

Improving Diversity in Education:
NOWTEACH focus group.

Date: 11.02.2021

Agenda:

- 6:30pm - Introduction
- 6:35pm - What is belonging and how can we ensure that all students and staff feel as though they 'belong' in our schools?
- 7:10pm - This project - What are we aiming for? What do you want to achieve?
- 7:30pm – End

Ground rules- This is a space where members:

1. Are able to speak openly and honestly.
2. Are able to share experiences, thoughts, feedback and ideas.
3. Are respectful and tolerant of other people's points of view, ideas and experiences.
4. Demonstrate an acceptance of, and celebrate, diversity and difference.
5. Are able to share their views confidentially.

Main discussion points:

How are you creating a sense of belonging?

- Departments ensure regular training so that our classrooms feel like safe spaces.
- A broad range of CPD topics focused on achievements and gaps between key groups - e.g., disadvantage and vulnerable students/ WBRI boys/ BCAR boys / ethnicity/ culture / LGBT.
- School has visible safe spaces - where students can access for support.
- 'When I get to the stage when I am writing my own maths word problems, I see an opportunity to write ratio and proportion questions about recipes for Chinese and West Indian food which are my ethnicities!'
- Inclusion, empathy and diversity activities built into tutor times.
- Drop down PHSE days where subjects can be explored further.
- Safe space with tutor - building a sense of community and a space for debate.
- Bullying is dealt with in an understanding and inclusive way.
- Primary: Each class has 2 representatives. They discuss key aspects of PSE and share ideas. They then offer peer to peer support within their class groups. Students know that they can talk to a class representative if they need support.
- Maths: Researching Black female mathematicians and finding role models representing a range of diverse backgrounds, and highlighting their achievements

How can we move forwards? What things should we consider ?

- BLM: The school had assemblies focusing on BLM and diversity. This was good but also highlighted differences in staff opinions, perspectives and experiences. It is really important to think about engagement from staff and how staff are delivering these assemblies/ activities and following up key messages.
- The use of language in lessons is really important. Have been thinking about how to not to exclude students in the lessons. E.g., use of 'mum/ dad' when there are different family units and experiences represented in the classroom. The appropriateness of language is often overlooked.

- It makes a big difference if you share with students' stories of your own personal experience and background. This can build a sense of community, but also show students that people can achieve a range of things, no matter their background or journey.
- Really noticing students in the classroom who are disadvantaged or overlooked. Perhaps a slight degree of positive bias? Ensuring that you provide explicit opportunities for those students to be heard (and seen) can lead to really good outcomes for those students. Especially when there may have been negative experiences in education for that child previously - highlighting positives can boost self-esteem and change their level of aspiration and engagement.
- We do need to move from departments/schools 'going it alone' and move towards a more whole school/ whole education model. Lots of pockets of good practice but these can seem piecemeal and fragmented - even within the same school provision. A holistic approach which captures the pockets of good practice already in place across a range of schools and leads to the development of a whole school approach that can be adopted by other schools. A whole school best practice guide.
- Supporting students to recognise biases: How do we support students to filter biases – perhaps they are exposed to these in school or at home. How do we break down systematic prejudices – e.g., race, accent, appearances, gender stereotypes. Perhaps we need to revisit the PHSE/ RSE structures. Lessons on unpicking biases and misconceptions are vital both for students and staff. How society constructs pressure and expectations can influence self-esteem and aspirations.
- There is a danger that we duplicate PSHE curriculum. Perhaps we need to identify which schools might be willing, to share their ideas and then consider 2/3 particular strategies alongside 3 objectives. This would focus the outcomes.
- What is the issue? Why haven't we moved on yet? Is there an issue with whole school policy? Is there an issue with Govt. policy? Or do the policies work in principle - however there is simply an inconsistency in how they are expressed across provisions - perhaps due to beliefs and biases? How would we tackle this?
- Showing and role modelling is really important: It is important to recognise that you cannot win every battle against every prejudice... but you can be a positive role model in your classroom.
- Building aspirations: Students can often have very shallow ideas about what they can achieve and aspire to. This may be due to a lack of preparation or exposure to opportunities. Bridging that gap and showing students how to move to the next stage is vital. Some students live and are educated within the bubble of their own community, they may not have the opportunity to explore other parts of the UK or the world, and the diversity of thought and experience that this exposure offers. Perhaps they feel wary of other people with other experiences and backgrounds who may want to help them. It is important that they are able to accept support from other people, and also have the opportunity to interact with different groups of people during their educational journeys.

Action points:

1. When is the best time for our next meeting? March/ April?
2. EDI quick audit: What is working in my setting? What is not working so well? How can I make the curriculum more representative - What can I change in my classroom? How could I contribute to building a whole school EDI focus?
3. Additional resources: BAME reading list, further reading on belonging.
4. How do we communicate our ideas with the wider NOWTEACH cohort? How will we share our ideas and outcomes - articles, personal stories, best practice guide?
5. Thinking about the NOWTEACH programme - is there any feedback or actions that NOWTEACH can take to support its members?



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