

TEACHING & LEARNING JOURNAL - EDITION 14

Westbourne's Journal—'Engaging boys—increasing aspirations'

Richard Page, Maths Teacher

Initially, I signed up to the 'progress of boys' workshop as I was quite aware that there were a significant number of 'underperforming' boys across my 2 year 9 classes and my year 10 class. I wanted to explore and develop different teaching styles to create an environment where success was celebrated.

As the sessions went on it became clear that there would be lots of different ways in which I could change my approach to teaching, to help maintain the motivation of 'the boys'. Some of these have had immediate impacts. The use of Praise was my first step.

This praise was expressed verbally with positive points being awarded on SIMS. During lessons, I would try and ensure that I managed to circulate and observe these students regularly so that I could monitor and give immediate recognition

I made a conscious effort to praise ALL pupils for:

making an effort to settle quickly in lesson

I ensured lessons were well organised and prepared. There was always a starter on the board that was accessible to every pupil, with more challenging tasks on the same slide.

I would often use a selection of 'Countdown Puzzles', which I noticed the disengaged boys enjoyed. I believe there were two main reasons for this. Firstly, the competitiveness of the tasks, pupils/tables would try and complete all the tasks first. Secondly, there was more than one correct solution to each puzzle. This was particularly noticeable when boys would challenge other answers that differed from theirs.

On-task behaviour

Once, pupils were settled, I try to ensure the boys remained focussed. I used a seating plan where boys were mainly sat at the front near the classroom door. This enabled pupils to get to their seat quickly as well as limiting distractions around them. My normal standing stance from my desk, across the whiteboard allowed me to have the boys in my eye line most of the time. This allowed me to praise them regularly, as well as encouraging them back on task if their concentration waivered. I used praise of other pupils as an exemplar to the boys.

Work completion

I found the use of differentiated tasks, and worksheets supported the completion of work by the disengaged boys. I also introduced a mathswatch online lesson once a fortnight. I had to book ICT rooms due to the poor quality of the school laptops, slow or non-working laptops did not help the behaviour of the boys. However, once the technical issues were sorted, I found the work completed in these lessons was excellent. I was able to spend with pupils on a 1-1 basis to support them.

Use of directed questioning, was another strategy I used to engage the boys. I realised confidence was a common issue for certain boys not wanting to take part in the lesson. To start with, I would ask a pupil to give an answer (Countdown Starter) I knew they had already written down. As well as praising the pupil, it also improved the confidence of the pupils.

I believe building a positive relationship with pupils is paramount to supporting disengaged boys. I've found the following particularly rewarding:

Avoiding confrontation and public reprimands of pupils

Not raising my voice at the class, and giving students thinking time and cooling off time. Allowing pupils an opportunity to back down without losing face.

Non-verbal instructions are often more powerful. I particularly use a thumbs up, smile, or even a 'virtual' high five for a great response to a question.

A private telling off often has far more impact than a public one.

Try and find an opportunity to phone home, or send a postcard home, to provide positive feedback which can make a big difference on a bad day.

I have tried to highlight above my biggest takeaways from the book and the things that I will be working on as I try and continue to address the gender gap, moving forward.

Reference:

Boys Don't Try by Matt Pinkett and Mark Roberts, Routledge, 2019.

