

INTRODUCTION

In my experience of GCSE lessons in Academic PE, pupils are often less engaged during the last few minutes of double lessons (85 minutes). Is this due to them being athletes? Are they used to spending shorter amounts of time focussing on the task as they would on the sports field? Is it that they are struggling or is it all groups of people? I am going to use a group of Year 9 students in an English lesson to see if this is also the case in an other subject, as well as seeing if a mid-lesson break increases the level of focus in the last 5 minutes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is little research around this topic as it is difficult to quantify focus or lack of focus. A journal article written by Neil Bradbury in 2016 investigated the attention span of university students and discussed the possibility of a 10-minute attention span during lectures. He states that previous works by Davis, Wankat, Benjamin and MacKeachie all “agree on a quantitatively precise 10 -15 minute time course for a variable (attention) that is nebulous and never quantitatively defined.” He concludes his article by stating that, “as scientists and physiologists, we are called on to provide evidence for our research and data backing up our assertions. Yet when it comes to attention span, an unsubstantiated mantra of 15-minute is chanted, with no support other than “that’s what I’ve been told.” This only continues to emphasise the lack of quantifiable research that has taken place around this topic due to its complexities.

METHODOLOGY

WHO?

I will be observing a Year 9 group of students in an English lesson, as these are a class who are available on a weekly basis when I am free. They also have a wide range of characters in the group and at times have been known to be easily off task and lose focus.

HOW?

I will observe the class, attempting to record any pupils off task throughout the lesson. I will observe for 2 weeks, add a break for two weeks and then look to see if an active break increases focus in the last few minutes. I have created a grid to be able to log the number of times I deem a pupil to be off task. I have two columns in the grid:

- One for pupils who are deemed to be off task - this may be staring out the window or off into space and it is then not followed by moment of writing or contribution to the task. Or, it may be that they are doodling on their devices as I can see that as I will be stood at the back of the room.
- The second column will be for pupils who are talking off topic. I will be unable to hear all their conversations. However, I have defined a conversation as off task if there is some sort of laughing or reaction to what is being said by one person that look unrelated to the work.



I used the same grid for all lessons and sat at the back of the class for all lessons.

RESULTS

From these graphs, we can see a significant drop off in the number of pupils off task after applying a break in the middle of the lesson as opposed to the first two lessons without. It was interesting to see that the implication of a stretching exercise mid-way through the lesson didn't have as much of an impact as a full switch off from the laptops and a chat with their friends about anything other than work.

CONCLUSION

This research has shown me how beneficial a small break can be for students during lessons. These initial findings suggest that the attention span of a Year 9 is not as long as the double lessons they are in and therefore a break will likely increase the level of productivity in my GCSE PE lessons, as well as potentially across other subjects.

There were several limitations to my research. I was only able to use one class for the data collection.

Going forward I would want to repeat this across several year groups to see if the effect changed depending on the age. Additionally, I would also look to triangulate my results to get a greater range of evidence about the effectiveness of the application of a break.

I would want to get reliable feedback from both the pupils and the teacher. Having spoken to the teacher at the time, he agreed that the level of focus from the class increased when a break was introduced, but I would want to explore this in more details and get different teachers' views across different subjects and teaching styles.