



SSAT Journal 21

Spring 2023

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Welcome

Sue Williamson
Chief Executive, SSAT



Has schooling lost its raison d'être? I was asked to write on this theme, and it made me reflect on my own time working in schools, as well as at SSAT. I started teaching in September 1980 – I was a mature entrant having spent ten years working in the NHS, and the headteacher decided that I had the experience to be the unpaid head of history. My job was to redesign the history curriculum – these were the days before the national curriculum. I made reasonable progress in year one, but my time was taken up with introducing A-level history in the newly created sixth form.

Curriculum designing really took off when two newly qualified teachers of history were appointed, and we became a team developing a knowledge and skills rich history curriculum. We wanted every child to succeed, and that included examination results, but we also wanted to inspire young people to love history. I cannot give you any data that says we did, but we did get some good feedback from students and parents. Only recently, I was told by my former colleague that two of our students had gone on to become professors of history – one in the UK and one in the USA. I wish we had had the opportunity of writing an article in a publication like the Journal to share our story; to get responses from fellow professionals, and ideas for improving our practice. In 1988, Kenneth Baker introduced the national curriculum, and curriculum design took on a new meaning. He also introduced Baker Days and professional development was transformed.

This edition has a number of articles that highlight the challenges faced by schools today. Schools must be at the heart of their communities – they

are the constant factor in the lives of many young people and their families. Schools can not solve all the problems in the world – they need help from the government and other stakeholders to tackle issues such as poverty. Katrina Morley and Sean Harris write about poverty in the Tees Valley. I have been to Katrina's schools and seen the outstanding work her team are doing to alleviate the impact of poverty on their students learning. Her leadership empowers an amazing staff team. The children and young people are known as individuals rather than a piece of data. There are close links with families, and Anthony Henry's interview also highlights the importance of parental engagement.

Over the coming months, we will be focusing on themes in this Journal: professional development, transition, racism, role of artificial intelligence in education, teaching and learning. We are continuing our fight for deep social justice – we want every child to lead a fulfilled and purposeful life. We will debate with you the question: has schooling lost its raison d'être? We will share with policy makers, political parties, and other stakeholders the network's thoughts on next steps for a school-led system of schooling.

Sue Williamson



Poverty unmasked: Listening to the voices of children and families in the cost of living crisis

By Katrina Morley and Sean Harris, Tees Valley Education

Poverty is complex.

Be it the social stigma faced by families, the anxieties it causes or the impact on mental health – the impacts of poverty are far reaching and understanding it is arguably the biggest challenge facing school leaders and educators in the 21st century.

Whilst poverty as a term is problematic; the term is referred to here to encompass both poverty and what commentators often refer to as disadvantage.

The problem with ‘poverty’

Complexities exist in both defining and codifying what we mean by poverty, especially in relation to our work in schools.

Haughton and Khandker (2009) argue that poverty is best understood as a ‘pronounced deprivation in well-being’. It’s more than a deficit of economic possession or fiscal access; it permeates every aspect of life for those that face poverty on a daily basis. The work of Wagle (2002) is useful here in indicating how researchers tend to view the definition and measurement of poverty through three particular lenses – economic wellbeing, capability and social exclusion. However, Wagle indicates that this ‘reductionist approach to poverty definition with excessive emphasis on one aspect cannot take us far enough in understanding what factors lie at the core of poverty problems’.

Further challenges face those wanting to understand poverty because lived experiences of poverty can be transient. For example, Coudouel et al (2002) highlight how seasonal variations exist and can impact how families and individuals experience in poverty (e.g. running out of food stocks at the end of a particularly difficult season and then partially recovering later).

School leaders wanting to understand a broader definition of the term poverty in relation to health, social status and economic wellbeing may find it helpful to read the work of Marmot et al 2020. Similarly, education leaders and teachers would find it helpful to understand the dangers of an over-reliance on using free school meals and pupil premium labels as a core proxy for defining or understanding poverty in relation to their school communities (Gorard 2016; Harris 2021).

Listening to lived experience

Deep social justice must then evolve from deep listening. Our work as system leaders has to move beyond the orthodoxies of general parent questionnaires or bolt-on pupil voice. Whilst these processes may serve some value, the issue of poverty and associated themes clearly demand their own air time in our schools or organisations.

There is a plethora of research to support the importance and moral imperative of listening to the voice of children, families and communities (Dewey 1948; Freire 2005; Hooks 1993). Van der Hoek (2005) cites that children living in



poverty are not equally impacted by the effects of disadvantage and argues the need for a more cohesive understanding of child poverty that accounts for the views of children and the interventions that will best support them.

Komulainen (2007) highlights that children are often positioned as both ‘dependent, vulnerable receivers of care and education, and sometimes as ‘agentic’ subjects with distinct voices’.

At Tees Valley Education Trust, social justice is one of our core tenets. We are increasingly aware that the voices of the children, families and communities we serve are necessary to an understanding of social justice, highlighting which aspects of injustice need to be urgently addressed through the work of our academies.

As part of this article, we felt it important to capture the insights of a parent and highlight what families believe about the importance of deep listening too. Janet, a parent to a child in one of our academies, offered these insights:

“It is really hard working and living in Middlesbrough at the moment. Morale is low within the community and more people are worried about the cost of living crisis ...

It feels lonely for many parents especially at the moment. It’s now more important than ever for schools to communicate more closely with families and listen to what it is like on a day-to-day basis for children and families facing financial difficulties.

We still feel some embarrassment about it all, especially when we think others might

judge us. But, schools are well connected and have so much information and expertise to help us. Schools are all about learning and working closely with parents and families in crisis creates a stronger bond for learning. By talking and listening we can help understand more about how to face these hard times”.

So, what might help?

Below are some approaches that we have used or are currently trialling that may be of support in other settings as part of deep listening with children and families.

- **Poverty education:** develop a core continuing professional development (CPD) strand that focuses on local poverty and what research says about the pain-points that the local community is struggling with in relation to this. This may be especially helpful for colleagues with limited lived experience of poverty or who have misconceptions about the local area.
- **Trauma-informed approaches:** research draws clear correlations between the experience of some disadvantaged children and the benefit of trauma-informed approaches to practice. Enrol colleagues in CPD and qualifications which add further expertise to your teams in this. We have appointed a trauma-informed leader in our Trust as part of our own commitment.
- **Poverty on the brain:** examine some of the growing research about the links between neurology and poverty (Harris, 2022). Re-examine your core CPD diet for teachers. Consider whether the core principles of classroom pedagogy are driven by what we know helps knowledge and learning to stick and embed in long-term memory for children.
- **Focus groups:** consider forming focus groups with families and/or children that invite stakeholders to share how they are coping amidst current economic and fiscal pressures. Invite critical feedback on how school processes and routines are supporting or even adding pressure to these and what may need to be adapted.



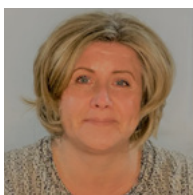
- **Research roundup:** As a Trust, each week we curate research insights and blogs that are relevant to the social justice agenda and send these to colleagues in academies and to others nationally. These help us to listen to the landscape of poverty and consider our approach in teams.
- **Academic insights:** consider those colleagues that may now be beyond an NPQ or want to pursue further academic thinking in relation to the poverty or social justice agendas. As a Trust, we have funded degree, masters and doctoral research to keep growing our expertise in teams.
- **Partnerships:** consider working closely with charities, universities and research organisations that demonstrate a commitment to social justice. For example, we have worked closely with colleagues at Teesside University to submit a bid to research health inequalities locally and consider a collaborative and place-based approach to addressing these.
- **Pupil voice:** when carrying out school improvement processes (e.g. deep dives, feedback scrutiny etc) invite disadvantaged children to play an active role in these and outline what this looks like through their own eyes.
- **Cost of living crisis agenda:** consider making the cost of living crisis a recurring agenda item in strategic leadership and

line management meetings. Aside from using this to check-in with staff on their own wellbeing, it encourages teams to routinely share intelligence that has been gathered on this topic and how it is impacting workforce, children and families.

- **Curriculum:** identify key milestones in curriculum and extra-curricular activities to signpost support that is available to children, young people and families. Consider increasing coverage of learning about individuals or organisations that have sought to fight for social justice. This further demonstrates that the school is responsive to the current climate and openly prepared to talk about these issues and learn about them.

Janet, the aforementioned parent of a child in one of our academies, added the following by way of encouraging school leaders to think further on this topic:

“Schools are the beating heart of a community. Having a positive, safe and non-judgmental environment for mums, dads and children to talk about these topics would be helpful to everybody. You already do so much, but let us help you understand it more so that we can work together”



Katrina Morley (@Katrina_morley) is CEO of Tees Valley Education Trust. Katrina is equally passionate about social justice and works alongside a vast network

of individuals and organisations to champion social justice through the work of schools and system leaders in education. Examples include Northern Power of Women, Tech Equal, Schools North East and SSAT National Primary Board.



Sean Harris (@SeanHarris_NE) is a doctoral researcher with Teesside University investigating poverty and how system-leaders can further work with

children and families to investigate it. Sean is also an author and is Trust Improvement Lead at Tees Valley Education Trust.

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Headteacher Update Podcast: *Tackling the consequences of poverty*, July 2022: <https://bit.ly/3agpffQ>

Harris: *Crafting your curriculum with poverty in mind*, Headteacher Update, November 2021: <https://bit.ly/3qI3dXP>

Find out more about the work that Tees Valley Education Trust are leading on social justice and how they can further support your organisation: <https://www.teesvalleyeducation.co.uk/trust-specialisms/social-justice-equality/>



ChatGPT is confirming my suspicion all along, and this is great news!

By Nadia Seaborne, GEMS Wellington International School

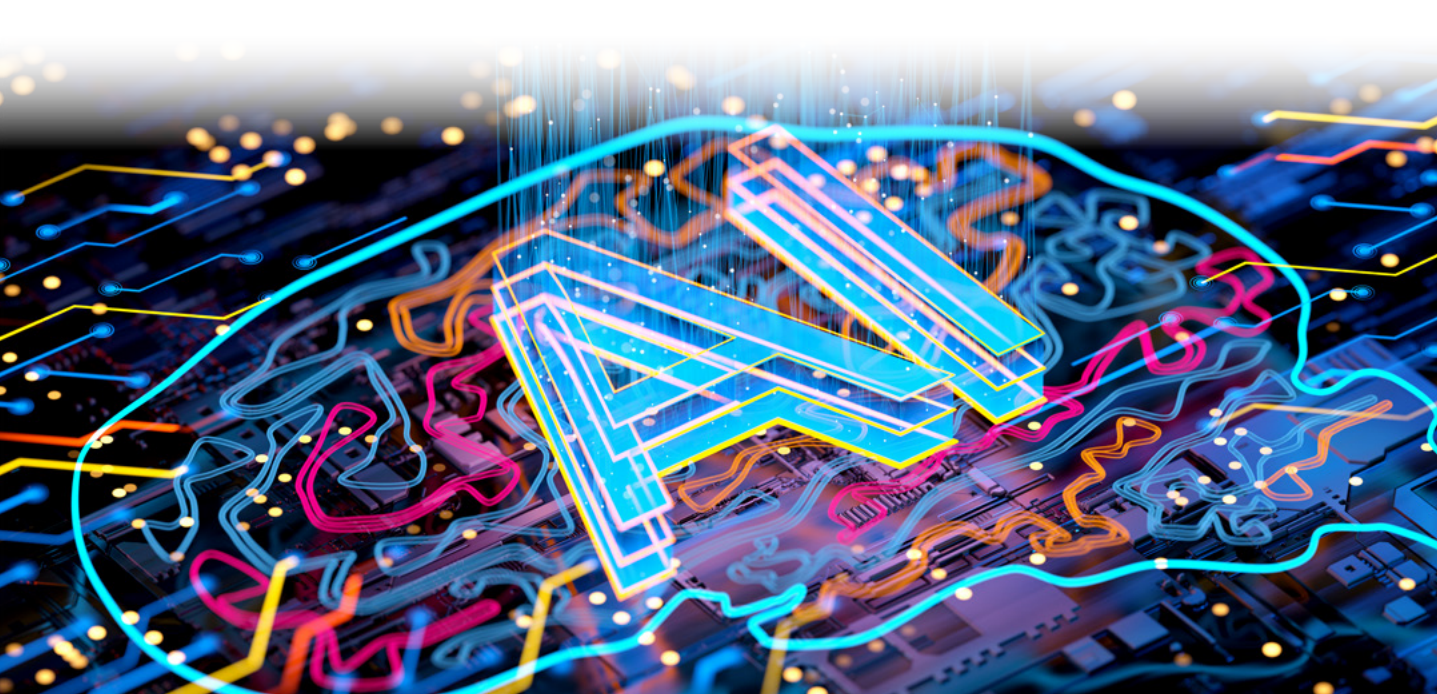
Scrolling through any education forum or Facebook post, I would be very surprised if ChatGPT is not too far away from any conversation. Threads are full of panic, hesitation and a relentless worry by teachers who cannot believe what they are seeing. Panic and fear seem to have settled in (even though this AI is only a couple of months old) and optimistic posts about this being a learning tool, and a fantastic one at that, are few and far between.

What is ChatGPT?

For anyone of you that hasn't yet dabbled in Elon Musk's newest AI baby, let me tell you. GPT (Generative Pre-training Transformer) is a type of artificial intelligence (AI) model

that has been developed by OpenAI and it is specifically designed to generate a human-like text. It is trained on a large dataset of human-generated text and uses machine-learning techniques to generate new text that is similar in style and content to the training data. GPT can be used for a variety of natural language processing tasks, including language translation, summarisation, and text generation.

I was astounded when I first opened the programme and began exploring what it could do. This model is faster and more sophisticated than previous AI systems and the language and content of what it produced initially shook me to the core. It initially seemed much more real.



It was terrifying yet brilliant at the same time.

Within five seconds of writing a question, the programme had written a poem in the style of Shakespeare using iambic pentameter. Shakespearean style techniques ranging from assonance, consonance and metaphors were so perfectly placed within this AI designed poem, they wouldn't look out of place in an original Shakespearean collection.

Within ten seconds, the programme created an essay on the comparison of Ibsen's *Doll's House* and Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*.

Ten seconds – quotations based on specific themes in specific books.

Five seconds – editing and proofreading.

Five seconds – poems written in the style of famous authors.

Five seconds – gathering research on specific themes and characters.

Three seconds – answers to specific English language and literature questions.
The list goes on ...

Written before my very eyes, within seconds, was content that would ultimately take myself and my students hours to produce in real-time lessons. I instructed ChatGPT to write an essay and then mark it using the criteria of the IB, so it did, it also gave itself evaluative feedback about what it needed to do next time. This new AI programme has changed everything that I know about delivering lessons, and what's worse (or better) is there is absolutely no way that I could ever compete with this. How could I? And more to the point Why would I? Could there be a chance we are both on the same side? Getting knowledge to others, whilst giving them the skills to do this themselves.

Remember the saying 'Keep your friends close ... keep your enemies closer'

This is exactly how I feel about ChatGPT. Competing with this machine would be a huge waste of time so I began thinking about ways

that this new technology could enhance my own learning and teaching and ultimately make me a more effective teacher. How could this technology save me valuable time both with planning and inside the classroom? There was absolutely no point in trying to hide this type of technology from my students as they may have been using this already without me knowing.

With a new optimistic mindset, I began asking the system questions about the types of lessons and activities that I could include in a scheme of work that I was currently writing. Within seconds, ideas were created and outlines of lessons were being written. This was incredible. There were some great ideas and reminders about what we need to include in lessons and the type of activities that students enjoy. My schemes of work were being revamped and it was like receiving instant professional development. Like all great professional development, it meant that I could ultimately magpie key ideas and adapt them based on my students.

What I have noticed about the content that is being produced

Whilst the content that is being generated is clear, coherent and well-written. It does lack the 'voice' of the teacher, this I feel is something that AI like this will never be able to really do, how could it? It's not us. The more focused and detailed the questions are, the better the response yet the voice of who we are isn't there. It is a machine after all. As teachers, we are anything but, and we all have different relationships with our students. We know them and they know us.

The case will be the same if students use AI to produce their work - we will know! If we absolutely know our students and we know them well and how they write, we will be able to tell if there are any changes. Personalised learning is going to be more crucial than ever and this is great news. Maybe this is the reminder that we all need.

If we stop fearing this type of AI and think about ChatGPT as a friend, not an enemy, it will force us as educators to remember that the connection and relationship between the student and the teacher has always and will always be fundamental to learning and success.



Whilst AI offers numerous opportunities and ideas, the face-to-face connection that happens in real lessons and that real exchange can never be substituted for machine learning, a suspicion that I have always had regardless how good technology gets!

ChatGPT is a timesaver!

What's brilliant about this resource is that it will save students time looking for quotations, finding themes, learning about context etc. Diagnostic tests can be written in seconds by both staff and students and they can check their answers instantly. ChatGPT will give our time back to us as teachers so that we can do what we do best.

We now have time for those critical thinking discussions and we can be present to support students to improve their writing. We may even have time to read texts again in class without skipping sections – can you imagine? This could potentially bring back students' love of reading whilst still allowing them to learn and have access to everything they need to be successful. We just need to think about how we will set writing. Perhaps the days of completing written work at

home are gone, so let's use this to give them time to write in class with pen and paper, where we can live mark and really see what they know!

As an educator, I am incredibly excited to try new ideas and ways of teaching in class, the possibilities with this GPT is endless and I for one cannot wait to see how my students respond.

As an example, I have created 20 ways you can use GPT in the classroom in order to improve critical thinking.

1. Use GPT to generate discussion prompts and questions that encourage critical thinking and analysis.
2. Have students use GPT to generate writing prompts or summarise texts, and then use the generated prompts or summaries as a starting point for discussion or analysis.
3. Use GPT to generate debate topics or positions, and have students use critical thinking skills to defend or refute the generated arguments.

4. Use GPT to generate problems or scenarios for students to solve, requiring them to apply critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
5. Have students use GPT to generate potential solutions to real-world problems, and then use critical thinking skills to evaluate and improve upon the generated ideas.
6. Use GPT to generate alternative viewpoints or perspectives on a topic, and have students consider and analyse these viewpoints using critical thinking skills.
7. Have students use GPT to generate questions about a topic, and then use critical thinking skills to research and find answers to these questions.
8. Use GPT to generate outlines or diagrams that illustrate complex concepts, and have students use these visual aids to better understand and analyse the concepts.
9. Use GPT to generate summaries of texts or articles, and have students use critical thinking skills to evaluate the accuracy and completeness of the generated summaries.
10. Have students use GPT to generate reports or presentations on a topic, and then use critical thinking skills to evaluate and improve upon the generated content.
11. Use GPT to generate multiple versions of a text or story, and have students compare and contrast the different versions, using critical thinking skills to analyse the changes and differences.
12. Use GPT to generate prompts for creative writing assignments, encouraging students to use their imaginations and critical thinking skills to come up with unique and original ideas.
13. Have students use GPT to generate responses to prompts or questions, and then use critical thinking skills to evaluate and revise their responses.
14. Use GPT to generate quizzes or tests on a topic, and have students use critical thinking skills to answer the questions.
15. Have students use GPT to generate questions for peer review or peer feedback sessions, encouraging them to use critical thinking skills to evaluate and improve upon the work of their classmates.
16. Use GPT to generate study guides or review sheets, helping students to focus their critical thinking skills on the most important information.
17. Have students use GPT to generate flashcards or study aids, encouraging them to use critical thinking skills to distill complex concepts into concise and memorable summaries.
18. Use GPT to generate group projects or collaborative assignments, encouraging students to use critical thinking skills to work together and come up with creative solutions.
19. Have students use GPT to generate presentations or demonstrations, encouraging them to use critical thinking skills to explain complex concepts in a clear and concise manner.
20. Use GPT to generate ideas for hands-on activities or experiments, encouraging students to use critical thinking skills to design and carry out their own investigations.





Core, Cohesion and Culture: Building a sustainable, staff centred CPD model

By Nikki Sullivan and Kelly Tatlock, Beckfoot School

Improving our core offer

“Don’t design the future until you deeply understand the present.”

Viviane Robinsonⁱ

At Beckfoot School, our ‘present’ involved a CPD structure that strongly served faculty priorities through ‘collaborative planning time’. In these weekly sessions, subject teams worked together on identified areas for development from their faculty improvement plans (FIPs) – whether they were curriculum, teaching and learning, or assessment focused.

Problem 1: Whole-school priorities

We also knew that our present involved a CPD structure that did not as strongly serve whole-school priorities.

Our reading and exploration took us down the route of teaching and learning teams, similar to teacher learning communitiesⁱⁱ. Colleagues from across faculties and career stages volunteer according to the identified school priority and how this links with their particular areas of interest or expertise, then work collaboratively to find a solution to the area identified.

The team considers reading and relevant research, trials ideas in their own subject areas, and then reconvenes to discuss initial findings. This cyclical process is repeated until contextually evidence-informed strategies are identified and

can be trialled in faculties more widely, enabling a broader evaluation and refinement prior to an agreed addition or amendment to policy.

This approach empowers staff through the co-construction of our ‘what works here’ and ensures careful consideration of the nuances of different subject areas.

Problem 2: Individual leverage points

We also knew that our present involved a CPD structure that did not as strongly serve individual priorities and leverage points.

Although we had been utilising coaching for many years, it was not prioritised and protected as it needed to be (thrown into sharp relief over the pandemic), and it did not always have a lasting impact on teachers’ practice.

Considering all ‘opportunity costs’ⁱⁱⁱ, we allocated 30 minutes of weekly collaborative planning time to long-term, bespoke CPD in the form of instructional coaching. This shift in our coaching approach not only meant this time was protected and prioritised, but also strengthened the active ingredients included in our coaching model, with a greater emphasis on teacher habits, modelling and practice. Although this resulted in 30 minutes less time in subject teams, all teams still had an hour a week. In addition, through our trials, we noticed that coaching supported faculty improvement as staff were better able to implement faculty priorities into their teaching.



Key thinking: *Although CPD content needs to come before determining the form of CPD, changing the form of CPD too frequently is inefficient. Building a mechanismⁱⁱ-focused model that can serve school, faculty and individual priorities, curriculum, teaching and learning and assessment results in sustainability over time.*

Building cohesion

“We need CPD that learns from the lessons of the same kind of thinking that we give to the curriculum we provide for our pupils. CPD should have a clearly planned programme that builds on our prior knowledge. There should be an end goal in mind: this is our intent.” Zoe Enser and Mark Enser^{iv}

Problem 3: Building a cohesive whole

We knew that having three core strands to teaching and learning development (teaching and learning teams, collaborative planning time, instructional coaching) could feel disjointed. Clarity and cohesion were key. Clarity around whole-school priorities enables faculty leaders to consider these when shaping their faculty priorities. In addition, if whole-school teaching and learning priorities are based on

our staff, our students and our school, then faculty priorities will coincide with this, as will teachers’ individual leverage points.

Example 1

As a school, we identified the need to strengthen systems and strategies around retrieval practice. In science, the team agreed that this was a reflection of an area of need in their subject. The faculty leader worked with their coach to develop their use of retrieval practice, quizzing and, in turn, their use of Carousel Learning^v. This strategy was then shared in collaborative planning time, and subsequently other staff chose to focus in on this in their coaching.

Example 2

We identified that systems around marking and feedback were inefficient and not optimally effective. Our teaching and learning team determined that ‘whole-class feedback’ would support teachers in effective reteaching and designing of learning sequences to support students in closing gaps in their learning. Each faculty refined the approach to maximise effectiveness in their subject areas. The implementation journey continued through collaborative planning time but, by this point, many teachers had already been involved in the project and had already adopted this strategy into their practice.

Key thinking: *“Each level consists of a stream of activity that has a vital role to play and needs different kinds of thinking, different inputs, structures and supports to keep them going – whilst all forming part of an integrated whole.” Tom Sherrington ^{vi}*

Building culture

“the continuing professional development (CPD) leader needs to:

- Get teachers excited about teaching.*
- Get teachers talking about teaching.*
- Get teachers planning and evaluating teaching together.*
- Get teachers observing and learning from each other.*
- Get teachers sharing what works with each other.” Shaun Allison ^{vii}*

Problem 4: An ‘extra-curricular’ offer

If we are thinking of our approach to CPD as a curriculum, then we also need to consider outside our ‘core offer’ – how do we provide enriching opportunities through ‘extra-curricular’ CPD

experiences? We recognised that some of our staff want more. We also recognised the importance of building a real culture around professional learning, reflective practice and ‘being better tomorrow than we are today’ (Beckfoot Trust).

So, alongside our core offer, we have developed an opt-in cultural offer, utilising many ideas from the book quoted above – *Perfect Teacher-Led CPD* by Shaun Allison ^{vii}. Examples include:

- **Open classrooms:** Teachers have the opportunity to pop and see other teachers in school, with cover provided as needed.
- **Bulletins and newsletters:** Sharing in-school updates and links to external blogs, podcasts and webinars.
- **Faculty research leads:** A team of cross-faculty teachers who love to read, attend webinars and share subject-specific best-practice, mirroring our outwards-facing whole-school approach.
- **15-minute forums:** Short, teacher-led CPD sessions sharing best practice and recent developments.
- **Developing Greatness platform:** A SharePoint site with recordings of in-school CPD, external webinars, links to blogs etc.



Key thinking: *These additional strands help support our culture of lifelong learning. That being said, we would still say that the best way to build a culture of professional development is to ensure that a school's core offer is sustainable and impactful. All staff being supported to develop and refine their practice is the biggest driver to motivation, to staffroom conversations, to building a 'buzz'.*

A “never-ending story”

“The curriculum is a never-ending story. Lots of colleagues are saying that they are not as far ahead as they would like to be on their curriculum journey. That will always be the case: there will always be something that we want to refine, ditch, add depth to. We need to enjoy the fact that curriculum is never-ending.” Mary Myatt^{viii}

If we are seeing our CPD model and its content as a curriculum then, in the words of Mary Myatt, we need to see it as a “never-ending story” – something which will evolve and be refined. Areas we are currently refining include our coaching CPD offer – both its contents and the logistics of working with this very busy team and making our non-core offer as available to everyone as possible for example through recordings as well as live sessions. We relish refining our CPD “never-ending story” to ensure we are providing the most efficient and effective CPD we can for our brilliant teachers.

To summarise...

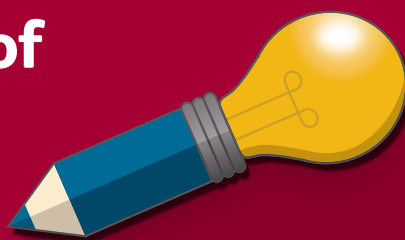
As shared in a recent blog post^{ix}: “Teaching is complex. Leading is complex. Creating a CPD model which feels cohesive and uncluttered is complex – and engaging in the complexity is how we ensure it lands simply and effectively.”

Follow the authors on Twitter at: Nikki Sullivan @Nikki__Sullivan and Kelly Tatlock @socwarrior

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- ⁱⁱ*Effective Professional Development* | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)
- ⁱⁱⁱ(3) Dylan Wiliam on Twitter: “@JohnTaylorPri This is why I think opportunity cost is the single most important concept in educational improvement. Every hour teachers spend doing one thing is an hour they don't have for something else...” / [Twitter](#)
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- ^{viii}*The Curriculum As A Never-Ending Story: Some Thoughts On Curriculum Discussions* - [HWRK Magazine](#)
- ^{ix}*Further reflections on CPD and putting people first...* – Love to talk Teaching and Learning (wordpress.com)

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Delivering a really great deal for local families

Based on an interview with Anthony Henry, Redden Court School

Anthony Henry, the headteacher of Redden Court School, would be the first to say that they don't do anything just for the benefit of Ofsted. But their recent inspection report gives a good indication of the improvement journey the school has been on. The report opens with the lovely line "Pupils flourish here" and grades the school as outstanding in all areas.

Anthony explains that their main focus has been on providing an outstanding education for local families. Redden Court is a real community school; students are mostly drawn from a small catchment area close to the school in Romford, Essex. The school's strong reputation for SEND provision also means that families from further afield select Redden Court for their children.

Many students at Redden Court have a high level of need. As a result, outcomes data might not always be as strong as elsewhere. However, what stands out is the ambition that staff have for every student, irrespective of their starting point. "We could change our offer to improve school outcomes," Anthony explains "but students' needs always come first." Curriculum pathways are carefully tailored to meet the needs of students, ensuring that they are on courses which will enable them to succeed. The school offers three main curriculum pathways – an EBacc route, a modified EBacc route (minus one subject) and an SEN pathway known as the blue route. Students on the blue pathway access the full curriculum offer and a key focus has been to ensure that

it is truly aspirational for students. They have invested heavily in ensuring that students with SEN receive the support they need to thrive.

Importantly, Anthony explains, students always have the opportunity to move between pathways. This ensures that doors aren't being closed and there is always room for progression. As Anthony says, it is always about what is "best for the child, not best for the school."

Curriculum planning is responsive, building on the interests of students and ensuring that the offer is always accessible for all. Students have an open choice in year 9 – option blocks are built after choices have been made to enable as many as possible to study their first choices. The school is responsive to students' interests and enthusiasms.

A carousel approach in year 9 enables students to experience new subjects before taking their options and this has resulted in increased uptake of triple science, music and languages.

The breadth of their curriculum is also reflected in the extensive opportunities for wider learning. It is expected that every faculty will invite in at least one guest speaker and offer at least one trip. Every department offers one club and one intervention session a fortnight. There are over 100 clubs in operation, with most taking place at lunchtime to ensure that as many young people as possible can attend.



Student leadership is given a high priority and was recognised as a strength by Ofsted, with importance placed on positive attitudes and engagement. Students act as role models for each other and there is a focus on developing character and self-confidence.

This investment in young people is mirrored by investment in staff. Anthony stresses the vital importance of having a happy team, who feel valued and invested in. He explains how they have worked to narrow the gap between the leadership team and the rest of the staff, providing opportunities for staff at all levels to lead and shape whole-school development. The appointment of lead practitioners and a Raising Standards Team have provided development opportunities and encouraged talented staff to stay rather than look for promotion elsewhere.

The Raising Standards Team and the lead practitioners have been central to school development at Redden Court – forensically looking at what can be done to improve. As Anthony puts it “we only talk about how we can make things better.”

This determination to focus on continuous improvement is reinforced by an exceptionally strong pastoral team and positive relationships among staff.

The differentiated approach to learning also extends to the staff. The team have moved away from whole staff training to a model where staff choose their own professional development from a programme which offers extensive opportunities for leadership development and learning about pedagogical practice. Evidence-based research is used to inform the development of practice. Expectations of staff have changed – workload is carefully monitored and staff wellbeing is given a high priority.

Anthony stresses that his focus is always on making sure that both students and staff receive a really good deal at Redden Court. Their student-led approach is ensuring that there are no barriers to success and that expectations are high for all, regardless of their starting point. Redden Court is a school which wants every member of the community to succeed, staff and students alike and this investment is clearly paying off.

We need to talk about racism

By Safiya Raqib, Waddesdon C of E Secondary School

Safiya Raqib and Helen Drought are Diversity and Inclusion leads at Waddesdon C of E Secondary School. The school recently achieved the RACE Charter Mark Silver Award. The RACE Charter Mark delivered by Fig Tree International and awarded by SSAT recognises schools wishing to demonstrate their commitment to action and improvement in relation to race equality in all aspects of their work.



Our journey in actively identifying and seeking to correct, through changes in policies and practice, the covert and overt systemic discrimination that our school like many others experience started in the aftermath of the George Floyd murder in America. It was a year of global changes with the carnage and restrictions of Covid-19 becoming the norm. Increased reporting in the media during the pandemic catapulted the murder from potentially being another case in the history of violence in America against black people, to one that commanded people's attention and started a movement towards a discussion on the matter of race and discrimination.

Our head of history, set up an anti-racist group named 'We Need to Talk about Racism' (WNTR) in order to provide a safe place for our minority students to express

how they felt about the murder, and about their lived schooling experiences.

Of course, like many schools we had our experiences of racism, even though they appeared limited. Essentially, did we think we had a problem of racism or micro-aggressions in our school? No.

However, what our students told us through a narrative video, recorded by the newly formed WNTR group, sent staff a clear message: they as minority students in our majority white school had experienced micro-aggressions that were going unchallenged, unnoticed and often unrecognised. We had undoubtedly opened a can of worms we had not been prepared for.

We had limited incidents reported as racist; our results showed no clear difference in the performance of our students regardless of background; we had won the literacy diversity prize and received 100 books by diverse authors; our curriculum subjects had elements of cultural awareness embedded within them through the recognition of this requirement via the exam boards; and yet some students from minority ethnic groups felt alienated. The shock, disbelief, sadness and disappointment felt by all stakeholders of our school community facilitated a drive to change this narrative through education, training, policy adaptations and ultimately listening.



We had given our minority students the power of voice and now we had to give our majority a perspective (Li, 2010); they needed us to listen and we were listening. We had to understand that conditioning prior to attending our school meant that in the past students may have withheld information where they felt marginalised in order to not challenge the norm which was likely to affect how the problem was perceived and responded to, an issue identified in Critical Race Theory.

The steps that followed contributed to our commitment to empowering the voices of our minority students and recognising that we had to take a critical thinking approach in order to challenge our own concept of 'normal', regardless of our backgrounds as educators. We took many steps to ensure that positive change was embedded into our school at all levels, including:

- Appointing a new governor for diversity and inclusion, who also became our first non-white governor.
- Using the Race and Conscious Equality Charter Mark action plan to identify areas within our school hierarchy and community that needed addressing.
- I undertook a masters level course with the Open University: 'Addressing inequality and difference in educational practice', enabling better understanding on recent UK and US based race research within schools and shedding light on the concept of epistemic racism.
- Formally creating a role for a diversity and inclusion lead within school, with a focus on race and ensuring that this role entailed working closely with our headteacher.
- Adapting our uniform requirements to include culturally appropriate clothing and adhering to the Halo code.

- Delivering race-related inset training, ensuring racial and cultural misunderstandings are reduced and ultimately eliminated, and promoting culturally responsive teaching (Cazden & Leggett, 1976 cited by Khalifa et al, 2016).
- Adapting our school community music festival to encompass a cultural element, with an emphasis that we celebrate together as a school, rather than having a stand-alone 'culture day'.
- Having Black Celebration Month specifically in October, but visual representation and discussion throughout the academic year through assemblies and PSHE lessons.
- Ensuring that the cultural celebrations of our students are given importance in the school calendar.
- Undertaking a staff diversity indicator survey to monitor our recruitment and selection of staff.
- Ensuring that positive diverse images are present in lesson, for example images of a black foetus in science and normalising everyday items used by our minority groups such as pik combs, plantain crisps, henna cones in maths and business-based case studies and questions.

Our key learning and message to other schools is that a lot can be achieved regardless of the ethnic backgrounds of students. As a majority white school we do not have the benefits of drawing upon the wealth of knowledge and participation of parents and communities of minority ethnic groups, many of whom are not represented within our school. Instead, our important and influential role as educators is to facilitate conversation, raise consciousness of the systemic racism that can exist, and promote education for all by ensuring a high quality education for all in a majority white school who live in a majority white country. These students will form a greater proportion of the workforce, legislators and indeed future educators than their minority ethnic counterparts so it is vital that they have a more holistic and knowledgeable experience and appreciation of the importance of acknowledging and normalising the differences of race and related identity and empowerment. Only if we do this can we ensure that education settings like ours are a positive tool for change in bringing about equality and equity for all our students from all backgrounds. (Milligan, 2014).

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Creating Independent Learners: Using ‘The CPD Rainbow’ to enhance teacher autonomy

By Dr Marcella McCarthy, Royal Latin School

Running CPD in school is a challenge - teachers are a tough audience. With so much focus these days on cognitive overload, it's surprising that the format of school inset days has stayed so much the same, and that for some staff they still seem to consist of “managerial rhetoric and inane box ticking”¹.

Thirty valuable hours of training disappears all too quickly. You might offer a session with an outside speaker to address a school priority such as behaviour management, or on issues such as racism and toxic masculinity that have recently come to the fore in schools. Teachers ask for individual preparation time, department and year heads want to meet with their team, and what about SEND or pupil premium issues? Then there's reading policies and checking safeguarding; everyone needs to have read the latest KCSIE (Keeping Children Safe In Education). It's no surprise that staff feedback about inset is often mixed, because the training itself can seem incoherent and unconnected to the school². So where do you get the time to cover it all? And how does inset fit into other forms of CPD, and into the school's planning?

In any job, autonomy and a sense of control over what you do is important when it comes to wellbeing. This is particularly important in teaching³. Research done by NFER in 2020 showed that teachers had significantly lower autonomy than other professions (16%), and

that this did not increase, as in other careers, with added age or experience. In particular, the research found that “autonomy is strongly associated with improved job satisfaction and a greater intention to stay in teaching”.

One of the key findings of the research was that 38% of teachers perceive little or no influence over their professional development goals, and that this made staying in teaching less attractive. It was concluded that “increasing teachers' reported influence over their professional development goals from ‘some’ to ‘a lot’ is associated with a nine-percentage-point increase in intention to stay in teaching”⁴. At a time of a growing teacher retention crisis, in short, addressing autonomy in CPD should be a priority.

At the Royal Latin School, wellbeing is one of our key ongoing priorities for staff and students. Accordingly, we decided to address the issue of inset fatigue head-on. Surveying staff, we discovered that they disliked a ‘one-size fits all’ approach, wanting connections between inset and creative professional development throughout the rest of the year. They wanted autonomy, and they wanted to feel trusted and respected as professionals. And so the CPD rainbow was born.

The CPD rainbow has six layers, and with the help of their line manager staff choose training that connects to their personal goals. Pink signals what you need just to do your job well and effectively, for example safeguarding.



Then orange links specifically to your work with a particular group or groups. After this, there are opportunities to work with students (yellow), engage in research (green), form working parties (blue), with the purple band indicating leadership opportunities such as shadowing a colleague at another school. All training links into departmental and school planning, so you can click on (for example) the ‘working with students’ section to see what opportunities there might be to become involved with student leadership.

This flexibility means other changes are necessary. At the start of the year, a hyperlinked inset calendar lays out the plan for the year, with all CPD transparently connected to the school development plan, online training and key documents. We have one “virtual” inset day in which online courses and tasks such as policy-reading can be done. This day can be taken in lieu if staff wish, with training links made available at the start of the summer holiday. This resulted in, for the first time ever, people competing to read KCSIE as early as possible! We also have a day in the autumn dedicated to research and outreach. Deliberately held at a time when other local schools are working, this is an opportunity for staff to visit another school or workplace, or work on individual research projects. Staff attend carousel sessions to share the good practice developed - and we drop in wellbeing sessions as well. This January, we offered juggling and biscuit-making among others!

Continual feedback allows staff to personalise and balance their CPD, and approval ratings are high: in the wordcloud I created from feedback, the most used word was trust. Research day is probably the most popular, with 98.2% of staff rating it highly productive and 100% requesting a similar day again, but for all sessions enthusiasm is visible. A typical comment reads: “This has been the most productive inset I have had in my career! Good for professional development and wellbeing. Thank you”.

References

¹See *Secret Teacher: don't waste my time on torturous training days* (Guardian, 15th September 2015)

²David Didau *So, what *IS* the point of INSET days?* (Learning Spy, January 6th 2013)

³See, for example, “*Why teachers need more autonomy-and how to give it to them*” by Irena Barker (TES online, 18th February 2022)

⁴*Teacher autonomy: how does it relate to job satisfaction and retention?* Jack Worth and Jens Van den Brande (NFER January 2020)



Supporting successful transition

Based on interviews with Jack Gallagher, Richard Challoner School and Anna Dwyer, St John the Baptist School

Many schools in the network feel that transition into year 7 has become a bigger issue in recent years. Obviously this has partly been driven by the pandemic – the need to address gaps in learning and support pupils presenting with mental health issues has become more pressing. However, for the team at St John the Baptist School, this was a longer term issue. They had seen a marked increase in the number of pupils joining the school not only with SEND but with a wide variety of needs. Anna Dwyer from St John the Baptist observed that these needs did not always present themselves fully in year 7, but became evident as pupils moved through school and lacked the skills needed to cope as academic demands increased.

Feeling that they needed a different approach, they looked to see how other schools were addressing this issue. Meeting the needs of all learners is a long-standing strength at Richard Challoner School, where a high number of students have ECHPs and diagnoses of different kinds. The team at Richard Challoner have a well-established transition department and were able to share useful experience, which informed decisions at St John the Baptist.

Both schools now offer carefully designed transition classes, which provide a manageable start for those students who might struggle with the move to secondary school. Both have two transition classes in year 7 and careful thought is given to the make-up of each group – ensuring

that there is the right balance of challenge and nurture. Pupils are taught for the majority of their subjects by a primary specialist, which reduces the potential difficulties they might face in adjusting to lots of new teachers and enables that member of staff to gain a really good understanding of their learning needs. Jack explains how students often maintain their connections with transition teachers long after they have finished being part of the class.

Students study English, maths, history and geography within their transition class and receive targeted literacy and numeracy support. At the same time, students continue to attend some subjects with the rest of their year group, accessing specialist teachers and gaining some experience of moving around the site. Both Jack and Anna stress the importance of ensuring that students in transition are not isolated from others.

Both Anna and Jack are keen to emphasise that this is not a regular SEN group. As Anna puts it, “this was a curriculum decision, not an SEN one.” While those students who struggle academically are supported in transition classes, there is a wide range of ability. Students might be selected to join transition classes because they have had a disrupted key stage 2, because they have mental health issues or suffer from anxiety or just because they don’t quite seem ready to tackle the full jump to secondary school.



At Richard Challoner, where transition classes have been running for quite some time, students have gone on from transition to study A-levels and even to achieve Oxbridge places.

Nor is this about curriculum narrowing. As Anna explained, they “wanted to bring children up to ensure that they can access the full curriculum rather than having to simplify provision.” Great care has been taken by both schools to ensure that early intervention to support literacy levels doesn’t limit students’ choices – for example in both schools students in transition are able to study a modern language. Whilst in transition class, students study the same curriculum as everyone else, ensuring that they aren’t being left behind whilst they are receiving additional support.

Both Richard Challoner School and St John the Baptist run transition classes in years 7 and 8, but the number of pupils in transition is far fewer by year 8. Students transition to mainstream classes – at St John the Baptist, this happens mid-year when appropriate. Whilst some students will inevitably require longer term support, some make very rapid progress. As both Anna

and Jack explain, this approach is all about responding flexibly to the needs of learners.

Anna sees their work around transition as a logical development of their focus on the science behind learning. By reducing the cognitive load relating to the pressure of adapting to new school structures, teachers’ names and approaches, homework etc, students have more capacity for learning. Both schools have found that the attendance of pupils in transition classes is excellent and behaviour has similarly improved. Students feel more positive about school as they feel safe and experience success.

Both Anna and Jack explain that their key focus is finding the best journey for each individual young person. Jack stresses that their work is about inclusion not exclusion: “some of the students would not be here without transition.” As Anna puts it “we have five years with each child – we have to make the best use of that time for every individual; we have to find the best route through”.



Encouraging integration, respect and diversity

By Roisin Morrison, Chorlton High School

This article is based on a think piece submitted for SSAT's Leadership Legacy Project.

This project was inspired by the rise in LGBT-phobic and faith-phobic incidents in my classes and after-school clubs. Having spent time working from home, potentially having their beliefs and identities reinforced through their social media/social network 'echo chambers', many students who are either religious or members of the LGBTQ+ community were reluctant to learn about each other and found it hard to accept that they could coexist peacefully. I observed that they were more likely to see sexuality/gender and religion as mutually exclusive, and this caused tension in lessons, clubs, corridors, and in group chats.

I wanted to see whether students could be encouraged to become more tolerant and respectful through carefully curated group

projects, open discussions, and restorative conversations. I believe that tackling prejudice or harmful stereotypes while the students are surrounded by a huge wealth of diversity could have a beneficial impact on not only their experiences in school, but also on the way they treat people from different backgrounds and minorities in future.

I used a few different approaches to explore key issues:

1. **Bespoke form time projects.** Form time projects were used with pupil premium students from a range of backgrounds and beliefs. Students worked together to discuss a positive change they could make to the school and were supported to implement the change as far as possible. These were carried out in very small groups so that I could intervene non-judgmentally with



any conversations between students that demonstrated misconceptions or prejudice. I hoped this would allow them to converse with students outside of their friendship groups and build valuable skills to go towards their CVs and SSAT qualifications.

2. **Brene Brown's framework on vulnerability.**

I aimed to use this framework to create a non-judgemental space, particularly in RESPECT (the name given to lessons covering EPR topics at Chorlton High School). I wanted students to have more opportunity in RESPECT lessons to openly discuss questions they have about religion or sexuality, addressing misconceptions or judgements. Conversations were followed up with restorative meetings to ensure that students continued to feel comfortable communicating and asking questions in lesson/around each other.

Brown's framework follows the acronym BRAVERY, and I intended to do the following things to establish a vulnerable but respectful classroom:

Boundaries – We co-created rules and expectations within the RESPECT classroom and revisited these regularly to check how well these were working for our groups. Students were encouraged to create and criticize rules to allow them to feel active and autonomous in the classroom.

Reliability – I intended to be very open about the reasons students were given consequences and rewards, so that students were clear exactly which behaviours would elicit which reactions. This would hopefully contribute to the consistency of my behaviour management and continue to establish a trusting classroom. I felt it was important to model how to react to controversial statements, or opinions you may not agree with. I metacognitively drew attention to this when it happened in lessons, attempting to model a trusting and respectful debate space.

Accountability – Students' mistakes were treated with respect, and it was explicitly stated that no question or opinion was incorrect or not allowed, but that students had to accept any consequences

that these questions might create. For example – if students asked a question that was silly, people would laugh, if students gave an opinion that might cause offence, people may become angry.

Vault – Students were permitted to leave the classroom if they felt that they were overwhelmed or needed to speak to someone. I did not want the students to feel that they were being forced to sit in the classroom and participate in potentially upsetting or controversial conversations, and they could access safeguarding or time-out if they needed to.

Integrity – I aimed to include frequent tasks and questions which probed students' gut feelings, and core values. I encouraged students to develop ways to advocate for these values, and have faith in their gut feelings, but also communicate their reactions in a safe and respectful way to people whose opinions differ from theirs.

Non-judgement – I intended to have open conversations with students about judgement and used specific scripture verses which supported this (for religious students).

Generosity – I wanted to minimise the use of sarcasm in classes and ensured that students always received help and support when they asked for it.

3. **Pride Month themed RESPECT lesson.**

I planned a lesson which encouraged students to have an open dialogue around issues relating to each other's faiths or sexualities. Students were encouraged to ask questions around the subject to facilitate future guided discussion in the lessons.

4. Microscripts for some religions on respectful attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people. I researched religious texts and spoke to members of a range of religions. I created a bank of resources (PowerPoint slides, microscripts, speeches, verses from scripture) to enable conversations to happen around school in a way that made the young person feels understood and not judged but gave them no doubt that prejudice and intolerance are not acceptable.

5. **Ally Award with the GSA club** to challenge the belief that only members of the LGBTQ+ community are supportive. This was designed to enable more allies to be a part of Pride celebrations and LGBTQ+ events.

I decided to trial these methods with year 9s first, as this is the year group I knew the best (having a year 9 form, English, media and RESPECT classes). The range of subjects I taught the year group gave me ample opportunity to discuss prejudices, preconceptions and stereotypes in a supportive way, and hone the restorative resources I create.

I hoped that this project would encourage wider acceptance in school, allowing students to discuss their feelings and preconceptions in a safe way, outside of their echo chambers. Students would (hopefully) feel that their ideas and negative stereotypes of other communities were challenged, and they would be able to forge beneficial friendships with their peers in a way that gives them a tolerant outlook after they leave school. Their increase in awareness and the positive atmosphere in lessons would

allow them to flourish, giving them more confidence in themselves and their peers.

Assessing the impact

Following the four strategies being implemented across the year, I carried out a pupil voice activity with some of the students I teach in RESPECT, my form, and the year 9 students who attend GSA.

Whilst there were some evident issues still, with students in Summer 2 still feeling that they are not valued in the school community, or where students still strongly disagree or disagree that this school accepts students, there was a much more encouraging shift from Spring 2 to Summer 2. Where possible, I tried to ask the same students, and made the majority of these pupil premium so that I could gauge the reaction of some of our more vulnerable students.

Students were overwhelmingly more confident expressing themselves in lessons.

(55% agree/strongly agree -> 79% agree/strongly agree)



They also felt much more valued in the community.

(55% agree/strongly agree -> 87% agree/strongly agree)

They felt that school was more accepting.

(50% agree/strongly agree -> 83.2 % agree/strongly agree)

There was a slight improvement in the enjoyment students felt interacting with people who are different from them, but this was already very high.

The form time projects were only for pupil premium students, so the improvement in confidence from these sessions has hopefully contributed to the closing of the gap for pupil premium students not feeling welcome or supported in school. I also made sure that I spoke to these students during the sessions to coach them on how they could apply their new skills (leadership, teamwork etc) in future, with college applications or job interviews. Whilst this does not explicitly improve the relationships between marginalised groups within school, this has still hopefully had a positive impact on students who were involved.

Generally, the atmosphere in the class did improve, as demonstrated by positive pupil voice. At the end of the year, during Pride month, the microscripts, and the specific lesson on LGBTQ+ issues allowed for a very respectful discussion. Students who had initially been very reluctant to engage respectfully, particularly when discussing gender and sexuality, asked very open and curious questions, which facilitated debates and discussions. Students were given the option to ask questions anonymously about the LGBTQ+ community, and whilst at the start of the year, the anonymous question feature of my RESPECT lessons had been misused at times (students writing what they thought were controversial and silly questions), there were no silly questions, and students were genuinely curious to hear the answers. Students even felt comfortable raising their hands asking questions following on from these. Some students who did feel negatively

towards people of a certain religion, or towards the LGBTQ+ community felt safe enough to voice their feelings in the lessons, rather than only speaking to other people who feel the same way, and these discussions were carefully handled (with PowerPoints containing verses from the Torah, Quran, and Bible explicitly telling people not to judge others), which meant that students could have their opinions safely challenged. This would not have been possible at the start of the year.

The improvements seen in the year 9 pupil voice surveys, whilst potentially attributed to the strategies implemented across the year, could also be due to the fact that the recent Beelong and Pride festivals had taken place shortly before I carried out the survey, with all of the interviewed students involved in some way – this could have bolstered their opinions of community, belonging and their impact within school. The positive results could also be a result of students becoming more familiar with their classmates and myself throughout the year, and therefore more comfortable expressing themselves.

To take this further, I want to ensure that all RESPECT lessons are run as a safe space, with microscripts on dealing with difficult conversations available for staff, and specific training on delivering RESPECT lessons in a non-judgemental space so students feel comfortable discussing their opinions.

I also want to carry out the pupil voice activity with students across the whole year group, ensuring that even students who are not involved with community festivals can see that they are accepted and valued in day-to-day lessons throughout the year. The Ally Awards were successful, and students and staff benefitted from celebrating people around school who support the GSA students. I would like to extend this further, encouraging staff visits to GSA to be more regular. I also want more student allies to join GSA – potentially having ally ambassadors that will work with the GSA to encourage integration.



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A foray into learning by drawing

By Rae Garvin, Central Foundation Girls' School

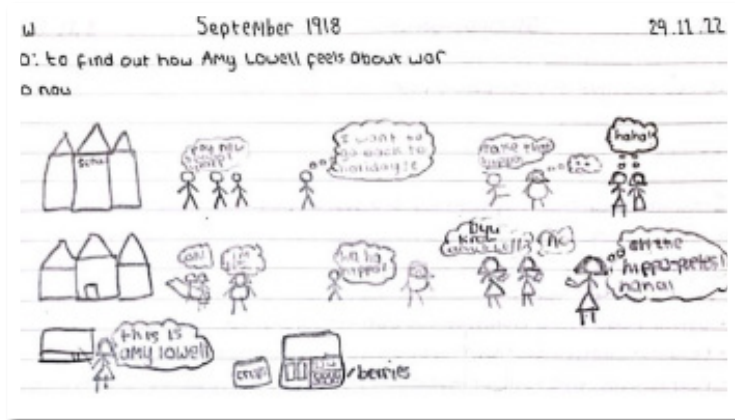
Once upon a time I was told off by a judge. I was doodling on some paper whilst listening to some evidence and they thought I was not paying attention or taking things seriously enough. I was. I was barely aware I was doodling. I pulled a horrified look and stopped. I sat up in an attentive stance. I tilted my head in a 'listening' pose and focused so hard on appearing to listen, I was unable to actually listen. I always fidget and doodle during meetings. I always listen and contribute fully during meetings. Contrary to that judge's opinion that these actions are incompatible, for me the first enables the second.

So, whilst planning an upcoming inset and inspired by my doodling anecdote, I decided to focus on one of Fiorella and Mayer's eight generative learning activities: drawing. In their book *Learning as a Generative Activity* Fiorella and Mayer suggest that "meaningful learning is a generative activity in which the learner actively seeks to make sense of the presented material". In my school, where student passivity is a widespread phenomenon and student participation is a key focus in our learning and teaching vision this year, the idea of the learners actively seeking 'sense' is very attractive. Zoe and Mark Enser in *Generative Learning in Action* suggest there are four types of drawing that you can use: decorative, representational, organisational and explanative. I would add two more of my own - attentive (which is what I

was doing in court) and creative. The following lesson relies on this last creative type where the act of drawing generates new ideas.

I had a go with my year 8s. We were studying a unit on war poetry and my lessons until then had been quite uniform: gathering prior knowledge to make predictions, reading the texts, discussing, learning new context to develop our understanding and then ending with some AfL often in the form of writing. I was getting bored! Probably so were my students. Our next poem was *September, 1918* by Amy Lowell. It's different to the other more typical war poetry of Sassoon, Owen and Pope for two main reasons: she never went to war and she lived thousands of miles away from the action – perfect for a different approach.

We started with drawing a picture of September – a chance to assert their prior knowledge. Many of them drew their school as it's the month they return to it. Some of them drew sad faces for this reason too! We made some predictions about the poem and then I read it to them. I asked them to add images that they heard to their pictures. We had a look at everyone's drawings and looked for links between their September images and images from the poem. Common overlaps were weather, falling leaves, children and sadness. Next, we read an article about Amy Lowell's life. The students added images to their pictures again and again we looked for links. Lowell was bullied by contemporary male poets who nicknamed



Drawing by Student 1

her the hippo-poetess for her size and her sexuality. Several students had drawn hippos but some had depicted bullying and this suddenly sat perfectly inside their school settings. We looked for links again.

We talked about how these link and they said:

- “lots of people are bullies not just kids”
- “people bully you if you’re different”
- “maybe that’s why she’s sad not the war”
- “maybe her war is with the men poets””

Finally, we did some analytical writing. Below is the work of the students who drew these pictures.

Student 1 – “Amy Lowell think war is horafing and terrible and every-thing is destroyed and also the world is broken. She says the world is broken and it’s much harder for her because she has the war braking her world but also all the fat-shaming and bullying because she is a lesbian.”

Student 2 – “Lowell thinks the world can start again like

school does in September. She says that its broken and she has been bullied badly and the war is horrible for her but she thinks that it will end. She says ‘some day there will be no war’ and she will be able to taste apples again. I think when she says broken world at the end she is talking about the war and she is also talking about the way that people treated her because of her being over weight and gay.”

Both these pieces of writing weave context into their arguments in a way that these students haven't achieved before. In both these pieces of writing the visual links that the students have been able to make through their drawings have enabled them to reach multiple layers of meaning within the poem.

I think my first foray into generative learning by drawing has been a success! Next time I will spend some time reassuring students that they don't need to be skilled artists to be successful; giving some advice on how to select 'significant' information; and devote more time to exploring the links between



Drawing by Student 2

images as this was the part of the lesson where new learning was generated.

Next up – I'm developing training for the teachers at my school on how to use drawing to generate learning. I'll let you know how it goes – watch this space!

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Microculture: Practical mechanisms that enhance an ambitious culture in sixth form settings

By Matthew Lloyd, Chase Terrace Academy

“What does an aspirational sixth form student look like to you?” A tricky question to answer in an interview, and an even trickier thing to make a reality! In 2020, I was promoted to the post of assistant head of sixth form within a large state secondary school in the West Midlands. My remit was to lead change alongside a newly appointed head of sixth form and deputy headteacher, and create a culture where ambition and high aspirations were encouraged. Often, phrases like ‘raising aspirations’ make catchy school-wide strategies, but I quickly realised that the onus was on me as middle leader to help make these goals physically materialise within our small community of 200 16-18 year olds – many of whom were still reeling from the general sense of social anxiety, unease and aimlessness of our first lockdown.

At the time, the academic outcomes of our sixth form centre were quite low, and the mindset of our students compounded this – a general sense of demotivation and disengagement was widely endemic. But where would I start? The answer was simple: “good morning!” Each and every day, I tried to be as present as possible within the sixth form community – be it standing in the foyer to greet our bleary-eyed students as they entered our centre, or regularly dropping in to lessons or their tutor time.

As any head of year worth their salt will tell you, this not only helped with building a rapport with

students, but also acted as an early indicator in which I could identify trends in the year group.

“Keep your finger on the pulse” and “testing the waters” are popular leadership tropes, but this one I do have to agree with. It was during these drop-ins that I noticed our first problem: tutor time. Often massively underutilised, the first twenty minutes of a student’s day should be as empowering and motivating as possible – particularly for students who lack the usual routine and rigour beyond the walls of school. My immediate goal was to create a tutor time programme that acted, in its own way, as its own invisible curriculum that ticked-away in the background; embedding the right messages, at the right times, to our students each morning. A scheme of learning that would foster a microculture of collegiality, but also ambitiousness. Before personal development became the latest buzzword of the new Ofsted framework, I tried to blend several key components together: Martin Griffin’s incredible work on the VESPA mindset was critical to our year 12s in their first term in honing their A-level study skills and attitude to learning, but a little more creativity was needed for the wider PSHE work ...

The requirements for PSHE at sixth form level are truly vast; focusing on things like budgeting, multiculturalism, the democratic process, sexual health, negative relationships, and even road safety! You can see in figure 1 how I built these



into the tutor time curriculum in an organic and time-appropriate way (around key priorities like the dreaded UCAS deadlines!), and I firmly believe that this structure which students live through each and every morning has set them up to succeed ever since. Our assembly programme also mirrored this curriculum; focusing on things like safe alcohol use, being a good citizen, surviving your first semester, and even how to vote. Each year, our students vote and elect their peers to positions of student leadership within the sixth form committee – a process that not only deepens their understanding of the democratic process (we even use a physical 1950s-era ballot box!). It also allows them a voice in saying how the sixth form is run – particularly in the run up to key events like study leave and prom. On the topic of the democratic process, I am particularly proud of our committee's work in liaising with our local MP to create a debating team, which will take part in a national competition to debate with other schools across the country.

It is in giving students opportunities like this, that we can truly realise their potential and ignite their aspirations. To create an ambitious environment, students need to see leadership at all levels in their microculture – especially, and most powerfully, amongst themselves.

However, being an ambitious year 12 and 13 student is about so much more than tutor time and student leadership. At the core of their experience are their A-level and BTEC studies, and they need to feel like they are working towards their next step expeditiously.

It was during one of our committee's meetings that they discussed their experience of sixth form lessons in comparison to GCSE. They lamented the more structured way of working in lessons – and tackling the quality of education for KS5 across the school was going to be a different beast entirely for me ... I was a little in-over-my-head! Weirdly, “can you balance an egg?” was the question that kept coming to mind. You cannot change the laws of physics, and when the wind is blowing in a direction, you ride with it – not against it. Schools are bureaucratic beasts of institutional life, and in our school, the winds were blowing strong in pushing new strategies like a new house system, and improving the quality of education through curriculum intent and teaching implementation. I seized the opportunity and used these strategies as a means to achieve our goal for the sixth form. In order to enhance the wider sixth form experience, I led monthly CPD sessions on delivering quality KS5 lessons, which focused on pedagogy and

techniques that were less generalised to KS3 and 4, and more appropriate for what the sixth form community needed. We also used the house system as a mechanism to launch a new way of thinking about attendance. We began rewarding 100% attendance and holding attendance drop-in clinics to fix issues, rather than punitively targeting those who were struggling.

Aiming for the top, but also allowing the sixth form students to take the lead and

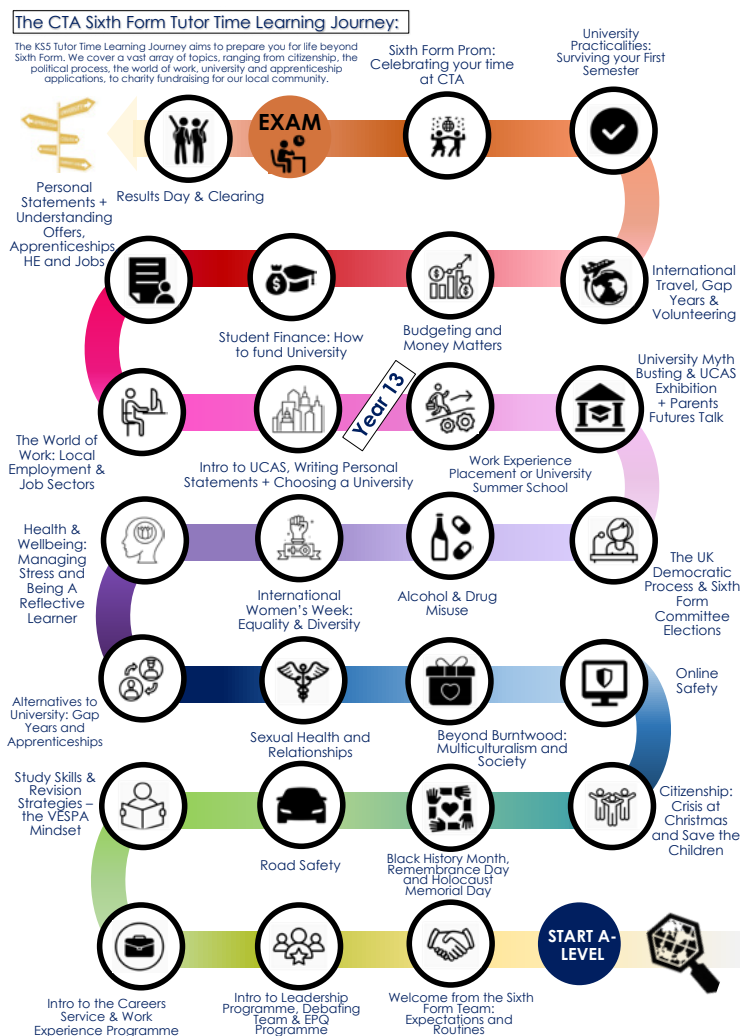
pick the next course, is the general theme here, then. Choice is an incredibly powerful thing, and once we reconfigured our priorities as leaders and teachers, the students generally did the same. By the time I was reaching the end of my first year, we had honed our 'leadership programme' – in which students supported lessons lower down the school with initiatives around literacy and numeracy – but also wider community work, such as supporting the school's community food bank.

As we approached the spring term, another lockdown had ensued, but I had managed to implement a few key strategies for the following year – such as launching the extended project qualification (EPQ) for our high-flyers, and a robust work experience programme, which I am proud to say attained 100% of students having a placement in 2021.

It's no surprise that the word 'community' appears as frequently in the above as the often lofty strategic words of 'culture' and 'ambition'. As I quickly realised, they are all intrinsically connected and intertwined, and to change the culture of a sixth form and shape its inhabitants into ambitious and hard-working learners, the idea of community needs to be at its heart.

Creating a microculture that reflects the world we live in is a difficult task, but I am proud of what we at Chase Terrace Academy have achieved here in igniting ambition and aspiration amongst our students. Working with sixth form students is an incredible privilege. These are students with a willingness and drive to change the world. Ironically, all we need to do in fostering a community centred on ambitious students, is take away our own desire to control, manage and instil these virtues, and instead simply allow them to find it themselves.

Figure 1: Chase Terrace Academy Sixth Form PSHE topics



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