LEADING IN LEARNING

New Year New Challenges

ISSUE 1: JANUARY 2013

Collaboration

The best CPD comes from working with others

Written feedback

How to make your marking count

Workload

Ten tips to get the work-life balance right

The teaching and learning magazine from Leeds West Academy

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Welcome to Leading in Learning, the Teaching and Learning magazine from Leeds West Academy. We have tried to create a magazine that appeals to all. A quick skim through should offer some useful tips and a fuller reading will allow you to explore topics in greater detail. If you have an article idea for the next issue, please get in touch.

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WORK LIFE BALANCE

It's a new year and a new term. Wouldn't it be great if this year we were able to finally sort out our work life balance? It is a challenging job and long hours seem to come with the territory. However, there are changes that you can make to the way you work to increase your work-life balance. You cannot perform well in the classroom if you are ill, stressed or unhappy.

Here are our suggestions to help get the balance right.

MORE EFFECTIVE WRITTEN FEEDBACK

Phil Beadle states, in 'How to Teach', "Make no mistake: this is the most important thing you do as a teacher." High quality written feedback is an essential tool in helping students to progress.

However, marking every piece of work in detail is an enormously time consuming process. In order to make the time spent worthwhile, then the feedback needs to be effective and it needs to impact on student progress.

Pupils must understand their feedback, be clear about what it means and what they have to do. Time must routinely be made available for pupils to work on their improvement points. Here are some strategies:

BEFORE – COMPLETING THE TASK

- Share the success criteria for a piece of work- use style models.
- Make sure students link back to their previous targets- write this at the top of the piece of work.
- Before handing in, pupils could answer a question at the end of their work as a nice bookend: 'how has your writing improved since your last task?' or 'how have you met your target?'
- Explicitly teach skills of proofreading, drafting and editing.
- Build in self/ peer assessment and critique as part of the process before a piece of work is handed in.
- Try to secure an authentic audience for their work.
- Be selective in what you mark and be clear about this with the students.

DURING – AS YOU MARK

- Make sure that you write comments only, not grades. This ensures that students will concentrate solely on their feedback.
- Ensure that your target is specific and offers advice on how to improve.
- Record targets in your markbook and RAG achievement.
- Use this to reflect on the impact of your teaching on the learning.
- Identify patterns of misconceptions and allow it to inform your next steps.
- Indicate progress by referring to the pupil's previous work.

AFTER – ENGAGING WITH THE FEEDBACK

- Write a question after the feedback that they must answer.
- Hide the feedback: Write the pupils' comments in another page in the book. They have to find them.
- Pupils must prepare a starter activity to teach the rest of the class on the subject of their target.
- Correct the first half of a pupils' work. They correct the second half.
- Give pupils an activity immediately to develop their target .
- Self assessment 2.0: Pupils hand in a piece of work to be marked. The teacher photocopies it then marks as usual. In the feedback lesson, students mark their own then compare their version with the teacher's. They then reflect on this.
- Coded Feedback: Feedback is written in such a way that it has to be 'translated' e.g. in another language, an anagram etc.
- Feedback is written sideways in books so they have to turn books to read it.
- Late night marking (from The Lazy Teacher): Give pupils the wrong feedback and ask them to explain why it is the wrong feedback. Or handing pupils their feedback on slips but to the wrong pupils. They have to find their own feedback.
- A couple of acronyms: STAR: Strength, Target, Activity, Response; STEP: Strength, Target, Evaluation, Progress.
- Arrange your seating plan to seat pupils with the same targets together. They can support each other and you can help them together. Alternatively, you could pair a pupil with a particular target with someone who is strong in that area.
- When you need to share grades, do this after you share the written feedback.

Cross Curricular

What happens when teachers collaborate across subjects? We interviewed **Richard Senior** (Art) and **Tom Lascelles** (Maths) about their successful cross-curricular project.

Why did you decide to work together?

Tom: We were initially paired together during an NQT training session where we were looking at the idea that one subject could be taught through the medium of another. We decided to pick the idea of transformation as that topic had links to the art world and real life Mathematics.

What were your initial ideas?

Richard: We tried to work out the best links between our subjects. We thought of shapes and colour then we moved on to transformations as it was something I was doing in World Art. We looked at tessellations-looking at cultural aspects of different patterns.

T: We actually took a lot of inspiration from looking at indigenous textile materials e.g. rugs. We looked at Islamic artwork because that showed a lot of reflections and rotations. We also started looking at iconic structures-like the Taj Mahal-and how that had perfect lines of symmetry.

How did the lesson go?

R: I had a small class with a teaching assistant and we thought this project would be quite engaging for them. We started in an Art lesson as I was currently doing that subject.

T: I had tried to do it before but instead of doing this as a collaboration, I taught it through Maths and then would add, 'by the way this links to the art world' instead of making a full on link which is what we tried to benefit from in this case.

R: When I was trying to teach that lesson previously, I was attempting to make literacy and numeracy links but it was difficult without that background and working with Tom helped me.

T: We showed them an Islamic mosaic and we asked them to find as many mathematical objects or facts as they could. Because this was a real world example, students were interested and keen to come to the board and point out triangles, parallel lines etc. So without us having to introduce the topic or talk to them, they had already established 8 or 9 mathematical facts for themselves. They discovered the objective of the lesson without us having to show a slide with levels etc. It was a great way of doing it.

R: From the starter we moved into groups. We had a fantastic teaching assistant Donna Hobson in there. It was a small group and perfect for experimenting-12 students with 3 members of staff. Each group was given a mathematical key word and had to use that in their art. The idea of us as members of staff working as a team and the students working as a team had a really positive impact. The fact that a Maths teacher was in Art made them think 'why is this happening?'

How did you build on that successful lesson?

R: We started to get our imagination going- how could we improve this? We could definitely see how the lesson could be improved so we met up again.

T: Because it had worked so well, albeit with a small class, I had a year 8 class with a few challenging students and we thought to try applying it to a regular class size. I taught a 'bog standard' lesson first and we found that the class was a bit noisy with some off task behaviour. The following week, with the joint lesson, behaviour issues were non-existent.

R: This lesson was demonstrably more successful. When we compared pure Maths and pure Art lessons with this joint lesson, we could see that the quality of the learning had improved too.

How has this impacted on other aspects of school life?

T: We now do a Maths and English after school club. Students have signed a sports contract which means they have to do English and Maths. We use football as the medium to teach these e.g. writing match reports and analysing match stats. They then take part in football training. That has worked really well.

Do you have any final reflections?

R: When you plan with someone, you see how they plan. I would never have seen how Maths plan without this. I have taken ideas from Tom. I now add Maths into my Art lessons.

T: It also gives the opportunity to see another teacher in a guilt-free, no pressure environment. Rich has a much more calming voice than me and asking to see someone immediately puts pressure on. In this way, you get ideas that you wouldn't have otherwise.

R: Some staff, because of their subject, don't always get on with students and it could well be because they don't like the subject but sometimes seeing that teacher in another context helps to build a better relationship with that student.

Richard and Tom leading a training session on the NQT residential

Collaboration

There are a huge number of new ideas in education. Some of them are great and some of them are not. Some will prove to last the test of time but others will disappear quicker than you can say 'VAK'!

As we strive to be outstanding teachers, we want to be open to new ideas but it can be difficult to fully evaluate how much impact something will have. To develop practice across a whole school, we need to supplement high quality staff training with allowing teachers to explore what works themselves, gradually trialing, adjusting and sharing ideas in classrooms so that by the time certain methods reach a critical mass, teachers are secure in their understanding of not just the what, but the *why*.

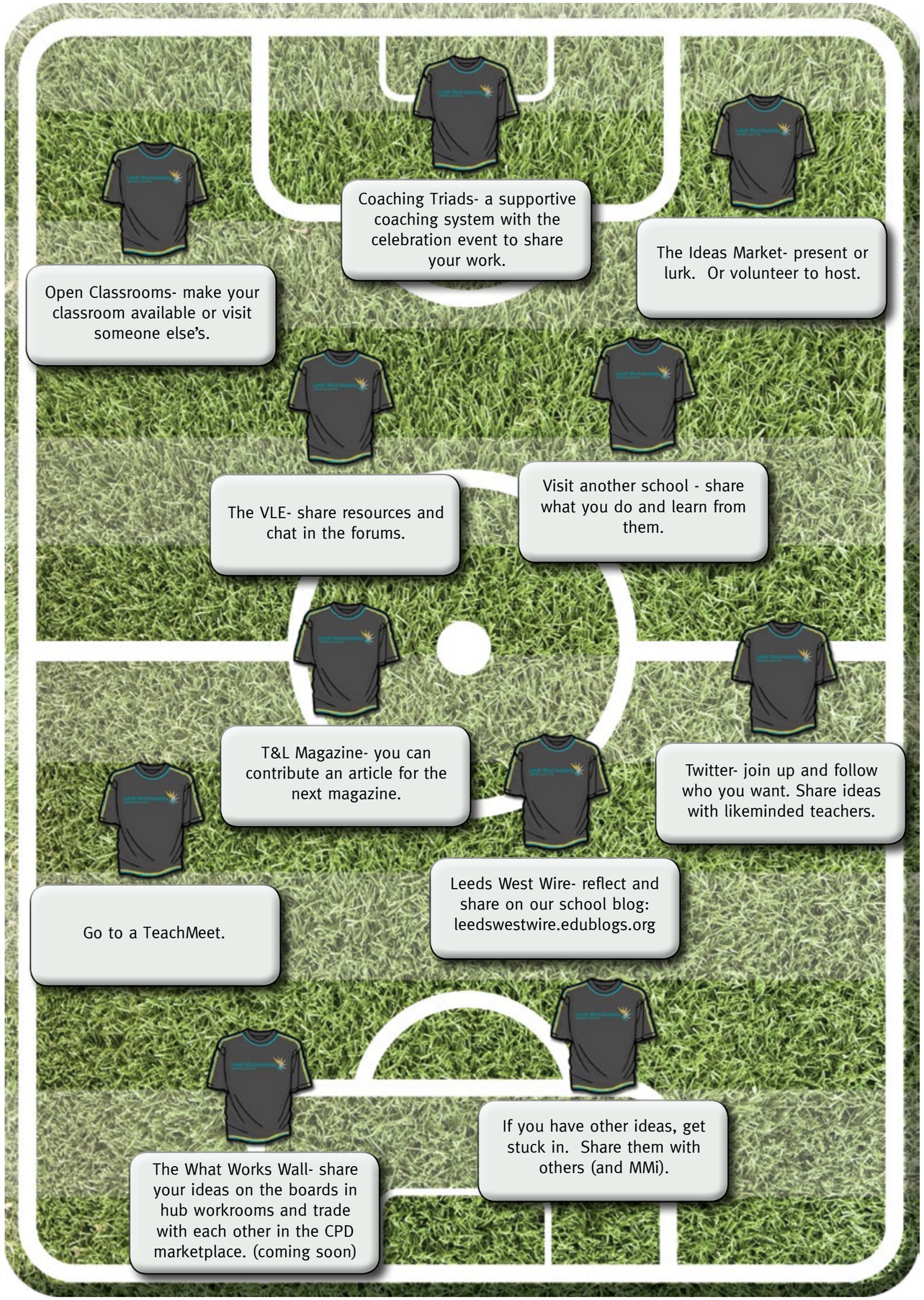
Often, the best professional development is as simple as a conversation between two people. Whether this happens in real life or in an online forum such as Twitter, educators sharing ideas is a powerful thing. Part of the reason, I think, is that people share what works and are able to articulate exactly how they have used things in their lessons and the impact. The problem is that all too often these conversations happen by chance and not by design. So instead of an idea being presented solely in a staff meeting, let's suppose you visit a colleague's classroom and see them using it. Instantly, you can see how it works, how the teacher is using it and how the students are responding. You can see the downsides and you can see the benefits. You talk to the other teacher and they show you examples of students' work benefitting from the idea. You try it in your classroom team teaching with them. You adopt it into your practice. Or you don't- but it is an informed decision.

Collaborative Cultures

Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves state, in Professional Capital, that "...teachers who work in professional cultures of collaboration tend to perform better than teachers who work alone." They also state that "In collaborative cultures, failure and uncertainty are not protected and defended, but instead are shared and discussed with a view to gaining help and support."

Professional development in teaching is changing. Why spend £250 on a course when the teacher in the next room can show you all you need to know about getting boys to read? The expertise in house is often better than anything you will find elsewhere. Why wait until the next whole staff training to learn about the latest thing that you have to do? We might even get to the point where whole staff meetings work the other way around- where teachers explain what they have been doing in the classroom and why it should become school policy and not the other way around. An hour at a (free!) Teachmeet can be the best professional development you'll ever get. The best thing about this way of working is that you don't have to wait for someone to organise your training- you do it yourself and you focus on what you choose to.

On the opposite page are the methods we have for staff to collaborate, reflect and share practice at Leeds West Academy and beyond.



Making Connections

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi developed the theory of 'flow'. He defines it as 'the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.' This is something which we can strive for in the classroom. There are lots of ways we can go about trying to create the climate where flow occurs and one of these ways is getting students to make connections.

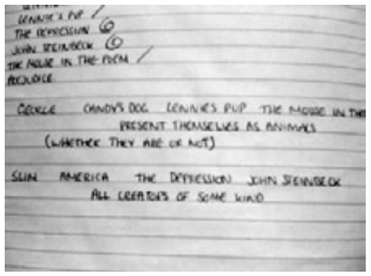
In the BBC4 show, Only Connect, the teams have to find connections between words, images etc which seem completely random at first. The task for the teams is to identify the right answer. This is particularly tricky in the 'Word wall' round. In this, there are 16 words and the teams must place them into 4 groups of different categories. There are often red herrings in there which lead the teams down all sorts of paths. Now let's take this format into an English classroom. The grid below was used with year 11 students studying Of Mice and Men. Students were asked to find connections (4 groups of 4) but there were no correct answers by design.

Crooks	Candy	Slim	George
Curley's Wife	Curley	Lennie	John Steinbeck
Candy's Dog	Carlson	Lennie's Puppy	The Mouse in the poem
The Boss	America	The De-pression	Prejudice

e.g. Curley's wife/Lennie/Lennie's puppy/ Candy's dog- *spoiler alert* - they all die.

Crucially, the need to make four groups meant that a) pupils had to reconsider their ideas and reject some ideas and b) there was some real divergent thinking when students ended up with 4 seemingly unconnected ideas. With no 'correct' answer, things became interesting. It was at that point when the challenge was sufficient for the students to be in that state of flow.

It is a brilliantly differentiated activity too. If students are given 4 characters and ask what they have in common or which one is the odd one out, the number of answers is restricted. It is also easy to fall into the 'read my mind' teacher mode where there is an expected answer. In trying to find 4 groups of 4, some students can make simple connections and as the options decrease the challenge increases. Below is an example from one of the students in the lesson. The second answer led to a great discussion in class and helped this student to really meet A* criteria.



Making connections is an essential higher order skill. Staying with English, it is explicitly in the markscheme for Band 5 in GCSE English Literature: "make a sustained discussion of links and comparisons between texts; make apt selection of details for cross reference; at the highest level, make subtle points of comparison and probe links confidently." There are similar requirements at the higher levels of most subjects.

This means that this kind of thinking is rewarded explicitly in the mark schemes. However, making connections works well as the means rather than the end. Students who can make these connections are able to create ideas and develop solutions that they may not have arrived at with more conventional thinking.

This kind of approach offers interesting ways in to topics. Connections can be made to prior knowledge, to pupils' lives outside of school and to their futures. The connections can be explicit and straightforward or tenuous and complex. By asking students to make these connections, we are setting them the challenge to think in a way that is less than linear and which will help to place them into that state of flow.

Learning grids: These are 6x6 grids. Students work in pairs and roll 2 dice. The square they land on is then used to dictate next steps. For example, in an English lesson, there could be a number of images/words representing a genre. Pupils then use them to build a story in that genre. In Maths, pupils could be given equations to simplify. Then answers could be given to another pair who have to work out the original square.

Magic square: arrange topics in a 3×3 grid. Pupils get a point for every connection they can make: horizontal, vertical, diagonal and 4 corners.

Hexagons are useful to work with as they can be connected in a variety of ways. www.triptico.co.uk/thinklink.html is great for this. You can laminate hexagons or use hexagonal post-its. If you 'explode the node' and write a paragraph based around the intersection then it will be ready made with lots of detail.

Write words/phrases associated with a topic on a page scattered out then students have to draw connections. They can then write up their findings easily by starting at one point and exploring all the links.

Triangles are equally useful. Write whatever you want on the side and ask students to connect. You can have planned answers with some red herrings or just make them random and see what happens...or squares?

Six Degrees of Separation from @fullonlearning: Give a starting point and an end point. This could be images or other stimuli. Students have to get from one to the other in six (or more or less) steps. Another way is to turn this into a loop so the last step links to the first step.

How is _____ like a _____? Set up a random name selector to pick e.g. a character from a book/ a scientific process and another to pick a thing. Or pick them out of a hat. How is Lennie like a tumble dryer? How is respiration like a bottle of fairy liquid?

Teach connectives: Students who can use a wide range of these can articulate ideas and explore connections easier.

Draw up a grid or create a Blockbusters style honeycomb and challenge students to get from one side to the other by making connections between words/ topics etc. You could be ambitious and set up a room with 'stepping stones' on the floor. Students can move to the next one only with a valid connection. The next one across cannot go exactly the same way.

Pupil Premium

Case Study: Raising the attainment of students from socio- economically disadvantaged backgrounds In this abridged version of her dissertation research, **Katie Sandham** reports on factors affecting the achievement and motivation of students receiving the Pupil Premium.

There is no evidence to suggest that students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are inherently less intelligent; 'their low academic performance is not necessarily an indication that they cannot master cognitive processes.' (Taba and Elkins, 1966) However, there is an abundance of evidence suggesting that they are more likely to have '...poorer health... less energy...be emotionally upset by the tensions in their lives... less likely to have the opportunity for study and educational help at home...and vulnerable to low levels of self efficacy...' (Mortimore and Whitty, 2000)

Of course, this is not true for every individual child. The application of the term 'socio-economically disadvantaged' is problematic in the sense that not all individuals who are economically disadvantaged are socially disadvantaged. Mortimore and Whitty also put forward that '... Whether the impact of disadvantage of a particular child's education is lasting or not will depend on their own resilience as well as on how much their parents are able to shield them from the effects of disadvantaging circumstances.'

What factors contribute to socio-economically disadvantaged students attaining less well than their peers?

When faced with a new learning task, students use their motivational beliefs to '...perceive and appraise a specific learning assignment; their commitment to tackling it; and how they regulate their motivation during learning.' (Boekaerts, 2010) It stands to reason then, that if motivational beliefs are low, that the students 'commitment to tackling' the task will be less, consequently; '...motivational beliefs thus influence willingness to engage in learning activities, even without students being aware of them.' (Boekaerts, 2010) In addition to this, if the students' commitment to tackling one assessment in a particular subject area, or in all areas, has resulted in a sense of failure, this will impact negatively on their future motivation to attempt a learning task. This can then result in these students '... considering effort as a threat to their self-esteem. Most students lose face when they fail despite having tried,' (Boekaerts, 2010) It could be said that this is the case for many students from socio-economically deprived backgrounds. Students who perceive that their ability is predetermined are less likely to engage positively with failure but those who believe that their abilities are capable of being developed are more motivated to succeed.

Furthermore, it is thought that '... anti-social peer group culture' (Beveridge, 2005) exists within socio-economically disadvantaged communities; '...working class students' have to make '...costly choices' between '...popularity among the peer group and a successful learner identity.' (Reay, 2006) Consequently, the challenge is two-fold: to ensure that students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds have positive attitudes towards education and academic success, and to create an environment in which it is acceptable amongst peers to act upon this.

How can teacher language be used to motivate socio-economically disadvantaged students?

The class which was chosen for the study was from Year 11. This meant that students were likely to have set 'motivational beliefs' about different areas of learning and this study allowed for an exploration of what these were and whether or not they could be changed. Interviews about teacher language were conducted with Year 11 students receiving the Pupil Premium in order to gain insight into what language they found motivating or de-motivating. The language used in the classroom was adapted in accordance to the interview findings and a colleague observed the use of teacher language before and at the end of the research period in order to measure the impact of these language changes. Finally, the students completed a summative questionnaire which involved sharing their experiences of teacher language.

One interesting aspect of the research was the impact of 'time' referenced language on pupil motivation. The supporting qualitative data included statements that the time limit made the student 'work harder to meet it' or 'give up' because they knew they wouldn't. Interestingly, the students that were motivated by a time limit were the higher achieving students, which suggests they experienced positive 'motivational beliefs' when faced with a new task. On the other hand, students who had been less successful academically referred to themselves as 'slow' or 'too thick' to do something in timed conditions, and stated that in the past they had not managed to complete the task stated, so therefore were less willing to try. The extreme effect that statements linked to 'time' had on nearly all the participants has considerable implications for teachers, who are frequently also under 'time pressure.' Teachers' may be inadvertently 'motivating and de-motivating socio-economically disadvantaged students via the use of time constraints, which in turn will have an impact on attainment.

There was also clear indication that other phrases motivated participants more effectively. The positive effect of the teacher referring to success in upcoming assessment was clear. 69% of participants stated that 'If you have met the first objective, you are working at a grade D, if you have met the second objective you are working at a grade C, if you met the third objective you are working at a grade B' was motivational and 85% stated that 'You need to be able to do this to get a good grade in your exam' was motivational. When students shared their reasoning for deeming these phrases motivational there was repeated reference to the importance of getting 'at least a C' suggesting that they were motivated to succeed, which goes against the common perception that students from socio-economic backgrounds lack aspiration and links to the view that; 'students are more motivated to engage in learning when they perceive stable links between specific actions and achievement.' (Boekaerts, 2010) Aspirations to succeed were also communicated amongst peers in the classroom, which contradicts past findings about socio-economically disadvantaged students; 'saving face amongst peer group was often viewed as more important than striving to achieve higher GCSE grades.' (Macdonald and Marsh, 2005) Again, this directly contradicts the common view that Pupil Premium students are lacking aspiration.

Can Learning Objectives with a meta-cognitive focus be used to improve the attainment of socio-economically disadvantaged students?

Meta-cognitive learning objectives as well as curriculum based learning objectives were implemented over a half term; the impact of this was measured throughout the research period using assessment for learning activities and at the end using progress and attainment data and student responses in the summative questionnaire. At the end of the research period, all participating students were given a higher level for effort on SPT than they were given in the previous half term and most students improved on their progress and attitude level. The fact that 'effort' was the main area to improve could be viewed as significant as it suggests that motivational beliefs had increased; '...motivational beliefs influence willingness to engage in learning activities.' (Boekaerts, 2010) This could be seen as an effect of the adapted use of teacher talk in response to the interview findings. Additionally, the fact that all the participants attained a higher mark on their second Media GCSE Controlled Conditions Assessment could also be seen to be a positive affect of the interventions put in place.

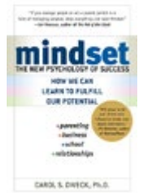
Conclusions

Whilst the view that 'schools cannot make all the difference necessary' (Reay, 2006) is true, it is of the utmost importance that the differences that can be made to increase the attainment of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are firmly grasped. Meta-cognitive aspects of learning and Personal Learning and Thinking Skills should be taught with as much passion and dedication as many teachers deliver individual subjects, as these are the areas in which our most disadvantaged students desperately need assistance. This will increase the likelihood of these students developing the transferable skills they need to succeed not only in school, but in later life.

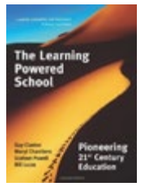
The different individual responses to the same teacher phrases and the same educational system, suggests that a concrete set of strategies to improve the attainment of students from socio-economic backgrounds is not easily attainable. It could also be said that all 'groups' of students who have been found to attain less than their peers (minority ethnic groups, boys, students with special educational needs, looked after children) are also a group of individuals, and consequently there is no hard and fast rule as to how we can adapt our teaching to meet their need as there simply is no collective 'they.' However, the quantative and qualitative data produced in the interviews gave insight into the participants' individual views of teacher language and their individual emotional responses to learning. This led to personalised provision within the classroom for each individual within the case study group, which in turn meant that the needs of the group were met more effectively.

Another clear and unanticipated finding was that anecdotal evidence suggested that the opportunity to share their views on teacher talk made the participants feel valued, and in turn, led to their increased motivation to succeed.

Further reading:



Carol Dweck
Mindset



Guy Claxton
The Learning Powered School: Pioneering 21st Century Education

LITERACY – WORDS

Each issue will have a literacy focus. Here we look at vocabulary. We are all familiar with 'Word Walls' but vocabulary needs to go beyond subject specific 'Key Words'.

COMMAND WORDS

These are commonly used in exam questions and it is essential that students understand them. Otherwise they will get tripped up before they can show their subject knowledge!

- Analyse
- Assess
- Compare
- Contrast
- Define
- Describe
- Differentiate
- Discuss
- Distinguish
- Evaluate
- Examine
- Explain
- Illustrate
- Interpret
- Justify
- Outline
- Relate
- State
- Summarise
- Trace

PRECISE VOCABULARY

For A*, students need to be precise about their language. The English language supplies us with a wealth of words for this:

- Truculent
- Malicious
- Cynical
- Clandestine
- Sycophantic
- Vociferous
- Cajole
- Impertinent
- Incisive
- Myriad
- Obsequious
- Acquiesce
- Penchant
- Meticulous
- Diligent
- Impeccable
- Repudiate
- Feral

What are the precise words in your subject?

CONNECTIVES

Students should become adept at using connectives to structure any text. Connectives are a great way of organizing thoughts and signposting the direction of the text.

SIMPLE ORDERING OF IDEAS

Firstly
Secondly
Thirdly
To begin with
In addition
In conclusion
Finally
To sum up

EXPLORING MEANING

This could mean
It may be
This suggests
Perhaps
Possibly
It seems to me that

EMPHASISING

Also
Moreover
Unquestionably
Undeniably
Bearing this in mind

CONTRASTING

Although
Despite
Even if
Whereas
While
However
Contradictorily
Paradoxically
Nevertheless

LINKING – CAUSE AND EFFECT

Consequently
As a result
Therefore
Thus
Subsequently
Hence

EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

Another meaning could be that
Alternatively
On the other hand
A different way of looking at this is
Looking at it this way

COMPARING

Likewise
Similarly
Just as
In the same way
Equally

EXPRESSING ATTITUDE AND FEELING

Admittedly
Fortunately
Incidentally
Ironically
Naturally
Logically
Probably
Surprisingly
Understandably
To be precise
In my experience
As I see it

Gold Mine

Sam Pocock: When feeling low, make 10 positive phone calls. Yes, the students love it, but it can also be a really big morale boost for yourself when you hear how happy and grateful parents/carers are.

Helen Jeffrey: Ask a question, then choose the student to answer it rather than the other way round. It helps to make sure all students are engaging with the question.

Janine Guy: At the start of the year, stick a photograph to students' folders. You'll get to know them quicker.

James Rand: Make sure that you build a bank of model answers for every year group. Show them great examples of what they are trying to do.

Elaine Borthwick: Be very self aware about how you are feeling. 'You are the weather in your classroom'

Sami Barrett: For practical lessons, film your demonstrations beforehand. This frees you up to ensure that everyone is focussed. You can make sure everyone gets a good view and it's a resource you can refer back to.

Kelly McCarthy: When a student doesn't have a pen, give them a brown pencil (or equivalent). They won't like it and you can easily keep track of which students are repeat offenders when you look at their books.