

TEACHING ENGLISH THE USE OF EDUCAKE FOR LOW STAKES TESTING

'You can never be wrong in English'

We've all heard it. We've probably said it at some point. It's well intentioned, but it's not true is it? If you think the witches killed Macbeth, you're wrong. If you think Cassio is dead at the end of Othello, you're wrong. If you misinterpret a word or make up a quotation for a character then we're doing our students a disservice by telling them otherwise. Telling a student they are wrong is powerful: it helps them to confront an area of misunderstanding and provide clarity.

Because of the abstract nature of English as a subject we can often prioritise the crafting of analytical writing without giving students a secure knowledge base. For example, we ask students to read a chapter of a novel at home and then come to class ready to analyse meaning. Early in my career this was how I taught texts: staggeringly, I did not think reading in class was a very productive use of lesson time. If an observer popped their head in during class reading I'd instantly stop and fire out some directed questions, ensuring that students were scribbling down annotations until the intruder disappeared. Only then, having breathed a sigh of relief would I get back to reading.

What's become clear to me over my career is the importance of consolidating student knowledge using closed questioning. This inspires confidence meaning that students can write more assertively because they actually understand the text. In Lionheart Educational Trust we have done a lot of work on implementing a

'knowledge-based curriculum' and have produced a series of knowledge organisers and low stakes quizzes for all of our units at Key Stage 3 and for the GCSE exams, all of which has had a big impact on student confidence with the challenging texts we teach on our curriculum.

Another tool that we have begun to use is the online platform **Educake**.

If you're a Head of Department you've probably heard of Educake. Their marketing strategy is a stroke of genius: enclosed with the usual leaflets and brochures is a little Cadbury's Fredo every few months, the thinking being that even if you put the bumf straight in the bin they've helped you out by giving you chocolate.

I like that.

Having eaten several Fredo's I made the decision to invest in Educake and see what it could offer our students. And I'm happy to report that I like that even more.

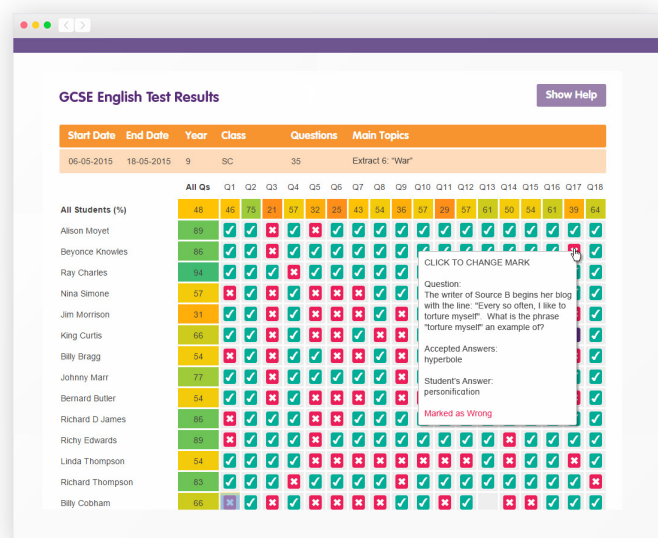
Educake is basically a database of online quizzes which can be set by class teachers or Heads of Department. Their questions are relevant and written by teachers. They focus on knowledge retrieval and skills and (here's the big one) it's marked automatically. This means that rather than gathering in numerous sheets of paper and ticking my life away, I can spend time analysing the data (not nearly as awful as it sounds as Educake does so much of this for you) and challenging misinterpretations.



We have found that Educake works best as a homework tool. In fact it's replaced all of our previous homework tasks across Key Stages 3 and 4. No longer are we having the awkward silences when students are asked to produce their homework tasks: the evidence can clearly be displayed to students by showing the Educake screen. It's popular with students; the site is accessible and provides instant feedback.

Questions range from basic understanding ('When the witches say 'When shall we three meet again' who else do they say they will see?') to more detailed questions about the impact of word choices and the effect of literary techniques. Students either select from a range of answers (all plausible but only one correct) or type in their answer (spelling accuracy is important here!).

It provides me with an online markbook (a thing of beauty) where I can keep track of who is engaging and instantly see where students are struggling and what specifically they are struggling with. If some students are late submitting their work, in a few clicks I can contact parents and ask them to remind students to complete the task.



If I want to be organised in the first week of term I can pre-set all of the tasks for the next few weeks so that students know they have consistency. As HoD I can do this for the whole year group and remove some of that workload from my staff who can focus on tracking and intervention.

But for me the most fun part of Educake is the DATA.

I'll be honest, I'm a typical English teacher - rubbish with numbers. In normal circumstances data analysis has driven me to drafting letters of resignation. I hate it. But with Educake it's different.

At a few clicks of the button I can see instantly how many English specific questions have been answered in our school (nearly a quarter of a million from January - July, not bad for a school of less than 1,000). I can see the percentage of who got them correct. I can see which year groups have answered the most questions which I can pass on to Heads of Year to give them praise in their weekly assembly. I can see which classes are engaging best and which ones need a bit of a push from their teacher.

But what I really love is looking at the student leader board.

I love seeing that a year 11 student with target grades of 2 and 3 has answered the most questions in the entire school. I love seeing that a year 9 student with the highest number of behaviour points in the school has set themselves 75 questions independently. I love that interspersed with some of the excellent hard working students with high target grades are students who really struggle at school. This shows me that this platform is equitable.

We run a lunchtime club for students to complete tasks when they don't have these facilities at home. We also run a weekly 'catch up' session (not detention!) for those who have fallen behind.

In summary then, Educake allows us to build on the student knowledge that we have given them in class by consolidating this at home. It's simple, accessible, easy to log on (and I should add, easy to reset the password when students have forgotten) and it's fun! It manages to decrease our time spent creating countless resources and quizzes and it logs all the data centrally and analyses this for you automatically.

For me, it's a no brainer.

Oh, and they give you chocolate.

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