

Tournament of Minds

Geraldine Nicholas, Professional Learning Coordinator, Tournament of Minds

at a glance

- Meeting the variable needs of students
- A challenge based environment to build creativity
- Using cross-aged teams

All students need nurturing as well as the support and opportunity to participate in programs and activities that enhance their strengths and challenge their weaknesses. Tournament of Minds (TOM) is one program that aids in catering for the variable needs of all students.

TOM as a program, runs within a wide variety of schools and follows no particular model of best practice. How each school or teacher provides the opportunity to participate in TOM is highly dependent upon the finances, time allowance, resources and willingness of staff and administration to identify and foster the needs of those children involved. However, what is immediately evident is the enjoyment and direct benefits, social, academic and emotional for those who engage in TOM.

Many students are not identified through the use of the traditional testing methodology that can overlook ability or potential in many high ability students but TOM draws in a wide pool of students and can be a valuable early predictor of adult creativity and even hint at possible career choices (Olszewski-Kubilius & Lee 2004).

For the thousands of students that have been involved in TOM, it meets the need to be challenged; provides enjoyment in a rigorous environment; the joy of finding 'like-minded' people where age is not the indicator of friendship groups; and the benefit of working in a team to achieve a creative output. It

provides a competitive environment where excellence is celebrated and creativity is applauded. It celebrates that there is never a right or correct answer. The solution to the challenge or problem is always open ended and your interpretation is important as long as you meet the criteria.

What can schools learn from Tournament of Minds?

TOM's mantra of cross aged teams based on their interests or passions has repercussions on the way groups are organised in schools. To allow students to be grouped not only on their ability but on their level of knowledge or even readiness is powerful. Using different strategies to group students is important as this allows the high ability students to act not as teachers but as guides or mentors within the mixed ability group. It also allows for the other students to share their own strengths and perhaps 'show off' skills and knowledge that is not

within the realm of the gifted student.

The use of criteria to assess and judge teams means that the solutions created are not purely prescriptive or to a formula but generates the possibility for imagination, creativity and originality to be fostered and encouraged. Thus the journey is almost as important as the destination for many teams and here success is measured in not just winning but by putting together a presentation with six others.

All TOM challenges are attempted by both secondary and primary teams. The non-age element of the challenges means that teams are exposed to content, ideas and knowledge that could be beyond their year level. This reinforces Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory where children learn best when pushed beyond their level. Thus, by struggling within an environment that accepts risk taking with ideas, provokes the quest for knowledge just beyond what they know and demands a solution that needs

creativity, TOM provides many students with the opportunity to gain many benefits such as leadership, persistence, being flexible and communication.

"it generates the possibility for imagination, creativity and originality to be fostered and encouraged"

Ivanhoe East Primary School

Sherbourne Primary School

This program is really for the gifted and talented students in our school. These students need to work together as a team and sometimes encounter difficulties working in this situation. They learn a great deal about perseverance, these are often the children who find school relatively easy but TOM will really challenge their thinking. They develop their team skills, their co-operation and social skills. They learn to listen to each other and build on ideas.



references

- Gifted and talented: A challenge for all 31

