



CASE STUDY REPORT

Use of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to engage students and develop independence

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This study was originally published in 2009 as part of the 'What Works Well' initiative, part of the National Strategies for Education in England.

Abstract

Background: The purpose of the study was to identify if students would become more engaged with learning and develop independent learning and thinking by using a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

Aims: The main aim of this development work was to identify if students would become more engaged with learning and develop independent learning and thinking, with the use of a Virtual Learning Environment.

Methods: The participants in this case study were the head of department, the ICT consultant, the year 10 DiDA group, and the VLE provider. The methods used included training sessions, demonstrations, experimenting with different options, and creating step-by-step instructions. Students were encouraged to access their work outside the classroom, collaborate, and work at their own pace. Teacher assessment, pupil consultation data, and logs/interviews were used to measure progress.

Findings: The main findings of this case study are that the use of a VLE enabled students to become more independent and take control of their learning, resulting in improved grades and better relationships between students and teachers.

Implications: The findings of this case study suggest that the use of a VLE can help to engage students, improve attainment, and enable independent learning and collaboration. It can also help to improve teacher teaching capabilities and lesson planning.

This abstract was generated by Camtree using a large language model (LLM) and added to the original report in 2023.

Keywords: Secondary education; Behaviour and attendance; Creativity; Self evaluation and review; Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL); Information and Communication Technology

Introduction

What were your reasons for doing this type of development work?

To identify if students would become more engaged with learning and develop independent learning and thinking within the age group. Would students start to take some responsibility for their own learning and development?

From this study I wanted to find out if students would be encouraged to learn outside the classroom environment in order to support the 'anytime, anywhere' learning theories, both within the school and outside. Also I wanted to see if this would help to engage the students more and improve attainment.

John Slessor (the then ICT consultant) asked the head of department if they would pilot, for the area, the use of the VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) with the year 10 DiDA (Diploma in Digital Applications) group as this would be the first cohort for this course within the area. It was agreed that the ICT department would pilot the use of the VLE within the authority, with the DiDA group.

Without the use of the VLE the head of department felt that the course would not have been the success within the school that it was and could have easily failed like a lot of others that started within the pilot of the DiDA course. It is felt that they could not now imagine teaching ICT without this valuable learning and teaching tool.

Who might find this case study useful?

- Middle leader
- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- Subject leader
- Teacher

Description

What specific curriculum area, subject or aspect did you intend to have impact on?

- Behaviour and attendance
- Creativity
- Self evaluation and review
- Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)
- Information and Communication Technology

How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

Pupils would be able to access their work both in and out of school in order to develop their skills and start to take some responsibility for their progression and learning. They would be able to take ownership of learning, by it being available 24/7 'anytime anywhere' learning as well as teacher-led learning in the classroom.

Pupils would be able to complete group work and communicate both in and out of school so that if one was absent they would be able to still hold a meeting and help solve problems jointly, encouraging collaboration.

Pupils would be able to share work and get feedback from a variety of audiences such as peers, parents, siblings and teachers.

Pupils would be able to access lessons at home and in advance if they completed a section. This would help them to progress with their studies and work at a pace that they were comfortable with, without others in the class knowing.

This study was also trying to get students to have access to work outside the class so that they would want to improve and be able to complete work even if not in school or class.

What were your success criteria?

Overall students would be able to improve their attainment levels in the DiDA course by encouraging the following areas: -

- Pupils were able to access their learning outside the classroom environment and improve their work as well as developing their skills;
- Pupils were able to complete work if unable to attend school;
- Pupils were able to look at the next lesson before the lesson took place, if needed in order to progress to a high level or look over the lesson if a section was not fully understood;
- The VLE would also enable them to look at a lesson with a mentor, another teacher or parent in order to help to develop their understanding.
- Work was easy to track, assess and feedback was given from both peer and teacher assessment, which improved attainment.
- Use of student journals were available to work collaboratively even if the pupil was not in the class at the time;
- Students were able to work at a pace which suited their learning styles.
- All this was achieved through the use of the VLE which evidence can be located on the impact section of this case study (see tracking data).

What information or data did you use to measure progress towards your success criteria?

- Periodic teacher assessment
- Pupil consultation data

Describe the CPD approaches you used

At the start of this project a training session was arranged by the ICT consultant for the VLE provider to visit the head of department to look at how to set up a class. This followed one more 1 hour session where eLFs and uploading files were developed.

The head of department then set up the MyClass training section for the DIDA group. The head of department then demonstrated the VLE to the student and instructed them on how to use the sections, such as uploading work to the elf, adding work to the personal file box in order to take sections of work created in the lesson home in order to complete.

Other sections of the learning environment were developed through experimenting with different options. By the end the class was able to access learning objectives, outcomes, lessons, instruction and files from not only in the classroom but in the comfort of their own homes.

At this time no school in the area was using the VLE to deliver work or enhance learning so little development or CPD was available at the time. At the end of the first year of using the VLE the head of department was asked to demonstrate how they had been using the VLE and to share good practice with other secondary schools, and FE institutes. From this demonstration one of the FE colleges acquired funding to cascade the training into school.

Through this the VLE Champions programme was developed. Each school was offered free training and CPD to develop one member of staff to become the school champion. Although this was a little late for the start of this project it demonstrated the effectiveness that the VLE had started to have on the students and their learning experiences.

What CPD materials, research or expertise have you drawn on?

When first embarking on this project there was very little CPD or materials that could be drawn upon. Although different case studies in relation to the move to using a VLE was researched and some material was available from research sections the full effect of the VLE within the secondary sector had not fully been investigated, especially in this area.

Who provided you with support?

- External agency

How were you supported?

Little support was given in relation to producing the use of the VLE, although some assistance was given in training, SMT in the school did not fully understand the impact this tool could have on learning at first.

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

Through the use of the VLE work was easily submitted which ensured that it could be assessed, feedback given and then improved. Work was no longer lost or destroyed. This impacted on the finished coursework and as the VLE was used more and more, students grades improved and under-performing boys in other areas were achieving their target grades or above. The outlook of the students changed and more accessed their work and learning from home.

Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

The overall impact of learning was good. I felt that it enabled students to become more independent and take control of their learning.

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

The best people I could get feedback from and make quotes in relation to the overall impact on learning are the students. To see how just some of them felt read the attached documents.

The use of the VLE can enable students to become more independent and enables them to access learning 24/7 both within and outside the classroom.

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Periodic teacher assessment

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Logs or interviews
- Pupil consultation data
- Pupils' work

Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

The above is the true reflection of how pupils learning was improved. The class became more interested, focused and even those that underachieved would do the work, submit it in private in order to keep peer credibility. It opens new methods to enable students to develop independence and take responsibility for when and where they completed their work.

What has been the impact on teaching?

That traditional way of teaching is not the best way forward for all pupils' learning outcomes. Teachers are able to improve their Teaching capabilities and planning of lessons by using the tool contained within the VLE. This new way of being able to work at own pace, review work or just move to the next section enables a different form of teaching to take place. More control of the class was given to the students and they stated what form of input they wanted from me as a teacher. It became a partnership not a dictatorship. This enabled a better relationship to form and support for available for those that needed it. Not only was I the teacher but also became the student.

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

Quotes from student asking for more subject to use the VLE to deliver their courses.

"It's helped me to learn at a pace that is suitable to me without feeling that I was falling behind adding pressure."

"I am able to access my work at home as well as at school"

"It helped me to improve my work"

Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring
- Improvements in curriculum documentation
- Teacher perceptions

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

It has been evident that teacher perception has changed dramatically in using the VLE for learning and teaching in the classroom. This can be seen in the lesson planning and monitoring of students' work.

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

The school is looking to develop the use of the VLE. More schools are requesting training and whole school visions being developed which include the use of the VLE.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

Through more use of the VLE schools will be able to ensure that they are meeting government initiatives especially with the new reform of the 14 - 19 provision.

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

The enthusiasm of the students and the ability to track work was the crucial thing that made the difference. Another area was that students were able to access and review their work both in and out of school as well as addressing issues of looked after students, attendance, inclusions and exclusions. All were still able to complete the work.

What key resources would people who want to learn from your experience need access to?

First of all you would need to find out which VLE your school is using.

Check with your Secondary National Strategy consultants to find out if training is available.

Resources in relation to how to complete your VLE.

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

Unfortunately there were not many resources available at the time but I have now created step by step instructions to show any teacher (even non ICT specialists) to create an eLF and a class (see examples below)

If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where would they start and what would the essential elements be?

If you want to look at taking on this case study, start by contacting your local ICT consultant. Only start small: pick one particular year 10 class and train them; once you are happy with this then add another and another until you have achieved your aim.

Your VLE provider should also have some information to help you. Always get the students on your side, explain the advantages and how it will enable them to access learning.

What further developments are you planning to do (or would you like to see others do)?

To take this further I am now involved in training VLE Champions (one member of staff from each school). I have also been asked to do whole school training as well as department training. I aim that all schools in the area will be using the VLE in a way that will achieve the school and students requirements.

Supplementary Materials

This report is accompanied in the library by the following supplementary material:

- Evidence of students submissions
- Students Thoughts
- Students comments
- Year 11 student tracking data
- Layout of the MyClass section
- Tracking of progression
- SampleDiDALessonPlans
- Calendar Property
- Creating a property
- Creating an eLF
- Setting up a MyClass

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About 'What Works Well'

This case study was originally published as part of the 'What Works Well' section of the National Strategies for Education in England. The National Strategies were professional programmes aiming for improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in schools in England. 'What Works Well' involved teaching practitioners from all phases and areas of education sharing accounts of real developments which had improved learning and teaching, and made a difference to pupil progress. 'What Works Well' case studies were designed to support practice transfer and include sufficient detail and resources to enable others to implement the effective practice described. They were reviewed by experts prior to publication as 'User Generated Content' (UGC) under a licence which encouraged reuse and derivative works, but which precluded commercial use.

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