

# LEARNING ABOUT LEARNING

Further insights from the Harris Student Commission

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# Introduction

**For almost two years, students in our academies have been working and learning with their peers and teachers through the Harris Student Commission on Learning. This ambitious programme of research and development is truly co-led by students and staff and is destined to radically improve learning and engagement across the Harris Federation.**

The commission is extraordinary, groundbreaking and of national significance and we are proud to be leading the field.

But most important for those of us who learn, teach and lead in the federation is the impact the commission is having for the students and teachers taking part.

The commission is already delivering tangible and lasting improvement in the range and quality of teaching and learning approaches, by enhancing collaboration and creating better student-teacher relationships, and by raising the confidence, skills and capabilities of students.

We have seen students become leaders of their own and others' learning as they have been given a real stake in how their education is organised and delivered. We have been astounded by the enthusiasm and skill with which students and teachers have met the challenge of taking on different roles and how they have changed their relationships in order to learn together in new and exciting ways.

In October 2009 the commission published '12 early ideas about learning' as a framework to test out new approaches now being trialed in our academies. In the pages that follow you will read more about the work that has been undertaken and, we hope, will be excited by the potential to take these approaches to scale across the federation.

In that earlier publication Richard Elmore, Professor of Education at Harvard University, was quoted. He says there are three things schools have to do simultaneously in order to raise student achievement.

- Increase teachers' knowledge and skills about learning and teaching;
- Change the content of what students learn; and
- Change the relationships between students and teachers and between students and the content.

We firmly believe that all three of these areas are being achieved through the commission. Our collective challenge, as the commission moves into the next stage, is to find ways for the important discoveries about learning and teaching generated by this year's projects to have an impact in many more classrooms.

Through the commission we are developing a deep and practical knowledge base about what really makes a difference for student learning in the 21st Century; what inspires and engages our young

people and how to ensure they have consistent access to world class learning opportunities in every part of every academy in the federation.

However, schools have always found it difficult to take great ideas and practices developed by the minority and apply them across a whole school. Walk into any school and you will find some inspiring and highly skilled teachers, exciting lessons and motivated learners. But practice is rarely consistent, resulting in a student learning experience that can vary significantly in quality from teacher to teacher, subject to subject.

In January 2011, two years after the commission started, it will publish recommendations setting out new approaches to teaching and learning for the federation to adopt. We, as a group of leaders, are committed to implementing these recommendations. The commission is much more than a research project. The end point being not the discovery of great learning, but widespread implementation of it.

So our task in these coming months is to develop a set of recommendations for learning transformation that we will all feel proud of and be inspired to implement.

Drawing on the ideas of Professor David Hargreaves from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, we are especially interested in identifying ways to align and incorporate the findings and ideas of the commission into the mainstream development work of the federation. If we can achieve 'complementarity'; where the whole adds up to significantly more value than the individual parts, it will be a very significant measure of our success.

We genuinely believe that through the commission we are beginning to see a major shift in students' expectations and appreciation of learning and willingness on the part of teachers to improve their pedagogy yet further. By working closely together both staff and students have reached new levels of understanding and appreciation of their respective roles and perspectives.

As the federation fast becomes a community of learning, where individual academies have their own unique characteristics but all students and staff understand and are committed to improving learning together and on behalf of each other, we feel privileged to be part of it, and hope you do too.

Thank you for all your hard work in supporting the commission to get this far. We look forward to hearing from as many of you as possible during this exciting final phase.

**"Our task in these coming months is to develop a set of recommendations for learning transformation that we will all be proud of and inspired to implement."**

**Dan Moynihan**, Chief Executive Officer,  
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**Dawn Rumley**, Principal,  
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Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich

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Harris Academy Falconwood

**Andy Halpin**, Principal,  
Harris Academy Merton

**Cathy Loxton**, Executive Principal,  
Harris Academy Peckham

**Carol-Anne Alcock**, Principal,  
Harris Academy Purley

**Carolyn English**, Principal,  
Harris Academy South Norwood

# Commission enquiry projects

## Summaries of Harris Student Commission enquiry projects 2009/2010

Since October 2009 all academies have been planning and delivering their own enquiry projects in order to investigate what the 12 early ideas about learning could look like in practice.

### Harris Academy Bermondsey

#### Students as learning buddies

*Hypothesis: When students work together as learning buddies of different level abilities student grades will raise.*

Learning buddies trained to work in two classes (Year 8 and Year 10). Learning was assessed before and after the intervention through observation, interviews and looking at student work and assessment.

#### Engagement through student interest and experiences

*Hypothesis: The inclusion of activities related to students' interests and experiences when planning lessons, will result in students becoming more engaged.*

Students co-planned lessons with teachers in order to include ideas for making learning relevant. Lessons were observed, student surveys and interviews conducted.

### Harris City Academy Crystal Palace

#### Student-teacher collaboration and podcasting

*Hypothesis: When students work with teachers to identify and develop podcasts that explain difficult concepts student engagement will increase.*

Students co-designed and developed podcasts for a range of subject areas and delivered these in lessons. Observations, interviews and video were used to assess student reactions and behaviour.

#### Year 7 Thematic Day Session 1

*Hypothesis: When students have an active role in producing learning, students will find the learning more interesting and as a result better future lessons can be produced.*

Students and teachers worked together to co-plan and design a full day of learning on a specific subject for all Year 7s. Students undertook the bulk of the delivery with the support of teachers. Interviews, observations and surveys were used to assess the impact of student involvement in the process.

### Harris Boys' Academy East Dulwich

#### Using effective Assessment for Learning to develop learning and increase motivation in students

*Hypothesis: When students understand the language and techniques of AfL and work collaboratively with teachers, they are able to develop as more successful autonomous learners and help teachers to develop lessons that enable independent learning to be more effective and successful.*

Students were trained in Assessment for Learning and undertook observations to baseline current classroom practice. Reflective cycle involved feedback given to teachers, teachers amending practice, students observing again and teachers making further changes.

### Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich

#### Flexible use of time in association with Goldsmith's University

*Research questions:*

- Does metacognitive learning require the flexible use of time?
- How does the flexible use of time support teachers to become orchestrators of variety in learning?
- To what extent does project based learning require flexible timetabling?

Students trained as researchers and carried out research internally with both students and staff, as well as consultation with and observation of potential models from other schools.

#### Learning to Learn

*Hypothesis: When students have the opportunity to develop conceptual awareness of 'learning power' and to identify, enact and develop these skills on a personal level, they will become more effective learners across the curriculum.*

Students in Year 7 undertook the Effective Life-long Learner Inventory (ELLI) and participated in a learning to learn programme. Impact was assessed through observations, interviews, focus groups, learning logs and specific project based activities.

### Harris Academy Falconwood

#### Teachers meeting all learners' needs through enterprising lessons

*Hypothesis: When students take on the role of observers, and learning consultants and teachers are open to learning from students' feedback, enterprising lessons can be created.*

Students co-planned and co-delivered lessons designed to use enterprising skills to make learning more differentiated. Three to four cycles of observation and feedback undertaken, as well as questionnaires, interviews and discussions with both teachers and students.

### Harris Academy Merton

#### Moving to outstanding lessons in Science

*Hypothesis: Using student observers can make Science topics and lessons more engaging and interactive.*

Students were trained and then observed lessons to track activity and levels of engagement. They then co-planned lessons with teachers, observed again and reviewed the impact using a control group, exit surveys and detailed questionnaires.

#### Students working to help their peers develop into better citizens

*Hypothesis: "We believe that students will learn more effectively if they are confident, happy and well-behaved and that other students can support their peers to develop these attitudes."*

Carefully recruited mentors are paired to work with younger students to tackle behaviour and social issues, with the purpose of supporting better learning. Impact data is collated through existing academy tracking processes.

### Harris Academy Peckham

#### Teaching with teachers

*Hypothesis: Teaching with teachers ensures collaboration and achieves new, fun and effective approaches to learning.*

Students have co-designed lessons and parts of lessons with teachers and taken on the role of deliverer. Impact data has been collected through observations, interviews, surveys and focus groups.

#### Developmental feedback

*Hypothesis: With effective developmental feedback comments students will be able to pin point and act upon what they need to do to improve.*

Student commissioners worked with a teacher to gauge the effectiveness of developmental feedback comments through studying student work, assessment scores, interviews and focus groups.

### Harris Academy South Norwood

#### Stimulating deeper learning through Faculty Fridays

*Question: How can we maximise the provision of extended time on Faculty Fridays to ensure deeper learning?*

Students have observed and enquired into, through lesson audits, and interviews with students and teachers, the type and quality of learning taking place on Faculty Fridays.

#### Student involvement in monitoring, evaluation and review

*Hypothesis: Active student involvement in monitoring and reviewing the quality of learning with teachers will have a positive impact on student progress and engagement levels.*

Student commissioners were first trained in carrying out lesson observations and work scrutiny and then took on a key role in internal departmental reviews as part of the academies' monitoring, evaluation and review cycle. Students fed back to teachers and the leadership group about the quality of teaching and learning.

### Taking the commission forward at Harris Academy Purley

When we were first confronted with the existing student commissioners at an NQT event in October, we were remarkably impressed: they were smart, eloquent and they knew their stuff. We struggle to think of a definition of learning ourselves, let alone articulate what 'outstanding' learning looks like and how it should be done, and to see a roomful of young minds wrestling with the philosophy behind their own education was inspiring.

We are looking forward to getting on board with the commission. It is a controversial thing to allow students to set the mandate for their education, and let them enquire into the parts of teaching that we normally keep behind closed classroom doors, and yet, undoubtedly it will be a powerful one. At our first meeting at the end of term, names of potential commissioners were already flying round the room, and there was a genuine sense of excitement about working in partnership with the students and enquiring into learning together.

At Purley we don't yet know what our enquiry will be about; we don't yet have a clear picture of what our students would like to learn about learning and how we are to do that. We can't know that until the commission is launched and teachers and students start working as equal partners investigating learning. If this is to be a truly collaborative process then we should set the agenda for our enquiry together. We want to work together to ensure that we all, whether directly involved in the commission or not, become 'leaders of learning.'

# Learners

A reminder of the early ideas about learners set out by the commission in 2009

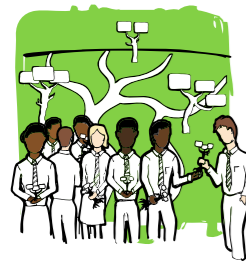
The work undertaken in the first year of the commission suggested that deep and lasting motivation to learn happens when:



## Idea 1

**Learners explore and understand the 'how' of learning**

*How can opportunities be created for all young people to become 'tuned in' to good learning?*



## Idea 2

**Learners take responsibility for, and have ownership and control of, their own learning and achievements**

*What is known about how young people can best be supported to value and take hold of their own learning?*



## Idea 3

**Learners take on roles that involve responsibility for the learning and success of others**

*What would a school look like where all young people worked with peers to help them learn more effectively?*

*What approaches to peer support positively shift motivation and achievement?*



## Idea 4

**Learners create worthwhile products and artifacts through the learning process**

*What would school be like if the outputs of learning had value other than as a means of assessment?*

*What if learners were creating learning resources for other students or for staff, or being asked to develop something that someone outside school would enjoy, find useful or informative, and perhaps even spend money on?*

The challenge for the commission in its second year has been to take these early ideas about learners and to develop them further through practical enquiry projects and further research.

In the following pages you will find:

Summary of commission findings and insights about learners from year two of its enquiry p8

Structured peer mentoring programme makes major impact on students' behaviour and learning (Harris Academy Merton) p10

Ensuring peer mentoring and tutoring is effective (further evidence and research) p12

## Summary of commission findings and insights about learners from year two of its enquiry

Growing numbers of students have become commissioners and many more have actively participated in commission projects. These students have become more powerful learners because they have taken ownership of learning and explored specific pedagogical approaches in detail.

The second phase of the commission has taken student commissioners' knowledge of learning and their capacity to teach to a deeper level. By observing, discussing and giving feedback on classroom practice, as well as planning and delivering parts of lessons themselves, they have shown their willingness to take responsibility for and improve learning for their fellow students.

The commissioner role has evolved and students have truly become leaders and *shapers* of learning. They are becoming more confident and mature, and with an increased desire and capacity to be change makers in their own schools. Teachers are sharing and changing their practice as a result of commission projects.

Combining explicit training and support with involvement in research and public events, and working closely with teachers and other students, has enabled commissioners to become knowledgeable advocates for new practices and to actively support their peers. They are able to express reasoned opinions, are more articulate about the learning process and better placed to relate to adults in a variety of situations. Teachers, parents and student commissioners themselves report significant growth in their confidence and the acquisition of new skills and attributes including creativity, self-awareness and drive.

### Some of the insights and findings from academy enquiry projects and international visits:

#### Learning to learn, Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich

Understanding the 'how' of learning can and should be seen as a key content component in the curriculum. However, there are also many other activities, partnerships and roles that students can undertake which help them to understand what good learning is and their role in achieving it.

There is a clear recognition of the importance of combining the development of learning powers with the creation of high quality, relevant learning outputs.

#### Stimulating deeper learning through Faculty Fridays, Harris Academy South Norwood

Students have demonstrated their value as learning experts and there is now increased demand from teachers to have students directly involved in planning and observing lessons.

#### Moving to outstanding lessons in Science, Harris Academy Merton

Teachers are beginning to see students as experts in learning through this project. Students have a status and level of expertise that is new and different.

Students uniquely bring pedagogical expertise in some key areas, e.g. creative ways to use technology, grouping students in different ways.

Students acting as trained observers can have a positive impact on the quality of learning and engagement.

#### Student-teacher collaboration and podcasting, Harris City Academy Crystal Palace

Producing tangible learning outputs that are valued by teachers and other students is motivating for the students involved. There is double duty in terms of learning – for both producer and audience.

#### International visit to Charter Schools, New York

Students leading parents' evenings provides a valuable opportunity for them to present their own report and an analysis of their performance.

#### Teachers meeting all learners' needs through enterprising lessons, Harris Academy Falconwood

Students were initially sceptical of the impact their involvement in planning and delivering lessons would have. They grew in confidence throughout the course of the project as evidence of their positive impact became clear.

Training and preparation of students to undertake new roles is critical. When the right training and support is in place then students can work really effectively with teachers and be effective carriers of important messages about learning.

#### Students as Learning Buddies, Harris Academy Bermondsey

There is a double duty impact of peer support on learning – both sides in the buddy relationship gain. The 'expert' has to explain and share his or her knowledge with someone else and this creates a clearer and deeper understanding of a topic or idea, i.e. if you can't explain it simply to someone else you don't understand it. The buddy gets to hear in simple and accessible language the explanation of a topic from someone 'on their level'.

Learning Buddies is a simple but scalable approach that could easily be taken forward in every classroom. It provides an alternative to more formal mentor roles. The pairing of students as Learning Buddies within classes should be seen as part of the role of teacher as expert designer of learning.

#### International study visit to High-Tech-High, San Diego

Students and their learning are at the centre of everything – from the design of the projects they are working on, the appraisal of their work, peer feedback and support to changes that may happen within the school, students are consulted and actively involved in every stage of the process.

Students are very proud of their school and extremely focused and engaged with their learning. Students feel their education is relevant and worthwhile and they value the efforts teachers make to ensure that the products they create are real and have worth.

Having an end product to any project or section of student work is vital to project-based learning. This end product can be one thing or a selection of things, such as a poster, piece of artwork, play, book, short film, presentation, document, report, piece of furniture.

It is also important that there is a final audience for the product, particularly in the form of some kind of exhibition or display that the students' parents, other staff and students, and members of the wider community are invited to.

#### Year 7 Thematic Day, Harris City Academy Crystal Palace

In the delivery of learning by students to students, the age gap between the student deliverers and receivers was important. It wouldn't have been as effective if students were delivering to their peers. Student teachers should be one or two years older.

## Structured peer mentoring programme makes major impact on students' behaviour and learning Harris Academy Merton

**“My mentor was as bad as me at my age. Now look at him, he’s a great student in all the top sets. I want to be like that.” Mentee**

**At Harris Academy Merton successful students are providing powerful and focused support to younger students who need help taking responsibility for their learning and making a more positive contribution in school. The programme is reaping rewards for both mentor and mentee.**

Lonell is a Year 7 student who openly admits he didn't have a great start to the year. In his words “it was a bit dodgy. I wasn't listening to teachers. I was distracted and talking to my friends in class. Basically, I was annoying. I didn't get on with my work and I answered back a lot.” Staff identified that Lonell might benefit from being part of the student commission peer-mentoring project the academy was starting up, as the existing discipline process didn't appear to be having an impact.

The project had the strong backing of the Principal, Andy Halpin, who is clear about the long-term goal. “What we are aiming for is to build up the levels of self belief, self discipline and community conscience amongst students to the extent that they are confident enough to challenge their peers in a non-confrontational way over educational, social and behavioural standards and expectations. Thus developing the ‘good citizen’ concept. In the early days this was clearly the job for staff but as we continue to improve I believe it should now be a job shared with students.”

Lonell has been working with his mentor, Sherieka who is in Year 9, for about nine weeks. At first they spent time establishing what the problems were and why they needed to be addressed and then Sherieka started to share strategies for making changes. “I noticed that he knew what the problems were. I asked him why he got distracted and what he had tried before to stop it. I used examples of people I knew to explain what he should do in class.” That week Lonell chose to move away from his group of friends when he knew they were preventing him from learning. He immediately noticed the difference it made. “The teacher was speaking to me nicely and asked me questions in class. That made me feel good. I didn't feel like the dumb one. I was focused on my learning.”

Sherieka and Lonell are clear about why their partnership works. For Lonell it is about having someone who will give him advice based on her own experiences and someone he feels is on his side. Sherieka stresses the importance of building trust, “Getting to know him and gaining his trust was the hardest. But we gained our trust together because I am someone who has experienced his problems. He thinks teachers aren't that bothered and don't understand.”

Since starting the mentoring Lonell's behaviour has been transformed. From having lots of negative entries prior to the mentoring, he

received his first positives in the first week. His parents are happy and that makes him happy. His Form Tutor Ms Parsons says he is now a really positive force in lessons. “He now sees the consequences of his actions and he's taking ownership of his behaviour. His communication has improved and he is integrating better with other students in a supportive way.”

Ms Parsons has also seen the impact of the mentoring on Sherieka, who was a hard-working student but lacked confidence. “She has really come out of her shell and is using her voice more in lessons. Her personality has really developed.” Sherieka can also pinpoint the

### Project features:

- Students formally apply to be mentors and take part in a rigorous interview process
- Selected students participate in an intensive one-day training programme outside of term time
- Unsuccessful applicants given detailed personal feedback and chance to reapply
- Staff nominate students to be mentored – likely to be students with low self esteem, low literacy and numeracy and poor behaviour
- Detailed knowledge of both mentee and mentor, including issues to be addressed, personal qualities and skills, used to identify pairings of older mentors with younger mentees
- Mentoring sessions take place every week during breaks or lunchtimes
- Mentors meet fortnightly as a team to discuss successes and issues
- Mentors actively work with teachers to develop strategies of support and to monitor progress
- Existing academy systems for tracking attainment, behaviour and attendance show the impact of mentoring sessions

benefits of taking on the mentor role. “Right from the application I was thinking hard about why I should do it. I knew I would have to be more responsible and confident. The group work in training and working with teachers has really built my confidence. Normally I am quiet but now I'm more open minded and active in lessons. I take part in discussions. There's not much point in my just sitting there.”

Julie Anne Harris runs the academy Student Referral Centre and has been responsible for setting up the programme. Its success seems to be due to a number of factors, including rigorous recruitment and proper training for mentors, clear processes for identifying mentees and a supportive structure for mentors to share problems and get advice throughout the process. Julie Anne also works hard to pair the right students, taking into account the issues to be addressed but also their personalities, “I pair them very consciously and can only do this because I know all mentors through the training and have lots of information from staff about the mentees.”

The mentors are always older than their mentees, usually by two year groups. But they are not always the same gender and, in fact, some of the best partnerships have been between older girl mentors and younger boys, as in the case of Sherieka and Lonell. “Sometimes what the student needs is a big sister role model”, says Julie. And all the mentors show high levels of commitment to their role, which in addition to initial training and termly refresher training, normally means them giving up two break times or lunch times per week to undertake mentoring and attend a supervision meeting.

Although the programme has been running at quite a small scale, with 20 mentors currently trained, enthusiasm from staff and students means it is set to expand from September. Existing mentors have volunteered to take on more mentees and more mentors are being recruited. Existing mentors will be involved in both recruiting and training the new intake.

### Summary of data showing impact on mentees:

- Year 7 boy – 6 negative event entries, 1 positive in the 3 weeks prior to mentoring. 8 positive event entries, zero negative in 3 weeks since. (Mentor: Year 9 girl)
- Year 8 boy – 7 negative event entries in 3 weeks prior to mentoring. 6 positive event entries, zero negative in 3 weeks since. (Mentor: Year 10 boy)
- Year 8 boy – suffering from OCD has stopped certain daily rituals since being supported. (Mentor: Year 12 girl)
- Year 9 boy – history of persistent disruptive behaviour prior to mentoring, zero negatives in 2 weeks since. (Mentor: Year 12 boy)
- Year 7 boy – 6 negative event entries in 3 weeks prior to mentoring, 10 positive event entries, zero negative in 3 weeks since. (Mentor: Year 10 girl)

The academy is also planning a number of new strands of activity designed to build on the success of peer mentoring. These include:

- Subject experts: The recruitment of subject experts in each year group to act as advisors to their peers at a set clinic out of lesson time on a weekly basis.
- Mentee activities: Mentors in conjunction with staff will run a range of after school activities that mentees can attend, for example sporting activities, literacy and numeracy events and behaviour workshops.
- Peer mediators: Following the success of mentors it is felt that suitably trained mentors could also act as peer mediators.

Teachers are seeing and enjoying the benefits of the programme in their classrooms, as Gregg Morrison, Faculty Director, reports, “The Peer Mentoring Scheme has had a very positive effect on students across the Academy and within my faculty, in a variety of ways. A year 7 lad with poor organisational skills persistently missed homework and other deadlines, since having an older student mentor he has shown a big improvement in his time management skills.”

Ken Penney, Post-16 Co-ordinator, feels strongly about the particular benefits for mentors, “Peer mentoring has caused a real buzz amongst our post-16 students. Several are already mentors and many more want to become one, so the scheme will definitely be able to expand. It's served as a great link with the lower school, enabling the students to help younger pupils, act as role models and gain skills which will assist them greatly in the future.”

The Principal is also clear about the impact the programme has had so far, “It is early days to evaluate impact, however there are some remarkable anecdotal examples from students whose attitude and behaviour have been completely reversed.”

### The ‘double-duty’ of peer mentoring

Traditional models of peer mentoring have the more confident or more able or simply older student mentoring or supporting a less (confident etc) or younger student. However, evaluations of this approach almost always discover that the greater benefit accrues to the student who gets to be the teacher or mentor. This kind of approach works because the mentor/teacher is required to reflect on and articulate their own experience, knowledge, ideas and insights which are usually tacit and intuitive, and make them explicit. In doing so they refine and progress their own understanding as well as making it accessible to others. This has important implications for thinking about who gets to take part and in which role.

## Ensuring peer mentoring and tutoring is effective

### Further evidence and research

There has been extensive research into peer tutoring and mentoring. Some of the material most relevant to the commission is captured here.

#### San Francisco schools combine peer mentoring with peer teaching...

For example, **Galileo High School** students mentored up to 700 new students on sexual harassment as well as taking sessions in middle schools. The diverse work of 14 San Francisco schools involved in similar projects has been subject to review by academic researchers. They identified common features in successful mentoring programmes<sup>1</sup>.

- Teenagers were responsible for all the teaching. They did not merely assist an adult.
- They taught children who were at least 2 to 3 years younger than themselves.
- They taught small groups, usually 5 to 12 children, not one-on-one.
- They were trained and taught a curriculum subject rather than acting as homework helpers or counsellors.
- The curricula taught to younger children were for enrichment, not remediation.
- Programmes were long enough to allow mentors to develop relationships with each other and with the children they taught.

In terms of impact, the research found that teenagers and younger children acquired an increased acceptance and respect for diversity as well as improving their academic achievement and developing collaborative and conflict resolution skills. There was also a reduction in alcohol and drug abuse among teenagers and increased empathy for teachers.

The following were considered essential components of successful programmes:

- Complex planning and skilled implementation.
- A dedicated adult who supports students
- Active recruitment strategies.
- A strong curriculum supported by high-quality training in social skills, time for group processing, and positive interdependence.

#### Cross-age peer mentoring is particularly successful...

The **Lawrence-Sheriff School** has a raft of personalisation activities which includes enrichment led by students<sup>2</sup>. This was introduced as part of a coherent approach to changing the school culture. There has been a shift to 'vertical tutoring' in which students work to help each other, across age divisions, enabling younger students to learn from the experience of their elders. This is supported by reorganising the day so that assemblies and tutorial time are now located in the afternoon.

As a result of the changes the school has seen a reduction in bullying, an increase in cross-age friendships and improved attainment. But this kind of change requires high level leadership input and communication if it is to be successful throughout a whole school.

#### Students can be a valuable additional resource for other learners...

In **Nevada Middle School, Iowa** students act as TechYES peer mentors helping others to get certification for IT project work. Mentors have to work hard to maintain their places in the peer mentoring group and they become the acknowledged experts and role models for younger pupils. Their expertise is also valued by teachers who appreciate their assistance and are willing to learn from them about technology related issues. The input of the mentors frees teacher time and enables the school to offer a richer and more varied technology experience. Mentoring carries a status that is an incentive to students and student mentors – who are not necessarily A grade students – work harder to retain their status<sup>3</sup>.

Taken from an overarching study<sup>4</sup> of peer tutoring in higher education, these ten dimensions provide a useful framework or checklist for designing peer support approaches, and also indicate the flexibility and widespread applicability of the approach...

<b>1. Content of the tutoring</b>	This may be knowledge or skills oriented, or a combination of the two. Practical examples are available in virtually every subject.
<b>2. Pattern of tutoring</b>	The pattern of tutoring can vary widely. A tutor may act single-handedly or with a partner to teach or mentor a group of 2 to 30 or more students. A more intensive form of tutoring in pairs (dyads) may be appropriate for different ages and activities.
<b>3. Age of participants</b>	Tutors and tutees may be of the same age and level or of different ages and levels of attainment.
<b>4. Ability of participants</b>	The ability levels of tutors and tutees may be widely different or very similar.
<b>5. Role allocation</b>	The roles of tutors and tutees need not be fixed, especially in same ability tutoring. Structured switching at strategic moments offers greater novelty and a boost to self-esteem as all participants have the chance to be tutors.
<b>6. Place of activity</b>	The locations in which tutoring takes place may vary enormously.
<b>7. Time of activity</b>	Tutoring may be built into class time, carried on outside lessons or done as a combination of the two.
<b>8. Tutee characteristics</b>	Projects may be for all students or a targeted sub-group.
<b>9. Tutor characteristics</b>	The greatest overall gains can occur where the tutor is of average ability. In fact, many projects have successfully used students with learning difficulties as tutors.
<b>10. Objectives</b>	Projects may target a variety of organisational objectives, intellectual achievements and affective, attitudinal, social or emotional gains in any combination.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.joe.org/joe/2001february/rb1.php>; [http://www.sfedfund.org/peers/what\\_edu.php](http://www.sfedfund.org/peers/what_edu.php)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ncsl.org.uk/personalisinglearning-index/personalisinglearning-casestudies.htm#lawrence-sheriff>

<sup>3</sup> Sylvia Martinez; Dennis Harper – *Working with Tech-Savvy Kids, Educational Leadership*, Vol.66, No.3, November 2008, pp.64-69

<sup>4</sup> *The ten dimensions of peer tutoring* (based on K.Topping 1996 - Effective Peer Tutoring in Further and Higher Education SEDA Paper 95).

# Teachers

A reminder of the early ideas about teachers set out by the commission in 2009

The work undertaken in the first year of the commission suggested that the role of the professional needs to develop to ensure that:



## Idea 5

**Teachers are specialist enablers of learning – experts not only in subjects but in learning and learning design**

*What does it really mean for teachers to be ‘enablers’ of learning? What would they do more and less of?*

*What is the expertise of our most expert teachers? What is it they know and do?*

*What do we know about creating learning spaces that students are keen to occupy?*

The challenge for the commission in its second year has been to take these ideas about teachers and to develop them further through practical enquiry projects and further research.

In the following pages you will find:

Summary of commission findings and insights about teachers from year two of its enquiry p15

Testing and trialling new approaches to teaching and learning – a route to becoming an outstanding school? (further evidence and research) p17

Variety is the spice of learning – how ‘Faculty Fridays’ are providing deep and powerful learning opportunities (Harris Academy South Norwood) p18

What can teachers learn from listening to their students? (further evidence and research) p19

Teachers changing practice – partnership, focus, risk and trust (further evidence and research) p20



## Idea 6

**Teachers are orchestrators of variety in learning**

*What is known about how young people can best be supported to value and take hold of their own learning?*



## Idea 7

**Teachers demonstrate that they are learners too**

*What is it that teachers can best learn from their students?*

## Summary of commission findings and insights about the role of teachers from year two of its enquiry

Through the commission teachers have given time and energy above and beyond their day-to-day teaching responsibilities to work closely with students. Even reticent practitioners have shown a commitment to collaborative enquiry – exposing their practice to and receiving feedback from students. This has enabled seeds of curiosity about pedagogy to develop into tangible, powerful learning experiences for both sides.

Teachers are actively demonstrating an openness and willingness to learn. They have commented that they are more willing to take risks in their classrooms having co-designed learning with students and many have changed their practice as a direct result of student feedback. The process of joint enquiry into learning has been exciting and invigorating for the teachers involved.

As students learn how to become better learners, clearly the role of the teacher must also support this. When the ‘basics’ of a good learning environment are secure, teachers can actively provide opportunities to develop the social and cognitive dispositions of students in order that they are able to learn for themselves and become less dependent on the teachers’ continual presence.

In a culture with learning at its heart, both students and teachers need to be part of the learning process. When teachers expose their fallibility to students they make a connection with them as learners. In lessons where teachers are willing to say ‘I don’t know’ or ‘I wonder why that happened?’ they gain the respect of and encourage students to step up and help find the answer or to solve the problem.

### Some of the insights and findings from academy enquiry projects and international visits:

#### Using effective AfL to develop learning and increase motivation in students, Harris Boys’ Academy East Dulwich

A structured cycle of student observation, feedback and collaborative action planning with teachers can result teachers changing their practice and students becoming more knowledgeable. Students are acting as partners in improving the learning process.

Teachers’ willingness to engage with students to reflect on and change their practice requires generosity and their commitment to showing they are a learner too.

#### Students as Learning Buddies, Harris Academy Bermondsey

Variety in learning is about both the responsibility of the teacher to design and deliver it, but also the responsibility of the learner to actively engage with a range of approaches and methods.

#### Learning to learn, Harris Girls’ Academy East Dulwich

As well as discrete taught content, the language and concepts of learning to learn need to be clearly connected to learning in lessons. Teachers need to apply ‘split screen thinking’ by attending to both subject content and the development of students’ learning skills and dispositions.

Students won’t believe in or value learning to learn approaches unless they see them utilised and lived out by teachers.

## Testing and trialling new approaches to teaching and learning – a route to becoming an outstanding school? Further evidence and research

### Moving to outstanding lessons in Science, Harris Academy Merton

Teachers are beginning to see students as experts in learning through this project. Students have a status and level of expertise that is new and different.

As the relationship between students and teachers shifts, so teachers are recognising the contribution students can make and are changing their practice by incorporating suggestions and ideas from students, especially around increasing engagement. This relationship is encouraging teachers to ‘be brave enough to just let go’.

### Stimulating deeper learning through Faculty Fridays, Harris Academy South Norwood

Teachers have shown real enthusiasm for student involvement. Through observation and interviews students have helped teachers to reflect and evaluate sessions effectively.

Variety in learning is critical – in terms of content focus, differentiation and the nature of activities. Student involvement in planning and in giving feedback creates variety. Variety can include; cross-curricular learning, creativity in delivery, one to one time between students and teachers to give good feedback and support.

### International study visit to High-Tech-High, San Diego

The teacher subtly ensures that the students are leaders of lessons. The teacher’s role was very much one of facilitator and student engagement and progression was extremely high as a result.

The curriculum is decided by teachers based on their passions for subjects and topics, based on the belief that students benefit from passionate teachers passing on deep knowledge they believe in and value.

Staff are vitally important to success. Their work is celebrated and they are awarded with a huge amount of autonomy, flexibility and trust. Without exception teachers are positive, enthusiastic, passionate and extremely knowledgeable about their subject.

### Student-teacher collaboration and podcasting, Harris City Academy Crystal Palace

Podcasts are a simple way to introduce variety into lessons. They are another component that can be added to the teacher’s toolkit.

Students’ knowledge about and willingness to utilise technology is an area where they can make a specific, unique and tangible contribution to the development of learning and learning resources.

Because podcasts are informed by the student perspective they provide an alternative way of introducing a topic. The language students’ use and the ways they find to explain concepts are entirely different to and more accessible than a teachers’.

### Teachers meeting all learners’ needs through enterprising lessons, Harris Academy Falconwood

Teacher experience and expertise is essential in ensuring effective learning takes place within lessons. The partnership between students and teachers in co-planning and co-delivering adds to and enhances this, however, the teacher is the major orchestrator.

### Year 7 Thematic Day, Harris City Academy Crystal Palace

Students were testing and trialling new approaches that teachers could learn from and see what worked (more interactive and more creative). In the co-planning process teachers are able to test out whether their ideas would be engaging for students. The sessions were more creative, interesting and interactive than would have been if produced alone (teachers).

Students co-delivering learning is variety in itself.

Every year Ofsted uses the data collected from school inspections to produce ‘state of the nation’ reports about schools and school improvement. In 2008, Ofsted researchers looked at inspection reports of a sample of outstanding schools across the country to try to see if there were any common strategies or features that might help to explain their success.

To make it even more interesting, the outstanding schools they chose were also in challenging circumstances. To be included schools had to have been recognised as outstanding at two out of the last three inspections, have above the national average of students eligible for free school meals and have achieved consistently high contextual value added scores (CVA) between key stages 2-4. Eighteen schools met these criteria nationally that year and twelve were included in the study.

Predictably the answer to the question ‘how did they do it?’ was complicated, and different things were more important in some schools, and at some times, than others. However this is Ofsted’s list of what made these schools were so successful<sup>1</sup>:

- They excel at what they do, not just occasionally but for a high proportion of the time
- They prove constantly that disadvantage need not be a barrier to achievement; that speaking English as an additional language can support academic success and that schools really can be learning communities
- They put students first, invest in their staff and nurture their communities
- They have strong values and high expectations that are applied consistently and never relaxed
- They fulfil individual potential through providing outstanding teaching, rich opportunities for learning, and encouragement and support for each student
- They are highly inclusive, having complete regard for the educational progress, personal development and well-being of every student
- Their achievements do not happen by chance, but by highly reflective, carefully planned and implemented strategies which serve these schools well in meeting the many challenges that obstruct the path to success
- They operate with a very high degree of internal consistency
- They are constantly looking for ways to improve further
- They have outstanding and well-distributed leadership

One of the most interesting features that the report covers in some detail is the restless and relentless search that all these schools are engaged in to find new and different things to try to improve teaching and learning and to raise achievement. Teachers in outstanding schools are constantly observing each other’s practice, scouring research and professional journals and sharing ideas and suggestions in coaching and enquiry partnerships designed to keep their practice moving forward.

In one school there was a strand of activities specifically designed to move good lessons and teachers to outstanding, by taking a strong focus on pedagogy rather than content and by using structured feedback – what went well/even better if – delivered by colleagues and sometimes students observing the lesson. Collaborative planning both within and across subject areas featured too as did master classes in specific evidence based teaching and learning approaches such as Assessment for Learning.

Having achieved outstanding status, the schools realised they needed to work just as hard (maybe even harder) to sustain it. Ofsted inspectors and researchers noticed that over time, the focus in these schools was shifting subtly from thinking about and developing teaching as a set of technical skills and practices, to a focus on learning and thinking critically about how to investigate and improve student learning. Questions such as whether students were being sufficiently challenged in lessons and the extent to which the curriculum was engaging them and meeting their needs began to arise, taking the teachers onto the next stage of their development journey.

### The Harris Outstanding Learning programme

The Harris Federation Outstanding Learning programme began in Spring 2010. Its purpose is to celebrate, understand and share the best teaching and learning practice from all Harris Academies across the whole federation. The programme is led by Caron Clifford (Harris Academy Bermondsey), and Sam Hainey and Carolyn English (Harris Academy South Norwood). Outstanding teachers from each academy are using a coaching model to work together and with teachers from within their academies in order to learn and develop their practice.

<sup>1</sup>Twelve Outstanding Secondary Schools: Excelling against the Odds, Ofsted 2009, London

## Variety is the spice of learning – how ‘Faculty Fridays’ are providing deep and powerful learning opportunities Harris Academy South Norwood

“In Faculty Fridays students are actively learning through well-structured workshops. There is input from outside experts and beyond the classroom, enabling deep learning for students. At the end of the day students have something tangible to show for their learning, and this is a motivator in itself.” Commission Co-leader

**Faculty Fridays are already a successful and embedded alternative approach to learning at Harris Academy South Norwood. They offer students and teachers the chance to immerse themselves in a single subject for a whole day and to utilise a wider range of teaching and learning approaches. Through a commission enquiry project students have been looking closely at what makes them successful and how they could be improved even further.**

Student commissioners involved in the enquiry project carried out a series of observations and student and teacher interviews in order to identify both good practice and areas in need of development regarding the provision of Faculty Fridays across the academy.

What they found was high levels of enthusiasm and commitment to the approach from both students and teachers, which allows for diverse approaches and a sustained focus on one subject area.

Student engagement is high for the following reasons:

- Students are immersed in a variety of learning approaches; teachers use multimedia to facilitate teaching and learning, activities are highly practical and students work in groups and pairs for the majority of the sessions. In addition, students have the opportunity to go on trips and attend workshops on the theme of the day. Links with everyday life make tasks meaningful and relevant to students.
- Hands-on activities tap into students’ creativity; artefacts are a tangible representation of the learning that has taken place on the day and students share good practice and celebrate each others’ successes.
- Enterprise permeates every Faculty Friday – students develop skills in teamwork, leadership and problem solving.

Having observed a Faculty Friday session one student commissioner commented: “I enjoyed the MFL classes I observed the most. The students were enjoying themselves; they were doing practical work and I was very surprised because the teacher joined in as well! I thoroughly enjoyed all the lessons I went to – the students asked questions without hesitation and the teachers encouraged them and supported them with their work. The lessons were very well planned.”

Teachers at Harris Academy South Norwood have embraced the Faculty Fridays project. Students themselves have commented on how welcome

teachers made them feel during observations and how eager they were to answer questions and engage in a constructive dialogue. Although having students carrying out lesson observations was originally met with some scepticism and hesitation, teachers were impressed with the professionalism and knowledge of student commissioners when observing lessons and conducting interviews. Teachers felt that both they and students could learn a lot by co-planning (or observing the process of planning) or co-delivering a Faculty Friday. One teacher summed up the feeling by saying, “Students are our customers – why not involve them in lesson observations? Every discussion I have had with a student commissioner has been meaningful and certainly influential in the way I teach.”

The project has collected clear evidence about what works and doesn’t work in the delivery of Faculty Fridays and this will be used to inform future delivery in both Harris Academy South Norwood and elsewhere.

“Students are our customers – why not involve them in lesson observations? Every discussion I have had with a student commissioner has been meaningful and certainly influential in the way I teach.”

### Suggested key learning features of a successful Faculty Friday

#### Student responses:

- Practical activities where we get to do different things
- Have fun but also structure and learn things
- Topics that stimulate the minds of the students
- Learn things to use in the future
- Something not learned in normal lessons
- Have more trips to help with learning
- Shorter activities and lots of group work
- Not a lot of book work
- Positive mental attitude
- Have outside visitors

#### Teacher responses:

- Coming together at the end and sharing products students have worked on
- Allow students to be creative
- Planning has to be good and activities should be fun and practical to motivate students
- Going on trips and having outside visitors/professionals coming in
- The teacher needs to be enthusiastic and able to plan the topic well in line with the students’ needs
- A variety of activities to break up the day, including collaborative work
- Cross-curricular activities – working with other departments
- Students to have an opportunity to reflect on their own/others’ learning throughout the day and to receive feedback from the teacher
- Plenty of active learning tasks
- Smaller classes (10-15) students

## What can teachers learn from listening to their students? Further evidence and research

**A 2005 study<sup>1</sup> looked at three components of student feedback about learning through the experiences of six teachers and their pupils:**

- pupils’ views about three lessons
- teachers’ reactions to their pupils’ comments
- how the teachers used the pupils’ ideas with their classes

The researchers interviewed thirty-six Year 8 pupils individually about three lessons and fed back the pupils’ comments to their teachers. They then interviewed the teachers about their reactions to their pupils’ comments and investigated the use the teachers made of the ideas with their current and subsequent classes.

The researchers found considerable agreement between pupils in their views of teaching and learning. They preferred lessons that were less teacher-led and appreciated interactive teaching that gave them ownership of their learning. They also wanted more opportunities to collaborate with their peers.

The teachers felt that many of their pupils’ ideas were sensible, practical and educationally desirable. The most helpful suggestions were those that:

- asked teachers to extend existing or previous practices (e.g. investigational work)
- encouraged teachers to persist with innovative ideas
- were sensible, practical and purposeful (e.g. discussing wrong results more)

Teachers’ responses to the pupils’ suggestions fell into three types: two teachers grew increasingly enthusiastic about the benefit of consulting pupils, two experienced success in the short-term, but did not continue to make use of pupil consultation, and two teachers’ experiences of using pupil consultation were unsuccessful.

The researchers identified some key challenges to teachers changing practice based on student feedback.

- The pupils teachers most need to hear from are the most difficult to consult
- Genuinely responding to student feedback involves a change in the balance of classroom power

<sup>1</sup> McIntyre, D., Pedder, D., & Rudduck, J. *Pupil voice: comfortable and uncomfortable learnings for teachers*, University of Cambridge, 2005

“Nothing really changes for pupils unless there are changes in the thinking and practice of the adults in schools who work with them.” Lorna Earl, 2006<sup>2</sup>

**Research into the impact of different forms of professional learning for teachers for a long time struggled to demonstrate that teachers who took part in CPD actually changed anything significant about their practice as a result. And without those changes in practice, it’s hard to see where improvements in student outcomes will come from; if you do what you always do, you’ll get what you always get.**

There seem to be three major factors that encourage and support teachers to change their practice:

- the kind of professional learning and practice development activities in which they take part;
- their beliefs and values about their own and their students’ learning; and
- the general ethos and culture of the school.

#### Learning activities that support changes in practice

Thanks to a series of extensive reviews<sup>3</sup> carried out around the world and over ten years, we have a much clearer picture now of the kind of learning for teachers that, done well, will enable them to really change the way they do their work. To change their practice teachers need:

- **peer support**; to work collaboratively with others
- **specialist support**; to have access to people or resources who know more than they do about the thing they’re trying to change
- **processes for sustaining learning over time**; i.e. not just a one-off episode, however great it is
- **help to make a realistic assessment of their starting points**; what they know and can do already
- **to feel ownership of the change**; to really believe there is a need for them to change their practice and to feel that they are in control of things
- **a clear focus on student learning and outcomes**; to understand and to care about its effects for their students.

When we look at examples of teacher learning activities that have these features and have also demonstrated an impact on student learning outcomes we find that three models of teacher learning turn up time and time again. They are coaching, mentoring and collaborative enquiry. And if the ‘shopping list’ above is right, this is really quite unsurprising. In his influential (2000) book *Evaluating Professional Development*, Thomas Guskey suggested that: “It is difficult to overestimate the amount of study, practice, classroom coaching, discussion, and small group problem solving that are necessary to lead to changes in instruction<sup>4</sup>.”

Coaching, mentoring and collaborative enquiry support teachers attempting to change their practice to experiment with new approaches, to talk through their ideas, concerns and problems with others and to gather evidence through observation and by looking at student learning and outcomes to work out for themselves what’s working and what’s not.

#### The role of beliefs and values

Two sets of beliefs and values appear to affect how likely teachers are to change their practice. One set relates to what a teacher believes about their students’ ability and intelligence and capacity to learn and to improve. Put simply teachers who believe that all students can achieve well and be successful in learning are less likely to ‘blame’ student attitudes, behaviour or underachievement on the students, and are more likely to see changes to their teaching practice as the route to improving student learning outcomes<sup>5</sup>.

The second set of beliefs and values relates to the teacher’s sense of their own capacity to make an impact. Will it make a difference if I change my practice or will things carry on just as before – maybe even get worse? A critical factor here is the teacher’s attitude to risk – how risky do they

perceive changes in practice to be and what risks are they able and prepared to take in exchange for the chance to improve learning for their students?

The link between change processes and risk is well established, but recently we have begun to understand in more detail the different ways in which individuals perceive risk and respond to it and what implications this might have for the support teachers need to change their practice. In a 2009 study for NESTA<sup>6</sup>, Professor Elizabeth Chell of Kingston University identified five essential skills, attributes and dispositions necessary for innovation. They are:

- **Creativity**; imagination, curiosity and the ability to connect ideas and solve problems.
- **Self efficacy**; self awareness, self belief, and a sense of empowerment.
- **Risk propensity**; innovators need to be comfortable about moving forward with an idea when outcomes are uncertain. They need to be able to calculate and manage risk.
- **Energy**; drive, enthusiasm and the motivation to take an innovation forward. While a bright idea may be the work of a moment, its exploitation may take considerably longer.
- **Leadership**; innovators with leadership skills are able to mobilise commitment and energy amongst others to support their ideas<sup>7</sup>.

#### How culture and ethos can influence a teacher’s decision to change their practice

In *Teachers as Innovative Professionals*, OPM<sup>8</sup> discovered nine ‘building blocks for innovation’; the conditions they found to be necessary to encourage and support teachers to change their practice. They were<sup>9</sup>:

Strong student voice	Structures for internal sharing and reflection	Commitment to CPD
Time and space to innovate	Strong, reflective and distributed leadership	OK to fail
Some focus on skills and competencies	Well run organisations	Trust in teachers’ professionalism

A culture in which experimentation is encouraged, where its ‘ok to fail’ and where there is ‘trust in teachers’ professionalism’ is achieved by school leaders’ modelling of appropriate risk taking, accompanied by strong messages that work like this has a high value in the school, communicated through accountability and support structures such as pay and performance management.

#### idiscover and Harris Academies

**NESTA (the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) is piloting a new education programme in several Harris Academies. The scheme, idiscover, provides participating students with online credits each term which they can then use to purchase inspirational educational experiences.**

This could be exploring aerodynamics through building and launching rockets to using simulators to learn about touch technology and testing its applications in veterinary procedures or going behind the scenes at a theatre to learn about some of the science involved in putting on a play. As such, the learning is very ‘hands on’ with young people exercising a broad range of skills and having the opportunity to apply what they learn in real situations.

Teachers have the opportunity to observe the experiences to gain their own insights into new ways of delivering learning that are, as much as possible, practical, experiential and student-led.

A core feature of idiscover is that it gives young people ownership of their learning. By placing decision-making in their hands, it allows the young people to make informed choices about the educational activities that will help them in the future and encourages them to find out about emerging economic sectors and the possibilities they present.

The scheme is being evaluated to appreciate the impact that it has on the development of the students’ wider skills and competencies as well as their motivation and engagement in learning. It also has the potential to impact positively on subject and career choices – experiences related to STEM skills have been extremely popular – and enables students to appreciate some of the links between what they learn in school with the challenges and opportunities of the future world of work.

[www.idiscover.org.uk](http://www.idiscover.org.uk)

<sup>2</sup> Earl L, Katz S, Elgie S, Ben Jaafar S, Foster L, with Sammons P and Mujtaba P. *How Networked Learning Communities Work*, Part One of the evaluation of the Networked Learning Communities Programme, NCSL 2006, Nottingham.

<sup>3</sup> *Continuing professional Development (CPD) – The Evidence Base*. Evidence from four systematic international literature reviews of evaluations of CPD carried out for the EPPI (Evidence into Policy and Practice Information) Centre and summarised for the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) by CUREE, the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) [www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/e/eppi\\_research.pdf](http://www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/e/eppi_research.pdf) (accessed July 2010)

<sup>4</sup> Guskey, T (2000) *Evaluating Professional Development* Corwin Press

<sup>5</sup> *Behaviour for Learning* An anthology of research evidence summarised for the General Teaching Council for England’s (GTCE) Research for Teachers online resource by CUREE, the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education [www.gtce.org.uk/documents/publicationpdfs/bfi\\_anth\\_pbf2\\_0310.pdf](http://www.gtce.org.uk/documents/publicationpdfs/bfi_anth_pbf2_0310.pdf) (accessed July 2010)

<sup>6</sup> NESTA is the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts and a sponsor and supporter of the Harris Student Commission

<sup>7</sup> Chell, E *The Identification and Measurement of Innovative Characteristics of Young People*, Kingston University and NESTA 2009, London.

<sup>8</sup> Office for Public Management, *Teachers as Innovative Professionals* was a research study commissioned jointly by the Innovation Unit and the General Teaching Council in 2008.

<sup>9</sup> *Teachers as Innovative Professionals*, OPM for the General Teaching Council for England (GTC) and the Innovation Unit 2008, London.

# Content and the curriculum

A reminder of the early ideas about content and the curriculum set out by the commission in 2009

The work undertaken in the first year of the commission suggested that young people are engaged by a curriculum that ensures:



## Idea 8

**Learning explicitly combines valuable subject knowledge with the development of key skills and attributes**

*How do we ensure that teachers possess the highest level of subject knowledge and expertise in their area of specialism?*

*What are the best ways nationally and internationally of effectively combining the learning of subject knowledge, key skills and attributes?*

The challenge for the commission in its second year has been to take these early ideas about content and the curriculum and develop them further through practical enquiry projects and research.

In the following pages you will find:

Summary of commission findings and insights about content and the curriculum from year two of its enquiry p23

When subject content comes to life – making meaningful connections and broadening horizons through learning (Harris Academy Bermondsey and Harris Academy South Norwood) p25

Year 7 students assess their ‘learning power’ and identify ways of becoming better learners (Harris Girls’ Academy East Dulwich) p26

Developments in understandings about learning (further evidence and research) p29

Exploring possibilities for using time flexibly to improve learning (Harris Girls’ Academy East Dulwich and Goldsmiths’ University) p30



## Idea 9

**Learning connects to students’ interests and experiences and develops their curiosity about the unfamiliar**

*How can the boundaries between school and beyond be made more permeable?*

*How can valued subject knowledge be framed so it is valuable to and valued by young people?*



## Idea 10

**Learning is deep, enquiry-based and practical**

*What different learning designs allow for deep learning?*

## Summary of commission findings and insights about content and the curriculum from year two of its enquiry

Students and teachers have been inspired by the possibilities that extended projects offer for learning that is deep, enquiry based, creative and challenging. Students want to be stretched and to learn more independently. They see how different subjects and ideas connect and are looking for learning opportunities that are joined up and which seek to answer tricky questions and solve complex problems.

Creating opportunities for students to learn in this way requires more time than the average lesson allows. If academies are to foster effective learning through projects, there is a clear need for a combination of longer lessons, collapsed timetables and whole day learning units, plus a willingness for teachers to work across their traditional subject boundaries.

Students have enjoyed discovering more about how they learn through assessment and greater understanding of their ‘learning power’. But we know that to be effective ‘learning about learning’ needs to be embedded in the learning culture of the school and this means students and teachers grappling with the concepts together and developing their own joint language of learning. This can only happen when learning dispositions, as well as subject content, are attended to in every lesson throughout the school.

For learning to be engaging it needs to feel relevant to learners. But relevance is not about matching up existing subject content with students’ interests or their likes and dislikes. When teachers do this they risk dumbing down complex ideas in the process of making them more ‘accessible’. Relevance is not being contrived but finding real-world challenges, questions and issues which bring subject content and ideas to life.

## Some of the insights and findings from academy enquiry projects and international visits:

### Learning to learn, Harris Girls’ Academy East Dulwich

It is not easy to introduce a new ‘learning to learn’ model and language (e.g. learning powers). Some concepts are harder to understand than others and both students and staff need to grapple with and develop their own understandings and representations.

Approaches like the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) have strengths over others, e.g. learning styles, which serve to label students as a certain kind of learner rather than give a balanced view of what students are good at and what they need to improve as learners. ELLI encourages students to develop their learning power as opposed to saying, “I am a visual learner so I can only learn in that way”.

Learning to learn must be firmly located in the core curriculum and not seen as a bolt-on approach. Combining subject knowledge and the development of key skills and attributes is key – not the separation of.

Teachers need to fully understand and implement the approach in their lessons – paying attention to both the learning of content and of skills for learning.

### Stimulating deeper learning through Faculty Fridays, Harris Academy South Norwood

When students are given the opportunity to learn in different ways, e.g. utilising more creative approaches, longer time units, cross-curricular learning, they engage and behave well. The additional freedom doesn’t lead to poor levels of behaviour.

## When subject content comes to life – making meaningful connections and broadening horizons through learning

### Moving to outstanding lessons in Science, Harris Academy Merton and Students as learning buddies, Harris Academy Bermondsey

Where students are observing lessons they are developing clear understandings of what student engagement looks like and how it can be supported. Measures or indicators of student engagement in lessons are useful tools for both students and teachers.

### Flexible use of time, Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich

Longer lessons can lead to more variety and deeper learning, including; increased levels of 1-2-1 feedback, higher order thinking (e.g. self-guided learning and following individual lines of thought). Longer lesson length is a prerequisite for deeper and project based learning.

Students' enthusiasm for longer lessons (e.g. BTEC Mondays) relates to their desire for more independent and more practical learning opportunities.

Teachers enjoyed the freedom of the longer lesson and felt empowered to try new things, but they also felt they needed longer to plan. They were planning for learning, not teaching.

Longer lesson lengths can reduce the wasted time from constantly moving students around the school from one class to the next. There is less time spent 'settling in' to lessons and progression is made more quickly because effort is focused more intensely and has the chance to become embedded.

Standards of behaviour can improve in longer lessons because they are less rushed and more focused on learning – lessons are less about 'getting through stuff' and more about learning.

### Student-teacher collaboration and podcasting, Harris City Academy Crystal Palace

Podcasts are a practical example of how a bank of resources could be created and shared federation-wide in order to improve learning.

Podcasts offer the opportunity for students to act independently by drawing down learning content as and when it is required.

### Engagement through student interests and experience, Harris Academy Bermondsey

It is more important to connect subject content to the real world and to help students see relevance in this way, than to try and connect to their interests. Teachers should focus on equipping students with the skills to be able to make their own connections between what they are learning and what they already know/are interested in. There needs to be time and space created within the curriculum to enable and encourage students to do this, e.g. through project-based learning.

It is critical that learning both fosters curiosity about the new and unfamiliar and connects with existing knowledge and interests. These are two sides of the same coin. Learning is not only about being relevant, but also about expanding horizons and challenging assumptions.

Ideas about relevance and what will be of interest to other students is a unique contribution that students can make in co-designing/planning learning with teachers.

### International visit to Charter Schools, New York

It is possible to deliver high quality project-based, cross-disciplinary lessons which are rooted in real-life problems. This is supported by excellent links with business and the local community.

Small group 'advisories' give more targeted pastoral support than a regular tutorial system.

Choice and differentiation for students can be fostered through the delivery of certain courses online.

Students of all ages can benefit from practical work experience.

### International study visit to High-Tech-High, San Diego

Project based learning is the basis for the curriculum. Projects are usually developed from the teachers passion and a connection to a real world challenge or issue. Teachers frame the projects but students decide on the detail of what they will do to meet the brief.

Choice and flexibility in lessons ensures student engagement. Lessons link to prior learning and focus on building the knowledge and skills base needed for upcoming projects.

A flexible and adaptable curriculum which enables cross-curricular working is absolutely critical to effective and widespread project-based learning.

"When our girls at HAB were whipped into a frenzy of ecstatic chanting and banner waving when Barack Obama was elected President, how many of us then grasped the opportunity to 'cash in' on this wave of enthusiasm, creating lessons that encouraged them to reflect on the importance of the right to vote, issues of racism, the nuances of persuasive language and other related topics?"

Caron Clifford, Harris Academy Bermondsey

**Two outstanding Harris teachers highlight how securing real engagement with core subject knowledge means going beyond half-hearted attempts to be 'relevant'. It requires flexibility, adaptability and the ability to identify and act upon the learning opportunities offered up by current affairs and the world around us, as well as students' own experiences and expertise.**

Jacqui Lomas, Federation Mathematics Consultant Leader, focuses on creating opportunities for students to investigate and explore in Maths – sometimes moving away from text books in order to help students understand that life isn't always clear cut. "Fundamentally, students need to learn how to use their mathematical skills and knowledge in a context that isn't just 'real life' but is real to them." In its simplest sense, it could be about ensuring that when the class is looking at data it's real and useful data the students have generated themselves with their peers and that the graphs created from that data are displayed in order to convey that useful information to others.

Jacqui also believes in always keeping learning current by commandeering events or issues that spark the imagination and enthusiasm of students. "During the general election we looked at carrying out polls and sampling, tackling questions of the reliability and trustworthiness of statistics. After an episode of The Apprentice when one promising young entrepreneur was fired because they got the costing wrong, students watched a clip of the programme and tried to explain what she had done wrong, what she should have done and whether she should have been fired for it? I also use budget announcements to look at tax and pay with older students. They look at different rates of pay in different types of job, work out their take home pay using percentages and discuss what their tax will be spent on, and also look at cost of living."

Caron Clifford, Lead Teacher, Harris Academy Bermondsey, agrees that the best learning comes about when we capture the imagination of students, but recognises that when it comes to being 'relevant' it's not always as easy as we might think. "For a teacher like myself, on the wrong side of forty, what I think is engaging to a 14 year old might be a social faux pas waiting to happen. What I have found works for me is not trying to predict the latest 'sick' craze in youth culture and then shamelessly attempting to 'get down with the kids' (the teaching

equivalent to watching your Dad dance at a wedding) but considering the essence of us all as human beings who are struggling with universal conflicting hopes, fears, joys and tragedies. It's less about relevance and more about making learning feel personal."

In English there is a wealth of literature that simply mirrors and reflects all our private dramas. Caron explains: "Whether it's William Shakespeare or Alice Walker they provide a guaranteed platform for creating meaningful connections with our students' real life experiences and prior knowledge; suddenly another tragic and pointless gang killing in Verona is as relevant and as compelling as the latest shocking headline direct from South London." One of Caron's Year 11 students Basma Tahir believes strongly that, "students need to feel they are learning something that will help them understand their own lives... to take the skills learnt in the classroom and identify how they can be applied elsewhere."

Seizing opportunities to learn about real events and live issues with our students ensures that fantastic stimulus material for all subjects is readily available. Students are in constant connection with the world around them, locally, nationally and globally. They have ready access to thousands of up-to-date and diverse knowledge sources through their own social networks and through more media channels than many adults know exist. Not only this, they are expert seekers and quick absorbers of this information. Surely it is part of the teachers' role to support students to make sense of this information and to extend their thinking through different subjects. As Caron says, "If I was approaching Duffy's 'Education for Leisure' I would consider the media coverage of Raoul Moat or Derrick Bird a starting point. As teachers we must grab these opportunities while we can, fully understanding that they have a sell by date. Grasp the bull by the horn and enjoy the thrill of watching our young people express opinions and cogitate fundamentally important matters with passion and energy."

## Year 7 students assess their 'learning power' and identify ways of becoming better learners Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich

"I know now that being resilient will help me to not just give up when I'm finding things difficult and to use critical curiosity to find out information that I need and to make my work even better." Year 7 student

### Through use of the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI<sup>1</sup>) and a course in 'learning to learn' (L2L) a group of Year 7 students have created their own learning profiles, identified their strengths and weaknesses as learners, and begun to develop their learning powers.

Students and teachers at Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich have been investigating how developing students' awareness of themselves as learners and helping them to develop new 'learning to learn' (L2L) skills can have a positive impact on their effectiveness as learners across the curriculum.

The project has involved a group of Year 7 students undertaking ELLI, which is an online tool designed to find out how learners perceive themselves in relation to seven dimensions of learning power. Students are introduced to the learning powers and then take the survey online. This creates a profile of how the learner or group of learners are doing on the seven dimensions. The ELLI profile can be used diagnostically by the learner and by the teacher and helps both focus on areas for development and change.

#### Seven dimensions of learning power:

- Changing and learning – seeing yourself as someone who learns and changes over time
- Meaning making – making connections and seeing that learning 'matters to me'
- Curiosity – wanting to 'get beneath the surface'; the opposite is being 'passive'
- Creativity – risk-taking, playfulness, imagination and intuition; not being bound by rules
- Learning relationships – learning with and from others and also being able to learn alone
- Resilience – persevering in the development of your own learning power and relishing challenge; not being 'fragile and dependent'
- Strategic awareness – being aware of your own thoughts, feelings and actions as a learner and able to use that awareness to plan and manage learning processes; not being 'robotic'

For students at East Dulwich, the questionnaire was a learning experience in itself. It challenged them to think about all sorts of aspects of learning that they weren't aware of and was a tool for preparing them to think about how they could be even better learners.

Ellie Carding, the teacher leading the project, is clear about the projects' intended outcome. "We want to create more proactive learners who can learn independently. Learners who know their strengths and what they need to develop."

In planning the project she visited Matthew Moss High School in Rochdale to see their learning to learn programme in action and found it a real eye opener, "I saw students working confidently and independently on projects that they talked enthusiastically about. They were able to use the language of the learning powers effectively to reflect on their learning and progress." In particular, Ellie noted that teachers talked favourably of the programme and were convinced by how it enabled students to see themselves as learners and to take responsibility for their learning. It was also clear that the programme was only effective in the context of a really strong ethos about learning throughout the school.

When designing the HGAED programme particular attention was given to how students were sufficiently challenged, how their progress would be assessed and that they understood how they were progressing, and how the impact of the programme could be secured across the academy.

Students have been engaged and enthused by the experience so far, saying that they were happy to get feedback through ELLI, as one Year 7 student reports "It's not like getting a low level. Everyone has strengths in some areas and once you know where you are weaker you can build on those."

Students now have more confidence in their own learning and have developed a new language to describe how and why they learn. Because the new understandings about learning powers are also being adopted by staff, this new language is shared and is beginning to influence how teachers are delivering their lessons. "I've become more aware of my learning and how other people in my class learn." (Year 7 student)

Some learning powers were harder for students to understand than others, but they have been supported with this through the learning to learn lessons. Keeping a learning log has proved to be a really useful tool for ensuring students recognise when they are using which learning powers in their lessons. Students are now planning special projects and considering how they need to use their learning powers to deliver them successfully.

Delivering the project has been a steep learning curve for both teachers and students. It has been a true enquiry process requiring the team to change elements of the design as a result of feedback. In particular, student responses to learning to learn lessons suggested they should move from discrete modules around each learning power to looking at projects that incorporated them all. Ellie reflects that it has also, "prompted important discussions among staff and between staff and students about the essence of learning and how we can provide effective learning opportunities at HGAED."

Some of the most significant learning from the project has been around collaboration, dissemination and a supportive structure.

- Collaboration in the planning and evaluation of L2L lessons is vital. Teachers need to work together with students to create a shared vision and plan learning tasks that fit with this.
- The concept of the Learning Powers has been very effective in helping students to develop their language of learning, but it must be disseminated across the curriculum areas to give it centrality and value in improving teaching and learning.
- It's important to achieve a balance between enabling freedom and independence for students whilst also providing structure and support through the L2L programme.

All the experience gained this year has been useful in guiding what will be an even bigger and better project in the next phase, as this approach to learning becomes embedded in the Humanities area for the next Year 7 cohort. Following this, plans are to use the strengths of the work throughout the whole curriculum.

Principal, Jane Fletcher is aware of the risks of such a project. "We are all too aware that there are many 'learning to learn' projects which fail to have the intended impact. We have learned the immense power of these critical learning powers, seen the underdevelopment of them in our

students when they reach us in Year 7 and the capabilities of those same students when allowed to work as leader of their own learning. The next step for us is to embed these powers within curriculum areas. Beyond that, I want to link all that we have learned here to our quest to offer our students 'real world' learning which results in high quality, relevant outcomes that are better found outside the academy gates. If we could find a way to combine the learning powers and skills development of L2L with top level, quality outputs, we would feel we had made a step forward in exploring the key elements of outstanding learning."

"If we could find a way to combine the learning powers and skills development of L2L with top level, quality outputs, we would feel we had made a step forward in exploring the key elements of outstanding learning."

#### Project features:

- Staff undertake research visits to sites of excellent practice and use these insights to inform project design.
- Year 7 students take part in ELLI and receive their individual learning profiles (baseline measure).
- Students take part in a learning to learn course for two hours per week – this introduces them to the learning powers using iconography and a linked narrative.
- Students also work on eight step autonomous and independent projects designed to apply and develop the different learning powers.
- Students publicly exhibit and showcase their work at the end of the project.
- Students undertake ELLI following the interventions in order to reassess their learning power.

<sup>1</sup> ELLI was introduced to the commission through a partnership with the Learning Futures programme [www.learningfutures.org](http://www.learningfutures.org)

## Developments in understandings about learning

### Further evidence and research

**The Campaign for Learning (CfL<sup>1</sup>) defines learning to learn as: “a process of discovery about learning. It involves a set of principles and skills which, if understood and used, help learners learn more effectively and so become learners for life. At its heart is the belief that learning is learnable<sup>2</sup>.”**

### Research underpinning ELLI

An ELLI research project identified the characteristics and qualities of effective lifelong learners and developed tools and strategies for tracking, evaluating and recording people's growth as effective real-life learners. It was funded by the Lifelong Learning Foundation.

There were two major research strands, a scientific strand concerned with identifying the components of 'learning power' and a dynamic strand concerned with exploring how those dimensions of 'learning power' might be useful in teaching and learning in the classroom.

- The research project gathered data on nearly 2000 learners from the age of 7 through to adult learners.
- It identified the seven dimensions as being inter-related aspects of learning power, and that people whose profile is low on these dimensions appear to be fragile and dependent as learners.
- These ELLI learning dimensions are like a shadow of the formal curriculum, and are applicable to all subjects and disciplines in the classroom and beyond.
- What was clear from the data was that over time, and through the course of formal schooling students actually become weaker on ALL learning dimensions, but especially creativity. At the same time they actually become MORE dependent and fragile as learners.

### Dynamic research strand: building Learning Power in the classroom

- School based research involved teachers working with these learning dimensions in practical ways in order to understand how they may be useful to promote learner self awareness and growth in the classroom.
- Sixteen teachers, across four schools, received learning profiles for individuals in their classes and the average profiles for the whole class. They then used this information to decide on new 'learning interventions' that were specifically aimed at nurturing students' learning power.
- These interventions ranged from re-organising the way in which information was presented to students to a specific focus on self-assessment using the language learning.
- These interventions made a difference to students' learning power profiles after two terms – in particular they became more resilient and more strategically aware of their own learning and less dependent and fragile.
- There were also indications that students actually achieved more in terms of standard learning outcomes. The control cohort, who matched the experimental group, actually became weaker on the learning dimensions, in keeping with the evidence from the whole cohort.
- The key themes underpinning the learning interventions were - teacher professional vision and values, the creation of positive interpersonal relationships which involved trust, affirmation and challenge, quality of dialogue, use of learning language, modelling and imitation and teacher professional judgement.

Learning to learn requires students to self consciously develop specific skills and dispositions in order to make the best use of the learning opportunities that school offers. CfL call these the '5 Rs':

- Readiness to learn: being emotionally and practically ready and willing to learn something and believing you can do it
- Resourcefulness: knowing how to use different approaches to learning
- Resilience: being able to cope with difficulty and bounce back from frustration and error
- Remembering: being able to recall different learning strategies, which you have used in other contexts
- Reflectiveness: being able to stand back, take stock and think about your own thinking

This list and others like it – Costa and Kallick's '16 Habits of Mind<sup>3</sup>', Guy Claxton's '4 Rs' (rather than 5<sup>4</sup>), Howard Gardner's Multiple (8) Intelligences<sup>5</sup>, the 7 dimensions of learning power in Bristol University's Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI<sup>6</sup>) and so on – are all based on broadly the same idea; that by making visible and explicit the skills or dispositions that students need to be effective learners, teachers can help students to develop their own sense of themselves as learners, to become confident in evaluating how well they are learning at any given time and to discuss their learning using a vocabulary that they understand and share with their teachers and their peers.

This is an important aspect of learning to learn approaches. Making learning visible means that it can become the focus for discussion student-student and student-teacher. As students grow in confidence in their articulation and analysis of their learning, they are able to share their insights with their teacher that in turn enable the teacher to fine tune their approach to meet the specific and changing needs of each student.

This language of learning is not a provided language (as in skills) or a divisive language (as in styles) but a narrative language for communicating experiences and building a richer picture of learning<sup>7</sup>.

Links between learning to learn approaches and raising achievement have been made convincingly and repeatedly.

“Effectiveness as a learner hinges on a student's ability to be versatile, to have a rich view of learning and a learning orientation, which is in turn linked to the ability to plan, monitor and review their own learning<sup>8</sup>.”

Since 1985, we have had firm evidence that students with more elaborated conceptions of learning do better in public examinations at age 16. Specific techniques employed to support students' learning to learn that have been shown to have a positive effect on attainment were:

- student generated questions used to review progress in developing learning to learn
- an explicit focus on the development of investigation and enquiry skills in science
- self explaining and self talk while reading in English
- peer talk and peer support.

Some approaches however had no effect. These tended to be tactical and deployed at the level of hints and tips and offered little metacognitive challenge to students. Whether students benefited from consistent support and were required to give repeated attention to the approach also seemed to be important<sup>9</sup>. Simply highlighting a skill or disposition relating to learning to learn, therefore, is unlikely to have any lasting effect on a student – one off or short-term engagement won't do it.

**“Making learning visible means that it can become the focus for discussion student-student and student-teacher.”**

<sup>1</sup> The Campaign for Learning started in 1995 as an RSA project and became a registered charity working to promote lifelong learning in 1997.

<sup>2</sup> [www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/learninginschools/121](http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/learninginschools/121) (accessed July 2010)

<sup>3</sup> Costa, A and Kallick, B (2000) *Activating and Engaging Habits of Mind* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

<sup>4</sup> Claxton, G (2002) *Building Learning Power* Bristol TLO

<sup>5</sup> Gardner, H, (1999) *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century* New York: Basic Books

<sup>6</sup> [www.ellionline.co.uk](http://www.ellionline.co.uk) (accessed July 2010)

<sup>7</sup> Watkins, C (2006) *Explorations in Metalearning from a Narrative Stance* European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction Special Interest Group 16: Metacognition Cambridge

<sup>8</sup> Entwistle, NJ and Kozecki, B (1985) *Relationships between school motivation, approaches to studying and attainment among British and Hungarian Adolescents* British Journal of Educational Psychology 55: 124-137

<sup>9</sup> Watkins, C *Learning, Performance and Improvement* Research Matters International School Improvement Network No 34 Summer 2010

## Exploring possibilities for using time flexibly to improve learning Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich and Goldsmiths' University

Research teams made up of students, teachers and University researchers have worked with around 300 students and teachers across four schools and two countries to discover that changes to the structure of the curriculum are needed to facilitate alternative approaches to learning.

The three research teams from Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich each explored one key area of focus within the research project.

Team A looked at whether 'metacognitive learning' (understanding how you think or, 'thinking about thinking') requires longer lessons, first by exploring the concept through secondary research, then by keeping diaries of their own metacognitive learning and finally through visits and telephone interviews with other schools, including Chelsea Academy and Cramlington Learning Village, and teachers at HGAED.

Team B focused on whether differentiation in teaching would be facilitated by longer lessons. They observed lessons across the range of year groups and subjects, and undertook follow-up interviews with teachers, as well as giving teachers diaries and interviewing students.

The third team, Team C, was interested in the effect on the curriculum of implementing project-based learning. This research involved a range of strategies, including a visit to High Tech High in San Diego, looking at a Geography project at HGAED, interviewing students and teachers, and looking at observation data and work samples.

Not only has the project provided valuable findings in all of these areas, but it has also provided an opportunity for the students involved to be fully trained as researchers. Anna Carlile from Goldsmiths commented that the students 'worked incredibly hard to gather the data needed to answer with great articulacy what were high-level questions about pedagogy.'

### Focus: Does metacognitive learning require longer lessons?

**Summary of findings:** Coaching time in particular was often thought to currently be too short to implement metacognitive learning. Guided (explicit) metacognition, such as the careful use of questioning or discussion, was found to need careful planning regardless of the length of the lesson. However, discussion time, during which much metacognitive learning occurs, does need a longer lesson, or at least flexibility within the lesson to engage in a lively discussion. Self-guided metacognitive work, where students are given the opportunity to reflect on their own learning strategies appears to definitively require longer lessons.

### Focus: If teachers commit to differentiate learning styles to match all learners, do lessons need to be longer?

**Summary of findings:** Longer lessons give teachers more opportunities to switch between giving attention to the group and to individuals. More is achieved in a longer lesson, both in practical subject and in terms of teaching theoretical content. Whilst some students find it difficult to focus throughout a longer lesson, the key to success seems to be careful planning within the longer time available to make best use of a range of learning strategies, offering students a variety of experiences within the lesson.

### Focus: What will be the effect on the curriculum if we move to project-based learning?

**Summary of findings:** If projects are given enough time and resources, and are carried out and supported in school by teachers aware of the potential for independent learning, project-based learning can develop a deeper, more meaningful and engaging relationship between student and curriculum. This is particularly effective as an approach, especially where students are trained explicitly in the skills they need to successfully carry out a project.

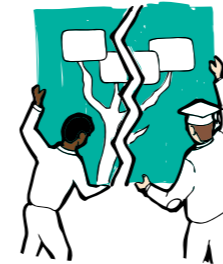
### Focus: Should the length of lessons be changed, and if so, how?

**Summary of findings:** It is suggested that a longer lesson length can support a deeper engagement in the learning process, offering more opportunities for students to: a. produce meaningful artefacts of a higher quality; b. think more deeply and make the kinds of connections that makes learning truly engaging and transferable; and c. benefit from personalised input from teachers. However, for this to work, it is essential that these goals are planned into lessons with explicit regard for what is required to make longer lessons work effectively.

# Partnerships

A reminder of the early ideas about partnerships set out by the commission in 2009

The work undertaken in the first year of the commission suggested that changes in relationships between learners and teachers involves:



## Idea 11

### Genuine learning partnerships of students and teachers that inspire and motivate

*How is it practically possible for teachers to have genuine learning partnerships with all their students?*

*What can students uniquely contribute to these learning partnerships?*



## Idea 12

### Collaborative learning design, delivery and assessment

*What approaches to collaborative learning design, delivery and assessment fit sufficiently well with the rhythms of school to allow for all students to take part often?*

The challenge for the commission in its second year has been to take these early ideas about partnerships and develop them further through practical enquiry projects and research.

In the following pages you will find:

Summary of commission findings and insights about partnerships from year two of its enquiry p32

Relationships, relationships, relationships (further evidence and research) p33

Learning about partnerships from commission enquiry projects p34

- In co-planning and co-delivering learning, what is it that students can uniquely contribute to the process? (article based on a project undertaken at Harris Academy Falconwood)
- Students and teachers learning together to improve Assessment for Learning (article based on a project undertaken at Harris Boys' Academy East Dulwich)
- A collaborative approach to whole-school curriculum improvement (article based on a project undertaken at Harris Academy South Norwood)
- Teaching with teachers as a relevant and purposeful approach to learning (article based on a project undertaken at Harris Academy Peckham)

Creating and delivering learning in partnership (Harris City Academy Crystal Palace) p36

## Summary of commission findings and insights about partnerships from year two of its enquiry

Through the commission new learning partnerships involving over 200 teachers and many more students have been established. Through these partnerships and enquiry projects the conditions have been created for young people to take on greater responsibility and for teachers to open themselves up to further input and challenge from students. Students are being trained to take on roles as learning partners, observers and deliverers, but this doesn't mean teachers step back or withhold their expertise. The responsibility for effective learning sits firmly with both teacher and student.

The range, depth and structure of enquiry projects are challenging the parameters of co-design and consultation and moving to a different level of purposeful collaboration and collective endeavour. By shifting to a partnership paradigm, the commission is harnessing the creativity and ingenuity of both students and teachers.

The federation is fast becoming a community of learning where individual schools have their own unique characteristics but all students and staff understand and are committed to improving learning together and on behalf of each other. There is a palpable buzz about learning as the commission opens up new conversations and possibilities.

By working closely together both staff and students have reached new levels of understanding and appreciation of their respective roles and perspectives. Teachers have been surprised and excited by the commitment, passion and maturity of students and students feel privileged to look at learning through the teachers' lens.

### Some of the insights and findings from academy enquiry projects and international visits:

#### Teachers meeting all learners' needs through enterprising lessons, Harris Academy Falconwood

Teachers identified the process of co-planning and co-design as a valuable and positive experience and said their approach to lesson planning/design was broader and more varied as a result.

Students are very eager to work with teachers and convey their thoughts, feelings and opinions in relation to the improvement of learning and to see these applied in lessons.

Some teachers are apprehensive about working closely with students; however, many teachers are very positive and are happy to further enhance meaningful learning and teaching relationships.

Students must be given adequate training when working in partnership with teachers to co-design learning. This ensures they are able to convey their ideas effectively and have a positive impact on learning.

A regular and structured process for co-design, co-planning and co-delivery is essential, where students are clear about their roles and staff are open to their contribution.

#### International study visit to High-Tech-High, San Diego

A relaxed but focused learning environment is enabled by informal and trusting relationships between students and staff. The teachers have authority but students also have a great deal of independence and self-motivation.

Good relationships are fostered by high contact hours with each student and their family. For one semester, one teacher will see the same student for two hours every day. At the beginning of each school year, the students' Tutor (or Advisor) visits the students' homes. They meet with the parents and find out about their lives, what interests them, problems, concerns etc.

#### Stimulating deeper learning through Faculty Fridays, Harris Academy South Norwood

Students have demonstrated their value as learning experts and there is now increased demand from teachers to have students directly involved in planning and observing lessons.

#### Year 7 Thematic Day, Harris City Academy Crystal Palace

The creation of effective *teams* of students and teachers who design, plan and deliver learning together is critical. There must be genuine trust and partnership, and recognition of the value each brings to the table.

Time and opportunity for co-planning needs to be identified and protected – it won't happen otherwise.

Students can make a unique contribution in terms of learning design. They bring empathy and can take decisions that teachers wouldn't want to risk, e.g. creating new groupings of students as opposed to sticking to form groups.

Students have employed more interactive and creative approaches which teachers have learnt from. In the co-planning process teachers are able to test out whether their ideas would be engaging for students.

#### Monitoring, evaluation and review, Harris Academy South Norwood

Students and teachers can work together to improve the whole school, not just individual lessons. Students can offer new insights and respond positively to the new levels of responsibility they are given.

#### Moving to outstanding lessons in Science, Harris Academy Merton

Co-planning needs to go beyond thinking about learning as individual lessons and needs to focus on cycles of lessons or whole topics.

## Relationships, relationships, relationships

### Further evidence and research

#### Positive learning relationships and the skills to develop them were found to be critical to student achievement as long ago as 1969 by Carl Rogers in the influential *Freedom to Learn*.

Rogers explored effective learning environments that supported student wellbeing and achievement and characterised them as classrooms in which teachers were genuine, accepting and caring, and empathic. He noticed that the learning environments created by teachers like this were also characterised by<sup>1</sup>:

- more student talk;
- more student problem solving;
- more asking of questions;
- more involvement in learning;
- more physical movement;
- higher levels of cognition; and
- more student creativity.

Rogers concluded that an effective learning environment was one that was student-focused both in terms of the teacher's investment in building a warm and understanding emotional climate and that incorporated enquiry based learning, peer teaching, cooperative learning and self assessment.

More recently (2003) in a major research project commissioned by the Department for Education (then DfES) Weare and Gray summarised the general behaviours of teachers who were successful in promoting positive relationships and student achievement. They included<sup>2</sup>:

- teaching relationship building behaviours and skills explicitly;
- using a positive approach – focusing on positive behaviour, rather than punishing negative behaviour;
- using active and participatory methods, for example, group work, role plays, games, simulations and structured discussion for clarifying beliefs and values, reflecting on learners' emotions, practising assertiveness skills, and developing critical abilities;
- using whole class settings to model listening, being assertive, empathising, and resolving conflicts;
- using co-operative group work;
- using peer education, such as peer support work and buddying; and
- ensuring consistency across the school.

In his 2009 synthesis of international research comparing the different effects of schools on students Hattie identified what he called 'visible teaching and learning' in which both student and teacher are active, explicit and skilled partners in a complex set of processes. He describes visible teaching as "*active and involved*" and visible learning as "*intense, buzzing and risky*". This is demanding of both partners, but well worth the risk; "*The more the student becomes the teacher and the teacher becomes the learner, then the more successful the outcomes*"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rogers C & Freiberg H. J. (1994) *Freedom to Learn* Prentice Hall; 3rd Revised edition

<sup>2</sup> Weare, K and Gray, G *What Works in Developing Children's Emotional and Social Competence and Wellbeing* Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Research Report 456 2003, London.

<sup>3</sup> Hattie, J (2009) *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of over 800 Meta analyses Relating to achievement* Routledge.

## Learning about partnerships from commission enquiry projects

### In co-planning and co-delivering learning, what is it that students can uniquely contribute to the process?

#### Harris Academy Falconwood

Through an enquiry project at Harris Academy Falconwood students have been co-planning and co-teaching in order to create lessons that use enterprising skills to make learning more differentiated. Students conducted initial lesson observations, followed by two cycles of co-design, co-planning and co-delivery incorporating feedback.

Students identify 'their perspective' as a key element in the co-planning process. When creating lesson activities, students are especially mindful of ensuring their fellow students would be interested and engaged at all times. Both commissioners and teachers comment on the benefit this perspective brings in enhancing student interest and engagement.

"When we planned the lesson, we wanted to make sure that the activities were fun as well as to allow students to learn. When our lesson took place, the group work activity we planned kept them interested whilst also allowing students from a range of abilities to learn."

**Nick Martin, Rory Hamill and Jack Hards,**  
Student Commissioners

"Planning lessons with student commissioners allowed me to think more broadly about how students can learn effectively in a variety of ways. Group work was something I use regularly, however when I also incorporated a variety of other tasks the commissioners suggested it allowed for more active engagement as well as effective learning to take place."

**Miss Lotter, Teacher**

"From observing student commissioners' co-planned and co-designed lessons, it is clear that the process is a valuable one. Students are constantly striving to develop their knowledge about learning and when this is harnessed and used to assist in lesson planning and delivery as a partnership with teachers, other students find activities relevant and exciting. This also facilitates engagement that at times is not present with teacher only planned lessons."

**Mr O'Brien, Commission Co-leader**

### Students and teachers learning together to improve Assessment for Learning

#### Harris Boys' Academy East Dulwich

##### Project features:

- Students trained in Assessment for Learning (AFL) and then observe current practice
- Students give feedback to teachers and together identify possible changes, then teachers amend practice
- Students observe again and give further feedback
- Five subjects and five teachers

##### Impact

- Students are able to understand and use the language of AFL effectively
- Meaningful collaboration between teachers and students on what makes good learning
- Reinforcing and developing AFL practice
- Enable students to work with teachers to develop a collaborative approach to AFL development
- Development of a reflective cycle and associated tools that enable an effective teacher-student dialogue and for actions to be implemented

##### Future plans

- Students will develop their leadership skills by disseminating what they have learnt to their peers
- Students will lead their peers in paired observations of lessons to coach them in what effective teaching and learning looks like through AFL practice
- Students will develop a formal observation proforma which can be used to observe lessons – this will focus upon effective teaching practices as well as effective learning practices within the classroom

"I have developed my confidence by observing teachers and talking to them about their lessons. I like being able to suggest to teachers what they could do to improve their lessons next time."

**Student Commissioner**

"The project has enabled students to engage effectively, creatively and most importantly, inquisitively with the principles of Assessment for Learning. The student-teacher partnership has allowed for an exciting and new dynamic to be explored between student and teacher; students feel empowered to engage with the very principles that their own learning is based upon."

**Teacher**

### A collaborative approach to whole-school curriculum improvement

#### Harris Academy South Norwood

Student commissioners are working with teachers and leaders as part of the academy's existing Monitoring, Evaluation and Review (MER) process. Students were trained to carry out lesson observations, which involved teachers volunteering to be filmed and students watching lessons and discussing them with a member of the leadership group. Following the training, commissioners have been involved in two internal reviews (MFL, Music and History). Feedback from the students has been incorporated in the report written by the vice principal overseeing these areas.

Students have found the process extremely rewarding and stimulating. They are aware that the MER process is an integral part of ensuring that teaching and learning are of the highest standard; they take their role very seriously and have shown confidence in working with teachers. They have written thoughtful and coherent reports which clearly show their deep understanding of what constitutes effective learning and what can be done to further improve the learning experience of students at the academy.

"From the experience of observing lessons I have seen how hard teachers work and how many more things we as students can do to maximise our learning. It's a collaboration – not just what teachers have planned to do in the lesson."

**Student Commissioner**

"I have learnt that it doesn't matter how old you are, you can still be what you want. I gained in confidence and can see things from a teacher's point of view. I know how I can become a better learner – what works for me and what doesn't."

**Student Commissioner**

"Next year, student commissioners will continue to be an active part of the MER cycle. We expect to involve students in the process of feedback to teachers and train them on how to give constructive feedback. In addition, students will be trained in carrying out work scrutiny, alongside course leaders and coordinators. The impact on the whole academy over the next three years is expected to be significant; we expect more and more teachers to be observed and receive feedback from students. This means that staff see students as active stakeholders who can rise to challenges and engage in constructive dialogue to improve learning. We hope this project adds to the current strategies employed to ensure each member of staff delivers outstanding lessons marked by a unique partnership between teachers and students."

**Rebecca Hickey, Vice Principal and Commission Leader**

### Teaching with teachers as a relevant and purposeful approach to learning

#### Harris Academy Peckham

This project has focused firmly on teachers and students planning together and discussing both what students need in terms of their learning and how teachers can address these needs in their planning. Students approached teachers they felt comfortable working with and they planned teaching activities together. Focusing the partnership on teaching with teachers meant the collaboration was both meaningful and purposeful.

Students took on the role of teacher in delivering either starters or full lessons and judged the impact through interviews.

Key findings and impact:

- Staff like the idea of students being in charge of the learning and more want to get involved
- Working with teachers in a meaningful way improves student-teacher relationships and understandings

- In this approach the subject/content knowledge comes from the teacher and the student helps them to teach it better
- Teachers have taken on some of the students' ideas that they wouldn't have risked implementing before
- Students are now joining the academy teaching and learning forum
- The focus next year will be on developing the approach in English and Maths

##### Student responses

"Teaching alongside my teacher has helped me understand how to plan for lots of different students."

"Teaching is quite difficult to do – you need to plan a lot."

"I feel that I can understand more what learning is all about – I have to take responsibility for my learning too."

## Creating and delivering learning in partnership

Harris City Academy Crystal Palace

“I felt proud to be working together with the students and found it interesting and often surprising to hear what they think. It was good to be working with them towards a common goal, and it broke down the ‘them and us’ mentality that can be pervasive.”

Teacher involved in podcasting project

**Two commission enquiry projects in Harris City Academy Crystal Palace have created successful partnerships of students and staff in pursuit of better learning. Here some of the teachers and students involved reflect on the experience.**

Student commissioners have identified the development of student teacher relationships’ and drawing upon student knowledge and skills to improve teaching and learning as a key learning strategy at Harris City Academy Crystal Palace. Through their podcasting and Year 7 thematic day projects they have explored and begun to understand how both these goals can be achieved.

Susie Poole, Commission Co-leader, comments on the nature of the learning conversations students and teachers have been able to have through the podcasting project, where students have created learning focused podcasts for use in lessons: “Student commissioners and subject teachers have been able to discuss subject content in a focus group format, allowing students to identify topic areas that could be explained in more depth or in a different way. Although this type of focus group analysis has happened in some departments in the past, students have never been the ones tasked with solving the problem. In this project they go away and sort out the explanation themselves, for use in subsequent lessons.”

There are two critical motivating factors for the students. First, they are being asked to lead on problem solving with the *active support* of their teachers, and second, they know it is for the benefit of their peers. And these students also learn as they go through the creative process because it gives them the opportunity to deeply evaluate what they know and why. They then use this information to produce a useful artefact that can be used again and again to explain ‘tricky’ or ‘uninteresting’ concepts to others.

Importantly, both projects gave teachers a deeper insight into how students think and learn, and students a clearer understanding of both themselves as learners and of the distinct role that teachers play in supporting their learning. As one student commented, “It has made me really aware of how difficult it can be to try to teach something, but also how rewarding it can be if you get it right and help someone. It’s also made me think more about how I and other people learn.”

In the Year 7 thematic day project Year 12 students and teachers worked closely as a planning and delivery team. Mark Brockwell, Commission Co-leader, summarised the purpose of the project: “Their task was to design a one-day immersive learning experience for all Year 7 students which focused on a topic that wouldn’t usually be delivered within the constraints of the normal curriculum. This particular thematic day focused on World Finance and Globalisation.”

Students led on the learning design and focused on making the event as interactive and engaging as possible. They identified a range of potential activities including role-play, board games and group presentations and then worked with teachers on the logistical elements and to develop high quality content and materials. On the day students led all sessions with dedicated support from teachers.

The response to the day and to the co-planning process was really positive. Year 7 students found it interesting to have other students present and found their explanations of ideas and concepts easier to understand than those of teachers. Teachers were excited to see students leading the sessions, but also found it hard to step back. Student commissioners showed maturity in their approach and handled the responsibility well.

“We quickly realised that to be effective the students and teachers needed to work as a team rather than have separate roles. It needed to be about breaking down the idea of ‘us and them’ and being clear about what skills and knowledge we collectively brought to the table.”

The project team learnt the following about co-planning and co-design:

- Collaborative planning was very time consuming and needed dedicated space and time, as well as significant commitment from both sides
- Students need ongoing help and guidance from teachers, especially on learning design and on delivery
- Students bring new and practical ideas and approaches to the table and can deliver them successfully
- Staff found it very exciting to see students delivering the sessions
- The topic area was very challenging and, although they didn’t have all the answers, using students as teachers helped ensure that Year 7 participants were actively engaged in the content
- Clear responsibilities must be planned and agreed, with set timescales and mutual agreement

The process wasn’t without its complexities, particularly around the specific roles different parties played, as Mark outlines: “We quickly realised that to be effective the students and teachers needed to work as a team rather than have separate roles. It needed to be about breaking down the idea of ‘us and them’ and being clear about what skills and knowledge we collectively brought to the table.”

### Student perspective

#### Dean Hochlaf, Year 12, comments on the Year 7 thematic day project

**The idea that students are able to help one another to achieve a greater potential isn’t exactly new, however the student commission at Harris Crystal Palace took an entirely new approach when several students worked with teachers to actively plan and deliver a Year 7 thematic day centred around global finance.**

Of course there were many difficulties along the way, particularly in terms of time management, and the complexity of planning learning which could be enjoyable, engaging and effective. Although all commissioners involved were inexperienced as teachers, they were able to get the attention of the younger students effectively, with the help of a designated teacher. Many of the younger students found it was easier to engage with fellow students and were able to offer insightful comments and actively contribute.

The delivery of learning was entirely professional and reviews of the day shows that, despite problems, we were relatively successful in helping teach others. The problems we met were primarily due to our inexperience and perhaps the need for even more planning leading up to the day.

However these issues could be easily overcome in future. With the right help and advice, and with good cooperation between teachers and commissioners, we can provide an entire year group with an engaging and productive day on a topic that, although vital in our lives, does not come up often in other lessons.

# How could learning look in the future?

In July 2010 a group of student commissioners spent time thinking together about what learning at Harris Academies could and should look like in the future. They drew on all they had learned through the commission and captured their ideas in the following scenarios.

## A project and enquiry based approach to learning

At Harris Academy Merton there is a massive enthusiasm for learning. Much of the learning is focused on significant projects and enquiry which encourages students to constantly ask questions and try to find out more. Students show a distinct pride for their work, have great working relationships with their teacher and put a massive amount of effort into their learning.

Projects vary in size and length, some encompass the whole academy and last only two days, while others take place in small groups and last for weeks or a whole term. Most of the projects link right across the curriculum, while some link only one or two subjects. They are all based around real life scenarios and are designed to encourage transferable skills. One project was using Maths, Science and forensics to set up a murder mystery, with clues and suspects all around the academy. This evolved into a dramatic court scene where roles were filled by students and teachers to investigate and close the case. Students examined crime in literature and examined prison life through history, as well as the controversies surrounding prisons. At the end of the project students upload material to their online portfolio (which anyone can see) and give presentations to the academy, detailing what they did, how well they did and what they learned.

Teachers design these projects in collaboration with students, in order to decide what they actually want and need to learn. Some students deliver lessons because they know more than the teacher, who becomes student for the lesson; they also co-design the assessment criteria. Teachers say this improves their relationship with students because of the equal status they often have. There is genuine respect between the two.

## “Project Pod” – a dedicated space for independent learning

One of the most exciting developments to come from the student commission is the “Project Pod” at Harris City Academy Crystal Palace – a dedicated independent learning space designed to intensify learning.

This vibrant learning space is open before school, lunch, break and after school. At different times departments provide stimulus for their own departmental projects within the pod. Students can use these stimuli to complete project work and build on subject knowledge independently. The space is equipped with laptops and SMART boards and has a film area where students can view and record relevant material.

The project is both inspiring and practical. Students readily engage themselves in the interactive learning space. It has a vibrant and positive atmosphere and is in constant use. Teachers are acting as facilitators of learning but the responsibility to act is on the students.

## Cross-federation learning induction in Year 7

Since Harris introduced the cross-federation learning induction week for all Year 7s there has been a big change in the way students understand their role as learners in their own academies and across the whole federation. Getting them together for a week of activities is a brilliant way of giving them transferable skills and to help them think about how they make the most of learning opportunities at Harris.

As Year 11 students we helped to run some of the Expert Witness Sessions at the first induction week last year. The Year 7s get to choose from a range of these taster sessions about learning – some involve experts from the community, like business people and parents, coming in to talk about their experiences and knowledge of good learning, others involve existing students (like us!) or films and online discussions connecting them to students or other education experts in the UK or elsewhere in the world. During the sessions students really got involved in asking questions and seemed to be really motivated by what they were hearing.

That year the induction took place at Harris Academy Bermondsey, but this year it was at Falconwood. We have spoken to teachers and students about the impact and they say it gives students the opportunity to look at their learning dispositions by taking the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) and also develop independent learning skills, communication and teamwork. All these things will set them up to be better learners throughout their academy life.

## New work experience programme for Years 8 and 9

Across all Harris Academies work experience has been expanded and redesigned for students in Years 8 and 9. The new work experience programme runs over two weeks and means that students get more opportunities to experience different kinds of jobs and skills during their school life. The programme is made up of three days in the work place, some independent project work and a presentation day where students share what they have learnt from their work experience with other students and teachers.

Last week I interviewed a group of Year 9 students who had just finished the programme. It was the end of the two weeks and they were exhausted after the presentation day where they ran workshops for other students to share their new skills and ideas. One student went to an architect’s office, he told me “After the three days in the office it was really good to have some time to think about what I had learnt. I really enjoyed creating a presentation on where I went, what I liked and what I didn’t like, and also what it taught me.”

The students I spoke to thought work experience was a brilliant way of getting you ready for the future. It’s a completely different type of learning and they find it really exciting and challenging.

## Cross-curricular teaching and learning

I recently interviewed the Principal at Harris Academy Falconwood about the fantastic cross-curricular projects they have been doing. She explained the whole approach to me. First, the teachers who would be taking part in the project come together to discuss what the project should be about. They take into account what lessons they would otherwise teach and what subjects would be interesting and engaging, and what could be done together. Projects normally work across 3-4 subjects and students are always part of the design process.

I was able to see a project in action. Years 9 and 10 were looking at the Titanic as a project in several different classes. In History they were taught about the facts and history of the Titanic; in Geography they learnt about the places the Titanic was made, where it travelled etc; Maths was figuring out how many people the Titanic could carry and what happened when it sank. I later visited the class in English, where they were reading aloud their fictional diary entries, as if they had been on the Titanic.

The students loved the project. They were very alert and ready to answer, perhaps because their learning was continuing from one lesson to another. The teachers enjoyed it too because they were working with new people. Although they had to find time to plan together it was easier because they were looking at the project as a whole rather than individual lessons.

## Annual Enterprise Market

Harris Academy Peckham recently held their second annual Enterprise Market. It was amazing to see students from different year groups participating in the event, where groups of students were promoting and selling their products to the rest of the academy and to parents and members of the community. The products in different year groups were themed depending on the project work they had been doing, but all the themes related to a real-world challenge that students were asked to solve. In Year 9 they had planned, designed and produced South London guides for visitors coming to the Olympic Games in 2012. The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games had agreed to fund the full production of the winning design idea.

We were invited into a Year 10 class where students were pitching their ideas for resources and programmes that would help adults in the local community improve their literacy and numeracy. They presented to an audience of about fifty people, including representatives from the local charity who were partners in the project, before the products went ‘on sale’ in the main hall marketplace. Many of the students were wearing suits and they came across as really professional in their pitches. The training they had been given certainly paid off.

A Year 7 student told us “The whole thing has been brilliant, I got a sense of what it is like to take an idea and make it real and I’m so proud of my team. Coming up with an eco-friendly product for children was really hard but we loved the challenge.”

## New roles and training for students to support each other

On Wednesday we had the pleasure of witnessing the impact that a student commission inspired initiative is having in South Norwood. We spent two hours in the Learning Café observing a workshop with Harris Future Skills Coaches. The workshop was the latest in a series of sessions where ex-Harris students return to their academy to give coaching in life and work related skills. This session was led by Samuel, the coach, and gave Year 7 students insights and training in the importance of drive and self-motivation. Samuel was a real inspiration as he had successfully set up his own software design company since leaving school. But it wasn’t an easy journey and by the end the session the students really understood why you need to remain focused on your goals even when things go wrong. The atmosphere in the room was immense, all the concentration and engagement between the students and the ex-student created a real buzz.

The Future Skills Coaches programme is running in all academies and is just one example of the way in which Harris students take responsibility for the learning of others. Our student-led Help Centre is a place where students can get confidential advice on personal and social issues from other students who have experience of the issues. We also have peer tutoring taking place in tutor sessions all the time because these are organised vertically, with students from all years in each tutor group, meaning everyone can get access to help with homework and learning at any time.

The Learning Café is a brilliant idea and most academies have them now. Our café is open every breaktime, lunchtime and after school. Different subjects or projects take over the space on different days and relevant teachers and Student Subject Advisors are available for people to go for expert learning advice and support.

### Workshop participants

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**Diana Odoom**, Harris Girls’ Academy East Dulwich  
**Emmanuella Adjei-Manu**, Harris Girls’ Academy East Dulwich  
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# Acknowledgements

The following students and staff have supported the delivery of the commission's enquiry projects in 2009/10.

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The Harris Student Commission is grateful for the support it has received from the British Council, Learning Futures and NESTA.



This publication was written and edited by GoddardPayne in collaboration with students and staff from Harris Academies. Particular thanks to Julie Temperley for her contribution and support.