

Developing Student Leadership in the Arts

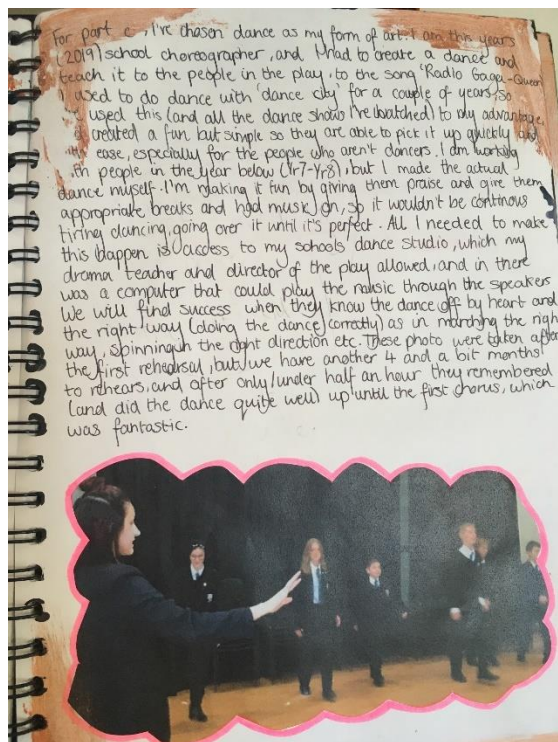
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Statement of focus

As a school we value the arts in the curriculum and have high numbers of students engaging in extracurricular activities. In September 2019, as we continued with our Arts Mark journey, I felt it was the right time to develop our students' skills further, and in line with our school development plan it was agreed with the Head Teacher that our focus would be to develop student leadership in the arts.

The development process

As a key member of the creative arts team I had already begun running Arts Award Bronze with a small number of students and could see the potential to develop leadership to evidence Part D (Sharing a Skill). The aim was to target specific students with an interest in the arts to focus on planning the choreography and lighting designs for the school production of 'We Will Rock You'.



Every week, some of our Year 9 students would meet with staff to discuss each phase of the rehearsal schedule and then students would then begin to plan ideas for identified scenes. These ideas were shared with cast members during lunchtime rehearsals. I was impressed with the level of motivation and skill required to meet such a demanding role. Student response to this leadership was very positive indeed and little teacher input was necessary. This work was of a high standard and supported the portfolio process, demonstrating the positive and independent work ethic to evidence participation in the arts.

In addition to this, I had been approached by a small number of Year 10 GCSE Drama students interested in facilitating the weekly KS3 Drama club.

The club had been running for a year, facilitated by Year 11 student prefects. However due to exam pressure it had often lacked structure and focus as not all students were dedicated to developing their role as leaders at that time. Numbers had fallen and participation was minimal. When approached by the year 10 students I saw this as a perfect opportunity to develop the club and their leadership skills further.

Challenges

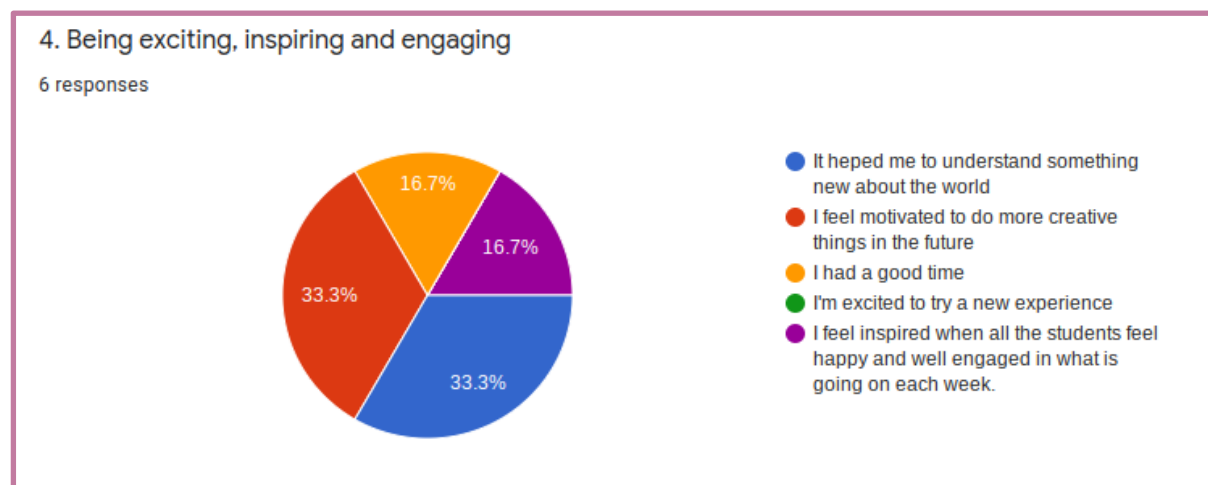
Leadership across aspects of the school production ran smoothly for the most part and required little teacher intervention. Meanwhile, it became apparent very quickly that enthusiasm alone wasn't going to be enough to build a successful drama club; it was going to require more input from me than before, therefore I spent some time observing in order to create an action plan. I identified that the student leaders needed training in structuring tasks and managing behaviour. There was also an issue with student numbers; we needed to create awareness about the club and after some discussion with the students we decided that the quickest way to notify the majority of students would be through assemblies. The leaders and key participants planned and delivered their pitch to all Key Stage 3 students. This was well-organised and students were commended by the Head Teacher for their initiative and confidence.

In order to boost confidence in behaviour management I facilitated a series of workshop sessions; students learned a variety of strategies allowing them to become more skilled leaders in the classroom. We also spent some time planning a 'scheme of work' and leaders initiated a student voice to assess their practice and inform further planning. Recruitment issues were resolved and participation increased. In addition, these leaders created more initiatives for retention and increasing numbers further; awarding merits and rewards.

Evidence of impact

Audience feedback suggested that the school production had been a roaring success and it was refreshing to witness the pride among those who had supported the creativity through their leadership. Evidence for Arts Award is of a high standard and several students have expressed an interest in facilitating workshops to support their leadership for the award. In addition to this, our GCSE Drama cohort expands next year to accommodate those with an interest in the technical elements of the course.

The Drama club continues to go from strength to strength and in a recent questionnaire, data highlights the improved confidence of all those involved; this has been observed in lessons and we have already received enquiries regarding participating in the next school production!



Recommendations/proposals for practice

We have recently received the great news that our application for Artsmark Gold was successful. Feedback was very reassuring:

'You are developing the voice of young people by involving them in planning and delivering authentic arts and cultural experiences and through your Performing Arts Prefects who deliver performances and clubs' (Artsmark, Arts Council)

As we move into the next stage of our arts journey, we aim to share the good practice of student leadership in other areas of school and the wider community; work has already started with our new school magazine and enterprise club. Furthermore, we aim to continue to develop our existing projects and we look forward to launching our new student voice (Arts Ambassadors) in September 2020.

Recommendations from Artsmark suggests we explore:

'how your young people can be ambassadors for high-quality provision and learning, and how they can take a leadership role in delivering continued professional development (CPD) opportunities to other settings.'

With this in mind, I am aiming to introduce leadership into the primary transition programme, working with pupils and staff to promote arts and culture in our wider school community.

Reflections on achievements

Using the Quality Principles form Artsmark I invited students to share their thoughts about their participation in the arts this year so far. The feedback was very positive and highlighted our good practice.

An unexpected barrier has been the global pandemic which has since halted face to face work with our students. However, I was very overwhelmed to read recent communication from one of our drama club leaders, encouraging our younger students to be creative while at home, offering a variety of fun activities for the whole family - what a positive outcome in such unprecedented times! I feel that this really sums up our success this year.

Reflections on my development as a leader

As I near the end of this first phase of my journey, I can say without question that I feel more passionate about the development of arts and culture in educational settings. I have recently had some discussion with senior leadership about developing this role further so that we can continue to create more exciting and enriching projects for our staff and students. And as we embark on our journey towards Platinum our good practice has been recognised, meaning there will now be a dedicated budget for arts and culture: this is great news as it will allow us to work in partnership with arts and cultural organisations. I'm looking forward to the opportunities that lie ahead.