

Relax and read

Alison Pope, assistant manager of the learning resource centre at Lipson Community College in Plymouth, discusses how she successfully taught Year 7 and 8 students how to relax, focus and read for pleasure.

In a plan to bring more Year 7 and 8 students to the learning resource centre (LRC), I developed a series of relaxation sessions designed specifically with the lower ability and 'nurture' groups in mind. To help with the programme, I enlisted a handful of sixth form students who had previously studied mind relaxation techniques. We explained to the students that the aim of the sessions was to build their relaxation, visualisation and listening skills, as well as to promote reading for pleasure.

The first session began with the sixth form students demonstrating relaxation exercises and instructing the group to follow their lead. Once everyone felt relaxed, I invited the group either to remain seated in the comfy chairs and listen as I read, or to sit at the table and colour in pictures related to the story. The idea behind the colouring was that it would help them to focus on listening and prevent fidgeting. In addition to these options, I projected an image of the book onto the white board to give others something else to focus on.

I chose books to read based on our time limit, the group's ability, and the book's fun content. Paul Jennings' 13 Unpredictable Tales was chosen for the mixed group as it matched the criteria. The Alex Rider book *Stormbreaker*, which includes pictures of gadgets for colouring, was chosen for the all male group.

Students truly benefited from their experiences during these sessions. I noticed right away how all the groups, even the more lively ones, were able to relax quickly and remain calm for the entire duration. They really loved being read to and although some preferred just to listen, most enjoyed the colouring aspect as well.



And.....relax

I have definitely seen an improvement in the confidence levels of the students in terms of their willingness to come to the LRC by themselves. In fact, I have seen many of the pupils return to the centre to pick out books on their own or even ask me for my assistance when they need it. Not only have they learned to relax and focus on listening and visualising, but they have also developed an appreciation for reading as a soothing and leisurely activity. These two newfound abilities, focusing and relaxing, will surely transform the way this group of pupils thinks about reading for years to come.