

Does the Teacher Learning Community (TLC) format help to support small scale classroom-based research projects? *Preliminary findings*



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Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs)

The Redhill Teaching School Alliance (RTSA) uses a range of strategies to promote research by teachers across the alliance. Some staff have participated in national projects such as Closing the Gap but smaller scale classroom-based research projects have been more limited.

Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs) are groups of around 10 to 15 staff who meet regularly each half term, with each group focusing on a particular aspect of teaching and learning, such as effective feedback or differentiation. This structure has been in place at Redhill for some time now and has proved very effective for developing and supporting staff. We wanted to find out if the TLC format could be used to encourage staff to

participate in small scale classroom-based projects and provide them with the necessary support and guidance to design and carry out a project during the academic year.

The TLC format provides excellent opportunities for sharing good practice, learning new ideas and supporting staff. Each member of the TLC has an opportunity to discuss what they have tried since the last session, followed by new learning to be trialled before the group next meets. Regular support and advice is especially crucial in the early stages of a research project when generating interest and motivation with staff and it is important at other times when guidance on how best to proceed may be needed.

Teachers' research projects

Does frequent low stakes testing improve outcomes in high stakes examinations?

What is the impact of implementing Accelerated Reader programme and regular directed reading time on Year 7 students' reading ages and motivation to read more?

Regularly reviewing of the specification content for Year 11 students will increase their retention of facts and improve their ability to solve application problems in Physics and Additional Science examinations.

Does pastoral intervention post-exclusion reduce the likelihood of students reoffending?

What is impact of resources that aim to increase pupil independence in Key Stage 3 Food lessons?

What impact does exam preparation within the Arts Award in Year 9 have on preparing students for GCSE Drama?

What are the barriers to students being independently creative in Art lessons?

What is the impact of a concept focus on the levels of progress of low ability students in Maths?

Does the use of model answers in class improve students' application of knowledge in tests and examinations?

Developing the programme

A program of resources was developed to support staff with the different stages involved in a small scale research project. Working with Kerrie Moorhouse (Lead Practitioner, The Redhill Academy), we divided up a typical research project into six sessions (one for each half term) with a different focus in each session. We decided to devote more time to the early stages of the project to allow staff to develop their ideas into something more concrete and achievable before consideration is given to gathering evidence.

Our Research TLC group began in September 2015 and we had twelve people sign up from a number of different faculty areas. The initial sessions helped them to develop research projects in a range of areas, mostly related to school priorities such as literacy and memory and recall. These included:

Our findings

Part way through the year I asked each TLC member about the reasons why they chose to participate in this initiative,

what they hoped to gain from the experience and about any issues they had faced while carrying out their research. I was also keen to find out how the TLC format had supported their research work. This was done by questionnaire with a view to gathering similar information at the end of the year when their participation in the TLC ends.

Reasons for participation

Common reasons given for participation included wanting to find evidence about the impact of particular strategies in the classroom, or to help find the best solution to a particular problem. There was a willingness to plan and adapt new teaching methods based on the outcome of their research. As well as improving these aspects of their practice, members were also keen to develop new skills in research techniques and the opportunity to sharing their ideas was appreciated by some.

Using the TLC format

People found that the structure we had put in place was logical and manageable and it had helped them to organise and focus their project during the first part of the year. The opportunities to review their progress in each session were liked, particularly as it allowed people to hear first-hand examples of how other research projects were progressing. The time in-between sessions (one to two months) was appreciated by some, giving them time to develop their project but conversely it was also seen as too long by others. This issue could be addressed by communicating with members between each meeting, for example by email, to reiterate key points and allow for further guidance to be sought.

Issues

Some members found that organising their time to work on the research project was an issue and others found that certain stages, such as the gathering of evidence, could only be carried at particular times which did not necessarily match up with the way the TLC stages had been scheduled.

Some also found that their students had responded in a way that they had not predicted which had caused them to have to review and adapt their project; this is inevitable when trying out any new strategy or technique and may be useful experience for such projects in the future.

Some members required further with particular aspects of research, such as the analysis of results, and we were able to target support where and when it was needed.

“By far the best and most useful TLC I have done. Well structured, inspiring and supportive”

The future

The TLC format has proven to be an effective structure on which to provide opportunities and support for teachers to carry out small scale classroom-based research projects.

Although we were only halfway through the year when this information was gathered, the vast majority of participants stated that they were likely or very likely to carry out further such research projects in the future. We will need to consider how we can best support staff outside of the TLC format once their participation during the year has ended.

A further review of this initiative will be carried out at the end of this academic year.