Unit 4 – Major project
Production, validation and defence

Smoothing the troughs of academic downtime through creative learning approaches

Or… what to do with a problem like “End-of-term-it is”

Ryan Williams

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All supporting materials to be found in blog format at:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/

Word Count 10433

Project overview

It's the last week of school and fatigue is beginning to set in. The weariness of my students has begun to manifest in a heady blend of restlessness and cynicism. Students have completed their coursework and the next teaching module isn't due to start until after summer break. I have a challenging period five lesson at the end of the day and a flash incident occurs in which I have to consider escalating a student to an exclusion status.

Partly due to this incident, I decide to show my next group of students a slightly dated DVD. At first they seem to passively accept as the norm for this period in the school year. Half of the teaching group have seen the film and get bored. Boredom leads to another flash incident… Ad infinitum.

In accumulated personal experience of secondary education, I believe there is a tendency for student output and engagement to diminish according to the proximity of key time periods throughout the school calendar. Depending on the time of year (and current positioning in their academic career) I have observed students losing motivation through their own fatigue and the fatigue of their teachers. Many students receive a passive experience that fails to enrich development or foster intrinsic growth due to this 'trough' of disengagement.

In this action research project I attempt to identify and tackle academic downtime at Kingswood School in Corby. I explore potential reasons for the downturn, from end of term "burnout" to student disengagement. From the research, I then test a number of creative learning events that serve to motivate and engage students and teachers alike. This study considers the current structure at Kingswood school in Corby but I believe has facets of research and practice that are significant and adaptable to UK based secondary schools nationwide.

Literature review

Defining Student engagement. Refining student disengagement

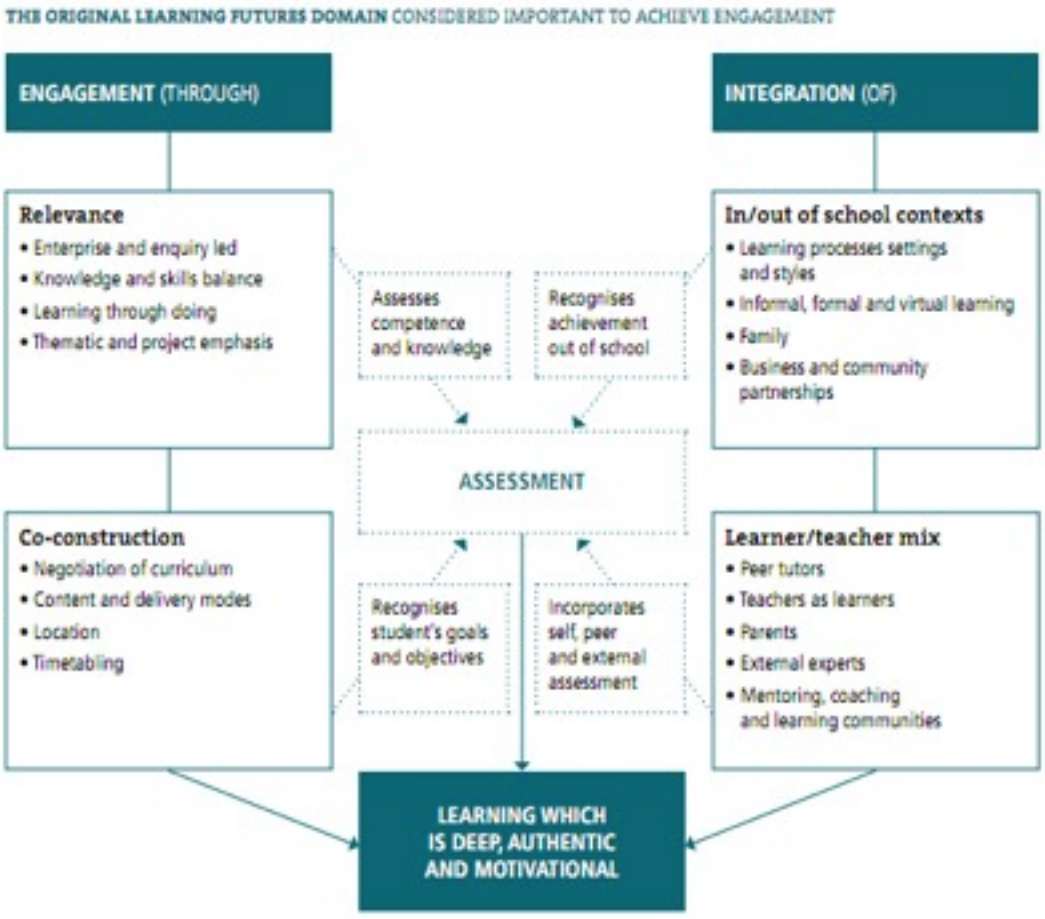
"Student engagement" is a broad term frequently used in educational literature as incentive to present justification for proposals of pedagogical theories and practice. I have first hand experience of colleagues expressing the term as justification for purchasing materials and defending lesson content. It is of pertinence to this project, as a rethink of attitudes towards student engagement in academic downtime should be carefully considered due to the winding down nature of this time period. I considered the need to explore the term with a closer eye towards agenda in application to educational contexts. Intentions to increase engagement in academic slumps have to be validated succinctly for the project to progress. In personal reflection, the buzzword nature of the term almost transcends into an educational cliché that may be approaching the tipping point into cringe worthy territory.

In *Student engagement: paradigm change or political expediency?* Hardy and Bryson examine the term within a UK education context in which they observed critical discourse studies focusing upon "student behaviour and attitudes". In deeper definition they extrapolate that much of the usage of the term refers to "The nature of the approaches to learning and teaching"
"There is too much to gain in seeking a greater focus on student engagement not to pursue that goal"

In *The impact of teaching strategies on intrinsic motivation* (1997) the collective authors state that student engagement refers to a "student's willingness, need, desire and compulsion to participate in, and be successful

in, the learning process promoting higher level thinking for enduring understanding." These ideals to me were tangible in elucidating student engagement concepts (and later become central to project conclusions), but how can a “need” or “desire” be cultivated in a project such as this?

I considered the “learning futures” project, which has student engagement as part of its central ethos. Based in the UK in multiple secondary schools, the project operates by developing “Innovations” such as “large-scale student consultations, mentoring programmes, enquiry-based learning experiences and strategies to accelerate learning” Ultimately the project seeks to develop “the creation of practitioner materials which supports teachers in secondary classrooms, in adapting their pedagogy to the 21st century challenge of ensuring students’ deep engagement with learning.”



Learning Futures engagement flowchart

The *learning futures* model to achieving engagement became important to my secondary research with attention in particular to concepts of "enquiry led" learning, a balance of "knowledge and skills", "learning and doing" and especially thematic and project emphases (Although these are not new concepts). Also excitingly for an action research project were the concepts of co-construction which I interpreted to be between teacher and student for the benefit of both parties. These ideals were later utilized in considering planning elements for tackling troughs of engagement in education.

Thematic learning to engage

As an elemental facet of the *Learning Futures* materials I further considered the use of "Thematic learning" as a way to reduce end of term disengagement in the students at Kingswood School. Thematic instruction is a topic or theme based method that allows whole school integration of subjects and multi-discipline teaching.

An advocate of thematic learning is Maryellen Vogt. In her 1997 paper *Cross-Curricular Thematic Instruction,* Vogt discusses advantages of thematic instruction within education. Highlighting the advantages of this method with convincing claims of its success, Vogt discusses the concepts thusly:

- **"Acquire, communicate, and investigate worthwhile knowledge in depth".**

The school day may be spent exploring content in a variety over a longer period. Subjects are connected and interrelated, rather than isolated and

divided. Subjects such as maths, science, art, and music can be studied within the context of a given theme. Exploration may include reading and writing about a topic, role-playing, art projects, music, and research.

- **“Use prior knowledge of the world and past experiences with language and text to create relationships among various sources of information.”**

Students build upon their current knowledge base and connect what they know with what they are learning. As new ideas are gleaned from a variety of reading experiences, they become integrated with previously learned information.

- **“Make choices, interact, collaborate, and cooperate”**

Students explore topics individually, in small groups, and together as a whole class.

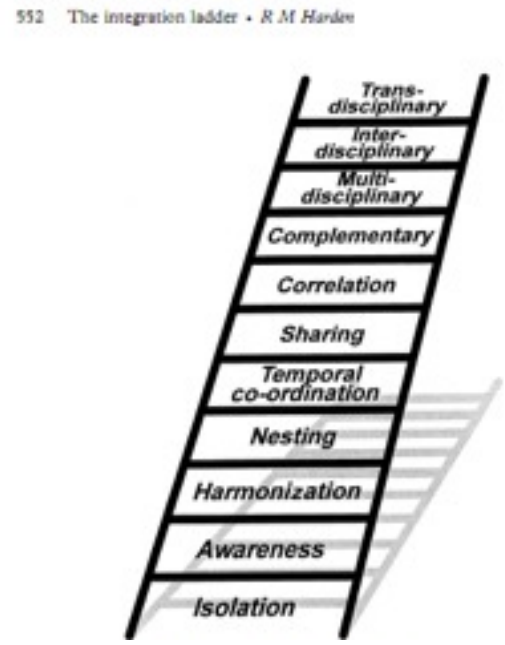
- **“Informally assess their understanding and application of what they are learning.”**

Students and teachers share the responsibility for progress checks as well as on-going evaluations.

(Vogt’s development of the conceptual underpinning to justify the project became more persuading as the project bore fruit in its development. The principles are clearly developed and expressed as part of the second action research cycle towards the end of this project)

In further consideration of cross-curricular concepts, the literature led me to consider the opportunities for collaboration for the purposes of generating

creative content. A useful model in my research was the concept of the "integration ladder". In Ronald M Harden's *The integration ladder: a tool for curriculum planning and evaluation* (2000) Harden identifies steps of an "integration ladder" that considers the makeup of educational integration within subject disciplines. Despite the emphasis of Harden's paper operating within the sphere of medical education, I believe there is pertinence to this project in considering multi/inter/trans-discipline planning approaches for teachers.



The ascension of the categories considers the extremes of "Isolated" subject teaching all the way to the "Trans-disciplinary" concept. Harden accepts that there is a need for "increased planning time" in adopting this approach but argues that wider holistic knowledge benefits outweigh potential disadvantages greatly.

Having the freedom to move beyond subject boundaries or segregation, as a pedagogical concept is entirely seductive and potentially seismic in a longer lasting context. Greater teacher networks developed from planning meetings and collaborative projects could reap complementary benefits of morale, support and motivation.

In further looking at strategies to engage students in academic downtime I came to the conclusion that the planning in this project was dually unique and significant in the way that it could exist solely of my design. I had no need to fulfill the agenda of exam boards or governmental educational policy. I could dare to be brave and solely concentrate on the experience of teaching and learning and create a memorable experience that doesn't need validation from meeting assessment criteria. The educational agenda could be mine alone.

"…the centralizing influence of a national curriculum runs the risk of placing a dead weight on innovation—discouraging imaginative teachers and schools from developing their curricula." Kimbell, R. (1996) *The Role of the State in Your Classroom.*

Burnout

Whilst I grew confident that there were emerging benefits to tackling downtime at the end of school terms, there are those that argue the merits of complete downtime in which students could recuperate from what is expressed as "Student burnout". A recent study into "School burnout processes" looked at the effects of prolonged exhaustion in students. Philip Parker of the *Max-Planck Institute* and Katrina Salmela-Aro concluded their research by suggesting there was an inevitability to an increased sense of inadequacy in students that had experienced burnout.

They then suggest the following ways to change burnout into engagement:

- Study guidance should be provided on all educational levels.
- Resources and strengths should be emphasized.
- Study skills should be taught on all educational levels.

- The competence, coping facilities and motivation of the youth, parents and teachers should be nurtured.
- The sense of community should be cultivated.

School Burnout Can Be Turned Into Educational Engagement Parker and Salmela-Aro 2011

Whilst identifying succinct supportive pastoral measures to reduce burnout, there is little in terms of modifying current practice to improve engagement, to prevent burnouts. There is however pertinence in the study's consideration of teacher needs that would play a part in the "burnout process". In particular the identification of all stakeholders in student education (students, parents and teachers) playing a part in managing end of term fatigue.

Creativity as engagement?

Throughout the reading, I pondered the idea of using of creativity as a way of filling the downtime void. In (Brewster & Fager, 2000) The duo argue that all schools should "Develop a school climate that recognizes individual differences, encourages creativity, and gives both teachers and students a sense of autonomy." Could the courage to develop an autonomous creative ethos become as significant to the project itself?

In *The Creative Age: Knowledge and Skills of the New Economy* (2009) Bently & Seltzer argue the case for promoting increased creativity in education "Schools should develop creative qualities by creating an environment which promotes trust, freedom of action, variation of context, the right balance between skills and challenges, interactive exchange of knowledge and ideas, and real world outcomes." Through the course of their writing they argue that schools are lagging behind in terms of underlying economic shifts in the emphasis of skills employers want to see in 21st century students. So could this project explore problem-based learning that benefits

students to adapt and make decisions in a real world sense? Can creative learning foster creative problem solving out of everyday teaching contexts?

Methodology Research

In terms of assessing a range of appropriate research methodologies I considered the application a number of approaches to develop this project before settling on the most appropriate in terms of educational research.

I also considered research methods that would help to answer questions posed by the research I undertook. In order to justify the validity of the project there should be a healthy range of primary and secondary, qualitative and quantitative methods that would be complementary to the development of the project. It was important to me to research and survey student and teacher attitudes that would serve to inform the journey through the project.

Much of the initial “grounding“ research (not to be confused with grounded theory) was conducted by questionnaires that attempted to ask questions of the project which I needed to justify before commencing to the latter stages of the project. Much qualitative research was utilized as reflection and summary of developments of the latter stages of the project.

Grounded theory analysis

Often touted as being at the forefront of the “qualitative revolution” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994) and relying on concepts of “coding” and the identification of thematic applied to concepts of collected data, grounded theory seeks to develop knowledge from data garnered from research and attempts to explain through concept development.

Grounded theory works in reverse fashion to traditional research methods whereby a theoretical framework is chosen as a way of working through

project themes or questions. The data comes first and then questions are developed from looking at patterns or themes within the data.
There is an emphasis on qualitative research methods that develop empirical theory. In *reinventing grounded theory: some questions about theory, ground and discovery* James and Thomas point to the inconsistent nature of grounded theory in the tension between its formulaic nature and creative interpretations of theories deduced. My role as an educator to improve practice and develop practical strategies for engagement in academic downtime leads me away from grounded theory as a methodology.

Ethnography analysis

In assessing other possible methodologies, I also considered the application of ethnographical study as the basis of my research. Ethnography often consists of fieldwork observing cultures and practices in order to gain knowledge of human development. According to *Ethnographic research* (Wortham) the goal of ethnography is to "make the familiar strange" originating from the field of anthropology, ethnography seeks to understand the world as it is, without intention to change its subjects.

In reading further it became clearer that ethnography would be an unwise decision for a teacher intertwined with an agenda for change and improvements. Although an ethnographer uses similar methods in the shape of interviews, questionnaires and surveys, there is a need for distancing so as not to become a part of the data. Ethnography is very much an observational discipline with the researcher often being faceless or anonymous to the subject or participants. There would be tension in validating a research methodology when there are obvious pre-existing relationships between student and teacher. This is of particular pertinence for this project in the fact that one of my leading hunches argues the literal connection between the two parties.

Action Research analysis

In choosing a methodology for this project I felt a natural lean towards action research. Action research works well in educational contexts due to the possibility of the researcher being able to implement change to their institution or practice (Researcher as teacher). In other methodologies there are fewer opportunities to effectuate change with the same results. I am in favour of this approach due to its flexibility in process and data generating flow. It is also compelling in terms of the cyclical nature allowing for researchers to start at any point in the cycle and move on into further developments answering further research questions pertinent to the topic. Theory and new knowledge can be garnered from this approach, but its pro-change/improvement nature suits intentions for this project. Acting upon research evidence gives the project higher purpose than solely developing theoretical standpoints from the data.

The action research process could afford opportunity to emphasize research findings in my own primary data collection and implement proposals for real change in my institution. In *When teachers are researchers, teaching improves,* Heidi Watts argues the following: “Teachers work best on problems they have identified for themselves”. (P118)

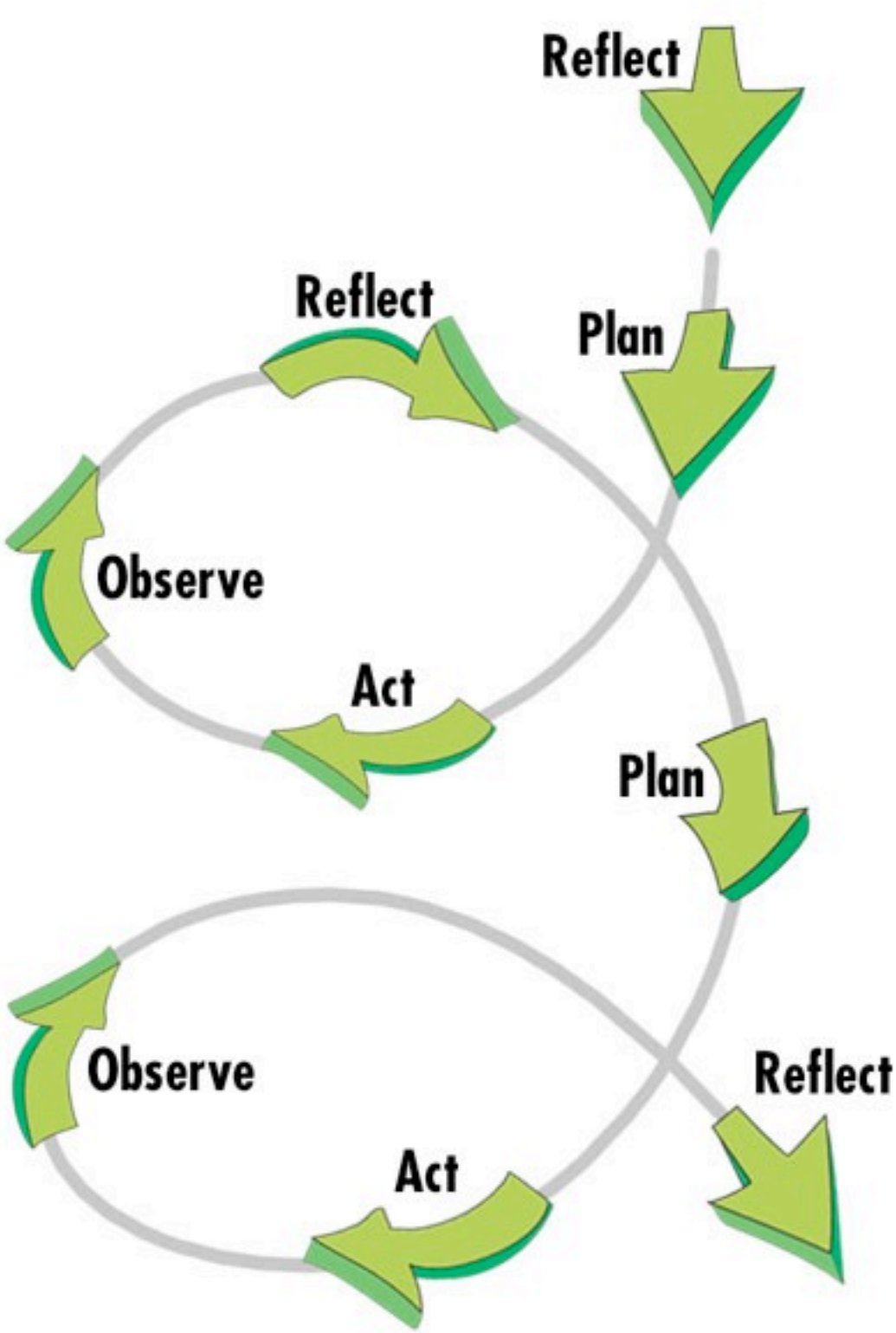
I believe that operating on a local or micro level in terms of identifying real “everyday” problems will build the foundations to learner-centric experiences that tailor content and provision that can lead to large-scale improvement.

Action research is pro-collaborative and is extremely important when considering teacher/student, engagement and downtime issues. The importance of a two way “conversation” in which all participants have a direct effect upon the outcome offers pertinence and integrity. Through supporting methods of questionnaires, interviews and focus groups in all stages and cycles I could build a convincing project to present to peers and senior

management. With an emphasis on practice rather than theoretical rhetoric the cyclical nature of action research is accumulative and builds upon previous data to improve practice through doing.

“Built into action research is the proviso that, if as a teacher I am dissatisfied with what is already going on, I will have the confidence and resolution to attempt to change it. I will not be content with the status quo... “
Action Research, Principles and Practice, McNiff,1988*,*

There are variations in the action research cycles, but essentially they break down in to incremental phases that rely on the stages of “Research, Plan, Act and evaluate” It is a flexible model in which the researcher can begin from any point in the cycle, but must follow the course until the cycle is complete. Subsequent cycles of research build upon previous research and knowledge.



A model of action research

(Unknown, 2010)

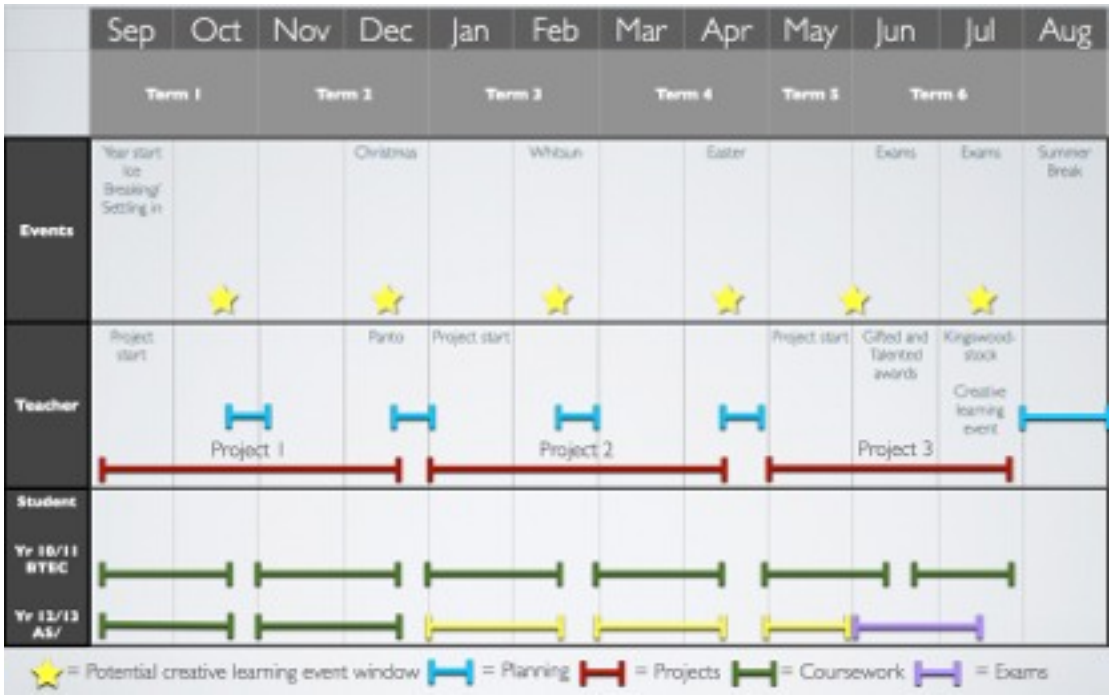
Action research cycle 1

Phase 1 – Research

In terms of researching downtime periods in secondary education, I initially considered the makeup and rhythm of the school year. This was done in to decide which points in the year were significant to this study.

With each term, in all teaching groups there are a multitude of factors that dictate pace of teaching and learning. From the ice breaking, whip cracking settling in period from September to December (Don't smile until after Christmas) to the winding up and cramming nature of exam preparation in May and June. The fluctuating nature and pulse of the school year divides the seasons with certain flavours punctuating each period with its own tensions, pace and commitments. In reference to two official Kingswood school calendar documents that appear in this blog post; http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/kingswood-school-draft-timetable my "hunch" that academic downtime in education could be better used to learn in a creative context, I was able to produce a timeline to help me target specific periods of the school calendar. The dates in the documents highlighted perennial exam periods, holidays and events that had pertinence to working out the shape of the school year.

I subsequently saw the year this way:



(Larger version can be found at: http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/events-of-school-year-1-teacherstudent-view)

N.B. The timeline is based upon my teaching schedule and directly refers to the course content of the three Media Studies courses I teach at Kingswood school. I acknowledge that windows of opportunity for action vary greatly between subjects and Key stage levels on a whole school level.

At Kingswood school, the EPA (expressive performing arts department consisting of Dance, Drama, Media Studies, Art) follow this structure in terms of the vocational BTEC courses, which aid correlation in considering changing practice across the school.

In looking at the EPA year structure I divided the year horizontally into three main parts. Those parts consist of Events, Teacher, and Student sections.

"**Events**" tie in to the general makeup of the year considering holiday periods and phases of examination.

The "**Teacher**" division details the demands of delivering course content (Including exam preparation which runs into the duration of the exam period)

The "**Student**" segment looks at the rhythm of student requirements in terms of coursework and exam preparation over the entirety of the school year.

The interrelated "Biorhythms" of teacher and student downtime were clarified as a means to focus improvement in school engagement declines.

Questionnaire research

As a main component of this project I had to consider teacher and student opinion, which would help to surpass (or confirm) my own biases towards the pathway of this project. I began by profiling teaching staff within Kingswood School. Questions were presented in the form of an online survey monkey questionnaire and were completed by a cross section of colleagues from different subject disciplines that taught across secondary education key stages. The questions were posed in order to back up some ideas about the current downtime questions I was asking of the project. A quantitative approach helped to confirm ideas I had about the project.

This sample consisted of ten teachers from Kingswood school. Six were males and four were females. Many teachers were differing in subject discipline, but were handpicked as potential participants in later creative learning events. The data was used to influence reading and nuances of the project direction.

Teacher Survey Questions

Survey monkey page resides at: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/GMZTP53

1. Which key stages do you currently teach?

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	Response Percent	Response Count
Keystage 3	60.0%	6
Keystage 4	100.0%	10
Keystage 5	80.0%	8
answered question		10
skipped question		0

I was weary not to focus my research on a specific group so as to provide a stronger case to the stakeholders in my institution. All respondents taught keystage 4 (Ten) with keystage 3 and 5 being taught by six and eight teachers respectively. Some respondents taught all key stages which made their responses more valuable to the study.

2. Which subject do you teach? (Main subject)

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My research sample largely comprised of differing subjects with the exception of Media Studies (Three respondents)

Science
Design and Technology
Drama
Art and Design
Media
Media Studies
Music
Health & Social Care
Music
Media

Respondents across multiple curriculum subjects would help to give the questionnaire integrity and provide alternate outlooks on my project theme.

N.B. The sample was dominated by creative subjects, which may have had an adverse effect on the findings. This may be of significance when assessing qualities of creative approaches.

3. When do you feel most fatigued by the demands of teaching? Create Chart Download

	Response Percent	Response Count
End of term	80.0%	8
End of the week	20.0%	2
Period 5	0.0%	0
End of the school year	0.0%	0
Other (please specify) Show Responses		1
answered question		10
skipped question		0

I asked this question in order to begin the comparative study of teacher and student engagement in the context of the school calendar. The question was posed to assess the “burnout” theory carried out in my literature review (Salmela-Aro and Parker). This question confirms that fatigue for the majority of respondents (eight) occurred at the end of term.

4. Do you feel the quality of your teaching can be affected by certain events/occasions in the school calendar. i.e. Pre school holiday, The run up to Christmas, pre-exams, period 5 on a Friday etc?

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Choice	Response Count
Yes	100.0% (10) 10
No	0.0% (0) 0
answered question	10
skipped question	0

There was an unequivocal response to this question (100% said yes). I believe that the question should have had a more specific focus in whether the sample felt affected positively or negatively regarding the question. Asking respondents to decide upon which event they were most affected by and specifically how may have improved the data may have been a better question.

5. Do you change your practice near the end of term? i.e. provide more practical/creative tasks as a means to maintain student engagement?

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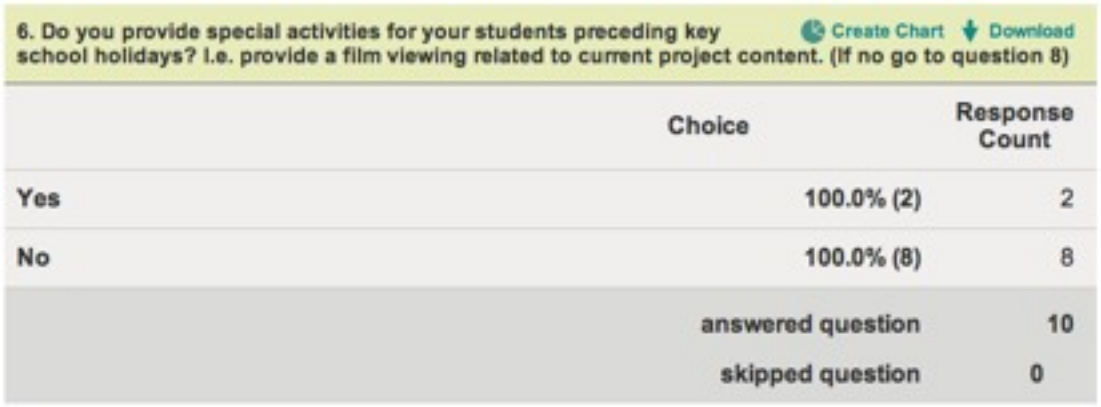
Choice	Response Count
Yes	100.0% (7) 7
No	100.0% (3) 3
answered question	10
skipped question	0

Both questions were designed to examine how teachers responded to certain phrases in the questions. Both questions have similarities in terms of content but there is an almost polar opposite response in the data.

Question 5 positively loads the question: Do you change your practice near the end of the term? And continues with positive keywords such as “Creative”

and “Student engagement” Largely the sample replies “Yes” (Seven responses) and only three of the sample answer “No”



6. Do you provide special activities for your students preceding key school holidays? I.e. provide a film viewing related to current project content. (If no go to question 8)

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Choice		Response Count
Yes	100.0% (2)	2
No	100.0% (8)	8
	answered question	10
	skipped question	0

Eight out ten participants answered in the negative whilst two teachers confirmed providing special activities such as “film viewing” to their students.

I suspect there would be a conflict in teachers responding “yes” to the question, as they would not want to bring their department into possible disrepute and to perhaps deflect the spotlight on their own practice a little.

7. If you answered yes to question 6, what sort of activities would you engage your students with ?

Download

“Less rigour, sometimes films or games console depending on year group and size of class” and “Films and creative opportunities to produce media based productions.”

Interestingly, these responses are from media teachers. Perhaps it could be argued that there is stronger justification to adopt this practice in this subject. If there were a teaching culture of showing video clips or perhaps even full media texts, there would be natural progression into providing this to the students. If for example students were nearing the end of an animation project and it was the week preceding the Christmas break, there seems logic

to showing *Tim Burton's The Nightmare before Christmas*. Other subjects may think negatively in terms of this practice, or might not get the opportunity to tie course content in with student learning as is the way with subjects tied into the national curriculum.

8. Given the chance would you value cross-curricular activities that would benefit teaching and learning at Kingswood School? Create Chart Download

Choice	Response Count
Yes 100.0% (10)	10
No 0.0% (0)	0
answered question	10
skipped question	0

One hundred percent valued the idea of cross curricular activities benefitting teaching and learning, confirming that there would be opportunity to explore this avenue in this project. In discussion with the sample of this questionnaire many were excited of the prospect of working collaboratively in terms of content generation and alongside colleagues in a lesson context.

9. How important to you are the following aspects of teaching? (1 being not important, 3 is quite important and 5 is extremely important)							
	1 - Least important	2	3 - Quite important	4	5 - Extremely important	Rating Average	Response Count
Relationship with students	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	10.0% (1)	**90.0% (9)**	4.90	10
Creativity in your teaching	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	40.0% (4)	**60.0% (6)**	4.60	10
Creativity in student learning (creative/practical tasks)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	40.0% (4)	**60.0% (6)**	4.60	10
Learning outside of the classroom	0.0% (0)	10.0% (1)	**40.0% (4)**	30.0% (3)	20.0% (2)	3.60	10
Student engagement	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	10.0% (1)	**90.0% (9)**	4.90	10
Use of digital technology	0.0% (0)	10.0% (1)	**40.0% (4)**	20.0% (2)	30.0% (3)	3.70	10
Thematic learning (immersive teaching with students and/or teachers in role)	0.0% (0)	10.0% (1)	**50.0% (5)**	30.0% (3)	10.0% (1)	3.40	10
					answered question		10
					skipped question		0

This overarching question was designed to explore importance of creative teaching elements within the psyche of the sample.

In terms of the Likert scale analysis, ninety percent of respondents felt that their “relationship with students” was extremely important. This fit in with earlier reading of building student relationships through extended creative engagement (Vogt, thematic instruction)

Sixty percent of respondents (6) thought “creativity in your teaching” was extremely important, whilst the other forty percent opted for the preceding importance value (column 4)

The sample responded identically in rating importance of “student creativity” with a sixty/forty percent divide in either “Extremely important” and the preceding rating value (column 4).

In terms of “Learning outside the classroom” the sample were more evenly split but the majority (4) chose to opt for “Quite important” in terms of ranking. I suspect logistics and red tape surrounding learning experiences outside the classroom cast negative light regarding this facet of education. In my own experience I can empathize that trying to organize external trips can be difficult to manage.

Regarding the importance of “student engagement” the majority of the sample (9) chose this option (As explored in literature review)

The majority of respondents (4) considered the use of “digital technology” quite important to teaching but there was a scattered spread of data across the board that left the result inconclusive. Had there been a larger sample there may have been a clearer result.

Lastly in this question the sample were largely in favour (fifty percent) of thematic learning with teachers and students also being immersed in a role.

10. In periods of academic downtime, (study leave/post exams etc) how do you spend the available time? (Please pick 3) Create Chart Download

	Response Percent	Response Count
Planning for lessons/researching new lesson content	100.0%	10
Catching up on marking	70.0%	7
Networking with other teachers	90.0%	9
Mentoring form members	10.0%	1
Observing colleagues lessons	30.0%	3
answered question		10
skipped question		0

This umbrella question was designed to evaluate teacher downtime usage. I wanted to know how down time was currently being spent. In terms of picking three of the options the majority of teachers opted to use their time planning (10) networking (9) and catching up on marking.

Next I surveyed students at Kingswood School as a way of garnering data for comparison purposes. The questions were posed differently but still operated within the same academic downtime sphere. The student-focused questions were designed to evaluate student perception of end of term practice.

Student survey questionnaire:

Survey Monkey questionnaire evidence: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/CH56VJL

1. Do you often feel tired at the end of school terms (I.e the last couple of weeks)? Create Chart Download

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	83.7%	36
No	16.3%	7
answered question		43
skipped question		0

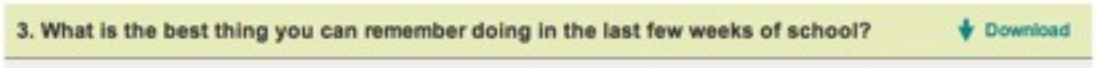
I posed this question as to assess student fatigue at the end of school terms. This was something I considered as learners may struggle to maintain engagement with the current end of term practice at Kingswood School. Thirty-six out of forty three agreed they felt tired, which is a significant percentage of students to work to engage with an alternative downtime solution.

2. Have you been in a class in which you have been shown films in the last weeks of term? (Please be truthful)

Create Chart Download

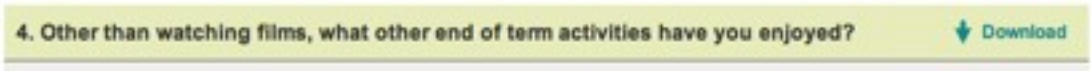
	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	76.7%	33
No	23.3%	10
answered question		43
skipped question		0

Thirty-three students said they watched films in the last weeks of term, which proves to me that many teachers are using film viewings as a way of ending school terms. (Upon reflecting upon this I do believe that in the right situation, film viewing can be an extremely positive experience but I also believe there are many more creative possibilities with the tools we have in the classroom that are not being used to their full potential.)



3. What is the best thing you can remember doing in the last few weeks of school? Download

Responses for this question were enlightening with six of the students opting to favour creative activities from previous years. There were also many students who chose to express watching films as the best end of term activity. Nine students said variants of “Watching films”. Other responses included trips and sports based activities.



I had preempted that a proportion of students would say “watching films” in the question three, so I asked them to describe alternative activities in greater detail. Responses are as follows:

“When we built a golf course on the upper school site.”

“Go on computers laptops and play games or do posters and poems. Fun things!”

“Colouring”

“Games”

“Making things in art”

“Football tournaments”

“Playing football and playing games on computers.”

“Let us play on phones or ipods and laptop.”

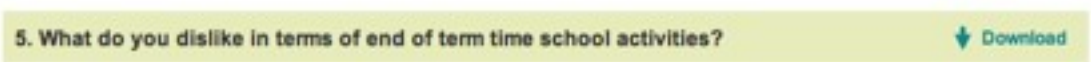
“Creating short movies and learning about games in media.”

“Word searches Played games on the computers.”

“Fun lessons”

“Drawing posters, word searches, colouring pictures.”

Creativity and play were common responses from the sample.



Answers to this question were generally critical of the level of 'fun' or engagement that current end of term activities provide. I perceive an expectation from the students that isn't currently being met by our current provision. Responses to this question included:

- Watching Films - Why come to school just to do something I can do at home?
- Sometimes they aren't as fun as sometimes thought.
- Not having a choice about what we would like to do in the lesson.
- It's the same thing just watching film and being on laptops
- Same DVD over and over again.
- It gets a bit bad and boring we should have it more fun as we have not got long left.

6. Would you enjoy the opportunity to be regularly creative at the end of school terms? Create Chart Download

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	100.0%	43
No	0.0%	0
	answered question	43
	skipped question	0

All forty-three respondents replied positively (yes) to the idea of being regularly creative at the end of school terms. This would suggest there is potential to provide creative learning opportunities on a regular basis.

7. What would you most like to do at the end of term? Download

A selection of responses handpicked from the results:

"Have a massive full size football game or creative learning"

"Have fun!"

"Play games"

"Do tech all day and make stuff in tech"

"Have trips outside of school, or have free time outside e.g. In the Courtyard, On the Tennis Courts."

"Do more fun activities in classes to make it more fun and exciting"

"Be more creative with work and have more fun than we usually do."

"Watch decent films, play games, go on the laptops/computers.

"Do art things and watch movies."

"Do work but more fun work and be more creative and arty in our work as we never involve anything arty in any of the lesson except art"

"Watch films and colour in"

"Making things"

"Active and none written work maybe new unknown sports and arts to our school"

"Keep on working if I'm honest"

The results for this question were varied, but again pointed towards activities that the students considered creative or fun. Playing games in school also featured highly on the student agenda.

Research findings

There were clear signs that there was a direct link in Student's and teacher opinion that current end of year practice developed fatigue, frustration and a need for a change. There was a tangible negativity towards the current system but to implement change I needed to develop methods that utilized aspects of creative learning that engaged students and teachers in a way that challenged and pushed all participants to develop.

My research for this project became focused into four main questions that were formulated from the results of my initial survey and research into relevant reading.

Can the natural downturn of the academic school year be better used in projects that utilize aspects of creative learning?

Are there missed opportunities for creative learning projects to evolve through utilizing resources and staff that are not being used to their full potential?

Can teachers and students build better relationships through being in thematic/narrative contexts?. i.e. Changing the relationship of teacher vs student. (Fostering facilitation rather than lecturing)

To what extent can content from non-creative subjects be taught creatively?

Exploration of these questions through an action research methodology would allow for potential academic downturn approaches to be formulated and deployed. These questions sharpened the project focus and underlie the continuing themes of the reading undertaken in the literature review.

Action research cycle 1

Phase 2 – Planning

In developing materials to test my creative learning approach to academic downtime "hunch", I planned two creative tasks that would test the viability of my proposal. Due to the time sensitive focus of this project, (i.e. aimed at changing end of term practice) and the limited timescale, I have to highlight the slight contrivance of the experiment. The "mini creative learning events" would be intended for delivery at the end of term (the last week) as provision to increase student engagement. These events were delivered within the last month of the final summer term, so I still believe there is significance in the findings. Given more time, I would have delivered all tasks over the last weeks of multiple terms and then measured the results.

Tasks display traits of Maryellen Vogt's "thematic instruction" which I use as a justification to develop creative events for this project.

I developed the dual approaches of fostering engagement in teacher and student, but split the tasks separately to garner specific participant reflections. The QR code treasure hunt sought to engage my own creativity by allowing me to explore themes and being "in role" (in a drama sense). I was attempting to engage the students in my own creative immersion and dare I say it? Enjoying the process. My research sample had clearly expressed that fun activities were at the center of their wants and needs, so I developed a digital variation on a treasure hunt theme and a reworking of the popular *Dragon's Den* show within the sphere of video games. Further planning details of the events are entwined with the action phase of the research.

Action research cycle 1

Phase 3 – Action

Deploying mini creative learning events

Mini creative learning event one

QR Treasure Code Hunt

Summary footage from this event can be found here:
http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/qr-code-treasure-hunt-video

The sample I chose for this experiment was my form group. The group consists of a mix of boys and girls from year seven to year ten. The experiment took place in form time, which lasts for twenty minutes in total.

The group was split into four equal teams and introduced to the concept of QR codes. By means of a keynote presentation and verbal instructions the group were guided by “pirate verse” in terms of conduct and behaviour expectations.

The groups were then given the initial clue, which would send them outside of the classroom in order to start the QR code treasure hunt.

The clues directed the students to retrieve QR codes that they had to return to the classroom and scan on the computers. This would then direct their web browser to a prepared website which displayed a video giving the next clue.

The students would then repeat this process until the final clue revealed the location of the prize.

Reflections on the QR code treasure hunt

This mini event was the first experiment conducted and was successful in engaging the students for its duration. In part it was designed to implement a competitive gaming aspect inside and outside of the classroom (Albeit still inside the school grounds) The emphasis for this task however was to push forward my (Teacher) creativity in the way that I generated tasks for the students to complete. I was able to stretch my creative legs, as I was able to work outside of curriculum and associated bureaucracy. There was genuine excitement in creating the video sections of the task as it taught me aspects of QR code technology, which I was then able to pass on and utilize in the classroom.

It should however be acknowledged that the development process was disproportionate in the time it took to generate the ideas and materials for the students (The development time was in total around two to three hours, but the actual time it took for the students to complete the task was around twenty minutes.). There were also some technological headaches in attempting to install the QR code applications onto the school computer system which wont let any programs be installed for fear of viruses and malware/spyware. The placing of the clues was also time and location sensitive so students didn't stumble across clues beforehand.

Connections were made with staff members that I would not normally have come into contact with that became the "guardians" of clues or prizes at the climax of the event.

Student feedback can be found at:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/qr-code-treasure-hunt-post-event-focus-group

In the slightly frenetic feedback from this session, key findings from the discussion indicated the following:

- Clues should be more challenging
- Students enjoyed leaving the classroom and being “allowed” to run around school
- Students enjoyed the process in general

(These pointers were utilized later in the planning for the similar latitude and longitude sessions within cycle two’s creative learning week)

Video Games Dragon's Den

This event consisted of the students participating in a Video Games Dragon's Den themed creative learning experience. A full class of Media Studies learners (twenty five) were involved with the sample consisting of 9 girls and sixteen boys of varying ability.

A Video Overview of the Video Games Dragon's Den process including contextual Keynote and student progress throughout the task: http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/dragons-den-draft-video-1
Group 1 Presentation resides at http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/dragons-den-presentation-group-1-thunderbolt

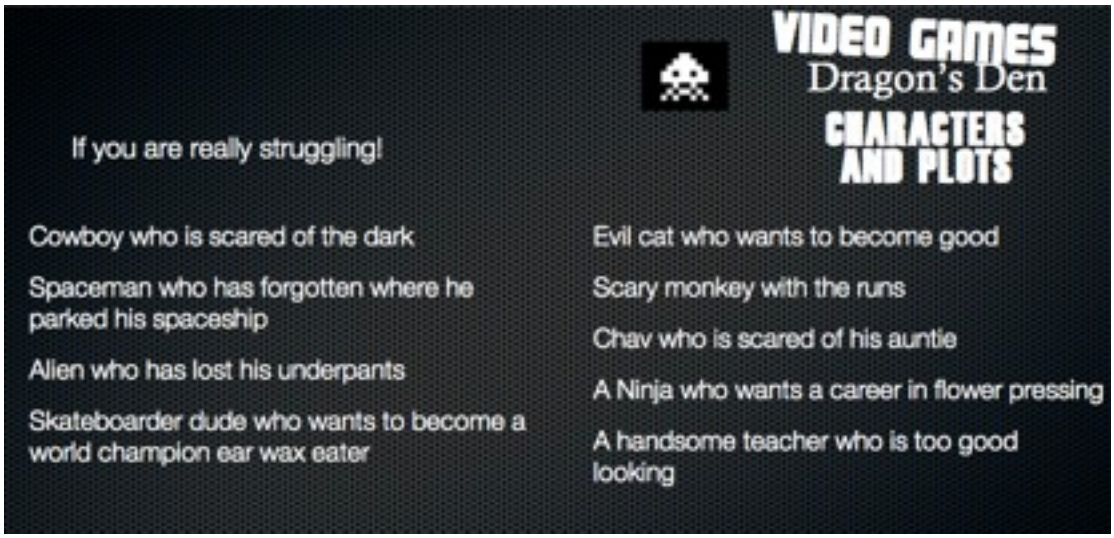
This event was introduced to students by playing them video excerpts from the BBC TV program to give the task "thematic weight". Participants were assembled into teams and had to work collaboratively to complete tasks that

were given to them on a drip feed basis. Students had to complete each task, which segmentally contributed to a final presentation that would be presented to the "Dragon" (My role in the thematic sense)

Students formed a video games production company and had three hours in which to develop the following:

- Name and Logo for their company
- Story concept/narrative elements for the game
- Game poster, box-art or website designs
- Level plan of the game (Drawn on grid paper or on macs)
- Demo level of the game in *Atmosphir* or *Sploder* (video game creation packages)
- Ongoing Keynote presentation that would be presented at the end of allotted three hours

This task demonstrated a small-scale attempt at an extended learning experience that allowed students to be creative inside competitive collaborative contexts. In small groups students developed games from scratch but low ability students were assisted with creative prompts (See below).



Whilst appealing to the students humour, this also served the dual purpose of being able to control pace and flow of the activities. As part of a differentiated approach no student could get left behind with creative aspects of the task. I had prior experience with this group and upon embedding creative tasks into the learning, I found some students expressed anxiety when being be asked to generate story ideas or being asked to draw characters.

Quantitative/qualitative summary of Dragon's Den questionnaire

Video Games Dragon's Den evaluative survey resides at this address: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/39GFN7K

The Video games Dragon's Den activity was rated "Good" and "OK' in the student survey (a combined 94.1% and the following individual rated it "awesome"). In describing the best/worst thing about the task, students largely enjoyed making their own game level but expectedly disliked the presentation aspects of the task. Level design was considered the best part of the tasks from the majority of students. Many participants wanted more time on level design, which I interpreted as a successful facet. The sample

appreciated opportunity to work collaboratively, expressing favourable comments in their answers. The students unanimously enjoyed the competitive aspects of the tasks with many instances stating that they thought it made the task fun.

Action research cycle 1

Phase 4 – Evaluation

Reflections on the process and recommendations for cycle 2

From the research undertaken in cycle one, I could recognize definite teacher and student benefits of creative learning exercises that within the academic slump periods of secondary education. I could be brave with the content I developed and whilst the tasks in this cycle dipped their toes into the remit of "Media studies" I was able to teach content not dictated by exam boards or course specifications. Students were showing signs of enjoyment and clearly enjoyed the change from everyday lessons. Video Games Dragon's Den had been successful by wrapping a thematic context around a series of mini tasks

that the students could engage with. Students were clearly “into it” and have since requested more similar activities, (also see QR code focus group video) but how significant were these tasks? Planning for future iterations could aspire to promote deeper learning content despite existing outside of specific curriculum concerns.

I reflected upon the prolonged exposure to the thematic context being important to the integrity of the event as a way of getting the students to buy into the experience. If I could organize more time, I could develop an event that bore more significance in terms of experiences and deeper learning constructs.

Opportunities to exploit learning downtime for the good of student development especially in the realms of confidence boosting and integration are worthy ideals for the further integrity of this project. Even though students are traditionally resistant to exercises that conclude in presentations, I believe there is a payoff if the main bulk of the task is seen as fun or engaging. I still considered the tasks to be a little bit too safe in their formation and wanted opportunity to be bolder with the content and push for significance in intent and philosophical groundings.

In evaluating the development time it took to create these activities I originally felt there was a disproportionate level of planning required in this instance. However in reconsideration there was a realization that I was working alone in their creation. I decided in the second cycle that I should enlist the assistance of colleagues and willing volunteers for the project.

The creative learning tasks gave me a vehicle to develop further reading and research into this project. In developing these tasks I became more confident that a large scale extended version of the creative learning event principles were the right approach to tackling academic downtime. I had set out test

principles of thematic instruction and had been rewarded with evidence that students were being engaged in creative contexts.

Action research cycle 2

Phase 1 – Research

Embedded within a later time period (two weeks preceding end of term) this cycle exists to develop principles of research undertaken within the first cycle. There is also an attempt for deeper engagement with the creative learning concepts perhaps too tentatively explored within the previous cycle. Much of this cycle involves personal reflection, which I consider a valid part of the research within my dual roles of researcher and teacher.

As a finding of the initial cycle and as a way of justifying learning principles set out in cycle one, my research continued by considering how deep learning could be cultivated as part of a larger creative learning event. My intention was to prevent criticisms of frivolity in development of content. There had to be sound learning justification to ensure a "thick skin" around the project.

Deep Learning

I began the research of this phase by applying deep learning concepts to the project in progress. The phrase "Deep learning" is attributed to Marton and Säljö who in 1976 observed differences in the ways students processed information in learning. Students who used "deep level processing" focused upon substance and meaning but also displayed a personal commitment to understand learning material.

"Deep learning is learning that takes root in our apparatus of understanding, in the embedded meanings that define us and that we use to define the world" (Tagg, 2003)

In *A new shape for schooling? Deep Learning* (2006) Hargreaves cements principles of deep learning in UK education that set to develop intrinsic

qualities of learners. He points out the need for learners to become reflective and relate knowledge to their worlds.

Sims sets out the principles of a deep learning approach thusly:

Deep approach

- Relating ideas to previous knowledge and experience
- Looking for patterns and underlying principles
- Checking evidence and relating to conclusions
- Examining logic and argument critically
- Becoming actively interested in course content

(These deep learning principles were key to the development of the creative learning week content later on in phase three of this project)

Sims argues the point that the current system of teaching is moving towards "surface learning" and is reliant on students regurgitating facts in order to pass exams. Fostering an over-reliance on the teacher to cram knowledge into learner's minds can lead to burnout (See literature review).

Even if this project was seen as an add-on to the year, if deep learning principles were embedded into the core of the planning I could be sure of rightful intentions to develop students outside of the examination remit. If it took place at the right time there would be little to argue against its presence in the school calendar.

Action research cycle 2

Phase 2 – Planning deep creative learning approaches

The plan for the creative learning event was to immerse the students in mock training days based around the *Men in Black* training facility. Students would participate in a varied curriculum of tasks/events that would be narrative led and would serve to drive deep learning in the pre-identified time period. Teachers would be in role and in place to drive the plot of the week.

Initial negotiations were made for students to participate in three consecutive days of the project so as to build a level of thematic immersion. The students would be taken off timetable and the event was partly justified as a reward for high-level student attainment. Students were briefed in role and assets to embed the thematic nature of the week were produced.

The planning process for the creative learning event was significantly fecund in terms of the addictive rush of collaborative planning with likeminded colleagues with vested interests in creative teaching and learning methods. The trans-disciplinary (Harden et al.) approach to the planning was invigorating with the involved teachers bouncing ideas back and forth nourishing the depths and complexity of the project. Initially there was an appeal to subject discipline expertise, but it became apparent that teacher engagement was stoked by encouraging ideas that were fun or mischievous in design. Elements of danger (controlled science explosions or theatrical scares that could go wrong) were discussed with refreshing vigor with sometimes no deeper purpose than “How can we REALLY scare these students?”

In terms of planning this event, it was decided that the week would follow a Science Fiction theme that borrowed significantly from films and conventions of the genre. As this project has increased student engagement as one of its ideals, I had initial concerns of the potentially male dominated source material that could turn-off female participants. My concerns were later quashed as

proven by the positivity expressed in the concluding evaluation session towards the content by female participants (See cycle two, phase four)

(Additional planning elements are intertwined with the action phase of this cycle for the purpose of brevity and to reduce repetition in the writing)

Action research cycle 2

Phase 3 – Action

Xeno academy

This section consists of highlights of content deployed for the purposes of meeting the ultimate concept of tackling student disengagement in academic downtime.

Timetable/full list of content can be found at: http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/finalized-timetable-and-week-content

Induction

The first session commenced with students taking part in an induction ceremony in which they were asked to sign up as the Kingswood Bureau of investigation faction of Xeno Academy. As a way of cementing narrative, students initially undertook a "theme embedding" enrollment /indemnity waiver form that would serve to suggest what they would be tackling in the week. (http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/kbi-enrolment-form)

The sample group was divided into four factions that consisted of ALPHA, BRAVO, CHARLIE and DELTA teams. Incorporated into the week was a competitive team based format with points awarded in each session for high-level thinking or performance.

Teams were allocated and then undertook a recruit aptitude test that would serve to commence competitive proceedings. The test was in quiz form and consisted of observational questions derived from science fiction movie trailers shown to the group. (http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/inductionmock-recruit-aptitude-test)

Induction concluded with recruits having identity photos taken for use with lanyards later received. Students were instructed to wear these lanyards at all times (even at break) so as to keep them engaged within the narrative of the week.

Recruits finally pledged allegiance in a rousing hand on heart ceremony in which they read a specially developed Xeno Academy pledge out loud in a verbatim fashion.

The induction sequence was important as a way of establishing an appropriate mode of address to the students and served to allow us as teachers (or trainers in the context of our roles) to settle in to driving the narrative. Whilst there were plenty of giggles and a few raised eyebrows, there were signs that the students were already engaged in the proceedings.

Jujitsu

Session two involved the recruits taking part in melee combat deployed by a colleague who had skills in Jujitsu. His regimented style fit into the creative learning theme and I was impressed (if not a little concerned) in the intensity of the physical aspects of the training. I had asked him to work students hard and he certainly pulled no (literal) punches in his approach. Students learnt Jujitsu techniques and competed in a small-scale tournament that awarded key recruits team points.

A few red knuckles later, students returned to base with smiles and stories of how scary the trainer was. An intention to develop the student's physical confidence was as important to me as an ideal of creative learning approaches, which I believed to have been delivered within this session. http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/jujitsu-footage

Code breaking/Latitude and longitude

The third session commenced with an audio message from "L" the chief intelligence officer of Xeno Academy. (http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/l-code-message)

This message began the first of the code breaking exercises in which recruits had to hypothesize the meaning of the numbers in the sequence. Once recruits had been guided to working out that the code was a latitude and longitude coordinate, they were then instructed to investigate the location. (http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/lattitude-and-longitude-presentation-slide) As a finding from the QR code treasure hunt carried out in cycle one, this got the students out of the classroom and into the school grounds. The students were directed to progressive points around school until they found the alien egg.

(http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/egg-discovery)

The literal gestation of the planning process laid an egg that borrowed form from the 1979 film *Alien.*

A work in progress "DAAK" alien egg ready to invade Kingswood school.

It was decided that the egg would form the basis of much student enquiry (deep learning) and dually splice the cinematic narrative, alongside the trans-disciplinary subject nature of the tasks the students completed. The alien egg was well placed to support learning within the newly un-segregated worlds of Media Studies, Biology, Drama and ancient history with the addition of Egyptian hieroglyphics to the design of the egg. The egg played a prominent part, being the focus of four sessions out of the fifteen in total.

In subsequent sessions, recruits were given the tasks of documenting the egg (learning digital SLR photography techniques such as composition, exposure and manual focus) and through the understanding of media propaganda and information control, created diversionary news reports that were intended to mislead the general public in their understanding of the events occurring at Xeno academy. (Ethical considerations were discussed with the students in terms of the role of media and propaganda concepts)

MEDIA, MISTRUTHS AND THE PROPAGANDA MACHINE

Time	Team Alpha		Team Bravo		Team Charlie		Team Delta	
	Photography	Filming	Photography	Filming	Photography	Filming	Photography	Filming
1200hrs	Introduction to session - ME2							
1215hrs	Separate groups - filming groups to ME1 with DR and RW, photography groups to ME2 with GTh and PMa Filming task: You are going to be part of a government cover up so that the public are left unaware of what is really happening. We don't want panic in the streets! It is your job to produce a news flash to be broadcast on national television playing down the event and misguiding the public... see your task page. Photography task: You need to accurately record the events of today so that our scientists can discover the eggs true meaning. It is your job to comprehensively photograph the egg using digital SLR cameras and upload the images to our mainframe... see your task page.							
1230hrs	Deploy team to site	Remain in ME1 - create back story	Deploy team to site	Remain in ME1 - create back story	Deploy team to site	Remain in ME1 - create back story	Deploy team to site	Remain in ME1 - create back story
1250hrs		Deploy team to site - film news broadcast		Deploy team to site - film news broadcast		Deploy team to site - film news broadcast		Deploy team to site - film news broadcast
1300hrs	Return to base - transfer, enhance images		Return to base - transfer, enhance images		Return to base - transfer, enhance images		Return to base - transfer, enhance images	
1310hrs		Return to base - transfer, edit footage		Return to base - transfer, edit footage		Return to base - transfer, edit footage		Return to base - transfer, edit footage
1325hrs	Upload images	Upload broadcast	Upload images	Upload broadcast	Upload images	Upload broadcast	Upload images	Upload broadcast
1330hrs	END OF MISSION - STAND DOWN							

Photo group mission orders: http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/photo-mission-orders

Film group mission orders:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/film-mission-orders
Film/photo crew diversionary news/egg documentation http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/film-crew-editing
Student Photos of egg:
http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/student-egg-photography

The first day's proceedings were collated as part of a Sci-Fi- trailer to assist the cinematic feel of the week: (http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/xeno-academy-day-one)

Day two

Parkour

Day two's physical session commenced with recruits training to produce "escape routes" that displayed qualities of parkour and free-running. Students were instructed to plan and perform a sequence that used assets from the environment around the school in case of an impromptu alien attack. This was a popular part of the week and combined physical theatre with creative narrative.

Into the epidermis

The next session consisted of a reintroduction to the egg and became pivotal in embedding drama elements into the week. In the narrative, the egg had partly hatched with remnants existing in the form of placental matter. Recruits were instructed to extract elements from the egg in order to start analysis of its contents.

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/into-the-epidermis

This section introduced the “gooier” parts of the week with the egg epidermis being explored by the students. Conclusions from this session led students into an hour dedicated to a frankly terrifying demonstration of parasitic infestations in human nature given by a science colleague. The level of student “scares” were beginning to increase and were doing the job of immersing the students deep into engagement. Students learnt a breadth of information relating effects of parasitic infestation in discussion and

observation through microscopes and supporting scientific instruments. A mouse dissection to ascertain cause of death was effective in terms of biology integration ramped up to increase intensity of learning.

Day three

Gadget prototyping

Commencing the final day was the integration of technology methods in the theme of the project. Students were required to design and prototype a device that would help to assist them in dealing with the potential alien invasion. They were instructed to develop in the following categories:

- Surveillance
- Cloaking
- Offence
- Defence

Gadget prototype designs

As a hand on experience, this was another popular session in which students got to make and do, but also deepening creative thinking in this problem based learning task.

Later sessions on the final day consisted of teacher interrogation and political ethics.

Creative Ethics

The ethics session was discussion based with students being pushed into deciding the fate of the alien DAAK planet. Questions were asked to decide whether it was right to destroy an entire planet based upon the actions of aliens they were encountering. Connections were made to highlight parity in political tensions in the Middle East with ramifications of the actions being presented incredibly coherently by the students.
http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/targeting-the-daak-planet-video
This was preceded by the sample being shown a video in which the president of the Daak Race was attempting to contact their earth dwelling comrades further embedding narrative into the teaching and learning of the week.
http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/alien-message-interception
I considered this a further development of "in role" principles garnered from the QR Code task delivered in cycle one.

Teacher interrogation

The teacher interrogation allowed students to develop thinking and questioning skills in terms of trying to work out who the body-snatched teacher was. Based in a drama context, students were given opportunity to grill teachers dynamically on the events of the days preceding the session. http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/teacher-interrogation-gareth-section. Student questioning was sophisticated, deep and probing. I believe this was due to the level of engagement the students were experiencing. This

session embodies Hargreaves's deep-learning principles perhaps most succinctly in "Relating ideas to previous knowledge", "Checking evidence and relating to conclusions", "Examining logic and argument critically".

Alien Vivisection

The week culminated in what I would consider to be the greatest experience of my teaching career. Upon ousting a teacher as an alien who had been "body snatched" he was promptly neutralized and transferred into a drama space for a live vivisection witnessed by the students. The drama space was dressed with scientific/medical iconography (EKG machines pulsed and vintage oscilloscopes formed their monochrome wave patterns) and teachers involved equally donned scrubs, lab coats and complementary paraphernalia from the genre. Convincing internals (consisting of a cluster of fennel "hearts", a cauliflower "brain" and variations of offal, pig skin and angel noodles were contextualized in a teaching sense by questioning the makeup of the aliens biological defenses. I was in role as the anesthetist, which allowed me to control the pace and the visuals of the session through my laptop connected to the projector. Of course there had to be a climax and the mischievous side of me planned an intense scare in which the alien hearts went into cardiac arrest. The EKG machine (Projected large scale for the purposes of the drama) developed a fault and plunged the theatre space into darkness at a crucial point in the vivisection process.

The alien torso came alive and grabbed the teacher acting as surgeon. Delicious, rewarding, theme park style exhilaration ensued as the screams testified the deepest level of student engagement I had ever witnessed. The breadth of knowledge and what I witnessed to be true "deep learning" felt truly inspirational and changed my perspective on teaching for the better.

Full vivisection sequence resides at: http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/alien-vivisection-sequence

Action research cycle 2

Phase 4 – Evaluation

In evaluating this cycle there were was an almost intimidating amount of data to consider for the purposes of integrating deep learning within creative learning approaches.. Student focus groups were conducted alongside teacher interviews.

Student Evaluation videos:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/student-evaluation-part-1

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/student-evaluative-focus-group-part-2

Written transcription:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/student-evaluation-transcript

Key findings:

The evaluation cemented that attempts to implement aspects of deep learning were successful in approaches to effectuating engagement. For the purposes of improving academic downtime, student evaluation evidence was strong in terms of enjoyment feedback but there was also discussion that some students preferred this learning method to everyday teaching practice (perhaps the novelty aspect of this experience would grow weary if extended past the duration of this particular project. It was certainly exhausting in a teacher sense). There were no apparent "burnout" issues in the students and enthusiasm for the project was high. Responses were mature in discussing future creative learning week developments with students thinking logistically about experiences that would be delivered In a whole school sense. In asking the students whether they thought the project would work on a larger scale, discussion covered how story elements would need to be delivered simultaneously so as not to spoil plot developments. The students were split in whether they thought it would work. Levels of story scares were also discussed as a key asset to the project in terms of the vivisection and general tension delivery. Future themes offered up by the students for potential creative learning week content were that of Cluedo/Murder Mystery events, time travel/*Back to the future* experiences and paranormal/*Ghostbusters* themes. Opportunities for increasing confidence were also appreciated in terms of mixing the year group teams. It helped students mix with students older than themselves. Reflection equally included ways in which students commented on learning things in different ways.

Teacher interviews and reflection of the process exist at:
http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/teacher-focus-group-part-1
http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/teacher-focus-group-part-2

(Findings from this will be explored and discussed as part of the following exhibition module five)

Personal Reflection

This cycle, whilst intense and demanding of increased work output became an incredibly rewarding development of the principles set out in this project. From positive relationships made with students to the revelations of the amazing talents of colleagues unseen in the confines of everyday teaching practice. The freedom to teach content in this fashion is liberating and inspiring to be a part of, but to actually lead a successful manifestation of a creative learning week is simply sublime. The involvement of colleagues collaboratively increased the quality of content substantially and has already strengthened networks inside and outside of the staffroom.

The role of drama pedagogy to allow deepened learning was a real revelation and the organic growth it allowed the project to exibit was truly exhilarating. The week became more drama based than I had initially anticipated with input from the Drama faculty. Whilst my mind was set to keep a pacey delivery, concerned with cramming information into the theme (Perhaps even didactically) Drama teachers were rightfully slowing down the pace exploring every angle to deepen the immersion and contemplative aspects of the three days. I will admit to resisting this approach (being unforgivably possessive) until I saw the experience flourishing through drama pedagogy. I was myself encouraged to explore knowledge by improvising ideas relating to the Sci-Fi theme. This unexpected benefit of this was my own teacher involvement that I perceived to drive a cycle of engagement between student and teacher alike. I reflected that this “feedback loop” of engagement increased the intensity of the experience for both sides of participants.

Final Conclusion

Through the research, planning and development of this project, I believe that the justification for tackling academic downtime with the complementary benefits of creative learning approaches is clear. Given the opportunity endorsed by a progressive educational management team, there are real benefits to providing memorable learning experiences for our learners. Deep learning opportunities that equally support teaching and learning within trans-disciplinary contexts improve support networks and whole school development.

The inextricable end of term burnout experienced by teachers and students has been considered in a way that benefits both parties. Through the findings in this project I do not think there is value in passivity exercises for the end of term “troughs” in the year. I believe that we need to fully engage learners with alternative experiences that develop deep intrinsic learning qualities and also inspire us as teachers to create and discover in ways we readily convey to our students. Through planning creative learning events there are obvious benefits of stronger cross-curricular networks and better working relationships all round.

For both teachers and students, I am proposing that through this project I have justified a temporary revision from the practice and conventions inherent to the current end of term practice. Through my primary and secondary research I think there is value in allocating time to be brave with identified low output periods of the school calendar. I believe there is also significance in providing alternative ways for learning to be presented to students. Increased Student engagement may be justifiable by itself but added deep learning experiences are undeniably valuable to all stakeholders. The value is experiential and I believe that prolonged immersive experiences with

teachers and students collaboratively bringing knowledge to the classroom in a creative context is an invaluable opportunity that should be seized with all hands (small or grown up)

I am mindful of resistance and complications in proposing large scale changes to educational practice especially when considering the politics and potential problems when integrating subjects and individuals in a cross curricular sense, but giving teachers opportunity to carry and dictate their own part in the creative learning planning would allow greater integration of teacher expertise (within a thematic context) and hence a greater potential for enjoyable creative experiences. We also rarely get opportunity to deliver content alongside our colleagues, which this opportunity would afford us.

We owe it to ourselves and our students to reward the hard work that teaching and learning demands with a change in pace, delivery and sense of fun in the deep engagement that a creative learning week can offer.

If we can gear up to captivate instead of winding down to pacify, the troughs of academic downtime could ascend and ultimately become the peaks of creative engagement uptime.

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Appendix

Entire project archive resides at:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/

Full archive of Creative learning week (Xeno Academy) photos:

http://www.flickr.com/photos/kingswoodepaarchive/sets/72157627170723550/

Assorted iPhone photos from Xeno academy day three:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/more-pics-n-vids-day-3

Xeno Academy week In progress trailer (Day one):

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/xeno-academy-day-one

Backwards alien message:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/alien-audio-message

Amazon materials order:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/shopping-list-tbc

Xeno ID Matrix site:

http://xenoidmatrix.posterous.com/

Hieroglyphics and Papyrus materials:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/hieroglyphics-and-papyrus

Sci-fi prototyping examples:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/gadget-design-prototypes

Media Mistruths and propaganda:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/media-mistruths-and-the-propaganda-machine

Photo mission orders:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/photo-mission-orders

Film mission orders:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/film-mission-orders

End of term student survey monkey questionnaire:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/CH56VJL

Video Games Dragon's Den presentation:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/dragons-den-presentation-group-1-thunderbolt

Kingswood school “exploding” composite test:
http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/composite-test
Breaking video game news:
http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/breaking-video-game-news-print
Video Games Dragon’s Den Evaluation questionnaire:
http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/39GFN7K
Kingswood School term dates:
http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/kingswood-school-draft-timetable
Video Games Dragon’s Den process (Edited):
http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/dragons-den-draft-video-1
QR code treasure hunt focus group:
http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/qr-code-treasure-hunt-post-event-focus-group
QR Code process (Edited)
http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/qr-code-treasure-hunt-video
Initial Xeno academy Artwork
http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/xeno-academy-artwork-batch-1-74711
KBI enrollment form:
http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/kbi-enrolment-form
Teacher end of term questionnaire
http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/GMZTP53

Standalone QR Treasure code clue example:
http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/clue-5
Xeno Academy Student list: http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/student-list
Xeno Academy (KBI division) invites:
http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/xeno-academy-invites
Initial planning materials:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/creative-learning-week-draft-planning

Highlighting of periods for academic downtime:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/events-of-school-year-1-teacherstudent-view

Creative learning week teaser poster one:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/teaser-poster-2

Creative learning week teaser poster two:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/teaser-poster

Initial creative learning week teacher meeting:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/creative-learning-event-planning-meeting-1-un

Induction/Recruit mock aptitude test presentation:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/inductionmock-recruit-aptitude-test

Lattitude and Longitude presentation

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/lattitude-and-longitude-presentation-slide

EKG Meter for vivisection session

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/ekg-meter-for-vivisection

Targeting the DAAK home planet

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/targeting-the-daak-planet-video

Xeno Academy pitch/meeting to colleagues:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/xeno-academy-introductory-meeting

Teacher focus group part one:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/teacher-focus-group-part-1

Teacher focus group part two:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/teacher-focus-group-part-2

Student focus group video part one:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/student-evaluation-part-1

Student focus group video part two:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/student-evaluative-focus-group-part-2

Student focus group video part three:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/student-evaluative-focus-group-part-3

Full edited alien vivisection sequence:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/alien-vivisection-sequence

“L” intelligence audio file:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/l-code-message

Jujitsu footage

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/jujitsu-footage

Film/photo mission footage:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/film-crew-editing

Egg discovery (From latitude/longitude task):

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/egg-discovery

Student egg photography:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/student-egg-photography

Into the epidermis video:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/into-the-epidermis

Finalized timetable and week content:

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/finalized-timetable-and-week-content

Teacher interrogation (Gareth)

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/teacher-interrogation-gareth-section

Abridged transcript of student evaluation

http://creativelearningweek.posterous.com/student-evaluation-transcript

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