

## **A Review of Learning at Chafford Hundred Campus**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the efforts of Chafford Hundred Campus to implement an effective planning and learning structure within lessons, based on the most meaningful and relevant educational research available. It considers the current trends towards learning to learn, as well as other research on feedback, metacognition, collaborative practice and accelerated learning. Finally this paper evaluates Chafford Hundred Campus' method, the ALC, as a means of meeting the needs of all learners.

### **Current Research**

Recently, there has been a great deal of debate amongst all kinds of educational circles about the importance of learning to learn, and its place within an educational context. Most researchers agree that establishing an ethos of lifelong learning is important, but there is much debate about the precise nature of learning to learn, as well as its relation to things like accelerated learning, brain-based learning, collaborative practice, critical thinking and mastery teaching are often conflated with learning to learn.

Fiske (1991) writes, 'We must own up to the fact that anything short of fundamental structural change is futile. We are trying to use nineteenth-century institutions to prepare young people for life in the twenty-first century.' In this, Fiske is arguing that the traditional methods of teaching and learning are losing their power – and even their meaning. Clearly this is the case, when one considers teachers must compete against learners who have Xboxes and iPhones and can access games through mobile phones and laptops, not just at home, but within the educational setting too, due to the growing prevalence of laptops within schools.

Educators like Harpaz and Beare have argued for this fundamental change, as well, suggesting a movement away from a traditional objectivist approach to learning, defined by Harpaz as, 'Traditional schooling is based on four fundamental pictures: *learning is listening; teaching is telling; knowledge is an object; and to be educated is to know valuable contents*. These pictures are deeply embedded in the consciousness of students, teachers and decision-makers, and are maintained daily by school structure and activity.' Instead, Harpaz and Beare argue for a community where learning is actually knowing how to find out the answers – or perhaps even how to ask the right question. This approach has often been termed as 'just-in-time learning' as opposed to 'just-in-case' learning.'

### **Learning at CHC**

In order to address this debate, and with the set goals of aiming to prepare students for a future of lifelong learning, Chafford Hundred Campus adopted a two-fold strategy. Firstly, within Key Stage 3 Topic classes, students would undertake a single 2 hour learning to learn lesson. Furthermore, in all other classes, teachers would adopt a four part lesson cycle, known as the Accelerated Learning Cycle, which would be based, in a large part, on the model proposed by Alastair Smith and ALITE, although there would be differences that would make this cycle idiosyncratic to Chafford Hundred Campus.

The first part of this strategy was heavily reliant on the L2 program, developed by ALITE. This program, which at the time of implementation at CHC, consisted of 3 20 hour modules, sought to provide students with the knowledge, skills and attributes to become life long learners. As well as the 20 hour long lessons, there was also a variety of personal inventories for students to access, in which they could identify their strengths and weaknesses in these areas.

This part of the program at CHC was quite successful. After a number of staff development meetings, staff members were asked to begin delivering the L2 lessons, in the first session of topic for the week. Immediately, the results were positive. A number of teachers said that they felt the lessons, 'set up the learning for the rest of the week' and 'gave the students skills and focus that they would need in other lessons.'

Students, too, were very positive about the lessons, enjoying them and finding them useful. In the initial evaluation, more than 80% of students felt that they understood their learning processes better because of the work they had completed during these sessions. Another highly-rated category was students approach to collaborative practice; more than 72% of students felt that they could work as part of a team more effectively after the L2 sessions than before.

The second part of the program – moving towards a whole school implementation of the ALC was more problematic. In the year preceding this movement towards a cycle, a monitoring, evaluation and review had taken place, examining the quality of lessons within the campus. It had found that a large proportion of the lessons provided little opportunity for collaboration or teamwork, multi-sensory learning or even personalized learning. Due to this, the main findings of the review were that students felt disengaged from their learning, that it wasn't relevant to their lives, and they were not motivated to engage in the learning process.

The main reason for this lack of strategies was because teachers felt they were not well enough supported in professional development in this area. This, therefore, dovetailed nicely with the learning to learn program and the ALC; in effect, providing teachers with a professional model to follow in their pedagogy would both improve the quality of teaching for the students, but it would also allow teachers to develop their skills through a modeled exercise, with numerous examples.

The process towards developing and then implementing the CHC ALC was lengthy; it was decided that staff input was vital, and therefore, at leadership groups staff members were invited to discuss their perceptions about good learning. In addition,

staff engaged in professional reading, including the work of Hargreaves, Beare, Fisk and Harpaz, as outlined above. This process led to the formation of the 'Good Learning Looks like...' statement for CHC. This statement (see the appendix) attempted to outline the key features of learning, including elements like feedback, pace, range of activities and the use of objectives. From this point, leadership meetings attempted to develop a practical method of turning these ideas from theory into pedagogical practice. The final version of the CHC ALC was the culmination of this project, and it is outlined below.

At its most simple level, the ALC effectively divides a lesson into four parts. Within each of these parts, there are numerous objectives that should be accomplished. It is intended that each cycle should last for no more than 1 hour, although exceptions have been made. Furthermore, there are times when the ALC is not appropriate; it was intended, at all times, as a guide or framework, rather than a cast iron rule. Part of developing this model means acknowledging that teachers are highly trained professionals, and there are times where it is appropriate to depart from the ALC.

The first stage is the Connection Phase. During this part of the lesson, students are presented with the context of the lesson. They take part in an audio visual or high energy stimulus activity, like watching and discussing an excerpt from a film, playing a game, having a quiz or something similar, before moving onto discovering what they are learning, why they are learning it, and how they know they will have succeeded in learning it. This is also where differentiation of outcomes enters the lesson cycle.

Secondly, there is the Activate Phase. During this phase, the teacher provides students with the material that they will use later in the lesson. The aim of the teacher is to encourage lower order comprehension – which will be developed during the Activate phase. Thus, common activities here are reading and summarizing, note taking, discussions and tutorial groups and so on.

In the Demonstrate Phase, students are encouraged to engage with the material covered so far. This means that they must begin to work at a higher order than previously – so the information and skills that were learnt during the activate phase are now being applied and evaluated, which enhances students understanding. In a sense, students are moving from an objectivist approach to teaching and learning in the activate phase to a constructivist approach, where they engage with the subject and object and create their own meaning and understanding through that engagement.

The final part of the lesson is the Consolidate Phase. In this part, students review what they have learnt, and preview what learning they might undertake in the future. It also allows a teacher to assess which students have met the required outcomes, and which ones require more assistance.

### **Analysis of the ALC**

Since the implementation of the ALC, there has been a great deal of progress regarding the quality of lessons at Chafford Hundred Campus. The most noticeable improvement is that the pace of the lessons has increased. Whereas previously, students might have spent more than 50 minutes on a single activity, now, due to the

ALC, students are completing similar kinds of activities within a shorter time frame. Furthermore, the emphasis on the learning objectives has really ensured that the lessons are more rigorous – students are aware of what they are learning and why they are learning it. Having said that, there is still a requirement for continued professional development with regard to these learning objectives. In particular, the differentiation needs to be focused more on learning, rather than completion of set activities.

In addition, the fact that the majority of lessons start off with a game or other engaging aspect of learning has meant that there is much less fractional truancy – students arrive on time, because they actually look forward to the engaging starts of lessons. The number of students arriving late dropped more than 15% in the time the ALC has been in operation.

Personally, it is my analysis that the quality of teaching has improved far more than the quality of the learning, although I would consider both to be of a good standard. It is important to realize that meaningful change does take a certain amount of time to implement – the full educational benefits of the ALC will not be seen for a long while to come.

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