

What colour is your dragon?

A DRAGON CASE STUDY

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When the Dragon team asked me to write a paragraph for her webinar I thought, gosh it can't be done. How could I possibly convey the incredible experience I've had with the dragons in my classroom so succinctly?

Let me begin by telling you that after just over a decade of teaching within different settings, primary, secondary, mainstream and special schools, I finally discovered a programme that meets all the criteria I would hope to find that addresses the growing social and emotional challenges that we all, students and staff alike, encounter in schools today.

What do I like about it? It's visual, it's creative, it's simple to deliver and the students instantly 'get it'. It's strength is in the science that underpins it. You do not have to be a neuroscientist to use the Dragon Programme. Despite the fact that I am someone who is interested in the neuroscience, I was relieved that I could use the programme and let the neuroscience take care of itself. It really was as easy as that. Follow the programme; trust the science.

The Dragon Programme surprised and excited me from the minute I began using it, both in my professional capacity and on a personal level (I completed activities alongside the students). Surprised by how easily the Dragon Method assimilated into the PSHE curriculum and excited by the creativity that is embedded throughout, yes, it is fun! This approach to learning engages children, reignites their love of learning and reminds me why I got into teaching in the first place.

The specifics: well I introduced the Dragon method to my tutor group, 33 Year 7 students of mixed ability, including learners with EHCP, in Term 2, 2019. I got straight to it. Session 1, WALT (We are learning to) draw a dragon. That caught their interest! In the following few sessions, we took time to fully understand the concept of the red, green and blue colours as emotions that we would feel in our bodies (red - shallow breathing, feeling sick, dread. Green, Slow gentle breathing, calm, smiling) and coloured in our dragons. We all spontaneously began to use Dragon language in our discussions. 'I'm feeling a little red at the moment'. "I was dealing with an incident in the corridor. I need you to all sit quietly while I take some time to gather my greens'. Where I modelled, they followed. Further sessions were dedicated to a whole variety of creative activities, some learner initiated (the best kind). The flexibility of the programme is its strength. Dragon methodology can be applied to (almost) any situation and Dragon language can address any higher-order question about fairly complex subjects.

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Here are my thoughts on the process that unfolded. I was struck by the immediacy of change in some of the students, particularly the more reticent ones and those with specific communication difficulties. Suddenly they had a common language to communicate with. Everybody wanted to share their creativity. We shared in a multitude of ways. Peer to peer. Whole class. I made PowerPoints of their pictures and we looked at them, made observations and asked questions, 'Break-times are green for so many of you', 'Why might this person feel red every morning when they arrive at school?' It wasn't long before students were turning to each other for advice and making helpful suggestions and offering support. The outpouring of empathy was very moving. I felt honoured to call my tutor group my mini Dragon crew.

I believe passionately that you can't simply tell a child to be more empathetic, compassionate and kind, it is our job to give them the tools to develop empathy, discover compassion and practice kindness.

In a nutshell: the Dragon method gives permission to acknowledge and allow the full spectrum of feelings and the tools to know how to shift the brains focus out of the **red** into a more peaceful **green** place. It works just as effectively with adults and students. It's a programme that cries out to today's student teacher relationship and that feeling that more than ever we are all in this together.

What changes did I observe in my students before lockdown? In no particular order I witnessed improvements in all the following areas:

- Full engagement in activities
- Speaking and listening
- Self-control and impulsiveness
- Courtesy
- Tolerance and acceptance of differences
- Empathy
- Recognising and challenging fixed mindsets
- Problem solving in all subjects
- Gratitude
- Self-worth and self-esteem
- Confidence
- Future aspiration
- Presentation and pride in work
- Leadership skills
- Friendship and relationships

Am I going to continue to carry on with the Dragon Programme when I return to school? I can't wait.

Here is a short video that Julie made about her Dragon journey.

<https://youtu.be/ozaTmr8YnjM>