



WEST LONDON
ACADEMY
PROUD TO LEARN

Continuum

Issue 8, Summer 2011



Innovation, Creativity and the Importance of Thinking

Making our All-Through, all-through



Continuum

Issue 8. Summer 2011

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Take pride in doing things differently

To boldly go...or to go boldly: Academies and the remit to innovate

Dr Hilary Macaulay, Principal and CEO



As one of the original 12 Academies, which opened between 2002 and 2004 in areas of high socio-economic deprivation, with a remit to address years of endemic underachievement through high quality resourcing and freed from much of the prescriptive bureaucracy in order to do so, West London Academy has placed innovation at the heart of its work. Having the first Professor of Innovation in the country as the Academy's founding Sponsor (Sir Alec Reed is Professor of Innovation at Royal Holloway, University of London) pump primed the Academy from the outset. In fact innovation to raise standards across every aspect of the organisation has been at the heart of the notable rate of progress and improvement. This is innovation for very specific purposes, not innovation for the sake of innovation which staff, students and parents would never have bought into. The innovation at West London Academy comes from the Academy, from the staff, the student body and the wider

community who are involved daily in our work and are West London Academy. It is a response to the real need from people who are living these needs every moment of their lives to better their futures.

Long before age not stage entry to examinations became widely adopted by schools, with research and development placed at the heart of the organisation and where blue sky thinking is a concrete reality, West London Academy made no excuses for doing things differently. As the old adage goes 'if you keep doing things the same way you'll keep getting the same results.' As one would expect, doing things differently was not universally accepted by those either locally or nationally seeking solace in the comfort of maintaining the status quo. After all, education is often the last bastion to change and, as with all the original Academies, the media, unions and even some local authorities took the opportunity to slam the innovative work of these most challenged and challenging schools even before their first couple of years were out. Listening to and reading the almost weekly attacks

and negative comments from external sources was certainly not an option for a school that had to make rapid progress. Being creative and innovative in order to break free from the 'one system fits all' handcuffs meant everyone having the courage not only to think outside the box but also to act and deliver in a new domain. In fact as original academies we were pathfinders, setting our own direction against considerable adverse opposition from those who had not only watched but allowed the predecessor schools to fail under their watch. Of course being the first is not always a beneficial position to be in, after all it's often better to let others make the mistakes and buy into the second iteration of an initiative. However as one of the original 12 Academies, being a first phase one with not only the freedom to innovate but recruiting a talented staff with the mind set to do so has been highly energising, empowering and indeed liberating and we will not lose sight of our original mandate which has proved all those sceptics wrong. We needed to go boldly and boldly go we did and West London Academy will continue to do so.

“It is a response to the real need from people who are living these needs every moment of their lives to better their futures.”

Some wheels just aren't good enough

Gillian Hodgson, Vice Principal - Assessment for Learning, Data & Reporting



It has been a phrase which has made me cringe for the whole of my career, a mantra people chant when they want to keep the status quo, “there is no point in re-inventing the wheel”. I understand for some that the phrase simply points to the fact that the wheel is effective and if something isn't broken then why fix it. For me, though, it symbolises a belief that what we are currently doing is as good as it gets and I can't ever believe that we ever find that ultimate place which is as good as it gets.

Taking the humble wheel, it may well be shaped still in its circular form but it most certainly has seen its fair share of innovation and creativity. Through creative engineering and design the wheel can be designed for specific purposes, lighter, stronger, faster, more efficient, we certainly do not see the ultimate 'as good as it gets' wheel.

Yes if we understand the word 'wheel' as a generic round object it has not been re-invented but I am sure given a choice of wheels for a bicycle we would be able to rank them in order of usefulness.

Every school up and down the country tracks their students' achievements, at WLA we thought we could track the students in a better way, designed by us for our purposes for our learners, staff and parents. So we worked with software developer EduTrack to design a totally customisable tracking system which gives all stakeholders access to up to the minute assessment information. Every school up and down the country also engages in Improvement Planning. At WLA we thought we could make the process simpler, more all encompassing and with clearer accountability. Since 2006, thanks to the innovation of the Principal, we have had a completely transparent online Improvement Planning system which is linked seamlessly with financial planning, professional development and which is audited and reviewed regularly. Long gone are the laminated and highlighted sheets of paper of yesteryear.

The list goes on of the wheels which WLA has, at least if not re-invented, certainly re-designed and optimized to

help us make more progress. The WLA staff have an ability to look with fresh thoughts at the building blocks of our practice, our goals and ambitions for our students and to design newer, better ways of working. Now thankfully I have been able to work for a number of years in an Academy where we have seen that there is a point to reinventing the wheel because some wheels, frankly, just aren't good enough.

“we have had a completely transparent online Improvement Planning system which is linked seamlessly with financial planning, professional development and which is audited and reviewed regularly.”



2 DEVELOPING PROBLEM SOLVING

The role of creativity and innovation in problem solving



Pushing back the boundaries

Amy Troughton, Phase Leader



As an all-through Academy we want our children to be able to move through the Primary and Secondary phases developing an increasing range of skills to enable them to develop their own learning and to be able to strive to achieve their potential. In Phase 2, children have many opportunities to develop their skills in innovation and creative thinking through taking part in interactive lessons. We use self and peer

assessment as a tool for setting and reviewing targets and to enable the children to take learning opportunities into their own hands.

By putting the children at the heart of the learning experience we can develop learning experiences which inspire and interest them. As a result, children show an increased level of enthusiasm in their learning and show a higher level of engagement, which in turn compliments their thinking and creativity. Creating interest and engagement is vital if the Primary Phase is to be only the beginning of a life long learning experience.

Problem solving activities are essential across many subjects of the curriculum. Knowledge is never sufficient, application of that knowledge to solve problems is vital. We aim to embody a safe environment where children feel confident in

taking risks. Opportunities to work independently and in small groups are varied and providing them with open ended tasks enables children to take the responsibility of deciding how they are going to complete the task, taking on roles and responsibilities within the group, what they want the final product to be and more importantly, how they are going to get there.

Within the classroom setting, we actively encourage the children to think outside of the box both in their creative approach to tasks and problem solving as well as taking part in their learning in a way that enables them to push the boundaries of what they are capable of and set new learning targets. With this attitude and mindset, the children develop new ways of learning and seamlessly move through the Academy with the ability to tackle problems in a creative and innovative manner.

A House to a Home

Abrafi Kusi, PE, Sport & Dance Teacher



One of the things I love about West London Academy is that the Principal embraces innovation that focuses on improving standards and raising attainment levels. This has really given me the confidence to explore new ideas whilst keeping current working strategies to help improve standards in Dance across the Academy.

Improving standards is indeed, a key aim in Dance. First, the questions; what level is the learner at and how high can they go? What are their strengths and weaknesses? And how can I work with the learner to fill the gaps in their knowledge and skill? The second is putting words into action. Through working with both the Physical Education and Sport and the Performing Arts Teams I have been able to give Dance a higher profile within the Academy.

I have learned that as a teacher, it is important for me to grow with the learners. Like a freshly squeezed orange juice, learners need to trust that I am there to enhance and support their development with my skills, knowledge and fresh ideas. In order for development to take place, there needs to be the notion of process to product involving the student and teacher. Having modelled your expertise to inspire learners, you

now need to:

- Develop existing skills so that learners can use these to complete tasks
- Give a starting point - like a spring board, to give learners the confidence to begin

Creative Thinking

- Feed learners' imagination with images, ideas and questions to encourage creative thinking

Improvisation

- Give learners material they can explore, do and undo, rehearse or practice with

Problem solving

- Give manageable tasks to complete - like a puzzle; allow learners the time to produce a finished product

Of course, the nature of Dance for example, allows individual learners to create a product that is fused by creative thinking, improvisation and problem solving. However, it is important to realise that this process can also work effectively in all disciplines to improve standards.

For me, a learner is like a house and a house needs to be filled with everyday essentials and personal items to make it a home. That home then becomes a treasured asset. In the realms of education, everyday essentials can be teacher modelling, ideas, skills and tools. Personal items can be creative thinking, improvisation or problem solving.

In order for a learner to become an asset, it is essential for the learner to see the expertise of the teacher in action, so as to aspire and subsequently work hard to achieve. That is, modelling a possible outcome, presenting learners with an idea and giving learners the necessary skills and tools to begin the notion of process to product.

Moreover, it is imperative that learners are given the opportunity to think creatively, improvise on the idea and given the time to solve the problem to produce the final product. This process not only allows the learner to take personal accountability but it also gives the learner a great sense of ownership, worth and achievement.



3 DEVELOPING INDEPENDENCE

From spoon feeding to functional learning



How functional are our students?

Will Dryden, Deputy Curriculum Leader - Mathematics



Functional Mathematics requires learners to be able to use mathematics in ways that make them effective individuals that are able to operate confidently in life and to work in a wide range of contexts.

Due to Functional Mathematics being embedded into the KS4 GCSE math's

curriculum it became important for the whole Academy Mathematics and Numeracy curriculum to have functional skills integrated into the Schemes of Learning and for teachers to teach and display the key processes necessary to be functional in mathematics. These key processes include: analysing, interpreting, evaluating, communicating and reflecting. Mathematics is not about aimlessly repeating skills with no thought, the interpretation and the development of a robust line of argument is what drives a thorough understanding of Mathematics.

How do you know when a student is functional in maths? They,

- have the confidence and capability to use mathematics to solve increasing complex problems

- are able to use a range of tools, including ICT as appropriate
- possess the analytical and reasoning skills needed to draw conclusions, justify how these conclusions are reached and identify errors or inconsistencies
- are able to validate and interpret results, judging the limits of the validity and using the results effectively and efficiently.

The core idea behind Functional Mathematics is for students to understand that Mathematics is not just 3 hours a week in a room at school, it is for them to have the realisation that Mathematics is everywhere and in every part of their life.

“Shall I start now?”

Emma Downton, Deputy Curriculum Leader - English & Media Studies



“Shall I start now?”

This is the question that never fails to turn me into Victor Meldrew “I don’t believe it!” Students have been given instructions for a task, they know what they are doing and then sit there and ask, “Shall I start now?”

In the hope of never hearing this question again, the English and Media Team endeavour to mould our students to be independent thinkers,

who are creative and innovative, who plan ahead, who solve problems themselves. In an age of mobile phones, last minute planning and entertainment streamed 24 hours a day, thinking can be a steep learning curve for some.

We have had our successes though. Through a constant and persistent insistence that students write their own essay plans, create resources to teach each other poems or topics and read novels, they became independent learners, more than that they became problem solving machines. Their resources are now so good that students from other classes come asking for copies as they believe they were as valuable as professional revision resources. We also do a range of revision exercises where students have to work in groups to interpret instructions and complete fairly challenging tasks. As an English and Media Team we always

have high expectations, but the students surprise even us with what they can do when we take away the safety net and encourage them to take risks. We know it is essential to make the students think for themselves. It was a gamble to stop spoon feeding students in a year where the government has announced ever increasing floor targets. We are totally committed to the idea that pushing students to think for themselves gives them the courage and tools to succeed like never before.

By the end of their time with us the students had developed so much that they were able to form their own opinions and were honestly excited when they thought of something original. They took responsibility for their own learning and it made them even more proud of what they achieved.



Helping learners to reason

What do they think?

Eleanor Parry, Curriculum Leader - Business & Economics



Many students who choose Economics in Year 10 themselves transported into an alien environment where they don't speak the language and where survival is based on having their own informed opinions. Even high achieving students struggle with the subject. Many students don't have a clue about the "real world", preferring to exist in a cocoon like existence between facebook and reality TV. A Gifted and Talented Year 11 student asked 'how can we get goods from Egypt when they don't have roads?' She was under the impression that Egypt was a desert and camels were the only form of transportation. Some students think saving money in a bank means they put your money into a box with your name on it and it stays there until you want it.

Student misconception has been one of the best tools for creating a classroom culture of thinking and making a reasoned judgement. When we cover unemployment there is usually at least one person who

makes a comment about foreigners coming to the UK and stealing jobs. Instead of dismissing this as a stereotype we will look at employment patterns, the EU etc. Then we will go back to the initial comment to see if they can back up their comment or if they would like to change their mind. Another favourite is surprisingly the students' opinions on the benefits system. Challenging their statements and then merging the economics with it has improved the participation in classroom discussion and led to the students being able to form their informed opinion. It has had a knock-on effect on other subjects such as Citizenship. Students year after year seem to be very pleased when they find they could use the skills and theory from economics in their answers to exam questions from other subjects like citizenship.

Getting students interested in the news is crucial, they need to move from the news is boring mentality to actively making connections between what is on the news and what we learn in the classroom and the impact it has on each and everyone of them. Surprisingly the coalition government has done much to improve the success of economics students. The removal of EMA and the increase in university fees has really brought home the ideas of opportunity cost and subsidies. The participation of UK forces in Libya has got students thinking about globalisation, standards of living and government finances.

'If I were Prime Minister for a day' is great for thinking skills. Students are given the Budget and have to allocate funds; justifying giving more to health care at the expense of their education becomes a thought provoking exercise, where their problem solving skills are tested.

I was very proud of how far our students had come when they informed me that a member of staff told them that as we were in recession they need to ensure they took advantage of their education to get the best jobs, they pointed out that were in fact out of recession as we did not have two successive quarters of negative GDP. Instead of asking me what I think they are now able to tell me what they think and more importantly they are able to reason why they have certain opinions.

“Students year after year seem to be very pleased when they find they could use the skills and theory from economics in their answers to exam questions from other subjects”

Forward thinking and independent learning raise standards

Rebecca Petley, Phase Leader



Within the Primary Phase we are constantly working on ways to get the children to think about their own learning. We want children to take part in the whole learning experience and this includes having their say in what they learn and how they can improve their own work. Our children begin a topic by suggesting things that they would like to learn so that the learning becomes more meaningful, enjoyable and therefore productive. In Phase One, we are not only inviting children to input their suggestions into the planning stages but also in the assessment and target setting. There is little point in giving children targets that they are not going to use to raise the standard of their own work.

Actions for Further Learning ensure that children respond to the assessment of the teacher by improving an aspect of their work. Children need to be actively involved if they are to consciously remember what their goals are and be expected to act upon them. By involving them in the target setting process it allows them to be fully aware of what steps they need to take next in order to succeed in their own learning. In Year Two the children have begun to select their own targets from their formative assessment sheet given to them after an assessed piece of work which followed a unit of two to four weeks of work. This sheet shows children very clearly the areas that they need to work on. The children are invited to look at where the gaps in their learning are and think about what their next steps could be. From the sheet they choose two next step goals which they will then work on during the 6 week half term. Children love to be involved in the decision making and really enjoy the freedom and independence to choose skills that they wish to work on next. When their targets are selected and have been agreed with the class teacher, each child creates

their own unique, individual target card. During lessons, these are then readily available for each child to access to remind and prompt them to think about their own personal goals. As they work through a piece of work they can put a tick on their card to make sure that they are aware of when they are actively working on their target. At the end of the half term the children then look through their books and discuss with the teacher whether or not they feel they have met their targets and how they have done this. This has proved extremely productive, when assessing children's work as there has been clear evidence of the children using their own targets to improve their work.

Encouraging our children to think for themselves is giving them the opportunity to actively improve the standard and level of their work. Allowing children to take charge of their own learning and to be part of the entire process encourages forward thinking and independent learning which ultimately results in raised standards.



Providing opportunities to see and do things differently

Developing Creative Scientists at WLA

Shagufta Khan, Deputy Curriculum Leader - Science



The World needs creative scientists who produce useful and innovative solutions to our problems. Creative scientists differ from non creative scientists in at least two distinct ways. First, creative scientists need to be free from rules in order to exercise flexible thinking. This flexibility makes them more likely than others to know when to abandon non-productive efforts and change approaches to problem solving. Second, creative scientists also seem to be more open to experience, making them more sensitive to problems than their non creative colleagues. It appears that they know when to expend effort on a problem and recognize the potential for significant breakthroughs. The creative scientist recognizes a problem that others miss, and thus, possesses great potential for producing original research.

Understanding the need for innovation and to promote creative thinking we have designed a curriculum which drives students to think, be more creative and investigate different

aspect of science. At WLA we are leading a new approach towards science which enables students to explore new concepts and ways to achieve them in order to use in practical life. Our Schemes of Learning provide opportunity for students to think, create, plan their investigations and analyse their results. This new idea is pulling students interest towards science in a strongly affirmative way.

Teachers train their students to think flexibly in order to entertain a variety of approaches to solving problems. In science, flexible students think of different types of variables that may impact a phenomenon. Flexible thinkers also have the ability to look at things from multiple perspectives. Flexibility is inherent in remaining open to experiences, which is, as mentioned above, a key difference between creative and non creative scientists. Youngsters who are open to experiences will be observant during investigations and notice things others may miss.

Resistance to premature closure is a corresponding attitude that teachers encourage students to adopt. Teachers do not want students to accept the first explanation or answer that comes to them, but rather, resist closing on an idea until others have been explored. It is necessary to defer judgment, in order to resist premature closure and remain open.

Elaboration, another component of creative thinking, enables students

to pay careful attention to detail. Teachers want students to be able to provide detailed explanations of their discoveries and to plan their own pursuits to answer questions of interest.

Teachers in the Science Team set scope for discovery and investigation by preparing an environment in which youngsters encounter appropriate stimulation, igniting their sense of wonder and inviting questions. Teachers do not want students to squelch their own questions, fearing that others might consider them silly or dumb.

At the secondary level, questioning and experiential learning lay the basis for later science concepts and essential understandings.

Working together as a department we have taken science to a higher level where students experience the joy of planning, investigating and analysing various scientific aspects of life. "Discovery consist of seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody has thought" Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, Hungarian Biochemist, 1937 Nobel Prize for Medicine.

Music is the future

Charlotte Bowater, Music Teacher and Careers & Work Experience Co-ordinator



Music learning works best when young people are making music, and when their existing passion for music is reflected and built upon within the classroom. Within the Music Team at West London Academy we aim to make music learning as practical an activity as possible, done 'with' and 'by' the students, not 'to' and 'for' them. During Year 9 students are

taught Musical Futures throughout the year, they are encouraged to work as part of a band using instruments such as the guitar, bass guitar and drum kit. Musical Futures is an approach to Learning and Teaching. It is a way of thinking about music making in schools that brings non-formal teaching and informal learning approaches into the more formal context of the Academy. Musical Futures is not run as a Scheme of Learning or as a project but it is an ethos that underpins everything that the Music Team at West London Academy believes. All Musical Futures projects are designed with student voice and student choice at the centre. Throughout Musical Futures there are opportunities for the views, opinions, interests and preferred learning styles of students to play a vital part in determining how sessions

run and progress - giving scope for teachers to react by personalising projects as a result. Student voice is the fundamental reason why there is no one 'typical' Musical Futures project. As a teacher it is fantastic to be able to teach in an environment where students are excited about music and are keen to be involved. By allowing the students to be more innovative and creative in their work we have witnessed a wide range of benefits including improved behaviour from most students and an increased uptake of Music at Key Stage 4. That big we have quadrupled the uptake onto the Key Stage 4 music course in 2011. With the development of the curriculum, Musical Futures is being introduced into Year 8 to encourage this love of music from an early age within the Academy.





Challenge and nurture together making a difference

Hayley Taberner, Integrated Art in Education Co-ordinator

Am I a teacher or am I an artist?
Could I be both? Might I be more: a facilitator, an enabler, a companion on the artistic journey or maybe a catalyst for creativity itself?

One who challenges and at other times nurtures requires intuitive knowledge of human nature; a gift essential to the true educator. The ability to recognise, develop and harness the talents and temperaments of learners is pivotal to the success of all children, resulting in increasing life chances and life choices. Criticism and correction can have offensive and destructive effects on self confidence and many adults have a fear and aversion to Art as a direct result of criticism encountered at a young age. Perceptions of what is 'good' or 'the right way to do something' are learnt, and usually involved drawing and painting. Developing trust through praise and appreciation of work well

done encourages personal growth and creates a safe environment to dare to be different and have an opinion. The open minded exploration and imagination of children can lead them in surprising directions and as teachers we serve to steer the ship on which they sail. In the Art department we celebrate that fact that the days of 'I can't draw' or 'Art is a lie?' (Something whole classes of WLA students used to chant many moons ago?)...are echoes of the past. When Art is subjective yet criteria makes it prescriptive, tirades of confusion hail from all angles, but somewhere in the middle there is a point when creativity and control meet, allowing for the freedom to not only learn the rules but to break them so that the pieces when put back together look exiting, new and different. This element of risk taking in Art is a joint venture and takes place within an environment in which both students and teachers

learn together, seeking new ways of asking questions in an increasingly visual world.

An imaginary open top bus ride through London, drawing iconic London landmarks along the way is the inspiration for one Year group. They will meet the artist Stephen Wilshire for inspiration, recording and documenting architectural buildings old and new through the methods of description and memory. This is not an organised trip, will cost very little and required no risk assessment, because it will take place in an art studio and provide students with the stimulus for a series of work related to the formal element of Perspective. The experience will set the tone for the weeks ahead, build relationships, trust and the freedom to develop in a safe and creative environment.



Above: Some of the exam outcomes independently achieved at KS4 and KS5



Above: 6th form – painting with light experiments using photography creating and recording kinetic light formations. Sharing skills and working alongside students to make art happen.



Above: Creating opportunities outside – found natural and manmade objects/frottage and tiny treasure hunt

‘Developing Creative Designers’

Phillipa Bower, Design & Technology Teacher and Gifted & Talented Co-ordinator



Creative thinking and problem solving play a fundamental role in Design and Technology and our Schemes of Learning have been designed to encourage these skills. All of the projects that we teach are based around real life problems, where each student is given the opportunity to produce a high quality usable product.

In the creative industry, designers are given briefs by companies, along with a strict set of design criteria that the desired outcome must meet. We follow the exact same process in Design and Technology. For example, when delivering a textile Scheme of Learning with Year 8, they were given the following brief:

‘A toy company wishes to extend its range of soft toys to appeal to young children. The company has asked you to design, make and package a felt toy suitable for children aged 3 to 7.’

In order for students to meet target levels and produce a viable outcome, a design criteria is supplied. For the textiles project, the toy had to be made from felt, include at least

3 stitches and be no bigger than 160mm x 100mm.

The design criteria act as a starting point to inspire students in creating individual and unique designs. Inspiration can come from an endless number of sources: existing products, films, advertisements, music.

Throughout the design process, I encourage students to communicate with each other about their designs. As well as talking to peers, students are also encouraged to gain feedback from potential consumers. This is a vital part of the design process and one that teaches the students to put the opinions of others before their own.

The outcome of teaching Design and Technology in this way is that work is finished to a higher standard; in many cases the work is finished to such a professional standard it could actually be sold. Students take a greater ownership of their work and take pride in their finished solutions. They become aware of the importance of designing for others and understand how to use feedback to make their designs more appropriate for their target market.

Over the next year I aim to make links with local design agencies with a view to getting them to set real briefs for the students. Having to pitch their designs to real firms would add an extra element of ‘realism’ and competition to the projects and in turn raise the aspirations of the students, along with the standard of their work.



Being Techno Savvy in a Technological Age

Lemuel Au, ICT Teacher



I am sure you all have heard of the term 'ICT Solution'; an advertisement jargon coined by the likes of IBM to sell their services to government and

corporate bodies around the world. However there is an argument for linking the words 'ICT' and 'Solution' together and the reasoning behind it is this; Technology was developed to solve problems. Problems such as 'how do I communicate with someone thousands of miles across the world?', 'how do I teach a computer to identify faces in photographs?' and also the mundane problems like 'how do I make the monotonous tasks I have to do easier?'. From these examples of everyday life problems we can see that the purpose and importance of ICT will not diminish but arguably become more relevant as society progresses.

One key characteristic of ICT is that of constant change. New devices, new software and new concepts all come together to make teaching ICT as a subject extremely complex. So then, what do we teach in ICT? If it were 'what to click and when to click it' then the relevancy of what is being taught will quickly diminish. However what we teach in ICT is how to use technology to solve everyday problems. To do this we need to develop students to be innovative and creative in their approach to ICT and above all else, they need to think for themselves.



Knowing there are better solutions

Pallavi Shah, Senior Accountant



When I joined the Academy back in 2006, there was a lack of real time finance information. We were unable to provide the Budget Holders with an up to date information on their spend and their budgets as the accounting system at the time was not capable to produce the required information. The challenge was to make sure that we find a solution where the staff could have instant access to all the information they need to make financial decisions.

We managed to find a company that had designed an accounting system which could be tailored to our requirements. I worked with the company to design the workflow process and also made sure that the online system ties in with our academy improvement plan so that all the staff could clearly see what their budget allocations were and what they had spent against each allocation. Departments are able to raise purchase requisitions online and are able to monitor their budgets in

real time. At any point in time the department manager is able look at their up to date spend and can also view all the invoices online. This online system has reduced the number of queries significantly as the department managers can view all the information on their own computer screens.

West London Academy has always been ahead in terms of technology. We were amongst the first few academies who got this system and managed

to successfully change it according to our requirements.

Finance Directors from other academies & schools wishing to convert to academies have come to see our system and are amazed at the fact the staff at West London Academy have access to up to date information.

Through our own desire to solve problems in a creative and innovative way we successfully achieved the goal we set out for ourselves.....real time financial reporting!

If the answer isn't obvious, start thinking differently

Sian Davis, Human Resources Officer



Thinking back to the beginning of the Academic year, my biggest frustration was the dinosaur of a HR IT system that I was using. Fed up with being stuck with an inherited system that wouldn't let you record data and create reports in a way you need, the search was on for a more flexible system where you could design, build and create your own format of recording and reporting. I found a perfect system and since then the recording of staff personnel information has been simple and report writing and data manipulation a lot more streamlined. I now want to go one step further and am looking into getting an online self-service for staff to access their personal contact information and attendance records and where they will also be able to request annual leave online. The self-service aspect of the system makes HR available to employees and line managers 24/7 and allows staff to take responsibility of managing their own information in a controlled way.

With the continual occurrence of staff going on Maternity Leave and an increase in Paternity Leave applications along with the recent government introduction of Additional Paternity Leave, I decided that there needs to be more information available to staff on how the process of leave

works. We do have policies on this but I wanted to go one step further and so I decided to make mini handbooks on Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Leave for staff – not to be confused with a handbook on how to make or raise children! Instead, more of a 'what happens when' with regards to the process before the leave, during and when returning to work. It isn't designed to take away from the face to face contact and advice that I provide to staff but for them to look at in their own time and then we can discuss in more depth with an increased understanding of a somewhat complicated process.

More recently the most exciting project that I am working on is creating an online pre-induction taster for new staff to the Academy.

Staff usually get an induction on their first day, however it can be an overwhelming experience especially for those who have not worked in education before or are just starting their careers in teaching. I wanted to change my approach from simply going through the handbook and talking through the policies.

So I created a condensed version of the handbook which also included things that you wouldn't necessarily

find in the handbook such as the food on offer in the Restaurant and how to get an induction to the fitness suite. I still wasn't happy with this though, it wasn't engaging enough. So I tried to come up with a different approach to getting the information across. Extensive research showed that people who continue to be included and engaged in an organisations activities prior to their first day, have better performance results and increased motivation. The Academy already has low staff turnover, lots of stability and very low sickness rates amongst its employees. Often we recruit staff who do not commence employment for some months, especially teachers who we start recruiting to start in September as early in the year as January. This is a long wait and they may begin to forget a lot of the information we tell them when they come for interview. The whole concept for the WLA pre-induction is that successful candidates will be able to access more information online prior to their first day thus reducing the stress of the transition into a new job. They will be able to access information on things they need to know prior to their first day e.g. completing necessary forms, dress code, parking facilities, sample restaurant menu; and then what will happen on their first day e.g. meeting their line manager, getting access to the computer systems, being introduced to the rest of the department. There will also be videos from some of the staff where they talk about their experiences and what they have achieved whilst working at WLA and the opportunities on offer here. An interactive pre-online induction is a more creative approach to an area of induction which is commonly misconceived as unnecessary.

All discovery is key to learning

To be the best

John Nolan, Learning Manager



Our year group target and motto is 'To be the Best' the aim being that we aim to ensure that every individual student maximises their full potential. We never put a ceiling on that potential, concentrating on creating those who aspire to reach ever increasing heights.

To achieve this, our first stage is to gather useful information on the students; this is carried out in a number of ways.

1 Liaison with the Key

Departments - Both the English and Maths departments have lists of students who are making slow progress and need personalised intervention to help them succeed, these are discussed in the year group and shared with all the form tutors.

2 Form tutors - play a key role collating information from: through the ongoing use of weekly assessments through LAP Records, individual discussions with students, target / report cards, praise and discipline emails.

3 Parental concerns - as well as contact with form tutors, a number of parents have a close working relationship with the Year Group SAFE Worker and so liaise directly with her, concerns and issues are then passed on to the Learning Manager and form tutors.

4 Edutrack - is used to track the 'value added' achievement students are achieving.

The second stage is to act on the information. It is all very well to gather information but if this is not backed up by action it will not lead to improvement. Some of the actions we have tackled as a year team in order to strive 'to be the best' are:

1. Reading Schemes - a

considerably below average reading age was identified across the year group. Set reading times during registration were arranged and individual students of concern were identified and involved in group reading with the Learning Manager twice a week.

2. Reports - Individual students are targeted and put on report for issues such as: lack of home work, concerns regarding lack of progress and this is monitored by Form Tutors and the Learning Manager. Form Tutors set targets in student planners to move learning forward and monitor this in conjunction with LAP Records.

3. Desk and Computer Access - Students have access to computers

which they are able to use for a variety of things including completing research and printing off work. Students are actively encouraged to attend home work club on a Tuesday and Thursday where they have access to a work space of their own and computers if they are needed.

4. Positive Reinforcement - A key feature of the year group is positive reinforcement; this is done during registration and assembly when praise emails are publicly celebrated. There is also the end of term celebration assembly where teachers nominate students for a number of different learning and achieving awards.

As the students progress through the secondary phase we know them as individuals. They are maturing into people with manners, aspiration and perseverance. To us they will never be mere statistics, they are individuals with their lives ahead of them. Through the work we have all done we, students and staff, are starting to believe that actually, just maybe if we continue the hard work, we can all fulfil their motto, maximise all of our potential To be the Best.

A Tree of Knowledge

Ian Selby, Learning Leader



Monty Python's song made the world aware of the overwhelmingly mundane nature of the traffic light. For those of us unfamiliar with the experience, the song consists of a pseudo-accountant repeating over and over the line "I like traffic lights." After several minutes of this he adds "Although my name's not Bamber," before there is a groan and a thud as the singer collapses with utter, grinding boredom.

The cultural value of the traffic light did not improve significantly - until this...

"Innovation is not the product of logical thought." (Einstein)

The point about innovation is that the ability to see something from another perspective and renew or improve it, is a skill that can be developed and then transferred. Pierre Vivant, the designer of the above installation was not a street engineer, but saw the connection between the London Plane trees in the background and the traffic installations nearby.

How does innovation impact on the classroom?

Firstly, students' ability to innovate comes in stages and is always praiseworthy, no matter how many times you have seen it. The fact that others before have come to the same conclusion does not lessen the

achievement of the individual child.

An example - it will take about three months from arriving at High School for the first Year 7 boy to realise stuffing a jumper up his shirt and using a high pitched voice will make him the embodiment of womanhood on stage. Each and every year a student will make this discovery, to much peer acclaim.

This process of innovation continues as students develop. The student who picks up a guitar and picks out a tune without being shown how. The girl who makes the connection between a news item and a PSHCE topic. The boy who cites the Geneva Convention while complaining about a detention. All are inventive, innovative and inspired - albeit safely within areas explored by their predecessors and all eagerly encouraged by able teachers.

Secondly, the spirit of the Traffic Light Tree should encourage teachers to

think laterally, to approach things in a new way, and to test our own perceptions as well as our students. Lack of innovation is a kiss of death in any classroom. I once had a supply Maths teacher for a couple of weeks while at High School. He had retired, or should have, and had made a comeback. In our first lesson he took a faded exercise book from his briefcase, pages yellow with age, turned with the greatest care. He began to copy the notes onto the board and we copied these into our books. This continued for the whole hour. There were several groans and thuds as my classmates began hitting the floor. Boredom, utter grinding boredom.

"Genius," as Edison never said, "is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration and zero percent boredom!"



Above: ...

Learn from Everyone



Going Global

Matt Brown, Subject Leader - Geography

Learners at WLA come from a huge variety of ethnic, religious and social backgrounds, and we have a key role to play in community cohesion through inclusion and raising aspiration for all. At the Academy, learners are increasingly being encouraged to engage with complex global issues and explore the links between their lives and people in the wider global community. The global dimension to education encourages learners to evaluate information and think critically about the many challenges facing people across national boundaries. Our commitment to this is reflected in the Academy being awarded the 'International Schools Foundation' status last year.

In Humanities, we have introduced a variety of curriculum opportunities with the global dimension in mind. We work closely with the charity Link Ethiopia and we are at the early stages of creating a sustainable link with Maksegnit Preparatory and Secondary School in the north of the country. Although in its early stages, the link has started to become an integral part of the curriculum. After a series of lessons that challenged learners'

stereotypes of Ethiopia and Africa, Year 8 geography students wrote letters to their counterparts in Ethiopia and have now received their first replies. The letter writing has not only confined itself to the students thought. The Principals have also written to each other sending information about each others schools to help the students understand more about the respective education establishments.

Learners at both schools have also taken part in the first 'shared learning activity' which focused on how we care for the environment. Year 9 GCSE Religious Studies Learners completed an independent learning activity, in which they used a range of research, thinking, and enterprising skills to develop their knowledge and understanding of what is being done to improve sustainability. Learners at Maksegnit completed a similar activity and the results were shared.

Humanities students have also started work on other projects that will be shared with Maksegnit. These include the use of the Academy Fields Weather Station to compare climatic conditions, and the raised beds

competition to compare the range of crops that will grow.

Though still in its early stages, the link has encouraged learners to consider our changing world, their place in it, and the rights of others and they have started to make friends and communicate as part of a global network. The letter writing activity encouraged learners to be reflective and show empathy and imagination.

We are looking to embed our international links and extend them across other departments through a range of activities and strategies with our Ethiopian partner school. International links can support curriculum innovation in every subject area and there are a range of support packages, schemes and funding available to support learners to develop as global citizens. Over the coming months we will be looking to work across departments sharing activities and allowing learners to think creatively, linking ideas between different subject areas.

The Foundation in Innovation

David Robinson, Vice Principal, Primary Phase



Lunch break at a professional development course in central London, a group of teachers sit making small talk amongst themselves when the conversation turns to the Foundation Stage. One of the delegates announces that the thought of dealing with ‘small people’ and snotty noses all day is her worst nightmare. She then proceeds to state that the Foundation Stage staff at her school must have such an easy time just playing games and singing songs.

Unbeknown to her, one of the delegates in the group is a Reception teacher of three years and a Foundation Stage Coordinator. Sensing the need to put this woman straight, I asked, “When was it that you learnt to read?” After some deliberation she settled on the answer that, “It must have been when I was in Reception.” Noting the hint of surprise in her voice I asked, “Which teachers do you remember from your time at Primary school?” There were two, her Year 6 teacher and her Reception teacher.

The reason she remembered her Reception teacher was because she made learning such fun.

The Foundation Stage provides children with their first footsteps on the

long and challenging journey through education. Those first steps need to be perfect and create a desire to learn. This was why I worked extensively on creating an innovative Reception classroom.

The concept is driven by the core standard for pupils to develop a love of Literacy and Numeracy. Weekly planning for all the areas of learning from malleable play to outdoor learning have a traditional story at its centre. For example, Little Red Riding Hood would feed in to mathematical learning. Making a bed for the dolly of Grandma from a selection of materials that was big enough for her to sleep in brought in basic shape and special awareness as well as the use of non-standard units of measure. The role play area would house puppets from the story so that pupils could revisit and rehearse the story language whilst engaging in emergent writing opportunities, composing warning letters to the Three Little Pigs that the wolf was up to his usual tricks.

Unless carefully managed, outdoor learning can become just an opportunity to ride around on bikes with very little educational direction. I created a scheme of outdoor learning activities linked to traditional stories. Activities such as, ‘How many porridge oats can you put in baby bear’s bowl in one minute?’ With the use of a 1 minute sand timer, pupils extended their knowledge of time. Using tweezers to pick up the porridge oats and put them in baby bear’s bowl helped to develop muscles in the hand required for to master the fine motor control of holding a pencil. Counting out and recording the number of oats on a basic pictogram encouraged understanding of data handling.

With some thought and a little innovation every activity in the Foundation Stage, whether it be free flow or adult led, can provide pupils with several different learning opportunities. And of course, you should always spare a little time for singing songs...



Once they taste acknowledgement they want more



A true underdog!

Danny Edwards, BTEC Co-ordinator and Learning Manager Post 16



Whilst on a recent course I was in conversation with a head teacher from a well known independent school. He remarked on the issues that his staff and students had when considering high aspirations and taking personal accountability for their actions. He suggested that staff and students consistently set themselves targets that were either easily achievable or beneath their true ability. As a keen sportsman he asked how in sport the 'underdog' can flourish in so many difficult situations. It led me to consider that in every team that I have been involved within, words such as 'winner', 'achieve', and 'success' are constantly used by team managers and players. The important traits often found in truly gifted sportspeople consisted of creativity and the ability to

react to stimulus on the pitch quicker than the opposition. This led me to consider the type of student I was teaching.

Students, who typically join the Post 16 Sports course, come from a range of schools and the majority tend to have limited success in education at GCSE level. However, in the interview process it is obvious that they have been very successful in a sporting environment and are keen to continue to achieve. Therefore, when I looked at the students it was important to break down the constraints that restrict their progress in the classroom but allow them to become successful on the sports pitch. We began to recognise the importance of making students responsible for their own actions and as staff consider different new ideas of getting our teaching and learning outcomes across to students. I felt that we had to recognise the strengths of our students and work towards these using new ideas that can support their learning. With the use of assessment data we produced goal setting sheets that allowed students to define their own personnel short, medium and long term goals. This impact allowed all students to have set targets that allowed them to

remain focused in and out of lessons.

We have found that the majority of the students on the Sports course are kinaesthetic learners and we decided that a programme that allowed them to learn new skills practically would support their progression and self esteem levels. We have achieved this through a number of enrichment opportunities that include a volunteering programme, leadership programmes, and coaching badges and with the use of a Sports Psychologist group (Inner Drive) to focus on what can be achieved through hard work and determination. We feel that this creativity and supporting the learners to start to think in a variety of styles has supported them in the classroom.

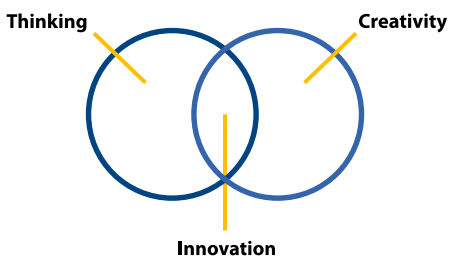
These processes alongside others have allowed the BTEC Sport results to improve year on year with 85% of last years Year 14 group achieving triple distinctions the equivalent of triple A at A-Level. These results in our opinion were the result of a number of initiatives that support the overall development of the student and inspire them to be ambitious into what they can achieve.

Building blocks

Rose Iksilara, Subject Leader - Modern Foreign Languages



“Innovation, Creativity and Thinking” are crucial areas in the development of both teachers and students. Innovation can be seen as the combination of Creative Thinking, which when put in action, brings about change. A Venn Diagram can make this thought more visual:



By following such model ourselves as teachers, we would hope to be open enough to encourage the same type of behaviour in our students. In MFL, for example, I believe in developing Thinking Skills through grammar. By asking students to identify patterns and propose a theory for why that pattern is present, the students are applying all their knowledge to date, and consolidating it, before putting on the next building block. Although I advocate a combination of kinaesthetic activities, visual aids, games and songs in lessons, I also find that giving students the tools to understand the building blocks of language is the only way of making them truly free. It could be argued that

students can have the power to be creative with a foreign language only by understanding how it works, and thus overcoming the “parrot effect”. Making a parallel to the world of architecture, students can make their constructions as simple or as daring as they want them to be, but its basis needs to be there and be strong.

Nevertheless, because we are dealing with people (and not concrete!) we need to have a solid basis upon which classroom learning can be built; I personally see this as respect. Respect towards others’ ideas and pace, as well as listening to one another are, albeit basic, absolutely essential in creating a safe environment in which students can feel comfortable about making mistakes and support each other in learning from these. Every start of the year we engage our students in a brainstorm about respect and create the top 3 rules for that class. Students are then expected to stick their “respect statement” on the front page of their books, sign it and most importantly: abide by it!

Moreover, it seems reasonable to suggest that, as educators, we have a responsibility towards the holistic development of our students into social beings. Hence, nurturing both the academic and emotional areas impinging on them seems evident. Also, “knowledge is something no one can take away from you”, I recall my parents saying, “so that should be your biggest investment”. Years on, now as an educator, I find myself encouraging personal accountability for one’s development and fostering independent learning. I believe in motivating through ownership and achievement.

In summary, actively involving our students by giving them ownership of our subject (in our case, the building blocks of language) we aim to give them the power to develop their thinking skills and the freedom to be creative with it. Hopefully, this will lead them to be innovative in the way they learn, propelled by their motivation to achieve. Undoubtedly, once they taste achievement, they will want more!



- 1** To go Boldly:
Do not be afraid to do things differently.

- 2** Develop problem solvers:
Actively encourage children to break problems down.

- 3** Develop Independence:
Move from spoon feeding to functional learning.

- 4** Develop Thinkers:
Help learners to reason argument.

- 5** Develop Creativity:
Help students to see, do or use things differently.

- 6** Develop Passion:
Nurture, harness and enable creative ideas.

- 7** Embrace Change:
Be ready for future developments

- 8** Encourage Discovery:
Understand that discovery creates learning.

- 9** Respect Others:
Learn from everyone.

- 10** Inspire Ambition:
Let them taste achievement, they will want more.



About West London Academy

West London Academy is a special partnership between Government and private investment benefiting from a stunning building which opened in September 2005 designed by world famous architects Foster and Partners.

The Academy Sponsor is Sir Alec Reed, founder of the Reed Executive employment and training group.

The Academy comprises:

- A Children's Centre
- A Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative for 3-5 year olds linked to a 0-3 nursery nearby
- A Sure Start parenting programme with activities for children under 3 years
- A Nursery and Primary School for 3-11 year olds
- The John Chilton School for both primary and high school age students with special needs
- A High School for 11-19 year olds
- An Adult Education Centre
- A Community Sports Centre



**WEST LONDON
ACADEMY**
PROUD TO LEARN

Continuum

Making our All-Through, all-through

Continuum

Innovation, Creativity and the Importance of Thinking

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