

Innovating Learning

Doing things differently to do them better

Co-construction

Collaboration

Creativity

Culture

Case studies

SSAT 20th National Conference

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ACC Liverpool

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SSAT's National Conference will bring together leading thinkers, practitioners

and professionals. **Sue Williamson** introduces the conference themes

For the last 25 years, SSAT has been the key driver in school improvement through applying the principle “by schools, for schools”. This year’s National Conference will bring together the best international research and practice to help schools on their journey to becoming world class.

SSAT has challenged school leaders to raise achievement through innovation, collaboration and a commitment to developing a highly skilled teaching profession, including the next generation of school leaders.

We have always believed that headteachers should lead the system. Our 20th National Conference, *Innovating Learning*, builds on this legacy and starts to look at the major challenges of the next 25 years.

With imminent changes to the examination system and the national curriculum, it has never been more important for the profession to define the purpose of education. We need a curriculum that has academic rigour but also encourages creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. A new examination system must recognise deep learning rather than rote learning.

School leaders need to be at the forefront in redesigning the system. If schools are to be successful, they must have the confidence to innovate. Sir James Dyson, inventor and entrepreneur, wrote recently: “I scraped seven poor passes at O level. I had, and still have, little patience for rote learning. Instead I excelled at creating things – inventing and art. Without understanding where my strengths were, I might not have found my way to the hub of designers, engineers and scientists that is London’s Royal College of Arts. Like all good education institutions, it was a place for trial and error, wrong thinking and frustration – but also triumph and achievement.”

This should be the ideal time for school leaders to be innovating learning in their schools. We have greater autonomy for schools and school leaders, the best qualified teaching workforce and high quality school leaders. However, there is a feeling of depression and anger that the great strides over the last 20 years are not being recognised. The unfairness to many students of the GCSE English results and the constant criticism on results day are undermining confidence. The climate is not conducive to innovation and risk-taking. If our schooling system is to be truly world class in preparing students to live and work in a globalised world, we have to look at new ways for children to learn. SSAT’s definition of innovation is a simple one: “Doing things differently to do them better.”

Professor David Hargreaves, who produced this definition, also introduced the concept of



Doing things differently to do them better

co-construction, in which students and teachers are active partners in the design, implementation and evaluation of their education – and indeed over every aspect of schooling. Co-construction is a key theme of this year’s conference, and schools will showcase the work of students who are co-constructing learning.

Deep learning brings together Assessment for Learning (AfL), learning to learn and student voice. Professor Dylan Wiliam, an international expert on AfL, will show how schools can embed it – he has yet to find a school in the UK or USA that has done so. He will also share his findings on developing teacher quality; in his view the most important factor in school improvement.

Professors Guy Claxton and Bill Lucas will focus on learning to learn and Professor Tanya Byron on the importance of empowering young people. Ewan McIntosh, who has worked with some of the UK’s leading creative companies, will explain the processes that school leaders can use to create the space for innovation.

A different model of teaching and learning – the concept of the flipped classroom – will be the focus of Professor Eric Mazur’s keynote and workshop. Where does the balance lie in giving students the answers and having them discuss and apply reason to get their answers? How practical is it for any teacher to apply a flipped learning model, where students guide themselves through content on their own at home and then send their questions to a teacher before coming to a class where this material is applied at a deeper level? Two schools will

share their experiences, the difficulties they have faced, and their students’ reactions.

The vital importance of students being engaged in their learning will feature in all the keynotes, school showcases and rondivals. The challenge for teachers is to develop articulate, autonomous but collaborative learners with high meta-cognitive control and the generic skills of learning. Dr Don Passey will examine how learning technologies including games can be used to give students engaging educational experiences and challenges. Finally, award-winning innovator and young entrepreneur, Emily Cummins, will argue for a curriculum that gives all students the opportunity for creativity and innovation.

I do hope you can join us to debate these issues at the National Conference in Liverpool.

• Sue Williamson, chief executive of SSAT (*The Schools Network*) will deliver a keynote address to the National Conference in December. For more information, visit www.ssatuk.co.uk

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Flipping the classroom

The Flipped Learning approach is now employed by educators across the world. Its creator, **Professor Eric Mazur**, will be one of the key attractions at this year's SSAT National Conference

Professor Eric Mazur is a distinguished physicist who has been teaching at Harvard for 30 years.

He'd always assumed he was "a really good teacher" because his students gave him high evaluation scores and did well in his exams. But in the early 1990s, the realisation that students in his physics for pre-medical class had not grasped basic concepts made him completely change his teaching approach.

"It was an eye-opener," said Prof Mazur, who will be one of the keynote speakers at this year's SSAT National Conference.

"The traditional approach to teaching focuses on the transfer of information. As a consequence students tend to take it in and don't do anything meaningful with it.

"But by accident I discovered that if I got students to talk to each other, to work together to answer questions and solve problems, not only did their engagement increase, but so did their learning. There was a level of engagement that I had never seen before. It went from zero to 100 per cent."

This was the motivation behind Peer Instruction, Prof Mazur's pioneering method for teaching large lecture classes in a far more interactive way. He later went on to write a book about it, *Peer Instruction: A User's Manual*, and in 2006 helped to produce *Interactive Teaching*, an award-winning video.

Prof Mazur's approach is now more commonly known as Flipped Learning or Inverted Learning and has been taken up by schools, colleges and universities all over the world.

Some sceptics declare that it can be summed up as students watching online videos at home and doing homework in school classes. But as Alan November and Brian Mull explained in their 2012 article, *Flipped Learning: A Response to Five Common Criticisms*, Prof Mazur's interactive approach to teaching and learning makes for a "thoughtful, rigorous experience".

"I like to think of education as a two-way process," said Prof Mazur. "The first is information transfer and then the hard part of it is the second stage – the making sense of information and the connecting of information with existing knowledge. Where does that typically happen? We naively

think that it happens in the classroom, but in the traditional approach to teaching it really happens outside the classroom, when students mull things over and reflect on what they have learned."

Flipped Learning typically involves students preparing for classes by watching videos, listening to podcasts and reading books and online material. They are asked to reflect on what they have learned and to come up with questions and problem areas. Then in class students work collaboratively to answer questions and solve problems, with the teacher engaging with groups of learners as needed.

"The most important part of Peer Instruction is to have students active in teaching and learning," Prof Mazur continued. "You can see the lightbulb going on in students' heads and their excitement about learning. It also means that the teacher is not 'the sage on the stage', but 'the guide on the side'."

“ Not only did their engagement increase, but so did their learning. There was a level of engagement that I had never seen before. It went from zero to 100 per cent ”

More recently, Prof Mazur has turned his attention to the complex issue of assessment. Concerned that the typical approach to education focuses on delivering information that is rapidly forgotten, he has introduced new assessment methods for his students.

Around five or six years ago he switched to open book exams, and then to open computer exams. A year ago, however, he decided to "eliminate all exams" and began using a more collaborative form of formative assessment – Immediate Feedback Assessment Technique (IF-AT).

This involves students sitting in groups of four to eight. For the first third of their assessment they work individually (for 50 per cent of their grade). For the remaining two-thirds of the assessment, they work together to obtain a group grade (the other 50 per cent



of their overall score). The whole group must agree on their answer and when they submit it they get instant feedback, either through scratchcards or electronically. If it's wrong, they get a second chance for half the marks and then a third chance for a quarter of the marks.

"The assessment shifts from the answer to how to get the answer," said Prof Mazur, who will discuss the project at the National Conference.

"This is the first year I have done it and if it works, I will scale it up."

Even though Prof Mazur has spent his career in higher education, he is convinced that his approach is applicable to pupils of all ages – from early years to university students.

"Children have boundless curiosity but over the years we manage very effectively to switch their curiosity off and turn them from active to passive learners," he said. "It's important to remember that human beings learn from each other. You only have to step into a kindergarten to see that."

• *Eric Mazur is area dean of applied physics and Balkanski professor of physics and applied physics at Harvard University in America. He will be discussing his development of the Flipped Classroom approach with delegates during a keynote address and workshop at SSAT's National Conference in Liverpool on December 4 and 5.*

The work and philosophies of Professors Eric Mazur and Guy Claxton can be seen in action at Perins School, where a number of innovative approaches are helping to create truly independent learners

With its redbrick façade and blazer-clad pupils, Perins School looks very traditional from the outside. But step inside and it's a different story. The 11 to 16 comprehensive in Alresford, Hampshire, is fast making a name for itself in the education world for its innovative and creative approach to teaching and learning.

Janice Bernard has been headteacher at Perins for the last 12 years and says her team has always been interested in "the transformational nature of technology".

With this in mind, the school provides all its year 7 to 9 students with their own laptops. These are loaded with software and enabled for wireless internet access and youngsters carry them to every lesson.

From making videos and carrying out research to designing interactive quizzes and mentoring their peers, the students use technology to enhance almost every aspect of their learning.

"Students having their own personalised laptops is hugely significant," said Ms Bernard. "Although many schools have very good VLEs (virtual learning environments) and wireless networks, and we have both of these, it's about putting technology in the hands of the children and allowing them to use it to power learning forward. It's also



Independent learners: Janice Bernard works with students at Perins School

Skills to learn

"The idea is that the students are getting this really secure foundation to move into their three-year key stage 4 studies.

"At the moment it's only anecdotal, but our staff say that the children are much more self-motivated in their learning. They are more confident, more able to make links between learning in one subject and another – the transferability of skills – and much better at taking risks and being able to risk things going wrong."

In years 10 and 11, Perins students are allowed to bring their own devices into school – including phones, tablets and video cameras.

"The notion is that the skills they learn in Transformational Learning are driven into the other areas of the curriculum," said Ms Bernard. "We are clear that using e-learning properly is about using it at the higher end

"It's all done in a very supportive way online," Ms Bernard explained. "Children can email one of the mentors and say 'I'm struggling with this, can you help me?' – we think it has massive potential."

The school also uses an online portfolio system called Mahara, where pupils create personalised pages to showcase their best work. In a recent science lesson, for example, students constructed their own learning resources and then posted these on their own Mahara page. Other youngsters were then able to access the resources and use them if they wanted to.

In another lesson, pupils discussed apps they had chosen to support their learning and debated which one was most useful in achieving the desired outcomes.

Like many schools, Perins runs weekly CPD sessions for teaching staff. The difference is that here the sessions are run through a software package called BlueSky and are driven by the outcomes of teachers' performance management reviews. Staff explain what their CPD requirements are and future CPD courses are tailored to their needs.

Several staff have also attended conferences given by Professor Eric Mazur (a keynote speaker at this year's conference; see page 3) and IT guru Alan November, who is particularly interested in the ways in which technology can support a genuine approach to life-long learning.

Ms Bernard is adamant, however, that even though technology has been embraced by students and teachers alike, it is important to get a healthy balance.

"All the staff have bought into this notion of using ICT to support learning and delivering lessons that focus on higher-order skills," she said. "But rigour is essential. None of this works if it doesn't enhance students' learning. This isn't about PowerPoint ad nauseam or repeating things ad nauseam. It's all about quality learning."

• Perins School will be showcasing its work at SSAT's National Conference in December.

It's about reflective inquiry, teamwork, independent learning, resilience and those kinds of qualities. Students are getting this really secure foundation to move into their three-year key stage 4 studies

about the amazing collaborative and creative tasks you can do by using technology to deliver on higher-order thinking skills."

Perins, which became an academy in 2011 and has 1,050 students, runs a two-year key stage 3 curriculum. This includes a pioneering programme called Transformational Learning, where for four periods a week year 7 and 8 pupils concentrate on developing their personal learning skills.

"It's about reflective inquiry, teamwork, independent learning, resilience and those kinds of qualities," explained Ms Bernard.

of learning. It's not about using it to cut and paste things from Wikipedia or going on to Google and finding something that someone else has done. It's about making bits of information relate to other bits and creating a new understanding because you are putting them all together in a different way."

Perins School prides itself on encouraging children to be collaborative and to learn from each other. In 2011 the school launched a peer learning project for year 7 and 8 students. Children apply to be academic mentors, are interviewed and then help peers who are stuck in any area of their learning.

It's school gym, but not as we know it



Professor Guy Claxton will be discussing the 'learning-powered' school at this year's National Conference. He explores some of his ideas in this short story



Once upon a time, a village became worried about the fitness of its children, so the villagers built a brand new gymnasium, and filled it with all the latest equipment. They had cross trainers, steppers, pecs machines, dumbbells – and loads more.

Every day, after school, the children would walk down to the gym, sit quietly on the floor and learn about the equipment. They studied the history of the cross trainer and the construction of the pecs machine, and they calculated the weight of the dumbbells. Every so often they were tested on the knowledge they had gained, and they did pretty well (except for a long tail of children who didn't). But to the puzzlement of the villagers, they did not seem to be getting any fitter.

So they sought high and low and appointed a new director of the gym. He was called the grand operational visionary executive, and he instantly saw what the problem was.

"Tut, tut," said the Gove. "You have been using quite the wrong equipment. I have been to visit a people called the Ebak who live in a far-away land, and I can tell you that those new-fangled machines will never build the kind of fitness our young people need. The Ebak have the solution.

"You need to replace those tinny machines with tried and trusted equipment that has stood the test of time."

So out went the pecs machine and the stepper, and in came big old-fashioned medicine balls, low benches, skipping ropes and a lovely old vaulting horse. The Gove kept the dumbbells, because their value was beyond question.

Everyday, after school, the children walked down to the gym. They sat quietly on the floor, studied the history of the medicine ball and wrote creative stories about the life of the vaulting horse. They measured the strength of the skipping rope and calculated the weight of the dumbbells.

Their understanding of the equipment was tested more frequently and more rigorously. The Gove found that the test scores went up by a percentage point or two each year and he was well pleased. But the villagers were

puzzled, because no-one could understand why the children were still not getting any faster or stronger or fitter.

One day a woman wandered in to the village. She asked a passer-by why all the children were so fat and sluggish and why the grown-ups looked so perplexed and dejected. They explained their puzzlement and she went to see the children in the gym for herself. She said her name was Vita, which didn't stand for anything.

“ If you want them to build up their strength and their fitness, they will just have to. No-one ever won the 100 metres by writing an essay about it ”

She hummed and harred for a bit and then said: "But they aren't actually using the equipment, are they? They aren't really exercising."

"What on earth do you mean?" said the villagers. "They are studying as hard as they can and they have some excellent teachers."

Vita said she would show them what she meant. She stood up, stripped off her jacket and started to throw the heavy medicine ball up and down in the air until she got red in the face. She

stepped up and down on the low bench till sweat started running down her arms, skipped till she was out of breath, and lifted the dumbbells up and down till her arms were so tired they couldn't lift any more.

The villagers were horrified. "We can't have that," they cried. "The children will get upset if we make them struggle like that. They aren't used to getting sweaty and tired. They will feel inadequate, and their self-esteem will suffer – especially the high achievers."

"Tough," said Vita. "If you want them to build up their strength and their fitness, they will just have to. No-one ever won the 100 metres by writing an essay about it."

The villagers grudgingly admitted she might have a point, so everyday, after school, the children went down to the gym. But instead of sitting quietly on the floor, they started to use the equipment to stretch their muscles, build up their stamina, become more flexible, and develop their co-ordination.

Quite soon the children got used to getting sweaty, hot and tired, and they began to enjoy the experience of being really stretched – even the high achievers (though it took longer for them to get the idea). They became much more nimble and their stamina and energy increased by leaps and bounds.

The villagers weren't quite sure what they had unleashed and were a little daunted by the children's energy – but they thought it was good. An important group of villagers called the Employers were very happy indeed. And so were the fitness coaches (called the Teachers), because most of the children had become a pleasure to teach. And they all lived vigorously and inquisitively ever after.

• *Professor Guy Claxton is a world-renowned authority on expandable intelligence. He will be challenging delegates at December's SSAT National Conference on developing the "learning-powered" school.*



Collaboration and creativity

Four more keynote speakers at the National Conference will tackle themes including learning culture, informal learning, professional development, and SEN

SSAT's National Conference will feature a host of outstanding names from the world of education – people who understand how children learn and believe that a culture of co-construction, collaboration and creativity can be developed in all schools.

The speakers include Dr Don Passey, director of the Centre for Technology Enhanced Learning in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University, Professor Dylan Wiliam, former deputy director of the Institute of Education, Ewan McIntosh, founder and CEO of creative education company NoTosh, and world-renowned SEN expert Professor Barry Carpenter OBE.



Dr Don Passey

Dr Don Passey, who has spent 23 years studying the uses and outcomes of digital technologies in supporting teaching and learning, will be running two showcase sessions. The first will look at how co-construction, collaboration and creativity are “drawn together” through culture, while the second will consider the shape of tomorrow’s curriculum – formal, non-formal and informal.

“The conference theme is an important and interesting one because we have come through a massive period of innovation, development and school improvement,” explained Dr Passey. “For me, culture is something that in essence is managed and created by vision and leadership and within that, the elements of co-construction, collaboration and creativity emerge, develop or are created.

“Culture isn’t just framed by a school itself. It is also shaped by the wider community, nationally and, increasingly, internationally. Schools were very much more inward-looking 20 years ago, with everything measured or identified in terms of local requirements, whereas now the considering of globalisation has increased. I often hear headteachers talking about their roles, not only within the local community, but within the national and international community too.”

During his second session, Dr Passey is keen to examine the links between the formal curriculum, the non-formal curriculum (learning that takes place through after-school activities, clubs and societies), and the informal curriculum (learning at home, through technologies and via digital media). He will also look at the ways in which these three elements can be blended together in different ways to improve learning outcomes.

“There are good examples of where schools have used informal learning to support what is happening within the formal curriculum,” he explained. One example is a project set up in a socio-economically disadvantaged area in Birmingham. Two thousand computers were put into homes – and schools then provided links with work for primary children to do at home. Over quite a short period of time their attainment in both reading and mathematics improved quite significantly.”



Professor Dylan Wiliam

When Professor Dylan Wiliam gives his keynote speech, he will be keen to stress his belief that there are no limits to what teachers can achieve if the right support is there. He regards teacher quality as the key to improving students’ achievement and is convinced that teachers can improve their effectiveness with the help of formative assessment. He is adamant, too, that school leaders should help teachers to be “the best that they can be”. How? By creating a culture that enables teachers to continue developing their expertise.

Prof Wiliam reckons that while teachers develop hugely during the first two years of their careers, particularly as they learn through trial and error in the classroom, the story changes later on. In his view, many teachers stop improving after three years. “They stop trying out different challenges and their work becomes characterised by repeat practice. But there are no limits to what teachers can achieve if we support them in the right way,” he added.



Ewan McIntosh

With the theme of co-construction in mind, Ewan McIntosh will be highlighting a range of practical ideas to help schools put more learning into the hands of the students themselves.

A former French and German teacher, Mr McIntosh moved into technology research and leadership as Scotland’s first national advisor on learning and technology futures. He later became the first digital commissioner for Channel 4’s £50 million Innovation for the Public (4iP) fund. After setting up Edinburgh-based NoTosh in 2009, he has worked with many of the UK’s leading creative companies and believes that their processes, attitudes and methods can be used successfully in schools too.

“The result is a way of critical and creative thinking and a set of pedagogies that engage students in co-constructing the curriculum, understanding their own learning and freeing the reins of learning from the hands of the teacher,” said Mr McIntosh, who has worked with hundreds of schools worldwide.

“Schools are such busy places and they are plagued with initiatives. Finding space to innovate is tough but I want to encourage the audience at the National Conference to be innovators, not wait for someone else.”



Professor Barry Carpenter OBE

Professor Barry Carpenter OBE believes that innovation in learning applies to all children and wants leaders to think creatively in order to find solutions to “nurture, encourage and enable” pupils by engaging in the complexities of SEN, learning difficulties and disabilities.

In 2009, Prof Carpenter oversaw the Children with Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Research Project and since then has overseen the development of online training materials for teachers of children with severe, profound and complex learning disabilities.

Prof Carpenter will be at the conference alongside special schools demonstrating best practice to help leaders consider the impact of children who are presenting teachers with new patterns of learning that require new pedagogy. He will share his research and help educators to use and understand his findings and translate them into practical strategies to support innovation and learning for all children.

He said: “Teachers are asking about this new generation of children with complex learning needs and how they learn. I think some of these answers to the new generation of children rest outside of the traditional approach.”

• SSAT’s National Conference takes place on December 4 and 5 at Liverpool’s ACC. For programme information, visit www.ssatuk.co.uk

Fearing that learning today has become too 'safe', teachers at King Edward VI Grammar School developed a strategy to bring more risk, excitement and challenge into their classrooms

At first glance, skateboarding and teaching don't have much in common. But the head of a grammar school in Essex reckons that teachers could learn a lot from the determination, persistence and mutual support shown by skateboarders.

"If you are in a traditional school with traditional approaches to learning, skateboarding would be deadly," explained Tom Sherrington, who has been headteacher at King Edward VI Grammar School in Chelmsford since 2008.

"The teacher would take control of the lesson by saying 'okay guys, line up. Here's the safety briefing, get your helmets and pads on, do this, do that'. The teacher would control everything and try to move everybody forward, without doing anything too dangerous or risky. But how would these students perform compared to the kids at the skate park next door who were allowed to do what they liked, feed off each other and construct the experience entirely for themselves?"

"At the skate park it is normal that every trick requires 50 'fails' before it is perfected. Falling off and getting back on is just part of the process. The intrinsic reward of succeeding, having the freedom to choose what to do next, and having a peer feedback system is much more powerful than anything the traditional student-teacher relationship can deliver."

In Mr Sherrington's view, today's learning is often "too safe" and "too controlled", rather than "exciting, fun and challenging". But if his skateboarding analogy was applied to schools, then teachers would take more risks and give students far greater autonomy and ownership of the learning process.

He hit on the idea of comparing teaching and learning to skateboarding after learning about psychologist Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's "flow" concept, which emphasises the importance of matching skills to challenge.

"If you don't have the right skills level and the challenge is too hard, it's very demoralising, while if your skills outweigh the challenge, it's very dull," explained Mr Sherrington. "The goal is to match the challenge so that it's just ahead of a child's skills – and skateboarding is a classic example of that. If you can get kids to enjoy their learning because they are directing it themselves and getting a real buzz about it, then it's very exciting."

With this in mind, teachers at King Edward VI are keen to encourage co-construction, which along with collaboration, creativity and culture, is one of the four challenges to be discussed at December's National Conference.

At the 900-pupil school (which achieved its best ever GCSE and A level results this year), students plan their own learning in many

Embracing risk



“ At the skate park it is normal that every trick requires 50 'fails' before it is perfected. Falling off and getting back on is just part of the process ”

curriculum areas. In RE, for instance, teachers tell year 7s they are going to study Islam, then ask the youngsters what they want to learn.

English literature students in the 6th form get a high level of responsibility for their own independent research and reading, while for the last four years the ICT department has run the annual Project 9 initiative for year 9 pupils.

King Edward VI teachers don't teach ICT to the school's year 9 cohort. Instead, students in year 10 and above map out their own ICT course and deliver it to their younger counterparts. "It's amazing," said Mr Sherrington. "The students know things about ICT that teachers have no idea about. At the end of the year they do a big showcase of what they have learned and it's a great example of deep learning, leadership and ownership of learning."

Another strategy the teachers are keen to highlight is the school's own version of Assessment for Learning – Zest for Learning.

"We wanted to capture the spirit of learning at the school and the way in which we bring formative assessment alive," said Mr Sherrington. "We're keen for kids to have a sense of learning being a great buzz, and a member of staff came up with the idea of Zest for Learning. Basically it includes themes like understanding how to learn and how to improve, shared planning and collaborative learning, and rigour and scholarship."

The King Edward VI team is also keen to discuss what makes a teacher great. Mr Sherrington reckons that the very best teachers



tend to be "drivers". "They are standard-setters, never happy with mediocre work or sloppy thinking, always pushing every child to go further, to aim higher," he said. "This manifests itself through classroom dialogue, inherent challenge in lessons, routinely giving challenging, engaging homework and so on."

Other characteristics are the ways in which great teachers "nurture student-teacher relationships based on genuine mutual respect", use deep subject expertise to go beyond the syllabus, explain complex ideas in ways that make sense, give good feedback, and are "principled about people and learning".

But Mr Sherrington, pictured above, is adamant, too, that there should be more discussion and emphasis on pedagogy and teaching and learning. "Politicians tend to focus on how to organise schools and exams," he said. "But actually, the main thing that makes a difference is what happens everyday in the classroom. That's what we should be talking about."

• King Edward VI Grammar School will be showcasing its work at SSAT's National Conference in December. Read Mr Sherrington's teaching blog at www.headguruteacher.com

Developing student leaders

Keynote speaker and young entrepreneur **Emily Cummins** is passionate that we must allow students to develop leadership skills if they are to succeed and is backing SSAT's Student Leadership Accreditation

Entrepreneur Emily Cummins is convinced that the skills she learned outside school have been as crucial to her career as those she learned in school.

Now an award-winning inventor, her interest in design, technology and problem-solving dates back to the age of four, when she began making toy trucks and rounders sets in her grandfather's shed in Keighley, west Yorkshire. By the time she left school, she had designed a sustainable refrigerator powered by dirty water, a water carrier and a toothpaste dispenser for people with limited arm movement. She then spent five months in Africa teaching local people how to make her fridges – a project that proved so successful that tens of thousands are now in use in South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana.

"I was very lucky," said Emily, 25, who studied business management and sustainability at Leeds University. "My granddad always encouraged me to make products that I wanted to make. Once I'd learned how to use a lathe,



Young leaders: Ringwood School's SLA pupils at last year's National Conference. Entrepreneur Emily Cummins (right) will speak this year on the importance of leadership skills

and analysing," she said. "I sometimes wonder whether we are teaching those skills well enough in the classroom. Students need to identify a problem, think about how they can solve it, research what currently exists, ask questions, use their creativity to come up with the best solution possible, test it and analyse it again. Then we will have students who are ready for work."

As well as running workshops and speaking to young people in schools, Emily is currently working on an education apps project. But she still uses the skills her grandfather taught her on a daily basis. "I know it's scary for teachers to let students do what they want, but if we allow students to be innovative and make things they are passionate about then they'll start to see the bigger picture," she added.

"I want today's students to realise that

my community" and "working with others".

SLA pilots have been run in three schools and from this autumn all SSAT schools will have free access to the scheme. It will also be showcased at National Conference.

Ringwood School – a National Teaching Academy in Hampshire was the first to adopt the scheme. Ten students who took part last year have all received their gold SLA certificates and are now mentoring the 125 year 8 to 13 pupils who signed up this year. "We leapt at the idea," said Margaret Olive, assistant head and head of student voice and community, who runs the SLA programme alongside Nicky Watson, head of health and social care.

"One of the real benefits is the way it recognises students' extra-curricular activities. When pupils get to the 6th form they can use their folders for their UCAS personal statements and take them to interviews. It's a way of showing their wider learning. Employers and universities like to see evidence of commitment, enthusiasm and passion, not just for the academic side but in other areas too."

Year 13 student Jenny Baldwin, 17, is one of Ringwood's SLA mentors and is full of enthusiasm for the initiative. "It's really helpful to collate all your skills and achievements in one place," she said, "along with the evidence you have collected to support it all." Meanwhile, year 12 student George Whittingham saw the benefits when he went for an interview for a summer job at a local campsite. He took his CV, references and smart leather SLA folder, "but the person interviewing me wasn't interested in my CV and references," said George, 16. "He wanted me to talk him through the folder. And yes, I got the job."

• *Emily Cummins will discuss the importance of developing student leadership with delegates at SSAT's National Conference in December.*



“If we allow students to be innovative and make things they are passionate about then they'll start to see the bigger picture”

saw and hammer, he'd say to me, 'here are some materials – decide what you want to make and we'll learn how to do it'."

But her enthusiasm dimmed temporarily when she started secondary school. "I was really frustrated in technology classes because we all had to make exactly the same products. By the time I got to GCSE though, I ended up studying resistant materials and could be creative again."

At this year's SSAT National Conference, Emily will tell the audience about the importance of developing leadership skills and how her own experiences have empowered her in her career.

"Students need to learn skills like leadership, using their initiative, creativity, questioning

they really can make a difference and design something that can change people's lives."

One way in which schools can help pupils to develop leadership skills is through the new Student Leadership Accreditation (SLA).

SSAT has launched the SLA to recognise and celebrate youngsters' achievements inside and outside school – whether it's a Duke of Edinburgh's Award or helping in their local community.

The scheme requires students to create an online or portfolio folder where they gather and upload evidence to showcase their skills. They grade their work using a self-assessment framework that covers three overarching topics – "developing myself", "contributing to

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