

An independent evaluation of the Innovation Unit's 'Learning through REAL Projects' programme (A Project Based Learning approach).

Submission date 03/03/2015	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	<input type="checkbox"/> Prospectively registered <input type="checkbox"/> Protocol
Registration date 10/03/2015	Overall study status Completed	<input type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Results
Last Edited 07/05/2021	Condition category Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Innovation Unit has developed a Project Based Learning intervention called 'Learning through REAL projects'. Broadly speaking this involves teachers designing and planning projects which enable pupils to produce a publicly-exhibited output such as a product, publication, or presentation by working through project content. The intervention (or programme) has minimum requirements for the organisation of the school, staffing and the curriculum as well as classroom practices during REAL projects lessons; all of these factors can be significantly different to normal school practice. This evaluation aims to look at whether this intervention improves literacy outcomes for pupils and whether it increases their engagement with school and learning. It also aims to look assess the potential adoption of this model in schools. The project has a one-year initial phase which will be an intervention development and pilot phase (2013/14). The second phase will include the main impact study (one year - 2014/15) and will look at how the intervention works (two years 2014 - 2016).

Who can participate?

Innovation Unit will work with 8 state-funded secondary schools for the pilot phase – all of which will introduce the intervention in 2013/14. Innovation Unit will then recruit 24 further state-funded schools for the main trial – 12 will offer the intervention in 2014/15 and 12 will act as control schools with the option of implementing the intervention in future years. All pupils in year 7 in participating schools will take part.

What does the study involve?

The eight schools recruited for the pilot phase of the project use the Learning through REAL projects teaching method with Year 7 pupils. Innovation Unit provides training and support to these school and will learn from any issues that schools have. The research evaluation team feeds back to Innovation Unit based on observations and interviews with pupils and teachers. Year 7 pupils in all school complete literacy assessments as well as a survey about attitudes to and engagement with school and learning. This allows the research team to look at how well the

assessments work as well as trialling some of the procedures for the main study. For the main study phase the 24 schools recruited are randomly allocated to using the Learning through REAL Projects approach during 2014/15 or to being part of the comparison group during this year which continues with normal schooling. School implementing the approach start this with pupils in September 2014 with training and support provided by Innovation Unit starting in February 2014. The intervention involves schools offering at least 20% of their Year 7 lessons as 'Learning through REAL Projects' lessons. This involves teachers designing projects for pupils that are focused on answering a key question, which cover curriculum content and end with pupils producing a publically exhibited output . At the end of the academic year, all pupils in intervention and comparison schools complete a literacy assessment and an engagement survey. We will look at whether pupils in schools who used the new approach performed better on the assessment and whether they were more engaged with school and learning.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

The Learning through REAL Projects intervention provides schools with a high level of professional development for teachers and for school leaders to help them to implement the programme. This professional development includes support on organisational set up and making organisational change as well as classroom practices, assessment and teacher development. Schools could benefit from the expertise provided by this programme which has been successfully implemented in the US. The developers expect that in schools where the intervention is being implemented pupils will increase their interest and engagement with learning and teachers will improve their teaching practices. The programme also aims to cover key curriculum content in a deeper way than normal teaching so pupils should have a more in depth knowledge of the curriculum content. Participating in the study will enable us to add to the research evidence as to whether this method of teaching would improve learning and engagement in schools. While similar programmes have been successful in the US, there is limited evidence so far as to how well they might work in the UK. As these lessons take a significant portion of the curriculum time there would be a risk that pupils in schools where the programme is running may not achieve at the level they are capable of. The change to teaching practices may have a negative impact on pupil learning due to teachers being unsure of delivering lessons in this new way. The changes to timetabling may also cause difficulty for timetabling further up the school.

Where is the study run from?

The independent evaluation is being conducted by Durham University and the University of York. The recruitment of schools and support for running the intervention is the responsibility of Innovation Unit.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to last?

January 2013 to December 2016.

Who is the study funded by?

Educational Endowment Foundation (UK)

Who is the main contact?

Dr Andy Wiggins

Contact information

Type(s)

Public

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Scientific

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number

N/A

Study information

Scientific Title

An independent evaluation of the impact of the Innovation Unit's 'Learning through REAL Projects' programme (a Project Based Learning approach) on Year 7 pupils' literacy skills and engagement with school using a cluster randomised controlled trial design.

Study objectives

1. What is the impact on learning (literacy) for the participating pupils?
2. What is the impact on engagement in school and in learning for the participating pupils?
3. What is the potential for wider adoption of the intervention in schools?

Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

Board of Ethics for the School of Education, Durham University, 20/11/2012

Study design

Cluster Randomised Control Trial following a pilot/development year.

Primary study design

Interventional

Study type(s)

Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Education trial

Interventions

Intervention: This project-based learning intervention involves Year 7 being taught through a structured 'project' approach involving well-planned projects on relevant topics that aim to engage pupils. Projects are designed by teachers to include core curriculum content and are based around a driving question to be investigated by pupils, culminating in a public exhibition of work. Projects involve student-led inquiry, multiple drafts of work and critique being used in the classroom. The intervention involves specific requirements for schools on timetabling and staffing including longer lesson times for PBL lessons, PBL lessons taking 20% of the curriculum and the involvement of the English department in the project team. This PBL intervention is called 'Learning through REAL Projects' and will be delivered by 'Innovation Unit' who are responsible for providing a high level of professional development and support for schools involved. The research team will feed back to the Innovation Unit during the development period in order to improve the programme so it can be effectively implemented in a wide range of schools, and can be replicated.

Control: Business as usual.

Intervention Type

Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)

Pupil scores on the "Progress in English 12" assessment at the end of the intervention year (2014-15)

Key secondary outcome(s)

1. Pupil responses to an 'Engagement with School and Learning' survey, delivered at the end of the intervention year
2. Pupil attendance (percentage of possible sessions attended) for the first two terms of the school year (obtained through National Pupil Database)

Completion date

31/12/2016

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

1. Any Year 7 pupils at participating schools
2. Schools will be eligible to take part if they are state secondary schools willing to be randomised to implementing the Innovation Unit's intervention (and pay a contribution of £10,000) or to be part of the 'business as usual' control group

3. Schools must willing to undertake all related research procedures and must have the capacity (as assessed by Innovation Unit) to deliver the intervention particularly regarding changes to curriculum and staffing involved

Participant type(s)

Other

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Child

Sex

All

Key exclusion criteria

Eligible pupil whose parents do not wish their child's data to be used for the study

Date of first enrolment

01/01/2013

Date of final enrolment

27/01/2014

Locations

Countries of recruitment

United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre

Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring at Durham University

Mountjoy Centre

Stockton Road

Durham

United Kingdom

DH1 3UZ

Study participating centre

York Trials Unit

University of York

York

United Kingdom

YO10 5DG

Sponsor information

Organisation

Durham University

ROR

<https://ror.org/01v29qb04>

Funder(s)

Funder type

Charity

Funder Name

Education Endowment Foundation (UK)

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

IPD sharing plan summary

Other

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Funder report results		01/11/2016	07/05/2021	No	No