

## Changing the climate for learning at Repton School

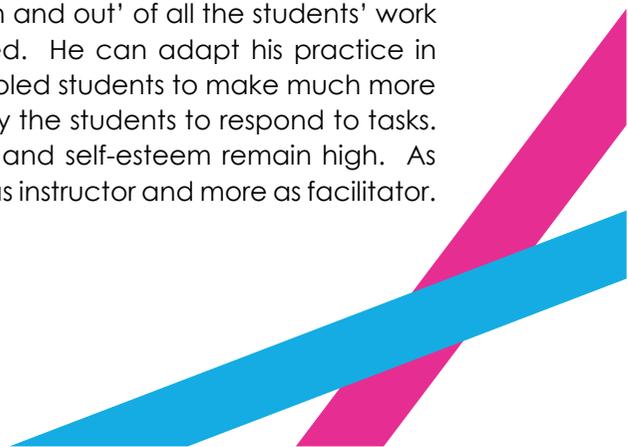
Repton School, Derbyshire, became a Microsoft Showcase School in 2015. At that time James Wilton, who was then Head of the English department, made the decision to trial the use of digital technology in his classroom. He believed that this would lead to greater engagement from students and that it could have a positive impact on student outcomes. James believed the time was right to take this sort of risk with his practice as he had several years of experience of teaching the examination courses and his own knowledge of how to use the IT was secure.

In 2016-17, James used OneNote with two Year 12 classes to deliver their A-Level coursework lessons. OneNote provided the platform for all resources and for live feedback to students. All lessons were planned and delivered using the programme and more significantly, all the work they did in class whether on the smartboard, on laptops or on paper was captured and put into students' online exercise books or the content library on the group OneNote. It meant that the students had a repository for all the collective knowledge of the class over time. James reflects that it took around 7 weeks for students to become comfortable with a new way of working, but once they saw the benefits there could be no return to the previous style of working.

The following year James undertook a larger scale piece of work with a high ability year 11 class. All examined work and coursework was delivered through OneNote. Initially the model was one of James delivering lessons through the medium, however, lessons became increasingly collaborative with James finding his role moved from that of instructor to facilitator. Against the MIDYIS data the class secured a value added of 1.7 in the final exams. James was convinced that the digital technology was enabling his high ability students to achieve better outcomes.

The next step was to demonstrate that similar results could be secured with lower ability students. 2018-19, James used the same methods with a lower ability and against MIDYIS the class secured a value-added score of 1.24. The use of EdTech has impacted beyond grades. When working through OneNote, students have taken far greater ownership of their work. The technology allows them to share and record everything they produce in class whether that is work the class have co-constructed with James on the smartboard, in the collaboration space or individually.

The most interesting impacts have been on the pedagogical practices employed by James. As he can 'dip in and out' of all the students' work at any point throughout the lesson he has found his formative assessment practices have been finely honed. He can adapt his practice in response to learner needs within the lesson. This minute by minute approach to formative assessment has enabled students to make much more rapid progress. In addition, the use of the Microsoft 365 software has increased the variety of methods used by the students to respond to tasks. This means James can differentiate by task, differentiation is less obvious and consequently student morale and self-esteem remain high. As students became more familiar with OneNote, James discovered that increasingly his role in the lesson was less as instructor and more as facilitator.





Co-construction has become a feature of all lessons, and this feeds positively into the student sense of ownership described above. As a result of these pedagogical shifts, the culture of the classroom has changed immeasurably.

Beyond pedagogy, the impact of EdTech has been most noticeable in terms of well-being, for the teacher and the students. James reports feeling a greater level of control over his work. He has been able to redirect his time towards the high leverage activities that make the most difference to students. More time in class is spent assessing formatively whilst the students are with him and can directly benefit from his feedback in the moment. Less time is spent marking after the lesson, when arguably the point at which it could impact on student learning has passed. As students feel in control of their work, their anxiety levels have reduced. They never leave the classroom unsure of what they have learnt that day. They are part of a continuous feedback system and can ask questions of the teacher through OneNote without the potential embarrassment of alerting their peers to their misconceptions. This in turn has led to greater participation rates with homework.

Since the start of this academic year James has been promoted to the school's senior leadership team as Director of Digital Development. He is now working with staff on a range of projects across every academic department designed to replicate the successes he saw through his own projects. In addition, he has just become one of the countries only Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert Fellows, tasked with sharing his work across the Midlands region and nationally.

What can we learn from Repton?

- Success is much more likely when you are operating in a school in which the leadership team has 'bought-in' to the digital agenda. As Repton were already a Microsoft Showcase School their buy-in was clear.
  - Take calculated risks with your practice: ensure that any risks you take are guided by the fundamental principle that changes will improve student ownership and outcomes, there is no point using digital technologies for their own sake.
  - Start small, think big.
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