

Re-engaging Disaffected KS4 Students within the United Kingdom

Hemanta Raj Dahal

Abstract—This paper considers ways in which we can engage students within the UK, particularly those that have almost finished schools. It examines research from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, Ofsted, the NFER, and other organizations within the British Education sector. It will look into the problems schools and students face which cause disengagement, and will look at solutions to tackling said problems. It is very important to me that every student is given a fair chance and that we, as educators, strive to engage every student – not just the academic, well-behaved ones. It is usually the disengaged ones that can be the perfect students to teach, once they have unlocked their potential and are eager to learn.

Keyword— Disaffected, Students, United Kingdom

I. INTRODUCTION

Engaging students is one of the biggest problems the Education Sector faces today. Throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, students are at risk of becoming disengaged with school. Whilst the participation in higher education has gradually increased, from 42% - 21% being 18-year-old students - in 2006 to 48% - 28%, respectively, being 18 years old - in 2015 (Department for Education, 2016. – Table 1), there is still a long way to go, and students within poverty inflicted areas are increasingly more vulnerable to becoming disengaged. This paper will consider the possible reasons for student disengagement, groups which are most at risk, and techniques and programs which aim to remedy the problem.

II. RE-ENGAGING DISAFFECTED STUDENTS

With these possible reasons for students to become disengaged in mind, it is important to effectively deal with them to ensure that no child is left behind, regardless of the difficulties they face. We need to ensure that Open to Learning NEETs are no longer disengaged, and their requirements are met – as these students have the highest chance of being re-engaged. Undecided NEETs must be provided with options that suit their needs and encourage them to return to education willingly. Sustained NEETs are the most difficult students to re-engage, but that is not to say that some changes can't at least re-engage many of them. Ofsted, the Department of Education, the NFER, the C4EO, and many other organizations have looked into many schools which have managed to turn disaffected students around, and successful

Mr. Hemanta Raj Dahal, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, International College, Siam Technology College, Bangkok, Thailand.

schools all have some things in common.

III. RELATIONSHIPS WITH ORGANIZATIONS

Similar to providing students with the opportunities to undertake vocational courses, some schools were developing relationships with employers and organizations. Companies such as Connections were brought in under the last Labour government to help students in areas such as CV and cover letter writing to help them fall out of education and employment altogether. Apprenticeships were also an integral part to the education reforms of that government, with government subsidized apprenticeships for students who chose to further their education through work.

One programme some schools are offering is a mentor programme. Students are given mentors. One school Bielby's (2012) report covered was providing students with mentors who were not employed by the school but, instead, local business people. The school had paired Year 10 students who had a negative attitude towards learning with these mentors as part of a voluntary programme. They would then meet for one hour per fortnight and discuss certain topics such as employment and skills the students were interested in learning which may be beneficial to them. Other schools also had mentor programmes where they would meet faculty members and discuss similar topics. In all of these programmes, they were perceived as positive and welcomed. Nelson and O'Donnell (2012) said that preventative approaches should include one-to-one support. Treating students as adults, like this, and engaging them about their future without patronizing them in a school environment can have huge effects.

IV. LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

In his book, Rob Plevin (2015) discussed when he first became a teacher and he worked in a secondary school within a low-income area. His students treated teachers with contempt and showed no interest in learning. He found that the only way they would show any positive change was if teachers treated them fairly and with respect, acknowledged and praised their achievements-no matter how small, shared a relaxed and approachable attitude towards students, trusted the students and treated them firmly if needed, and gave out relevant information in an interesting way. That is a lot to consider, but it is often the biggest gripe of students. Lloyd-Jones of NFER (2010) recommended creating a positive learning environment where students are not afraid within the classroom. Students must feel safe and respected for them to engage – before they even start learning. HMIE (2010) said it is vital for teachers to

be flexible. They must differ their methods when needed and tailor them for individuals or groups who may become disengaged. Teachers must be alert for signs of this so they can quickly adjust lessons so students maintain interest.

In Sheffield University's study on the disengagement of students in science, they found that students had become immensely more engaged when carrying out experiments and other forms of practical work. When undertaking tasks such as this, they were happy to be in class and enjoyed the subject. Physics, which had fewer experiments, showed the least levels of enjoyment whilst biology had substantially more. However, they did mention that this could also be because it had more relevance to daily life as nature was all around them. The NIACE found in their 2015 that learners particularly interacted and engaged in maths and English lessons when they were practical and interactive and were related to real-life experiences. They suggested that classes are made as interactive as people as to engage students.

Many studies, such as Ofsted's study on engaging students (2008), three NFER studies on engaging students (2010, 2011, 2012), Sheffield University's study on the disengagement of students in science, and the NIACE's similar study in maths and English, there was a trend. Small class sizes. If class sizes are small, they enable teachers to engage and support all students in class. It provides fewer opportunities for students to be left behind and, in turn, act out. They are perceived by everyone, especially learners, to be most effective.

V. BEHAVIORAL AND LEARNING SUPPORT

The Tunmarsh Pupil Referral Unit has, on site, around 60 students aged 11-16 for whom they care. Pupil referral units such as this are essential to re-engaging students in education. In the case of Tunmarsh, some of their students have been permanently excluded from school or are risk of exclusion for a number of reasons. They act as an interim school, where students usually spend two terms before they return to a newly allocated mainstream term. These types of referral units ensure that students are not forgotten about and provide the opportunity for students to develop themselves so they can return and be productive students. Some students stay on with Tunmarsh to undertake their GCSEs and other vocational course qualifications such as NVQs. Of the schools Ofsted looked at in 2008, the most successful at rehabilitating pupils were those with dedicated support areas. They may be offices, or separate classrooms, and would often hold workshops and meetings for students who required them. The students who were interviewed in these schools had all said that the key point to their re-engagement was the support staff who they had said had helped and listened to them. Support staff are key members of any school. In a class of 30, in the middle of a lesson, a teacher may not have the time required to deal with issues that arise. The schools had allocated offices, or separate classrooms, and would often hold workshops and meetings for students who required them. The students who were interviewed in these schools had all said that the key point to their re-engagement was the support staff who they had said had helped and listened to them. Support staff are key members of any school. In a class of 30, in the middle of a

lesson, a teacher may not have the time required to deal with issues that may arise. In these instances, it would be the job of the support staff to remove the affected students and to help them deal with the issue until they could return to class. Schools which had fewer behavioural issues, often had more support staff (Ofsted, 2008). The National Learner Satisfaction Survey also found, in 2011, that support staff were usually more impartial than teachers which helped to diffuse conflict. Students who believe they are given a fair chance are more likely so stay engaged in education.

VI. CONCLUSION

Engaging all students is one of the most important things the education sector faces today. The smallest interactions can make such a defining difference. Providing one-to-one support with students gives them motivation, makes them feel like they're mature adults whom teachers and staff respect, and encourages them to learn. Offering extra courses to those who may benefit from it and provide opportunities which could really change their life are of paramount importance. Students can truly discover who they are and who they want to be and start off in a positive direction. Ensuring flexibility and positive atmospheres in classrooms is something all teachers should be doing. For many NEETs, school can be an escape from complicated home-life, and classrooms should reflect that. As a final note, this is no magic trick to fix this problem, and every student, in every school, in every area is different, but many of these techniques to aid with re-engaging students are not huge or off-putting. There is no reason why schools should not be trying to deal with this problem.

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