

TEACHING & LEARNING JOURNAL - EDITION 8

'Engaging boys – increasing aspirations'.

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Initially, I signed up to the 'progress of boys' workshop as I was quite aware that my current year 10 BTEC group is very boy heavy and I wanted to ensure that motivation continued to shine through and the pupils achieved as much as they could. I didn't want to fall for the trap of 'the boy problem... of masculinity and peer pressure being the main reason for underachievement' (boys don't try, David Fulton) as the group had started well and I wanted to explore and develop different teaching styles to help this continue and 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 huge, almost immediate impacts; Competition has worked well; I developed this further by adapting my questioning so that the disengaged felt self-value as they participated through answering questions and gained points for their team. I've also noticed some really good short term goals through using a (not so random) name generator. On face value the pupils think that the Name Generator picks them at random and they will have to answer the question I give them; this works well in ensuring they stay alert and engaged with the lesson as they don't know when they will be selected. However, in reality, I have increased the chances of certain pupils being asked questions before they have even entered the room. In the background I can select groupings of pupils eg: PP, target grades, SEND, male, female or even just certain pupils who need to engage more to be 'randomly selected' to answer more questions in that particular lesson.

Although these techniques, along with other ideas I have picked up from the working party have clearly had an impact on the students and their engagement in my lesson; I couldn't help but think that the impact being made was quite narrow and would this new found engagement continue throughout the other 4 lessons they have that day? Or into the next day? What will motivation and drive look like next year? Do the boys revert back to type as they leave my classroom and no longer strive to succeed/to win?

This led me to embark on my own research and reflections, beyond just my teaching, but as a school; I came back to the same question each time. How can we move away from relying on narrow, short term fixes in lessons so much (although I feel they certainly have their place) and instead raise the aspirations of pupils and therefore maintain the intrinsic drive and motivation?

'Taking the time to celebrate the success of a student is an incredible community builder. Recognition and understanding of a peer's accomplishments can help others feel more connected to that person's actions. This creates more positive interactions such as encouraging conversations or questions on getting involved'. (<https://minga.io/celebrate-student-success-at-school/>).

I believe, to truly overturn engagement issues it needs to be done through creating an ethos of celebrating success and not being ashamed or embarrassed... Dare I say it, in the right environment, it could become a very motivational tool, but it has to be wanted by and not thrust upon the pupil. This is why I have been putting together a student leadership and reward proposal over the last few months in a bid to adapt the way our school looks to develop this ethos. To gain a greater insight into what this could look like, I have visited some other schools to look at the way they successfully implement both of these areas. Firstly, looking at reward; we have put together the new badge reward system, which will encourage open recognition of successes.

Pupils will need to achieve certain criteria to gain a subject area badge but once this has been achieved, they can then keep the badge for the duration of their schooling at Westbourne. This not only acknowledges their successes but raises their accountability with the fundamentals such as commitment to learning, attendance and home learning. The badges they collect as they complete their journey will also help them develop the skills to become successful leaders.

Student leadership is so important in many different ways. Through an effective leadership programme it can empower pupils with the skills that will help them achieve in lessons, their communities but also push their own boundaries beyond any limits they may have set.

Giving students ownership of their education and true responsibility helps build accountable, confident individuals. It also provides them with marketable skills that they can apply to future endeavours. Student leadership...helps students develop skills they might not have otherwise had the opportunity to grow. (<https://online.campbellsville.edu/education/student-leadership-in-the-classroom/>).

In our setting it will also put context to the badges that they are achieving as well. One of the criteria for pupils to become part of the student leadership team will be to have certain badges so they can show they have engaged with their schooling and again challenged the barriers that may have once held them back. From next year we will also be looking at introducing a Junior Prefect team to work alongside the Senior Prefect team. By doing this it will upskill our young learners as well as develop our Senior Prefects and the leadership qualities they have.

It's fair to say I have gone full circle this year when looking at pupil engagement and how to maintain their drive. It seems a long time ago that I went to my first 'progress of boys' workshop with the aim to help find some ways to maintain the motivation of some boys from my BTEC class. From next year I will be overseeing a whole school project that I believe will encourage the celebration of success and change the ethos within some of our students; so that aspirations have no limits, hard work is recognised and rewarded and characteristics and skills are developed to help our pupils succeed beyond our school gates.