Dalkeith High School Learning Visits: May 2016

Introduction

In session 2015-2016, it was agreed that the focus of learning visits involving all teaching staff would be on the **feedback** strand of **Visible Learning**. This was in response to Midlothian priorities.

The first tranche of Learning Visits focused on the way in which teachers gave feedback to learners. The second tranche focused on the ways in which learners gave feedback to teachers to create a **'feedback loop'**. Prior to this second tranche, as part of ongoing CLPL (Career Long Professional Learning) for staff, the Reflection Tool was completed on an individual basis. This meant that staff could invite visitors to consider the extent to which they were meeting their personal focus in continuing to ensure excellence in Learning and Teaching.

Personal focuses included the following:

- Ensuring learners can identify **skills**
- Offering **personalisation and choice**
- **Active** learning
- **Self** and **peer assessment**
- **Collaborative** learning
- Use of **demonstrations** to promote learner understanding
- Promoting the **relevance** of learning beyond the classroom
- Sharing **success criteria**
- Using the **language of learning**
- Enabling **pupil feedback**
- The use of **examples** to improve learners' understanding
- Welcoming **mistakes as part of the learning process**
- Linking **learning intentions** to skills as well as knowledge
- Pupils identifying their own **success criteria**
- Use of **plenaries** to gather feedback on the lesson

Staff had four weeks in which to complete their visits and had been encouraged to find their own visit partners/ trios in an effort to enable **open, peer to peer dialogue**. Most staff continued working with the pair/ trio they had collaborated with in the first tranche of visits, further developing the positive working relationships across faculties and departments. Those who had joined the school in the interim were invited to join existing pairs.

Composition of learning visits

47 learning visits were evidenced. The subjects represented were: Art and Design, ASDAN, Biology, Business Education, CDT, Chemistry, Computing, English, Geography (including through the Duke of Edinburgh programme), Home Economics, History, Maths, Modern Languages, Modern Studies, Music, PE, Physics, RME, Science and Support for Learning.

Almost all of the visits were to classes in the Broad General Education (BGE). This is because Senior Phase classes were engaged in their exam diet during May. Given that the BGE will be subject to a curriculum review in session 2016-17, this was also a good

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opportunity to find out more about Learning and Teaching across a wide range of subjects at this curricular stage.

In addition, there was also a visit to the S4 Summer School. This is a vocational programme for S4 pupils whose courses do not include end point written examinations and ran for the first time in May 2016. The aim is to ensure that pupils develop appropriate skills for life, learning and work, with a particular focus on employability.

Gathering Evidence

All staff taking part in learning visits were supplied with the same pro-forma (see Appendix A.) This had been slightly modified to ensure clarity in the **links between the HGIOS indicators highlighted and Visible Learning**, **with particular reference to feedback**.

All visitors structured their comments with reference to:

- Learners' experiences (2.1)
- Teaching for effective learning (5.2)
- Meeting learning needs (5.3)

Further to this, they were encouraged to make a note of:

- Key discussions points following the lesson
- Aims for future visits [NB Learning Visits will continue in session 2016-17 with an updated focus. The programme will take cognisance of *HGIOS (How Good Is Our School?) 4,* which will be in place from August 2016]
- Good practice observed

Key observations: Learners' experiences (2.1)

Almost all visitors confirmed that the purpose of the lesson they were visiting was clear and that learners were engaged and motivated. There were also many references to the use of learning intentions and success criteria. The following observations have been linked to specific subjects to aid understanding of the context. However, it is important to note that many observations were repeated across a variety of subjects and curricular areas and that the list below is in no way exclusive. The majority of this good practice clearly links back to **Visible Learning**, with particular focus on the **visible learner** (a key area of development for next session) and **feedback.**

Art and Design: Learners were encouraged to explain their idea through **think/pair/share**; Bloom's taxonomy was referenced to highlight s**kills.**

ASDAN: Learners responded to **questioning** with direct reference to their own experiences.

Biology: Peers gave feedback through **peer assessment.**

Chemistry: Teacher **questioning** was used to regularly check the **understanding** of the lesson.

Duke of Edinburgh: Learners were asked to **explain** the thinking behind their decisions making processes.

English: Learners were encouraged to offer **developed opinions** rather than one word answers; high levels of **learner independence**; they were working in teams with clear **responsibilities**; they used **higher order** thinking skills.

History: The **purpose** of the lesson was clearly identified and referred back to; **active learning** helped learners to re-cap; learners were **expressing views** and **contributing** to lesson.

Home Economics: Learners were **motivated** by the aim of creating a high quality final product.

Maths: Learners **views were listened to**; **active** participation was in evidence; **questioning** was used to ensure involvement from all; **strategies** were in place for learners to remove themselves from the 'learning pit.'

Music: Learners were clear on how they could **improve**; **choice** was offered with the instruments used.

PE: Clear references were made to **interdisciplinary** skills; learners were placing previously developed skills in **new contexts**.

Physics: Learners were aware of their own **strengths and development needs**; learners were confident in **asking questions** of both the class teacher and Support for Learning teacher during the lesson.

RME: Learners were keen to **ask and answer developed questions**; learners could explain the **learning intentions.**

Science: Learning intentions were clearly based on **skills**; learners **directing their own learning** through **peer interactions**; there were opportunities to **share views**; lessons began with clear re-cap.

Summer School: Learners were given **targeted feedback** to help them improve; the **skills** developed by each task were **explicitly discussed**.

Support for Learning: Learners were responding to questions with **direct reference** to their **own experiences**.

Key observations: Teaching for effective learning (5.2)

As in HGIOS indicator 5.1, comments under 5.2 also clearly demonstrated the application of **the principles of Visible Learning**.

- ⇒ Learners have the chance to give **feedback** on how well they think the work is going
- ⇒ Learners take part in **whole class and group discussions**
- ⇒ **Dialogue** in the class is **purposeful and clear**
- ⇒ Learners work both **collaboratively** and **independently**
- ⇒ The teacher gives **instant feedback** while the work is ongoing to allow **changes and improvement**s to be made
- ⇒ **Creative thinking** is encouraged
- ⇒ **Discussions** encourage learners to **build on and/ or refute points** rather than just list new ones

⇒ **ICT** is used to enhance the lesson
⇒ There are **links** made between the **skills** being used and **real life contexts**
⇒ Learners give **feedback** in relation to **success criteria**
⇒ Learners reflect on the **purpose** of the lesson and give **feedback** as a way of concluding the lesson
⇒ Learners are encouraged to **identify** their **achievements** and **next steps** in discussion with the class teacher
⇒ **Varying the tasks** throughout the lesson helps to ensure the learners stay engaged
⇒ Learners work i**ndependently** and think **creatively**
⇒ **Feedback sheets** are used for learners to assess their own progress through the unit
⇒ **Understanding is checked** through using thumbs up/ middle/ down
⇒ Sort cards are used to gather **feedback on understanding**
⇒ Use of **self-evaluation** sheets
⇒ Use of **specific praise** to promote engagement
⇒ Effective **use of pace** to ensure learners are on task at all times
⇒ A **clear aim** for the lesson was stated to keep learners on track
⇒ **Discussion** used regularly throughout the lesson
⇒ **Learner responses** taken into account by teacher to ensure **scaffolding** and **challenges** to thinking where appropriate
⇒ Learners able to explain the **purpose** of the lesson to each other
⇒ Pupils thinking **creatively** in tasks with no right or wrong answer

Key observations: Meeting learning needs (5.3)

The pro-forma encouraged staff to identify specific learning needs either before or during the visit. As a result of this, there were comments focused on **targeted supports** for individuals as well as effective **whole class strategies** for ensuring access to the curriculum for all. It was also clear that a number of staff were taking into account the needs of the most able as well as those requiring more support. The strategies noted included the following:

⇒ Opportunities for learners to work through task at their **own pace**
⇒ A **range of questions** are used to meet the needs of the most and least able
⇒ Teaching staff **work well** with the Support for Learning staff in the class
⇒ There are good, **familiar relationships** between the learners and the learning assistants
⇒ Watching **model performances** helps the learners to know what to aspire to
⇒ Pupils are encouraged to **actively participate** in lessons
⇒ Teachers **identify learners with ASN provision** before the class starts
⇒ Teachers **regularly circulate** in the classroom to support learners
⇒ A focus on **subject specific vocabulary**
⇒ **Scaffolding** for those struggling with reflective vocabulary
⇒ **Positive reinforcement** from the class teacher
⇒ The use of **open ended questioning** to encourage learners to find their own solutions
⇒ Learners given **choice** about how to present their work
⇒ Learners **supporting each other** in mixed ability groups to ensure overall success
⇒ Instructions and **clear and concise**
⇒ Learners are encouraged to **re-check their learning goals** at various points in the lesson
⇒ **Key words** are identified to add to glossaries

⇒ Teachers **assess the impact of teaching throughout** and check for progression
⇒ **Resources** are provided at a **variety** of levels
⇒ Learning assistants offer **one to one support** where required
⇒ **Learners are valued** no matter what their abilities in the subject
⇒ Teachers use questioning to get feedback on the understanding in the lesson
⇒ The teacher **changes role** according to what support is needed: director, facilitator, observer, informed participant
⇒ The use of **audio visual and practical activities** support those who struggle with literacy

Key discussion points between teacher/ visitor

In comparison with the first tranche of Learning Visits, there was much more evidence of **reflective professional dialogue** having taken place after the visits. Some of these discussions were specific to the context of the lesson, but the points below relate to wider aspects of Learning and Teaching:

⇒ Where **learners' comments are clearly acted** on, the process of seeking feedback gives the process value
⇒ Learners prefer to **investigate and problem solve** rather than just doing teacher led activities
⇒ **Group work** is successful for **learners of all abilities**; as a support for the less able and for the more able to consolidate their learning
⇒ It's important to emphasise the links between the **skill in the classroom and real-life contexts**
⇒ A **positive ethos** is crucial in ensuring learners remain focused and on task
⇒ Learners respond well to their **progress being discussed and acknowledged**
⇒ Skilled **questioning** ensures the engagement of a wide range of learners
⇒ The use of **wall displays** encourages learners to use the **language of learning**
⇒ **Health and wellbeing** is promoted through the use of social interaction when learning
⇒ More **in depth feedback** aids the learners in self-reflection
⇒ **Feedback** which happens as the lesson is **ongoing** is most effective for the learners
⇒ Learners respond well to creating their **own learning intentions and/ or success criteria**
⇒ Engagement in lessons is high when there are elements **of personalisation and choice**

Outcomes/ aims

A number of these were specific to classroom contexts. However, it was very encouraging to note an increasing number of aims which were clearly linked to the Visible Learning strands of **feedback** and the **visible learner**. In learning from each other, staff in the school are motivated to (points marked with * indicate that more than one member of staff has this specific aim):

⇒ Give pupils **more responsibility for their learning**
⇒ Encourage learners to **move onto the next level** rather than stay in their 'comfort zone'
⇒ Create **differentiation by task as well as by outcome**
⇒ Use **plenaries** more effectively to **inform future lessons** (*)
⇒ Supplement **verbal feedback** with a written record
⇒ Focus on the use of **subject specific vocabulary** to develop answers
⇒ Encourage learners to **develop their own success criteria** (*)
⇒ Encourage **pupils to ask more questions** of each other and the teacher
⇒ Use **active learning**
⇒ **Identify the skills** that are in use in the lesson more explicitly (*)
⇒ **Monitor the progress of learners** who have intensive support to ascertain its effectiveness
⇒ Use more **differentiated materials**
⇒ Use **small group as well as whole class discussion**
⇒ Develop **links between departments in promoting literacy**
⇒ Continue to **promote the language of learning** in class (*)
⇒ Focus on using **more Visible Learning strategies** (*)

Notes of good practice

Many of the features noted below were recorded in several different classes. These will help us to move forward in sharing good practice in session 2016-17:

⇒ The use of **technology**
⇒ Directly linking learning to **real-life contexts**
⇒ Using **learning outdoors** to enhance engagement
⇒ The **purpose of lessons** is made clear
⇒ Skillful use of **questioning**
⇒ Lots **of independent learning** in classes
⇒ Realistic and **motivating targets** for pupils with additional learning needs
⇒ Use **of differentiation** by materials, task, or outcomes
⇒ Learners are aware that **success can look different for different people**
⇒ Learners are involved in **setting their own success criteria**
⇒ Learners are encouraged to give **examples and experiences from their own lives**
⇒ There are really **positive relationships** between staff and pupils

Next steps

Information from the Learning Visits will be used as the basis for staff professional development during the in-service programme in August 2016. The theme will be **'Excellent Learning Experiences**.' Staff will share existing good practice in relation to Visible Learning (with a particular emphasis on learner qualities) and a 'menu' of positive learning and teaching approaches will be provided. It should also be possible to share key lessons with staff as part of next session's CAT (Collegiate Activity Time) programme.

Although it is clear that some staff are already beginning to think about the visible learner as a specific strand for attention, there will be a whole school focus on building capacity in our learners to ensure they are:

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- Responsible
- Resourceful
- Resilient
- Reflective

These **learner qualities** will be at the root of Learning Visits in 2016-17. Next session will also see the addition of informal Learning Walks.