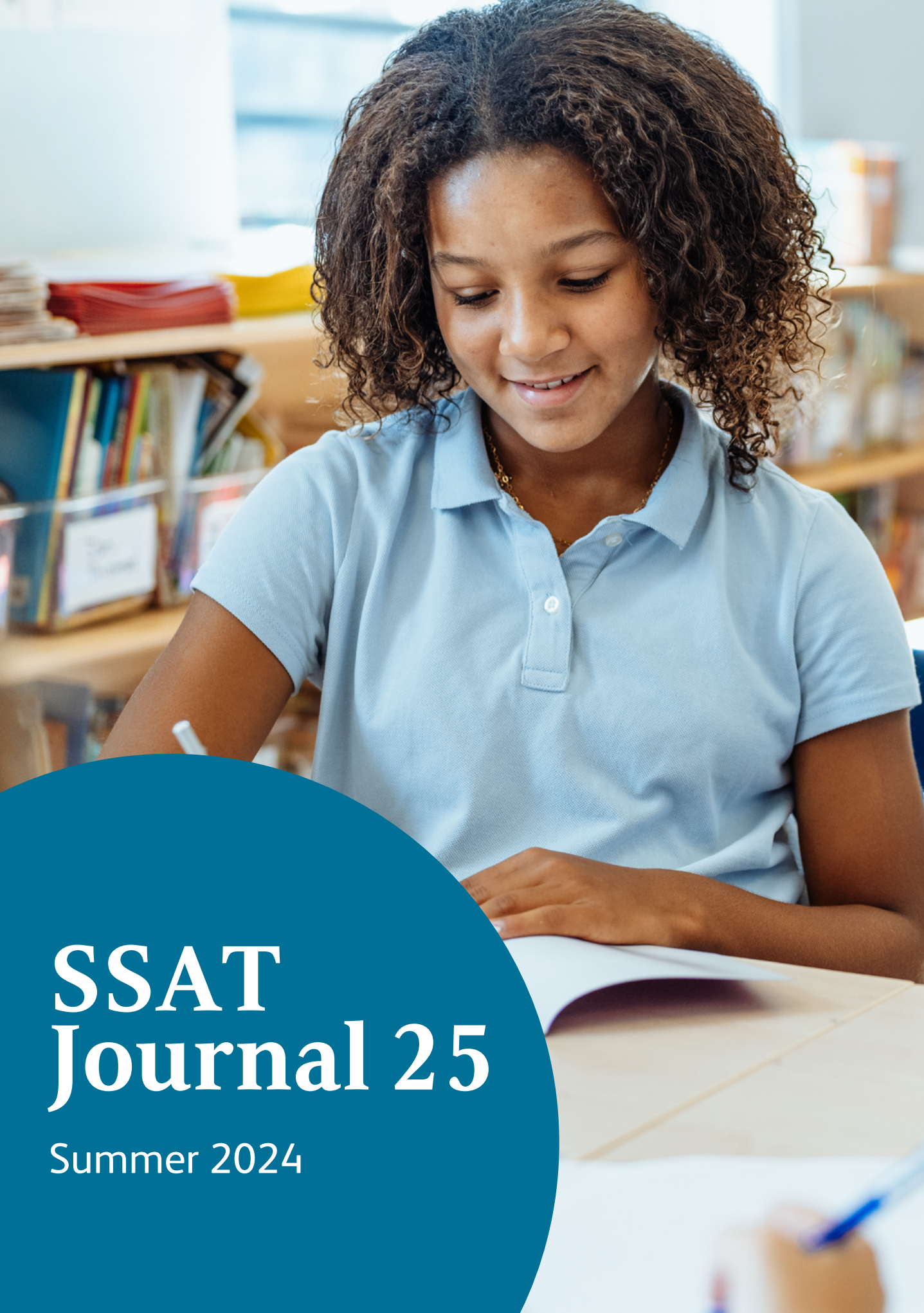




SSAT Journal 25

Summer 2024

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Welcome

Sue Williamson
Chief Executive, SSAT



Welcome to SSAT's summer journal. By the time you read this, we will have the result of the General Election. We will have heard from the leaders of all the main parties and their responses to questions will have been fact checked. This worries me, as clearly, we can not trust political leaders to tell the truth. So much for the Nolan principles. There has also been a tendency to talk up humble beginnings rather than describing how your family shaped you as a human-being. I admired Ed Davey for being a carer for his son, and he certainly had a good time on the campaign trail. I hope that our new prime minister will bring hope to the country – we can and must do away with food banks and child poverty. The challenges ahead are large, and the PM will need to take the country with them.

I remember the day I was appointed headteacher of a failing in school, thinking “***t, what do I do now?” I have always believed in the team approach, and I met and listened to every member of staff before I took up post. I wanted to know what they were pleased with in the school; what we could do better; and what were their ambitions? You will not be surprised to hear that we could have better behaved students. I had secured the post based on “Every child can succeed” – I believed this in 1994 and still do today. This was my non-negotiable, and everything that followed in the next eight years met this criteria.

This term, we are advertising for participants for our [Leadership Legacy Project](#) (LLP) – we believe that the school system needs school leaders, who put the success and lives of their students first. Schools need a broad

and balanced curriculum that challenges students to think and problem-solve. They need activities that promote resilience, well-being and good mental health. They need teachers and school leaders, who see students as individuals with different strengths and weaknesses. There needs to be numerous opportunities to celebrate success.

LLP has inputs from experienced school leaders, academics and thought leaders. It makes participants reflect and think. If I was back in school, I would have a group of LLPs looking to tackle the important issues in my school. The think-piece at the end of the programme should be about a piece of work that made a difference to the lives of students.

In a time of staff shortages, LLP is one way of rewarding and retaining staff. SSAT can offer other ways too, and we are always happy to discuss how we might help. Schools and the school system need leaders at all levels.

I hope that the new education secretary will develop a new relationship with teachers and school leaders. We want the very best for every young person – at SSAT we are committed to ensuring that all students, whatever their ability or context, leave school fully prepared to lead fulfilled and purposeful lives.

Thank you for all that you do to support the children in your school. I hope you have a restful summer break.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sue Williamson".

Sue Williamson



Curriculum, misconceptions and poverty

*By Katrina Morley, CEO, Tees Valley Education Trust and
Sean Harris, Leader of Research, Tees Valley Education Trust*

Poverty is arguably the most complex of issues facing children, communities and schools. We have [written about this before at SSAT](#). Poverty is complex and multi-faceted, so the response to it from schools needs to be more than a welfare or pastoral one. In *Teaching with Poverty in Mind* (2009), American educator Eric Jensen explores risk factors linked to disadvantaged pupils.

He notes the importance of leaders knowing that poverty “involves a complex array of risk factors that adversely affect the population in a multitude of ways”. Poverty is clearly on the radar of schools, charities, and policy-makers. However, between the political rhetoric and some people’s limited lived experience of hardship, [poverty can often be misunderstood](#) (Harris, 2024).



Despite recent pedagogical and sector advancements, we have observed some detachment of poverty, hardship, and disadvantage from curriculum and policy developments. Understanding of curriculum has expanded, yet attainment and post-school education continuation remain heavily influenced by indicators of disadvantage (Lessof et al, 2018). Middle leaders and classroom teachers play pivotal roles in crafting curriculum, emphasising the need for collective input beyond senior leadership (Oates, 2010; Robinson, 2015; Turner, 2016) but perhaps curriculum is still too often contained in senior leadership silos. Curriculum development is iterative; it demands ongoing review, discussion, and refinement (Turner et al, 2016). In my experience, poverty should be at the heart of curriculum discussions too.

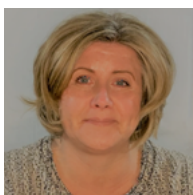
Our project revolves around developing the educational journey for children, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, by incorporating their perspectives into curriculum design. As teachers, we have observed how easily assumptions about pupils' prior knowledge can lead to gaps in understanding. We **implemented a small-scale pilot project across two multi-academy Trusts** initially that helped us to see this. In one RE and humanities lesson exploring Islamophobia, a year 9 pupil innocently questioned the term "British Muslim". In another example, a primary-aged pupil thought that an issue for people living near the coast might be that a coconut could fall on their head. Perhaps you are unfamiliar with our beaches in the North of England, but we don't have any palm trees or coconuts on our coastline! In both cases, pupils' misconceptions were significant and were amplified by the context in which these pupils lived.

With funding and support from Let Teachers SHINE, we embarked on a journey to explore how curriculum can better support pupils from low-income backgrounds. Collaborating with the Chartered College of Teaching and Evidence Based Education, we deepened our understanding of poverty and misconceptions. We have researched teachers' understanding of misconceptions and their incorporation into curriculum and lesson design, mapping common misconceptions and poverty's exacerbating role.

This year, our project team have worked hard together to understand and define what we mean by poverty and to consider what we mean by 'misconceptions'. This has involved teachers working closely with colleagues at the Chartered College of Teaching and Evidence Based Education to develop our knowledge of pedagogy, research and curriculum. Colleagues have researched with two of our academies how teachers and support staff understand the concept of misconceptions and how they plan for these as part of curriculum and lesson design. This has involved a team of teachers beginning to map the most common misconceptions that arise in a selection of subject areas (e.g. reading, science, history) and the reasons why this might be. This team have then considered and researched the ways in which poverty further contributes to these and how teachers can begin to plan with this in mind.

In the upcoming year, we plan to expand the project, working in co-production with pupils to contribute actively to curriculum development. Our goal is to create a toolkit rooted in children's voices, providing practical guidance for educators to address poverty-related barriers to learning. This project validates our commitment to equitable education, beyond mere financial support. I'm thankful for SHINE's support and excited to continue reshaping education for all children, bolstered by the support of colleagues at Evidence Based Education and the Chartered College of Teaching.

Sean and the team at TVEd work with schools and organisations across the UK, developing research and approaches to poverty-informed practice in schools. You can find out more by visiting <https://www.teesvalleyeducation.co.uk/trust-specialisms/social-justice-equality/>



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 education journalist and leader of research at Tees Valley Education Trust. Sean writes extensively about teacher-education, social justice and leadership development.

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Other links

Chartered College of Teaching
<https://chartered.college/>

Evidence Based Education
<https://evidencebased.education/>

SHINE: Let Teachers Shine funding
<https://shinetrust.org.uk/what-we-do/let-teachers-shine/>

Tees Valley Education
<https://www.teesvalleyeducation.co.uk/>



Empowering and developing middle leaders through effective line management

By Siân Cumming, Deputy Headteacher, Upper Shirley High School

Middle leaders are the powerhouse of the school, they drive forward and implement, they absorb, support, challenge and put into practice the actions from the school improvement plan – without them we would be lost. As a school, we were conscious of ensuring our middle leaders felt empowered to lead, to challenge, to provide us with feedback and to develop themselves and others. We wanted to find that challenging balance of sharing information and ideas around decisions without overwhelming them with the pressures of budgets, staffing and central policies. We wanted middle leaders to feel confident in being our critical friends and we wanted middle leaders who would problem solve and take the lead.

As a school, we have been through a lot of change. The school PAN has expanded over several years and we have had a new headteacher, deputy head and two new assistant heads in the last two years. Managing change in any organisation creates challenges for all stakeholders – middle leaders can feel removed or ‘out of the loop’ through these changes. This can lead to middle leaders who are frustrated, overwhelmed or disengaged and it is very much something we wanted to avoid.

This year, we have reviewed our **line management** and **CPD** to ensure our middle leaders are developed and, hardest but most importantly of all, we have asked for **feedback** to guide us at every step.

Line management

For us, line management meetings were something we wanted to review. We have all, at some point in our careers, left line management meetings feeling overwhelmed, with a long list of things to do. We have, I am sure, been cancelled on or experienced very different meetings when moving from one member of SLT to another.

To ensure greater consistency, we have created half termly agendas for all SLT and middle leaders. These are shared in advance so that colleagues can look and plan ahead, come to meetings prepared and have a consistent experience. We wanted to make sure we were all talking about the same things at the same time: year 11 data capture analysis, budget reviews and options are just a few examples of the operational conversations we wanted to ensure were happening.

But what about moving beyond the operational? We wanted middle leaders to be strategic and we wanted to develop them. As such, our agendas now also include built-in moments to reflect: we look at and explore what great team meetings look like; how they will build on CPD input; what T&L strands such as adaptive teaching look like within the nuance of their subject and we do all this through planned coaching questions. Questions we often use include:

- What would you do the same/differently?
- Tell me about X in your department/year group...



- In a dream world, what does a great team meeting look and feel like?
- What barriers are getting in the way/ what challenges do you face with this?

These agendas do not take up the whole meeting, nor should they. We wanted middle leaders to have time and space to ask questions, bring their own agenda to the line manager to talk through and address the things that were unique to them/their team. Some key questions as SLT we ask at the start and end of our line meetings now are:

- Start: *what is the most important thing you and I should be talking about today?*
- End: *is there a question I should have asked that I haven't?*

We have not got it totally right yet. Sometimes, the agenda has been out of kilter with what was happening in school (why are we talking about year 9 data analysis and not year 11 three weeks ahead of the GCSE exams?). It is a work in progress, and we will be asking our middle leaders in the summer term to reflect on the agendas over this year and change them in order to shape a better agenda for next year.

Feedback

Self-reflection can feel exposing, admitting where it did not go so well and how we would do it differently if we did it again can leave middle leaders feeling vulnerable. As an SLT, we had to do the same. We had to reflect on our own line management meetings: what works? What doesn't? We had a meeting to really dig into our experiences of line management and being line managers – it is sometimes a hard mirror to look in but if we were asking our middle leaders to do this, we had to do it too.

Ahead of this meeting, we asked our middle leaders to be our critical friend and give us feedback on their experiences of SLT as line managers.

We asked:

- What works well?
- What do you want to change/do differently?
- In a dream world, what makes a great line management meeting?

What do you do? Say?

What do Middle Leaders do? Say?

What happens in the meeting?

What happens after the meeting?

Our middle leaders responded brilliantly to this call, giving kind, honest and specific feedback that helped us to reflect on how we lead line management meetings. More importantly, our middle leaders valued being asked and responded positively to the leadership team asking for feedback.

As a leadership team, we reflected on what we wanted our line management meetings to look and feel like using the grid to guide us. Our reflections and ambitions of what great line management should look like aligned with our middle leaders. We all wanted:

- An overview of how things fitted into the big picture, to share the thinking behind decisions more.
- Time to think strategically and out loud with each other, to problem solve.
- A check in with our workload and wellbeing.
- To not leave with just a list of things to do!

We then reflected on how well we were achieving this at the moment, what we were and were not doing enough of. One meeting is not going to change our line meetings going forward forevermore, it is the start of an ongoing process of reflection. What we now have are some core principles of what great line management should look like, it is a list we can use to reflect on, refer back to and aim for.

CPD

Lastly, we have reviewed our middle leader CPD. No one teaches you to be a middle leader – you learn so much of it on the job. We wanted to put into place some centralised CPD for middle leaders; this presented a challenge as we have middle leaders who are new in role this year sitting alongside long-established, successful heads of year and heads of department.

In September, we all worked on how to action plan using a model that was new to all. We took our year / department development plans and for each of our three areas of development we asked middle leaders to:

1. Write a vision for the area of development – this is a general vision statement or goal.
2. Write down the four things we will see when it happens – this is to consider what the vision will look like in reality in the classroom, department, year group etc.
3. Against each of the things we will see, write down the current reality for each one now.
4. For each section, create a list of possible actions to overcome the current reality and move towards what we want it to look like.

Vision/Purpose/ Goal				
What will this look like when it is achieved?				
What is the current reality?				
Actions				

Where is your quick win? Which action will be most impactful? What is your priority order?

From this CPD, middle leaders were able to come up with actions that were both tangible and manageable: it allowed them to move beyond the big vision statements. Different experience levels were negated through line management and the coaching questions asked to support middle leaders. Line meetings with SLT were used to help middle leaders prioritise their actions and support them in their implementation: the key thing was, middle leaders owned their plans.

Middle leaders have also had CPD on understanding their teams, knowing their strengths and knowing who to utilise in what way. This has empowered our middle leaders to better understand their teams and develop them in the right way; it has also reminded them that being a middle leader is not just about doing things, it is about leading their team and collaborating with them.

Next steps

What we are taking away from our experience so far this year is the power of excellent conversations. We have to give middle leaders the tools to think strategically through high quality CPD. We must then be consistent and plan coaching opportunities into line meetings, getting the balance of the operational and strategic whilst taking time to reflect with our middle leaders, both giving and asking for feedback along the way, so that we continue to develop as leaders at all levels.



Follow Siân Cumming at
[@siancumming1](https://twitter.com/siancumming1)



Langley Grammar School become the latest school to achieve ‘transforming’ in all 12 areas of the SSAT Framework for Exceptional Education

Congratulations to the team at Langley Grammar School, who have become the latest school to achieve ‘transforming’ status in all 12 strands of the [SSAT Framework for Education](#) as part of their membership of the [Leading Edge](#) network. This is a significant achievement and a testament to the quality of their work in all areas.

John Constable, headteacher, attributes their long-standing success to their consistent focus on supporting their team to ensure that they can enact the vision for the school. He explains how he feels it is important to develop colleagues, establish systems which enable them to work collaboratively and empower them to develop areas of practice whilst ensuring that there is not a preconceived idea of what the end-point should be. Staff at all levels often work in pairs – for example, all pastoral leaders work in partnership with another phase leader to support two year groups. The two deputy headteachers have their own areas of responsibility but work collaboratively on developing a strategic framework for students’ personal development. This has developed a flat structure which promotes team work and supports succession planning. John says “I wanted to get to the point where if I was out of school for the day, no-one would really notice.”

David Harding, deputy headteacher, explains that they have undertaken a lot of work to ensure that they can clearly articulate what excellent

teaching looks like at Langley Grammar School. They have established a shared understanding of what lies at the heart of effective pedagogy, in their context, whilst empowering staff and subject leaders to develop approaches which support best practice in their areas. The emphasis has been on establishing core principles that everyone can subscribe to, whilst maintaining considerable flexibility to enable different departments to tailor approaches which best suit the needs of their subject. For example, the school feedback policy states that students should receive regular feedback, but the form this should take is not dictated to staff. Feedback is quality assured by checking whether it is being consistently given and whether staff know whether it is effective.

Participation in [SSAT’s Embedding Formative Assessment](#) programme has greatly supported practice; leaders say that whilst they were confident in their use of formative assessment before starting on the programme, they realised that there was still work to be done to fully embed it across the school. Professional development is always peer-led, with lead practitioners paid and supported to run teacher learning communities. Lead practitioners are trained and given time together to co-construct professional learning. Professional development operates in two-year cycles and great care is taken to ensure that training is well thought through, based on sound evidence, clearly focused and not too onerous.

Langley Grammar School has long been known for the quality of their work in relation to their use of technology and they continue to develop pioneering work. When the focus on individual student use of technology began, around ten years ago, the first step was to find members of the team who could think ahead and see the opportunities that were available. These days, pedagogy and technology work hand in hand, although John Constable stresses that it is always pedagogy which drives the tech, not the other way around. “Whatever tech is doing, it needs to enhance the learning.” Again there is a deliberately flexible approach – staff are free to use technology how they see fit, providing it is used. This flexibility also applies to students, with technology providing a powerful tool for supporting independent learning. John says that the use of technology “can make learning look messy” – but only because students are working in different ways and at different paces. Technology is empowering students to make choices about their learning.

All aspects of practice are underpinned by a strong shared ethos, rooted in the specific needs of their school community. Careful thought has been given to the characteristics of their students, considering what success means for them in the widest terms. For example, staff recognised that while their students tend to be capable, driven and ambitious, they can often lack confidence and be limited by a fear of getting things wrong. As a result, there has been a focus on developing personal qualities alongside securing exceptional academic outcomes. This has been distilled down to six key words:

1. Confident
2. Well-rounded
3. Independent
4. Creative
5. Responsible
6. Caring

As the headteacher puts it “exam results will unlock opportunities, wider development will help you to be successful in those opportunities.”

Reflecting on their experience of participating in the Framework for Exceptional Education, John says that it appealed to them because it “felt like it

was more about heart and soul than about systems and structures.” Dan Mace, assistant headteacher, explained that they had used the framework to support conversations about key areas of practice, exploring how consistent understanding was and how confidently different members of staff could articulate the approaches that were being taken. Having the opportunity to visit other schools and explain ideas to colleagues elsewhere has built confidence and given a wide range of staff the experience of sharing their work externally.

Langley Grammar School has long been innovative and creative. However John stresses “we don’t change very much too often.” With a strong shared understanding of what constitutes a great learning experience for their students, instead, the focus is on re-emphasising key messages and ensuring consistency. Their twelve awards demonstrate their success in achieving this.



Framework for Exceptional Education

The SSAT Framework for Exceptional Education was developed by the team at SSAT, working in partnership with schools from the Leading Edge network. It covers 12 key strands of school development.

Teaching and learning	Professional Practice	Leadership
• Climate for learning • Culture of reflection • Effective learning behaviours • Variety of teaching approaches	• Engaging with evidence and research • Engagement with key stakeholders • Principled assessment • Principled curriculum design	• Leadership through moral purpose • Professional learning • Quality assurance • Wellbeing

For each strand there are four descriptors showing different levels of practice: Beginning, Developing, Embedding and Transforming.

The framework is designed to provide schools with a tool to support self-review and planning. It takes a positive view of school improvement – trying to capture what it looks like when things are working really well, rather than highlighting problems.

The framework goes beyond statutory school frameworks and offers a fresh perspective on key areas of practice.

The framework is available free with SSAT membership.



Neurodiversity in the music classroom

By Bethany Dilworth, Teacher of Music, Formby High School

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

"The social model of disability says that disability is caused by the way society is organised, rather than an impairment or difference." (Wiltshire music connect).

When I was asked to apply for the SSAT Leadership Legacy project I had a long think about what topic I would like to explore to create a meaningful system or resource. One of the first ideas that sprung to mind was the ever-growing diversity of our school and the variety of SEND that are becoming more prevalent in the classroom.

Context and rationale

As a music teacher I have experienced that 'typically' students with SEND thrive in practical music as they are away from the constraints of writing and enjoy expressing themselves freely with instruments. "When I did my doctoral dissertation on the strengths of children diagnosed with learning disabilities, one capacity that kept coming up was artistic ability" (Armstrong, 1988). However, throughout this year I have been presented with SEND students who display very differently; they found practical music a challenge due to struggling with co-ordination, weak motor function skills or possibly low cognition. They particularly struggled with rhythm dictation, being able to hear a rhythm and then write it down in musical

notation. This took the joy out of learning for the students and therefore became the main focus for my think-piece. How could I create an accessible, user-friendly resource that the music department could use in lesson, to help support a wide range of neurodiversity?

Setting

High-quality teaching, as it is for most schools, has been a key focus this year. I teach at Formby High School where we have recently been awarded Inclusive School of the Year (TES 2023). In addition to this we have also secured funding with Sefton Council to build an on-campus SEND resource base, to deliver a bespoke approach to education for our SEND cohort in the near future. This will help to further our 'Reaching High' provision which caters specifically for our SEND students and is led by our ever-growing SEND department. Currently in KS3 we have 32 children with an EHCP and 85 KS3 students on the SEND register. My think-piece topic, therefore, seemed very aligned with the direction of the school and would provide some great resources for the department, teaching assistants and students alike.

Developing the concept

Before implementing any changes to the curriculum, I began to research 'Why don't students like school?' How does neurodiversity affect students? How can music teachers tailor their schemes of work to suit everyone?



I came across various interesting books, however, two that I found the most insightful were *Why students don't like school* by Daniel T Willingham and *Neurodiversity in the classroom* by Thomas Armstrong.

Why students don't like school considers how “If school work is always just a bit too difficult for a student, it shouldn't be a surprise that [they don't] like school much”. The book also promotes the idea of “instead of making work easier, make thinking easier” to promote “successful thinking”. This definitely resonated with me in terms of how my students struggle with rhythm dictation. They could recognise a ‘rhythm tag’ such as ‘tea’/‘coffee’ or ‘Coca-Cola’ and verbalise it but could not complete the step of writing it down. Clearly, there were just one too many processes and this was making them disheartened when they could see others in the classroom succeeding.

My knowledge and creativity was inspired further when reading *Neurodiversity in the classroom*. This promoted the idea that instead of “...Identifying certain students based on what they can't do”, we should be celebrating their successes and using those to our advantage in the classroom.

The book also focused on the idea of a “positive niche construction” of which there are seven components.

1. A comprehensive assessment of students' strengths.
2. The use of assistive technologies and universal design, for learning methodologies.
3. The provision of enhanced human resources.
4. The implementation of strength-based learning strategies.
5. The envisioning of positive role models.
6. The activation of affirmative career aspirations.
7. The engineering of appropriate environmental modifications to support the development of neurodiverse students.

With this in mind I decided to create a resource which would assist students when completing rhythm dictations in class. Playing to the strengths of my visual learners, I designed a sheet that had pictures of the ‘rhythm tags’ which are used in class. This idea was inspired by a CPD session we had last year from Oli Caviglioli who talks about the importance of dual coding for students. The idea that words alone are not enough for students to remember information, the words should be accompanied by an image.



Figure 1

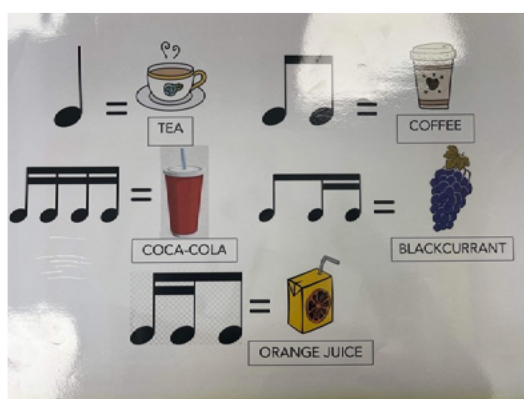


Figure 2

Therefore, I searched for pictures of my rhythm tags for example, a crotchet (1 beat note) we call 'tea' as it has one syllable.

Two quavers together (two half beats) is called 'coffee' as it has two syllables. The sheet contained pictures of these which I then cut into individual pictures to create flash cards (*figure 1*). The idea being that the student could line up the flash cards in the order they heard them and instantly have notated the rhythm dictation. This made thinking easier for them by removing the step of converting the sound to musical notation.

I created several of these packs and rolled them out in lessons. One of the great aspects of the packs is that the TA could use them instantly with the students and the students engaged with them like a game. This promoted positive niche construct three and five by giving the students more time to engage with the teachers they have the strongest bond with. Two of my students, who I will focus on later, became hooked with the task and almost



Figure 3

instantly started to see positive results. So much so that one of them felt confident enough to put their hand up and give answers to the rhythm dictations, something which felt impossible before.

Once the packs became embedded in the classroom, I started to think about how these could progress over the three years in KS3 to show how the students' understanding has been enhanced and supported. From here, I started to make the flash cards double sided, one side the picture and on the opposite the correct musical notation (*figure 2*). The idea being that, over time, the students will use the musical notation and hopefully after that just use it as a prompt whilst they write the answer. This developed into doing something similar with the musical elements to help aid the students' written work. Students could work with a TA to upscale their language from discussing the volume for example, to changing it out for dynamics using the flash cards (*figure 3*).

I also created a time-out sheet which has a variety of different web links to musical games. I encouraged the TAs to use the games with the students when they needed a time-out, this would help to keep them engaged in the topic but still give them a mental break with something fun (positive niche component 2).

This felt like a great success and I could see the enthusiasm starting to grow in my students who had previously been disheartened. Other members of the department were also seeing great results and were contributing ideas about how we could take them further. However some of the students were still struggling with the practical element, especially playing the keyboard.

From here I am going to introduce two pupils that I focused on, Pupil A and B. Both are students in KS3 with an EHCP. Both have cognition and learning needs and are working below the national average. However, both have great strengths in music. Pupil A has a great sense of timing and likes to take on the role of musical director. Pupil B can identify notes on a stave and copy back a rhythm precisely. Yet despite this, when put onto a keyboard task both students struggled to stay engaged or excel because the complexity of the instrument overwhelmed them and they struggled with dexterity.

I started to consider whether the keyboard was an important part of their learning or whether we could complete the 12-bar blues task on a different, more accessible instrument that would challenge them both, but still allow them to succeed. I, bravely, decided to try a glockenspiel. Again, almost instantly Pupil B was fully engaged, enjoyed the calming sound of the glockenspiel and could play the root note of each chord in the 12-bar blues much more accurately as they were focusing on only one aspect. Pupil A also started to improve, however enjoyed the glockenspiel less as they did not like to be viewed as different. Both students gained a lot of fundamental music skills from this change e.g. ensemble skills, accuracy of pitch and rhythm, dynamics and expression. The students would not have been able to focus on those had they still been trying to understand the keyboard.

For the remainder of the year, I trialled an alternative instrumental pathway for these two students in cases where it has seemed to overwhelm them. In one of our final schemes of work this year we have been looking at reggae with the performance task being a version of *One Love* on the keyboard. I decided to trial the two students on the keyboard to see if a year of alternate instruments had improved their foundational skills. We moved their keyboard into the back room to allow them more space and a quieter environment with the TA. After a few lessons of hard work both students performed their version to the class. Pupil A playing the melody and Pupil B playing the bass line. This was a massive achievement for both of the pupils who felt confident enough to perform but also were able to take on the challenge of the keyboard because they had built up the foundational skills throughout the year.

Although I was sceptical when looking at an alternative instrumental pathway for the students, it has worked for both. I was doubtful, as I did not want to limit their instrumental experiences. However, this has shown that by focusing on component one, four and seven of the positive niche construct, students can achieve a similar standard to their peers just through a personalised route. I also felt inspired and encouraged by the quote below.

“Recently when observing a whole class instrumental lesson a government minister expressed concern that the children were still only playing one note after a term’s work. In one sense she was right to wonder, but in another she perhaps missed the point. In this lesson the children could have been playing their one note with a real sense of expression, keeping in time with good tone, ensemble and dynamic contrasts ... their musical development was more qualitative than quantitative.”
(www.wiltshiremusicconnect.org.uk)

Impact and feedback

The creation of the packs has made a significant difference in the classroom for a range of my SEND students, not only in ability but also in confidence. I had a meeting with Pupil A and B about how they felt the packs had helped them this year.

Pupil A said: “Before the pictures (flashcards) it was hard because you didn’t know the beats because you couldn’t remember what they looked like. Now I can see them so I can just listen to the sound. I’m getting more right and feeling more confident. I like the piano, it’s easier because I’m used to it.”

Pupil B said: “It was hard because I didn’t know which one was which (the notes) but now I can see them (the pictures) so it’s easier. I like the glockenspiel because you didn’t have to put headphones on, they feel uncomfortable. You don’t have to put your hand on it (glockenspiel), the piano was confusing.”

Half way through the project I had a progress meeting with our assistant head to talk through my ideas. After the meeting he sent a ‘review and next steps’ document to myself and the headteacher. In this document he said: “Some great work has been developed so far. You have worked hard to develop a clear focus, tangible resources and encouraging results.”

I also asked for some feedback from my head of department at the end of the project, she said: “Resources created by Beth have made an incredible impact on all KS3 and 4 classes. The learner packs are integral to every lesson, offering diverse options to suit the needs of a wide range of students who struggle with the basic elements of music. They have been welcomed by TAs who are now able to deliver key skills within our music curriculum without the needs of specialist support. It’s made difficult concepts accessible to all”.

Next steps

Although I have spent time developing the packs this year I believe there is still a lot more which can be added to further improve them. I would like to create an alternative SEND pathway which runs directly alongside the scheme of work that staff can use and have readily available resources so that SEND students can thrive alongside their peers. This would be mapped from year 7 through to year 9 to help their foundational skills develop.

There are many more needs that we can cater for in the classroom that haven’t yet been covered in the packs yet such as SEMH and sensory needs. As

part of my timetable I also take part in outreach work with the feeder primary schools. Some of these primaries have designated SEND spaces.

This has been a great opportunity for me to go and deliver some music workshops to the school to share the resources we’ve made and how to teach basic music notation in an adaptable way. This could also tie in well with the creation of a music therapy resource/programme that could be a part of the new SEND base. This could be a valuable addition to the ‘Reaching High’ curriculum.

This is something which I will continue to develop over the course of next year to ensure we have a department that can provide for our range of SEND students and allow them to celebrate their individual strengths and successes.

Further reading

Neurodiversity in the Classroom

- Thomas Armstrong (2012).

Why students don’t like school

- Daniel T Willingham (2009).

Dual coding with teachers

- Oli Caviglioli (2019).

The power of music to change lives: a national plan for music education

- HM Government (2022).

Including Students with SEN and/or disabilities in secondary music - TDA (2009).

Music Inclusion: Guidance for Associates supporting SEND students in mainstream schools - Wiltshire Music Connect (2011).

Sing education: every child has a voice - <https://www.singeducation.co.uk/articles/send-expertise-is-at-our-core/>

Supporting students with SEND in music - Teaching Expertise - <https://www.teachingexpertise.com/articles/supporting-pupils-with-sen-in-music-teaching-expertise/>



Closing the word gap

By Harry Staves, Teacher of English and Lead teacher of ITT,
City of Norwich School

This article is based on a think-piece submitted for SSAT's Leadership Legacy Project. In beginning this research, I returned to one fundamental belief – that the system should function as a means of addressing the barriers posed by disadvantage to pupils in our classrooms, so that learning undertaken by children best establishes opportunities for success and equal opportunity in their futures.

When I began SSAT's Leadership Legacy project, I was asked to consider SSAT's definition of *Deep Learning for Social Justice* (Williamson, et al) and found that it most offered a way to enact this vision by driving my teaching, the teaching of trainees and the teaching of my department towards 'meeting the needs of learners fully, accepting that learners have different starting points but not accepting low expectations', and this has been the inspiration for the research presented here.

In my role as an English teacher active in the creation of curriculum content, and a mentor, I began to reflect on the creation of our curriculum. I considered which aspects were already beginning to support deep learning and could be impactful for the future success of our students, particularly those with SEND, EAL and disadvantaged pupils, including our pupil premium cohort. Nationally, and within my own school context, we know that these groups are likely to underperform in comparison to other pupils.

I considered two statements from the English department's 'Curriculum Commitments':

Learning will be part of a mapped journey aimed at ensuring deep subject knowledge, vocabulary development and wider cultural and conceptual understanding.

Teach so that all students can find, celebrate - and learn to use powerfully - their own unique voices.

I began to see that, if I could continue to build and deliver resources which maximised the truth of these statements, then I would begin to make the ideas that underpinned Deep Learning a reality. A robust approach to the teaching of vocabulary as a developing skill and the development of pupils' own voices presupposes a heightened literacy level, wherein a knowledge and application of words equate to a better ability to express oneself. In *Deep Learning for Social Justice* it is noted that 'individuals with low reading ability are disadvantaged across their lives', being 'less likely to gain employment' and yet more damning, 'more likely to have low levels of psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction' and 'less likely to use preventative health services, remain healthy or manage treatment and medications well.' This is far from the only research which links the literacy of young people with the opportunities which will be presented to them in life.

Ultimately, however, I think it is the following statement which best summarises what I am attempting to express as a reflection of my own research.

“When we talk of closing the word gap, we actually mean something much bigger than that unassuming phrase implies. We mean welcoming a child into a world of new ideas, insights and emotions, into a world that we, the word-rich, take for granted, and which we will routinely guarantee for our own children.”
(*Why Closing the Word Gap Matters*)

In order to begin my own contribution to ‘closing the word gap’, I considered what young people need to gain from their classroom-based interactions with new or unfamiliar vocabulary, what success in these circumstances would look like, and how to foster meaningful interactions with language which aid in the development of students’ independent success.

Within my school context, I wanted to focus attention on the creation of resources for a particular cohort of students – KS3 pupils within ‘Nurture’ classes, which are made up of pupils with many of the disadvantages to learning explored above. I placed my focus here as:

“Advantaged students who arrive in the classroom with background knowledge and vocabulary will understand what a textbook or teacher is saying

and will therefore learn more; disadvantaged students who lack such prior knowledge will fail to understand and thus fall even further behind, relative to their fellow students. This explains why schooling often fails to narrow the gap and may even widen it.” (Hirsch, E.D. *A Wealth of Words*)

The department has made attempts to act to correct this disadvantage through the explicit teaching of vocabulary, in practice by providing pupils with a weekly list of tier 2 or tier 3 words which they are to go away and find meanings for. However, in undertaking research I noted a flaw in this approach, perhaps best reflected here:

“the fastest way to gain a large vocabulary through schooling is to follow a systematic curriculum that presents new words in familiar contexts, thereby enabling the student to make correct meaning-guesses unconsciously. Spending large amounts of school time on individual word study is an inefficient and insufficient route to a bigger vocabulary” (Hirsch, E.D. *A Wealth of Words*)

Deep Learning for Social Justice, like Hirsch, notes the need to consider that ‘When assessing’ and, therefore, when teaching, ‘reading ability, we need to consider a range of skills’ including ‘decoding’, ‘comprehension’ and ‘fluency’ – my aim, then, would be to produce resources which avoided ‘spending large amounts of school time on individual word study’ and instead gave function and real use to new vocabulary.



Implementation

My plan was to create and implement resources which responded to these needs, and complete an action research cycle to help me consider its impact.

Planning: In planning these resources I returned to the Frayer model and the Reading Rope both of which expressed the importance of expanding beyond the teaching of meaning and began to give me insight into how else students should begin their interactions with unfamiliar words. The meaning was only the very beginning, what would be important would be acting in a way which created a real opportunity to develop a functional relationship with this language, or ‘enabling the student to make correct meaning-guesses unconsciously’.

Acting: The creation of resources provided these opportunities, beginning with the basic definitions, but moving into dual coding and therefore application of the word’s meaning, as well as questioning around the word when ‘put into familiar contexts’ and relying on ‘correct meaning-guesses unconsciously’ when the same word is presented in new forms as part of written examples. Students would then not only understand and apply the meaning of this new vocabulary, but synthesise it with previous learning, building yet more on the idea of using ‘new words in familiar contexts’ by using retention and retrieval, and pushing beyond current understandings of ideas by expressing new thoughts about previous knowledge.

Observing: Through weeks of this approach of new vocabulary learning being applied to lessons, the evidence began to show improvements across numerous aspects of students’ reading and written ability. Students were able to accurately and confidently decipher the meaning of sentences and writing which contained words they had become familiar with, or variations of this word, having become used to seeing it in context. Moreover, the student’s confidence and willingness to interact with and decipher language became evident, with an ongoing increase of student participation and active learning happening in lessons which used this format. Qualitatively, students’ verbalisations and expression became

clearer and more precise, and this also showed as evident in their written communication. Moreover, quantitatively, data showed a residual increase in students’ grading – and whilst this cannot be isolated and be explained as an effect of the implementation of these resources alone, it, alongside these general observations, begins to show a close to the gap created by disadvantage.

Reflecting and moving forward: Having seen the successes of this approach to the teaching of vocabulary I have already begun the process of implementing it within the department’s curriculum, providing templates and reasonings for the work that students should complete when learning vocabulary. More than this though, I have been proactive in championing the teaching of vocabulary beyond the department, having already shared through staff development days how this could be applied in other subjects. Moreover, it has been shared by myself during initial teacher training professional development sessions, and with my own mentees in the department, solidifying the future of the success of vocabulary teaching.

As a leader, it has been truly rewarding to see the nature of leadership as a cyclical endeavour, having taken someone’s previous work on a topic, applied new reading and developments in the understanding of education and providing it to others who, through their own research and experience, will no doubt continue to improve upon the success and potential of this approach, and add one more tool to the arsenal required to close the vocabulary gap.

References

- Hirsch, E.D. *A Wealth of Words*. [online] City Journal. Available at: <https://www.city-journal.org/article/a-wealth-of-words>
- Oxford University Press (2018). *Why Closing the Word Gap Matters: Oxford Language Report Contents*. [online] Available at: <https://www.oup.com.cn/test/word-gap.pdf>
- Williams, A., Settle, C., Chambers, P. and Schools, Students And Teachers Network (2019). *Deep learning for social justice*. London: SSAT.



Leadership Legacy Project: Developing the next generation of outstanding leaders

Our **Leadership Legacy Project (LLP)** is a year-long initiative for primary, secondary and SEND network members and is for teachers who have been identified by their headteacher as having the potential to become outstanding leaders.

Participants have access to online and face-to-face activities, including events, shadowing opportunities, resources and networking meetings.

By the end of the project, the Leadership Fellows will:

- ▶ form their vision for education and shape their educational principles
- ▶ gain an in-depth understanding of the current education system
- ▶ consider different leadership models and the skills required to succeed
- ▶ undertake wider reading
- ▶ spend time with highly successful educators
- ▶ submit a written think piece which evidences their developing practice as a teaching professional.

Registration for our next LLP cohort is now open.



Connect with Kennet – supporting community engagement

By Graham Wallace, Teacher of Business, Kennet School

Kennet School in Thatcham have been running a Community Lunch programme for the past 25 years. This is an event which takes place ten times a year and is open to the wider community but, generally, tends to attract senior citizens who are interested in following and maintaining contact with the school which very much lies at the heart of the town. It is just one example of the many ways this school reaches out and touches its wider community.

Kennet School is the largest school community in West Berkshire and draws in over 1800 secondary school students from the town and surrounding villages. Thatcham itself is a relatively small town with a population of approximately 25,000 lying three miles to the east of the larger town of Newbury in the county of West Berkshire. However, Thatcham does have a long and unique history with evidence of occupation dating back to prehistoric times. Indeed, Thatcham is listed in the *Guinness Book of Records* as a claimant to being the oldest continuously inhabited place in Britain.

Kennet School's history, although not quite as long as the town of Thatcham itself, dates back to its opening as a secondary modern in 1957. Subsequently, the school converted into a comprehensive in 1971 and latterly changed to an academy in 2011. The importance and the impact of Kennet School in the wider community is one which can be felt across the generations as it is quite common for many of the current

student body to also have parents and even grandparents who were also educated here. The school is a vibrant place of learning and wider community activity whose motto is Excellence through Endeavour. One such initiative which reflects this endeavour is the Community Lunch programme. The programme is effectively run by the students and forms an integral part of the Youth Awards course of study which recognise and accredit the non-formal learning achievements of our young people. The students' involvement in the Community Lunch fulfils the communication component of the Youth Awards programme but, of course, in the wider context of Kennet School it provides so much more enrichment for all those involved.

So, what is involved? For a small contribution, which is additionally and generously subsidised by the school, the members of the local community who attend (and this may vary from 15 to 30 at a time) are provided with a hot lunch prepared in the school canteen and served by the students. However, it doesn't stop there. The lunch provides a unique and informal opportunity for the students to interact with a broad range of adults in the community and they are certainly peppered with many questions as to what is going on in school. Much of this can be informal conversations about subjects studied and sports and other extra-curricular activities but there are also more formal presentations on student life at Kennet.



In the past this has involved students giving talks on educational trips they have undertaken, for example. The lunch might also be complemented by entertainment and performances from the school choir or soloists. Recently, the school's Combined Cadet Force contingent participated and explained their function in the school community and next month will see the Kennet art department give a demonstration of the wide range of arts activities available to the student body.

However, the Community Lunch programme is also just one example of a broader set of initiatives known as Connect with Kennet which seeks to identify certain needs within the community and provide informational and educational outlets. The school is in a unique position to identify ever changing needs and potential demand for community programmes as a result of its daily interaction with its broad and dynamic student body.

Consequently, the Connect with Kennet initiative has provided courses such as *Understanding Autism; Parenting and Challenging Behaviour; Keeping your Child Safe Online, Coping with Exam Pressure* and *Promoting Reading and Literacy in the Home*. This last course lies very much at the heart of Kennet School's new reading strategy, The Kennet Canon, which has been rolled out to all KS3 and KS4 pupils during the last academic year. From community lunches to lectures and a variety of educational initiatives there is something available for students, former students, parents and all members of the school community and beyond. Kennet is far from being a nine to four institution; its outreach programmes are a key part of our vision known as *The Kennet Way*.



Raising the profile of teaching and learning - a journey towards becoming a research informed school

By Charlotte Robinson, Assistant Headteacher, Stratford School Academy

Three years ago, the only exposure teachers at our school had to current educational research was in a 30 minute segment delivered on one of the three CPD days across the year, or maybe an hour or two during one of the half termly twilight sessions, that teachers were forced to sit through from 3.30-6pm, after a full day of teaching. Teaching and learning was not the priority, and this needed to change.

Bringing teachers up to date with the latest educational research not only supports student learning, it also helps to foster motivation and a feeling of togetherness between teachers—after all, they all chose to become teachers, so they all share a passion for not only teaching, but also learning about teaching, and talking about teaching.

First year

The initial plan to help increase engagement with educational research was to slowly drip-feed information to teachers through teaching and learning segments in the weekly whole school bulletin email. However, the bulletin was often a 10-page document that was emailed out to teachers on a Friday evening, so the teaching and learning segment, which I had spent two hours of my week putting together, was often overlooked. This was easy to tell, when I had passing conversations with teachers about the segments, I was mostly met with a glazed, awkward look. This had to change. Subsequently, I took to

printing off the teaching and learning segments for the week and sticking them up around the school in places where teachers often linger: the photocopier and the hand dryer in the toilets were prime spots. This was effective in the first instance. The first teaching and learning segment that was displayed around school was taken from Tom Sherrington's WalkThrus. I would often have teachers come to speak to me about how they had enjoyed the novelty of having the information displayed around school and had tried strategies in their lessons. However, over time, the novelty wore off, and the segments became 'wallpaper'.

Another strategy that we tried in the first year was to set up a teaching and learning group. This group met once per half term to take part in a training session that followed Ambition Institute's '*The Learning Curriculum: Explaining the Science of Learning to Teachers*'. Teachers in the group were selected based on their level of influence around the school and their level of experience. The view was that, if they find the sessions engaging and interesting, they will share their learning with and engage their departments. Teachers were asked to complete an evaluation after every session, and despite making numerous changes to the format, the feedback remained consistent—the session wasn't part of directed time, the learning from the sessions wasn't always transferrable, and teachers did not find them valuable. So, after five sessions, this idea was dropped.



Second year

Despite the setbacks, it was still clear that the best way to engage teachers in educational research was to drip-feed it to them throughout the year. Feedback had also highlighted that teachers wanted specific, usable strategies that could be applied in the classroom almost immediately. This was when the morning ‘teaching and learning briefings’ were born. During the second year of our journey towards becoming a research-informed school, all teachers were invited to attend fortnightly, 10-minute training sessions. Each session covered a different strategy from Doug Lemov’s *Teach like a Champion*. Teachers were provided with a brief summary of the strategy, the research behind it, and a video to show how it could be applied in the classroom. At the end of each session, teachers completed deliberate practice and were then asked to try the strategy in their lessons during that fortnight. The session was compulsory for all ECTs and senior classroom teachers, but all teachers were welcome; free pastries provided an incentive for others to join, which boosted numbers! We are now two and a half years into ‘teaching and learning briefings’ and attendance figures have not dropped; they

are attended by around 40 teachers each fortnight and have now evolved so they are delivered by different teachers around the school. This not only promotes teachers engaging in educational research individually, but it also provides the presenters with a professional development opportunity by presenting to others. We also now have ‘research briefings’, where specific research papers are shared, taken from Jade Pearce’s *What Every Teacher Needs to Know* book.

Third year

The final, and arguably the biggest change that was made during year three was the disaggregation of the half-termly two and a half-hour twilights. The research consistently shows that students learn best when cognitive load is reduced and content is delivered in regular, small chunks over time. The model of three CPD days and six two and a half-hour twilights across the year was not conducive to effective learning, so something needed to change. By reducing the number of CPD days and removing half-termly, extended twilights, it was found that directed time could still be completed by adding a 30-minute twilight at the end of each Monday. These twilight sessions were scheduled

on the same day as department time to allow teachers to implement the training immediately into their lessons. Staff were consulted on this change, and the overwhelming majority opted to move to a weekly twilight model. The new model allows for much more effective CPD, as each twilight focuses on one idea from educational research, which teachers then implement during the next week (similar to the model used for the teaching and learning briefings). Teacher evaluation at the end of the first year was overwhelmingly positive; therefore, the new model has continued into the current academic year.

It is important to note that the process of raising the profile of educational research has not only been achieved through fortnightly teaching and learning briefings and weekly twilights. Running alongside these larger structural changes have been smaller projects, such as the creation of a CPD library to provide teachers with first-hand access to the research and increasing opportunities for teachers to access external CPD such as NPQs, 'Leaders for the Future' and

'Step into Middle Leadership' courses, delivered through SSAT. Furthermore, an instructional coaching programme, which began by training five teachers as instructional coaches in the first year, then developed into training for departments in the second, and most recently resulted in the training of all teachers as instructional coaches.

We still have a long way to go. New educational research is released every day, and new staff join each year, so we will never be able to 'tick a box' to say that teaching and learning is a priority and all teachers are engaged in educational research. However, this journey has shown that through constant evaluation of impact, regular conversation with teachers, and the acceptance that, sometimes, you have to stop doing things if they don't work, will help to ensure that engagement with educational research remains a priority and the school will continue to move in the right direction.



A photograph showing a group of school staff and students in a meeting. A man in a red shirt and blue lanyard is leaning over, looking at something on a table. Several young women in school uniforms are looking at the same point with interest. The background is a bright, modern school interior with large windows.

How SSAT can support your school improvement journey

We can help you identify focus areas and access the right tools, advice, resources.

- ▶ **Embedding Formative Assessment programme**
Improve teacher practice and help your students make two months' additional progress in their Attainment 8 GCSE score
- ▶ **Lead Practitioner Accreditation**
Empower and recognise your staff to improve whole-school teaching and learning.
- ▶ **Curriculum design and quality assurance**
Support for middle and senior leaders at every stage of the planning and review cycle.
- ▶ **Deliver your own SSAT leadership programmes**
Become a delivery partner and deliver the National Award for Middle Leaders, Stepping Up to Senior Leadership or Pastoral Leaders in your school.
- ▶ **Coaching**
Tailored one-to-one support and bespoke group training.
- ▶ **Student leadership**
Training for student leadership coordinators or deliver your own training to develop student leaders in your school.

Re-introducing scholarship into a secondary school through The Trivium

By Desmond Deehan, Headteacher, The North Halifax Grammar School

The post-Covid educational landscape has created a number of challenges for schools. Many students have become overly reliant on online learning both within and outside the classroom. At North Halifax Grammar School we were increasingly aware of a higher degree of passivity amongst students and our students entering sixth form were less prepared for the rigour of A-level study. Students too had been susceptible to polarized opinions on social media. It was important for us as educators to explicitly teach the skills necessary for academic enquiry, reasoned judgements and the ability to express these coherently.

So, in 2023 we began to redefine what was important to ensure our students would become intelligent, articulate thinkers able to critically assess ideas and opinions, evaluate and challenge and ultimately form their own ideas based on reliable and tested enquiry. We looked to the past and the fundamentals of The Trivium (Grammar, Dialectic and Rhetoric). Around this we built an understanding of scholarship.

We identified the following actions to:

- introduce a coherent and consistent structure to our teaching
- embed a culture that valued academic study
- create a sense of value in discovery and learning; and
- remove the barriers and obstacles to the above.



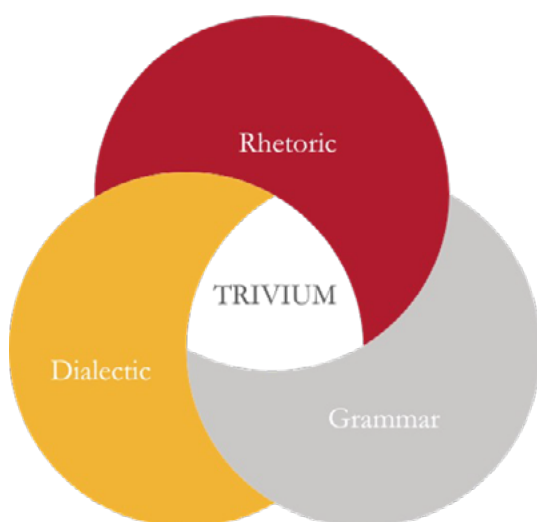
Beginning with the last of these we targeted mobile phones. This was not just a social issue but an educational one. Students' attention spans were decreasing as they became accustomed to frequent distractions from their phones. Effectively their minds were elsewhere. So, after explaining this to parents, staff and students and sharing the research we introduced an On Site Out of Sight policy.

Next, we raised expectations. We raised the entry criteria for our sixth form and reviewed our rewards, making it harder to gain recognition.

We also changed our Prize Day to a Speech Day, focusing on public speaking and awards for scholarship.

Based on the excellent work of Martin Robinson whose book *Trivium 21c* sets out the place of the Trivium as part of education we began to define our curriculum purpose. The Trivium comprises:

- a. **Grammar:** Knowledge and remembering that knowledge.
- b. **Dialectic:** The critical engagement with that knowledge.
- c. **Rhetoric:** The ability to articulate that knowledge and understanding in multiple ways.



Martin delivered training to our staff in September 2023 and we began to share the three parts of the Trivium with students and parents, delivering assemblies on each and holding parents' events to define and explain the place of the Trivium in their child's education.

We also defined the broader concept of scholarship. Scholarship is academic study or achievement at the highest level. It includes self-motivated inquiry, research, the development of knowledge and ideas and the critique of those ideas by peers and academic staff.

None of this is worthwhile however without the desire to learn, the passion that drives learning. As Plutarch says "Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire". So, we

framed our curriculum as The Wonder Years. We made it a priority that our curriculum, extra-curricular offer and lessons sought to inspire our students and ignite a passion within them.

While this is still a work in progress we have identified some key challenges. Understanding Grammar (knowledge) in the classroom is quite straightforward, particularly following the emphasis from Ofsted's EIF, but Dialectic proved challenging. There was no clear consensus and it proved difficult to capture it in practice. We used Pose, Pause, Pounce and Bounce as one way to extend questioning and encourage students to view topics from multiple perspectives. Rhetoric was clearer but still needed the development of rhetorical skills in presentation.

The students' response was surprising. They quickly adopted the new focus even commenting that the raised entry criteria for sixth form forced them to raise their game. For the most part they welcomed the emphasis on scholarship and the renewed challenge.

We required a robust quality assurance process and set a 100-day review model to maintain pace. We used external reviews to help validate our findings; we had the benefit of an Ofsted inspection, School Improvement Partner visit and regular surveys to complement the lesson drop-ins led by our strategic leaders. These corroborated our own, partly instinctual, conclusions.

What is evident is that the core of the classroom experience has to be a well-developed Dialectic involving extended questioning, repeated challenge and multiple perspectives. The latter fits well with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion drive and we have found how often the Trivium elements have complemented other priorities like this. This is really about where you place value as a school and what matters most.

We are still in the early stages and we are learning but we know we are on the right path.



Unleashing the potential: The transformative power of outdoor education on students from lower socio-economic backgrounds

*By Sarah Parkinson, Teacher of PE and assistant lead teacher
of outdoor education, Trinity Academy Halifax*

This article is based on a think-piece submitted for SSAT's Leadership Legacy Project. Outdoor education has emerged as a powerful tool for holistic development, with the potential to positively impact the lives of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. By providing opportunities for immersive, experiential learning in outdoor environments, outdoor education fosters personal growth, enhances academic achievement, builds self-confidence, and equips students with essential life skills.

This essay explores the various ways in which outdoor education and experiences like the Duke of Edinburgh award can bring about positive change in the lives of students facing socio-economic challenges, enabling them to overcome barriers and thrive, whilst shedding light on the underlying factors contributing to the reluctance of participation in outdoor education. This essay also aims to explore the stereotyping that can contribute to the success of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Outdoor education creates a supportive and inclusive environment that promotes personal development in students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Engaging in outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, and team-building exercises and initiatives such as the Duke of Edinburgh, allows students to explore their potential, build resilience, and develop problem-

solving skills. Through overcoming challenges in unfamiliar settings, students gain a sense of self confidence, self-reliance, and a belief in their ability to overcome adversity. These experiences really empower students, enabling them to break free from the limitations often associated with their socio-economic backgrounds.

The Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award has achieved remarkable success within secondary schools, positively impacting countless students. This prestigious programme encourages personal development and growth among young individuals, fostering essential skills, resilience, and a sense of adventure. By participating in a range of activities such as volunteering, physical fitness, skill development, and an expedition, students improve their teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving abilities. The awards enable students to challenge themselves beyond their comfort zones and experience something that those students from lower socio-economic backgrounds may never be exposed to. Through its structured framework and supportive guidance, the programme has proven to be a valuable and widely acclaimed initiative that equips young individuals with invaluable life skills, preparing them for future success after education.

Outdoor education goes beyond the classroom, offering a hands-on learning experience that can enhance academic achievement among students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Leading on the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze and



Silver Awards within the academy, has shown me how the outdoors can stimulate intellectual curiosity and enable students to make connections between knowledge and real-world applications. The expeditions provided a positive learning environment that motivated students who usually struggle in a traditional classroom setting.

For students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, outdoor education provides a unique platform to develop social skills and foster positive relationships. Students who participated in the expedition worked in small groups to navigate their way to various campsites within Halifax. By sharing this experience and challenge, strong bonds were forged among students, students socialised who wouldn't usually choose to spend time together within the academy and therefore the impact of socio-economic differences was reduced.

In society, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are often unfairly stigmatized, with the suggestion that they are less likely to succeed academically. However, research challenges this belief and highlights the potential for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to excel in their educational

pursuits. Research consistently demonstrates that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have the potential to achieve academic success. A study which was conducted by Reardon and Portilla (2016) found that while there may be an initial achievement gap between students of different socio-economic statuses, the gap can be significantly narrowed or even eliminated with the provision of quality education, supportive environments, and targeted interventions.

Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds often display remarkable resilience and motivation when it comes to their future educational prospects. I have found that these students often face adversities such as limited resources, unstable living conditions, and inadequate support systems. Despite these challenges, some of our students demonstrate exceptional determination and a strong desire to improve their circumstances through education. A study by Sirin (2005) found that positive school environment, strong teacher and student relationships, as well as access to quality resources can have a profound impact on academic outcomes for disadvantaged students. When provided with equal opportunities these students can thrive academically.

While students from lower socio-economic backgrounds may face additional hurdles on their educational journey, research indicates that they are not essentially less likely to succeed. By challenging stereotypes and schools investing in experiences such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award and other outdoor educational initiatives, I believe that we can empower these students to achieve their full potential. As teachers I believe it is important to recognise the capabilities of our students from disadvantaged backgrounds which in turn will benefit these individuals and society as a whole.

The personal development programme within Trinity Academy offers valuable opportunities for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to develop leadership and life skills that are crucial for success in the future. Students who participate in the award during these personal development lessons are exposed to situations that require decision-making, adaptability, and effective communication through their volunteering, physical and skills sections. Participating in this enables students to learn to manage responsibilities – packing their own expedition

kit, motivating others whilst out on the expedition and organising tasks such as cooking and cleaning responsibilities and pitching tents. The expeditions develop goal setting abilities, time management, and problem-solving skills. These transferable skills equip students with a competitive edge, enhancing their prospects for higher education, employment, and personal fulfilment.

For our students at Trinity Academy Halifax, The Duke of Edinburgh Award has emerged as a transformative programme that provides young people with invaluable experiences and skills to shape their future careers. I believe the award has had a huge impact on individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds and in future will aid in developing future life skills that will be transferable in future careers. These skills significantly enhance the employability prospects of individuals, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds who may face additional barriers to accessing career opportunities. Participation in the awards instils confidence and self-belief among our young people, enabling them to overcome challenges and embrace new experiences.



Increased confidence positively influences career exploration, decision making, and persistence in the face of setbacks, factors especially relevant for individuals navigating the complexities of the job market from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002).

The Duke of Edinburgh Award carries significant recognition and validation from educational institutions, employers, and wider society. Universities and colleges recognise the dedication, commitment, and personal development it entails. Employers value the Duke of Edinburgh Award as evidence of individuals' motivation, determination, and willingness to go the extra mile. This recognition is particularly vital for young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, as it helps counteract societal biases. The award offers experiences beyond the immediate environment of some of our students, nurtures resilience, and develops a sense of possibility, encouraging participants to aspire to higher education and pursue fulfilling careers that might otherwise seem out of reach.

However, a growing number of students have exhibited reluctance to participate in outdoor education programmes, opting for indoor activities and digital engagement instead. Many of Trinity Academy Halifax's students grow up with limited exposure to nature and outdoor spaces. This lack of familiarity with outdoor environments lowers their appreciation for outdoor education and its potential benefits. Students may view outdoor activities as foreign or unfamiliar, leading to a reluctance to participate. Sadly, the modern education system often focuses too much on testing, leaving limited time for extracurricular activities, including outdoor experiences. I believe our students are unaware of the potential benefits or the range of outdoor education opportunities available to them which can often result in a lack of enthusiasm and interest among our students within the academy, hindering their willingness to engage in the Duke of Edinburgh expedition. As a teacher, I believe it is important to encourage a balanced approach to technology, whilst emphasising and actively promoting outdoor education initiatives.

By overcoming these challenges, we can ensure that students develop essential life skills, and experience the benefits that outdoor education provides.

It is so clear to me that outdoor education has the power to break down barriers and transform the lives of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Educational institutions and policymakers should recognise the value of outdoor education and ensure that it is accessible to all students, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds. By investing in outdoor education, we can create an empowering educational landscape, opening doors of opportunity, enabling students to realise their full potential. A quote that will forever stick with me after the Bronze expedition with our year 9 students came from a young man who has had very limited exposure to the outdoors and has had little opportunity to experience adventures like camping trips etc. "This is the best thing I have ever done in my life. Thanks Miss!"



Boys in the arts: Deep Experience

By Emma Dent, Subject Lead for Drama, Langley Grammar School

This article is based on a think-piece submitted for SSAT's Leadership Legacy Project. As a reported 'Creativity Crisis looms' and research findings show GCSE music and drama students falling by a fifth over the last decade (Weale, 2021), there is a national uptake issue. Nationally, perhaps this may be accounted for by the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) with the government's ambition to see 75% of pupils studying the EBacc subject combination at GCSE by 2022, and 90% by 2025 (DoE, 2019). There is no doubt that some students have a restricted choice when completing their options selection.

However, within my own context: a selective grammar school, students have near full autonomy of their options selection, with a language choice being required but three options in which students are free to select any combination of options (with one small proviso that two art GCSE courses are offered, art: photography, fine art and art textiles, and students can select one pathway to take). Perhaps even more impressively, there are 14 different selections for the three option choices and in my four years of teaching (five with PGCE placement) students have always been given their three choices, despite providing two alternative choices.

All students at our school have the opportunity to select what they would like to take, they are not facing the same hurdles as students in other

settings. Therefore, I thought deeper to consider why our GCSE numbers have taken a dip – with the number of male students facing a particular nosedive. At the end of the last academic year, for the first time in over 15 years, we had only one class in year 11 of 22 students, with only seven of these students being boys. Despite getting our numbers back up to two classes for year 10, with 24 students, only four were boys. Additionally, at the start of this academic year, of our 24 students moving into year 11, we only had three boys as one student had moved away. At the same time, we had only one male student across KS5 which meant a serious lack of representation of boys in the arts at our school. Consequently, I designed a mini-project, involving male students in year 9, to investigate and explore possible reasons for the drop in boys in the arts. Here, for the purpose of my inquiry, I focused on drama specifically, rather than the arts subjects as a whole, although I have drawn from the arts industry overall at various stages of planning and analysing.

The importance of the arts

With the introduction of the EBacc and a decline in both funding and uptake in recent years, it is good to step back and consider the significance arts subjects have. Uptake of arts subjects can be limited by numerous factors including school budgets, parental pressures and priority being given to core subjects.

However, with the current Ofsted framework highlighting the importance of a broad and

balanced curriculum (DoE, 2021), schools have been encouraged to stress the status of all subjects within a curriculum (Inside Government, 2020). Certainly, research conducted by the Arts Council England points to the value of arts and culture:

“Schools that integrate arts across the curriculum...have shown consistently higher average reading and mathematics scores compared to similar schools that do not.” (Artsaward, 2021)

Additionally, as I undertook a new role of ‘Disadvantaged Champion’ supporting students who are a recipient of the Pupil Premium grant, I felt even more passionate that arts subjects and enriching arts and culture based experiences should be of importance to all school settings, as otherwise the poorest pupils across the country are yet again at risk of educational achievement being affected by family income. Case in point, alongside the students receiving inspiring opportunities they may never have experienced outside of school (such as a theatrical performance), research suggests that participation in the arts boosts students’ progress. Overall, the average impact of arts participation on other areas of academic learning appears to be positive but moderate, about an additional three months progress (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021).

As teachers, we have a moral duty to the pastoral care of our young people, with wellbeing a key concern for educators, (which was brought to the forefront of my teaching experience during my NQT year when we entered our first national lockdown, due to the Covid-19 pandemic). One in six children are now likely to have a mental health problem: “In the last three years, the likelihood of young people having a mental health problem has increased by 50%” (Children’s Society, 2023). Research and evidence points to the key role the arts can play in combatting poor mental health: “Getting involved with the arts can have powerful and lasting effects on health. It can help to protect against a range of mental health conditions, help manage mental ill-health and support recovery” (Mental Health, 2019). The use of social prescribing, using arts and sport to aid teenagers with poor mental health, has been adopted by GPs in the UK to treat people with mental health problems (UCL, 2022)

Finally, it is important to highlight the career opportunities available in the arts. Whilst the majority of students, particularly in my own setting, may opt for an arts subject for enjoyment or to develop life skills, the arts offer many careers pathways. Arts and culture contributes £10.6 billion to the UK economy: “before the



pandemic, creative industries employment was growing at twice the rate of the UK economy and it has been projected that post-pandemic, the creative sector could recover faster than the UK economy overall." (Arts Award, 2021).

Acting on the research

For my project, I decided to target year 9 boys, as this is the year where students go through the options process. I identified five or six of the strongest boys in each of the six forms using the following criteria:

1. Students who had consistently achieved M1-E in practical assessments.
2. Students who had consistently achieved M1-E in written assessments *and* had taken part in an extra-curricular drama offering during KS3.
3. Students who had made significant progress in their final term of year 8/first term of year 9 compared to earlier in their KS3 journey. (i.e. moved up two sub-boundaries).

These factors were used to gauge both interest levels and attainment of potential candidates, as both factors are needed for students to achieve to their full potential within GCSE drama. In discussion with my subject leader, I ended up with a group of 40 students and at this point, I decided to reach out to previous male GCSE drama students to gather feedback.

Three male KS5 students attended a lunchtime meeting to brainstorm ideas. Here the boys were able to offer their thoughts on what attracted them to drama at KS4/the GCSE course.

Their feedback was:

1. The practical nature of the course, working with others, competitive playing games. Therefore Session 1 became a team-building/'getting to know you session' with lots of drama games and a chance for the KS5 students to share their journeys.
2. Doing physical work within the practical work. Therefore Session 2 became a stage combat workshop (something KS3 students do not usually experience)
3. Exploring scripts that push actors or involve conflict. Therefore Session 3 became an exploration of Act 1, Scene 1 of *Romeo and Juliet*

4. Session 4 became a cumulative session, with students applying techniques learnt in session 2 and character exploration in session 3, performing and the best winning achievement/house points and being featured on our drama Instagram page – circling back to the working with other competitive aspect the KS5 students mentioned.

Throughout my consultation with my key stakeholders, I reflected upon the effectiveness of a female teacher discussing with young teenage boys the need for teenage boys to consider arts subjects, and it became clear to me that the students needed to hear from their own peers, to have a realistic, honest and authentic insight and ensure the project, was boy-dominated/focused. As one of the KS5 students I had met with had achieved a grade 9, and one was our current deputy head boy, I was confident they could both deliver the sessions to a high standard and share strong knowledge of drama/the GCSE course. Therefore, my role evolved from leader to facilitator. I provided the structure of the sessions, general content and registered/monitored the sessions, but the KS5 students led the activities, answered any questions and promoted boys in the arts with their high quality delivery demonstrating to their younger peers how drama has supported their growth.

Challenges

Once the first session began, all students turned up and engaged really well with what was asked of them by their older peers. Only three students did not turn up to the sessions that ran and once they shared their reasoning they were excused. I wanted to highlight autonomy and not have the students feel they were forced to take part, as within the context of my school setting, students are mostly very compliant. I wanted the students to understand and be proud of the reasons as to why they had been selected.

One of the biggest challenges we faced was time slot/time constraints. As it had taken a while to finalise the project focus/overall structure and I was conscious students had already had sessions with their options mentor, I launched the project within a busy half-term. Unfortunately, this meant I had to miss two sessions in a row due to illness and a firm tutor commitment and as the students

could not be supervised, we could not complete the final session. At this point in the timeline, we reached the end of the half term. With both momentum and availability being tricky after half term, due to the 3-4 week gap and scheduling conflicts, it became clear there was no feasible option to complete the final session. Additionally, the students themselves had other commitments to balance, such as playing in house sports teams during lunch, completing/printing homework in the library and much needed downtime, it seemed the sensible decision to move on as I did not want the project to be detrimental to their other activities and their view of the subject.

Findings

My findings came from two sources – an optional MS Forms survey sent out to the participants of the mini-project and the completed year 9 options forms. The MS Forms, which 25 out of the 40 students opted to complete, boasted a lot of positive feedback, with comments saying the programme was fun, engaging and enjoyable. Only one student from the 25 completed responses said anything negative about the project. This could be a sign of our students' compliancy, as previously mentioned - the majority of students would be hesitant to say anything which could appear disrespectful, however the students did outline some constructive feedback for if the project ran again, which was very useful, and the following comments appeared the most:

- **Fewer students** – upon reflection it was a lot of students in the space.
- **More time** – I would like to make sure all sessions can run and make it earlier in the options consideration/process
- **More games** – the Q&A with KS5 students was useful and they addressed some misconceptions about boys in the arts – sharing it is a male-dominated industry, but we only played three games and only on the first session.

Additionally, of the 25 responses, three students have opted for drama firmly and an additional seven shared that the project had made them reconsider drama within the options process. All students could outline the importance/transferable skills of the subject. From the completed year 9 options form, we can see the

trend that girls opting for the subject outweighs the boys but there has been an increase in number of boys compared to our previously mentioned current year 11 (three boys).

- 35 students opted for drama as their first choice/firm; eight boys to 27 girls.
- 19 students selected drama as one of their alternative choices; eight boys to 11 girls.

Finally, when asking the students what factors had been at play when they made their options selections, **67%** of respondents had either opted for drama or carefully considered the subject in their options process. Those who did not select drama had only positive comments to make, but ultimately opted for other subjects due to enjoyment and/or future career aspirations.

Future steps

Running this pilot project has been a really positive experience and certainly given me lots of consider moving forward, as outlined below, but also I have taken note of some of the initiatives I have had the privilege of learning of through my visits to my peer group school and second visit at another similar setting (grammar school).

- I would **target fewer students** and make sure that they know why they have been selected. This would mean a brief conversation during their drama lesson when work is on-going, so they fully understand why they had been selected.
- I would start the project earlier, looking particularly at **autumn term** to allow for the students to really consider why they have been selected and have the project recent in their mind as they enter their year 9 options process.
- I would **publicise the project** further, taking inspiration from one of my partner schools, I would contact home to celebrate their child having been selected, I would showcase work on our drama Instagram page and celebrate the students' achievements in their end of term celebration assembly.

Conclusion

There can be many reasons why boys are not taking up arts subjects as much as their female peers, but I am glad to work in a school where all arts subjects are celebrated and supported. I feel positive that the project was well received by the boys who were selected to take part. I feel I was afforded the opportunity to hear from lots of male students from both KS5 and KS3 and will continue to reflect upon and utilise these opinions moving forward. In general, I am proud of the uptake level

we have, being the fifth highest selected option this year (out of 14 choices), denotes the strong position drama is in at my school and how well valued and enjoyed the subject is by the students. Within the department, we will continue to reflect on any boundaries or stigma our key stakeholders may be challenged with when considering opting for drama/arts subjects and work on negating such barriers as we continue to move forward.

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