



LAWRENCE SHERIFF SCHOOL
A National Teaching School
RUGBY

ENRICHMENT

A few years ago the singer songwriter Neil Young released an album entitled 'Are You Passionate?' Not his best album, but it does raise the issue of how passionate we are about what we teach our students. Normally a subject is offered to students because it is thought to be important, a vital piece of what students should know or a crucial next step on the journey to future employment. In a typically English way, large parts of our curriculum seem to be based around a sense of compulsion or duty, with students being implicitly told: 'do this, it will be good for you'.

Profound learning often follows a different route. The moments of enlightenment that stay with young people into adulthood takes place when a teacher has a chance to share with students something that they care deeply about, a topic or a skill that has inspired them and which they want to share with others.

Five years ago we decided to explore the creative energy that could be unlocked by giving staff the opportunity to teach things that they really enjoyed. Hence all students were offered a half hourly 'enrichment' slot on a twice weekly basis. Teachers were not asked to follow the dictates of the national curriculum or Assessing Pupil Progress structures. Instead they were given chance to share with students something that they were really interested in and which they wanted to share with others.

When considering the most appropriate time slot to allocate to enrichment we deliberately created space in the middle of the morning to demonstrate to others how important we considered enrichment to be. Some colleagues expressed concern about the use of prime learning time and requested its relocation to the end of the day. This alternative would not, we feel, have delivered the benefits that we see in terms of improved behaviour in the lessons that follow on from it, because students have had a meaningful break from academic lessons, and the enthusiasm from staff who are not tired as they would be at later in the day.

Enrichment is open to teaching and non teaching staff alike, with some sessions being run by members of the sixth form. There are no requirements to offer something related to

subject specialism, in fact we prefer staff to offer something outside their subject area, linking instead to their hobbies and interests. Each term there are upwards of 70 activities on offer and examples include marquetry, cookery, model making, Arabic, film club, debating club, political discussion groups, origami, mission maker, horticulture and practical microbiology. Staff are able to select the age range most appropriate for their enrichment, but most groups are open to all ages resulting in year 7 and 13 working alongside each other. Students opt each term, giving 1st, 2nd and 3rd choices and we work very hard to make sure that they are allocated to activities that they have chosen.

At first the new curriculum structure was treated with a degree of suspicion by staff and students alike. However, as the idea sunk in that it really was a chance to do something that they enjoyed and found interesting, and not just another way to add to the stash of GCSEs that students accumulate, so enthusiasm steadily grew.

When launching the revised National Curriculum, Professor Mick Walters rightly emphasised the pride that we should all take in the knowledge that the nation has decided to share with its children. However, in order to capture this sense of pride and enthusiasm, we need to move beyond the language of compulsion and statute that all too easily gets mixed up with our curriculum models.

We believe that our structure of enrichment periods offers one way to unlock the sense of creative energy and dynamism that should be present in learning within schools. By allowing staff to share what energises them, learning becomes something that is fun, rather than a chore based upon duty or compulsion. Students and teachers tell us that enrichment often forms their favourite part of the school week precisely because of the sense of excitement in learning that it produces. Whisper it softly to those in charge of our education system, but creating a sense of enjoyment does seem to significantly improve learning.