



## The Progression Programme

### Overview

The journey to productive working lives starts well before employment begins. This case study describes how Business Psychologists have supported Educators in investing in young people, to change their outlook and opportunities.

Working with the Hackney Learning Trust, who wanted to address the slow rate of school progress of boys of African/Caribbean descent, they delivered a Programme to help build emotional resilience, self-esteem and self-efficacy in these Students.

Thanks to this Programme, 60 fifteen-year-old young people became more optimistic about their lives and, as a result, schools signing up for the Programme increased from three, in the first year, to 10 in the next.

### Challenge

#### A National Concern

“The underachievement of Black Caribbean heritage pupils has been a persistent problem facing national policy makers in British schools for many years. Over the past four decades national research has shown that Black Caribbean heritage pupils’ achievements persistently lag behind the average achievement of their peers and the gap is growing at the end of primary and secondary education. This underachievement issue is a question that has stirred emotions from as early as the 1950s when the Black Caribbean community grew concerned about their children’s education. Coard (1971) argued that they encountered widespread lack of understanding about the needs of Black Caribbean pupils, ‘fuelling the widely-held belief that Black children were somehow educationally subnormal’. He explained how the low expectations of Teachers damaged pupils’ motivation and confidence thus dooming them to a life of underachievement.” (Demie & McLean, 2017.)

#### The Golem Effect

The academic underachievement of boys of black ethnic origin which has been reported is evidenced by much lower than average GCSE results when compared to other students, and lower rates of participation in school sixth forms, and in higher education.

This persistent deficit model, reinforcing negative stereotypes, has a Golem effect, adversely impacting the expectations of all boys, regardless of their academic performance. (The Golem effect is a psychological phenomenon in which lower expectations placed upon individuals lead to poorer performance by the individual. This effect is mostly seen and studied in educational and organisational environments. It is a form of ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ (Babad, Inbar & Rosenthal, 1982).

Other elements of disadvantage that were identified as limiting the boys' educational performance in Hackney Council's Child Poverty Needs Assessment Report of 2014, included:

- Poverty, with 56% of black children-African/Caribbean background in poverty compared to 25% of white children-European background ('poverty' defined as families whose income was less than £13,728 a year or £264 a week, before housing costs had been deducted from their income)
- High rates of unemployment, with 19.2% of black British males unemployed compared to a national average of 8.5%

Additionally, in the Outcomes of School Exclusions in Hackney report it was noted, "the levels of permanent exclusions for secondary schools remain constant... and the vast majority of the permanently excluded pupils were either African, Caribbean or Mixed Heritage boys. This points to a clear overrepresentation of Caribbean boys in the cohort of children permanently excluded from secondary schools. This group of children is also overrepresented in the rates of fixed term exclusions for both primary and secondary school."

The social support infrastructure available in Black Caribbean heritage communities has also been lacking or limited. Despite the Government's investment in schools, Black Caribbean heritage young people attend schools where unconscious bias is likely to exist, often living in areas with above average levels of criminality and homelessness.

### Responding to the Challenge

The Hackney Learning Trust noted that many Black Caribbean heritage students had a range of not only socio-economic and educational challenges which impacted their development; but also the emotional changes which they experienced during adolescence.

When the Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP launched the Department for Education's Character Awards in January 2015, they described character traits, attributes and behaviours that underpinned success in school and work, including:

- perseverance, resilience and grit
- confidence and optimism
- motivation, drive and ambition
- neighbourliness and community spirit
- tolerance and respect
- honesty, integrity and dignity
- conscientiousness, curiosity and focus

The government believed that developing these characteristics in education would enable pupils to emerge from school more fully rounded, resilient, and better equipped to meet the challenges of employment and future life.

The Hackney Learning Trust asked Business Psychologists at Inemmo and CA Amos Associates to develop students' 'Character' as defined by the Awards (above).

They wanted the Programme to support the boys in building their character qualitatively, using business psychology models. As a measure of the Programme's success, they wanted

to reference pupils' performance against an existing 'Character' questionnaire. The Hackney Learning Trust had compiled a questionnaire with 34 questions that they believed measured a range of important student characteristics. They wanted the Programme to produce at least a 5% to 10% improvement across the 34 questions for the cohort of 60 students.

## Approach

### Business Psychology Applied

The Consultants at Inemmo and CA Amos Associates were experienced Business Psychologists who knew the importance of individual change and understood that changes in attitudes and beliefs were necessary to achieve behaviour modification.

They believed, to bring about behavioural change, a psychological approach was required. They recommended a Progression Programme that consisted of experiential workshops, coaching and mentoring. Importantly, the Programme would be supported by a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) based approach to examining each individuals' beliefs and thoughts, in order to consider the impact of their thinking on their emotions and self-esteem.

*(CBT is a psycho-social intervention. It is a short-term, goal-oriented practical approach to problem-solving. Its goal is to change patterns of thinking or behaviour that are behind people's difficulties, and so change the way they feel. CBT is based on a combination of basic principles from behavioural and cognitive psychology (Beck, 2011).) - Clodagh O'Reilly, Founder of the ABP Awards*

The Programme's purpose was to support young people in their personal development. It helped the students to improve their personal effectiveness by developing self-awareness and enhancing self-belief, confidence and skills that facilitated successful interaction with others.

Progression Programme workshops with the Business Psychologists provided space for Students to explore and learn new techniques. And group coaching sessions gave each Student the space to explore attitudes, behaviours and communication styles.

The Business Psychologists also incorporated the use of a psychometric model to introduce deeper Business Psychology concepts to the students. They selected the Lumina Spark model, a model they believed would appeal to the young people they were working with.

*(Lumina Spark looks at personality preferences; prominent behavioural traits, also called qualities in the Lumina Spark model. Based on the Big Five central personality dimensions and the eight personality traits within them, 24 different qualities are measured with the help of an online questionnaire. The results are presented in easy to understand format, with personalised text and meaningful graphics.)- Clodagh O'Reilly, Founder of the ABP Awards*

The Lumina Spark reports delivered to the students, with feedback, guided them to integrate 'Lumina language' in their everyday communications. These reports continued to be useful to the students beyond the Progression Programme, contributing to their ongoing development at school. The Persona report detailed Students':

- Underlying Persona, their natural self
- Everyday Persona, their conscious self
- Overextended Persona, representing their experience under pressure

## Preparing for the Programme

Progression Programme Teachers and staff participated in an Orientation Workshop facilitated by Progression Consultants during which they also had an opportunity to explore their own unique Lumina Portraits and a number of the models the Students were to experience. This allowed the Teachers and staff to support the Students during and after the intervention.

Training was delivered by a multi-disciplined team of Accredited Coaches and Business Psychologists who specialised in career, executive, leadership and life coaching. They were able to use, with impact, a range of tools and techniques to support the Students through their personal journeys of change, for example using a precursor to Cognitive Behavioural Psychology in the form of Albert Ellis's very simple-to-understand ABCDE model.

*(ABCDE is a mnemonic developed in the field of rational-emotive behaviour therapy, to help people mentally work through a reflection process to consider if they want or need to change their thinking and therefore their behaviour around some emotions. The basic idea behind Albert Ellis' ABC model is that external events do not cause emotions, but beliefs (particularly irrational beliefs) do (Sarracino et al., 2017).*

Another way to express the ABC model is:

*our emotions and behaviours (C: Consequences)*

*are not directly determined by external life events (A: Activating Events)*

*but rather by the way these events are cognitively processed and evaluated (B: Beliefs)*

*(Oltean et al., 2017)*

*Beliefs may be "rational" or "irrational." The goal when extending the ABC model with DE (Disputation and Effect) is to help the client accept the rational beliefs and dispute the irrational beliefs. This disputation process is what results in the model often being referred to as the "ABCDE" Model. According to Jorn, 2016:*

*D: Disputation of Beliefs*

*E: the new Effect, or the result of holding healthier beliefs*

*Disputation (challenging irrational beliefs held) may create a new Effect. - Clodagh O'Reilly, Founder of the ABP Awards*

## The Progression Programme Outline

Students on the Progression Programme experienced the following series of activities:

- Completion of a straightforward online psychometric questionnaire, enabling the production of a personalised Lumina Spark Portrait
- Attendance at a one-day workshop in an atmosphere that was supportive and fun
- Agreement to an action plan for personal goal achievement, using the GROW model

*(GROW is a coaching framework used to unlock potential and possibilities, based on individuals' Goals, Reality, Options and Will, created by Sir John Whitmore and colleagues in the late 1980s) - Clodagh O'Reilly, Founder of the ABP Awards*

- Participation in personal and group bespoke exercises and assignments, post workshop
- Participation in group coaching, to check progress and provide additional support, using the ABCDE model
- Attendance at a final one-day Lumina Spark workshop to check progress and solidify learning

Throughout the Programme the Business Psychologists observed the Students' growth in confidence and development into competent adults.

## Outcome

Evaluation and assessment formed an important part of the Progression Programme.

### Quantified Success

The Business Psychologists' task was to design a Programme to support boys in qualitatively building their character, using Business Psychology models. However, Hackney Learning Trust also required the Programme to produce at least a 5% to 10% improvement in 17 "Enablers," alongside a similar level of reduction in the 17 "Blockers" identified as important to Student performance and reflected in their 34-question 'Character' questionnaire. This questionnaire was administered to the students on the first day and at the end of the Programme. Analysis of the results showed both targets were achieved, with a 9% improvement in the Enablers alongside a 6% reduction in the Blockers.

The results showed changes to self-assessment scores by Students, from the beginning to the end of the Programme. Students' completed the questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale, from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

Average Student self-report ratings for **Enablers** showed improvement as follows:

"I like who I am as a person," increased 0.25, which equates to an increase of 5 percentage points

- "If asked, I could tell you something good about myself," increased 8 percentage points
- "I think I do most things as well as anyone I know," increased 11 percentage points
- "I feel good about myself," increased 5.8 percentage points
- "I have lots to be proud of," increased 6.6 percentage points
- "I could confidently speak in front of groups of people," increased 12 percentage points
- "I believe I can achieve whatever I set my mind to," increased 7.2 percentage points
- "I ask questions when I don't understand or need more information," increased 2.6 percentage points
- "I am happy to work in a group with people I don't know very well," increased 7.6 percentage points
- "I know how to handle situations that I wasn't expecting," increased 7.6 percentage points

- “When I am in trouble, I will find someone that I can talk to,” increased 6 percentage points
- “I believe that my opinion matters,” increased 5.8 percentage points
- “I have good communication skills,” increased 4.4 percentage points
- “I am good at solving problems,” increased 9.8 percentage points
- “I work well in a team,” increased 6.6 percentage points
- “I am usually able to influence other people,” increased 6.4 percentage points
- “When I am feeling anxious, I can think of ways to calm myself down,” increased 5 percentage points

Average Student self-report ratings for **Blockers** showed improvement on the five-point scale as follows:

- “I would have a hard time coming up with my top three strengths, if asked to list them,” reduced 13.4 percentage points
- “I find that it’s better not to get my hopes up, so that I don’t end up disappointed,” reduced 14 percentage points
- “When I need to do something difficult or unpleasant, I find it hard to motivate myself to get started,” reduced 1.4 percentage points
- “Comments that others have made to me have affected my self-confidence,” reduced 6 percentage points
- “I find it difficult to praise myself and rely on others to tell me when I have done a good job,” reduced 7.4 percentage points
- “Sometimes, I think I am no good at all,” reduced 1.4 percentage points
- “If I am not good at something right away, I’d rather quit than waste my time,” reduced 0.6 percentage points
- “I wish I could have more respect from others,” reduced 1.2 percentage points
- “I feel more comfortable when someone else makes my decisions for me,” reduced 3 percentage points
- “When I mess up, I say things such as “I am such a loser”, “Stupid, stupid, stupid”, or “I can’t do anything right,” reduced 2.6 percentage points
- “I am not satisfied with my work unless someone else praises it,” reduced 1 percentage point
- “I usually find it difficult to express myself clearly,” reduced 1.8 percentage points
- “I often find it difficult to see things from another person’s point of view,” reduced 4.6 percentage points
- “Generally, I don’t pay much attention to how other people are feeling,” reduced 8 percentage points
- “I often find it difficult to recognise what emotion I am feeling,” reduced 0.2 percentage points



- “I find it difficult to speak about my feelings even to my closest friends,” showed a small increase of 0.6 percentage points
- “I find myself feeling nervous about situations or events, and I don’t even know why,” showed no change when aggregated

## Qualitative Success

Overall, the Programme set out to improve:

- Self-esteem, which comprised both self-confidence and self-acceptance
- Resilience, as lacking resilience can hinder individuals’ progress due to their inability to adapt
- Self-efficacy, including helping Students build a belief in their ability to learn new things, complete tasks and achieve goals

Having qualitatively analysed both Students’ and Teachers’ feedback on the Programme, the Business Psychologists could report progress in:

- Students changing negative habits and attitudes, and improving their performance in all aspects of their lives
- Students recognising and addressing behavioural and emotional responses to situations
- Students building greater emotional resilience, so that they could ‘ride the waves of adversity’ and succeed in spite of their circumstances
- Students’ understanding of how to transform important relationships and communication skills

## Teacher Feedback

Examples of specific feedback received on the Programme included a message from the Head Teacher of a participating school who wrote, “I am writing to express our thanks and enthusiasm for the work you have both done in enabling our students to be involved with the Progression Project. The personality profiles and their use seem to have had a particularly strong and positive effect for each individual. We would love to continue to be involved and look forward to hearing about how this could happen over the coming years.”

## Student Feedback

A Student on the Progression Programme wrote, “I think the Programme has changed everyone’s perception of themselves. I have learnt that you cannot truly succeed without understanding who you are. The Programmes have enlightened me and allowed me to relate with others who I wouldn’t normally speak to. I enjoyed the coaching Programme the most as there was a larger focus on a smaller group. I’ve learnt more about myself and others in a shorter space of time. However, the larger sessions gave us time to express ourselves amidst a group of people and give us new skills. Overall, I enjoyed these sessions as they were, simply, lessons of life where we can understand who we are as a collaborative group and how we will reach success.”

Other Student comments included:

- “I feel that this Programme has helped me to learn more about myself and how I can improve some aspects of myself. It has also improved my confidence”



- “It helped me to express my feelings more and I can work with others now. I know my strengths”
- “I feel more confident and I can use more techniques every day”
- “I’ve learnt that I need to be adaptable and flexible in order to fit in with society and [my] environment”
- “This Programme has been really eye-opening and has helped me discover some of my strengths and to use them as an advantage”
- “I have learnt that I can rely on others’ opinions”
- “I believe I can achieve whatever I set my mind on”
- “The Programme raised my self-awareness. It was really enjoyable as I had fun really. It opened my mind, giving me many advantages”
- “I believe this Programme has helped me to know who I am as a person. And to face the world”
- “After this Programme, I think I can be more open with my feelings”
- “It has helped me adapt to some people in a different way than I would have done before. It helped me know who I am”
- “I think this workshop helped me in different ways, like I talk to more people now as it’s easy to find out things when you can talk”

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