

Collingwood's Aimhigher Aspirations

After recent conversations with Aimhigher partnerships, and looking towards the next year with our clients, the landscape is changing as far as Aimhigher is concerned. Obviously the 'uncertainty' of the next year, and most likely the demise of the programme in its current form has led clients to look closely at every aspect of their spending on projects – most especially theatre and other creative programming.

At Collingwood we are looking at people's requirements from both sides of the coin. With Simes Junior (me, would you believe) developing theatre in education and other creative input, and Simes Senior (the old man) continuing to work with partnerships in auditing and analyzing effectiveness and value. I'm hoping, as long as Lindsay can keep the peace, that together we can develop programmes which take creative and inspiring models, but which have the sustainability, legacy, and value for money that is so very badly needed.

It's no surprise that we are looking beyond the typical theatre show, which signposts the options and benefits of continuing into further and higher education. This is incredibly valuable, and there is no doubt that it has absolutely been successful in ensuring students en masse become aware of what's out there for them, as well as it being the key way of bringing Aimhigher to students as a brand. But if the brand disappears?

Content counts. Cohorts count. The learning journey counts. Ultimately we need to provide experiences for students who have the most need, which create an individual 'tipping point', raising aspiration by bringing together key interventions with mainstream school life. But the tipping point doesn't happen immediately or in a timely fashion either.

We know that theatre sometimes finds it hard to fit hand in glove with integrated, longer term initiatives, and the measures designed to evaluate them. But it must and can easily. How, well Creative Partnerships is a good example of it and we have been lucky enough to work with them. What makes these projects work? Creative interventions, designed in partnership between the practitioner, teacher, and project manager, which happen over time. These are designed to develop the teacher as much as the interventions themselves, or else they aren't delivered. All evaluated in a robust way which measures distance travelled for all stakeholders.

It's what we aspire to at Collingwood, and although our clients and their objectives are different, the theory is the same. Sustainability of theatre based programmes is frankly about effort, as the theory exists.

Lastly, content. Self-esteem is the key. Information vital, but self-esteem is the driver which ensures take up of the options available to a young person. Even more basic – communication skills. Communication and self-esteem are the drivers for learning, the drivers for asking questions, making decisions, getting advice, resisting peer pressure, overcoming barriers. At Collingwood our goal this year will be to underpin every experience we offer with these essential elements that empower students. What better than theatre and creative techniques to help students explore, practice, and feel good as a result?

So what are we keen to do for Aimhigher?

- Creative, targeted learning
- Developing professionals to embed and sustain over time
- Measured using a 'distance travelled model'
- Underpinned by a self-esteem and communication model delivered in an Aimhigher context
- Fully integrated with the range of Aimhigher provision for that child, cohort, or year group

To find out more about our ideas, do give us a call anytime at Collingwood. Let's get started.

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