

With the form tutor they would like meetings to discuss:

- ★ *time management;*
- ★ *personal issues;*
- ★ *UCAS applications;*
- ★ *career choices.*

In light of these results, the school has a new system of fortnightly tutorials where sixth-form students meet individually or in small groups to discuss important issues. These sessions are very successful, and this year we have made more progress with UCAS applications than in previous years as a direct result of having more individual time with form tutors.

It is also important to set up procedures for these types of meetings to take place with subject teachers. This is closely linked with the type of teaching style adopted. The main benefit for students in working together is in helping with each others' work. The following comments show that the key motivating features in students' relationships with other students are the ability and opportunity to work together and to share ideas in a supportive environment. "Students that have a good understanding can put ideas into simple terms." "We help each other to complete difficult tasks." "Get on well with each other so ideas are exchanged, therefore improving your learning."

It seems to me that the challenge here is to create a learning environment where it is not only acceptable but desirable for students to help each other with work tasks. Some students refer to specific occasions when they have benefited from working together. "In CCPR I taught a group as part of the course – this shows good involvement because we all have to do this and... learn from each other." "I benefited from a lesson when we were all in different groups and had to work together on a subject and then report back."

The most favoured teaching styles are debates and discussions. Also interesting is the number of students asking for regular tests before examinations to help them prepare more effectively. One said, "More testing before exams would help me with confidence and motivation." Another said, "I think small regular tests help to motivate me, as it means I have to go over my work more regularly so therefore I learn more."

Students feel very strongly that dictation and being "talked at" are demotivating, as the following comments illustrate. "Lectures are most boring and don't make me feel interested at all." "If I am only given notes all lesson long, which are not further explained, I feel demotivated towards the course. I lose interest and therefore do not understand."

This raises more questions about teaching style and student motivation. Is it possible to meet the demands of the syllabus without dictation? If students do not experience this type of learning in the sixth form, will they be disadvantaged in higher education?

This research found that students can give teachers much help in making improvements to our teaching by talking about their learning experiences.

Further reading

Davie R., and Galloway D., *Listening to Children in Education*, David Fulton Publishers, 1996.

Davie R., Upton G., and Varma V., *The Voice of the Child: A Handbook for Professionals*, Palmer Press, 1996.

Ruddock J., Chaplain R. and Wallace G., *School Improvement: What Can Pupils Tell Us?* David Fulton Publishers.

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Motivation of sixth-form students

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AIM

To find out what motivates students in the sixth form. What stimulates them in lessons? What motivates them to complete homework? What features of their relationships with teachers and fellow students motivate them? Which types of teaching motivate and demotivate them?

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FOR THIS CASE STUDY

- ★ Students feel the way to make lessons enjoyable and stimulating is to have a variety of activities, including group work, debates, class discussion, role play and practical work.
- ★ Lessons are made more interesting by the enthusiasm of the teacher, although interest in the subject is also important.
- ★ Homework tasks that are interesting and relevant are most likely to motivate students. Positive feedback and high teacher expectations also motivate students to want to complete work.
- ★ The main causes of students' failure to complete homework are a lack of understanding of the task and long deadlines. These are closely followed by other commitments, such as part-time employment and social life.
- ★ Students' motivation is increased by teachers who are friendly, approachable, understanding and helpful.
- ★ The key motivating features in students' relationships with other students are the ability and opportunity to work together and to share ideas in a supportive environment.
- ★ Teachers' actions are heavily linked to teaching style. Students found the most motivating styles to be those that encourage participation and those where teachers show enthusiasm and organise individual teacher-pupil contact. The most demotivating forms of teaching are dictation, being "talked at" and working from the overhead projector.

A research project commissioned by the Teacher Training Agency as part of the Teacher Research Grant Scheme 1996/97

Background

This research was set in a large, mixed comprehensive school that has 150 sixth-form students. It was carried out using two methods: in-depth interviews with a small group of students; and a questionnaire using open-ended and closed questions to the whole of the sixth form in July 1996. There were 58 responses to the questionnaire, because only Year 12 were in school after the A level and GNVQ students had left.

Explanation of findings

The findings are given according to the key questions shown under "Aim" above and draw on students' comments from interviews and questionnaires. It is clear from the results that students have a lot to tell teachers about teaching and learning. Many of the results here raise interesting questions and have implications for the future.

Students feel the way to make lessons enjoyable and stimulating is to have a variety of activities, including group work, debates, class discussion, role play and practical work. It seems the key to success in all these activities is to encourage as much student involvement as possible.

Students find activities in which they can learn or find out things for themselves to be the most stimulating. One student said this was because, "If I can do it, it gives me confidence." However, another student suggested these activities need to be supported by more structured textbook work. "Group activities that are backed up by textbook work make learning more

stimulating to me."

There is a strong correlation between the types of activities favoured and the lessons studied by the students. For example, science students overwhelmingly respond positively to practical work, and the students taking creative subjects benefit from visits and visiting speakers. This raises a number of questions. If teachers adopted more activity-related teaching, would the time they spent preparing lessons have to increase? Have all teachers got the necessary skills and experience to work in the ways

suggested? Would students be able to transfer learning from the experimental activities to specific syllabus and curriculum requirements?

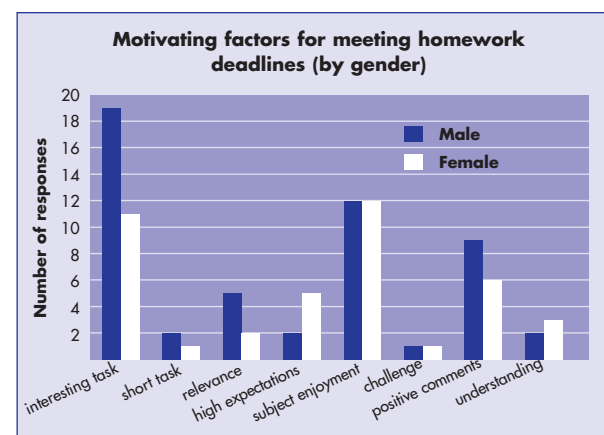
The students feel that the enthusiasm of the teacher is important for a number of reasons:

- ★ *It shows they are interested in them and their work.*
- ★ *It increases their interest in the lessons.*
- ★ *If the teacher is not enthusiastic, it dampens their own enthusiasm.*

These views are summed up by a student who said, "The enthusiasm of the teacher is very important, as this captures my interest."

The students also made the point that their own interest in a subject is very important. But they did not really offer any suggestions for how this interest had been created. It may have arisen from their experiences in their GCSEs. If this is the case, should GCSEs and A levels be taught in similar ways, following similar patterns of content? Do teachers work as hard at A level to make their lessons interesting as they do at GCSE? It cannot be assumed that students in the sixth form are inherently interested in or motivated by the subject matter. One student pointed out, "If the teacher is interested in the subject and makes it interesting, it helps me to understand and be better motivated."

The relevance of the task is very important in motivating students. Many are concerned about managing their time, not only their social lives or part-time jobs but also the different demands of course work and module exams in some subjects. Where students feel under pressure, they value work that they can see the importance in completing. This raises the question of whether students always see

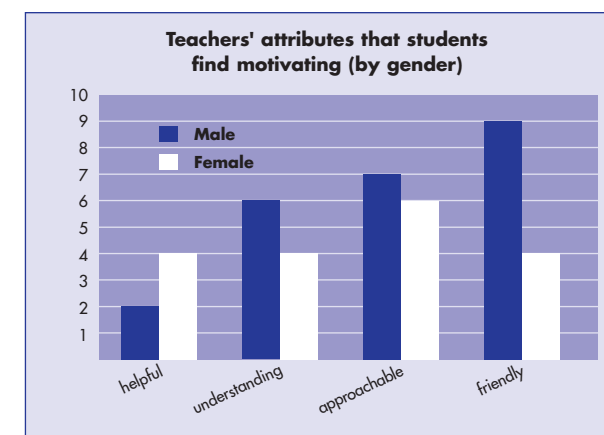


the purpose of their homework? Do they have ownership of or control over what they do? One student refers to negotiating homework. "I think pupils should have a say sometimes in how much homework they have, and they should be able to discuss with teachers appropriate deadlines when there are other pressures like exams present. This makes us feel more in control." Is this kind of negotiation possible or desirable? Would all students respond positively to this approach?

Many students refer to positive feedback from teachers. One of them said, "The high expectations of my teachers are very motivating. When teachers have faith in me, it helps me to have faith in myself." Encouragement from teachers and advice on how students can improve their work also feature in their comments.

The main causes of students' failure to complete homework are a lack of understanding of the task and long deadlines. This is surprising for two reasons: it gives the impression that some students feel they cannot approach their teachers for advice; and it implies teachers do not seem to spend enough time explaining homework tasks. This suggests that teachers need to spend more time with students on an individual basis (see later discussion on relationships).

The other significant reason for failing to meet homework deadlines was the concern with long-term deadlines, such as extended projects for which a number of weeks are allowed. Fourteen students expressed concern with this, preferring short, frequent deadlines to help them organise their time more effectively. One said, "If there is a while to a deadline, most people – me, in particular – wait to the last minute because you know you've got a long time to complete it in." Another said, "A regular programme of homework, such as twice per week, is



needed to get students into the pattern. The type of homework should vary, but deadlines shouldn't, unless it is a major project."

It is tempting to ask students to produce large projects at A level so as to encourage development of their skills and creativity. This clearly puts more pressure on them. It is possible, even where there are significant course work components, to create weekly deadlines to help students plan their time more efficiently. Graph showing that students' motivation is increased by teachers who are friendly, approachable, understanding and helpful. Thirty-two of the

58 respondents think these four qualities are most important in helping them to feel motivated. The following two comments are typical replies to the request, "Please give details of the things that make your relationship with your teachers positive."

The first is, "Them giving you time, telling you how you're doing, what you still need to do so as not to just let you float along. They need to be friendly, approachable and good at explaining things." The other is, "When I feel the teacher is approachable, this encourages me to ask for help so I can complete more of the work and gain a better grade."

Students said they would appreciate more individual time spent with their subject teachers and form tutors. Twenty-three of the 34 male students and 22 of the 24 females would like individual meetings with teachers.

With their subject teachers students would like to discuss:

- ★ *their progress;*
- ★ *improving their work;*
- ★ *their predicted grades;*
- ★ *higher education advice;*
- ★ *course content.*

"The high expectations of my teachers are very motivating. When teachers have faith in me, it helps me to have faith in myself."