile, by answering a questionnaire. The users preferences are then displayed using a chart (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2: An intelligence profile



The action part of the program also allows the user to investigate the range of intelligences and the associated learning techniques. If the user likes a suggested technique then he/ she can file it in his/ her learning locker and build up a store of ideas. Each intelligence is explained and examples of how the learning techniques can be used within subject areas are supplied (see **Figure 3**). In the mathematical section, the technique of creating a flow chart is introduced with an example of how it can be applied in biology.

Figure 3. Mathematical intelligence



3. Lesson structure

We decided that pupils would work together in pairs as they could then discuss ideas with each other and undertake a joint presentation to the class. Logistically, this meant that all the presentations could be fitted into the session. The structure of the lessons was as follows:

Lesson 1: Researching an intelligence

CHAMPS and the concept of different learning styles and types of intelligence was introduced to the form by the Librarian, head of PSHE or form tutor. The expected outcomes and tasks over the four weeks were outlined. The tutor sorted the group into pairs and allocated the intelligence. Pupils used the lesson to investigate their intelligence using CHAMPS.

Lesson 2: Researching a topic

The form tutor handed out topic cards randomly to each pair. Two extra topics were included in case any group wanted to swap. Each card had three to four focus questions and instructions. The pupils used the lesson to research the answers using folders of prepared printed materials (supplied by the Librarian) and the internet.

Lesson 3: Preparing a presentation

Pupils used this lesson to start preparing their presentation. The Librarian was available to check the progress of the pairs and to discuss their presentation and how they were integrating the techniques that they had identified. This session required pupils to use higher order skills, synthesising the information they had gathered with the styles they had identified. The session required pupils to think creatively.

Lesson 4: Presentations in form rooms

This lesson was spent by pupils giving and watching presentations within their form rooms. The whole class was given evaluation forms so that they could assess other group's performance. At the end of each presentation short feedback was given by a member of the audience selected by the form tutor. The evaluation had to: a) identify the learning style, and b) rate the performance in terms of how well the group presented the information and how well they utilised their learning style. The teacher also provided additional feedback as necessary.

4. Reflection

Overall the results (i.e. the presentations) delivered by the pupils were encouraging, with the majority of the pairs answering their focus questions in an entertaining manner that utilised a specific learning technique appropriate to their intelligence. Some examples are provided in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Some examples of the techniques that were used:

Intelligence	Topic	Technique
Mathematical	Teenage Pregnancy	<u>Creating equations</u> e.g. Boy + Girl = Baby!
Musical	Gambling	A <u>rap</u> about the problems of being addicted to gambling
Interpersonal	Health	Asking the class to <u>work with their neighbour</u> to answer some questions on the information.
Intrapersonal	Domestic Violence	Asking the audience to <u>imagine how it must feel</u> to experience domestic abuse.
Physical	Gambling	<u>Throwing a ball</u> & telling a fact
Musical	Drugs	Playing <u>background music</u>

Some of the intelligences proved to be more challenging to present than others. Those pairs who had the verbal style found it difficult to make their presentation memorable and often used visual aids to help them, but this provided a chance for pupils to think about the techniques that teachers used with them every day. Pupils also found that some topics lent themselves more readily to the naturalistic intelligence than others such as animal rights and the future of the countryside. Another problem faced by the group researching gambling was the school filtering system. This meant that they were unable to access any articles that

contained the word “gambling.” The solution was to turn off the filtering of that word for the PSHE sessions. This was not a perfect solution as this group faced problems when they wanted to do more research outside of the lesson.

The presentations provided a good way of assessing whether the pupils had been able to apply theory to practice and use the learning technique in a way that was appropriate. It was easy to identify those pupils who had engaged with the information and delivered more than just minimal answers. It was encouraging to see that some groups provided additional information and links to other information sources.

Observation of the pupils showed that the amount of time that had been allocated for research was sufficient and changing the focus of each lesson ensured that the pupils did not become bored but stayed focused on their topics. The presentation in the last lesson gave the whole project a focus as each pair knew that they had to perform on that day. The use of evaluation forms also ensured that the pupils stayed alert during the presentations and randomising the feedback meant that any pupil could be called on to give a response. The range of topics and styles resulted in varied presentations that were engaging for the audience, who were constantly being challenged by new presentation styles.

5. Conclusions and future considerations

The most positive result of this programme was that pupils enjoyed undertaking the tasks that had been set. They displayed positive attitudes in relation to researching the topics and responded to the focus questions that were posed. This response confirmed that the topics that had been selected were relevant to the year group. The pupils’ enjoyment of the task seemed to reflect their understanding of the relevance of the project to their own approach to learning. The presentation also allowed them to think about how information could be conveyed and as no limitations were placed on them as to how they constructed their presentation, they were able to be as creative as they wished. This meant that the pupils were able to experience learning from a different angle than just being passive recipients.

The project also showed that working within the PSHE curriculum is a useful way of embedding skills for the whole year group. As every pupil has to attend these lessons it meant that by the end of the sessions all the pupils were aware of the different intelligences and also how to use CHAMPS to access information on learning techniques.

This project was beneficial in terms of skill development as it required pupils to complete all the stages of the Independent Learning cycle and really engage and use the information that they had retrieved. The task required students to use higher order skills and put theory into practice.

The involvement of form staff was a vital element as they knew the abilities of the pupils and were able to allocate topics and intelligences that the students would find interesting but not too challenging.

The success of this project means that it will be incorporated into the PSHE curriculum and run again next year which validates the structure and sequencing of the lessons. There are other elements that could lead on from this project and thus extend its impact on this year group. It would be useful to build in some time for reflection, so providing pupils with the opportunity to think about the techniques they used and what they remembered from the sessions. It is also important that learning styles, Independent Learning and Information Literacy are highlighted in other areas of the curriculum so that the pupils can see the relevance of the sessions in their other academic subjects. This suggests that good practice needs to be shared with other teaching staff as they need to be kept up-to-date with the skills that the pupils have developed.

Acknowledgements

All images from CHAMPS software are reproduced with permission from Accelerated Learning Systems Ltd, 2001.

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