

Mining the curriculum

Sustainability is central to the ethos of Shipley College. With a top-down commitment, the college has brought this key theme into every aspect of its life and work, reflected in its Sustainability and Environment Policy and Learning for Sustainability policy.

The college is a diverse community; about 40% of its 16–19 learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds, mostly of South Asian origin. The core values of the college are quality, equality and relevance, and its post-16 citizenship programme is very much part of its mission to empower all young people.

‘We see very clear links between sustainability, citizenship and the Every Child Matters agenda’, says Heather Crane, the post-16 Citizenship Coordinator at the college. ‘Citizenship can ‘make real’ whole swathes of the curriculum and issues of sustainability can motivate our learners to make a positive contribution to college and community life.’

The curriculum is mined for opportunities to transmit the college’s core values and integrate these into teaching and learning. ‘Young people have a keen interest in environmental issues, not least with current predictions of the impact of global warming’, says Heather. She cites an example from the IT area. ‘I asked my students to prioritise environmental issues and they highlighted the importance of not leaving computers switched on in the classrooms.’

Looking beyond the college, active citizenship is promoted, for example, through work with youth groups to reclaim small pockets of derelict land for community use. Across all vocational areas the links between curriculum, sustainability and citizenship are there for the taking, especially since BTEC courses are alive with suitable opportunities.

To empower young people, the college is keen to show student opinions are valued. ‘Our new students come to the college with a range of attitudes’, comments Heather. ‘Often those who appear least engaged are those who feel most passionately about the environment. This gives

us a clear link into curriculum opportunities and a basis to motivate their learning.’

Through the student council, learners have a direct line to the governing body and the senior management team. Heather gives one example: ‘Last year the student body voted on whether there should be free water available in the college. With management agreement, they voted for a nominal charge of 5p provided that the income should be used to support recycling in the college.’

The need for community cohesion is seen as part of sustainability. Starting with her IT class, Heather has set up an intergenerational mentoring scheme in collaboration with the Bradford Community Accord. ‘The scheme encourages young people to meet with senior citizens to exchange experiences. Before they went out, the learners had very negative ideas of the elderly. These were effectively challenged through meeting the older people and discussing life styles. It was very much a two-way process; the senior citizens were just as interested in the backgrounds and cultures of the learners, especially those of Asian origin.’

Initially the scheme worked with a Methodist Church ladies group, and Heather is keen to expand the scheme to other community groups and involve more learners using those with experience of the scheme to train others.

Looking ahead, Heather sees other opportunities to link citizenship with sustainable development. ‘All course co-ordinators are encouraged to mine the curriculum to include sustainable development and encourage young people to raise issues that matter to them.’

*More information from **Heather Crane** at HCRANE@shipley.ac.uk*

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