

Action Research: Getting the best out of boys (MTa)

We considered:

1) approaches to seating and grouping students

'A teacher without a seating plan is a dunce and is asking for it...' (Phil Beadle).

'Overall, boy-only groups and pairs within classes were generally less effective than mixed-sex groups and pairs' (Ofsted, 1996).

'Ofsted suggest that the best way of getting serious work out of boys in a mixed school is getting them to sit with slightly lower ability girls' (Phil Beadle in 'A seating plan to soothe the male ego' in *The Guardian*).

2) dealing with boys without shouting or nagging

It is best to instruct and discipline boys without resorting to shouting and nagging - as the natural response to this approach is to simply 'turn the volume down'.

Ten communication strategies outlined by Lucinda Neal which, in essence, advocate the need to:

- **limit what we say** (e.g. say it in a word; use a gesture)
- **keep language positive** (e.g. state positive expectations; say what needs to be done)

3) how boys like to learn (or learn best)

Be wary of how long teacher input lasts and how frequently whole-class discussions are used as the default mode:

Debrah Myhill found that underachievers take little part in whole-class teaching episodes and that underachieving boys withdraw from positive class interactions very early in their school careers (Ofsted, 2003).

'No one actually learns anything from a teacher-led discussion. One person speaking at a time leaves thirty others in a state either of utter passivity or, worse still, totally zoned out' (Phil Beadle).

Gary Wilson stresses the importance of **consolidating the learning**: 'for boys...the most important parts of the lesson are those that allow them to review and to reflect upon their learning. It is there to create...a sense of completion and achievement. It should also be used to highlight where everything they have just explored fits in with the next stage of their learning'.

4) how we can get reluctant boys to write well

Discussion or structured talk is a brilliant precursor to extended writing.

One Minute Rant: one person rants while the partner takes notes, listening out for interesting words, phrases or ideas (swap roles after).

Talk for Writing includes reference to the use of **role play, drama, structured debates and the presentation of a persuasive argument** prior to writing. It's powerful because it enables students to imitate the language they need for a particular topic orally before reading it and then writing their own version (Pie Corbett).

Slow Writing is essentially about giving students very precise instructions on how to write each sentence. The process is about *quality* rather than *quantity* and it forces them to concentrate on the *how* instead of the *what* (David Didau).