

What happens when I introduce (classroom) SMART targets to my pupils?

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Rationale

- *Raising achievement for all is a key component in Airdrie Academy School Improvement Plan (SIP)*
- *Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) states its aim that every child and young person should fulfill their potential.*
- *North Lanarkshire is currently rated as the second most deprived authority in Scotland, this prevalence of economic and social disadvantage impacts on the ability of young people and adults to reach their potential, and is reflected in comparatively low levels of educational attainment”. (Raising Achievement for All 1.1 North Lanarkshire Council)*
- *“it is imperative that the department of education provides a curriculum and services which challenge and enable young people and adults to achieve whatever they are capable of achieving, irrespective of socio-economic background, gender, race or levels of ability or disability” (Raising Achievement for all 1.2 North Lanarkshire Council)*

I am currently working as a secondary art and design teacher in North Lanarkshire Council, raising achievement is a key driver in the authority and has relevance to me through my interest in strategies to increase learner engagement and attainment and my hunch that introducing class SMART targets to my 2nd year pupils could increase self esteem which could potentially positively impact raising both achievement and attainment.

Target or goal setting is an important strategy to encourage self-esteem and a growth mindset in young learners. S.M.A.R.T. targets are; small, measureable, attainable, realistic, timely targets or goals set by pupils to support them in realizing their potential. I was interested in the concept of introducing S.M.A.R.T. targets to this particular cohort of pupils (a class of varying abilities, some behavioural issues with many pupils in SIMD 1-3), as, during their last unit of work, Still Life, I encountered some pupils stating they ‘just weren’t good at drawing’. This impacted the collective class behaviour, engagement and resulting work which clearly reflected this individual lack of self-confidence. Carole Dweck believes, “Having an innate talent is not a goal. Expanding skills and knowledge is”. I wanted my pupils to focus on this and to realise that, through expanding their skills and knowledge, they could achieve success in art and design, even if they did not have an innate talent for it. Noticing that pupils were becoming disengaged, believing they lacked talent and therefore would not achieve and the fact that North Lanarkshire Council are a ‘challenge authority’ with a clear focus and requirement on us to close the attainment gap, I felt that using SMART goals had the potential to address the attainment issue by raising self-esteem.

The frame, therefore, for this small-scale enquiry, is my hunch that setting the pupils *collective* S.M.A.R.T. targets might offer a solution to the issue encountered and I therefore wanted to use SMART targets to address this and see what happened.

Aim

The aim was to explore the scaffolding effect of collective SMART goals linked to a learning experience that was active and creative encouraging pupils to learn through making mistakes, problem solving, resource sampling, individual/class creative discussions, sharing ideas, looking at others’ work and discussing the process of making; essentially *whole class* involvement with each pupil using their individual skills and strengths to help the class achieve the collective targets.

“A pupil’s relationship to creative learning develops through their personal identity and the way they ‘engage emotionally, physically and intellectually’ to the teaching and learning situation (Jeffrey 2008:4). “There is a strong link between pupils’ lack

of confidence and their inability or unwillingness to participate in learning activities” (Collins 1996 cited by Le Cornu 2004:27).

I hoped that by introducing the pupils to collective SMART goals they would each feel a sense of value through their personal contributions to the class working together sharing learning goals, expanding their own skills and knowledge through collaborating with peers, and feel individually supported through collective class discussions sharing ideas to achieve the SMART targets therefore developing self-confidence within the class.

Effective learning in young people has been found to be most successful in classrooms encouraging ‘flexibility, collaboration and tenacity’ (Ainscow, et al., 2000; Lloyd et al., in Head 2004). McGrath and Noble (2007) suggest ‘providing opportunity for ownership of their learning by allowing pupils to have an opinion in the way the class is operated and by showing ‘fairness and nurturance’ (Stipek 2006 cited in McGrath & Noble, 2007) to be successful.

Methodology

My approach to this enquiry was the development of class SMART targets, linked closely to lesson content (mask making - looking a different cultures through the art and design curriculum) and delivery in terms of creative teaching and giving opportunity for the pupils to lead their own learning. Jeffrey and Craft (2004) note creative learning places ‘learner empowerment’ as its main objective.

The class were informed that the department curriculum stated that this unit of work should have a 3D outcome. Through collaborative discussion in the class involving significant prior knowledge, a series of class targets were set; these targets were simple in structure, time based and recorded in a SMART planner.

- Develop an idea for a mask by drawing
- Complete a paper mache structure to make my 2D drawings 3D
- Experiment with materials (sample) to decorate the mask adhering to the initial design

Through further discussion the class developed and agreed upon a code of conduct to support an ethos of mutual trust and respect during lessons between pupils, peers and teacher ensuring the department health and well-being policy was adhered to when using resources. Each member of the class signed a copy. No-ones behaviour was highlighted.

Each period consisted of creative mask making, setting up, managing, sharing and tidying resources (all pupil led) with a plenary of a class discussion to determine the level of success of the lesson and why this was and to highlight the importance of collaboration, teamwork and tolerance to support individual learning. Pupils were encouraged to clarify what they felt was particularly valuable to them individually as part of the learning experience and what they felt they contributed to achieving the SMART targets (in order to increase feelings of self-esteem).

The evidence that I set out to gather was related to:

- Observing signs of improved engagement
- Improvement in the overall quality of work produced (achievement)
- Pupils collaborating (scaffolding their individual learning experience)
- Pupils engagement with peers
- A questionnaire to establish pupils' feeling about the task.

Findings

Bruner (1996) stated the notion that “it seems that developing pupil confidence, fostering positive self-images and creating supportive learning environments are important considerations for teachers who want to increase learning through active participation classrooms, reinforcing his view that one of the main functions of education is the ‘nurturing of pupils’ self-esteem’. Learning is found to be less successful when the ‘learner is a passive recipient of knowledge’ therefore by encouraging the class to be involved in the content of the lessons and develop SMART targets to support their learning, pupils have become leaders of their own learning with ownership of their ideas. This appears to have provided scaffolding for those who were initially less confident in developing and sharing ideas and drawings for the mask-making project.

The first lesson was challenging as pupils were required to closely observe and draw to develop ideas for their masks causing restlessness, shouting out, not listening to instructions and general low level disruption, as lessons progressed towards achieving the class SMART goals pupils were problem solving, thinking creatively and independently and became increasingly interested and engaged in their projects. SMART targets appear to have provided scaffolding for those less confident in developing ideas and drawings for their project. Through discussions and the development of a class identity, all pupils seemed to develop a team ethos helping and supporting each other, not only in terms of ideas for the project and problem solving strategies for making, but also in terms of respect for resources and the classroom environment. Everyone felt connected to the learning environment and a responsibility toward keeping the resources tidy, often resulting in the class being cleared in record time. Pupils were courteous and helpful to each other, organizing and clearing where required (even when it wasn't their mess).

The discussions at the beginning and end of each lesson consolidated new learning, with everyone contributing at some point on how to achieve the SMART targets suggesting that pupils felt more confident. Pupils were also courteous and helpful to each other. Teacher observations provided the most interesting data as the pupils were largely disinterested in the questionnaire, preferring to discuss their thoughts on their achievements and SMART targets as part of a class discussion, this also suggested growing confidence.

In terms of analyzing the data, through teacher observations and reflection I have gained new skills in terms of my ability to analyse and evaluate the data in my observations deepening my understanding of learning and teaching. Quinton & Smallbone (2010:126) state “the ability to reflect on and analyse material in order to form reasoned judgement is central to critical thinking and deeper learning”.

Conclusion

While I did not set out to measure self-esteem and wellbeing, I wished to explore the scaffolding effect of collective class SMART targets linked to the overall learning environment and experience.

It would seem that the development of self-esteem is critical to raising both achievement and attainment and that pupils learn and retain knowledge when they are able to understand and guide their own learning and set their own targets. It appears those who lacked confidence in previous curricular units felt they achieved more in a collaborative learning environment and felt more confident expressing ideas and opinions, gaining valuable knowledge from class discussions which enabled pupils to use this new knowledge and skill set to both meet the smart targets and complete their 3D project. Each individual pupil recognized they had a valuable part to play as part of the class, highlighting their own skill set and strengths in supporting and achieving a shared goal. The journey and process of making subsequently became more important than the finished outcome (although the standard of work was high). Pupils developed and built upon important social skills that were essential to achieve the collective SMART targets, this had a positive effect on self-esteem, engagement and behavior as well as the standard of work produced.

Implications for future practice

In a study on the affective classroom Dobbins (1987) cited by Le Cornu (2004) notes that the more knowledgeable the teacher is about learning and teaching the more confident they become in their ability to tackle issues, make changes, question their practice and understand and make sense of what they do.

Undertaking this enquiry has reinforced the importance of exploring teacher thinking to make sense of my thoughts and teaching practice and prompt the formation of positive and supportive relationships with my pupils to enhance their learning experience through feeling valued so that they “enter school willing to share their experiences, their views of the world and their (mis) understandings with teachers and peers and, in this way enhance their learning” (Le Cornu 2004:29).

Setting class SMART targets instead of individual targets has helped develop a strong classroom ethos, trust, respect and value for each other in place of the previous expectations of an individual’s success due to having an “innate talent”, this is something I will implement into classes with issues around self-esteem in the future.

Ongoing practitioner enquiry will support my professional development as a teacher

in terms of my ability to both self-reflect based on an open approach to questioning myself, my teaching environment and the input of others to “create a new and different frame of reference” (Quinton and Smallbone 2010:126) and will support me to become a “career long learner, critical knower and knowledge creator” (GTCS). Having an enquiring stance towards understanding learning and teaching at this stage in my career will help to ‘ground my pedagogical knowledge’ so that I develop “an effective decision making schema” (Posner 2000 cited by Griffin 2003) based on my reflective thinking and so that I retain good methods of practice grounded in “tentative conclusions and awareness of teaching as a moral activity” (LaBoskey, 1993 cited in Griffin 2003:209).

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