

ITT Citized Conference

Citizenship out of the Classroom – Nick Nielsen, Envision

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1). Summary

Envision is an educational charity pioneering active citizenship in post-16 education. Its aim is to enable young people to realise their capacity to make a difference by supporting them to undertake their own practical projects around social and environmental issues of relevance to them (e.g. disaffected youth, homelessness, street crime, Fairtrade). In only three years we have expanded into 40 diverse schools and colleges across London and beyond, engaging 80 volunteers and over 400 young people. The aim is to build towards making Envision a replicable national programme in the future.

2). Context

Citizenship Agenda, post-16

Following the second Crick Report it was made clear that in contrast to citizenship education for Year 11 and below, post-16 citizenship should be much more of an experiential process.

Limited pro-activity

A key challenge that Envision, and other bodies (including schools) seeking to engage young people in active citizenship, can encounter is a climate lacking student pro-activity in formal education. Not being pro-active is often the ‘thing to be doing’ from the young people’s point of view, particularly in the post-16 age group. The primary reason for this is often a lack of appropriate opportunities.

Staff time pressure

Because of both time pressures, and sometimes a relative lack of awareness of active citizenship, teachers understandably have a limited amount of time to organise relevant and engaging activities for students.

Importance of voluntary participation

Because of the importance of the experiential aspect of post-16 active citizenship education, voluntary participation on the part of the students plays an important part in the process. Coercing young people into the activity would run the risk of negatively impacting on their citizenship education.

3). The Envision Approach

There are a number of aspects which ensures the programme is as effective as possible:

External Organisation

Envision is able to present to the students as an external organisation, separate from the school. This has been important in conveying the adult nature of the opportunity, avoiding any negative perceptions the students may have of school authorities' attempts at getting them active, and most importantly removing as far as possible the 'teacher-student' relationship to encourage the students to take responsibility.

Making pro-activity exciting

To challenge the current climate in schools and elsewhere, Envision organises highly inspiring presentations which include powerpoint presentations, music, video and various interactive aspects. The engagement model varies according to audience as students from different schools and colleges are engaged by different styles of language.

Hands-on support

If the initial presentation was not followed up by a high level of hands-on support, Envision have found that any initial inspiration and engagement would quickly peter out as the norm of non-pro-activity took over. Therefore, Envision provides weekly hands-on support in the form of trained volunteers and the Envision Co-ordination team. This ensures momentum, effectiveness and flexibility in the model.

Non-prescriptive

A key technique in challenging a lack of pro-activity is to ensure the participating students are engaged on their own terms. Therefore the Envision programme offers the opportunity for its participants to identify what projects they would like to tackle. Examples of social and environmental projects are given but the participants take the decisions. This maximises their enthusiasm and the relevance of the programme enabling Envision to operate in a huge diversity of schools.

Open to all

While only a limited number of students can get involved in the Envision process (teams vary in size from around seven up to 30), it is important that the opportunity is perceived as open to all. For this reason a presentation to the entire 6th form is important, as is the open invitation for interested students to get involved through the year. Envision aims to provide an inspiring experience for its participants, providing an example to peers and younger students ensuring the experience has a wider-reaching impact.

4). Workings of the Envision Schools and College Programme

Presentations

At the beginning of the academic term members of the Envision coordination team carry out a number of interactive presentations to the entire sixth form of schools and colleges who have expressed interest in the programme. The presentation is both engaging and entertaining with the aim of being open to everyone.

Brainstorm

At the end of the presentation anyone who is interested in Envision is encouraged to sign up to come along to an immediate taster 'team' session where they will explore the issues they might want to tackle. They will need to commit to volunteering their time if they are to become an Envision Team member.

Team Formation

The students are then encouraged to form an Envision Team, a group who will work together and plan out a series of practical hands-on social and environmental projects. The team must learn to work through any issues of conflict or disagreement and develop a plan of how they are going to carry out their projects.

Volunteers

At the beginning of this process the Envision coordinators bring in two volunteers to support the team. These volunteers are referred to as Envision Youth Educators (EYEs). EYEs are members of the local community interested in supporting groups of young people to put their projects into action. EYEs are carefully selected through interviews and training and are policed checked before being placed with an Envision team. They commit to attending weekly meetings with the team over two to three academic terms.

Projects

Once the EYEs have established a good rapport with their team and have worked out a convenient regular weekly time to meet (usually a lunchtime), the students go about focussing their ideas and looking at what practical projects they would like to develop. The demands of schoolwork are taken into consideration and there is no pressure to achieve. The programme relies on the desire and the energy of its young participants to bring about change. Each team runs an average of two to three projects through the year. Press here for some examples to date.

Conclusion

The programme runs through the autumn and Easter terms with each team continuing to develop and implement their projects. It concludes in the summer term before exams and study leave. A large majority of teams who have Year 12 members wish to continue their projects after their exams are over.

Joint-Team Events

Throughout the year Envision offer a number of events for all the students involved to come along. These can involve workshops relating to social and environmental issues of interest to them, or practical projects in their local communities. By attending, the students meet people of their own age, get inspired by each others' ideas, feel part of an active community, and generally have a good time.

Student Website

Over the course of the academic year the participating Envision teams are encouraged to showcase their projects on their own Envision webpages housed at: www.envision.uk.net The site has become a hub for sharing ideas and best practice.

Award

The programme is an award scheme and so every year in July, a ceremony is held to acknowledge and bring together the achievements of everyone who has participated. Last year this was highlighted outside City Hall in London when students (with the direction of a specialist artist) created six giant waste sculptures, each with a theme of the issues identified by the students themselves.

Ultimately the students feel a sense of achievement for having given up their own time to make a difference, and observed the impacts of their efforts on the community around. Having realised their capacity to make a difference, they become Envision Graduates, to be kept linked in to a growing community of world-changers.

5). Envision Team projects

Because the Envision Programme is largely non-prescriptive, the range of projects undertaken by the students are extremely varied, responding to local environmental and community needs as groups of young people see them. Below are some examples of team projects carried out over the previous year:

Working in the community

Envision teams often express interest in tackling issues that are relevant to their immediate school community. The **South Camden Community School** Envision team wanted to address the problem of younger students causing trouble in the local area as its members in the past have themselves been identified with giving the school a bad name. After consultation with other young people in the school, the team devised a project to provide something for young people to do after school. After securing the backing of the school's headteacher, the team in co-ordination with Envision and its volunteers, put a proposal together to the Community Chest Fund to run a programme of activities including: sport sessions at the local youth club, Kung Fu accredited training, and musical workshops. The funding application has been successful and the team are planning to run the project each day after school from around 3.30pm till 6.00pm on a four-month pilot basis. The **Queens Park Community School** Envision team are also aware of the lack of after school activities available to their age group. They have set their sights on a vacated local building which has sat dormant for over 15 years. The building used to be called the Tiverton Centre, which was once a community hub for the area. The team want to convert the run-down building into a fully operational youth club, shared with other tenants, offering classes, a study area and computer centre. The project has the backing of the Mayor of Brent and the local residents association. Initial land searches have been carried out with Brent Council planning department. The team are now applying to various grants and engaging the local community through a series of presentations.



ADT College Envision team, have decided to challenge the stereotype of young people as apathetic troublemakers in a constructive fashion. They have set about making a short video documentary on the public's opinions of young people and how this changes when young people are actively involved in local community projects. The team have carried out their first project, cleaning up graffiti in a local park, and interviewed a number of local members of the public about their opinions and how this activity affected them. They are currently organising follow up activities and will then edit the material and the resulting

documentary will be used as an awareness tool to empower young people in their college and the wider community.

Fairtrade and ethical and healthy eating

With obesity levels in young people now a major concern and with the arrival of fairtrade products in the mainstream, the wider issue of 'food' has been something that a lot of students have looked at. The **Hampstead School** Envision team responded to a large number of complaints in the school about the state of their canteen. The canteen did not offer a good variety or many options for vegetarians. More importantly the team were concerned at the lack of healthy options. After carrying out a survey indicating high disapproval rates amongst students, the team set up a rival canteen selling reasonably priced, healthy and ethical food which was so popular it became a monthly feature. As a result, the canteen altered its ways, reducing prices and bringing in fruit and more diverse options. A number of schools including **Archbishop Michael Ramsey Technical College** have campaigned for and successfully installed a 'Green Machine'. The machines offer a healthy and fairtrade option to mainstream vending machines by guaranteeing that products are a mixture of fairtrade, organic and low in additives. Four Envision teams in total have successfully

installed the machines with a number of other teams looking to do the same. Students have learnt of the Green Machine through other teams pro-actively installing them, which highlights successful replication amongst the Envision community. With the growth of fairtrade in Britain, many Envision teams have pioneered new ways of promoting products whilst highlighting the issue and raising awareness within the school community. Determined to convince a sceptical fellow sixth form audience the **Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School** decided to bake a number of delicious fairtrade cakes and biscuits to win over taste buds in the school. The sale was so successful that they sold their entire stock in one lunchtime, raising over £140. The money will be given to a community project in Africa.

Tackling waste

Envision teams are aware that local authorities and national government are keen to reduce and recycle the amount of waste generated in schools. The problem is that waste is not a 'sexy' issue. How do teams make it relevant to the school community? The **Henrietta Barnet School** Envision team decided to popularise the issue by holding a 'recycled fashion show', a fashion show where the clothes were made entirely out of recycled and re-used materials. The team even managed to convince some of the teachers to model the clothes. The show had a tremendous impact and as a result, students from the team held a workshop at the Envision event. Subsequently both **St.**

Marylebone and **Seven Kings High School** are to hold their own versions to promote recycling within the school. **Howells School** Envision team decided to make use of an area in their school grounds to house a composting scheme and organic garden. As a result waste from the school kitchens is collected and taken to the bins; the compost collected is then used on the organic garden. A number of teams have realised that the only way of implementing recycling in the school is to get on and do it themselves. Both **Chiswick Community College and the LeSwap 6th Form network** have also set up school recycling schemes.



Homelessness

Homelessness is another community issue which students have been keen to tackle. **The Pimlico, Westminster City and Greycoat Hospital Schools** are all based in the City of Westminster and as a result the Envision teams at these respective schools have all felt that rough sleeping and homelessness is an issue that is literally on their doorstep. The Pimlico Envision team wanted to focus on younger homeless people. After some local research they found a local homeless shelter called the Cardinal Hume Centre, which works with 16-21 year olds and provides not only accommodation but a complete service to help the young people get back on their feet. The team have organised a whole fundraising week with cake and food sales, competitions, quizzes and an awareness campaign. The team are hoping to organise a volunteer to work at the centre itself. **Greycoats** Envision team organised a school assembly to raise awareness of the issue and invited two people, with first hand experience of living on the streets, to talk. They also organised a very successful school wide collection of Christmas decorations to give to the charity Crisis for their homeless shelters over the Christmas period. All Envision teams involved in the homelessness issue are keen to look at long term ways of helping to provide a solution to Britain's homeless population.

HIV/AIDS Awareness

Education of HIV and Aids awareness is an issue which Envision teams feel is not widely understood by a lot of young people and therefore raising the topic is of vital importance. The **Latymer School** Envision team raised awareness of the issue of HIV/AIDS after hearing about the impact this disease is having in developing world. They decided to organise a week of awareness assemblies and activities in their school and to raise money for the Terrance Higgins Trust. To raise money they organised for the school to have an 'own clothes' day where pupils had to pay £2 to be

able to come in non-uniform, they sold red ribbons, held a computer competition and in the future are also planning a sponsored parachute jump. To date the team have raised nearly £2,000.

Conservation and Bio-diversity



Urban surroundings suffer from a lack of green spaces and as a result Envision teams have devised a number of projects which have involved promoting the spaces they have and even creating new life! The **St. Savoirs St. Olaves** Envision team have been busy revitalising a green space that has been abandoned for many years. The area is dilapidated and as a result the team have been busy applying for grants to improve the fence around the area as well as purchasing a number of tools and plants for the garden. So far the team have received an Action Earth Grant. The team plan to use the area as a shared use garden for urban wildlife, composting, native plant species and a pleasant place for sixth formers to use in the summer. The **Old Palace** Envision team have also been busy encouraging new life. The team have embarked on a programme with the school and Thames21 to hatch baby trout (fish) and re-introduce them into Carshalton Ponds, tributaries of which run beneath the school. The trout were hatched in the school and have subsequently been released. The team are monitoring their progress.

Energy use and renewable energy

Energy and where we source it from has been a topic for teams with some looking at how they could switch energy supply over to renewable sources or offset the schools carbon emissions by planting trees. The **King Alfred School** Envision team were attracted by the possibility of getting solar panels installed in their school. After consultation with the school management and Parents Association, who felt that the project was unrealistic as the school could not afford to contribute and the students would be unable to raise the large amount of money needed, the team bounced back. They were not deterred and started organising fundraising events within the school. One student set about applying to a number of grant giving bodies and was successful with one which granted £5,000 to the project, a figure that will be matched by the government's renewable energy fund. The panels have now received planning permission and will soon be installed. The panels will power the entire energy of the school's science block and will feed renewable energy back into the national grid. The two year project has inspired a number of other Envision teams to apply for solar grants with **Camden School** Envision team awaiting to hear from a number of submitted applications and **South Hampstead High School** Envision team hoping to replicate the success. As part of their 'make a difference week' The South Hampstead team bought in a renewable energy expert to talk to younger pupils about the new renewable energy possibilities available to everyday people.



All projects are highlighted on the interactive schools and colleges website, run by the Envision teams themselves. Visit: www.envision.uk.net. This aspect has been far more successful this year because of the time invested in its development, the increased accessibility and the simplicity of the site. Teams indicate that it is a really good way of finding out what other teams are engaged in.

6). Key Lessons

Citizenship not explicit

While Envision is effectively a post-16 active citizenship programme, this is not made explicit to Year 12 and 13 students from the participating school or college. We have found that students are

more likely to be inspired if they perceive the reason for their involvement is not primarily their own education. While experiential learning is the context for the entire process, Envision has found that it's participants are only able to identify why they really got involved towards the end of the programme. The reasons given for getting involved at the beginning differ a great deal.

Active on their own terms

Because Envision is non-prescriptive it is often the first opportunity its participating students have had to take responsibility for their own process. This often means that the team is able to experience barriers, disillusionment and frustration (often part of the process) and with the help of the hands-on support, maintain momentum and learn from their experience.

Not just volunteering

In keeping with some of the Crick report recommendations that citizenship should be more than just volunteering, the Envision process is centred around weekly meetings which are opportunities for brainstorming, discussion, awareness raising, skills development, reflection and evaluation. This broadens the process and ensures citizenship learning is sustainable as all of Envision's participants are able to create their own opportunities.

For more information about Envision, and the potential to get involved in the programme as either a school/college or volunteer, please visit – www.envision.org.uk