

Case Study: Darryl Toerien (Head of Library), Lucy Breag (Librarian), Jenny Toerien (Library Assistant), Oakham School

Towards an inquiry-based curriculum

Oakham School Library sought to develop an inquiry-based curriculum for Year 6, teaching pupils to follow a modelled inquiry process: FOSIL (2.0) (Framework for Oakham School Inquiry Learning), which later became FOSIL (3.0) (Framework Of Skills for Inquiry Learning). Their ultimate aim was to build on this foundation as pupils progressed through the school in order to develop a coherent, collaborative and embedded approach to inquiry learning across all disciplines and year groups.

The library aimed to collaborate with the Year 6 teacher to embed essential inquiry skills into the curriculum, enabling students to engage with curricular material at a deeper level and encouraging a greater independence of learning. Through this collaboration the library also aimed to demonstrate the value of an interdisciplinary, inquiry-based approach and to equip the teacher with the skills to carry this approach forward. In so doing, the library was able to produce a powerful case study which it then used as an advocacy tool within (and outside) the school to promote and advance the academic vision of the school both amongst individual classroom teachers and those involved in curriculum design.

"The strategic vision of the school is highly focused on offering an education that prepares students for the life they will face in the 21st Century. They must appreciate and be successful in the facets of learning that will be demanded of 'Citizen 2030'. We put inter-disciplinary learning and its related skills and habits at the very centre of our academic vision for Oakhamians. This places the library at the heart of school as a true centre of learning given how instrumental it is in continuing to help shape and realise this vision." (Jon Andrews, Director of Teaching and Learning, March 2018)

Working with the Year 6 teacher, the library staff developed, planned and resourced an

inquiry unit. This involved coming up with a suitable question, planning the course of the inquiry, producing a workbook to support the pupils in structuring their inquiry and assisting with the delivery. Students enjoyed the opportunity to work independently using library resources, and both the teacher and the students found the structured approach to inquiry much more productive than the "go away and find 3 facts about" approach that is often taken, particularly with this age group.

The class teacher reported that the level of the final presentations (which she videoed) was of a much higher standard than in previous years, particularly in terms of appropriate use of PowerPoint to convey information. The teacher also felt that the level of student engagement with and understanding of the topic was much greater, as demonstrated through written essays following the presentations. The teacher was so pleased with the outcomes of the inquiry that she has continued her development of an inquiry based-curriculum, and has confidently begun to adapt and develop her own resources in line with the FOSIL framework.

The opportunity for the teacher and the library staff to work closely on the development and delivery of the inquiry was very valuable for all involved, developing relationships, skills and understanding on both sides. An unexpected benefit of increased involvement with teaching staff across the school is that this work has also encouraged the library staff to deepen our own understanding of inquiry into controlled, guided and open inquiries.

Evidence gathered from this and similar inquiries has proved to be a vital advocacy tool for encouraging colleagues and senior leadership to embrace an inquiry-based approach to learning within the school, and huge progress has been made at all levels throughout the school and beyond since this case study was originally written in March 2018. See www.fosil.org.uk for details.