

Reasons and Research: Pupil Development outside the Classroom.

In the Dame Allan's Co-curriculum we aim for pupils to meet the following objectives:

1. To become a socially capable individual who works well in small groups and larger teams
2. To make a young person aware of both their strengths and weaknesses
3. To help in developing resilience, commitment and loyalty, even when they might prefer to take an easier option
4. To increase their sense of self-esteem by reflecting on their successes and improvements
5. To more fully appreciate the varied contributions of others
6. To develop any latent leadership gifts by learning how to motivate, plan, communicate with and control a team moving towards a goal
7. To develop time management and prioritisation skills which then apply to other areas of life.

A major thread in all these areas will be the idea of *self-efficacy*. This relates to an individual's confidence, motivation and self-esteem, and their belief in their ability to exert control over their environment.¹ It has been shown that high levels of self-efficacy correlate significantly with educational performance, motivation and employability.² We also know from the work of Prof. Peter Clough and others that participating in co-curricular activities develops what Clough refers to as "mental toughness".³ By this he means that an individual will exhibit some or all of the following:

- Emotional control
- Life control
- Confidence in abilities
- Interpersonal confidence
- Goal orientated
- Achievement orientated
- They have an orientation towards risk
- They have a desire to undertake challenging learning

These characteristics closely follow Judge, Locke and Durham's ideas on self-efficacy. Clough's work suggests that we can, by engaging in co-curricular activities, either change and increase our mental toughness, and/or learn to cope with the mental toughness profile we currently have⁴.

We also know that mental toughness can be shown to have a positive effect on a pupil's well being. A person with greater mental toughness is likely to treat failure or disappointment as a spur to greater application, effort or determination. Their mental health will not be detrimentally affected when things do not go well; in fact they may enjoy better mental well being as a result of striving to do better.

There is also a very clear link to our High Performance Learning programme at Dame Allan's. We know that High Performance Learning happens when there is metacognition going on, that is, pupils are actively thinking about how they learn. This is strongly linked to self-efficacy since skills like prioritisation, time management, resilience when it gets tough, self-awareness and teamworking are central parts of a good co-curriculum.

For an example of a co-curricular activity where quantitative research has been done to assess the effect on young people and their attainment across a range of educational outcomes, see the Northampton University report on the participation of young people in cadet activities. [Social Impact Resulting from Expenditure on Cadets - University of ...](#)

The Role of Staff, both teaching and support staff.

Adults leading co-curricular activities should aim to make explicit the 7 objectives above by taking time to review and reflect with the young people at the end of the activity; even 2-3 mins could be sufficient, and for shorter activities this does not need to be done every time, but should be done some times. Open questions based on the 7 objectives should be used. They can be addressed to a group sometimes, but getting individuals to reflect may be more beneficial.

Making explicit links from co-curric to academic curric is vitally important if we are going to see transfer of the benefits of the co-curric into lessons.

Questions like these may help us achieve this:

- How did you make yourself part of the team?
- What would you say were your strengths in this activity? In which areas may you want to improve?
- How would you rate your commitment to the activity? What will happen when it gets tough or you have other things to do?
- What does it feel like when this activity goes well? How do you respond when it isn't going your way?
- What did you notice about the contribution of others? How did you benefit from their contributions?

- Did you see yourself having any type of leadership in the activity? Who do you think acted as a leader, and how can you tell?
- How did you make time to do this activity? What will you need to do to make sure you meet all your other deadlines?

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References.

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