

## TEACHING & LEARNING JOURNAL - EDITION 34

### Considering the progress of Boys

Tim Yeo

If I start by looking at some data from 2017, at GCSE 66.7% of girls achieved 5A\*-C compared to 58.6% of boys. The Progress 8 scores for the same year show a figure of +0.11 for girls compared to -0.17 for boys.

This gender gap is nothing new, but having completed a detailed analysis of the Science GCSE results last September, it was something that I wanted to find out more about and try and address over the course of this academic year.

Over the past year, I have participated in the 'progress of boys' working party, attended the webinar led by Mark Roberts and read his excellent book, 'Boys don't try'.

The first steps in trying to improve this gap in progress was to consider praise. I identified 5 boys in my 11Sc2 group who were underachieving in terms of PRE results, P8 scores and I made a conscious effort to praise them for making an effort in lessons, on-task behaviour, work completion and quality of work. Initially, 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. The results were mixed and varied from lesson to lesson but generally the targeted boys responded well to the praise.

I then extended this to my three Year 11 groups because it was difficult to assess the amount of progress being made in a lesson. I identified 5 under-achievers in each group and tried to mark their books at the end of each lesson. This gave me a greater amount of evidence and allowed me to be more efficient in offering praise and rewards, but also allowed me to quickly address the boys who were still not engaging. The boys quickly realised that I would be checking each lesson and leaving a comment, and this resulted in a significant improvement in work completion. The praise/reward element then needed to be extended with an e-mail to tutors/AHoH/HoH to formally recognise the improvement, alongside a phone call or postcard home.

Unfortunately, Coronavirus and lockdown occurred before I had a chance to assess the full impact on GCSE results/Progress 8 scores etc.

Since lockdown and having read the 'Boys Don't Try' book, there are several ideas that made me think about my own practise. Several of the things mentioned, I have probably been guilty of over the years, often subconsciously, but will ensure I address as we return to some normality in September:

- (i) **Competition.** In Science, we use low stakes testing for End of Unit tests. Usually practise is then to swap papers and for students to mark each other's work and then the marks are shared. The research shows that this works most effectively when students do not mark each other's tests, marks are not shared and comments made about performance. Students should not be made to retake a test for poor performance. The need to avoid a competitive element is important. As we continue with low stakes tests for KS3, I will ensure students mark their own moving forward.
- (ii) **Setting students.**

It is important that all students are given the same challenging outcome but the level of scaffolding/help will be different. Ensure that students can move between groups and do this regularly to award changes in attitude and progress. We should have high expectations of all sets. The idea that the 'best' teachers are given to the top sets. Although, maybe a little controversial, it is the lower ability students, who need the most help, they deserve the best teachers. Do not give less homework to bottom sets – if anything – they need more.
- (iii) **In the classroom.**

Are you guilty of holding different expectations of what boys and girls can achieve?  
 Ensure that there is a high level of challenge – pitch to the top and support those that require it.  
 Stop using extension tasks – they are often seen like optional tasks and not completed. If they are necessary, include them in the tasks to be completed.  
 Do you sit all the problematic students in one area of the room? Do you spread them out? Is a boy/girl seating plan the best policy?  
 How does the hard-working conscientious girl feel sat next to a disruptive boy? Ensure the seating plan is not rigid and change it regularly so that students experience working with a range of other students.  
 Have high expectations of students which are explicitly shared and bought into:  
 Complete work, including homework to the best of ability  
 Act on given feedback, striving for continual improvement  
 Rise to the challenge of memorising knowledge and grasping difficult concepts  
 Listen to the teacher, and each other, respectfully at all times.

**(iv) Build relationships.**

Try and avoid confrontation and public reprimands

Keep you cool and give students thinking time and cooling off time. They require an opportunity to back down without losing face.

Non-verbal instructions are often more powerful.

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.

Tim Yeo

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**Reference:**

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

