

Night Zookeeper: *using Night Zookeeper as a mechanism for raising engagement*

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Overview

Project aims

- To improve students' engagement in extended learning opportunities in literacy
- to improve the attainment of students in literacy.

Rationale

- As additional learning opportunities are a key strategy to embed and extend student learning, teachers must find increasingly engaging methods of motivating and inspiring students to participate in any enrichment tasks. Night Zookeeper is a digital writing tool with a gaming element. The software provides opportunities for students to complete writing tasks that are rewarded with in-game currency (orbs) to help build, develop and defend their online zoo. This game dimension incentivises students to participate in additional learning opportunities. In addition, this enthuses students to produce work of quality.

Project outline

- All mainstream Year 7 classes will be given extended learning opportunities in literacy over a term. Three out of the six participating Year 7 classes will be able to complete the tasks voluntarily on the Night Zookeeper platform. The other three classes will be given the same task but without the opportunity to use the software.
- Uptake of the voluntary task will be monitored and a sample of work from both groups will be taken from each piece of work to assess quality and outcome.



Impact

Uptake of voluntary additional work

All students were given the opportunity to complete the same additional tasks. The control group were given access to the same work via Word documents rather than Night Zookeeper software with tasks to be completed on paper.

There were 75 students in the treatment group and 74 students in the control group. No students in the control group submitted work. In the group using Night Zookeeper 59 out of the 75 students submitted at least one piece of work during the first term with the vast majority submitting multiple examples of work to varying standards.

According to feedback survey responses, both control and treatment groups stated that they enjoyed using technology for additional extra tasks. In the treatment group 90% (59/63 who responded to the treatment group feedback survey) said that they had enjoyed using Night Zookeeper, with 86% stating that they found the work engaging. In the control group, 83% (53/64) stated that they would do more optional work if they had access to the Night Zookeeper software.

Attainment of students

In terms of attainment in literacy, when comparisons were drawn between the treatment and control groups, improvement was seen in the outcomes of an assessed literacy task measuring how effectively students can use a range of vocabulary for clarity, purpose and effect. They were marked according to the English Assessment Objectives. Results of the literacy assessment show that the treatment group achieved markedly better results than the control group. There were no students in the treatment group who failed to achieve a grade (stage 0) whereas there were two in the control group. In addition, students in the treatment group achieved three times more stage 3s than the control group.



Control Group

	STAGE 0	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3
CLASS A	0	15	10	0
CLASS B	0	8	15	1
CLASS C	2	3	17	3

Treatment Group

	STAGE 0	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3
CLASS D	0	8	7	8
CLASS E	0	18	7	1
CLASS F	0	5	12	9

Comparison of results

	STAGE 0 TOTAL	STAGE 1 TOTAL	STAGE 2 TOTAL	STAGE 3 TOTAL
CONTROL GROUP	2	26	42	4
TREATMENT GROUP	0	31	26	18

Notes on stage descriptors

Throughout Year 7, each theme has an assessment point which is marked against one of the descriptors on an overall Assessment Objective grid. The stages of this grid were created by Shireland Collegiate Academy's English Department. The stages below were assessed in the 'Growing' Theme using an extract from Charles Dickens' Nicholas Nickleby. They relate to Assessment Objective 5a: "Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences"

WRITING STAGE 0	WRITING STAGE 1	WRITING STAGE 2	WRITING STAGE 3
The student is aware of the sequence of letters, symbols and words e.g. selecting and linking symbols together, writing their names and one or two other simple words correctly from memory. They can group letters and leave spaces between them as though they are writing separate words.	The student can write most letters in a way that is correctly formed and orientated. They leave spaces between words and upper/lower case is sometimes distinguished. There is only a limited sense of the text type, audience or purpose. Any ideas expressed lack relevance to the task.	There is an occasional sense of the text type, audience and/or purpose. One or two relevant ideas are communicated. There is occasional use of Standard English.	The text type is evident with an attempt to use an appropriate style for the audience and purpose. There is some attempt to engage the audience through more detailed language choices e.g. adjectives to create noun phrases. A range of relevant ideas are communicated. There is use of Standard English sufficient to make meaning clear throughout.



Progress of students

To contextualise the achievement of the treatment group compared to the control group in terms of progress, the results that students achieved showed that a significantly higher proportion of students in the treatment group achieved the highest level available of Stage 3 when compared to the control group (a 19% difference). The treatment and control groups were assessed as being broadly equal in terms of prior attainment before the treatment.

Student comments

“Using Night Zookeeper makes work more fun. I like being able to draw my characters in stories as well as writing about them.”

“I like doing Night Zookeeper work because it means I earn more orbs to build my zoo so it feels like I am playing a game as well as doing work.”

“I like being able to do my work on a computer and not on paper.”

“Miss can choose whether she publishes the work or sends it back for me to try again. I like that you can get work published as it makes it feel like your work is important.”

Teacher comments

In the initial phase of the project, three teachers used the Night Zookeeper software with their Year 7 class. Teachers found it a useful platform to tackle some areas of the national curriculum that specific students found they were struggling with.

“My students found Night Zookeeper an engaging way to extend their learning. The inbuilt gaming element provided motivation for even the most reluctant of learners.”

“The ability to give quick and effective feedback to students is useful. Students act upon advice given to them through this online marking facility as they seem to take pride in work that the teacher feels is ‘publishable’.”



How to...

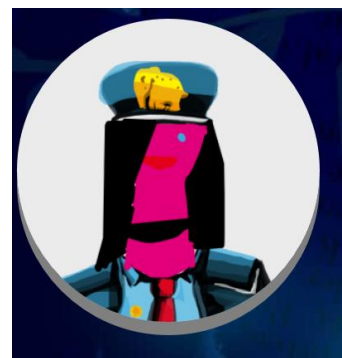
Resources

Computer access for staff and students

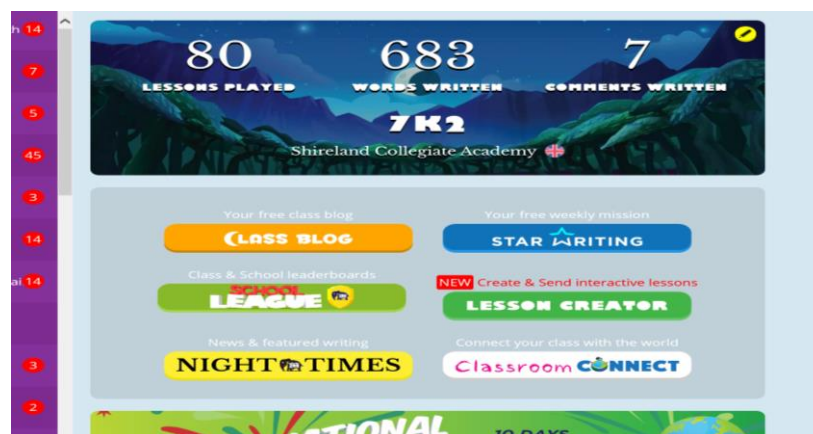
Account with Night Zookeeper

Set up

You first need to set up your account with Night Zookeeper. The next step is to establish your class site and ask your students to join by registering them with a Night Zookeeper account. This is a simple process.



Once registered, students will need to design their own avatar and complete some introductory tasks to introduce them to the Zoo and the Night Zookeeper.



When students have completed the introductory tasks, the teacher 'dashboard' will look like this. From here you can create and allocate lessons, access students' work and see how much engagement there is with the work set.

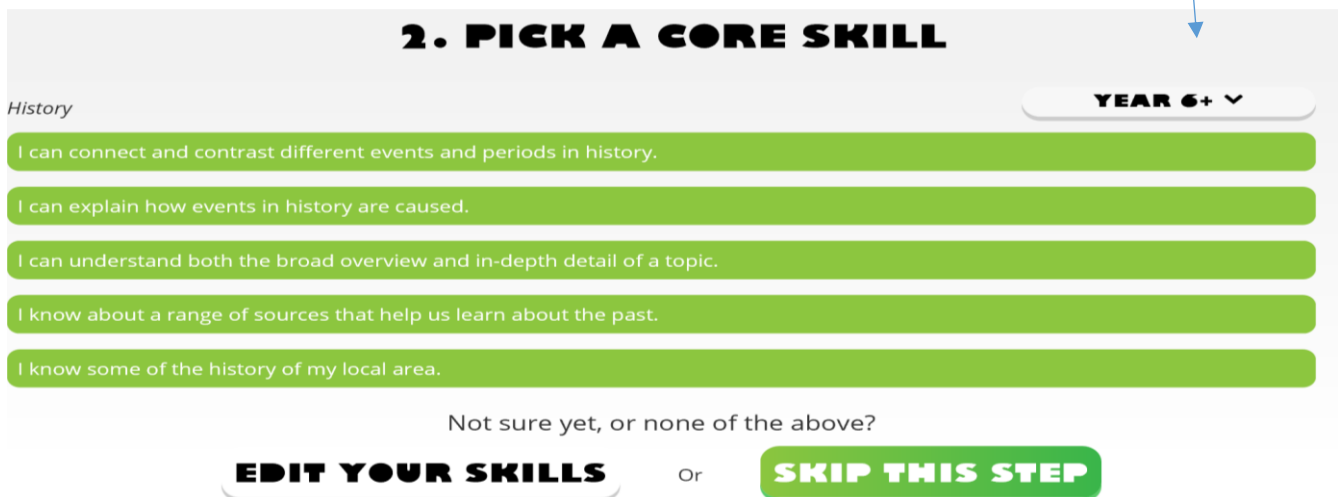
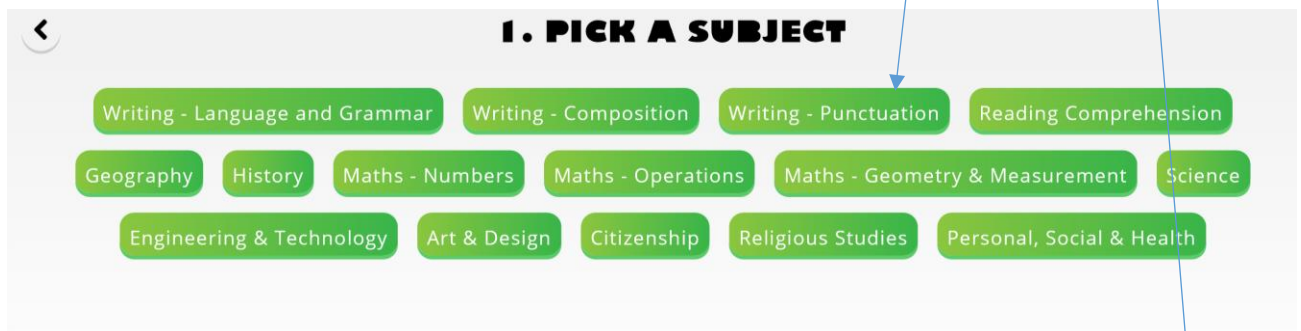


Allocating work



The lesson creator tab will take you to a series of pre-created lessons that can be on a variety of topics and curriculum areas.

Alternatively, you can also create your own lessons and map them against key skills as stipulated in the curriculum. This process is logical and straightforward and you are guided through it step by step.



Once you have selected or created a lesson you can preview it and send it to the entire class or target specific pupils as you so wish.



Assessment and feedback



At the side of the dashboard you can see all the students in your class. The numbers in the red circles shows the amount of work students have completed that need some teacher feedback.

Clicking on a student's name will take you to their submitted work where you can assess or make some written comments to advise students. Additionally, at the click of a button you can choose to publish work, reject it or suggest they try that piece of work again.

A screenshot of a student's submitted work page. The page shows a lesson titled "Lesson: Fables" with a brief: "Write a short fable that contains 2 animal characters. Use the followi...". The student's title is "The Truth Will Come Out!". The date and time are "Thu, 1 Dec 2016 11:56". The student's work is a "Free Write" about a boy named Timmy. At the bottom, there are buttons for "ASSESS", "COMMENT", and "VIEW". On the right side, there are three buttons: "Publish" (green checkmark), "Try again" (yellow refresh), and "Reject" (red X).

By clicking on the export report button, you can access all students' work, the number of words written and assess their coverage of the curriculum objective set.



Summary

Initial results show the positive impact Night Zookeeper has on students' engagement levels with additional voluntary work. Certainly, students are more willing to engage in the work in its online format. Due to the gaming element of the software, students have more of an incentive to produce work, which is rewarded with 'orbs' (the in-game currency). In addition, students that have been accessing Night Zookeeper have achieved overall higher results in a controlled literacy assessment with three times the number of students achieving a grade of Stage 3.

