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Talking to boys about school

Student Dissertation

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SAT: Talking to boys about school (Steve Penney)

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Steve Penney
2 January 2018

Extra content

Talking with boys about school

Using an accessible language of learning to mentor boys

You could write a story about disengaged males. I am sure thousands of teachers and families in fact anyone involved with working with boys and young men over the last thirty odd years would have their own experience to add. A story might be easier and potentially more amusing, Peter Kay's sketch about teacher talk often comes to mind.

"It's your time not mine!"

"I can do this all day!"

"Who do you think you are?"

Statistics tell us that white males from the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum have, it would appear plunged into an abyss of underachievement and unfulfilled potential. Certainly in my experience of a very localised context we do have a problem. However, while peering into this frightening pit that threatens to ruin your career trajectory it is of little use exalting the phrases above, unless you want to become an object of ridicule and amusement.

Considering more carefully the nature and purpose of the discourse is an essential part of my pilot programme:

- ▶ What is it we want to talk to the boys about?
- ▶ What do they want to talk about?
- ▶ Do we have a language of learning that actually allows us to communicate about their experience?
- ▶ Who is doing the talking?

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» Can we measure the impact?

Considering an answer to these questions that does not involve a stand-up comedy routine and a change of career has led me to the following practical steps.

1. There is a need for action, we need to stop talking about it and actually do something about it. Get our hands dirty!
2. Traditional educators need to recognise that sometimes they are the problem.
3. A purposeful real time and research related approach is needed.
4. We just need to work harder to find time and resources to work at developing soft skills especially with boys.

The project materials I propose to bring together are essentially these. The Seven Dimensions of Learning Power developed by Crick and others and disseminated by Elli global, modelled into a mentoring programme delivered by Undergraduate Students from Lincoln University written and delivered by myself and colleagues.

There is work that has already been done within the broad field of mentoring, almost to the point where the words mentor and mentoring have become through away terms that mean almost nothing when applied to specific contexts other than ones they were conducted in. While I have and will acknowledge work in this area the main premise of this project is to create a real programme that works in real time for real people rather than a hypothetical model or an academic exercise.

However, this is a pilot study and will necessarily inform an academic paper that will seek to provide evidence to support the positive impacts it proposes. Essentially then I am working backwards, creating a working programme and working out the problems as I go to inform the paper.

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[Dr Simon Ball](#)

7:53am 4 January 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi Steve

Please could you add your name in parentheses to your Cloud title?

Many thanks

Simon



[Steve Penney](#)

10:23am 6 January 2018 [Permalink](#)

Thanks Simon

Will do

Steve



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

3:25pm 18 January 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi Steve,

I'm interested in your question:

▶ Do we have a language of learning that actually allows us to communicate about

their experience?

While this is absolutely essential, I must admit that I've never seen a successful implementation of language for learning in schools - they've been so wrapped up in metaphors and jargon that they've failed to give learners the tools they need to express their experiences of learning. Could you give an idea of how we can address this?



[Steve Penney](#)

2:12pm 20 January 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi Jonathan,

Thanks for the question.

I agree with you, part of the problem has been the language used to communicate. Certainly not sure I have cracked it but my work has led me to the use of the ELLI definitions of learning power and thier questionnaire, which provides a graphical representation of these seven powers. What I have also looked at is re defining the terms into student speak with real examples of how this is played out in the classroom. For example, Learning Relationships become opportunities to speak, listen and act on advice effectively.

The questionnaire can be taken at intervals throughout the academic year and can suggest progress in specific areas.

I hope this helps

Steve



[Steve Penney](#)

2:12pm 20 January 2018 [Permalink](#)

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The questionnaire can be taken at intervals throughout the academic year and can suggest progress in specific areas.

I hope this helps

Steve



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

9:21pm 20 January 2018 [Permalink](#)

This sounds fab! Very much looking forward to your presentation! If I can help with another English teacher perspective for any stages of the artefact, let me know.



[Steve Penney](#)

7:37pm 23 January 2018 [Permalink](#)

New poster song is back



[Mike Lyons](#)

10:14am 2 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

I've been reading up on the 7 Dimensions of Learning Power. Your presentation sounds fascinating. Can your mentoring program be applied equally to any age group, both genders, and students from a variety of cultural/linguistic backgrounds?



[Steve Penney](#)

8:00am 4 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

I think the potential is there. I believe that they have been applied in international schools however the mentoring programme is unique as far as I know.

I did some work last year on the potential to work the dimensions into classroom teaching. My conclusions pointed to an all or nothing scenario which was not appropriate for our context at the time.

Dr Nigel Newton at elliglobal is a good contact



[Mr Jonathan G Brown](#)

4:17pm 6 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi Steve,

Is your project artefact the pilot study / workshop or a paper that presents your findings? Do you have any work in progress you could share at this point?

Cheers,

Jonathan



[Steve Penney](#)

4:48pm 6 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi

My artefact is a run / talk through the live project, it incorporates a research element with Lincoln University. Hopefully an academic paper will follow the project.

Steve



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

3:49pm 17 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi Steve

Well done on a great presentation! Here is a summary of the comments and questions you received following your presentation (including those you may have addressed verbally). Please respond in whatever way you choose.

Best wishes

Simon

- ▶ Do you follow Simon Kovesi on Twitter? @kovesi1
- ▶ Hi. In your Elli dimension visualisation - do they identify their own positions on the grid? Do they have the reflective skills or experience to do it successfully?
- ▶ Could you possibly use this research to get people like Edexcel to change from old English to modern English for use in the curriculum?
- ▶ I saw a couple of peers discussing girls-vs-boys activities in class - to encourage competition. Do you think that is healthy - or ends up reinforcing difference and stereotyping of behaviour?



[Steve Penney](#)

8:31am 18 February 2018 [Permalink](#)

Hi

- ▶ Hi. In your Elli dimension visualisation - do they identify their own positions on the grid? Do they have the reflective skills or experience to do it successfully?

Ok so I did not have time explain that the spidergram is created via a sophisticated online questionnaire which is unique to each student. It also provides feedback for each student to read which is written in an accessible form. One of the roles of the mentor is to work with the mentee to evaluate this profile. Hope that explains better.

- ▶ I saw a couple of peers discussing girls-vs-boys activities in class - to encourage competition. Do you think that is healthy - or ends up reinforcing difference and stereotyping of behaviour?

Many students experience barriers to learning because of the language used, in my context the most marked are those experienced by male students who have to deal with cultural disconnection from the experience and self image around male identities.

Anything that focuses on differences is can be very unhelpful, students like to win not to compete and male students do not like being beaten. They all learn in the same way, it is just that the boys focus more on the barriers rather than the solurtions.

Hope that is a better explanation.

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