

How can collaboration between year 12/13 and year 9 students improve attitudes and feelings towards the concept of Brotherhood?



Westlake Boys High School
Te Kura Tuarua o Ngā Taitamafane o Ururoto

The Westlake Boys Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

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Introduction

At Westlake Boys, our group of Student Action Research group believed that an obstacle existed that divided the school's seniors and juniors outside of their organised extracurriculars such as sports teams or music groups. Opportunities for these impactful interactions between the Year 12 and 13 and the younger years are often rare, creating a social gap that undermines one of our school's core values, brotherhood, by weakening the student's sense of unity and belonging.

By creating more chances for the two groups to bond and work simultaneously, it gives us genuine collaboration between older and younger students. Doing this, we could replace that distant feeling between the groups with a stronger sense and understanding of belonging and the culture at Westlake Boys. After all, brotherhood is grown through shared experiences, familiarity, trust and consistent time spent together, not just shared spaces.

Literature Review

We used a range of literature to finalise what action we were going to take and the purpose we wanted our action to have more depth than just 'improving brotherhood,' with us going through the process of understanding the key takeaways from each report and synthesising the ideas from them into more specific questions or ideas for actions.

Our findings from Ursula S. Aldana's 'College Dreams, Corporate Work Study, Brotherhood and Belonging: How urban Catholic high schools structure opportunity for low-income Latino and African American male youth.' (2012) were as follows: The importance of a 'social capital, through a sense of family' creates a closer connection for students to the school by seeing it less as an

institution, leading to better opportunity later. Extracurricular activities are a key factor in facilitating this ‘brotherhood.’ Chris Hickey’s ‘Physical education, sport and hyper-masculinity in schools’ (2008) explored the role of sport in masculine connection and how the overpromotion of sport and Physical Education can result in hypermasculinity and exclusion and entitlement. In addition, our findings from Julius Davis and Keisha McIntosh Allen’s ‘Culturally Responsive Mentoring and Instruction for Middle School Black Boys in STEM Programs’ were looked at how students with teachers/mentors of the same race and gender allows them to have better connection and success from these connections from the mentorship scenario.

From these readings we came to question the importance of extracurriculars, sports, and mentorship in brotherhood, and concluded that the commonality between these activities are the collaborative factor; how working together allows for better connection, while also considering similarities between groups allowing for better and faster connection.

Research Question

How can collaboration between year 12/13 and year 9 students in extended Virtute improve attitudes and feelings towards the concept of Brotherhood?

The Action

We decided the best way of investigating how collaboration towards Brotherhood be improved was through activities that required teamwork and problem solving such as puzzles. We had a class of 30 year 9 students and a smaller number of eight senior students ranging from year 12 to 13 participate.

We determined three weeks was sufficient for the action and to measure the brotherhood between senior and junior students. This meant a short enough duration that allowed students to be able to give effort while also giving enough time for students to acclimatise with their new peers.

The following plan for each week was implemented:

1. Icebreaking
2. Practice puzzles
3. Puzzle competition

The first week included an introduction sheet that included various questions to allow Senior and Junior students to get to know each other before the puzzles to prevent any potential hesitancy from unfamiliarity.

The second week was a trial competition that included puzzles like those they would have to solve in the real puzzle competition. These puzzles were comprised of various cryptograms, riddles and anagrams that tested team working and problem-solving abilities. To encourage teamwork and avoid working independently we separated different parts of the puzzles to the juniors and seniors. Seniors would receive majority of the puzzle, including the puzzle itself and any necessary questions while Juniors received hints and supplementary questions to support the seniors. We believed as Seniors have had more experience in teamwork, problem solving and leadership-based events and activities that it was important to allow the Juniors who may lack the experience to work with unfamiliar situations to participate in a less stressful way.

A Senior student commented “I love the way you got us to work together through splitting the work to Senior and Junior students, how we actually had to work together instead of just one person doing everything”

The difficulty of the puzzles ranged from easy, with almost no assistance needed from the coordinators to multitudes of hints needed to solve the puzzle. This was because the importance was not in the puzzles itself, but the ability for the Seniors and Juniors to work together and promote a feeling of brotherhood.

We utilised a reward for the greatest number of puzzles completed within the given time in the final competition (3rd week) to encourage teamwork and boost morale. Finally, we recorded our results from the beginning of the research through a digital form and ended our research with a digital form and compared the differences in results.

Data Analysis

The data (appendix A) shows that many students strongly agree that Brotherhood is important at WBHS, with nearly half of respondents (45.5%) selecting a rating of 8 out of 10 for the statement. Students demonstrated a high level of agreement, with 73% of respondents selecting a score of 8, 9, or 10. The remaining responses were distributed among 10 (18% of respondents), 4 (9% of respondents), 5 (9% of respondents), and 6 (9% of respondents). Overall, this analysis confirms that Year 9 students perceive a high level of importance in Brotherhood at WBHS even before the action.

The data collected shows that many students express strong enthusiasm for having an opportunity to do activities with senior students in extended Virtute. A significant majority of students agree with the action, as over 81% of respondents selected a score of 5 or higher. The remaining responses are distributed across 4, 7, 8, and 9, with each of these scores receiving 2 responses (18.2% of respondents). This relatively even distribution among high agreements (7, 8, and 9 collectively accounting for 54.6% of the responses) confirms that Year 9 students expect value in structured connection activities with senior students during the extended Virtute period.

The results show that senior students in Year 12/13 express a divided but generally positive interest in having an opportunity to do activities with junior students during extended Virtute. The highest level of interest was collected at 10 (33.3%). Fairly high interest (6, 7, and 8) was selected by 50% of the respondents. However, there was also a single response at 1 (16.7%), indicating a disagreement from one senior student. Overall, 83.3% of senior students scored their interest at 6 or higher, suggesting that a large majority of them are interested in this action for connection with junior students.

The results show that students expressed positive enjoyment for the sessions with older/younger students, indicating that the action was highly successful. The highest level of enjoyment was collected at 8, chosen by 6 out of 22 respondents (27.3%). Fairly high enjoyment (6 and 7) was selected by 7 respondents (31.8%), with 7 being the second most frequent response. However, there were three low responses (at scores 1, 3, and 5), each chosen by 1 student (4.5% each), indicating minor dissatisfaction among a few students. Overall, 16 out of 22 students (72.7%)

scored their enjoyment at 7 or higher, suggesting that a large majority of the students experienced a positive and enjoyable connection session.

The results show that the action had a positive impact on students' idea of Brotherhood from the sessions. The highest level of positive impact was collected at 8, chosen by 6 out of 20 respondents (30%). A positive response (6 and 7) was selected by 7 respondents (35%), with 7 (20%) and 6 (15%). However, there were five low responses (at scores 0, 3, 4, 5, and 10), each chosen by 1 student (5% each), indicating no change from the action. Overall, seventeen out of twenty students (85%) scored the impact at 5 or higher, suggesting that a large majority of the students felt the sessions positively influenced their idea of Brotherhood.

Results show that collaborative activities are the most effective method for improving student connection. Nearly half of all respondents (47%) chose collaborative activities as the most impactful session. The second most effective session was the competition, chosen by 26%. Combined, these two planned activities were chosen by 73% of students as the most beneficial for building connections, confirming a strong preference for engaging group work over initial icebreakers or other parts of the session.

Like the results for the most effective sessions, the ranking of sessions shows a clear preference for interaction and activities. Talking with team members was ranked highest, followed by collaborative activities and competition. The icebreaker and other parts were the least favored.

The results show that students generally found the sessions worthwhile. The highest level of satisfaction was collected at 8, chosen by 5 out of 19 respondents (26.3%). High scores of 6, 7, and 8 account for a significant 68.4% of the responses (4 responses for 6, 4 responses for 7, and 5 responses for 8). However, lower scores were present, with 10.5% of respondents selecting a score of 5 and another 5.3% selecting a score of 0, indicating a small minority found no worth in the sessions.

Findings

The key findings from this Action Research were that these collaborative activities generally did create closer connections between senior and junior students involved, creating a sort of 'older brother' relationship. One of the seniors in the project referred to his group of juniors as his 'three musketeers,' indicating there was a positive connection just from the conversations.

We can see that there is an overall enthusiasm from junior students wanting to participate in activities such as these, however there is more of a reluctance with senior students to participate.

There were some variations in responses, with the majority of students enjoying the session, but the minority that didn't was probably due to the competition design as the difficulty and ability of the students might have been overestimated by our team when crafting the competition. This caused some frustration for students. However, despite this, we still see overall positive results.

Conclusions

While collaborative activities are generally effective in increasing brotherhood and connection between the year groups, there may be an issue in the willingness of students to participate, in particular senior students, as it was hard to find seniors that would voluntarily take part in our action, the juniors were more enthusiastic and willing.

The number of seniors posed an interesting challenge. Due to the inconsistent attendance of senior students from uncontrollable circumstances such as sickness, traffic and conflicting programmes we were unable to effectively measure the effect of how the number of sessions affects the brotherhood between senior and junior students. Instead, it allowed us to see how senior and junior students interacted with those they were not acquainted with in situations they had encountered previously.

Through creating a teamwork like scenario, through this research we believe that regardless of the absurdity of the task, a shared experience heightens the connection between different age groups within our school, creating a better community and culture. This could be a factor for consideration in the future for the school when exploring the positive relationship between the boys and the school. This is important for teaching and learning, as boys that have positive feelings towards the school have better attention in class and are better at listening/learning.

A way we could make this more effective could be prolonging these sessions instead of only having a couple of sessions over a couple of weeks. Another way we could improve the effectiveness of this could be to use more of year 12 seniors and put more time into recruiting them, as year 13s generally are quite busy.

We hope that school leadership will consider our Action Research Project findings when planning future activities for junior and senior students. The findings from this project can have further impact on Virtute periods especially. Brotherhood is important to us as year 12 students and we hope that it can be further developed for students in years to come.

References

Ursula S. Aldana (2012) College Dreams, Corporate Work Study, Brotherhood and Belonging: How urban Catholic high schools structure opportunity for low-income Latino and African American male youth. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/24g0k082>

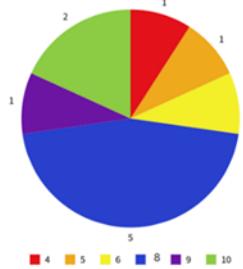
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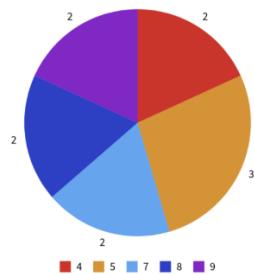
Appendices

Appendix A: Student Survey

How much do Year 9 students agree with the statement, Brotherhood is important at WBHS, on a scale of 1 - 10



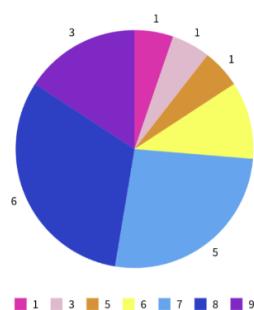
How much do Year 9 students agree with this statement, I would like an opportunity to do activities with senior students on extended virtue on Friday, on a scale of 1 - 10



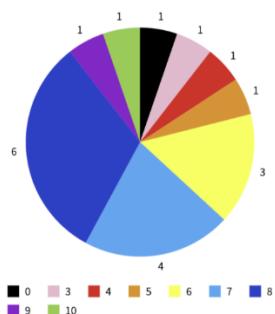
How much do Year 12/13 agree with this statement, I would like an opportunity to do activities with junior students on extended virtue on Friday, on a scale of 1 - 10



How much did the students enjoy these sessions with the older/younger students on a scale of 1 - 10



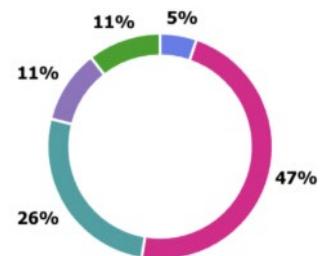
How much did these sessions helped improve student's idea of Brotherhood in WBHS, on a scale of 1 - 10



5. What part of these sessions improved your feeling of connection the most?

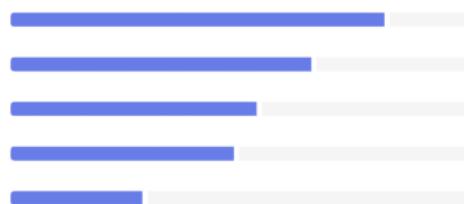
[More details](#)

- What part of these sessions improved your feeling of connection the most? 1
- Doing the collaborative activities 9
- Doing the competition 5
- The icebreaker 2
- Other 2



6. How would you rank these parts? (Higher = more liked)

- 1 Talking with your team member(s)
- 2 Doing the collaborative activities
- 3 Doing the competition
- 4 The icebreaker
- 5 Other



How worthwhile did the students find these sessions, on a scale of 1 - 10

