

Teacher Lucy Hinchliffe's Top 10 Takeaways From the Project

Working with my Year 9 students, and as a Department, on this EMC project gave me lots of new ideas and insights into what we should be doing at KS3, as well as how we should be doing it. Here are my top 10 takeaways, in a nutshell.

1. Students can generate ideas themselves.

With the right teacher planning, questions and guidance along with some rich material, it's surprising just how original and articulate your students can be.

2. The teacher doesn't always have the right answer. They're not the only expert in the room.

Moments of brilliance spoken by one student can lead to your next lesson's planning. Studying a text is a joint venture as a class and valuing students' ideas (not completely uncritically, of course) as much as your own is crucial.

3. Talking about texts improves confidence. Improved confidence in talking about texts means improved confidence in writing about texts.

It might be cheesy but I've seen it with my own eyes – quiet pupils gaining the confidence to make their voices heard and the superior quality of the writing that comes from testing out their ideas verbally first.

4. Boys (and girls) like to explore.

Boys don't just like 'a clear structure' and they aren't just 'motivated by competitiveness' which are some of the typical narratives delivered in CPD about boys' learning. In fact, boys enjoy exploratory talking and writing, they enjoy being asked their opinion and what they like. And, when asked to write about it, they produce some brilliant pieces. So do girls, incidentally.

5. Teaching off scheme isn't a crime – the opposite in fact.

What's so bad about off-roading when it's productive? If your department, like mine, shares schemes of work, that doesn't mean we shouldn't be responsive to what happens in lessons, and play on what students have found interesting to take a little detour. Detours are sometimes where the most important learning happens.

6. Learning happens when pupils think.

Maybe not the most surprising of statements, but one that's really struck home for me. Scaffolding to the point of removing the thinking does not a learning student make.

7. Creative writing is a fantastic way in to critical writing.

In getting to know and understand a writer and what is special about their work, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery (and one of the most useful lead-ups to critical writing).

8. PEE, PEA, PETAL, PEETAL structures are limiting.

And by limiting, I mean in length, scope and ideas. Students find it difficult to communicate their ideas in this structure because in a lot of cases, it's not idea-focused. When you free them from this, that's where the magic happens.

9. Group work doesn't mean 'get on with this without my help or involvement'.

Quite the contrary, in fact. It needs careful planning and structuring to pull it off. It requires a confident teacher who knows where they want pupils to be by the end of the lesson and a clear idea of the interventions and shaping needed to get them there.

10. 'Group work' isn't some odd, once-in-a-while thing.

It's continuous and evolving. It's not 'let's do groupwork™ today', it's 'which parts of my lesson today will benefit from group work or talk, and which won't?' and 'where should I position this group work for maximum impact for my students' learning?' then 'what next?'

