

Rich Task Report – science & ethics

Initial involvement

Two members of staff, one for each of the tasks, attended a two day induction training course in October 2006. Other staff were approached within the participating departments.

All background materials for the Rich Task were provided along with relevant handouts, Internet websites and none contact time provided.

There was little prior knowledge of the New Basics/Rich Task project and also little experience of cooperative learning techniques – although a one day course on this was provided in February 2007 prior to the commencement of the Rich Task projects.

Staff Preparation and Training

Staff spent three days related directly to the chosen task, covered the relevant cooperative learning in a one day course, spent time within school on interdisciplinary work in order to chart departmental strategies throughout February 2007.

The Science & Ethics Rich Task began in the last week of February 2007. Pupils were introduced to the topic a week earlier via a free lunch held in the Philosophy/RME department. This was an important factor in pupil motivation before the task even began. Throughout the course of March and April pupils studied the main theme of stem cell research and the ethical arguments that surround the topic.

Evaluation

All staff agreed that cooperative learning was an essential part of the project and that, generally, pupils responded in a positive manner to cooperative learning approaches. Each group was given a focus task with each member given a role to fulfil while doing the task. This created interdependence and accountability for each individual and each group. Timescales also kept up the pace of the learning.

Advantages for staff in this approach

Clearer understanding of the work done in departments through sharing good practice. An appreciation of important issues and how staff could link the parts together. Created a team spirit amongst participating staff and a creative atmosphere.

Disadvantages of this approach

Communication, getting time to liaise and co-ordinate the project was an on-going issue. Time needs to be allocated for regular meetings in order that staff are clear on what each other is doing and when. Due to time tabling constraints this is not easy to achieve in such a large school. Furthermore, complex subject material difficult to comment upon i.e. detailed science information.

Overall relation in 5-14

RME – majority of students achieved level F and E+ grades. Some pupils jumped two grades going from level C to level E.

ICT – working together as a group raised the grades of pupils who would not have achieved that working level individually.

Learning & Teaching – evidence of collaboration helping to raise attainment of less able pupils. Evidence of level E+ in English.

PSEd – core citizenship skills in evidence through practical organisation of ballot on the issue of stem cell research at the conference organised by pupils.

Science – pupils addressed complex topic normally reserved for upper school. Practical application of issues demonstrated on display boards during conference.

Assessment poles were used and proved to be an effected method of assessment between departments. However, on the whole, for individual subject areas, the assessment poles were vague and subjective.

Overall Evaluation

Pace and challenge of Rich Task stretched S1 beyond S1 levels ‘raised the bar’. Development of collaborative learning, focussing on team building and social responsibility. Pupils were aware there would be an ‘end product’ – this kept motivation high. Staff also given the opportunity to work collaboratively with planning sessions generating fruitful discussion around designing effective learning activities.

Timetabling restraints meant not all pupils were able to participate in all subject areas. Duration of the task a little too long for less able students. Tasks had to be manipulated to fit current standards (5-14). Pupils were confused by their English lessons not being relevant to the process, they were unclear that English Department had opted out.

Rich Task and Assessment is For Learning

Strong agreement that this is a viable model for embedding the four capacities. Staff witnessed creative and independent thinking, relationship building and consideration for others, development of complex ethical views and effective contributions made through a variety of mediums.

Final Thoughts

Consideration needs to be given to timetabling to enable staff to meet and allow full participation of pupils. Process needs a designated leader who will ensure clear communication links. Agreement amongst staff that it was a worthwhile and rewarding process. Concern that pupils may be left ‘a bit flat’ after their Rich Task was completed.

Manager Evaluation

Comments above have made it clear that careful planning prior to embarking upon this process is essential.

The success of our Science and Ethics Rich Task was due to the creativity and diligence of all participating teachers.

The finance provided by the authority funded all cover for courses etc. However, in Oban High the problem is often in finding appropriate cover teachers to allow routine meetings between participating staff. Several disjointed lunchtime meetings provided the coordination that was achieved. Some very useful resources were also secured through our participation in this project.

Support from senior management was required to help participating staff achieve objectives.

RME Timeline

February 2007	Pupils invited to 'free lunch' in department of Philosophy & RME prior to commencement of the task.
March 2007	Pupils begin task in RME and will receive 3 period per week for 7 weeks on ethics and stem cell research
March 2007	Stages (group and individual) What are Ethics ? Examples of ethics and how ethics can change Ethics and lying Ethics and breaking the law Ethical choices Animals and ethics Cloning Stem cells The ethical Debate Revision