

Changing the Culture of 9M

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Michelle Pitt is in her second year of teaching and is Head of Media Studies and Second in Charge of English. Before working in teaching, she worked in recruitment for 5 years.

9M are a class of 13-14 year olds. I took over the form in January 2004, after their previous form tutor left the school. They were identified as a difficult form and, because of this, we thought it would be good to conduct a Values Assessment with them.

I went through the findings of the assessment with Nicola Williams and Lesley Bond, and there was one area that stood out, which was the students' feelings towards the current culture of the form. I was most concerned by the fact that they viewed the culture as violent and aggressive.

We decided that it would be a good idea to use Citizenship lessons to try and change the culture of the form. Below are the first three lessons that I conducted with the class:

Lesson 1

The lesson objective was: Understand how the group feel about the current and desired culture of the form. The lesson took the following form:

Circle time – during the first part of the lesson I told them about the values assessment, and we discussed what violent and aggressive behaviour was. Students then wrote examples of violent and aggressive behaviour on Post-It notes and these were then read out.

We then discussed ways we could behave which would counteract this behaviour. These again were written on Post-It notes and read out by the class. The behaviour that was recommended was things such as helping each other, accepting each other, no fighting, talking to 'new' people, listening to each other and so on.

Students then drew a picture to represent the positive behaviour that they had identified and these were put on the wall.

In this lesson, I decided not to focus on the violent and aggressive behaviour, but rather focus on the positive behaviour that could be displayed instead of acting violently and aggressively.

Lesson 2

The lesson objective was: To be able to produce a Mission Statement that reflects the positive values of the form. The lesson was as follows:

We recapped on the positive values that the form would like as part of their desired culture.

We discussed Mission Statements, and how companies use them. We then looked at Mission Statements from companies like Microsoft, and other smaller institutions.

As a group, we then brainstormed things that we might like to include in our Mission Statement.

Students each wrote their own Mission Statement, which included a class motto and logo.

The class acted as a board of Directors. Then each student read their Mission Statement to the rest of the class, and as a group, a class Mission Statement was chosen.

All of the students produced excellent statements that reflected on the positive values of the form. Even low-ability students were able to think reflectively about the culture they wanted for the form. The winning Statement has been adopted as the class Mission Statement, and is displayed on the wall along with the pictures that were produced in the first lesson.

Lesson 3

The objective for this lesson was: To be able to draw steps to the desired culture. My ideas for this lesson were based on a training session I attended while working in Sales, which discussed the steps to closing a sale.

We recapped on the two previous lessons, which included discussing the Mission Statement.

Students were shown OHTs of 'Steps to a Positive Culture' taken by different companies. This included the steps outlined on the Microsoft Small Business Software.

Students divided a piece of paper into four, and put the headings of Fun, Relationships, Attitudes and Success on the four corners. Under each heading, students wrote down what they would like under each of these headings, or what these things meant in relation to school. For example, under Fun, many wrote 'more trips'. And under Attitudes, students wrote 'listen to each other' and so forth.

Students then designed ten steps for achieving a positive environment within the form. For most students, at the top was 'more trips', and the idea was that each step needs to depend on the next. For example, students couldn't start accepting each other if they didn't listen to each other.

Again, this lesson produced excellent work from all of the students.

Plans for the future

I feel that the groundwork that we have done so far has been successful, but we need to do a lot more before we can change the culture of the form. I feel that the next stage will be dramatising the types of negative behaviour that are currently being displayed, and then using techniques such as Forum Theatre, giving the students the opportunity to say what positive behaviour could be employed instead.

Findings

I believe that the Values Assessment has provided an invaluable insight into the thoughts and feelings of 9M towards their classroom culture. It is also a tool that can be used to enforce positive behaviour within the group.