A group of Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) within Birmingham’s Behaviour Support Service held an issue-based, cross-curricular theme week with a global focus.

What did they want to achieve?

Caroline Scotcher (coordinator of the theme week) is an Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) with the Behaviour Support Service, and the main objective of all her work is to engage challenging pupils back into learning using the arts and social and emotional aspects of learning. With this project, she wanted additionally to highlight global issues to raise awareness and to encourage compassion and empathy, which challenging young people can often lack. A secondary aim was to encourage her colleagues to use the arts to explore issues and emotions.

How did they set about doing this?

Caroline provided the Birmingham secondary PRUs with a set of global dimension resources and invited them to choose a topic for a theme week. Every subject teacher planned one or two lessons around the topic and each centre put together a themed set of lesson plans and resource sheets that could be shared between the PRUs for future use.

One PRU chose the topic of anti-violence, in which poems written by child soldiers were compared in English lessons to hip hop lyrics which glamorised violence, and Banksy’s work on the West Bank barrier between Palestine and Israel was the focus in Art. Exploring relevant issues in different contexts creates a necessary distance for the students who would tend to be less involved if issues in their own lives are addressed directly.

At another centre, which chose the topic of human rights, the UN Declaration was studied in PSHE; the Holocaust in English; relevant song lyrics in Music; in Life Skills, the role of charities supporting children's rights; and in PE, discrimination was experienced and explored through picking teams and relating that to real life situations. In Art, the students made a large mural, stencilling symbols and images relating to rights, peace and freedom onto a large silhouette of the Birmingham skyline (see photos). Lines of the poetry they had developed in English were superimposed along with rights from the UN Declaration. At the end of the theme week, each student had a ring binder containing work from all the curriculum subjects.

“People should know what is fair and right.”
How well did they achieve their aims?

Hard-hitting, true life images and stories had most impact on the young people, engaging their imaginations, giving them an understanding of the lives of others and making them realise that in comparison, they do have choices. The pupils enjoyed the week, saying it was ‘interesting’ and ‘different’. Other statements on a comments wall at the end of the week included “We should be aware of what others are going through so we can understand and know how to help”; “We need to be aware, most people don’t know” and “People should know what is fair and right”.

As an AST, Caroline has one day a week for outreach work which she used to support and coordinate the theme week planning. She felt this helped make the theme week more collaborative and integrated, with a tight focus. She hopes that staff will have been inspired by the experience and consider a similar approach and to use some of the resources next time.

What do they plan to do next?

The Behaviour Support Service have applied for the International School Award. Evidence from the global topic week will be used to support their applications and their next theme week will be planned around this.

The human rights mural has been entered for the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s ‘Young Brits at Art’ competition in which young people demonstrate their vision of a world free from prejudice.

The Behaviour Support Service is now planning to encourage the issue-based theme week approach in the primary PRUs.

More information

Caroline Scotcher’s website: www.creative-interventions.net