



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

Making learning matter

A co-development project of the National Middle Schools' Forum

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Introduction

The new secondary curriculum provides opportunities for more flexible approaches to curriculum planning. The projects described here come from a co-development project between the National Middle Schools' Forum (NMSF) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to explore these opportunities.

A group of 10 middle schools from across the country came together to undertake curriculum development work as part of QCA's Curriculum Network. The group aimed to create a 'learning feast' for students. In particular, it aimed to:

- help adolescents develop an appetite for learning
- use the ingredients of the curriculum to create a learning feast
- recognise individual taste, considerations and needs
- see a big picture of the curriculum.

All the schools involved in the Curriculum Network focused on changing their curriculum in ways that would engage students and extend their learning. The schools drew inspiration from two key starting points: QCA's *Big picture* of the curriculum (www.qca.org.uk/qca_5856.aspx) and the statements of good practice in the booklet *Middle School Matters* (NMSF 2002, www.middleschools.org.uk/documents/reports/MSch_Matter.PDF). Sharing practice with each other gave them the confidence to innovate and design compelling learning experiences.

Each case study outlines what the schools wanted to achieve, how they organised learning and the impact of the different projects on learning and teaching. Following each case study, you'll find some questions to consider that might be useful when considering how to shape your school's curriculum.

The case studies in this booklet reflect the breadth and depth of the group's ideas and show how they contributed to students' development as successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens. Comments from both students and teachers reinforce the project's success in improving learning and stimulating imagination, creativity and engagement.

Key lessons learnt

Several essential features emerge from the projects in this booklet that you should consider when planning for impact on students' engagement and achievement.

Focus on learning

Make opportunities for effective learning the starting point for planning, and where appropriate, work across subject boundaries in a cross-curricular way. In many of the middle school projects, learning went beyond that planned by the teacher. Challenge and raised expectations led to outcomes of a quality higher than that normally seen or expected.

Provide opportunities to apply skills in a real context

Learning in the classroom becomes deeper through application in a meaningful context. The middle schools capitalised on opportunities to take learning out of school and engage with the community. This gave learning purpose and helped students see the relevance of education and relate it to the real world.

Give students ownership

Engagement rises when students experience a degree of control over their own learning and its direction. This was a significant feature of all the middle school projects. Students were motivated by a context in which they generated their own questions for exploration. Enjoyment is an important feature – but not an end in itself. Activities need to be sufficiently testing and challenging for real progress to be made.

Use staff champions

Staff learning is an important feature – as one of the schools commented, there is conceptual development for both students and staff. A commitment to risk-taking is required, which in turn sparks professional debate and dialogue.

Vary student groups and structures

Many of the schools reported the value of students working in mixed-age or unusual groupings. Middle schools are well placed to use time flexibly. Cooperation and teamwork among students is essential – both for the development of collaborative and time management skills, and for the articulation of knowledge gained.

Plan with impact in mind

Compelling learning experiences are likely to have an impact on students' attitudes, values, involvement and engagement. It is important to bear this in mind from the outset and plan ways to evaluate impact on every aspect of learning.

Allenbourn Middle School: Literacy across the curriculum

As a pilot project, the head of English at Allenbourn Middle School in Dorset worked with mathematics and geography teachers to consider language development in different subject areas. They observed each other's lessons and cooperated in teaching some classes. Having observed good practice in language teaching, the mathematics and geography teachers worked together to consider approaches to developing and improving students' writing in their subjects.

To help evaluate the impact of this work, a QCA adviser observed two lessons and interviewed some of the students as a participant observer. The evidence generated helpful discussion that deepened the questions at the centre of the project. For example, was the development concerned with the transfer of skills from English, or was it about developing the language skills of students in subject lessons? It also raised questions about the nature of team teaching or joint teaching, clarifying the purpose of the collaborative working.

The school developed its model and built time into the curriculum for the head of English to work with colleagues in other lessons over the coming year.

Impact

As a result of the project, students reflected thoughtfully on their use of language in different subjects:

'It is hard to take skills from one lesson and put them into another. If you try, the language is different – you are asked to be mathematical in maths and to use geographical language in geography... You have the basic skills in English and then change it to apply it in a different subject.'

'In English, sometimes you are given the structure for writing, or different types of punctuation or sentences. This really helps you. Sometimes I try to use this in other lessons... I find it helpful to remember suggestions about how to start and the words suggested.'

'You have to use different vocabulary in different lessons... In English I might say, "The author suggests...". I would need to change that phrase in a geography lesson to be more geographical.'

Contribution to the *Big picture* curriculum aims

The project made a clear contribution to the students' development as successful learners and confident individuals.

<p>Successful learners</p>	<p>As the students' comments show, they became much more reflective about the nature of different subjects and their learning. They could see the benefit of transferring skills from different subject areas and were more able to think and act like a geographer or a mathematician. They showed greater understanding of how they learn, and learnt from their mistakes.</p>
<p>Confident individuals</p>	<p>The project built upon the existing skills developed by students in English and gave them confidence in their abilities. They showed they were willing to try new things and make the most of opportunities.</p>

Questions to consider

1. What opportunities are there in your school to work collaboratively with other members of staff to enhance teaching and learning?
2. How do you reflect on the nature of language learning in different subject lessons?
3. How might you encourage students in your school to think about how they transfer their skills from one subject area to another?

Bridgewater School: Making learning real

Bridgewater School in Hertfordshire wanted to help students at the start of key stage 3:

- realise that, while subject disciplines represent particular ways of thinking and doing, there are also many benefits of making connections, and that learning from one part of the curriculum can enhance other areas
- develop independence in their learning and discover ways of working with others in teams to maximise their engagement and cooperation.

This project grew out of an ongoing school/industry link with BP, the energy company. Teachers divided the students into teams, and each team worked as a marketing company specialising in eco-friendly products. They created a marketing strategy for a new chain of shops that promoted eco-friendly products to a teenage market.

The project gave students the opportunity to develop skills in teamwork, decision making, communication, marketing and using information and communication technology (ICT) in a real-life context. They developed knowledge of the environment and the world of industry, and fulfilled national curriculum requirements for textiles and resistant materials. The project culminated in each team producing a leaflet, designing a website and preparing a presentation, with the added challenge of using French and German languages.

Impact

A survey of students provided interesting insight into their response to this innovative project:

- they found working to deadlines, teamwork and presenting their ideas the most challenging aspects of the work
- they would have preferred less pressure and more time
- 54 out of 75 students rated the project 6+ on a scale of 1 to 10 in terms of level of challenge (with 10 being the most challenging)
- 51 out of 71 respondents rated it 6+ on a scale of 1 to 10 in terms of enjoyment (with 10 being the most enjoyable), with 33 students rating it 8, 9 or 10
- the students identified ICT skills, teamwork and public speaking as things they learnt that would help them in other subject areas

- when asked what target they would set for themselves or their team if doing a similar project in the future, the main areas highlighted included increasing the pace of their work to meet deadlines and better teamwork.

Students' comments on teamwork and leadership were particularly revealing:

'Working in a team was more difficult because, if you did something wrong or forgot something, then you let your whole team down... It also made it more fun though!'

'I found the teamwork really boosted my confidence because all the work I did got realistic and positive feedback from my team.'

'As I was the design leader for my team, I felt it important to finish work, to set an example to the rest of the team.'

Staff involved in the project responded equally positively, recognising its impact on students' learning and the sense of achievement generated:

'The BP project was one of the things that attracted me to apply to work at Bridgewater. It is inspiring to see children given the opportunity to behave like adults in the real world and to relate their learning to the sorts of decision making and time constraints that operate in the work environment. You can see them grow up before your eyes!'

'The BP project is worth doing for the feeling of achievement most children get from taking part and the level of work they reach... We can also see improved confidence and children who say, "Next time I would...", demonstrating that they've learnt from the experience.'

'A professional graphic designer came in to school to give an insight into the way a designer works with clients. She was very impressed with the standard of work, quality of ideas and creative ways of expressing them.'

Contribution to the *Big picture* curriculum aims

The project made a clear contribution to the students' development as successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens.

<p>Successful learners</p>	<p>The project gave students the opportunity to succeed according to their strengths as part of a team and to witness a final outcome of learning. They applied knowledge and skills in new contexts, convinced others of their arguments and showed an ability to learn independently and with others. The project helped the students learn about big ideas and events that shape our world.</p>
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<p>Confident individuals</p>	<p>Successfully presenting their marketing ideas before a panel of adult experts in a formal setting had a major impact on the students' confidence. They understood the importance of articulating their ideas clearly and confidently in a different context and to a different audience. They became increasingly independent and confident in taking initiative and organising themselves.</p>
<p>Responsible citizens</p>	<p>The students learnt to work cooperatively, make decisions and live with the consequences, accept joint responsibility for outcomes, work to deadlines and negotiate division of labour. They showed increasing understanding of how to sustain and improve the environment locally and globally.</p>

Questions to consider

1. What opportunities do you have in your curriculum for students to work alongside professionals from outside school?
2. Do you set deadlines for project work so that students have the chance to learn the skills of organisation and self encouragement?
3. Do you have sufficient opportunities to present to an alternative audience?

Combs Middle School: Organising eco day

Combs Middle School in Suffolk is working towards the Eco-Schools' awards and decided to plan an eco day as part of its focus on creating an engaging and exciting curriculum. The day was organised by the school's eco club, which is made up of students from all year groups who meet regularly to carry out surveys, make action plans, decide on changes and discuss how to spend money.

Working in class groups, students took part in five activities, one of which was led by an expert from the local community. Activities included designing and making a wind turbine, making paper from old paper and rags and colouring it with natural vegetable dyes, designing an eco car, making bird cakes and learning about environmentally-friendly building materials.

The school was keen to ensure the day involved the whole community. As well as a visit from the mayor, a local Green Party candidate brought his can crusher, and the Suffolk Wildlife Trust talked to students about conservation projects in the local woods.

Impact

The impact of the eco day was far reaching:

- it raised awareness of environmental issues in an accessible, interactive and stimulating way
- it offered students the opportunity to take part in memorable activities that would not have been easy to arrange through the timetabled curriculum
- the whole-day, whole-curriculum and whole-staff focus meant that students were immersed in ecologically-based learning.

The momentum generated by the day's activities enabled the eco club to work towards its Eco-Schools' 'Green Flag' award, which symbolises excellence in the field of environmental activity.

The headteacher recognises the importance of planning initiatives like this to ensure they have long-term impact:

'One-off days can be slightly self-indulgent – but this has had a significant impact on the school, not just academically but across a broad range of educational issues. An example has been the heightened awareness of conservation within the school.'

Contribution to the *Big picture* curriculum aims

The project made a clear contribution to the students' development as successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens.

<p>Successful learners</p>	<p>The wide range of activities on offer, including many with a practical, hands-on focus, ensured that the students engaged in learning. The obvious relevance of the day proved motivating and made students realise that learning can happen beyond planned lessons in the classroom. The students communicated well in a range of ways.</p>
<p>Confident individuals</p>	<p>The students gained confidence from working successfully in a team and interacting with the local community. The eco club showed real initiative in organising the event, taking responsibility for hosting the mayor and producing a newsletter about the day. They demonstrated how they are open to the excitement and inspiration offered by the natural world and human achievements.</p>
<p>Responsible citizens</p>	<p>The project encouraged the students to evaluate the impact of their actions on our planet. They were introduced to some of the different jobs that people do and how their work contributes to society. They took messages back to the community about how to sustain and improve the environment locally and globally. They showed an understanding of how to take account of the needs of present and future generations in the choices they make.</p>

Questions to consider

1. How can the value added from 'one-off' days promote the wider curriculum?
2. How might you plan for impact beyond the traditional school day?
3. Do you have opportunities to involve the local community in the teaching and learning that takes place in your school?

Christ Church Middle School: Remembrance week

Christ Church Middle School in Staffordshire decided to organise a 'breakout' week on the theme of remembrance.

They replaced the normal timetable for the week with a selection of carefully chosen activities to teach students about life during the two world wars. A local history group, which included two governors and relatives of students, came to school to share their knowledge. A historian and war expert spent two days working with students and showing them his collection of war memorabilia. Parents brought in medals and photographs, and many spent time in school helping with lessons.

Activities included designing and making activities, such as knitting squares to create a patchwork blanket, making clay tiles to form a giant wall display, making willow sculptures of poppies and Supermarine Spitfires (fighter aircrafts used by Allies in the Second World War), and interviewing veterans of the Second World War and people who were children during the war. On 11 November, Remembrance Day, the students assembled on the playground for the two-minute silence with a new understanding of its significance. One student played 'Last Post', and a visitor played 'Reveille' to mark the thought-provoking event.

The week gave students the opportunity to carry out independent research tasks, ask probing questions and draw their own conclusions. The activities gave them an in-depth understanding of what life was like during the wars and a much greater appreciation of the meaning of Remembrance Day.

Impact

Focusing on remembrance and the world wars for a whole week resulted in a real depth of understanding:

'Before, I never really thought about wearing a poppy. I just wore one or I didn't. Now I really understand why we wear one and why we celebrate remembrance. I've got a lot more respect for the soldiers who fought or died during the war. I'll always wear a poppy from now on...'

'It seemed like you were really there. Meeting the veterans was the best bit. We learnt so much more through listening to their stories. It was like you were getting first-hand experience.'

'I liked the trip to the War Museum best. We learnt about how awful the conditions were in WW1. We should think about wars going on today because it's just as bad for soldiers fighting today.'

A letter from a parent revealed the enthusiasm and engagement generated by the project:

‘... My son came home every day full of enthusiasm and interest in what he had learned and enjoyed every minute of it. It influenced him to such an extent that he continued with some of the topics himself this weekend, writing his own war stories and poems...’

Feedback from students in all year groups made it clear that the week’s activities made the world wars seem much more real – something that actually happened. They asked very perceptive questions, engaging with a range of experts and people from the community.

Contribution to the *Big picture* curriculum aims

The project made a clear contribution to the students' development as successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens.

Successful learners	The students showed they were developing enquiring minds and could think for themselves when processing information, reasoning, questioning and evaluating.
Confident individuals	The students spoke with confidence about the things they learnt during the week. They related well to others and formed good relationships.
Responsible citizens	The project made the students more aware of the spirit of remembrance and the sacrifices that people make in wars. A number of students represented the school at a remembrance church service and laid a wreath in commemoration of service men and women who lost their lives. They showed they were able to work cooperatively, respect others and act with integrity.

Questions to consider

1. How might you plan compelling learning experiences that enable students to understand how events changed and shaped the world?
2. What opportunities do you have to involve parents in the activities planned in school?
3. How can you draw on local knowledge and expertise to enhance learning?

Greneway School: A new take on homework

Greneway School in Hertfordshire wanted out-of-school learning (homework) to be more creative and challenging for students.

The school took the lead from its feeder first schools, which had already changed their approach to homework as part of an initiative to make the curriculum more creative. Teachers at the feeder first schools gave students learning logs and encouraged the students to express themselves freely and keep pieces of homework in the logs. Alongside more formal projects, they encouraged students to engage in creative tasks and take more managed risks. The project gave students enthusiasm for and pride in their learning.

Ideas for developing students' creativity and enjoyment of learning were discussed at the Royston Schools' Headteacher Network and shared through school visits. A headteacher from one of the first schools led an in-service training (INSET) session for all staff at the middle school.

As a result of this inspiration and the changes to the secondary curriculum, Greneway School decided to try a new approach to year 5 homework. They gave students longer, more creative tasks than in the past, with an emphasis on developing research skills and individual responses. For example, as a first challenge, they asked the students to produce a project about an artist who uses or used interesting mark-making in his or her work.

Impact

Responses to an evaluation sheet sent home to parents showed that they felt the new approach had moved their children's learning forward:

'She looked at lots of different artists and thought about techniques. She also learned that what is considered great art is not always technically difficult.'

'It helped her to do research and really made her plan her work, and she loved doing it.'

'It was helpful in providing an opportunity to explore an artist and work of their choice, and left lots of room for creativity and individual expression.'

The students also responded positively:

'I would like to do more projects like this.'

'I liked making things using colours and exploring.'

'I've only one word – unforgettable.'

Contribution to the *Big picture* curriculum aims

The project made a clear contribution to the students' development as successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens.

Successful learners	The approach to homework gave students new opportunities to develop their research skills and put their own individuality into a project. They were encouraged to think creatively and show their creativity in both written and visual media. They showed high levels of attainment, and as a result, teachers' expectations increased. Students demonstrated their creativity, resourcefulness and ability to identify and solve problems.
Confident individuals	The students gained confidence and enthusiasm from developing their repertoire of enquiry skills and ability to work independently. They felt inspired and wanted to use their skills to communicate their thoughts and ideas in a variety of ways. They were increasingly independent and able to take the initiative and organise themselves.
Responsible citizens	The project made the students think about other people's lives and the world around them. They showed awareness of others and improved their ability to express their thoughts and ideas.

Questions to consider

1. How might you use homework more creatively in your school?
2. What different opportunities are there for students to develop their research and enquiry skills at home?
3. How might homework be used to enrich classroom learning?

Hugh Sexey Middle School: Broadening experiences

Hugh Sexey Middle School is in a rural area of Somerset with little cultural diversity. Keen to broaden students' experience, develop their empathy for different world faiths and improve their understanding of multicultural Britain, the school decided that its curriculum development project should centre on a study of Sikhism.

The project included visits to two places of worship: a gurdwara (Sikh temple) and a mosque. Later students prepared and cooked a vegetarian meal similar to the Langar food served in a gurdwara, which they then ate together as a class. Students learned about Indian music and were shown a presentation, reminding students of the rationale behind the simplicity of food eaten in this context. Teachers encouraged the students to research information, use their enquiry skills and ask questions to gain a deeper understanding of Sikhism.

Impact

The teacher who led this project was delighted that the work had a powerful effect on students:

'Above all I have learnt that it is often easy to be completely unaware of the impact of the work we do and that visits can have a profound effect on pupils to an extent that probably few of us really realise. The pleasure for me was to have an independent reviewer record the opinions of the pupils and assess that the project had made a change to attitudes.'

When asked why they thought this project was important, the students showed sensitivity and insight:

'To show us different religions so we can understand different children from other religions – so that we can talk to them without offending them.'

'To show us children how important it is to learn about other people – not all about us. That other people matter.'

Meeting people of different faiths proved particularly influential:

'One person asked about terrorist incidents... The man at the mosque was happy to answer. He was just a normal person – but of a different religion. He said many things that I would have said.'

'After the trip – what they said about their beliefs – I thought about what [the Sikhs] said about equality. When I saw someone being bullied – a new boy not being allowed to join in the football game by others – I stuck up for the boy – thinking about equality.'

Contribution to the *Big picture* curriculum aims

The project made a clear contribution to the students' development as successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens.

Successful learners	The students used the essential learning skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT to carry out independent research for this project. Some showed an academic rigour that enabled them to gain higher levels than in other assessments undertaken.
Confident individuals	Many students said that the subject became more relevant and interesting to them because of the experiential nature of the visits and the meal together. In turn, this made them feel more confident in their questioning and understanding of cultures different from their own.
Responsible citizens	The visits broadened the students' horizons, giving them a better understanding of the diverse nature of British society, especially in city contexts. They showed an understanding of their own and others' cultures and traditions within the context of British heritage. They gained greater appreciation of the benefits of diversity and how to challenge injustice.

Questions to consider

1. In what different ways are faiths celebrated in your school?
2. How might learning about different faiths and traditions enable students to gain deeper insights into their own culture?
3. What opportunities are there in your local community for learning about other faiths?

Meadowdale Middle School: Exploring identity

In 2007 Meadowdale Middle School in Northumberland began evaluating how effective, relevant and engaging its curriculum provision was. As a result, the school recognised that it needed to change – that it was time to refresh what it was delivering and reignite the flame of excitement in teaching and learning.

Staff invested time in discussing and developing a shared ethos. This established a belief in and commitment to active learning approaches, with an agreement that the art of teaching lies in assisting discovery. Staff went on to look for new learning contexts that would fully engage and motivate students, building on QCA's vision of 'a curriculum that will inspire and challenge all learners and prepare them for their future'. They developed three projects:

- Africa and us – a two-week global citizenship project that involved students studying different areas of Africa
- Great Britain and us – a two-day project that started with a whole-school visit to York; a memorable experience for staff, parents, governors and students
- Coming home – a seven-day project exploring students' local roots and culture.

The views of a student focus group and the opinions expressed in a survey of all students shaped and directed the learning experiences.

Dedicated time was a key factor in bringing about a change in attitudes and extending staff's teaching and learning aspirations and repertoires. The school allocated time on the school calendar, used training days and sought continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities so that staff would fully commit and engage in developing and delivering curriculum innovation. New planning teams, with staff members electing to work outside their specialism with different teachers, meant that the sharing of expertise, interest and ideas was widened and opened. This feature of the projects led to better relationships across the school between staff members so that best practice could be shared.

Impact

The school succeeded in creating a 'learning feast' that excited, engaged and challenged students. It used a range of methods to evaluate projects, measure impact and inform future curriculum innovations:

- attendance records showed a rise in attendance from 89 to 95 per cent

- a diary wall of sticky notes enabled students to make immediate responses to learning
- an anonymous survey completed by all staff members showed how projects made an impact on their teaching
- an online student survey showed a huge rise in the response to the curriculum and in all nine attitude areas measured
- the latest Ofsted report raised the school's grades to 1s in most areas (the school gained its second 'outstanding' status)
- parent surveys revealed the enthusiasm and interest generated by the projects.

Teachers found the new approach liberating and stimulating:

'... Able to unleash creativity. I learnt a lot from colleagues.'

'The opportunity to work and plan with new people was refreshing and rewarding.'

'This has got me thinking about changes I want to make to my day-to-day teaching.'

The school is committed to continuing on this curriculum path in the future, as the headteacher explains:

'Have our new curriculum journeys been worth it? Definitely. The projects have helped us to invigorate our teaching approaches and enthuse teachers to motivate and inspire enthusiastic, lifelong learners. We will continue, like many schools, to craft learning experiences that will produce successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens.'

Contribution to the *Big picture* curriculum aims

The project made a clear contribution to the students' development as successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens.

Successful learners	The extended timeframes used in the projects allowed for a new depth of experience and learning. The students showed their enjoyment of learning and demonstrated greater motivation to achieve their best, now and in the future.
Confident individuals	The students worked in vertical groupings and gained confidence from the new experience of working in cross-age teams. They related well to others and formed good relationships.

Responsible citizens	Exploring their local heritage and studying Africa helped students to understand the world in which they live, both locally and globally. They learnt about their own and others' cultures and traditions, within the context of British heritage, and developed a stronger sense of their own place in the world.
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Questions to consider

1. Are there sufficient opportunities to review and change your curriculum?
2. How do you best use the expertise and knowledge of staff to plan a creative, challenging curriculum for your students?
3. What provision is there in your school for involving students in shaping the curriculum?

Riverside Middle School: Painting in oils

Riverside Middle School in Suffolk decided to focus on an art activity for its year 7 and 8 gifted and talented students.

The project involved a local portrait artist working with 12 students over a series of lessons. The students learnt the techniques involved in portrait painting with oils and had the opportunity to work with a model. All 12 students produced stunning portraits and enjoyed their own preview evening attended by friends and relatives.

As a result of the project, the local Rotary Club awarded each students a set of oils, two canvases and brushes so that they could build on their newfound skills. The enthusiasm generated followed through into extended school workshops with the artist during the summer holidays.

Impact

Taking on a new challenge proved successful for both the individuals involved and the school as a whole, as the school's headteacher explains:

'This is the first time in over 30 years of teaching that I've known pupils have the opportunity of working with oils, and they did a fantastic job. The artist said how impressed she was by how quickly the children learned to handle what was a new medium for them.

'The pupils' work was seen as a major achievement in the eyes of other pupils and had the effect of raising their aspirations – very important in this rural community. The teachers arranged to take a group of pupils to the National Portrait Gallery in London. The project made portrait work seem a "buzzy" activity for our pupils – and it has given us an interesting and rather unusual whole-school focus. All this has developed from the rather small group who initially took part.'

Contribution to the *Big picture* curriculum aims

The project made a clear contribution to the students' development as successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens.

<p>Successful learners</p>	<p>The project gave the students a new confidence in their abilities and greater independence in their approach to work. The final outcomes were of a very high standard, and the students felt they had achieved something worthwhile. They discovered interests and talents in an area not often explored in schools. They showed their enjoyment of learning and were motivated to achieve the best they could.</p>
<p>Confident individuals</p>	<p>Taking part in the preview evening and seeing the audience's reaction to their work was great for the students' self-esteem. Their communication skills improved through inviting and talking to friends, relatives and members of the local community. They recognised their talents and ambitions, and showed willingness to try new things and make the most of opportunities.</p>
<p>Responsible citizens</p>	<p>The students responded positively to the privilege of working with a prestigious artist and being trusted to work independently. They made the most of all the opportunities on offer and were able to work cooperatively with others.</p>

Questions to consider

1. How do you draw on the expertise and interests of your students in lessons?
2. What provision is there in your school for celebrating the skills, talents and abilities of your students?
3. What opportunities might there be for your students to experience working with professionals?

St Barnabas First and Middle School: World celebrations

As part of a Creative Partnerships project with other schools in the Pershore area of Worcestershire, St Barnabas First and Middle School decided to focus on the theme of ‘world celebrations’. Working with a theatre director, students explored celebrations including an English wedding, the Mexican Day of the Dead and an Indian harvest festival. The project was intended as a starting point for developing the school’s international links and introducing a wider range of languages.

The project began with a group of year 5 students looking at how events in the UK and other countries are celebrated and grew very quickly to include all 225 students across the school. Each class explored and prepared a celebration from a different country for a promenade performance that included mask acting. Recreating celebrations from around the world gave the students real insight into different people’s way of life.

The students went on to collaborate in writing a new school song focusing on the school’s aims as it moves forward over the next few years.

Impact

Teachers at the school found that the students’ written work improved as a result of dramatising the scenes from different celebrations. In particular, it enabled them to write about human feelings and emotions much more effectively.

The students were extremely positive about the experience:

‘I think it was a very interesting way of learning, and it will stay in my mind forever.’

‘It was great. I am definitely more confident now.’

‘The Creative Partnerships project made me realise that if I’m not good at something, I just have to have a go and enjoy myself.’

Contribution to the *Big picture* curriculum aims

The project made a clear contribution to the students’ development as successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens.

<p>Successful learners</p>	<p>Drama proved an effective way to explore ideas and feelings. The students communicated well in a range of ways, and using masks proved particularly liberating.</p>
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<p>Confident individuals</p>	<p>The project enabled students to express ideas about the lives of people around the world with greater eloquence in other areas of the curriculum. They demonstrated self-awareness and the ability to deal well with their emotions.</p>
<p>Responsible citizens</p>	<p>The project increased students' awareness of other cultures across the school and in their community, and they showed greater appreciation of the benefits of diversity. It has had an impact on initiatives to help others in different parts of the world.</p>

Questions to consider

1. How might you best use cross-phase learning to enable students to learn from and with each other?
2. How do you draw on the values and aims of your school in everyday learning?
3. What partnership opportunities exist in your local area that could be used to enhance and enrich the curriculum for your students?

West Moors Middle School: Students as observers

West Moors Middle School in Dorset decided to set up a teaching and learning group made up of 24 students from across the school (six from each year group). Senior staff members took care to identify students that represented the diversity in the school, with different genders and a range of social backgrounds, academic attainment and confidence. Initially, the group met once a term to discuss the concept of learning and the practical and theoretical issues that enhance the classroom experience.

The school then decided to extend the project and involve the teaching and learning group in observing lessons. Following training, pairs of students from different year groups were linked with a volunteer teacher, and a programme of classroom observations was drawn up. These observations included feedback sessions where the students presented their findings to the member of staff. During the first feedback session, either the school's key stage 3 leader or the local authority assessment for learning consultant was present to help the students when necessary.

Impact

The lesson observation project raised the profile of the teaching and learning group in school. Students in the group reported that their peers are now taking much more interest in the work and feel that staff and students are working in partnership.

The students directly involved in observing lessons felt that the process helped them develop as more effective students:

'It has helped me to have more organised discussions. I'm better at them now.'

'It makes you see how the kids are behaving, and that some teachers have more control and some don't. It made you think how to act yourself in lessons, and you realise how hard the work of a teacher is.'

'You learn for yourself because you see [other children] doing things that you might do, and you think, "[I] might be making it hard for our teachers and other pupils".'

Staff interviews revealed that the comments made by students were influential on their classroom approaches. One teacher commented that, in light of comments from an observer, she tried to:

'... Do more planned plenaries. I ask them to do things to show learning. The objectives are also simpler and clearer.'

Students agree that there have been changes as a result of the project:

'Our teacher is now using the interactive whiteboard more and using paper less and getting people up to work things out.'

Contribution to the *Big picture* curriculum aims

The project made a clear contribution to the students' development as successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens.

Successful learners	Students in the teaching and learning group felt that observing lessons helped them become more successful by developing their discussion skills and making them more aware of how to moderate their behaviour in class. They showed greater understanding of how they learn and can learn from their mistakes.
Confident individuals	Following training, the students successfully met the challenge of providing formative feedback to their teachers. They showed they were self-aware and could deal well with their emotions.
Responsible citizens	Observing lessons made the students more aware of the role of the teacher and how different students affect the learning of a class. They developed greater understanding of how their own behaviour can affect learning and why it is important to respect others and act with integrity.

Questions to consider

1. In what ways are students involved in observing and evaluating learning?
2. What opportunities exist in your school for enabling students to feedback to one another?
3. How might you encourage your students to think about they learn effectively and what they need to learn?