

Taking a Fresh Look at Qualifications

Skills for Learning, Skills for Life, and Skills for Work

CASE STUDY: Govan High School

Thinking Skills via Access 3 History

What we planned to do

We wanted to show skills development in all subjects. The examples that follow are from History but we would expect similar results in any subject area.

Govan High recently hosted a visit from a high school in Northern Ireland during which some of our senior pupils supported the younger visitors in a variety of ways. We were struck by the contrast between the clear vision that the senior pupils could articulate about how they could assist the younger pupils and the complete bafflement when they were asked what skills they themselves had gained.

In another project to alter our primary school induction programme we involved middle school pupils in a 'crime and investigation' themed approach with different 'crime scenes'. Again we were impressed with how highly skilled and effective the helpers were despite not knowing what the tasks were in advance.

Although by then we had developed a database of transferable ideas and techniques which suited different learning styles, and had looked at the psychological support package Mindscreen, we subsequently identified that there was a lack of focus on pupils' actual skills.

We, therefore, decided to:

- ◆ move to a skills-based curriculum
- ◆ emphasise that the skills are already there
- ◆ involve pupils as part of the process
- ◆ establish a common vocabulary for skills
- ◆ provide appropriate staff training

*Many schools maintain quite rightly that "skills are everywhere" and, in England, some schools have separate skills lessons thus presumably implying to pupils that their subject lessons do **not** involve skills. (GHS Skills Development Summary)*

The skills development in this case study is shown through Access 3 History.

How have we developed?

First of all we had to train staff — not the traditional model of training, but a reflective process to help our staff develop a school- and skills-based approach.

'The name "Big Picture Training" sums this up precisely.' (Teacher)

From this we developed a Future Skills model which has a broad concept of skills. We put the learner at the centre of the model but what is different from

some other 'learner centred' models is that we see this as encompassing teaching staff, support staff, pupils, students — everyone in fact!

We developed skills assessment booklets which pupils and staff used to identify up to 71 skills under headings such as the Communicator, the Connector, the Decider, the Doer, and the Originator. Many of the skills were Thinking Skills such as analytical skills, fact gathering skills, diagrammatic interpretation, objective rational thinking, and information processing.

Existing lessons in Access 3 History were looked at and the skills involved spotlighted and tracked using the skills assessment booklets. Pupils and teachers soon adopted the approach with enthusiasm, with many pupils seeing the benefits for their time in school and their future life.

'The qualifications will get me an interview but it's the skills that will get me the job.' (Fifth Year pupil)

We got used to looking at all school activities and completing skills assessment booklets as a matter of course — whether it was for a classroom lesson, whole-school activity or a planned excursion.

'We had African Awareness Day... so what? We realised that the usefulness of any skills learnt that day depends on whether they are connected to anything.' (Teacher)

As part of the Access 3 History Course, pupils looked at the Second World War and the Wars of Independence. We used videos showing footage of Hitler speaking to crowds in Germany and also the popular film *Braveheart*. The pupils duly completed their skills assessment booklets indicating the skills they identified as having developed during these experiences. Some pupils identified nearly 50 skills!

'I enjoyed telling the teacher how we would 'evaluate' our work.' (Vocabulary)

'I helped Katie improve her summary.' (Objective peer evaluation)

'I organised my booklet in an order that was easy to understand so I wouldn't get mixed up.' (Organising)

'When watching the film, Hitler, I understood the reaction of the German people to Hitler's speech.' (Consideration)

'We created a power point presentation on William Wallace.' (Presentation skills)

'We took useful points from the film Braveheart and put them into notes to help make our presentation.' (Note taking)

'I learned more Scottish words from the film Braveheart.' (Vocabulary)

Watching the war made me angry but I had to not let my own beliefs get in the way.' (Objective rational thinking)

The way forward

The 71 skills we identified as naturally arising within everyday school life obviously have close links with the Thinking Skills identified within Skills for Learning, Work and Life — eg the cognitive skills of remembering and identifying, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating.

We strongly believe that by highlighting Thinking skills within a traditional subject like History, pupils are not only given the opportunity to develop other skills but often their enjoyment of studying the subject will increase.

We will continue to help young people develop the skills that will help them move on with the rest of their lives. They themselves are clear about how they'll use these skills.

'They'll come in useful for job interviews.' (Pupil)

'I'll be able to put across main points without waffling.' (Pupil)

We were not too surprised when local employers gave us positive feedback on the general skills assessment approach and the use of the school's own 'Achievement Award'. All pupils are allocated points under the different headings and are each given a personal Achievement Report which lists not only any external qualifications but the Govan High Skills Award. This lists all events attended and the total number of points achieved under the different categories and a breakdown of the skills achieved.

'This is exactly what employers are looking for.' (Manager, Kall Kwik)

We will continue to work with local employers and the regeneration agency to ensure that the skills identified match what they also think are important. Staff are constantly looking for ways to connect skills across all areas of young people's learning. We now want to make that connection vertically into primary schools and early years.

On reflection

We asked the History pupils whether they felt the class had helped them with their Thinking Skills, including remembering and recalling facts, and whether it had had any impact on their life or other subjects they were studying.

'I got better at taking the main points out of stuff and not just writing everything out.' (Pupil)

'It's made me want to want to work to the best of my ability.' (Pupil)

'I've learned a lot more than I thought I'd know.' (Pupil)

We firmly believe that this Future Skills approach identifies, develops, assesses, records and reports skills for individuals and is a vital tool with regards to the experiences and outcomes in Curriculum for Excellence .