



National Education Trust

An evaluation of the work of Talk the Talk and whether it has successfully helped to give students, and teachers, a better understanding and ability in speaking up.

1. Summary

There is overwhelming support for the effectiveness of the Talk the Talk project in the schools visited.

2. Evidence base

Initial meeting with John Bothamley

Review of the evaluation of the project in July 2014 and associated data

Further discussion with John and the Project Administrator

Brief discussion with the Director

Visits to six schools in Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, Powys, Shropshire and Worcestershire

Observation of three training sessions and a brief look at three further sessions

Observation of an English lesson for Y10 following up a training session

Discussions with three Trainers

Discussion with two Headteachers, four Heads of English and two English teachers

Discussion with 18 students in Ys 10 and 11

Email exchange with another Head of English

3. Observations

3.1 The training sessions were carried out with good pace and effectively sustained the interest and involvement of the students during the day.

3.2 In the main, trainers are held in high regard by the teachers and students. They enjoy the fact that the Trainers come from different backgrounds, that they are approachable and students felt that it is often easier to reveal more personal feelings in presenting a talk to the group with Trainers than it is with teachers.

3.3 All Trainers used the booklet as the basis of their work with the students and emphasised the main points about 'how best to make a presentation' in terms of the key messages and structures outlined in the booklet. They were then able to use their own visual aids and prompts as suited to their personalities. Students and teachers particularly noted engagement, a sense of humour and enthusiasm as marking out good Trainers.

3.4 One school, who has been involved in the project for some three years, noted that one of the more recent trainers adopted a lighter touch and to some extent failed to involve the students as completely as in previous sessions. It was suggested that the induction for this particular (and singular) trainer was not as effective as enthusiasm, humour and challenge were lacking. These three aspects of the work of Trainers was seen by all schools as the essential quality of the TtT experience.

3.5 What was striking in the observation of the training sessions was that the Trainers were able to engage all students and that those who initially were shy or reticent eventually were able to make a presentation to the whole group. This is reflected in the response of students (para 5).

3.6 Discussions with the three Trainers during and after their sessions revealed a strong commitment to the work and an eagerness to ensure that all students could and should play a formative part in the day's experience.

3.7 In essence, much of the training was summed up by a Trainer who set the tone for the presentations by telling the group 'Say what you going to do and then do it!'

4. The Views of Teachers

4.1 Headteacher and Senior Leadership (SLT) views. The two headteachers were very committed to the project and felt that it had added much to the personal development of the students involved. As with their English Heads of Department (HoDs), they regretted the loss of Speaking and Listening (S&L) as an assessed part of GCSE (in England and Wales) and were determined to provide, at least, an adequate course of S&L skills for their Y10 and Y11 students and to celebrate where this had been successful. There was concern, particularly in Wales, about budget constraints (Para 6.2). Interestingly one Head of English said that she was 'surprised but grateful' that the SLT in her school had continued to fund the project at a time when there were current redundancy and cut-back issues. The Headteachers were strong proponents of the value of the project in terms of providing personal development for all students but did not want this to be seen merely as a Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) 'add-on' but for their English Departments to take the lead in development and for this to then influence other subject areas.

4.2 One Headteacher described a potentially difficult situation in a TtT session. It was explained that the catchment area of the school was essentially monocultural, traditional in views and somewhat lacking in aspiration. One student during a training session elected to speak about immigration and put forward a series of overtly racist views; needless to say, this could have caused repercussions in many schools. Rather than stop the flow, the Trainer encouraged debate and many students put forward strong counter arguments. Whilst this did not change the viewpoint of the presenting student, it gave opportunity for alternative and more considered views and was a particularly brave decision to carry on which may not have been possible or even advisable, in the present climate, in a classroom situation.

4.3 Other choices for presentation followed certain themes which the teachers could well have predicted: world poverty; gender imbalances; anger management; bullying; school uniform; sports. Other choices were a surprise such as a very personal presentation on contemplating suicide and, more prosaically, 'static agricultural machines'.

4.4 English HoDs views. Again, the teachers were very positive, one describing TtT as 'a beautiful project'. Generally they saw the project as giving confidence and in the case of some less confident students provided a chance to be less inhibited in speaking out.

In most schools, there was evidence that the work had spread from the English department to other subject areas; French, Science and History were mentioned. The English staff also felt that it was important that Heads of Year should be seen to support the project and not see it as merely an 'add-on' to any PSHE programme; they felt quite strongly that it should be seen as a specific piece of developmental work that should benefit all students and improve their presentational prowess.

4.5 One English HOD, who had originally booked the TtT session for the most able students (although this now applies to all) had encouraged those students to lead small groups of a similar age to develop their abilities to listen, argue and present views and this peer group approach had been well received. This idea had been just a 'one off' but is referred to in Para 6.4.

4.6 An English Teacher had been sufficiently impressed with the day's training that she had continued on an occasional basis to use a timetabled lesson with Y11s to continue this type of work. Observation of such a lesson revealed a good level of interest and discussion techniques but lacked the pace and inclusivity of the TtT sessions. There were comments from at least three teachers that the project could well consider some teacher training and this is referred to in Para 6.4.

5. The Views of Students

5.1 Four of the six schools provided students from Ys 10 and 11 for discussions. The students were articulate, courteous and interested that they were being involved in the project evaluation. All but one had very positive views about the day's training and in some cases clearly remembered the format and outcomes even from some 10 months previously. In the one case, the student indicated that she was still nervous and 'stuck for words' when asked to speak to small or whole groups but that she understood what she needed to do if only she could find the confidence to do so.

5.2 The students enjoyed working with the Trainers. They saw them as 'Outsiders' and, interestingly, often felt that they could reveal personal thoughts that they might not do with their teachers. This was seen as a comment on the quality of the Trainers and not as a criticism of their teachers who they would have to meet up with the very next day. One group of students likened the day to working with peers rather than 'just being taught'.

5.3. They felt that the booklet was very useful as it was clearly broken down in sections, set out the structures ('PEEEP', 'Sandwich' etc.), and acted as a reminder when they were later called to give a presentation, perhaps for an assembly or for a science project. One student mentioned that he was shortly to have an interview for a College place and had referred back to the booklet to check on how he would be presenting himself for the interview.

The booklet was popular in that it didn't require too much writing.

They also indicated the importance of posture, eye contact and gesticulation. There was a feeling that they were now more able to build up the points that they wished to make in a presentation. The summaries given at the end of each session were viewed as helpful and supportive

5.4 One group of three students responded that the training had helped with daily conversations at a time when texting was becoming the norm

5.5 A number of students, as with some of the heads and teachers, felt that learning in mixed age groups had been beneficial and gave more opportunities for a range of learning and the understanding of different views.

6. Recommendations

6.1 It will be for the Trustees and Director to decide on how this successful project should be further developed and marketed in wider contexts. Additionally, they might also wish to consider how the TtT work should become more embedded in the work of schools in England and Wales in terms of influencing policy makers.

6.2 The visits for this evaluation tended to focus on smaller secondary schools who have challenges about the economy of scale. All have severe budget constraints, especially those in Wales. Irrespective of school size, it will become increasingly important for the Project to consider how best to charge for the training sessions. Most schools would appreciate the costing and planning for these sessions to be agreed by the February of the academic year preceding. Thus for a 2017 programme, plans should be agreed by early next year.

6.3 Interestingly, one school had used some Sports Funding to pay for the training; a creative use of funds. More likely, is the chance to use Pupil Premium funding and the Trust would be well advised to promote this use.

6.4 It may well be that the Trustees and Director might consider extending the TtT menu. This could take a number of forms:

- Providing a departmental or staff meeting in a 'signed-up' school whereby the project staff or Trainers outline the traditional course available; or indicate opportunities for staff to engage in speaking out activities; or provide a day's INSET for staff on TtT
- Consider ways in the more able students might be coached to provide opportunities in their group or house-system
- Offer opportunities for there to be a 'Trainer in Residence' for a school or partnership of schools for period of time, say a term.
- Consider whether the project should be extended to Sixth forms or to primary schools, or groups of primary schools.

6.5 The project looks to be well-placed to develop further. This evaluation records the views of 6 schools (some 9% of those involved). Therefore the Trustees will take account of this 'dipstick' assessment. Were it that the project is as well respected as indicated from these schools, then there is good reason for the Trust to actively promote its work.

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