Wyke 6th Form College: Scattergun technology - ensuring something for everyone

Summary

Project funding enabled Chris Tansey to try out a new approach in implementing mobile learning projects. Rather than focusing on one or two technologies, Chris adopted a 'scattergun' approach and bought one of many types of technology. This created something for everyone and ensured that the technology was used in “every single lesson, every single day”. Chris works with students with learning difficulties and disabilities (SLDD). The technology has given the students new confidence, not only in using technology but also in working with each other. The approach has increased motivation in his students and won Chris a Handheld Learning Award.

About Wyke 6th Form College

Wyke 6th Form College opened in 1988 and offers a range of courses, mainly for 16-19 year-olds. Wyke is based in west Hull. Chris Tansey, Leader of Wyke Foundation Learning Tier Courses, works with learners with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) and students with learning difficulties and disabilities (SLDD).

The challenge

The aim of the LSC’s Learning for Living and Work project was to provide funding for equipment for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in order to increase their confidence, independence and opportunities for employment. Chris Tansey wanted to make sure that the equipment purchased would be of most benefit to his group of learners. His enthusiasm for gadgets meant he was interested in many different types of technology and so, with help from his local Jisc Regional Support Centre, he was able to put together a successful bid that included all the technologies he wanted.
The activity

Chris's approach was different. Instead of focusing on one or two types of technology, he decided to get one of many kinds of technology because he 'loves gadgets'. This could have been uncoordinated but his local Jisc Regional Support Centre demonstrated the many types of technology available and how equipment can complement each other. Mobile phones, iPods, digital cameras all connect to laptops, Tablet PCs and ultra mobile PCs (UMPCs). Digital still images or videos can be manipulated on the computer or loaded on the iPod to be more portable.

Chris also involved his students in deciding which technology to buy. Many do not have computers at home so “it was things like the Wii and the UMPCs, Nintendo DS Lite and the video cameras that really excite them and they want to use them.” Chris was “reading between the lines to see what would make them come to college…bits of technology that otherwise they wouldn't be able to get their hands on.” The result was that there were many types of technology for the students to use to learn in a different way.

Some of Wyke’s technology collection
The outcomes

Chris uses the technology in all lessons: “We do use them every single day – sometimes for Maths, sometimes for creative things”. A main part of Chris’s teaching is in Life Skills – basic time management, money management, getting from A to B – things that Chris says are “not so natural to these students”. He has found that the format of the technologies is particularly suited to his learners. For example, the Smartphone enables those that have problems manipulating a keyboard to use the touch screen instead.

The impact

Student enthusiasm for learning
The students are enthusiastic about the technology and are using the equipment “in every single lesson, every single day.” The range of equipment has meant that there is ‘something for everyone’ to suit their learning needs.

Student self-confidence has been raised
Formats such as touch screen technology and the Nintendo Wii are especially suited to his students, with the resulting impact on raised confidence. Chris outlines how one particular student has benefited:

“He didn’t really get on with computers. He found it very confusing. But with [the touchscreen Smartphone], he uses it a lot – he says, ‘it’s like you can touch the internet’. He felt he was in control because he could use his fingers to flick through and make it bigger.” The technology no longer allows the student to be overwhelmed by the task.

The technology allows greater flexibility
Chris comments “the different bits of equipment went together well…digital cameras are used for providing evidence and they support the laptops. We hook the iPods up to the laptops – they’re mobile and can be used anywhere. We take them out with us.”

Improved relationships amongst the students
The students work and play together using the technology, which aids their social development. Students ask to use the Nintendo Wii in breaks. Building relationships is especially important to these students. Chris outlines how “it gets them talking and interacting, building friendships, working in teams, having fun, which I believe is a huge part of learning and college life.”

The technology can push the students further
Chris has seen what the students are capable of achieving using the technology and he is now planning a major project to bring all the impacts of using the technology together. The students will use the equipment to produce artwork and also to arrange the project. They will “work as a team, a business, and arrange everything that is involved in putting on an exhibition.”
Organisational impact
The equipment has increased interest in his department from other parts of the college. Chris explains how “everyone was buzzing” when the equipment arrived. Financially, the technology he has chosen will not have a major budgetary impact, as software updates are low cost.

Chris’s methods in using the technology won him a Handheld Learning Award in October 2008 in the Special Needs Practitioner Award category.

Case study update
Since the original purchase of a selection of gadgets, Chris has continued to use technology with his Entry Level students on a daily basis and has found that he “continues to learn experientially through both setbacks and successes.”

Learning through play
Recent purchases and applications include new software for the Wii, which has encouraged students to ‘play’ academic games while in a college environment, to “increase confidence with literacy and numeracy and improve reaction times.”

Industry-standard software has been introduced through the Apple Mac in a simple, fun way by teaching “what students need to know first” then “allowing them to explore when they feel more confident.” Students who have missed lessons, or have problems engaging with others, initially make use of personal DVD players to catch up and engage with media in alternative formats. A major project this year has been for each student to create elements for an exhibition utilising digital video and stills cameras with tripods to capture evidence from a variety of subjects.

Learner enthusiasm and motivation
The result has been that many students have developed a new interest in finding technological solutions and gadgets, which they share with Chris as well as their fellow classmates. The students’ enthusiasm and excitement for learning remains high through the use of technology to support and enhance learning. However, Chris has noticed that some are now even “beginning to take ownership of their own learning process and journey.” Through the generation of evidence for an exhibition and use of group games on the Wii, the learners have developed team and collaborative working skills; aiding their social development, including one student who “wouldn’t engage with the rest of the group but, through constant exposure to group activities and games, started to participate first in fun, extra curricula activities and then academic tasks.”

Learner confidence
The biggest impact remains the improvement in the students’ confidence levels though the use of technology – especially when it reduces/removes barriers. Chris has seen evidence of this through the increase in communication between the students and himself and the greater level of self-expression, “as they have
confidence in their own thoughts and opinions.” Chris has found that using gadgets in the classroom to reduce barriers with learners from special schools, who have different needs and expectations, is particularly helpful because they begin to “feel they can do things, and then tell others about it too”, which is essential to moving on and succeeding after they leave the course.

Useful links

Wyke 6th Form College

Video case study of Chris Tansey talking about his work

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