2020 cohort

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How does 'cultural awareness' effect and impact student attainment for KS3, specifically can increased cultural capital increase the capacity for critical thinking, and afford an inclination towards enhanced engagement and wellbeing?

Introduction

That there are disadvantaged pupils in secondary schools is not surprising to anyone, but what is lacking, in practical pedagogy, is a more comprehensive approach to address an apparent lack of cultural capital: an awareness of being-in-the-world. This paper will discuss the philosophical and sociological theory of Martin Heidegger and Pierre Bourdieu to provide a framework from which to grasp this problem, and, moreover, develop a practical solution to impact on student 'cultural awareness'. In respect to the former, the dual focus united in an ontological education places emphasis on the self as a site of authentic action while, at the same time, insisting on an ability to be-aware alternative styles of word and sub-words. In respect to the latter, the reproduction of social disadvantage is levelled at a predisposed disposition to inherited fields of consciousness characterised by an interrelated habitus: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capitol. Together, these conceptual tools can provide a means of thinking the complex effect of culture and society on education and, as both advocate, provide an educational praxis designed to alleviate educational ill-health.

Research Questions and Logic Model

The main aim of this project is to assess whether an increased 'cultural awareness' in Year 8 secondary students can lead to enhanced critical thinking through the development of an inclination towards a predisposed framework of study. In addition, a secondary concern will be with the wellbeing of the students with regards to their academic in school study in English, including assessment and classwork. The theoretical background to the study is based on the work of Heidegger and Bourdieu who advance an existential approach to the understanding and development of educational pedagogy (Heidegger, 1927, 1959 & 1967; Bourdieu 1977, 1979 & 1986). In social science scholarship, it has been suggested that increased cultural capital can significantly impact on a student academic attainment, an essential capacity for objective, open yet critical, forms of intellectual engagement (Ruggiero, 2012).

Research Hypothesis: In view of the deprivation and disadvantage of pupils, an increased knowledge of cultural capital will improve educational attainment assets, including critical thinking, and an inclined motivation towards engagement and well-being.

Art & Society Intervention

The intervention will take place after-school in twelve one-hour sessions. The students will be encouraged to compete coursework after each session, but this will not be mandatory, - at the end of the intervention an assessed presentation is required. It will be up to the students how they respond to the teaching and learning delivered in the sessions; either through art, written composition, or discursive analysis. The topic of study will be contemporary cultural and social issues and how art and literature can afford perspective on how society ought and ought not to be organised. To impact on cultural capital, the use of literary and visual artefacts (including paintings, photographs, street art, conceptual art, and short stories) will afford an understanding of art as criticism and enhance awareness of objective cultural capital. In addition to this, the use study of several Isms (including, Socialism, Feminism, Environmentalism, and Gender and Race Theory) will afford the conceptual vocabulary to criticise, in an objective way, a range of contemporary cultural and social debates and issues.

The potential benefits to the students are as follows:

- To become more familiar and confident regarding art and literature.
- To develop a critical perspective alongside one's own viewpoint.
- To work towards a 'mastered' grade in accord with in-school assessment.
- To develop research skills, including note taking, planning, and presenting.
- To collaborate with like-minded students in a 'safe' learning environment.
- To learn more about oneself and your place in culture and society.

Overview of Findings

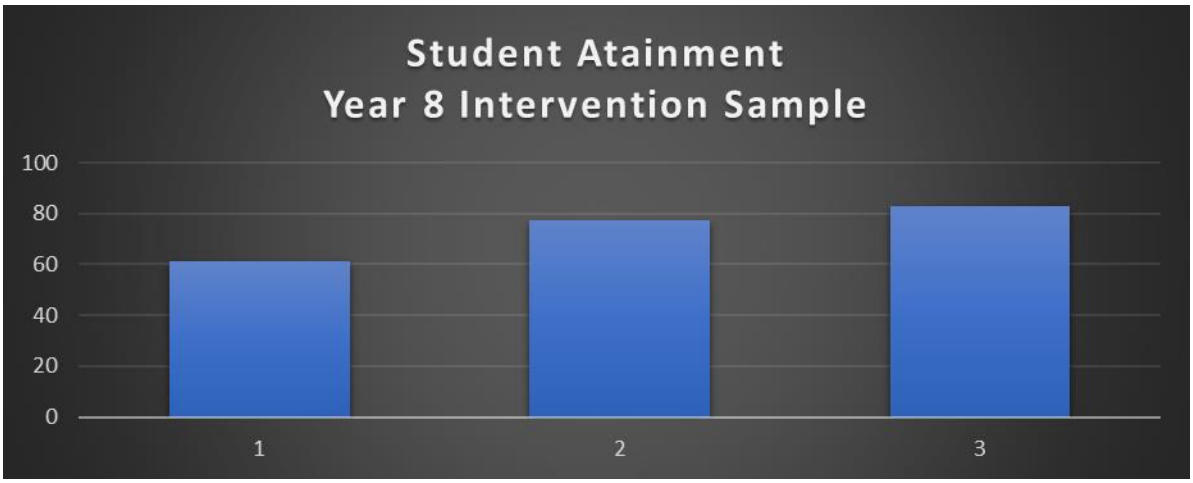
Of the eight students invited to take part in the research project there was one early drop out (Student 7), and two further students who completed the content but not the writing part of the intervention – the required presentation to be delivered post-intervention. On the whole, this was an excellent uptake and completion rate for such an intervention-based research study, especially due to the after-school hours and the independent nature of the work required of the students for the completion of the course. During the course of the intervention it was decided to cut the content part of the course to afford an in-school focus on the writing part, due to concerns about completion. It was notable that although most of the students were undertaking independent work during the weeks of the intervention, the write up of the presentation was causing anxiety and with this in mind the decision was made to afford extra support for the writing. On reflection, this was a much more appropriate format due to the age range of the participants and the difficulties many of these disadvantaged students have in completing work at home due to a lack of objective cultural capital.

Questionnaire

In terms of significant impact on student cultural capital and associated aspects (critical thinking skills, motivation and well-being) it can be said that students reported an increase in confidence across all aspects of in school experience. The results from the pretest (M=34, SD=8.4) and posttest (M=40, SD=9) on confidence in school indicate that the intervention had a positive impact on student ability. Although a high degree of significant increase was not demonstrated, combined with in school observation, it can be said that students have become engaged in class, and, moreover, more confident in their general English reading and writing abilities.

Attainment

In terms of student progress the table below shows the average total percentage points attained by students in Term One, Term Two, and the first half of Term Three. The intervention began at the start of Term Two and continued until the end of Half Term Five. The results from the pretest (M=61, SD=7.4) and posttest (M=83, SD=11.2) demonstrate a high degree of student progress over the course of the intervention.



Post-Intervention Interview

On the whole, the students interviewed were able to show their understanding of the aims and goals of the intervention and link the developed skills, of cultural awareness and criticality, to potential benefits in their usual English reading and writing. Of the students who responded in the interview (those who completed fully the intervention), the reported experience was overwhelmingly positive with 80% of the final cohort stating that they would take a similar intervention in Year 9, if it were available.

Intervention Findings: Interview.

(Q1) In your opinion, what if anything have you learned during the intervention?

(Q2) In three words, how would you describe your experience of the intervention?

(Q3) In your opinion, what is any impact has the intervention had on your academic study?

(Q4) If the option were available, would you take a similar intervention in Y9?

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
S1	Perspective	Significant / Eye Opening / Helpful	Useful: Analysis.	Yes
S2	Perspective / Social Issues	Fun / Helpful / Interesting	More Confident / Improved Work	Yes
S4	Social Issues	Entertaining / Fun / Educational	Useful: Analysis.	Yes
S5	Perspective / Social Issues	Boring / Education / Worthwhile	Useful: Analysis.	No
S6	Perspective	Fun / Interesting / Inspiring	x	Yes

Q1
- "I have learned about the problems that happen in the world and how to interpret them differently."
- "I learned about issues such as Socialism, Feminism, and Environmentalism. I learnt about how to look at artworks from different points of view.

Q3.
- "It helped me identify different points of view that I can look for in everything I read from now on."
- "I am a lot more confident in English and has helped me develop my knowledge, words and improved my writing skills altogether.

Conclusion

To conclude this report on this research and development project, it can be said, first off, that the project was a success in terms of student participation and there is certainly scope and interest from the host school to continue such an intervention.

Conclusion and Further Study.

Summary Notes:

1. Successful Participation and Completion.
2. Impact: Confidence and Attainment.
3. Impact: Cultural Awareness and Criticality.

Proposed Art & Society Intervention (2022/23):

- Term One: Year 9 – High Ability / Disadvantaged
- Term Two: Year 8 – High Ability / Disadvantaged
- Term Three: Year 10 – Passive / Disadvantaged

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