

## Digital Storytelling – faith in the workplace

Archbishop Holgate's CE (A) School, York: Olivia Seymour

### Purpose

- To design a 'compelling learning experience' in RE that would offer students an authentic encounter with people's values and sources of inspiration and that would challenge their own ideas.
- To engage students by using images and critical skills strategies and by providing an opportunity to make their own digital stories.
- To use the key concepts of 'expressing meaning' and 'values and commitments' to extend students' depth of learning.

### Main emphasis

Students would complete a digital storytelling project on 'faith in the workplace'. Preparatory lessons were planned to focus on a big question: 'What are the sources of inspiration for people's values and commitments?'

Students explored how beliefs and values affect people's decisions about work and at work by planning and preparing interview questions and then meeting people from their local community or family members. Students used digital cameras and other images to capture their story and produced short digital stories to show what they had learned.

The ICT strategy links to the project centred around refining and presenting information.

### School profile

Total number of learners	835
Age range	11-16 (Post 16 provision from September 2008)
Specialist status	Science College Status Vocational Status
Level 5 and above in key stage 3 tests (2007)	English 91% Maths 88% Science 88%
Five A*-C at GCSE (2007)	69%
Special educational needs	6.5% (9.2% inc SA)

As a Church of England school, Archbishop Holgate's is committed to an ethos in which Christian values are lived into being. The school's aim is for each member of the school community to be known as an individual and cared for as an individual. The school was awarded Leading Edge School status in 2004 and High Performing School Status in 2006 and has been designated a national Support School by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The school is currently moving into Post-16 provision.

The school RE provision follows the York Diocesan Guidelines for Religious Education. In line with the non-statutory National Framework the RE department has been working hard at forging links with the local community and involving the local community in planning and delivering the RE programme of study. The RE department has also been involved in collaborating with other subject areas to deliver themed days to enrich the RE experience students have. This has included a Science and RE morning, a Racial Harmony Day and an Inclusion and Diversity Morning.

## **Question 1: What are we trying to achieve?**

As a department we wanted to create a scheme of work that integrated ICT and RE in a very practical way. We wanted to use an interpretive approach to engage students more with the community around them and learn from people with religious and other community commitments rather than textbooks and classroom resources. We were also aware as a department that pieces of work at the end of a unit tend to be written pieces and we therefore wanted to look at more creative ways of assessing students.

We were aware that our students often rely on the teacher for the next steps and so wanted to provide students with a series of lessons that encouraged them to take ownership of their work from the very beginning. We also wanted to encourage group work that allowed all students to achieve and contribute through conversations about their own understanding of commitment and what they had learned through the interviews. As a School we have had some training from the Teacher Effectiveness Enhancement Programme (TEEP) approaches and as a humanities faculty have been exploring ways of improving questioning and independent learning in our lessons.

We wanted a scheme of work that was student led from the beginning and allowed students to steer their work. We also wanted to encourage students to think critically about their work and use a variety of presentation ideas to show what they had learned. We wanted to begin to challenge the 'textbook' stereotype of following a religion and allow students to speak directly to people in their community and find out in reality how faith and other commitments are relevant to people's lives and affect the decisions people make.

## **What differences did you want to see in your learners?**

In terms of *knowledge understanding and skills* we wanted our students to recognise and understand what it means to belong to a community and that beliefs and values impact on the decisions people make. We wanted students to demonstrate level 6 ability to engage with their communities and each other, to think more deeply and reflect on what commitment means for them and others and to recognise how this commitment is shown in their own and others' actions. We wanted students to develop their questioning skills and be able to recognise what an effective question looked like and how asking these questions would help the learning process.

In terms of *attitudes and behaviours* we wanted students to take responsibility for their own learning and recognise the value of their communities. We also wanted students to be able to reflect on their thinking and working together and evaluate how it helped their learning.

## **Question 2: How will we organise learning to achieve our aims?**

Before the project started we wanted to ensure that students were clear about the focus of the project and to ensure that students understood that the technology was to assist their learning in RE rather than the project being purely about using ICT. At the same time students also needed to recognise that they were using a broad range of skills from different areas of the curriculum as a way of meeting these objectives. It was important in the first few lessons to really explore ideas of inspiration and commitment so that when the students came to make their digital story they would focus on the RE objectives.

Planning and preparation needed to include liaising with the ICT co-ordinator and technician to ensure we had use of facilities and had backup if there were any problems, liaising with the music department for recording audio and liaising with members of the community who were taking part in the interviews so that they understood the nature of the task.. We also liaised with our LA consultant on using the TEEP approach to make sure the tasks that we set for students really focused on their questioning skills and group work. The students worked in groups of three or four. These groups were mixed attainment groups and were chosen with reference to students' home locations in order to allow them the flexibility of working outside of lesson time on their project.

The initial lesson of the project focused on the use of images and a thinking skills approach to explore the ideas of inspiration and commitment. For homework students wrote up their own understanding of what commitment means using examples of situations and people to help them explain their thoughts. The next lesson introduced the idea of a digital story and allowed students in pairs to review a selection of digital stories. They formed a plan of action for writing their own digital story, based around the key idea of where people found inspiration, including 'religious' inspiration for their commitments. The final preparation lesson focused on questioning techniques and through a variety of thinking tools students developed a series of questions to ask during the interview. Students, using Edward de Bono's hats, also analysed their thinking and group work during the lesson.

Once the planning stages were complete students were given time to meet the people who were willing to be a part of the project (some students did this by arranging people to come into school and others arranged the interview in their own time). This experience was a key part of the learning process. Both adults and students alike found it a learning experience and students enjoyed talking face to face with people about the sources of their inspiration for their values and commitments. It was more personal than inviting someone into the classroom for a question and answer session as students could have conversations and learn from these people in a deeper way. This wasn't always reflected in the final product students produced but we were aware that the real learning was in the process rather than the end product.

After the interviews, the final stage of the project was completed in the computer room with students using their photographs and video clips to retell the person's story in their own words. Students used MovieMaker and imported their digital photographs, edited video clips and audio (spoken or music) into movie maker and compiled their story. Students were encouraged to select photos and audio that was appropriate and fitted the message of their story. The final stage of the project allowed students to evaluate each other's work from the levels criteria and also reflect on their own skills development and progress during the project.

### **3: How well have we achieved our aims?**

#### **What differences are evident? What impact have we made on our learners?**

Students rose to the challenge of planning and organising their own work for the project. They responded well to the preparatory lessons and engaged well with evaluating their thinking and planning questions. The students highlighted that they found this way of 'flexible' working more effective as they had ownership of the task and could be more creative in their presentations. Students also reflected on how completing the project itself also helped them learn about commitment as many had committed time outside of lessons to make sure their project work was completed. Many students worked effectively with the freedom of the project and relied less on the teacher to solve problems.

Students adapted very quickly to this way of working and showed a real flare in using ICT to present their ideas. Students also showed their ability to solve problems and think creatively about how to finish their digital stories. One student even commented on how he learned he could 'teach himself' as his group designed the questions and planned the work. Students commented on how they enjoyed the physical learning process through meeting people and having conversations about beliefs and values. One student commented on how the project allowed her to interact with her work more effectively and another commented 'bringing real people into our learning is great as we can actually see what we are learning about in action.'