

The Bewdley School & Sixth Form Centre opened in 2007 as a mixed comprehensive with strong links with the local town and surrounding rural infrastructure

What was the school trying to achieve?

A majority of learners undergo a positive educational experience, taught by a team of supportive staff who foster good relationships with parents and the wider community. However many learners feel that Bewdley town does not offer a breadth of different cultural experiences and, therefore, are genuinely excited by new and purposeful experiences.

Curriculum planning offers little opportunity for taking risks, or cross phase/subject collaboration, and ICT facilities are difficult to access for large classes of thirty at key stage three to four. Questionnaires had identified the need for more ICT skills in animation and filmmaking, whilst the Head of Art wanted to explore more original ideas and feelings connected to sensitive and emotive starting points, whilst working towards a professional brief with a team of artists. The department also wished to develop issue-based projects.

The priorities therefore were to empower and personalise learning, exploit new technologies, and develop a sustainable project that would cascade new skills in animation, filming and editing to other learners.

It was decided to provide different group mixes, engender cross phase collaboration and the space to work outside the timetable.

Students were to be encouraged to take risks and learn from mistakes, and develop a wider cultural understanding, with a sense of purpose through cross curriculum links.

How was learning organised to achieve these aims?

Student 'voice' and decision making were paramount and a core group of learners, staff and senior management was established to organise the project, set aims and objectives, explore timetabling alternatives, contact artists, museums, and set groups.

The Holocaust Memorial Project proposed to explore the testimony of a Polish survivor Jack Kagan, who at the age of fifteen escaped from a concentration camp having co-ordinated the construction of a tunnel. A genuine mix of key stage three to five gifted and talented and disaffected learners were taken to the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum to meet and interview Jack Kagan to produce a DVD that would be viewed at school by learners and parents, and showcased at the Worcestershire County Performing Arts Evening.

£5000 from the Creative Partnership & PTA matched funding allowed for ten collapsed timetable days, cover and equipment, and the art room was allocated as a workspace. Back at school learners deconstructed their personal experiences and began to plan ideas with Rachel Lambert from The RMC. Small dynamic groups then worked over the following six weeks on model making, filming, research, painting, music, Polish voice over and editing. A 'provided lunch' offered time to reflect on the working day and everyone involved realised that professional filmmaking was a long and arduous process that required 100 percent from everyone.

Assessment was tracked through individual/group interviews, evaluation sheets and artwork and target grades. In addition GCSE and AS/A2 students' final exam grades were scrutinised.

How well did the school achieve its aims?

The impact and achievement of this project was in the spiritual and emotional response of the learners; students fully engaged with the subject matter and connected to Jack Kagan's story.

'I think visiting the imperial war museum was a good insight for everyone to understand more about the Holocaust. By listening to Jack's story it made people realise the seriousness and scale of what happened'

Harrison Thom Year 11

They shared a common pride in the school and the success of the work, and risks taken with mixing different groups and collaboration between key stages allowed a cascading of skills from key stage five to key stage three. 100 percent of learners in year 11-13 involved in the project achieved or exceeded their target grades in art and design.

'I found the first few weeks difficult. I was quiet and didn't have much to say. However, as the weeks went by I 'came out of my shell' and made more input, this is an experience I will never forget' Mason Stokes Year 11

Professional development for staff has opened a new approach towards high impact curriculum planning and personalised learning. This was a project that changed and empowered everyone and switched disaffected students on to learning.

