

Can an issue-based approach to English increase confidence and improve grades?

January 2011

1 The Schools White Paper 2010

'The twin challenges of delivering an aspirational National Curriculum and ensuring that teaching and learning reflects the nature of their local community.'

'There needs to be room in the life of the school for an exploration of wider social issues which contribute to the well-being and engagement of all students.'

2 What is an issue-based approach?

Since 2008 schools across Liverpool have been using the Senseless learning resource to tackle issues around bullying, racism and speaking out. The original resource was used by over 20,000 young people in Liverpool as part of PSHE. However, the curriculum is becoming increasingly overcrowded.

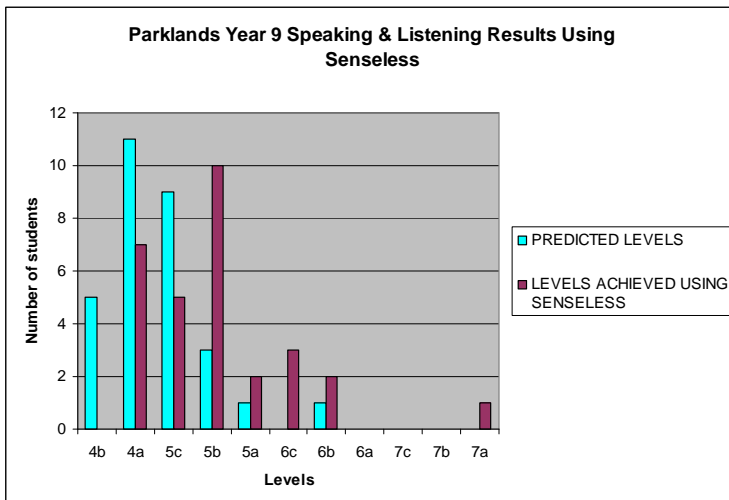
An issue-based approach involves dealing with social issues in the core curriculum. Ariel Trust have developed this issue-based approach with resources such as Senseless enabling teachers to tackle issues around racism as part of the new Key Stage 3 and 4 English Curriculum.

3 Is it possible to study racism as part of controlled assessment in the English curriculum?

The current pilot resource has been mapped against the following areas of the exam board specifications:

- AQA GCSE English Unit 2: Speaking and Listening
- WJEC GCSE English Unit 4: Speaking and Listening
- AQA GCSE English Language Unit 2: Speaking and Listening
- WJEC GCSE English Language Unit 4: Spoken Language – Using Language
- AQA GCSE English Language Unit 3: Part c – Spoken Language Study
- WJEC GCSE English Language Unit 4: Spoken Language – Studying Spoken Language

4 Can this approach to Speaking and Listening increase confidence and improve results?



“The pupils’ confidence really developed and obviously that’s had a massive impact on their results”

Joanne Stephens
English Teacher, West Derby School

**Parklands High School Year 9:
Speaking and Listening Results**



The graph on the previous page shows the results achieved by Year 9 pupils at Parklands High School, using Senseless as part of the new GCSE English Language specification. The light blue bars represent predicted levels whilst the dark purple bars show the results achieved using Senseless.

- All students achieved their predicted levels
- 80% of students exceeded their predicted levels
- Over 1/3 (36%) of students moved up by 2 levels or more

5 Why do we need to tackle the issue of racism?

Liverpool City Council's Bullying Audit of 2009 shows a 3% decrease in the incidents of bullying reported by young people. However, at the same time racist bullying has risen by 2 % with 26% of young people stating that they were being bullied about their race, religion or skin colour.

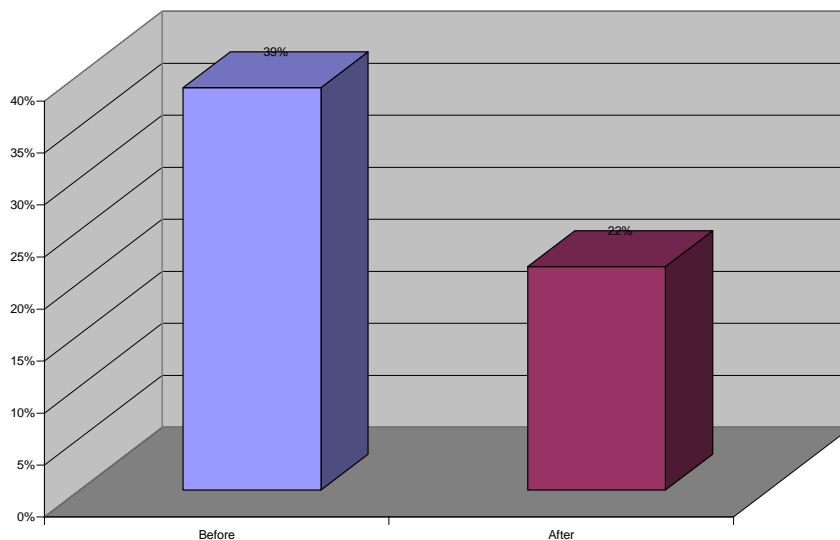
6 Can this issue-based approach work in English?

In June 2010 we began to redevelop Senseless to be used as part of the new GCSE English 2010 curriculum. The development and piloting of the new version of Senseless has relied on the cooperation of three schools: West Derby School, Childwall Sports College and Parklands High School.

6 Can English lessons change young people's attitudes to Racism?

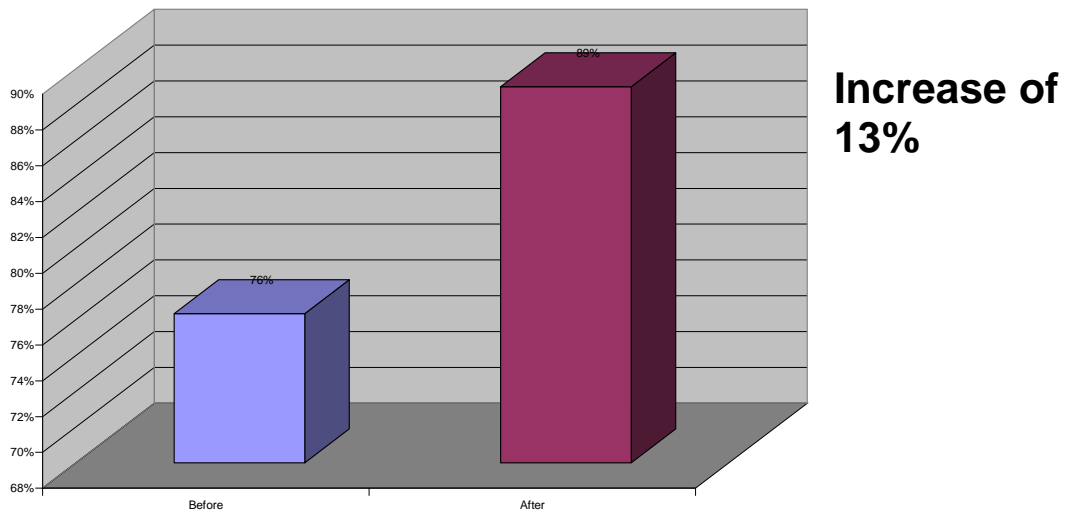
The data below is taken from attitudinal questionnaires filled out by pupils before and after the pilot project in Childwall Sports College. The light blue bar represents the results from the questionnaire at the start of the project and the dark purple bar shows the results from the questionnaire at the end of the pilot project in their English lessons.

Q4 The best way of dealing with racism is to keep quiet



Decrease of 17%

Q6 People should choose friends based on who they are, not based on what other people say they are



“Senseless helped us understand why some people are racist and how people react to it”

Pupil, West Derby School

7 Would you like to replicate these results in your school?

We are currently looking for English departments who are willing to try Senseless out in their schools. This is a free offer; we just need to track the results.