

Project outline

Summary

Each participating secondary school sent two delegates to an introductory two-day residential workshop in October 2010.

Delegates were teachers of citizenship, history, English, religious studies or PSHE, and were in a position to contribute to school or departmental policies on topics such as:

- speaking and listening
- equalities, including religion and belief
- preventing extremism
- critical thinking
- community cohesion
- spiritual, moral, cultural and social development.

After the introductory workshop participants planned and implemented practical projects in their schools and reported back on these at an event in March 2011.

The residential workshop was free of charge. Each school received in addition a grant to pay for supply cover, resources and consultancy during the project's lifetime.

Aims

The introductory workshop was planned so that participants could:

- consider Ofsted expectations about the importance of speaking and listening in classroom discussions, and build their own confidence and practical skills in conducting classroom discussions
- take into account current policy developments nationally, for example the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, and national projects such as the Rights Respecting Schools programme pioneered by Unicef and the Resilience programme on building confidence in handling contentious issues, organised by the Religious Education Council for the Department for Education
- consider and assess a number of web-based practical resources, including those developed by the Shared Histories project currently taking shape in Walsall
- increase their awareness of practical ways of developing critical thinking and media literacy, and of building resilience
- clarify general principles for talking and teaching in schools about difficult, sensitive and controversial issues
- begin to plan practical projects in their own schools or departments, supported if they wish by training and consultancy.

Planning

The project was planned in general terms in partnership with Walsall headteachers, and in detail by a group from Walsall Children's Services working with Robin Richardson, a director of the Insted consultancy.

Programme for the introductory workshop

The programme was highly participatory and consisted almost entirely of structured activities and exercises in small groups, supported by a substantial pack of papers. There was a special focus on the second day on plans for practical programmes of follow-up action in participants' own schools.

Venue

The introductory workshop and the follow-up review were held at the Woodside Conference Centre, situated on the outskirts of Kenilworth, Warwickshire.

Fuller information

Most of the papers used at the introductory workshop were subsequently revised slightly and then published on the Insted website. They include:

Questions in our minds – worries and concerns used in a ranking exercise

What do I say, what do I do? – scenarios for discussion

Principles for classroom discussion – responses to the earlier questions

Creating safe spaces – aide-memoire about practical exercises and activities

Discussion roles – reminders of helpful and unhelpful behaviour

'Political correctness' – nuances, implications and meanings

Words about words – summarising various points about language

Media literacy – questions to ask

Thirty useful websites – many practical ideas and insights.

Also on the Insted website there is an article about the project as a whole first published in the journal *Race Equality Teaching*.

The title of the article, 'Not Just Any Old Discussion', is drawn from reflections by a Year 7 student who took part in the project.

The article describes the genesis of the project in the national programme on preventing violent extremism (PVE), and in concerns and criticisms surrounding the programme when it was initiated. The article continues by outlining the exercises at the introductory workshop and concludes by summarising the range of follow-up activities which took place in schools.
