Case Study

'A Piece of Me' – An exploration of identity using digital photography

Babington Community Technology College: Dave Bennett

Purpose

- To enable students to consider what is important and what matters to them.

- For students to be able to talk and write about their views and beliefs.

- To promote community cohesion.

Main emphasis

In the first course in year 7 students had examined a variety of different religious stories and seen how these can be applied to moral decisions. As they did this they had developed an understanding of key aspects of the religions we covered as well as the opportunity to express their own views about a variety of moral issues. In this second course the students will focus more on their identity and beliefs and how religious people may express their beliefs. In this course they will have the opportunity to use a variety of ICT as well as using speaking and listening skills, presentation skills and interviewing skills.

School profile

Total number of learners	920
Age range	11-16
Specialist status	Technology College
Level 5 and above in key stage 3 tests (2007)	47%
Five A*-C at GCSE (2007)	48%
Special educational needs	50%

Brief overview of Babington Community Technology College

Babington Community Technology College serves the Beaumont Leys Estate which is on the north west of Leicester. The school is in an area of social deprivation and 37% of the students receive free school meals. Approximately half of the students are on the SEN register and approximately 42% are registered as EAL. Although the main area that students come from to the school is the Beaumont Leys Estate, which is a mainly white estate, many students travel from different parts of the city. Around half the students come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The main religions represented at the College are Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh. Many of the white students would describe themselves as non-religious. A high proportion of students join the college other than at the start of Year 7. Many of these students are either new to this country or new to any formal education and include several who are learning English for the first time.

RE at Babington Community Technology College

The RE department at the College has used the Leicester City Agreed Syllabus as the basis for writing schemes of work. However the Agreed Syllabus will begin to be reviewed from February this year and we have begun to use the Non-Statutory National Framework as an additional guide as we review and re-write schemes of work. This piece of work is based specifically on the concepts found in the Non-statutory National Framework.

Question 1: What were you trying to achieve?

The starting point: Identifying the priorities for development

What were your learners like at the start?

1. Babington is a multi-faith, multi ethnic and multi-racial community. This has many benefits, but also brings many challenges. Students demonstrate some understanding of each other's culture and religion. However to enhance community cohesion within the College it is vital that this understanding goes more than skin deep and that there is genuine dialogue and understanding.

2. When students arrive at Babington their experience of and attainment in RE is very varied. There are more than 20 feeder schools and also many students arrive from other areas of the UK or of the world. In previous years progress in RE has seemed to be slow and few students have really achieved their potential. Attainment in Key Stage 3 is very varied. This contrasts with Key Stage 4 where students achieve above the national average.

What differences did you want to see in your learners?

In this learning experience we wanted to focus on the key concepts of *identity, diversity and belonging*. We wanted students to *know* what young people from different faith communities and philosophies of life consider important and believe. We also wanted them to *understand* that religion is more about how people try to express their beliefs and put them into practice than books or lists of beliefs.

In terms of *skills* we wanted students to use:

- reflection and evaluation of what is important to them;
- ICT to present information including the use of digital images;
- speaking and listening skills.

In terms of *attitudes and behaviour*, we wanted students to be aware of the diversity of religions and cultures within the college and the way that young people might show their membership of different groups. We wanted the students to gain a deeper understanding of each other and talk about their beliefs and commitments.

By the end of the course, the majority of students would be able to:

- ask and suggest answers to questions of identity, and belonging and relate them to their own and other's lives
- explain what inspires and influences them;

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- express their own and other's views on the challenges of belonging to a religion or holding a belief.

Question 2: How did you organise learning to achieve your aims?

How did you set about making a change?

The first change we have made is how RE is delivered in the timetable. In previous years students in Key Stage 3 have been taught one lesson a week in mixed ability groups. This change was not made particularly for this learning activity however without this change it is unlikely we would have been able to do this activity. This year the main changes have been:

- Year 7 are taught in ability groups based on their Key Stage 2 levels;

- the top three groups have had what might be termed the 'usual academic diet' on their curriculum;

- history, geography and RE are timetabled at the same time for these three groups. We decided rather than teaching one lesson a week to teach them in modules. This means that a group does four lessons a week for five weeks of one of the humanities subjects and then moves on to another of the humanities subjects;

- the next three groups have been following a skills based curriculum where they are taught a number of subjects by the same teacher in eight lessons a week. This includes RE.

The benefit of these changes is that, compared to previous years, there is more opportunity to develop new ways of delivering the curriculum within both halves of the Year 7 curriculum. We felt that it was vital that students are excited about RE and so we began the course with the 'A Piece of Me' activity which we felt would engage all students and provide a good starting point as we developed the concepts of identity, diversity and belonging. In future years we will probably aim to deliver this as our first RE experience when the students arrive in year 7.

Other Organisation needed - (see description of the planned learning experiences below):

- RE teachers produced their own piece of work to show the students and modelled how to complete the task;

- working with the ICT department we borrowed a number of digital cameras for those students who did not have access to them and we also booked ICT rooms to carry out the second part of the activity;

- all classrooms at Babington have Interactive Whiteboards so once the work was completed all students could show their work to the class and talk through what they had included;

- we decided to display the best examples of work in display cabinets around the College;

- students work was assessed against the attainment target 2 levels: learning from religion.

Background to the lessons

In the Guardian newspaper once a week they have a feature called: 'A Piece of Me'. In this feature a celebrity submits ten photos of objects (not people) that are important to them with

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an explanation. I figured that this could be easily adapted to be used as an RE activity looking at the concepts of identity, diversity and belonging.

Delivering the Activity

Lesson 1 – Introduction

a) Introduce the idea to the students. I showed them some examples from the paper. I also gave them a sheet which explained what they were going to be doing and also how their work would be assessed. To ensure that the RE element is explicit I made it clear it was important that they selected an item or some items to represent their most strongly held beliefs whether they would describe themselves as religious or not.

b) I produced my own 'A Piece of Me' which I showed to the students on an Interactive Whiteboard and explained why I had included the ten different objects. I produced it in PowerPoint and that was the programme I wanted my students to use. However other teachers may choose to use other programmes.

c) Using the assessment criteria I got the students to work in pairs to mark the version that I had done and discuss it.

d) Students then made a list of what is important in their life. At this stage they could list as many as they wanted. Time was spent in pairs comparing lists and talking about why certain things were on the list.

e) They then chose objects that which would show these things.

f) I then set them homework to choose their ten objects and photograph them for their homework. They also had to include a photo of themselves. (Students who didn't have access to a digital camera were asked to bring their objects into school so that we could use school digital cameras to photograph them.)

NB it could be approached the other way round with students writing down objects that are important to them and then reflecting on why these are important and what they show about themselves.

Lesson 2, 3, 4 (it may take more lessons) – Producing the Work

We worked in an ICT room for these lessons.

a) Many of the students had access to digital cameras at home so they did this part of the work at home then brought it in on a memory stick or CD. Others brought their objects into school and then used a school digital camera to take pictures of them.

b) Once they had loaded the pictures on to the computer they then began putting them into their poster.   They produced a one page spread which could then be printed as an A3 colour poster. They had to use include their ten pictures on this as well as the significance of each object. We found it is easier and clearer if they numbered each picture and then it is easy to see what each piece of writing is connected to.

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c) Some of the students who worked more quickly produced a slide show that they could show to the class as well as their poster. As well as displaying the posters we were able to show these slide shows on computer screens that the College has in the dining rooms. This had the added bonus of making the work available to more of the College and so further promoting community cohesion. It is also promoted the work of the RE department.

Lessons 5, 6 – Presentations and analysis

This takes two lessons to enable students to ask questions and interact with each other on the work they have done.

a) All students showed an electronic version of their poster or a slideshow depending on which they preferred. This was a speaking and listening exercise and students were encouraged to listen carefully and ask questions. This part of the exercise is crucial in terms of the overall aim of the learning activity and time was needed to ensure that students were properly prepared both as listeners and presenters.

b) We used the assessment criteria we had given the students at the beginning and the students then were able to mark each others' presentations and provide positive feedback and ideas for improvement. During this part of the activity there was the opportunity for the students to talk about the demands and difficulties of holding a particular belief or of belonging to a faith group or community.

c) We then printed off the posters on A3 and put together a display to put up in the College. A small group of the students who produced the work were involved in organising the display.

3: How well have you achieved your aims?

What differences are evident? What impact have you made on your learners?

1. Motivation

The fact that all students could produce a piece of RE work about themselves irrespective of their religious perspective encouraged engagement. The use of ICT motivated the students to produce higher quality work than previously evident in year 7 RE. The fact that students knew the best work was going to be displayed was also a motivating fact.

2. Knowledge and Understanding

Students gained an insight into different religious beliefs and perspectives in their year group. Although young people may be from the same religious community they talked about different aspects of their religion and this gave them a better understanding of identity, diversity and belonging. It also reinforced that religious belief is about people and how they put their beliefs into practice rather than just about books or lists of beliefs.

3. Community Cohesion

The students gained an understanding of the varied and mixed group of people in their year group. In addition to religious diversity they found out about peoples' heritage, race, language etc. All this information encouraged the young people to understand and engage in

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dialogue with each other as they gave their presentations. Displaying the final pieces of work in the college also meant that many other students engaged with the information and were challenged to think about their own identity.

4. Assessment Levels

Because of their increased motivation and engagement in this activity many of the students raised their levels compared to previous RE assessments

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