Racing CPD

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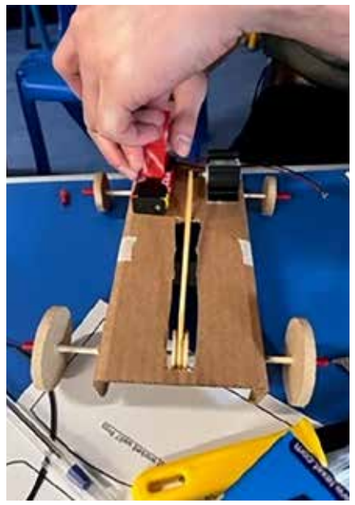
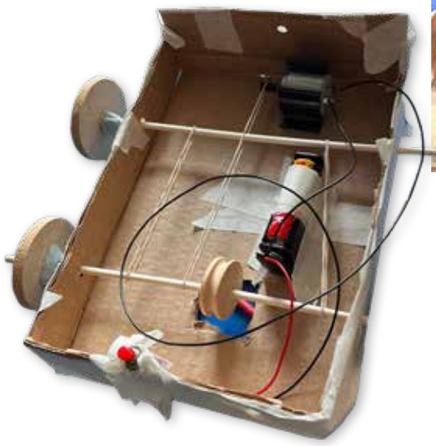


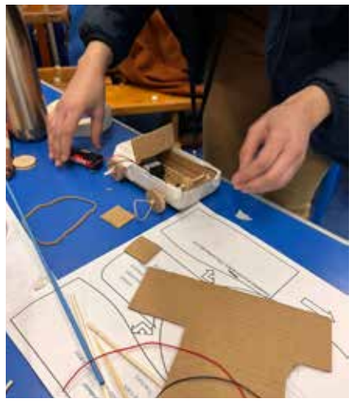


I loved D&T when I was in school and whilst I don't remember much about primary school, I do have fond memories of making a keyring out of acrylic in secondary school. Design was my passion and I remember digging my heels in when my mum wanted to send me to an all-girls secondary school that didn't teach D&T, as it was seen as a 'boys' subject. Luckily, my mum listened to me and sent me to a mixed school, which taught everyone D&T, regardless of gender. Thankfully, education has moved on a lot since then and D&T is taught to everyone as part of the National Curriculum.

New subject lead

I have now been appointed the Design and Technology subject lead for a large Catholic primary school in Outer London. When I was asked to take on the role I was nervous, as the pandemic had hit the creative subjects hard. D&T is a challenging subject to teach remotely, where resources in the home are limited, so I needed to raise its profile and my subject knowledge quickly. I found a subject leadership course run by the Design and Technology Association and booked myself on. This really helped me to understand the fundamentals of the subject leadership of D&T, learning how to plan D&T effectively and discovering first-hand how it should be taught. Despite the effective training, I still faced a major problem: D&T is resource-heavy and time-heavy. Previous experience of teaching 90 six-year-olds to sew finger puppets not only brought me to tears but made me realise we needed to do things differently. Raising the profile of my subject, whilst getting people enthusiastic about D&T was going to be tricky, but then the solution came to me in a flash... remote control cars and races across the hall!

On the training course I experienced D&T as a student and it was eye-opening, so I decided to run a CPD session for all staff on the next INSET day, to enable them to experience what I had – taking part in a lesson where they would be the children. I explained the principles of D&T, that we were looking for teamwork, innovation, problem-solving and creativity, and set them a challenge to create an axel and wheelbase for a toy car. Some very elaborate cars were designed initially, some with racing stripes and even a horse-drawn carriage which seemed great until I told them to add a motor and battery pack! Setting new challenges along the way required the 'students' to think on their feet and problem-solve. I gave them a variety of different ways to connect and fix their cars in order to support those who needed help, but ultimately the resources they chose were up to them. When they were almost finished, I added the requirement of a switch. By this point however, the staff were so enthusiastic, determined and competitive that they quickly set about making the necessary modifications.



Finally, with the furniture cleared and a masking tape finish line in place, the race was on!

The day was so much fun and by allowing the staff to experience what D&T should be – trial and error, problem-solving, innovation and teamwork – I hope to have created a new enthusiasm for a sometimes over-looked subject.

Learning curves

So, what was the point of racing cars across the hall? D&T can easily become prescriptive, asking children to 'copy' building models step-by-step and resulting in 30 identical models but sadly no thought for the user, function or purpose. This CPD session aimed to show everyone that D&T could be innovative and enabled great teamwork through creating problems for them to solve. One learning point for me was that while everyone was having fun, concentrating their efforts on making the cars, nobody completed the 'design, evaluate template' that I had given them, so this is something to address in future lessons with the children.

Everyone had approached the task differently: some sat and talked in their teams, designing the wheelbase before making it; others dived straight in and started building; some went for strong aesthetics; some focused on the 'bones' of the car. Some people found the challenge easy whilst some struggled. The teachers could see how each of them represented a child in a D&T lesson: the child that loves to build and invent; the child that struggles with fiddly bits; the child that wants to be in charge and the child that sits back and is shy. They are now going forward ensuring their teaching meets the needs of all of those children.

Moving forward, we have adapted the long-term planning to ensure full coverage of D&T across every key stage. Knowledge organisers and lesson sequences are in the process of being re-written to support the teachers in their planning and to ensure full coverage of the different aspects of D&T. Prescriptive lessons are a thing of the past. There is a strong focus on the progression of skills throughout the school, from Reception to Year 6 and teachers are planning exciting lessons that allow us to work around the constraints of time and money. We are inspiring our children to be innovative and creative and as a result of this, our children and staff are excited about D&T again, and I am proud to be leading this positive change.

I like the whole process: making a plan, testing it out with a prototype and then making a final product (Year 4 pupil)

I love trying different things (Year 2 pupil)

We can apply lots of the skills we learnt in the subject to our everyday life! (Year 3 pupil)

I enjoy D&T because its interactive and you learn life skills (Year 6 pupil)

Link

Primary Subject Leadership course: www.data.org.uk/event-sessions/primary-dt-subject-leadership-full-day