

Agency, Voice and Participation: an action inquiry project undertaken by Sixth Form students at Rainham Mark Grammar School into factors that contribute to deep learning

Introduction

This inquiry project has its genesis in an original piece of work conducted some five years ago at the school by the then newly appointed Assistant Head Teacher with responsibility for Teaching and Learning. His project investigated the key practices and methods that students found most beneficial in terms of learning and teaching.

It seemed timely, some five years on, to reflect upon the findings and outcomes of the original project. This is particularly significant at this moment in time as there has been significant investment in CPD with a strong emphasis on Assessment for Learning. Investment has included a conference with a keynote lecture given by Professor Dylan Wilam and the development of innovative school - based teaching and learning communities. In all of this, the Head Teacher's vision was to place teaching and learning at the heart of everything we do at Rainham Mark. That is, any meeting, any action, any conversation was to focus upon the impact of learning and teaching. This wider vision includes a challenging and rigorous curriculum that the school feels meets the needs of a Grammar School student that both stretches and challenges. That said, the school is in an area of significant social deprivation with a key statistic of 20% of parents having had a University education.

This project is situated, therefore, within the wider school commitment to inspirational pedagogy with the ultimate goal of engendering outstanding learning and teaching across all subject areas. The vision for the project was to firstly evaluate what pedagogical practices work well from a student perspective in terms of their own learning. The second intended outcome was to disseminate the findings to the teachers at Rainham Mark Grammar School.

Uniquely, the project was placed in the hands of six Sixth Form students. The students were introduced to a range of methods that would enable participants from across the school to have a voice in terms of their learning. The students embraced the project with great enthusiasm. They were engaged, motivated and challenging in the way that they navigated their research. Importantly, they brought humour, support for each other and an eagerness to share and reflect upon their findings.

The outcomes in terms of each individual project have been drawn together in a reflective piece at the back of this report. This reflection considers the implications of the findings for individual teachers, Departments, Middle and Senior Leaders and, of course, students for further school improvement looking towards the next five years.

The findings of this project will hopefully provoke further reflection on what creates a stimulating learning experience and environment at Rainham Mark Grammar School.

We hope you find the report challenging, thought provoking and enjoyable.

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