Catering for all

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Whilst undertaking observations of trainee design and technology teachers in a variety of settings across the North West of England, we have encountered an increasing rise in the number of schools offering catering as part of a varied and diverse range of curriculum options within the suite of design and technology subjects studied across KS3/KS4 and into KS5.

This short article seeks to highlight and celebrate just one of these examples. It looks at the rationale behind the investment in catering as a Key Stage 4 option, both in terms of capital spend (from the point of facilities and rooms) and staffing. Clearly these should be framed against the successes achieved by the young people at the school in question.

Our Lady's R.C. High School, Manchester

At Our Lady's R.C. High School a dedicated team help to deliver the full range of design and technology disciplines to students in a new build facility. Tracey Burke heads up this strong department and the range and quality of the work produced by the children, across a range of material areas is second to none.

Within the department, food which is taught by John Preston and Rebecca McArdle is offered at KS3, where they teach 'food technology' and also at KS4, where the decision has been taken to offer students the option to study catering, following the specification offered by the Welsh Board WJEC.

The rationale behind this decision, to offer catering rather than food technology is explained by Rebecca:

❝We chose catering over food for several reasons. We have some disaffected students who found it difficult to understand the relevance of the previous course. Catering has a more practical and vocational bias that suits our students, and in addition to a dramatic improvement in results we have also noticed increased improvement in behaviour.❞

The decision has resulted in a larger number of children opting which means they now have two groups in Year 10. Another unexpected but welcome side effect has been the increase in uptake of the subject by boys, in direct comparison to when food technology was studied; currently having eighteen boys and six girls.

Grow a Fiver

Using a whole school charity based initiative as a starting point, Rebecca and John explain how they devised and developed the 'Grow a Fiver' project with their catering students, with fantastic results.

Grow a Fiver is a project where a class is given £5 and over a period of time the aim is to 'grow' the original capital which is then reinvested with a view to making as much money as possible which is then donated to

charity. In Rebecca and John's group the initial investment was used to purchase a 25kg sack of potatoes. The cost of which was actually only £3.99.

Sharing out the raw material, the two parallel teaching groups 'converted' their investment into batches of flavoured healthy potato wedges, and in doing so created an even healthier £25 profit.

Amazed by how quickly their original investment had grown, the students were keen to continue. Having captured their imagination, by reinvesting the profit the project continued into a series of regular enterprise activities. The enterprise has given the students many skills; experience of real life scenario's, working to a budget, costing and profit making, client need, marketing and customer care.

As the project grew, the idea emerged to set aside some of the profit which could be invested and used at the end of the year as a treat for the two groups.

Originally the staff considered taking the students out for a meal, but the students had other ideas. As John explains;

> **The students didn't want to go out, they picked the theme of an international Indian buffet. They sourced the ingredients, using local produce where possible and then they planned the menu, undertook the costing and prepared and cooked the food.**

This introduced students to multi cultural cooking and working in small teams they produced starters; lamb samosa's, Bombay potaoes and kofta's. The main course of chicken korai was served with pilau rice and naan bread;

> " Everything was hand made from scratch using raw ingredients. "

John continues,

> " A big emphasis throughout all of this enterprise has been the need to follow the Government healthy eating guidelines and the usage of unprocessed foods, we buy very little convenience foods and all of our food is made from natural raw ingredients including our bread, soups, pastries etc. It is one of the things we pride ourselves highly upon. "

The event provided experience in managing a 'live function' giving them experience in holding a large scale event. The students prepared and made all the food but during the event it was the staff who served the food to them. The event was attended by a host of special guests and also Head teacher James Keulemans, who having presented achievement awards to many of the students exclaimed,

> " this is one of the best curries I have ever eaten. "

The event was an outstanding success and in the true spirit of enterprise, following the

event the students went onto raise an additional £50, by selling the small amount of leftover food as 'take away', which will be used to' jump start' the next project.

Improving student achievement

The decision by staff at Our Lady's R.C. High School to offer catering in preference to food technology has been as a direct result of their desire to improve student achievement. However it has also had a positive impact upon behaviour, increased the number of students opting and has also helped to redress the traditional stereotypical gender imbalance.

In these uncertain times, with many schools currently experiencing falling roles, staff are often under increased pressure to obtain outstanding results. When tasked with finding new innovative ways to address the key issues of improving student attainment and tackling poor behaviour many staff are exploring the possibility of alternative courses, particularly for study at KS4. For the staff and students at Our Lady's, like a growing number of schools we have seen across the North West, the move away from food technology to the introduction of catering appears to be a solution that works.

However what, if any, are the implications of this 'shift'? A shift that appears in part at least, to be as a result of external forces dictating the scope and content of what is taught in our classrooms, rather than adhering to the prescribed content of the National Curriculum.

What are the potential consequences, not only in terms of the immediate impact in

relation to the teaching of food technology, but potentially for design and technology as a whole?

Debate within open environments, such as the Times Educational Supplement (TES) subject group forums, indicate that this shift is a view shared by many, who appear to feel as though teaching food technology may no longer be worthwhile, and that catering is much better option. Additionally there is a further debate about the merits of the food/catering as a subject within its own right 'going it alone'. With many questioning why food/catering is even 'housed' within design and technology.

The next curriculum review, which is due for publication during 2012, may go some way to define the answer to this conundrum, but it is more likely that this debate will continue long after the review has been obtained.

Whatever the outcome, it is evident that catering certainly seems to be meeting the individual needs of a wide range of students. It also appears to meet the needs and demands of school league tables, and therefore for some is proving to be a useful tool in helping to safeguard departments in these difficult and uncertain times. So with catering quite literarily seeming to be a subject which 'caters for all' the question which has to be asked is; is food technology past its use by date?

Nevertheless, technology continues to advance and so does the need to ensure a relevant, challenging and worthwhile technological curriculum in all areas and subjects that make up 'design and technology.'