



Multi-award winning CPD & Educational Consultancy

# Raising boys' achievement

Contact :  
+44208 5314182  
office@jmcinset.com

www.jmceducation.com  
www.jmcinset.com



W I N N E R





## ABOUT ME



[peter@petersharp.education](mailto:peter@petersharp.education)

- Associate at JMC INSET
- Educational consultant
- Ex- Director of Teaching and Learning,  
Ex- Deputy Head (Academic)
- Training and developing teachers for  
10+ years
- Science teacher (Physics)
- Chair of Governors & MAT Trustee
- Reporting Inspector for ISI



## ABOUT YOU?

- ❖ Phase?
- ❖ Type of school
- ❖ What you want to get out of this session?
- ❖ Anything else!

# PROGRAMME

## **Session 1**

- Exploring the problem
- Techniques to use in the classroom

## **Session 2**

- Literacy for boys
- Developing boys' attitudes
- Beyond the classroom
- Whole-school elements



# “THE BOY PROBLEM”





**Note that in these discussions:**

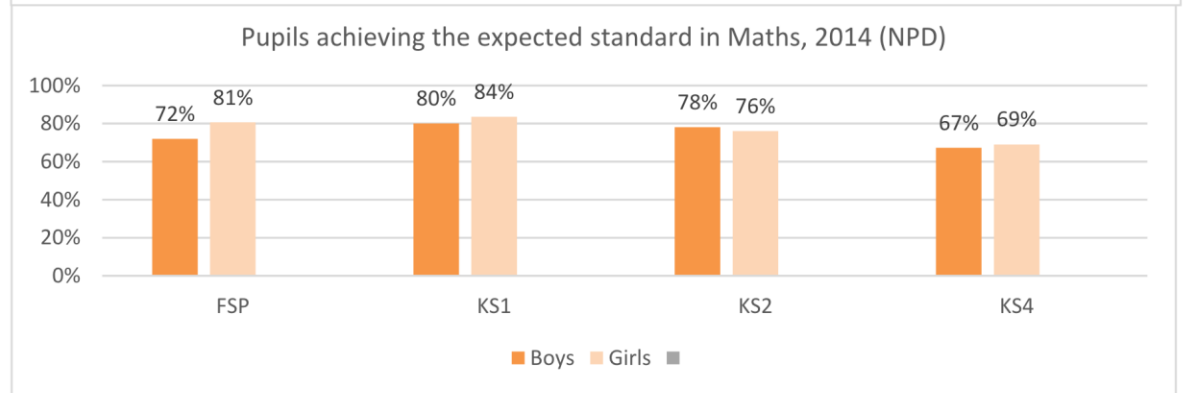
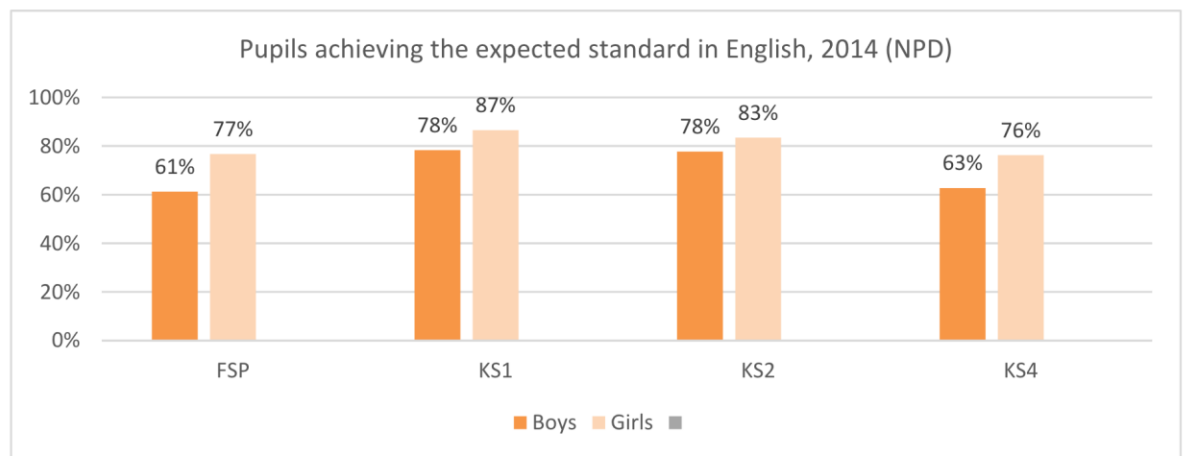
1. We are talking about differences between *groups*, these won't always apply to individuals.
2. Assuming all boys are the same can itself cause problems.
3. We don't need to make any assumptions about nature vs nurture.
4. We are talking about groups as a way of developing practice and hence outcomes.

# *RAISING BOYS' ACHIEVEMENT* (YOUNGER ET AL. 2005)

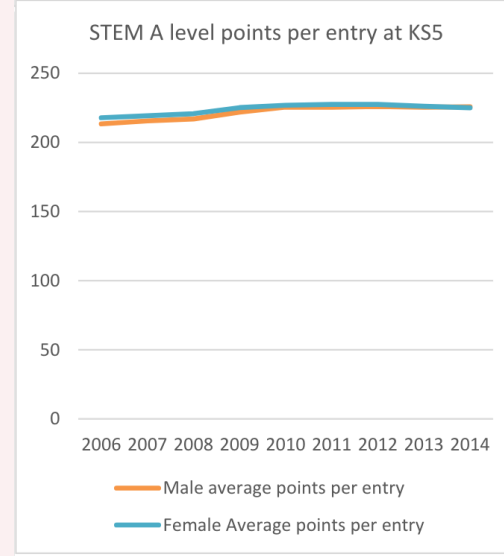
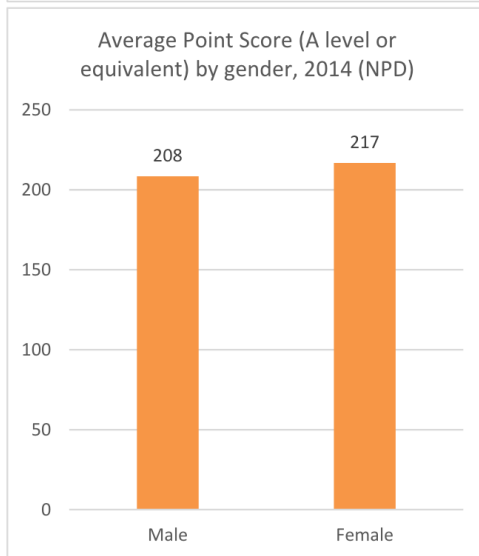
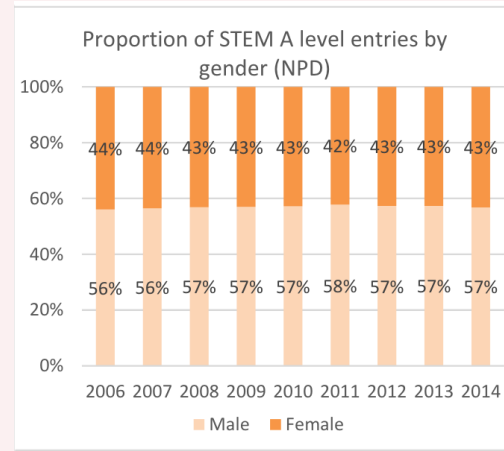
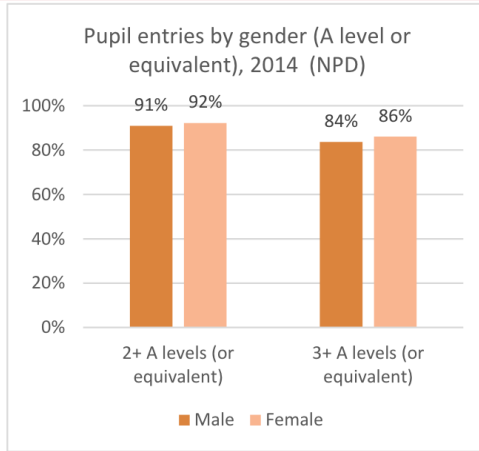
- All pupils' achievement is rising through time...
- ...but boys' achievement is rising less rapidly than girls'.



SHAW ET AL.  
(2016)

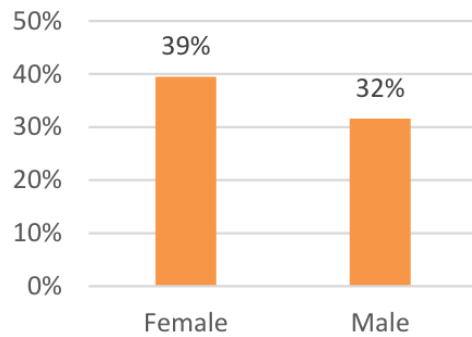






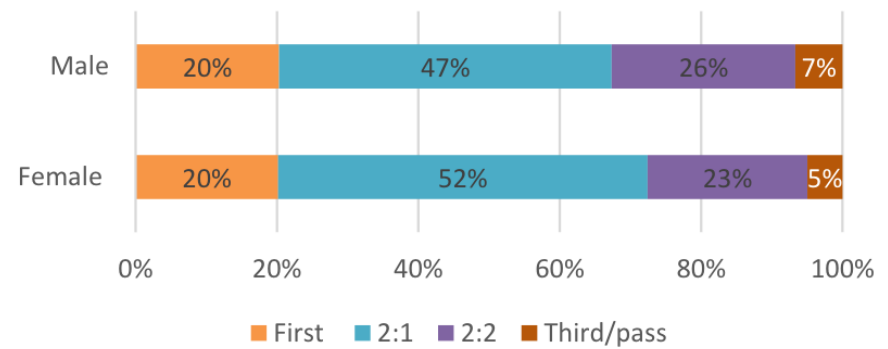
### Participation in HE at age 18 or 19

(students taking GCSEs in 2008, Greaves and Crawford 2015)



### First degree undergraduate qualifiers degree class by gender

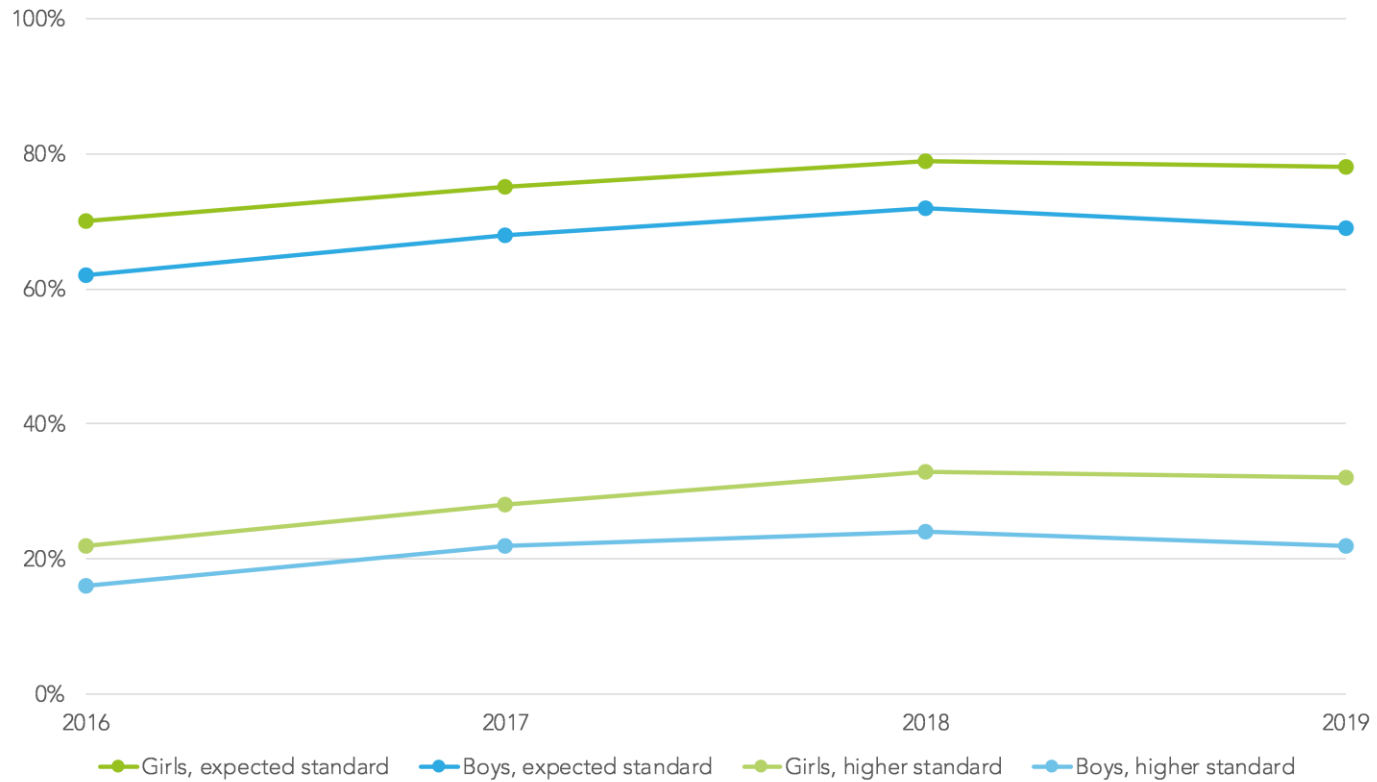
(HESA records 2013/14, ECU 2015)



# *RAISING BOYS' ACHIEVEMENT* (YOUNGER ET AL. 2005)

- All pupils' achievement is rising through time...
- ...but boys' achievement is rising less rapidly than girls'.
- Generalisations might conceal as much as they reveal
- A focus on *literacy*, particularly writing is important.
- Divided interventions into **pedagogic**, **individual**, **organisational** and **social-cultural**

Pupils reaching the expected standard and a higher standard  
in Key Stage 2 reading, by gender, 2016-2019  
All schools, England



(Nye and Thomson 2019)



WHY



What do you think are the characteristics of boys which hold them back compared to girls?

*(High level features)*

# WHY THE DIFFERENTIAL ACHIEVEMENT?

*'We face a genuine problem of under-achievement among boys, particularly those from working class families. This under-achievement is linked to a laddish culture which in many areas has grown out of deprivation, and a lack of both self-confidence and opportunity'.*

David Blunkett in The Observer (2000)

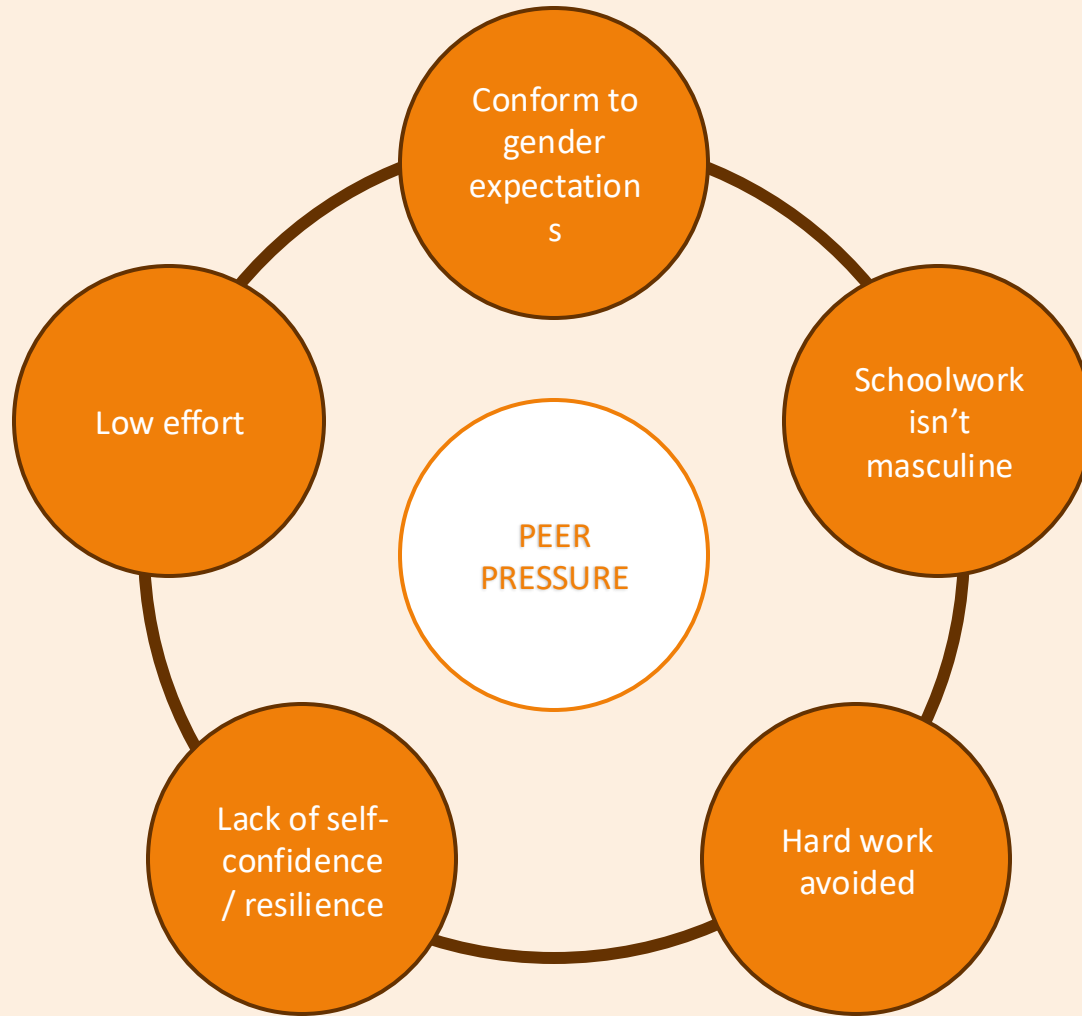
# WHY THE DIFFERENTIAL ACHIEVEMENT? (II)

Variety of explanations offered:

- brain differences between girls and boys
- boys' disregard for authority, academic work and formal achievement
- differences in students' attitudes to work, and their goals and aspirations
- girls' increased maturity and more effective learning strategies
- differential gender interactions between pupils and teachers in the classroom

## BUT MANY BOYS DO WELL!

# BOYS



After Pinkett and Roberts (2019)





# FOUR MYTHS



# 1. INTRODUCE COMPETITION

- Studies show that boys like competition...
- ...so introducing more competition into lessons will help them learn.



*“[Increasing competition] is likely to exacerbate the adoption of defensive strategies on the part of many boys”*

(Jackson 2002)

## 2. MAKE LEARNING RELEVANT

- Boys find the normal learning environment uncomfortable.
- So deliver through the curriculum through topics boys are interested in: football, gaming....



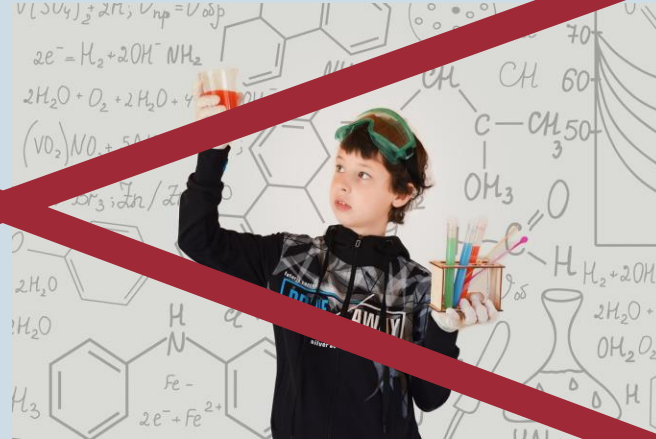
*“...I don’t think content drives interest...”*

*The content of a problem...may be sufficient to prompt your interest, but it won’t maintain it.”*

(Willingham 2021)

### 3. BOYS' HAVE A KINAESTHETIC LEARNING STYLE

- “Boys learn best when they are moving or involved in hands-on activities”

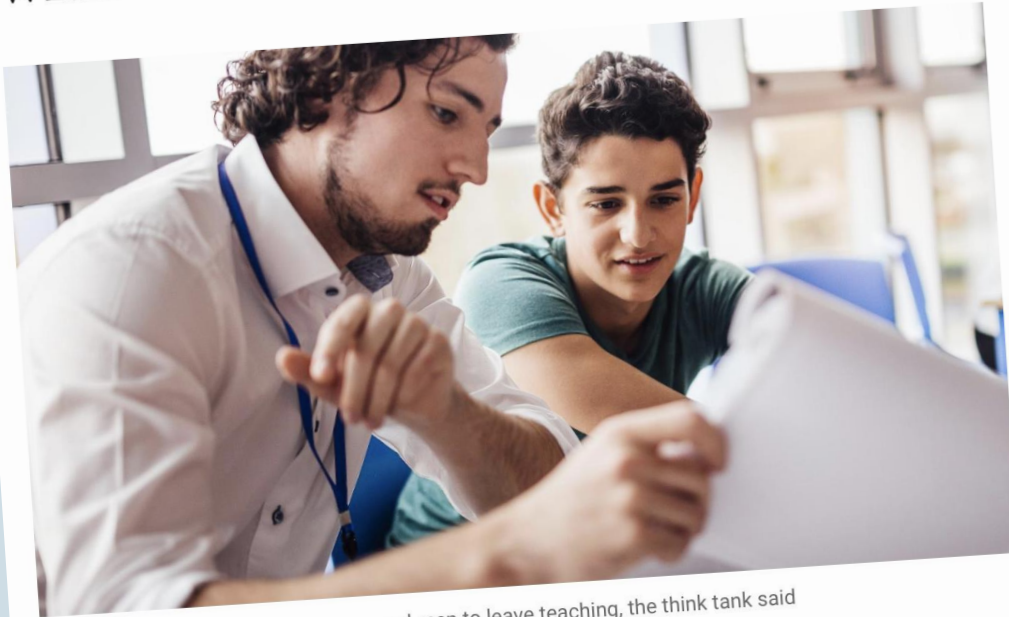


*“Analysis of the learning dominance profiles ... did not reveal any correlation with gender: indeed, contrary to assertions in some of the literature, the mean scores suggested that, if anything, there was more of a kinaesthetic tendency amongst the girls than the boys.”*

(Younger et al. 2005)

# 4. BOYS PERFORM BETTER WITH MALE TEACHERS AS ROLE MODELS

## Exodus of male teachers leaves boys without role models



A pay freeze is likely to have encouraged men to leave teaching, the think tank said

GETTY IMAGES

Share



Save



Thousands of male teachers are leaving secondary school classrooms every year, fuelling fears that a lack of role models is contributing to the under-performance of boys.

- Repeated studies show no impact of gender of teachers on student progress
- Students ascribe very little importance to their teacher's gender

For more see Wright and Brownhill(2018)

(Greg Hurst 2020)



1. These stereotypes boys! And may well reinforce these stereotypes further
2. Could reinforce unhelpful notions of masculinity
3. If boys aren't motivated they will get bored anyway
4. There is a risk that the 'relevant' part will be learned and not the curriculum
5. Encourages low expectations
6. It prevents the building of cultural capital

# BREAK TIME!

- Have a break / stretch / coffee!
- Open the form on the right
- Reflect on your priorities in your classroom(s)
- Choose top 3
- Submit form

Barriers impacting on boys'  
achievement



<https://forms.office.com/r/4GB0geL7J5>



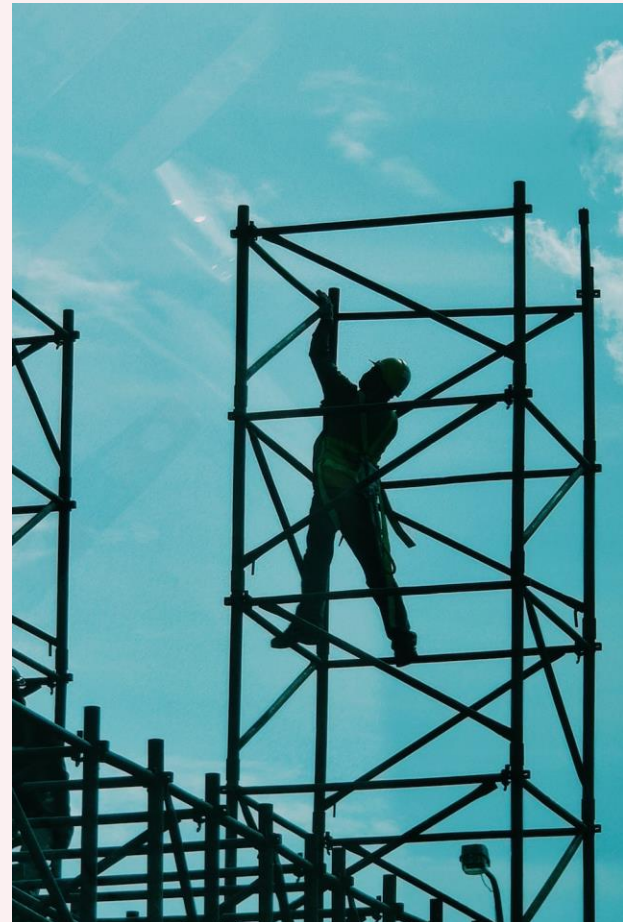
# IN THE CLASSROOM





# SCAFFOLD FOR SUCCESS

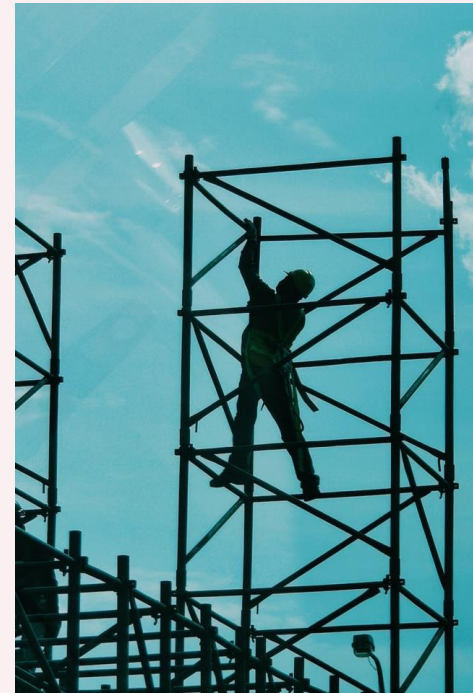
- Traditional differentiation excludes pupils from extension tasks
- Challenge + scaffold includes everyone



# WHAT IS SCAFFOLDING?

*The idea is that you should always create lessons that are challenging but achievable for students. The role for teachers is to provide that support (or 'scaffolding') until the student can complete the task without help*

(Jerome Bruner)



# EXAMPLE

Write a paragraph explaining how nuclear fission can lead to a chain reaction.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [5]

1. Explain what happens when a single uranium atom undergoes nuclear fission

.....  
.....  
..... [2]

2. Explain what happens to the smaller fission products if they do not pass out of the sample

.....  
..... [1]

3. Explain the effect of these smaller fission products on the other atoms of uranium in the sample

.....  
..... [1]

4. Explain how this can lead to a chain reaction

.....  
..... [1]

In a ..... reactor, a ..... is absorbed into a nucleus (typically .....). This causes the nucleus to split into two large fragments called '*daughter nuclei*'. In addition to the 'daughter' products, two or three ..... also explode out of the fission reaction. Many will leave the reactor, but some can collide with other ....., causing further fission reactions. As the number of nuclei involved is ..... with each step, this is known as a .....

# THEN ENGAGE STUDENTS IN WHOLE-CLASS TEACHING

- Builds confidence
- Avoids praise for easy task (low expectations)
- Avoids lack of involvement in 'harder' tasks



# MORE EXAMPLES

- Task planner
- A list of the steps a pupil needs to take
- Model examples of work
- Images that support vocabulary learning
- Word bank
- Writing Frame
- Sentence starters

# ONE-ON-ONE VERBAL SCAFFOLD

- “Let’s look at this together...”
- “What have you done before, that will help you with this task?”
- “Don’t forget, your work needs to include...”







## TASK

Think of an opportunity to provide scaffolding so all pupils can access the main task providing an opportunity for success during whole-class discussion

- Task planner
- A list of the steps a pupil needs to take
- Model examples of work
- Images that support vocabulary learning
- Word bank
- Writing Frame
- Sentence starters
- Verbal scaffolding

# MASTERY OVER PERFORMANCE

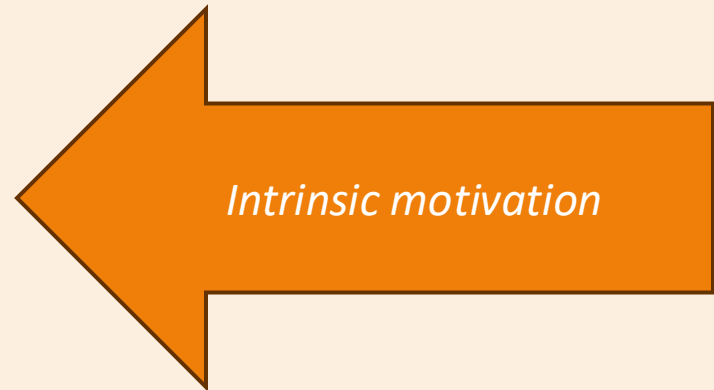
## Performance goals

- receiving good grades
- outperforming others
- receiving positive feedback



## Mastery goals

- learning new knowledge
- mastery over time
- enjoy challenge



# FOCUS ON TASKS AND LANGUAGE

- Help student understand that struggle and frustration are part of learning
- Encourage students with specific learning goals
- Be careful with general exhortations / praise
- Work on gradual improvement
- Be patient!



# EFFECTIVE GOAL SETTING

## **Less effective standalone goal**

*I am going to meet the required standard in reading SATS*

**How are we going to get there?**

## Goal

- Meet the standard

## Plan

- During silent reading I will stretch myself with challenging texts

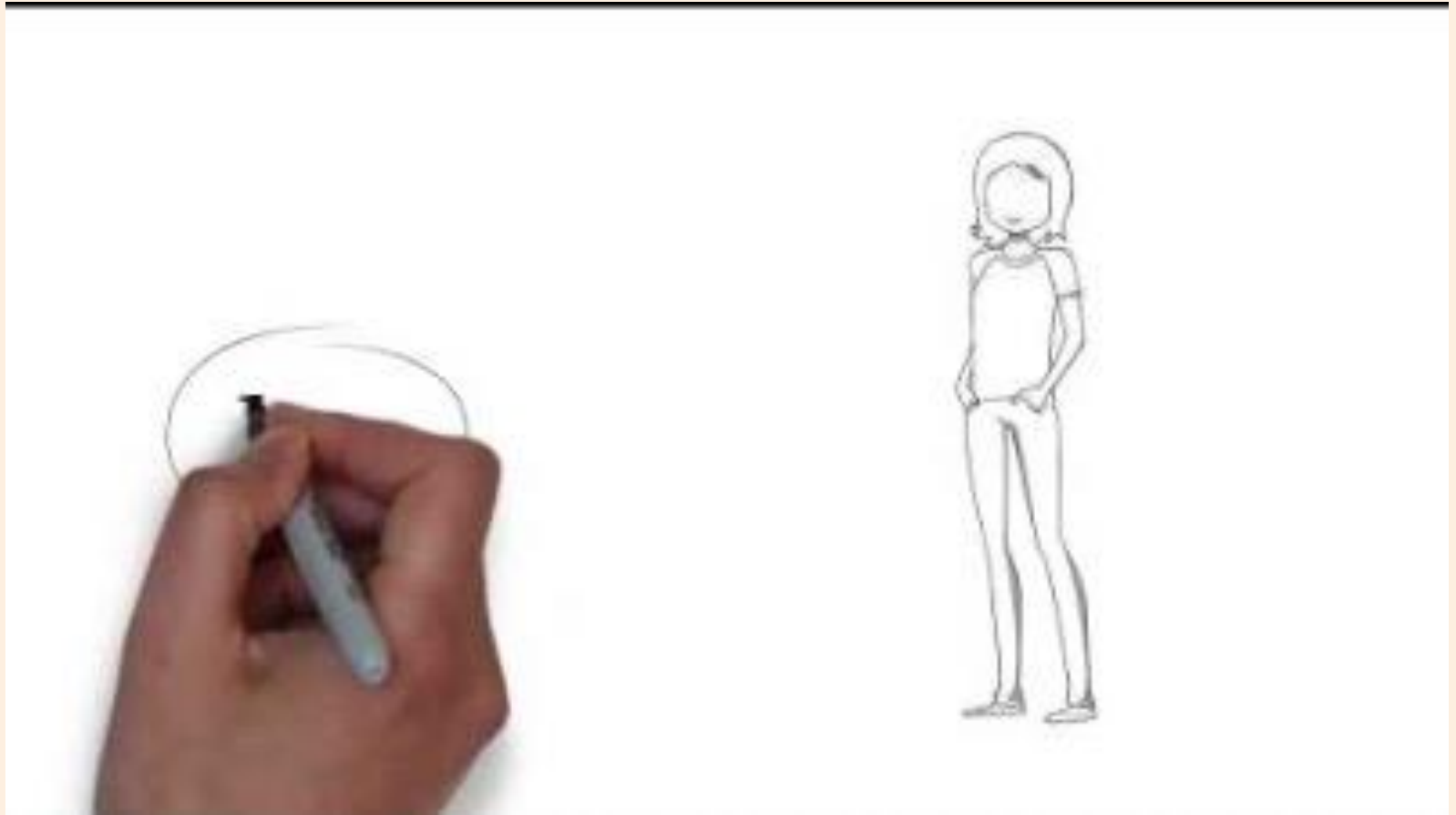
## Rule

- I read harder texts in school and easier texts in the evening

## Habit

- Four challenging texts read in the last half term

# WOOP!



# COMPETITION REVISITED

Mastery goals imply competition against prior selves:

- Focus on gradual improvement
- Highlight how far they have come



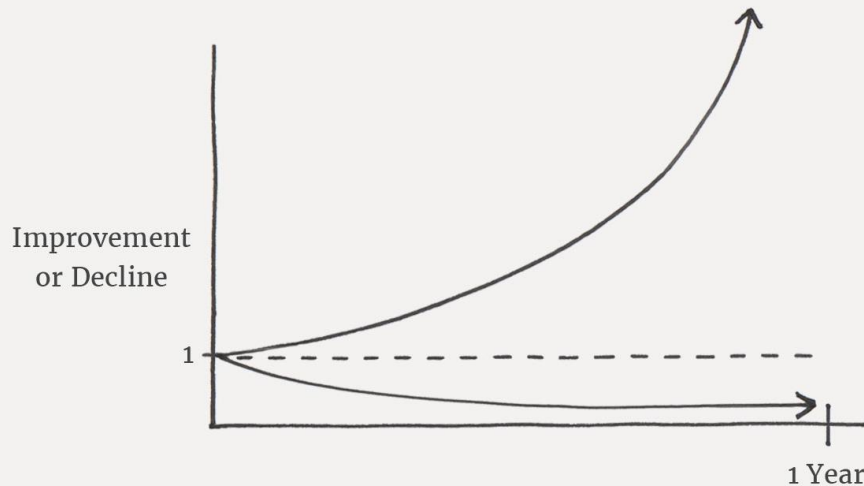
(British Cycling)

# MARGINAL GAINS

## The Power of Tiny Gains

1% better every day  $1.01^{365} = 37.78$

1% worse every day  $0.99^{365} = 0.03$



JamesClear.com





## TASK

Think about a key barrier prevent an underperforming boy you teach (or group of boys) from performing well.

- What is causing this obstacle?
- What *habit* needs to be embedded in order surmount this obstacle?
- How can you set a goal/task to embed this habit?

# STUDY SKILLS



# WHY MIGHT STUDENTS NOT STUDY EFFECTIVELY?

- In surveys, the majority of students put in less time studying than they would expect of a 'good student'

In particular, boys:

- start their homework later in the day than girls and spend half their time completing it
- are more likely to come to school unprepared
- are less likely to seek help
- are less likely to set themselves up in a helpful environment
- work inconsistently and produce work that is poorly planned
- are less likely to study at home

(Roberts 2021)

# ARE BOYS OVERCONFIDENT?



# EFFECTIVE STUDY SKILLS

Technique	Utility
Elaborative interrogation	Moderate
Self-explanation	Moderate
Summarization	Low
Highlighting	Low
The keyword mnemonic	Low
Imagery use for text learning	Low
Rereading	Low
Practice testing	High
Distributed practice	High
Interleaved practice	Moderate

(Dunlosky et al. 2013)

# WHAT CAN WE DO?



Teach pupils to  
revise effectively



No opt-out



Honest review



Curriculum  
planning

(Mark Enser 2019)

# TEACH STUDY SKILLS AND SELF REGULATION

- Pre-work checklist
- Study timetables
- Evaluation
- Work environment
- Procrastination
- Effective techniques

Question	Give details	Y/N
1. Have I got all the equipment I need for this session?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Green flash cards</li> <li>• Calculator</li> <li>• Mathshelp login details</li> <li>• A4 lined paper</li> <li>• Art photos from my phone (ask mum to print these out)</li> </ul>	✓
2. What prior knowledge do I have about these topics?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know about tree diagrams but struggled with product rules</li> <li>• Did a practice &amp; mark question last week in class</li> </ul>	✓
3. Where are my learning materials?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mathshelp videos 4b &amp; 4c</li> <li>• Business studies exercise book and Ms T's revision guide (model example)</li> </ul>	✓
4. What techniques will I be using today?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maths brain dump on tree diagrams</li> <li>• Put key points from Ms T's marketing model answer on flash cards for retrieval practice next week</li> </ul>	✓
5. What will I achieve by the end of the session?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finish leaf drawing in charcoal</li> <li>• Be able to answer easier product rule questions</li> <li>• Know enough about marketing plans to be able to do own &amp; mark answer next session</li> </ul>	✓

(Roberts 2021)



## TASK

*How can you integrate teaching and evaluating study skills into your teaching in the second half of term?*

- What aspects are holding students back? (Getting started, organisations, environment)
- How do students know what techniques to use?
- How are we ensuring that students complete the task?



# FEEDBACK

**Teaching and Learning Toolkit**  
An accessible summary of education evidence

[Watch the Toolkit explainer](#) [Read our guide to using the Toolkit](#)

Implementation cost <sup>?</sup> Evidence strength <sup>?</sup> Impact (months) <sup>?</sup>

£ ————— £    🔒 ————— 🔒    + ————— +

Search by keyword ▾

Toolkit Strands <sup>A</sup> / <sub>Z</sub>	Cost <sup>↓</sup> / <sub>↑</sub>	Evidence <sup>↓</sup> / <sub>↑</sub>	Impact <sup>↓</sup> / <sub>↑</sub>
<b>Metacognition and self-regulation</b> Very high impact for very low cost based on extensive evidence.	£ £ £ £ £	🔒 🔒 🔒 🔒 🔒	+7
<b>Reading comprehension strategies</b> Very high impact for very low cost based on extensive evidence.	£ £ £ £ £	🔒 🔒 🔒 🔒 🔒	+6
<b>Oral language interventions</b> Very high impact for very low cost based on extensive evidence.	£ £ £ £ £	🔒 🔒 🔒 🔒 🔒	+6
<b>Feedback</b> Very high impact for very low cost based on extensive evidence.	£ £ £ £ £	🔒 🔒 🔒 🔒 🔒	+6

(Sutton Trust 2023)

# EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

- Diagnostic
- Timely
- Acted upon
- Understandable
- Motivational



# MANAGERIAL FEEDBACK

Focussed on *work habits*

## Commenting on:

- handwriting
- presentation
- tools used (e.g. pen to draw a graph)
- state of book
- task completion

- ❖ Boys are more likely to receive managerial feedback than girls
- ❖ Where girls do receive managerial feedback it is usually positive]
- ❖ Girls are more likely than boys to receive managerial feedback at the end of a task

(Morgan 2001)

use capital letters for proper nouns

Try factorising as an approach to solving these problems

please write more

Use the adverb 'specifically' to make your points clear

You can do better than this!

Good work – well done!

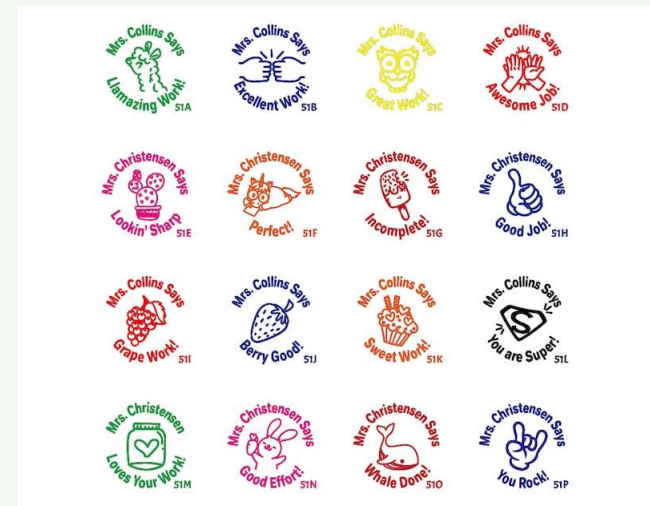
make sure you finish all the questions

Select evidence to support your points in the second paragraph

try to spend more time on your work in future

# THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT PRAISE

- Is it clear what is being praised?
- Are we feeding extrinsic motivation?
- Do boys appreciate public praise?
- How is praise motivating?



# NOT ALL FEEDBACK IS WRITTEN

## Applications and approaches

Written feedback

+5

+

Oral feedback

+7

+



## TASK

Think about some marking you are currently doing or is coming up.

What is the key learning barrier for your target learners? What is the most effective feedback you can give?

Think about feedback being:

- Diagnostic
- Timely
- Acted upon
- Understandable
- Motivational

# KEY TAKE AWAYS

- Boys' underperformance is real, and its causes are complex.
- In supporting boys, we must avoid reinforcing stereotypes.
- Quality teaching to help boys make progress must be central to our response.
  - Scaffolding
  - Goals/Habits
  - Study skills
  - Feedback

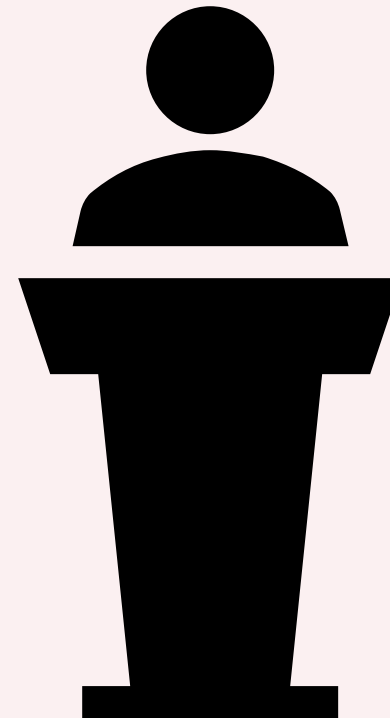


# FINAL THOUGHTS



# NEXT TIME

- Literacy for boys
- Developing boys' attitudes
- Beyond the classroom
- Whole-school elements



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