

Success Story No.2 – Using Class Dojo & You Tube at Waverley Special School

May 2020

I had the pleasure of speaking with Tracy Walker from Waverley special school and she shared the school's success using technology to engage their students.

What is your school context?

We are a school for 3 – 19 year old with most children and young people having profound and severe learning difficulties, with many having complex medical issues.

Currently, we have several children of keyworkers attending school, and also some children and young people that have behavioural issues that make being in the same small space difficult, so they really benefit from the environment of school.

What has been the biggest challenge?

Ensuring that families are all safe and have the support they need; seeing if they are getting enough food, supporting accessing the school meal vouchers.

The priority has been to engage parents and utilise the time that parents can give to supporting their children and young people. Every child and young person has a key worker and they have been speaking at least twice a week.

A few students do not have access to technology so accessing the resources and activities we are uploading has not happened. But we have got a couple of TAs that have raised money to buy tablets for children and we have also had donations of devices from the community.

Can you share your success using You Tube?

The YouTube channel we decided to set up 2 days before schools closed. While we were still in school, teachers and TAs made a few videos, so we were all involved in the first ones.

Since then we have made lots of videos, they link to our learning and use various methods of communication. We use PODD – pragmatically ordered dynamic display – which is a book full of symbols to support communication. Teachers have been using it on videos to introduce activities. The activities have all been practical for example; sensory play with bubbles, or counting activities. We have also used Makaton signing on the videos. One of our teachers has been working on life skills such as planting seeds with her class who are getting ready to leave school. They have been looking at the growth over this period.

As well as videos linked to learning, we have also created videos with different members of staff singing. This has been nursery rhymes for the very young children, up to rock songs for our secondary students, we wanted to have some videos that were just fun to watch.

All years are creating videos and there is a playlist for each class.

Was Class Dojo something you were already using?

No, our head teacher found it during Easter holiday, and after a few of us tried it out, we decided to implement it for every class. It has been great, as it links up every class and is a way for us to interact and set practical activities – we couldn't give worksheets to our children and young people.

Each class has a 'Story' on Class Dojo, and I upload a morning welcome video every day. Then I post 2 new activities each day, these are there if parents are able to do them, which sometimes they can't due to different circumstances. The videos often introduce these. Each child and young person also has their own portfolio page, so individual responses can be posted into that. With parents permission, I can then post this to our class story so that the rest of the class can see.

What has engagement been like?

Before families got used to accessing our YouTube channel and Class Dojo pages, engagement was hard, so calls home from staff were important.

Since then, it has been great to hear that students and parents have enjoyed the videos. We've found that for some parents, it has provided an opportunity to learn about how we use different methods of communication. It would be great if that was able to continue, that would be a positive outcome from this. Children and young people have really enjoyed seeing their teachers and TAs.

On Class Dojo, parents can upload videos or images from their children and young people, this has been really varied, some haven't posted at all, and some have posted a video each day.

We have used video calling to engage with our students. With our staff we are using Google Hangouts to connect and meet.

What are you thinking about next?

We need to plan the next stage carefully to ensure the safety of our children and young people, there are a lot of self-care issues which make social distancing impossible.

Any final thoughts?

It would be interesting to know how other schools are doing.

I really want to go back to school!

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