Global Spirit Ed

CASE STUDY
The 'REAL LiFE' Curriculum

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Life doesn't always fit neatly into isolated subject areas, yet this mainly logistical solution still dominates our education systems, often at the expense of genuinely deep and personalised learning.

The Real LiFE Curriculum has been designed by experts from across the LiFE MAT who have looked at research conducted by world-leading organisations about how education can best prepare students to meet the needs of the 21st century. But we want our students to do more than simply be ready to cope with the future...we want them to be able to shape it!
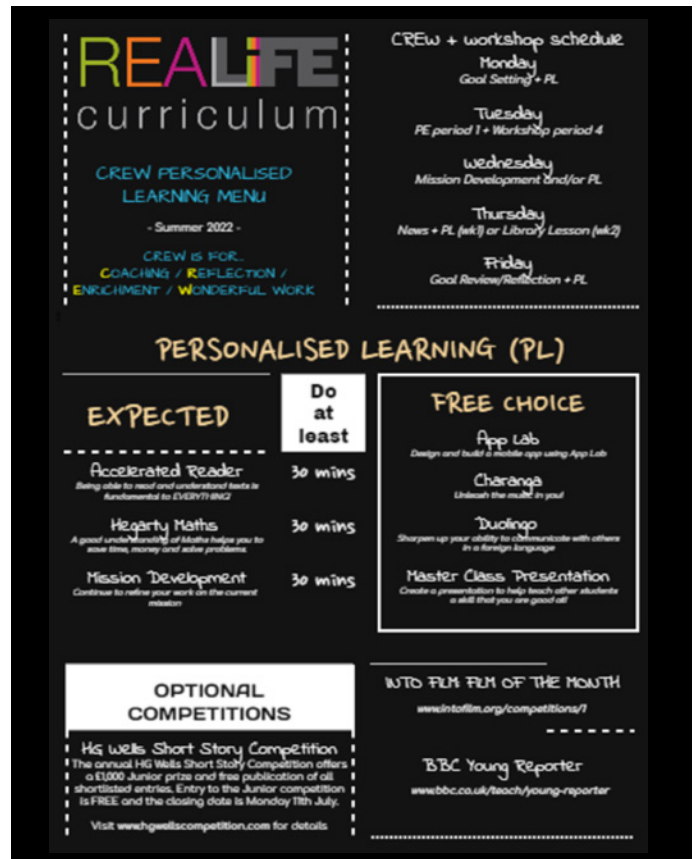
To do this our students need to have agency, and the OECD helped to determine our collective understanding of what this means.

> **"Student agency...is rooted in the belief that students have the ability and the will to positively influence their own lives and the world around them. Student agency is defined as the capacity to set a goal, reflect and act responsibly to effect change."**
>
> Source: https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/student-agency/

Our schools have always had students that fit this description, but the key question we considered was, "Can we empower more of our students to demonstrate higher levels of Student Agency more often?"

For our students to have the genuine will to make a positive difference we knew that our Real LiFE Curriculum would need to be relevant, interesting, and engaging. To do this we firstly make sure that everything in our curriculum is applied to and immerses the students in its real-life context. This stops the students from wondering what the point of learning about a particular topic is.

We thought long and hard about what would be interesting and engaging for the students to learn about, and how we would incorporate it into the curriculum. The problem facing all curriculum designers is that a balance needs to be struck between the knowledge and skills that are expected to be taught in order for students and schools to meet accountability measures, and the diverse range of interests that capture the imagination of our students. In the Real Life Curriculum, we solve this through CREW and multi-disciplinary Missions, and the main strategy that allows both of these features to develop student agency and empower students to take greater ownership of their learning is the use of our Critique protocol to help students self and peer assess their progress towards Visible Success Criteria.

CREW stands for Coaching, Reflection, Enrichment, and Wellbeing. It is a daily timetabled session that is fundamental to building the levels of student agency that we desire. Students are encouraged to take more ownership of their own progress and learning in the Real LiFE Curriculum and we are able to prepare and support our students to do this in CREW sessions. On a Monday morning, our students are coached by the CREW leader to set their goals for the week ahead. In total, our students set four goals, one each for reading, maths, their current mission, and a personal goal. They need to follow the SMART principle (Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic, Time), and once set, the students plan their use of the personalised learning time that is available during subsequent CREW sessions by outlining how they intend to meet these goals by the end of the week. This is recorded on a template that is uploaded to Google Classroom as an assignment which enables the CREW Leader to easily review and monitor student progress.

Weekly Goals

Remember to make your goals SMART:

S = Specific: Don't be vague...try to say exactly what you plan to accomplish.

M = Measurable: You can choose to measure how much you want to achieve by time or the number of tasks/exercises/pages you are aiming to complete.

A = Agreed: Make sure that this is something your CREW leader will approve of!

R = Realistic: Don't be over or under-ambitious. The goals should be a challenge but not something that is impossible!

T = Time: Give yourself a time limit and a deadline otherwise you will find that they will drift!

My goals for the week (Reading, Maths, Mission, and Personal)

- The book I will be reading this week is...
- The Maths topic that I plan to improve my understanding of is...
- In my mission I need to...
- My personal goal is to...

Personalised Learning Opportunities	What I plan to do in the Personalised Learning Time that is available that day (be very specific and detailed about your mission and personalised work)
Monday	1. I will set my goals for the week 2. I will use any remaining time to...
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	1. I will review how effective my goals were in the table below 2. I will use any remaining time to...

Friday Goal Review (complete the table below at the end of the week)

	What did I achieve in relation to this goal?	What should my goal for this be next week?
Reading		
Hegarty Maths		
My Mission		
My Personal Goal		

To support this process we put together a Personalised Learning Menu that points the students towards the many online learning platforms and resources that most schools already have available but are often under-utilised. In our LiFE MAT schools, we use Accelerated Reader to support the Reading goal and Hegarty Maths to support the Maths Goal.

For each mission, we publish a student guide with visible success criteria to help inform the mission goal (more on that later). While our menu highlights learning platforms from a range of subjects, as well as opportunities to enter national competitions to help inform the personal goal. We have two simple rules for the personal goal in addition to it meeting the SMART principle. Firstly, it needs to be something that you can work on safely in a normal classroom, and secondly, it must be something that can be worked towards without disturbing others. Of course, students are able to set themselves additional personal goals that they can work towards in their own time at home, and many of our students do...yes, some of our students have been setting themselves extra homework!
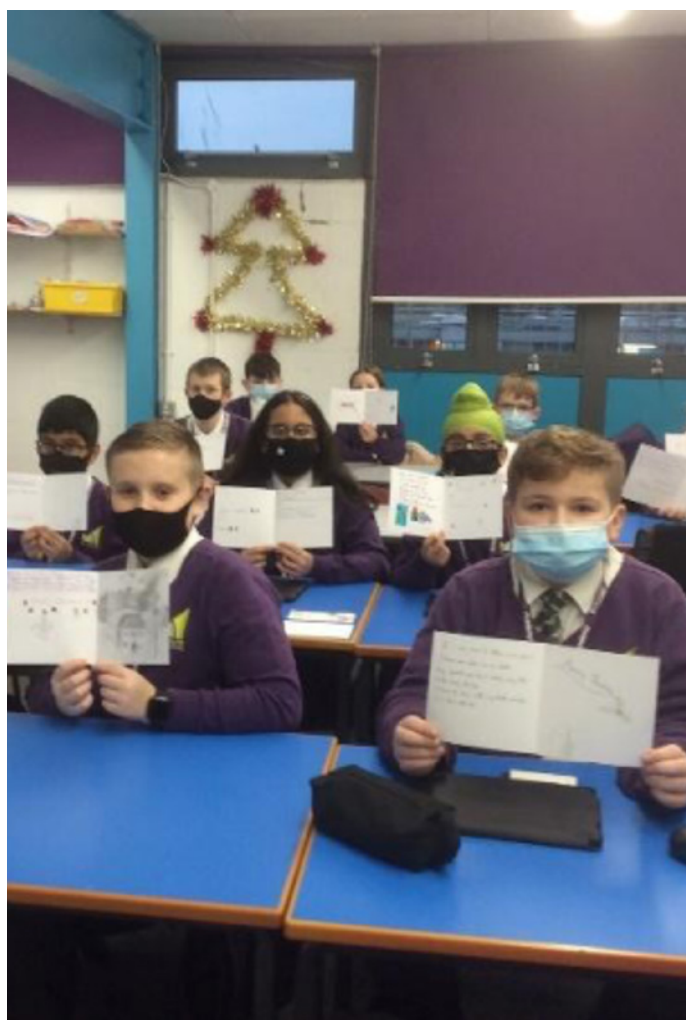
At the end of the week, the students reflect on their progress and upload basic evidence in the form of photos and screenshots which helps the CREW leader to monitor how successfully they have used their personalised learning time as well as to prepare the students for the following week's cycle of goal setting.

In our multidisciplinary Missions, students are immersed in a real-world issue and are challenged to come up with a response to that issue by developing a final product that is showcased via an event or exhibition where selected members of the public (such as their peers, family, and industry experts) are invited. Our students do still take tests and other assessments to demonstrate their understanding, but the public showcasing of work gives this a far more powerful experience that is much more relevant to real life.

We wanted to ensure that our students would continue to benefit from teaching by subject specialists, and also be prepared to select from an equally broad range of examination subjects as the students who follow a 'traditional' curriculum. The themes for our multidisciplinary missions were decided by consulting curriculum leaders from all of our subject areas, as well as through listening to students and staff. We were inspired by the approach of the World's Largest Lesson (https://worldslargestlesson.globalgoals.org/) to use the UN Global Goals as the umbrella theme for our missions. The Global Goals are often described as a 'to do' list for our planet. We want our students to make a positive difference in the world around them so it became the perfect guide to inform our planning.

The Global Goals
For sustainable development

To decide which of the Global Goals we would use in our missions, representatives of each subject area looked at our existing curriculum maps to establish where there might be possible opportunities to build on each other's teaching. Relatively quickly this allowed us to settle on the following missions for our Year 7 students:

• Who am I? - Global Goals 4 (Quality Education) and 10 (Reduced inequalities)
• Climate Action - Global Goal 13
• Good Health and Wellbeing - Global Goal 4

We deliver one mission per term over an 8-12 week period to ensure that students are able to go deep in their learning without drowning! Missions start with each subject providing an immersive experience that helps bring the issue to life from the perspective of their subject area. We have added Virtual Reality to our range of immersive experiences, but are mindful not to use technology at the expense of the many perfectly good immersive experiences that schools have always delivered both in and out of the classroom such as role play tasks, trips, and visits.

The final product for the mission is broken down into milestone tasks with the subject teacher deemed best suited to overseeing each milestone and taking responsibility for its delivery through their timetabled lessons. The subject specialists agree on when they should do this and are also responsible for providing feedback to the students about the evidence they submit towards this milestone task. All of the milestone tasks are set as assignments on a Google Classroom which means that all of the subject teachers, as well as the CREW leader, are able to see the progress of each student in real time.

Throughout the year our subject specialists do still teach other topics that don't fit authentically into any of the Missions. It is the responsibility of each teacher to manage their teaching time through medium and long-term planning so that they teach the Mission milestone tasks at the appropriate time as well as follow the discrete Schemes of Learning from their Curriculum maps in their remaining contact time.

While CREW and Missions provide the structure for student agency to be developed, it is the use of our protocol for Critique using the Visible Success Criteria for reference that really equips students with the skills needed to make a positive difference to themselves and the world around them.

Humans are brilliantly adept at completing tasks that they deem necessary but do they always complete them to the best possible standard and do they inherently know what that best possible standard might look like? The need to provide leadership and support to others is also really highly valued in society, but how do we ensure that the feedback we give to others is delivered in a way that is useful without leading to offence and embarrassment?

Ron Berger's rules of Critique

We were inspired by Ron Berger's rules of Critique, in that it should be kind, specific, and helpful. Experienced classroom practitioners can recount endless examples of students either being too nice or too generic when asked to self and peer assess (not particularly useful or specific) or being too subjectively harsh (unkind) which can be catastrophic to a productive learning environment!

A third outcome is often one that is the most common - students being too scared to give feedback for fear of failure because they don't understand what the next steps for improvement could be. Our solution to this has been to carefully consider what success in a task looks like by providing clear Visible Success Criteria to accompany tasks, and to coach the students to communicate their Critique by using the following sentence stems; "I like... I notice... I wonder...".

The Visible Success Criteria are presented as Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum steps and are written in the form of "I can" statements to provide the students with positive actions that they can do.

We use the Hess Cognitive Rigor Matrix (https://www.karin-hess.com/cognitive-rigor-and-dok) as a reference tool when planning to ensure depth, rigour, and challenge, but in simple terms, the bronze objective is the minimum acceptable response that often involves presentation of key facts, with silver, gold, and platinum scaffolding the next step actions needed for the students to demonstrate an increasing depth of the application/evaluation of knowledge.

The following table shows the Visible Success Criteria that were used as part of the Climate Action mission in a joint milestone shared between Maths and Science.

Friday Goal Review
(complete the table below at the end of the week)

	Bronze	Silver
Area (Maths)	I can measure lengths using a variety of different measurements and tools	I can calculate the area of rectangles and triangles within the environment of my school
Plants & Soil (Science)	I can identify at least one type of plant that would improve the ability of our school site to reduce Carbon and be able to suggest an appropriate location (based on the type of soil) where we should attempt to grow it.	In addition to Bronze I can attempt to grow my own plants from seed and be able to describe the process of how they are able to grow (germination).
	Gold	**Platinum**
Area (Maths)	I can calculate the area of composite shapes to work out the areas of unused space around the school	I can solve problems using area involving percentages, costs to produce a plan on carbon sinks around our school
Plants & Soil (Science)	In addition to Silver I can explain how to conduct an experiment to compare the different types of soil for growing plants.	In addition to Gold I can use the data from this experiment to justify the type of soil we should use to grow plants as part of our carbon reduction plan.

The example above highlights one of the many benefits we have experienced since introducing the Real LiFE Curriculum.

Staff from the full range of subject specialisms are collaborating to an extent that has simply not been possible before. This has highlighted areas of overlap and inconsistency that previously existed, one of many examples being the way that historically Maths, Science, and Geography have used data and graphs.

Our staff has been able to learn from each other and are now able to identify and exploit opportunities to build on each other's work.
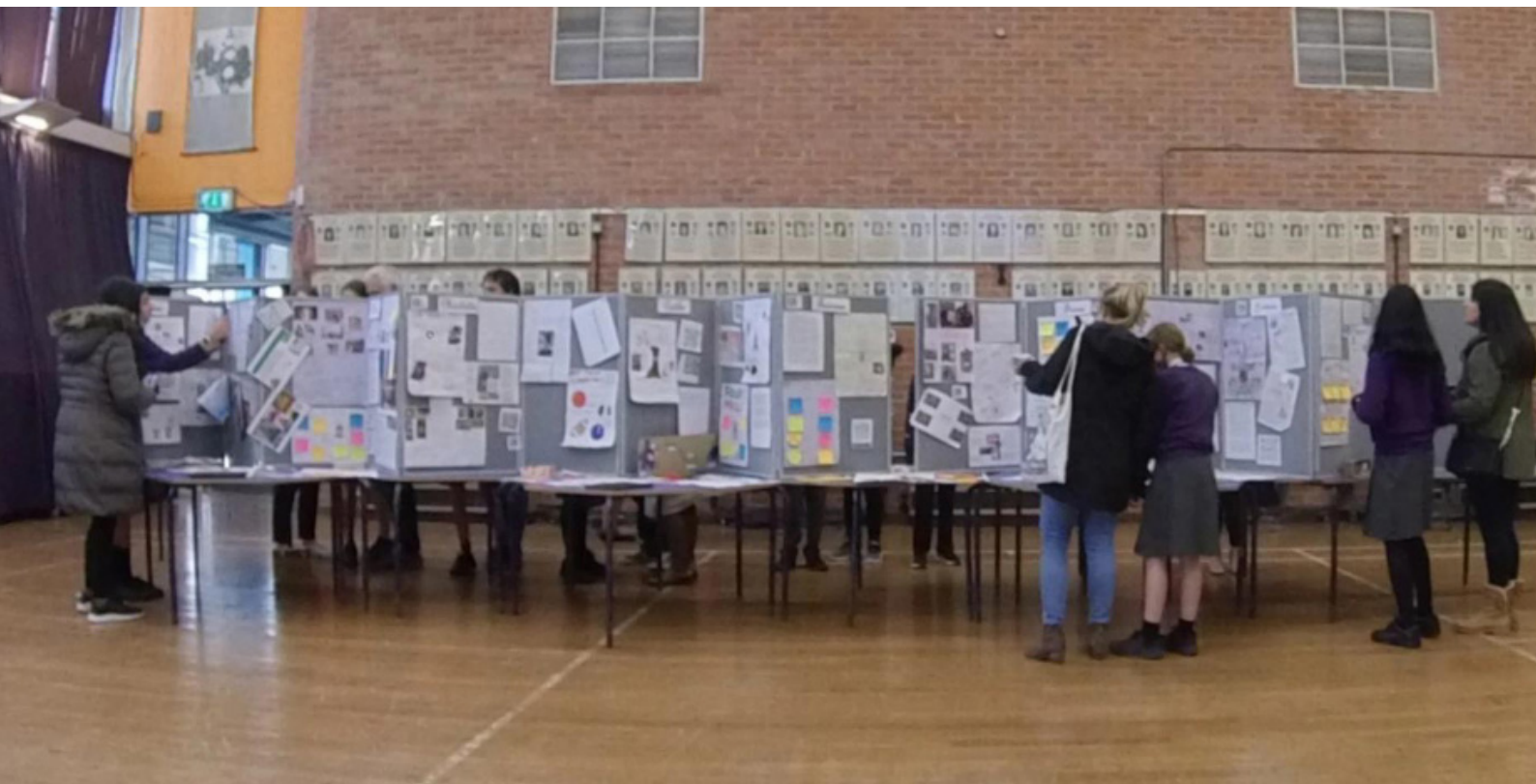
It is however the positive impact that the Real LiFE Curriculum has had on the students that have given us the impetus to move forward in this way.

Our groups have consistently shown higher levels of attendance and had fewer negative behaviour incidents which supports the perception of teachers that these students are more engaged in their learning than students who had followed a 'traditional' curriculum. They have used the personalised learning time in CREW to great effect, with numerous students choosing to learn additional languages while others have embraced learning technologies by using online tutorials to learn how to code mobile apps and create virtual reality experiences.

We have also had a significant number of students using this time to enter national competitions such as the BP Ultimate STEM challenge and the HG Wells short story competition. The comparative attainment data between the Real LiFE Curriculum students and those following the 'traditional' curriculum in areas such as reading, maths, and science has also been very favourable. By the end of the first year of the Real LiFE Curriculum, a significant number of students increased their reading age by more than two years with some increasing as much as four years!

In the classroom, it is clear that the Real LiFE Curriculum's focus on the critique by using the visible success criteria for reference means that the students submit higher quality work and are able to generate their own next-step feedback. Finally, the experience these students are gaining through the public nature of the final products is giving them the confidence and articulacy they need to take positive action to improve the world around them. If we can empower more students to be like this our future will be in safe hands!

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