

A Case Study in the use of experiential learning tools

St John Rigby is a high-performing Sixth Form College in Orrell, Lancashire. As a Catholic establishment, it has a distinct mission and ethos; it promotes Christian values and encourages students to engage with local, national and international issues.

The College offers a wide range of Vocational and A-level courses. It also offers an Honours Programme for academic high flyers who are aiming to gain entry into Russell Group Universities. Around 1,400 students in the 16 to 19 age group attend St John Rigby..



In 2014, students on their vocational courses achieved a 100% pass rate across all subjects. The overall A-level pass rate for the College was close to 100%, with a 7% increase in the number of high (A*-B) grades. The faith shown by the College in the ability of their pupils has been rewarded.

Connecting RSVP Design's tools to the curriculum

As an integral part of the curriculum, St John Rigby has a 'Values for Living' programme. This encourages the students to engage with broad ethical, social & political issues. Giving the students an understanding of the issues impacting the global community makes them aware of the need to play a role in wider society. It also contributes to enhancing their employability.

One of the 'Values for Living' themes is Citizenship. In March 2015, RSVP Design had the opportunity to work alongside Senior Tutors and Teachers to pilot the use of experiential learning tools to explore this theme. After discussion with Careers and Teaching Staff, we opted to use the 'Colourblind@' resource pack to explore and demonstrate the communication & listening skills that are necessary when students have to interact as citizens with other members of their community.



Our approach to Group Facilitation

A morning in the College timetable was selected when six Year 13 classes (predominately 17 year olds) were scheduled to be attending their 50 minute 'Values for Living' lessons. Using two sets of Colourblind, an RSVP Design facilitator worked in parallel with a Senior Tutor so that we each had class groups of 8-21 in size.

At the start of the activity, we made an explicit link to Citizenship and the skills around appropriate communication and active listening. Colourblind was then run and debriefed; a connection back to transferable skills was made. Before leaving, the students were asked to evaluate the enjoyment of the activity, its effectiveness at demonstrating the importance of communication/listening, and the potential for using practical activities like Colourblind in other areas of the curriculum; they responded using a 10 point scale, where 1 was Low (Negative) and 10 was High (Positive). Space for free-text feedback was also provided.



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Evaluation by the students

101 evaluation forms were completed in total by the Year 13 students. In terms of their enjoyment of the Colourblind activity, the average rating was 6.9/10. Most found the activity fun, but some were challenged by the nature of the brief and the need to work out their own group process. Our experience as facilitators showed that the groups required some reassurance and gentle guidance in the early stages of the task, more so than adult group comparators.

The majority of students found the activity effective at demonstrating the importance of sharing information and listening; this attracted an average rating of 8.7/10. Some of their feedback included the following observations:



- "It was very useful in showing how communication is vital to achieving certain goals"
- "It was good because it got you listening to other people and talking in an effective way"
- "It really frustrated me but I think it demonstrated how important it is to communicate and how sometimes people need one person to organise a groups thoughts"
- "Very good, I learned it is important to listen to information"
- "It was useful to have a chance to each step up and take the lead, and work together to reach goals"
- "I found this activity quite engaging and useful as it was a different experience to what we would normally do in other weeks or other lessons"
- "Very good, I learned it is important to listen to information"

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Testimonials and future opportunities

"The students felt that the activity was engaging and it emphasised the difficulties that people can have if communication is not clear". (Class Teacher)

"The activity was highly effective at teaching the students the importance of sharing information and listening to each other in order to complete the activity successfully. What was wonderful was that the students themselves recognised this when reflecting on the how they managed to complete the task. I believe this made the experience much more purposeful." (Senior Tutor)

"It was great to see the majority of the groups (eventually) working together and for certain students to take leadership in the task." (Pastoral Systems Officer)

"The activity was a leveller across all abilities and I felt that each student was appropriately challenged. All students were required to participate (even the observers who were asked to feed back to the group at the end of the task) which is something that not all traditional teaching methods can achieve." (Senior Tutor)

Having observed Colourblind, the staff at St John Rigby College involved in the pilot could see the value of similar experiential learning tools for other purposes. Some of the potential applications would be around support for employability skills, helping to explore the nature of high-performing teams/leadership and in preparing students for recruitment selection processes that used groupwork exercises. RSVP Design will continue to work with St John Rigby to explore these further.

"With Employability Skills coming high up on the political agenda then yes, I definitely do see a place for experiential learning tools as I believe they can complement and work alongside academic study and by doing so make our young people much more attractive in the global market to potential employers." (Senior Tutor)

Further Information

To learn more about how we can help you integrate powerful, student-centred learning activities into your academic curriculum and vocational training, or to enquire about staff development through one of our trainer training programmes, please contact:

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