Twilight Training Blog

Running staff training is not an easy task. I have run many sessions over the years, but this week I had to run some twilight training as a member of the SMT. Whilst our aim was to try and engage and inspire all staff, I have to realise that you are never going to please or inspire everyone. The fact of the matter is that staff are incredibly busy and if you are running after school training then staff will no doubt have to have changed their usual plans. Marking will have to be pushed back, childcare might have to of been changed, the gym might have to wait, the afternoon nap may well be cancelled. Even at our school, with a fantastic staff, people are already slightly put out at having to attend. External Training days are far more productive as staff are often off site, their lessons are covered, they have time to reflect and normally have a good lunch!

However, Twilight Training is a different matter. My aim was to try and give everyone something of value. With this in mind, I think it is important to try and cover a number of topics thereby raising the chances of benefitting many staff.

This week myself and the Teaching and Learning Team were trying to allow the opportunity for staff to reflect on their teaching. The initial exercise was to encourage staff to be reflective of their teaching. They worked in pairs to describe the best lesson they had ever observed. They then compared the two lessons before summarising the key attributes that both lessons had. They then worked as a group of 8 to compare their notes before deciding their top 3 attributes of great lessons. We were pleased and yet not surprised to see a great deal of overlap between the different groups. As expected, engagement, pace and progress were the most important factors.

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We then progressed to talk about teaching styles before showing them what the 2014 Ofsted handbook suggests about the matter. Ofsted are no longer interested in the teaching style. Sir Michael Wilshire does not mind if there is no independent learning, he is not fussed if the lesson is primarily teacher led. Do whatever you like, on the condition that students are making progress. I welcome this news, and I think that will be the case for some of our staff who teach in a traditional manner and get excellent results, whilst at the same time ensuring that their pupils enjoy the subject.

There was a worry in previous years that lessons had to be all singing and all dancing to get the top grade. We teach in a great school with a variety of learners and trying to get all staff to teach in the same manner would destroy the individuality and at times eccentricity that makes our school so successful. In a recent survey eccentricity in teachers is what our students really respond to.

We then presented ideas about Vygotsky's Zone of proximal development and linked this to a revised version of Bloom's Taxonomy. We then discussed the science, the art and the craft of teaching a good lesson. I am sure many of the staff remember these models from their own training days or private reading but we felt it was really important to remind them. We then watched a10 minute video of a lesson and attempted to see evidence of the science, art and craft of the lesson. We finished the group session by handing out details of the SMSC changes and how the 4 strands could be implemented within departments.

The staff then split off again in pairs and the planned their own "study lesson". In essence, this meant they planned a lesson together and arranged a time to observe each other teaching the lesson. In between both lessons they have the opportunity to discuss and then amend the lesson accordingly.

I planned an introductory lesson on Tourism with Andrew Zair. It was really enjoyable to plan a lesson together. Andrew observed me teach the lesson and I think he appreciated the opportunity to view another lesson but I found it really useful having him there to bounce ideas off. We then amended the lesson and I observed Andrew teach a far superior lesson. When discussing it at the end we were still not happy we have demonstrated enough evidence of progress, yet by the end of the discussion we felt that simple adjustments would make it a top standard lesson.

I am hopeful many of the other staff will enjoy a similar learning experience. Running the training was enjoyable but the actual study lesson was probably the most valuable aspect of the twilight session. I may have enjoyed it but the proof will be in the staff evaluation!