

Building self-worth through guided visualisation: a unique project with disturbed pupils

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This report on the work of the Swindon Youth Empowerment Project (SYEP) explores how personal and social transformations can take place when young people with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties are encouraged to talk through their life choices conceptually using visualisation, symbol and metaphor. This educational project was designed to empower disaffected pupils in urban schools who are failing academically. They are referred to as 'dispirited' as they lacked motivation and ambition. The SYEP project is unique in that the procedure was created by the team and has no direct parallels elsewhere. The evaluation took place over three years, 2004-2007 with the researcher working alongside the project team and interviewing a range of people involved. In doing so the team were trained in evaluation techniques in order to encourage a long-term culture of evaluation, in schools as well as in the project.

The research demonstrates a clear long-term effect on many of the young people involved. This report discusses a range of factors contributing to this success, primarily relating to trusting and empowering the young people so that they value themselves and their abilities, build positive and caring relationships with others, and work towards creating a better world. It locates the benefits of the project in relation to theoretical discussions about holistic education, self-belief, emotional literacy and wellbeing, and therapeutic approaches. It argues that young people can transcend their limited world view, learning to see themselves differently as people with energy, potential, compassion and the ability to affect positive change. In this they can reach out to others and with others, building moral understanding and cascading positive attitudes and energies to those around them.