

## Nicole Burman's Development Work: **Developing students' self-esteem and engagement in lessons** at Francis Bacon School, St Albans

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Nicole Burman had noticed that in some of her lessons a small number of pupils seemed to lack the confidence to take part in drama activities. Nicole's determination to try to address her concern was underpinned by her educational values. In her Teacher Led Development Work portfolio she made the following note:

*I believe that all pupils can learn from one another and not just through didactic teaching. I believe that every pupil has the right to achieve his or her best and it is up to the teacher to learn which way pupils can do this.*

Her work was also central to her department's improvement plan which focussed on 'Every Child Matters' (ECM)<sup>2</sup>. As Head of Drama, Nicole wanted to try out some work which supported one of the ECM outcomes, 'Enjoy and Achieve' ([www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk)). Nicole's work was equally influenced by reading Lawrence's work on self-esteem (1996). She was particularly encouraged by his suggestion that a teacher can contribute to developing greater confidence and self-esteem amongst pupils and that pupils and teachers can work together towards this. Nicole noted in her portfolio: *I wanted pupils to realise that it was all about confidence and that this can be developed.* This optimism was fundamental to her approach.

Nicole began her development work by undertaking some observations of Year 7 and Year 8 pupils in Geography, Art, History,

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<sup>2</sup> Every Child Matters is a government initiative which aims to ensure that all children achieve their potential through five strands: Be healthy, Stay safe, Enjoy and achieve, Make a positive contribution, Achieve economic well-being.

Information Technology and English. She taught these pupils in Drama and wanted to gain insight into how they engaged in other subject lessons. Nicole made the following observations:

- Pupils seem to be more engaged and willing to participate if a shorter, focussed task was given rather than a longer, more open ended task.
- Interaction with the teacher is important; where a teacher left pupils for long periods of time without discussion or an invitation to participate, their willingness to engage diminished.
- Pupils gained confidence when they were working in a group rather than working as individuals.

Nicole then planned a series of seven lessons for a Year 7 class, taking into account what she had observed. She focussed on three pupils in the group. Each lesson plan was annotated with detailed strategies and prompts for each targeted pupil. She planned a wide range of activities including:

- a collective memory warm-up based on a picture which a child had drawn during the second world war
- a poem about the second world war which pupils had to translate into freeze frames
- pupils directing a scene using stage direction sheets and wired characters
- structured improvisation lessons
- hot-seating
- a series of warm-up activities

Nicole gave a great deal of thought to how best to evaluate the pupils' responses to the lessons and sought advice and support from colleagues in the Teacher Led Development Work (TLDW) group. Following discussion within the group she devised an evaluation card which asked pupils to reflect on the extent to which they had contributed to the lesson and enjoyed doing the activities planned. Nicole was sensitive to the fact that some of the pupils attended school sporadically whilst other pupils had literacy difficulties. She therefore made the cards easy and quick to fill in. She used the feedback from each lesson to adapt her lesson plans and annotated her plans with specific ideas and prompts for her target pupils.

Within the TLDW group, discussions about how to evaluate the impact of group members' projects featured highly. In one session

an article was considered about the use of photo evaluation with pupils (Schratz and Löffler-Ansböck, 2004). The idea of visual representations through photographs appealed to Nicole as she could look at the photos after the lessons and discuss them with the pupils. She did not want an observer in the room as she felt this might disturb the developing confidence of the pupils. In her portfolio Nicole included a selection of annotated photos and reflected on the question of how to measure impact. She noted improvements in pupils' self-esteem and confidence. She concluded that the pupils' responses on the cards indicated an increasing willingness to participate; the visual story the pupils told through the photos enables her to assess the impact of her work. The photos showed how pupils moved from participating in the lessons to actually leading other pupils.

The impact on Nicole's classroom practice has been far reaching. At the outset she hoped that she would make a difference to the class and pupils she had targeted but she noted in her portfolio:

*Quite naturally as I was finding things worked with the one class I built the strategies into my other classes. It did not matter if I used the techniques with a class that was already confident as these techniques helped to build on that confidence.*

She shared her work with her department and later with colleagues at a staff development session.

From this project Nicole learned a lot about her own classroom practice but also about the importance of professional discourse - the value of discussion with colleagues. She described how the discussions helped her to 'visualise' the things she needed to do. She concluded her portfolio with a reflection on the purpose of leadership, who can exercise leadership and how her view about leadership had shifted.

*I always felt that to be a leader you had to be a senior member of staff. This, however, is not true. Leadership is about being able to change things for the better even if it is just about your own progress. It is also about being able to develop yourself and pass your knowledge on to help others.*

## References

Lawrence, D. (1996) *Enhancing Self-esteem in the Classroom*. London: Paul Chapman.

Schratz, M. & Löffler-Ansböck, U. (2004) 'The darker side of democracy: a visual approach to democratising teaching and learning', in J. MacBeath & L. Moos (eds.) *Democratic Learning: the Challenge to School Effectiveness*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.