

Title:

Learning Logs and Creativity in the Curriculum

Worth reading if you are interested in:

Curriculum design, creativity in the outdoor classroom, Key Stage transitions, connected learning, skills acquisition, active learning.

School context

Bangor Grammar School is a boys' interdenominational, voluntary grammar school of almost 900 pupils with an approved admission number of 125. It has a wide catchment area covering North Down and Ards and is oversubscribed at Year 8. The percentage of Year 12 students achieving seven or more GCSE grades A*–C, including English and mathematics, was 95 percent in 2019. Most of the Year 12 pupils return to post-16 study at the school. The school-leavers' destinations data indicates that almost all Year 14 pupils in 2018 progressed to higher education study. The school is a member of the Bangor Learning Partnership, comprising the four post-primary schools in Bangor: Bangor Grammar School, Glenlola Collegiate, Bangor Academy and St Columbanus's College. This enables sixth form pupils to study a Level 3 or A level course at one of the partner schools. The school is also part of the North Down and Ards Area Learning Community and is engaged in a Shared Education project with Bangor Academy and St Columbanus's College. Part of this involves working towards achieving Rights Respecting Schools status.

Personnel:

Mrs E P Huddleson, Principal

Mr S E Gilmore, Vice Principal

Background

The Board of Governors reviews and revises the school's curriculum policy every year. The school ensures that the academic curriculum provided meets the requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. It also aims to enrich this provision by including additional subjects, where possible. The Vice Principal co-ordinates the curriculum provision throughout the school in liaison with the senior leadership team.

The school day operates a timetable model of five hour-long periods per day. To accommodate the curriculum that it needs to deliver across the school, the timetable runs over a fortnight with time for staff development and preparation.

In Key Stage 3, boys are taught in classes that are not streamed. The main curricular subjects are: Art and Design, Biology, Chemistry, Drama, English, Food Technology, French, Geography, German, History, ICT, Mathematics, Music, Physical Education, Physics, Religious Education, Spanish and Technology.

Cross-Curricular Skills and Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities: Employability, Citizenship, Personal Social and Health Education are taught through the Learning for Life and Work programme and through the programmes of study of all curricular subjects. All boys have one hour of games per week. Science is taught as the discrete subjects of Biology, Chemistry and Physics throughout the Key Stage. French is the only modern foreign language taught in Year 8. In Years 9 and 10, boys take a second modern language, either German or Spanish¹.

At post-16, all pupils have a choice of 28 AS/A level subjects and each year the curriculum is modelled around the pupil options. Through the Bangor Learning Partnership, under the umbrella of the North Down and Ards Area Learning Community, currently pupils are offered BTEC Engineering, BTEC Hospitality, BTEC ICT, Moving Image Art, BTEC Performing Arts and BTEC Sports Studies.

What the school sets out to do and why

With over 30 contributory primary schools, handling pupils' transition to big school is fundamental to them having a launch pad to successful integration and fulfilment.

In 2018, Year 8 pupils were introduced to the school's Pupil Learning Log. This allowed them to reflect on what went well in each subject and then self-manage improvement actions that could make their work even better. In a reorganisation of the senior leadership team, responsibility for developing the Learning Log was aligned with transition links with primary schools, teaching pedagogy, Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities (TS&PC), Cross-Curricular Skills and connected learning links with departments. An action plan for 2019–20 on using the Learning Log with the TS&PC and Cross-Curricular Skills was agreed. Year 14 mentors of Year 8 pupils received training to help pupils complete the log and a resource pack of TS&PC activities was developed for mentors to use.

In keeping with the review of the key transition points particularly between Years 10 and 11, the school leadership introduced short taster courses in Business Studies, Design Technology/ Computing and Moving Image Art. This is timetabled in six rotations per academic year, helping to avoid distorting pupils' subject choice whereby the most recent rotation becomes a more popular GCSE choice. This timetabling model increases the opportunities for connected learning and skills acquisition, for example having pupils complete assignment work in Business Studies or Journalism, to be videoed in Moving Image Arts and with ICT presentations completing the projects.

What has been achieved so far?

As part of the TS&PC curriculum, the school embarked on an initiative in collaboration with the Clondeboye Estate by bringing the 120 Year 10 boys into the outdoor classroom to develop creativity and resilience and encourage active lifestyles. The Year 10 curriculum was collapsed for two days and building on the Learning without Walls² project pupils connected their curriculum learning across Science (purifying water), Home Economics (survival cookery), Technology and Design (shelter building) and PSHE (first aid training, communication skills, self-management,

¹ <https://www.bangorgrammarschool.org.uk/About/Curriculum/>

² <https://www.forestschoolawards.org/cgi-bin/lww.cgi?page=AboutLWW>

working with others, decision-making and problem-solving). This event was organised by the Connected Learning Co-ordinator. In 2018, a Vice Principal departed and a senior teacher stepped down, so an opportunity arose to replace the senior leadership team (SLT), building on a strong middle leadership cohort of committed staff. This senior management restructuring redefined roles and responsibilities, so the new SLT now consists of Principal, Vice Principal and Assistant Principal (Organisation and Routine) and three senior teachers in charge of pastoral care, pupil performance and school improvement respectively.

Building on the Learning without Walls scheme, a partnership between Trinity College, Dublin (TCD), Bangor Grammar, Kilcooley Primary and Clondeboye Primary was developed in which the schools worked with English undergraduates from TCD on creative writing pieces based on the natural habitat of Clondeboye estate and Lady Dufferin's apiary. She set the scene by giving pupils a talk at the start of the morning on the husbandry of bees, their colonies and benefit to the environment. This was another day on the estate with the pupils engaging across the three schools to assist key stage transition and connect their learning.

In Year 10, the process leading to the selection of options begins with a career planning day at the end of the Christmas term and an employability module delivered by careers teachers as part of the Learning for Life and Work programme at the beginning of the Easter term. Guidance to parents about their sons' suitability for GCSE subjects is given at the Year 10 Parental Consultation in January. Choices are confirmed following interviews (if required) between the boys and their parents in February. An options event is held as part of the University and Careers Fair in February.

At GCSE, pupils can study a traditional or flexible pathway allowing access to between 7 to 9 GCSEs. Pupils studying the flexible pathway will have the opportunity to study ECDL and have support classes to aid learning. LLW is delivered through a programme of collapsed days throughout the academic year³.

What still needs to be done?

Bangor Grammar has retained the availability of its three-tier GCSE curriculum model to cater for a varied range of educational needs⁴. Each intake cohort of pupils is carefully assessed and throughout Key Stage 3 tracked and advised about the most suitable GCSE pathways. Although individuals can be accommodated within the three tiers, senior staff have reported that as performance improves, fewer boys require or opt for the reduced GCSE model. In keeping true to the curriculum principles, the school continues to offer ECDL, Prince's Trust and Preparation for Adult Life (PAL)⁵ qualifications.

The school reviews the efficacy of the Learning Log and makes refinements in response to pupils' experiences of using the log to improve self-management of learning.

³ <https://www.bangorgrammarschool.org.uk/Links/Downloads/>

⁴ <https://www.bangorgrammarschool.org.uk/Links/Policies/> Curriculum Policy 2019

⁵ <https://bangorgrammarschool.com/Departments/PAL/>

What can the project share with other schools and providers?

1. When the opportunity arises for staff restructuring, it is timely to review management configurations to ensure that strategically the school provides a broad, balanced, modern and flexible curriculum with pathways that meet the needs of young people. Bangor Grammar School transformed its SLT appointing second middle leaders to senior posts with responsibility for pastoral care, pupil performance and school improvement.
2. The Learning Log is not just a diary or a record of what the pupil has done, it is a record of what he has learned, tried and critically reflected on. It is a personal record of learning unique to each author. It cannot be right or wrong. A Learning Log helps to record, structure, think about, reflect on, plan, develop and evidence our learning. It makes our learning explicit. Rather than having a vague feeling that you are learning, the need to complete the log forces you to become explicit about what that learning consists of. In the process, we can turn tacit learning – the kind of learning we do not consciously know about – into explicit learning⁶.
3. Introducing and engendering creativity in the classroom⁷ is difficult, given the time and resource constraints that schools labour under. Collapsing the timetable to provide a concentrated period of creative thinking and learning is one way to overcome any barriers erected by the traditional school timetabled day. By working with the Clandeboye Estate and moving to the outdoor classroom, Bangor Grammar School sparked pupils' imaginative thinking and required them, through various tasks, to think outside the box while connecting their learning in a meaningful and rewarding way. Although aware that STEM subjects require research, attention to detail and a critical approach that is useful in any occupation or subject, the Bangor Grammar school model believes that pupils can gain these skills equally from the humanities. STEM and the arts complement each other and many STEM careers need creativity⁸ as much as analytical skills. Most STEM roles are concerned with formulating solutions to problems and problem-solving is often about thinking creatively and imaginatively⁹. Therefore, the school takes time to connect the sciences and the arts in the pursuit of the holistic development of its pupils.

Key Learning points

1. Collapsing the formal timetable to extend the curriculum and provide more breadth and depth brings many learning benefits to the overall experience of pupils.
2. Opportunities provided by staff movement should be taken to implement long-term strategic curriculum design and planning goals.
3. Using outside school resources and the potential of the local community to enliven learning while extending the curriculum gives pupils a social grounding and a beneficial attachment to their locality.

⁶ <https://epdf.pub/the-handbook-of-work-based-learning.html> Section 4.16, Page 196

⁷ http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/curriculum_microsite/TSPC/useful_resources_links/essential_documents.asp

⁸ http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/curriculum_microsite/TSPC/thinking_classroom/the_language_of_thinking/index.asp

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/dec/06/people-listen-to-greta-thunberg-because-of-her-creativity-not-just-her-science>