

The Royal School Dungannon

Stretch & Challenge (S&C) – whole school policy

1. Why S&C and not G&T?

In recent years schools have been encouraged to promote 'Gifted & Talented' (G&T) programmes for their most able pupils. The typical approach in many cases has been:

- Identify G&T pupils
- Register G&T pupils (including informing pupils and parents)
- Assess G&T pupils

This has led to a number of problems, including:

- Identifying – what are the characteristics to look for? Issues of performance v potential with a tendency to fall back on data (e.g. 'the top 5%')
- Registering – who should be on the register; on what basis; how often to update; can a pupil be taken off (lose their giftedness or talent)?
- Assessing – repetitive assessment leading to '10/10 again!'; praise for achievement more than effort; extension task 'punishment' for completing the initial work

The G&T process is also often given over to a G&T Coordinator and this can lead to a perspective that it is this person's role to push the most able more than subject teachers. Overall, the G&T process can too often become a bureaucratic 'tick box' exercise driven by data and with the focus upon a small number of pupils, potentially with issues of complaint around who has or who has not been 'identified' and 'registered'. The focus needs to be less on measuring and labelling and more on learning.

At RSD the aim is to promote a challenging level of learning for all pupils so that every pupil feels stretched in their studies on a regular basis. The most able pupils in particular subjects are to be pushed but this should be no different to what is happening for every pupil who is pushed to reach the next level in their learning.

"It is getting the teaching right that is the key to it. That is our experience over and over again."

National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) in House of Commons report, 1999

2. S&C

S&C is about pushing every pupil to the next level in their learning. As such, S&C is synonymous with high quality teaching & learning and the RSD T&L Policy provides the platform for effective practice. The rationale for this approach is explained below.

Formative assessment strategies are crucial in helping pupils and teachers to understand the learning to come and the means of achieving such given the level of current proficiency. There is a shared interest between pupil and teacher in understanding where the pupil is currently placed in

terms of learning, the goal or level to be reached and the means of closing that gap. The five key strategies are set out below.

1	Sharing Learning Intentions	Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success
2	Questioning	Engineering effective classroom discussion, questions and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning
3	Feedback	Providing feedback that moves students forward
4	Self-Assessment	Activating students as 'owners' of their own learning
5	Peer Assessment	Activating students as instructional resources for one another
One Big Idea - using evidence of learning to adapt lessons in real time in order to meet students' learning needs.		

D. Wiliam

When pupils are provided with an understanding of **how** to improve their learning then there is strong evidence of pupils setting themselves challenging targets and aiming high. The crucial aspect here is that teachers are a fundamental part of that process, providing guidance on **the means** by which pupils can improve their level of understanding; how they can bridge the gap from current proficiency to a more advanced level. A genuine culture of high expectations is developed in that pupils have both the ambition to improve and a means of improving.

Much of this approach has been summed up in the work of Hattie and Dweck. For Hattie the most potent method for improving pupils' learning is 'self-reported grades'. This means pupils predicting their performance based upon past achievement. When teachers provide guidance on both the success criteria and means of improvement the pupil feels empowered and often sets ambitious targets for him or herself. For Dweck such pupils are being helped to develop a 'growth mindset' where intelligence is seen as malleable and can be improved through hard work and the deployment of effective learning strategies. Pupils' progress should be tracked by comparing current levels of learning to their own prior performance; and the learning still to be accomplished in relation to their own targets.

"... it is more likely that there are stronger relationships between certain self-strategies and achievement. Achievement is more likely to be increased when students invoke learning rather than performance strategies, accept rather than discount feedback, benchmark to difficult rather than easy goals, compare themselves to subject criteria rather than to other students, possess high rather than low efficacy to learning, and affect self-regulation and personal control rather than learned helplessness in the academic situation." ***J. Hattie***

"I am not interested in judging how good your work is, I am interested in the quality of your learning." ***C. Dweck*** on the 'growth mindset' teacher's attitude to pupils

Feedback is a vital component of this model: from teacher to pupil; and from pupil to teacher. The three levels of feedback which are effective are:

- a) **Task level** feedback – How well tasks are understood or performed. This feedback may indicate whether the work is correct or incorrect and may include directions to more, different or correct information, such as "You need to include more about the Treaty of Versailles."

- b) **Process level** feedback – The process needed to understand or perform tasks. This feedback is more directly aimed at the processing of information, or learning processes needed for understanding or completing the task. A teacher may say to the pupil, “You need to edit this piece of writing by attending to the descriptors you have used, so the reader is able to understand the nuances of your meaning”: or for a younger age group, “You need to use more powerful adjectives to help the reader understand how the person is feeling – use one of these or your own: devastating; appalling.”
- c) **Self-regulation** feedback - Self-monitoring, directing and regulating of actions. This feedback helps the pupil to self-regulate, encouraging greater skill at self-evaluation, or confidence to engage further with the task without relying on the teacher for help. For example, “You already know the key features of the opening of an argument. Check to see whether you have incorporated them in your first paragraph.”

All three approaches force pupils to think about what has to be learned and understood. It is important that pupils are then required to improve the work. A **‘Find & Fix’** approach can be used with Process and Self-regulation feedback as each requires the pupil to draw upon prior learning and to take responsibility for making the improvements.

The type of feedback to **avoid** is **Self-level feedback** where the focus is on personal evaluations of the pupil. Even when this is positive (‘well done!’ or ‘you are a great pupil’) the effect is negative. Pupils have been labelled a success and are afraid of losing that label. As a result, they avoid taking risks in their learning, reject challenges which they are not guaranteed to meet, and minimise effort. They have become trapped in a ‘fixed mindset’ where intelligence is perceived as pre-determined and unalterable and the aim is to avoid losing the label of being successful or ‘gifted’.

3. S&C for the most able

For pupils who achieve a level of ‘mastery’ in their learning, it is important that teachers provide next steps which pupils deem to be valuable and worthwhile. It is important that extending the most able does not lead to a diet of extra work and a sense of being punished for completing the required class work.

A useful way to think of the most able pupils in a subject area is those who can operate at the ‘next level’ of learning. For example, a Year 10 pupil who can cope with knowledge and ideas introduced at GCSE would be operating at his/her next level.

Pupils with this capacity for learning in any subject area should be stretched by tasks and activities which are:

- Abstract - involving more abstract materials, ideas or applications
- Complex - involving greater complexity in terms of resources, research, issues and problems or skills to be practised

- Transformational - involving greater transformation or manipulation of information, ideas, materials and applications
- Divergent - allowing pupils to make connections within or across topics or to plan an enquiry that takes them in a range of directions
- Open-ended - involving pupils taking responsibility for decisions, approaches and solutions

Tasks and activities could therefore:

- Offer breadth - tasks, for example, which involve movement beyond the stated syllabus but are not pitched at a level higher than the norm
- Give depth - tasks which involve more challenge, detail and complexity than the norm
- Offer opportunities for learning at an accelerated pace
- Focus on the development of higher-order thinking skills
- Promote independence and autonomy including giving pupils opportunities where possible to pursue their own particular interests

Very able pupils often display the following characteristics.

The pupils value one-to-one time and discussion with the teacher as well as (perhaps more so than) with other pupils, as this allows for effective feedback.

Clear learning objectives and success criteria, plus a sense of future learning to come, are crucial in provoking the pupils' interest so that s/he will carry out his/her own research independently. Without such clarity, especially with regard to the future learning to come, pupils feel less able to engage with the topic fully and to develop their own research.

The teacher's questioning, especially open questions, and the ensuing whole class discussion that is provoked, are seen as important for generating challenge, interest and engagement in a lesson.

A sense of structure and variety matters. Well-planned and well-resourced lessons and sequences of lessons with a variety of task sustain interest but it was also important to have some creative and open-ended tasks within the general process.

The quality of the topic and resources on offer also matter to pupils. There is a joy to be found in exploring "worthwhile" and "real world" knowledge and the more a teacher conveys this in the lesson and provides opportunity for further exploration outside the classroom then pupils are more inclined to pursue this learning independently.

The motivation to learn for the pupils is bound up with their sense of engagement in lessons, including the engagement of others. Vibrant classrooms, bustling with discussion crafted by the teacher through carefully-selected tasks and questions are ideal. The pupils feel secure in such an environment and able to enjoy lessons and learning. Given a range of appropriate resources as well, the pupils feel that they can become intrigued by the topics studied and that they can develop a genuine love of subject. Their independence is harnessed by the clarity of the learning objectives and a sense of sequence of learning to come: they have been "taken to the future". The central thread running throughout every aspect is the role of the teacher. When the teacher provides the right structure, resources and environment for learning then the pupils respond and have the confidence and sense of purpose to be more independent in their learning.