Seaton High School
A Culture of Achievement
Yong Zhao Project 2018

Background

- Seaton High School is a comprehensive co-educational secondary school, years 8 to 12, in the western suburbs of Adelaide.

- Middle Years Development Instrument data indicates that students have a high academic self-concept but low levels of engagement. Students are compliant but not necessary engaged.

- Students are recognised as experts in relation to classroom practice. After all, this is where they spend most of their time. Student voice is valuable to gain information about education from the perspective of year 10 students.

Aims

The project aims to investigate ways of strengthening communication between students and teachers. It will shed light on the challenges and issues faced by staff and students and the expectations of staff and students in regards to education.

Specifically it aims to investigate the focus question:

- How do we increase engagement levels of year 10 students in their learning?

For the purpose of the project, engagement is defined as:
Engagement occurs when the partnership between students and teachers creates the desire to learn and work hard while enjoying the process. This is often associated with making real world connections and understanding why we are learning what we are learning.

Method

- Site visits to Adelaide Botanic High School, Glenunga International High School and the Australian Science and Mathematics School (ASMS), observations and discussions were used to gain an understanding of different learning spaces, teaching and learning techniques and curricula. Data were recorded through transcripts.

- Student forums were conducted with all year 10 students. The responses were scribed and the data was thematically analysed.

- Staff forums were conducted in faculty meetings. The responses were scribed and the data was thematically analysed.

School Visits

Classroom Design

Student and Teacher Voice

Results and Recommendations

Engagement may be increased through improving staff and student relationships, developing learning plans that are personalised and creating environments that are bright and collaborative and promote 21st century skills.

Staff and students share many common philosophies on education. They identify similar characteristics when they describe ideal classroom design and environment.

The recommendations are:

1. **That the staff and students work together to strengthen student/teacher relationships.**

Suggestions include,
- Improving social interactions
  - saying good morning/good afternoon
  - teachers arriving on time to class and welcoming students as they arrive
  - teachers enquiring about level of understanding of work-simple questions to help students understand their work and feel comfortable
  - developing strategies for recognising students' progress with a class activity (eg, "How are you doing?" faces & arrow for work)
- Opportunities to coordinate assignment deadlines and receive assignments before they have started (to prepare the students/if they want to get ahead)
- Breaking up the last lessons of the day for students to choose the work they want to complete, rather than teachers having to 'make' students work on a particular task they may not feel inspired to work on.
- Brain breaks and alternative activities.

2. That Staff and Students work together to create a bright and collaborative classroom environment.

How can this be carried forward?
- Through Student Voice
- Focus on Graduate Qualities for Students
- Develop a code of practice for staff
- Student representative in faculty planning groups

Suggestions include,
- Fresh air - open windows and taking class outside
- Open spaces – areas for students to work collaboratively and on individual projects
- Multipurpose furniture – not having a 'front' of the class and having the ability to move around and teach in different sections of the classroom. Having different types of furniture to suit different learning tasks and students. Have tables face each other so students can work collaboratively.
- Displaying student work (examples of excellence)

How can this be carried forward?
- Student representative on the facilities upgrade (ie, new building) committee.
- Through Student Voice

Recommendations

3. That staff and students work collaboratively to personalise learning rather than a 'one-size fits all' learning plan.

Suggestions include,
- *Explain the content in different ways*-Each student processes information differently so having more than one technique of explaining the content will be beneficial
- *Provide real world connections*-Students seek purpose in their learning and providing a real-world example will help them to engage more
- Flexibility in lessons 5 & 6 to choose work on which to focus
- Student choice in the presentation of assessment tasks where possible
- The learning program allows students to follow their passion

How can this be carried forward?
These Recommendations will be carried forward by both students and teachers working collaboratively in,

- Student voice forums
- Faculty assessment task design meetings/critique

4. That global connections are identified and promoted within the learning.

Suggestions include,
- A focus on the capabilities, especially intercultural understanding
- Develop a strong online connection
- Promote examples or case studies from local, national and international sources.
- Use global sources for analysis

How can this be carried forward?
- Faculty project planning
- Reflect on our commitment as a Peace School (students and staff)

5. That staff and students collaborate to develop, deliver, evaluate and refine a *21st Century curriculum*.

Suggestions include,
- Design of authentic tasks
- Project or product based learning tasks
- A focus on the process of learning including drafts, critique and prototyping
- Connection with local groups within the community

How can this be carried forward?
- Student voice on the curriculum committee.
- Faculty project planning teams
- Focus on classroom design to promote 21st century skills