

A study of the use of independent learning activities with Year 10



Aim:

The aim of this study is to look specifically at what pupils and teachers perceive makes independent learning activities more or less beneficial to learning.

Rationale:

In my previous study I considered how pupils perceive independent learning in the science classroom. The findings showed that the majority of pupils had heard of independent learning and that many pupils can identify classroom activities during which such learning takes place. They could also recall examples of participating in such activities in the science classroom. Pupils were able to discuss both the advantages and disadvantages of independent learning in line with the ideas seen in literature. Overall it was concluded that pupils believe independent learning improves their ability to learn.

What is independent learning?:

The definition of independent learning to be used in this study is 'when pupils are encouraged to think, talk and develop their learning'. This definition is widely accepted by the DfEE, Ofsted and QCA (Broad, 2006, p.127).

Research Questions:

1. What do pupils enjoy about independent learning activities?
2. What do pupils dislike about independent learning activities?
3. What do pupils find helpful to their learning in an independent learning activity?
4. What do pupils find less helpful to their learning in an independent learning activity?
5. What do teachers enjoy about independent learning activities?
6. What do teachers dislike about independent learning activities?
7. What do teachers find helpful to pupils' learning in an independent learning activity?
8. What do teachers find less helpful to pupils' learning in an independent learning activity?

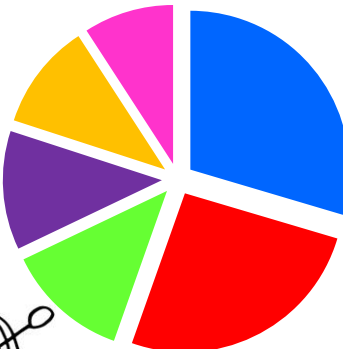


Methodology:

This is an action research design project that has built upon standard teaching practices. The following methods have been used:

- ❖ Five year 10 Lessons, taught by myself and two other teachers, with a specific independent learning activity incorporated.
- ❖ Pupil questionnaires after each activity to establish how the pupils enjoyed that activity and how they felt it helped their learning
- ❖ Interviews with teachers, on completion of the five lessons, to establish how they enjoyed the activities and how they felt they helped their pupils to learn
- ❖ Focus group discussion with pupils, on completion of the five lessons, to establish pupils' overview of the activities
- ❖ Follow up study with a year 9 class using the best two independent learning teaching activities.

A breakdown of the reasons why pupils felt independent learning activities helped them to learn

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- Didn't just get told
 - Had to think about it
 - Remembered the information
 - Learning was fun
 - Found it easy to achieve objectives
 - Talked about it



Preliminary Conclusions and Implications:

Pupils do enjoy independent learning activities and such activities do indeed help them to learn. The independent learning activities were most successful when they enabled pupils to find out the information for themselves but were not too difficult for them to actually achieve anything. Every lesson taught should have an element of independent learning in it. Pupils enjoy the activities and gain great satisfaction from doing them. In response to these findings, I, in collaboration with colleagues from the school, plan to integrate a wide range of independent learning activities into every module taught in science.

Preliminary Findings:

- Pupils do enjoy independent learning activities.
- Their main reasons are that they enjoy obtaining the information themselves and they find the activities fun.
- Their reason for not enjoying some independent learning activities is that they are boring.
- All pupils agree that independent learning helps them to learn better.
- Their reasons are because 'we don't just get told the information' and because 'you have to think about what you are doing'.
- Other teachers are enjoying these activities in their classrooms and are finding their pupils are fully engaged with the activities

References:

Broad, J. (2006) Interpretations of independent learning in further education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 30(2), 119-143