

'How Do I Motivate My Boys?'

When I first started on this long and interesting journey of Action Research I had decided to look at Assessment and Reporting in Numeracy R- 7, but at the very first session of the Quality Teacher Programme I attended I discovered that my focus was far too broad an issue and that I would have to rethink the area of Action Research I would attempt to follow. As I have a great interest in the Education of Boys, I felt that some of the boys in my class were under-achieving and unmotivated in Mathematics, so I changed my focus to 'How to Motivate Boys in Numeracy?' Once again my focus changed when I discovered that the boys in my class really liked Mathematics and enjoyed the challenges that the subject offered. On further enquiry the boys indicated a number of reasons as to why they were reluctant to actively participate in the class discussion and activities e.g the girls listen more attentively, some boys muck around, the girls are quicker, the girls are smarter, the teacher always asks them first and why should we answer when the girls have already given the answer that you want, so my focus then became 'How Do I Motivate My Boys to Participate in the Class?'

At Flaxmill Schools I have a year 2/3class consisting of 13 Yr3s and 12 Yr 2s, the gender balance is 12 girls and 13 boys. Within the class 1 student has CAPS, 2 have ADHD, 5 are on NCEs and 3 students are high achievers, there are also several students with Behaviour Problems. The school is in a low socio economic area, but I have a high level of parent involvement within the classroom. As my girls are very assertive I began to pay more attention as to who, was actually doing the majority of the work in class discussions and group work and who, manipulated the classroom activities. I was surprised at how the girls controlled what was happening within the classroom and that the boys appeared to be quite happy to let it occur.

The students within my class make the decisions on classroom values, routines (marking the role, marking off the readers, general room tidiness). They are also in control of their learning and this is decided by the class using consenograms, Affinity Diagrams and Brainstorming, they also monitor their own behaviour. Before beginning the Action Research I would have said that the class decisions were not influenced by either gender or myself, but when I actually sat back and observed, the girls usually had the first and last say and this quite often influenced the way the boys voted especially if one liked a particular girl presenting an idea.

The more that I observed, I became acutely aware that I gave the girls more time to articulate their point of view and that I didn't allow enough time for the boys to articulate their arguments. I quite often would ask 2 or 3 girls before asking a boy his opinion and of course this was not helping to motivate them as some of them thought that I really didn't value what they had to say. I have fortunately made a conscious effort to rectify this habit in my questioning and assessment of the students.

Fortunately at the beginning of my research I had a student teacher in my room and this allowed me to observe the boys more closely, she was also able to observe and offer suggestions. During this time I was able to work with the boys as a group by themselves and I was able to find out their likes and dislikes about school. I discovered

that they all enjoyed school and that their two favourite subjects were Physical Education and Maths and their least favourite was Reading. As a result of our discussions I decided to find out what motivated their learning and in the majority of answers the boys indicated that they were looking to the future whether it was going to high school, getting a drivers licence, or obtaining employment. They all thought that they needed a high degree of Numeracy to obtain these goals. A number of the boys indicated that they enjoyed the challenges and risks that arose from Maths tasks. As a group they decided to plan a unit of work for term 3 based on the Theme ' Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets.' This was highly successful and I have included their unit of work in my research. The boys through this exercise were able to gain confidence and they earned the respect of the girls by producing Maths tasks that everyone was interested in.

I was interested to see if any other Junior Primary class was similar to mine so during my Non Teaching Time I interviewed the eight Junior Primary classes, overall I had similar answers. The answers ranged from the girls are smarter, the girls laugh at us if we get the answer wrong, the girls work harder, the girls are bossy and the girls listen. The staff were interested in the findings and several of the teachers agreed with my findings that the girls were dominant in their classes as well as mine .

I also wanted to support Airlie Cheesman in her Action Research as she was also attempting to motivate her boys by trial ling Daily Runs and introducing Snack Time at 10 o'clock. I decided to trial Daily Runs and Snacks when I heard that one of my boys had breakfast at 4.15am and then nothing until recess time and of course was hungry and lethargic. Also a number of my girls were inclined to opt out of fitness and Phys Ed and were very unfit. As a result of this experiment the class now grazes between 9.45 and 1.10 as well as going for a 20 minute run every morning , it is amazing to see the difference in the concentration and fitness level, the students also monitor their heart rate and it is pleasing to report that their heart rate and fitness levels have dramatically improved. The grazing as impacted in all areas of study.

To give the boys further motivation Airlie and I decided to do single sex Peer Tutoring in Maths with our classes and this has been a great success, the Year 2/3 boys have enjoyed the challenge of explaining Area to the Receptions and Year 1s. The boys were able to choose with whom they wished to work and every group worked cohesively and there wasn't any need for me to monitor their behaviour. Both groups gained in confidence and it was pleasing to see the respect that the younger students gave to the Year 2/3s and this in turn made them more responsible in the class and yard. The majority of the older boys were able to explain and assist the younger students with the tasks that were set. My boys were able to help prepare the tasks for the 2 lessons a week as well as get the equipment ready for the lessons . Airlie and I were both very pleased that both classes look forward to Thursdays and Fridays and the students have asked if Peer Tutoring can continue 2003 but of course this will depend on whose class they are in.

The more that I have become involved in this Action Research the more determined I am to continue researching Boys in Education because even though my boys have come along way in nine months they are still dominated by the girls when they are together. It appears that society is saying to the boys, the girls must have first go and the boys are always to have the second. The boys unfortunately seem to accept the fact that coming second is alright as you don't have to work as hard when your with the girls as they always answer the question. This is not a good outlook for the boys so we

must seriously think about what we are doing to keep our boys interested in school and in learning.

As a result of my research I now consult more with the boys and involve them more in class decision making and lesson preparation. Hopefully what I have done with the boys this year will benefit their learning next year but I will be much more aware with my new class that my teaching will have to be even more inclusive than it is so that the boys are more involved.