



# GAINING GROUND

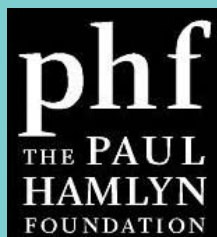
## FINAL REPORT

by Cathy Poole November 2007

Practical media workshops for excluded pupils and professional development of teaching staff at Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in Herefordshire



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## Starting Points

*'These small bites of success are above rubies for children who don't often experience success'*

**Eleanor Christopher, Headteacher, The Aconbury Centre**

*'You're learning out of things that are fun'*

*'It gives you a sense of choice, because, if really like it, you might go onto do it at college – you have more choice of what do when you're older.'*

**The Pupils**

*'It was great to see them persevere and learn the new techniques to eventually produce results they could be really proud of'*

**The Practitioner**

*The key strength of **Gaining Ground** was its two year duration*

**Nick Randall, Nick Randall Associates**

*'Involvement with the Rural Media Company has broadened the horizons of how to use visual media.'* Steve Thompson

*'It provides the participating pupils with a means of expression they don't get anywhere else'* Paul Murray

**Herefordshire Council Children and Young People's Services**

# **Gaining Ground: The Project**

## **1.1 Purpose**

To bring a fresh and sustained creative approach to engaging disaffected young people in Herefordshire who find themselves excluded from mainstream education

To establish a model for practical media education for disaffected young people based in Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) settings

To contribute to good practice and policy development concerning practical media education in PRU settings

## **1.2 Approach**

The approach was to trial two linked models:

- Practical creative media activity timetabled throughout two school years in one PRU, The Aconbury Centre, supported by In Service Training (Inset)
- Media Inset training and practical support to two other PRUs, St David's and The Priory, over the same two year period.

The pupils at Aconbury were two consecutive Year 9 groups. The pupils in the other two PRUs were in Year 10. It was therefore possible for some pupils to work with RMC at Aconbury in Year One, and then develop their skills at St David's or The Priory in Year Two.

Six modules ran in Year One: Digital Stories; Film Making; Digital Music; Journalism; Web Design; Animation. In Year Two, the following six modules were taught: Film Making, Digital Stories, Digital Music, Photography and Journalism, Animation, Mixed Media – Film and Photography for the web and for evaluation purposes.

In order to disseminate the models, the Rural Media Company:

- Spoke or was present at conferences and event (see section 9)
- Created a web site to make information about the project available, [www.gainingground.org.uk](http://www.gainingground.org.uk)
- Will run a symposium about practical media education/creative production in PRUs to disseminate findings
- Will make this report widely available

## **1.3 The Project's Values**

All involved showed a strong awareness of the needs of the target group and the issues involved in working with young people who had been excluded from school. Enhancing self-esteem was a key goal. All saw the project as an opportunity for the young people to develop new means of

expression. Practitioners developed activity that was engaging and enabled young people feel a sense of achievement as they created media products.

'Quality' was understood in progressive terms with the pupils improving their outputs as they learned. The 'quality' of the artwork produced was perceived to be relative to their development. 'Quality' also described the nature of the experience for the young people. They were supported to deliver a 'quality' end product for each module and they felt pride in their artwork.

All stakeholders were keen to benefit from the project's length.(two years). Year Two's programme improved through thorough evaluation of Year One activity and outcomes. All were keen that there should be a legacy beyond the project through embedding the work into the curriculum and through wider dissemination.

#### **1.4 Who Benefited**

##### YEAR 1 FIGURES

- 13 pupils at The Aconbury Centre
- 10 pupils at The Priory and St David's
- 9 teachers and Teaching Assistants (TAs) took part in the training
- 

##### YEAR 2 FIGURES

- 19 pupils at The Aconbury Centre
- 17 pupils at The Priory and St David's
- 5 staff and 3 TAs took part in the training

The calculations are based on the number of young people who worked directly with the practitioners at Aconbury and at The Priory and St.Davids. In addition, other students from The Priory and St David's who learned from their teachers and from the first group of young people are added into the calculation. These figures are increasing each term as new young people participate in the media work that is now embedded in the PRUs' curricula.

#### *Benefits to PRUs and LEAs, Regional and National*

The report will be made widely available through the **Gaining Ground** web site and other regional and national fora. A symposium is planned for 2008. By these means, we will enable a wider range of PRUs and LEAs to learn from the approaches employed during the project.

## 2.Context

### 2.1 *The Rural Media Company (RMC)*

The Rural Media Company was founded in 1992 and is an established media education and production organisation with a national reputation for its innovative, socially aware media and communications work. Its key aims are to:

- Enable rural communities to learn about and use media by participating in practical media education activities.
- Create and disseminate high quality media communications and educational resources.
- Ensure sustainability and growth of the organisation.

Its mission is to empower people in rural communities by enabling them to communicate through creative media.

### 2.2 *Special Education in Herefordshire*

Herefordshire is one of the most rural and sparsely populated counties of the West Midlands with a largely agricultural driven economy. Some political wards south of the river are among the most economically deprived in the country. A number of young people in Herefordshire experience mental health issues and rurality can further effect this aspect of their health.

Mainstream schools in the area are committed to sustaining relationships with their pupils, and only those with the most severe problems are excluded and attend the PRUs. Currently the number of exclusions from school for medical reasons is reaching capacity. For these reasons, while it is considered desirable, re-entry to mainstream school has been hard to achieve.

Hereford PRUs are highly rated nationally for the imaginative quality of their provision. Ofsted rated The Priory and St Davids outstanding, and both were included in Ofsted's *Good Practice in PRUs*.<sup>(1)</sup> Schools' involvement with artists in residence has been long term, significant and of high profile in Herefordshire.

### 2.3 *PRUs, The National Picture*

A national programme of PRU improvement is underway with strategies to address:

- Leadership
- Accomodation suitability
- Curriculum

Practice is changing to ensure more joined up provision with stronger links between all schools including PRUs and other local agencies. It is anticipated that in the future, pupils will attend PRUs for shorter periods

and return to mainstream school, rather than becoming long term attendees.

There is nationally some excellent practice. In Warwickshire, where provision is very well resourced and reintegration figures are high, there is a long-term link with the Rugby Art Gallery. One Ipswich-based PRU 'collapses' its timetable for one half a day per week so that all teachers and pupils can participate in arts activity, working with external practitioners.

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation has invested significant funding in the development of arts activity in PRUs, and several recent publications have identified its positive impact. *Creating Chances*(2), *Serious Play*(3) and *The Art of Engagement*(4). *The First Time Projects Fund* provided funding for PRUs that had never worked with professional artists before. The Foundation has recently supported a documentary showing the impact of the arts on young people who have been excluded from school, *Everything Stopped*,(5) Their funding for the development of the [www.prus.org.uk](http://www.prus.org.uk) web site has enabled support and national sharing of good practice.

Based on John Harland's work on the effects of arts education on secondary schools(6), *Serious Play* provides a typology of impact for PRU projects in their study, listing these types of effect:

- Art Form Knowledge and Skills
- Creativity and Thinking Skills
- Communication and Expressive Skills
- Social Development (Ability to Work with Others)
- Personal Development (Confidence and Self esteem)
- Enjoyment, Sense of Achievement, Satisfaction
- Behaviour and Attendance
- Commitment to School or Education
- Transfer Effects (to other Areas of Learning in the Curriculum)
- Reintegration
- Participation and Future Plans (7)
- 

These descriptors will be mapped against each of the areas of impact of **Gaining Ground** as described by staff, practitioners and young people at the Aconbury Centre.(See Section 5).

#### *2.4 Practical Media Education*

In 2004, charged with the media literacy 'duty.' Ofcom defined media literacy as 'the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts'.(7)

*The Charter for Media Literacy*, developed following Ofcom's national consultation, advocates:

'Supporting the principle that every UK citizen of any age should have opportunities, in both formal and informal education, to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to increase their enjoyment, understanding and exploration of the media.' (8)

The work of the **Gaining Ground** project is underpinned by awareness of this principle. Throughout the last ten years there has been a huge expansion of practical and creative media provision for young people. The recent report by the British Film Institute (BFI) and National Federation for Educational Research's (NFER) for *Creative Partnerships*, <http://www.creative-partnerships.com>, *Special Effects*, sets out to identify the distinctive learning outcomes from moving image education in case studies of nine Creative Partnerships school based projects.

The highest level of impact reported for these projects was in the following :

- 'immediate enjoyment and a sense of achievement and satisfaction'
  - 'film skills and techniques and film knowledge,'
  - 'social development, especially working with others and teamwork.'
- (9)

The study suggests 'that film-making can straddle the school-home/street divide that so often makes school learning irrelevant and alien to many young people.'(10) This was also an aspect cited in the feedback about **Gaining Ground**; the use of media proved an excellent vehicle for engaging the young people in a language with which they were familiar. Mark Reid, Head of Education, BFI, commented that on practical media projects 'young people gain a strong sense of well being and an ability to collaborate.'

### *2.5 The West Midlands Media Literacy Strategy*

In June 2007, the West Midlands launched its media literacy strategy in which it made clear the importance of media literacy for good citizenship. Its argues that 'Media literate trainers, educators and employers are able to use media in learning in order to engage with reluctant learners and hard to reach groups.'(11) Its overlapping priorities are formal education, lifelong learning and industry.

Its vision includes the following:

- Media literacy on the agenda of every local education authority, school and college.
- Every child has an entitlement to critically engage with, enjoy and create a variety of media throughout their school career. (12)

## *2.6 The Aconbury Centre (Aconbury)*

Pupils at the Aconbury Centre have been referred for both emotional and/or behavioural reasons. They may experience a range of problems or disabilities including: serious misbehaviour; Aspergers or autistic spectrum disorder; emotional anxiety difficulties stemming from home situations. A number of the students are Looked After by the local authority or live with foster parents.

Aconbury has a very clear philosophy for which raising self-esteem is at the heart. The emphasis is on what happens next for every child. The curriculum is adapted to their needs. Aconbury works towards self-regulation amongst the young people, and the mission is to reintegrate into mainstream schooling.

## *2.7 Previous RMC Work at The Aconbury Centre*

RMC worked at the Aconbury Centre for two brief earlier periods, in November 2002 and September 2003. While this first project partnership had considerable strengths, the project was limited by its short-term nature. **Gaining Ground** was put in place to see what could be achieved when support was provided over an extended period.

A report about RMC's previous work(13), proposed projects with one or two targeted institutions to gain case studies of good practice. It raised issues about:

- Lack of appropriate software in the school
- The need for more technical support and training
- Lack of time to enable the pupils to see the entire process of film making

**Gaining Ground** aimed to address these issues.

## **3. Evaluation Methodology**

*During Year One*, the aim for the evaluation was to estimate the success of the model for media work in PRUs. The main focus was on the work at the Aconbury Centre, while also evaluating the impact of the training in the other two PRUs. All aspects of the project were considered: the preparation and planning, the practitioner involvement, the nature of the partnership and what the young people learned from the project. The Year One report took a deliberately critical approach in order to inform planning for optimum impact in Year Two.

*During Year Two*, the following aspects were evaluated:

- The Impact on individual young people at Aconbury
- The Impact on the Aconbury curriculum and on staff empowerment

- The Impact of the project on The Priory and St. David's
- The Impact on the wider context; sharing approaches and outcomes amongst PRUs, practitioners/artists and the media literacy fraternity

The report focuses most fully on bullet points 1, 2 and 3. A further report that considers wider impact will be produced after the symposium

Data was collected through classroom observation of each module, face-to-face meetings, telephone interviews and questionnaires. Feedback from: teachers at the PRUs, the Headteacher at Aconbury, RMC, all practitioners and from the young people provided the data that informs the report. In order to assess the Aconbury young people's development during Year Two, a proforma was completed by teachers and artists at the end of each session.

Pupils were asked for feedback at the end of each module, and then the final term prioritised the opportunity to discuss what they had learned. At the end of the year, each of the participating pupils spoke on camera about what the project had meant to them, and what they had learned from **Gaining Ground**.

In order to provide a wider context for the work, the evaluator attended the *Bedded In not Bolted On* conference, (February 2007) about arts activity in PRUs in Warwickshire, and met or interviewed regional and national specialists. (see Acknowledgements)

The overall aim for the evaluation was to estimate the success of the model. Initially had been believed it would have been useful to trial the activity in depth in more than one PRU for comparative purposes. In fact trialling a slightly different model in the two other PRUs has provided useful information about the effectiveness of each approach.

This final report looks in depth at the delivery in the Aconbury Centre, its impact on the young people themselves and on the curriculum. It considers the value of the second model through investigating the impact of the practitioner support on the other two centres.

## **4. GAINING GROUND SUMMARY: STRENGTHS AND ISSUES**

### *4.1 Strengths*

- A fully funded two-year project. RMC could establish its presence in schools and, in Year Two, develop from what was learned in Year One

### *4.2 The Aconbury Centre*

#### **Strengths**

- RMC presence at staff meetings meant that staff were able to invest in the project
- Regular timetabled presence meant staff and pupils got to know RMC practitioners – they became ‘part of the school’
- Work took place during curriculum time and on a regular basis
- Through the training sessions, teachers and PAs learned new skills to contribute to delivery
- Two different classroom teachers managed the project at Aconbury, and TAs were always present during the production work
- The school has built up its computer and software capacity
- Mechanisms for validation of the activity and the artwork produced were in place. The work was shown during Circle Times, at end of year presentations, and used for Records of Achievement. Parents were invited into the centre to see the work.
- For the final session of the film making project, the timetable was collapsed so that the work could be completed (Flexibility.)
- The Headteacher saw the potential of the project and its impact on the curriculum (Leadership).
- There is a long term vision to bring more practitioners into school

#### **Curriculum Change Enabled by the Project**

- The Aconbury Centre has built Media Studies into the curriculum; teachers use their new skills and fresh ideas to support coursework; Digital Stories, comic strips etc.
- More technology and software has been purchased and downloaded to enable this curriculum development
- A TA who was trained by RMC will support Media Studies delivery
- The project added value to existing work, eg the pupils used to make CD covers in Design technology. Now they make their own music, cut the CDs and place them in the covers they have designed
- Film will be used in History lessons, and Claymation in Art lessons
- The Headteacher saw the project as ‘a fantastically useful way to demonstrate the benefits of cross curricular working.’ It has enabled a culture change in the Centre’

## Issues

- The amount of time the schools could devote to the project – the **Gaining Ground** work took place only when the practitioners were in school
- The pupil profiles proforma developed for use in Year Two completed by the teacher during the early modules took lower priority later in the project following reduction of non-contact time
- Occasionally during a session a TA's goal for the young person differed from that of the RMC practitioner
- Young people joining in the middle of a 5 week Unit had no ownership of the work, were defensive about their lack of knowledge, so had more potential to disrupt
- Schools favour PCs whereas RMC works on Macs. This made it harder for teachers to remember what they had learned. On one project the practitioner learned PC software for use in the PRU, but was not as fluent as he is on a Mac
- One teacher lacked confidence in the use of equipment at the end of Year One – however, all others gained skills. Year Two consolidated the skills development

### *4.3 The Priory and St David's (Year 10 pupils)*

## Strengths

- Through the training sessions, teachers and PAs were able to learn new skills to build into their classroom practice
- In Year Two, The Priory and St David's chose how to employ practitioner support. They chose to work with both teachers and pupils together and have been able to disseminate the learning to other pupils through both teachers and the pupils who participated
- Some of the young people who entered these PRUs had participated in the project at Aconbury in Year One and so already had skills to contribute to media activity at the PRU
- Pupils studying for examinations are able to employ the creative approaches learned on **Gaining Ground** to complete coursework (eg GCSE Art)

## Issues

- Some teachers favoured more ongoing support as in the Aconbury model
- One teacher believed their school context could have been more supportive
- . Some thought the media work had less impact on the young people who had participated at Aconbury. Others saw this as a real benefit they could build on, using the young people as 'experts.' (see above)

#### 4.4 The Providers

##### Strengths

- RMC is trusted by the schools and is able to attract practitioners who deliver high quality in terms of artwork, classroom management and sensitivity to the pupils' needs
- While each practitioner has a unique style and profile, all were enthusiastic, good facilitators, who related well to the young people and understood the project's values
- Pupils were taught by young, dynamic practitioners, closer to their own generation than teachers are, who they could look up to, and who engage them in a different way
- When the young people were asked to hold interviews, it was felt especially useful for them to work with an 'outsider', because there was a productive distance which would not have been possible with a class teacher
- RMC was flexible, regularly reviewed its approach, and made changes when it was felt these would be beneficial to the project
- The practitioners were willing to learn from their experience and to adapt their input to the needs of the pupils both during their module and especially in preparation for Year Two
- Teachers found it especially useful when practitioners conveyed a clear plan to them and left them with notes after the session so that they could further develop their own skills
- RMC structured the final term of **Gaining Ground** to give the young people the opportunity to review their own learning on the project and its impact upon them.

##### Issues

- There is sometimes a divergence between artists' and educators' views of measures of success, but it became understood that 'quality' also meant the quality of the achievement for the young people
- During Year One, one of the practitioner's expectations were not appropriate to the specific group of pupils; they had to quickly rethink their work programme to make it more appropriate
- In Year One, some practitioners were too directive or completed too much of the work themselves, which reduced the pupils' sense of ownership (in Year Two, the young people were involved in the entire process)
- While acknowledging that practitioners had a very different experience from teachers who work with the young people on an ongoing basis, one practitioner believed a pupils' refusal to participate could be challenged to enable them to achieve – this practitioner successfully challenged the young people and they rose to the occasion

#### *4.5 Working with Media Practitioners to Make Media Products*

##### **Strengths**

- Some young people in PRUs struggle to express themselves. Through media, the young people gained a powerful means of expression
- In Year Two especially, the young people were enabled to engage in the entire process of media making themselves.
- On the photography unit, for example, there were opportunities to improve what they produced and so they could see their own progress
- The young people could see their achievements and take away their own product, photographs, animation on CD etc., thus they gained in confidence and developed a sense of pride in their work
- The practitioners were flexible and able to respond creatively to the young people's ideas
- The young people gained self worth from knowing they were working with real experts, practitioners external to the school who valued them enough to work with them
- The young people said **Gaining Ground** gave them insight into the media and a view of new potential employment pathways
- Media products look good and this develops pupils' self esteem

##### **Issues**

- Only a few people at a time can use filmmaking or animation equipment and so a variety of tasks need to take place so that all young people can have a role

#### *4.6 Impact on the Young People*

##### **Strengths**

- The young people gained in confidence and self esteem
- The young people gained a range of media skills
- The young people were committed to their creative work
- Working with the practitioners, the young people made quality media products for each module
- The young people developed social skills working as part of a team
- The young people gained a great deal from working with adults from the world of work

##### **Issues**

- The life issues that young people face meant that on occasion they were not able to engage fully with the work
- Short attention spans meant that there were limits to what some pupils could achieve

## 5.1 Impact on the Young People at Aconbury

### 5.1 Year One

Behaviour, attitude and attendance are, of course, of specific concern in PRUs, and these aspects of the pupil's progress are most evident in feedback. Each pupil has individual issues and needs, and each individual responded differently to the project.

**Gaining Ground** had a considerable impact on the young people. The course was designed so that all pupils could see the media products they had made on a regular basis. In Year One, the class teacher reported that:

- 100% loved the film, digital stories and animation modules (Enjoyment)
- 100% improved their knowledge of media (Art Form Knowledge and Skills)
- 100% improved attainment (Creativity and Thinking Skills)

Specific media skills learned included:

- Song Compilation
- Basic Musical Theory
- Digital Photography
- Animation
- Filmmaking

(Art Form Knowledge and Skills, Creativity and Thinking Skills)

Other learning was also mentioned:

- Development of confidence (Personal Development)
- Communication skills (Communication and Expressive Skills)
- The ability to co-operate with others on a shared project. (Social Development)

### 5.2 Brief Case Studies

In Year Two after each module, was completed, the Aconbury class teacher and the practitioner were asked to consider the impact on each of the pupils. *Serious Play* (10) provides a typology of impact for the PRU projects in their study, listing types of effect (see Context/PRUs Section 2) The descriptors are set alongside feedback comments about the impact of the project on a sample of the young people.

#### **Pupil 1.**

Pupil 1 responded particularly well to **Gaining Ground**. The class teacher described them: 'an able but anxious pupil with a history of non-attendance, initially nervous, did not attend Session 1, became the mainstay of the group, acting, filming and editing confidently and capably.'

Has become more confident and capable with peers.’  
 The pupil said ‘I liked every bit of it...I think it boosted my confidence a lot, especially with working with people.’ When working on the animation module later in the year, this pupil’s ‘focus didn’t waver and they were thrilled with the finished piece.’  
 (Social Development, Personal Development, Enjoyment, Sense of Achievement, Satisfaction) Extracts from this pupil’s school PASS profile (Pupil Attitudes to Self and School – see below) measured at beginning and end of the school year show how much the pupil progressed in feelings, attitude and behaviour during the year at Aconbury. This progress demonstrates a great achievement for the pupil and for the Centre. While **Gaining Ground** was only one part of the curriculum, it had a strong contribution to make to this pupil’s development.

**Pupil 1 PASS Profile**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Beginning %</b>	<b>Year End %</b>
1. Feelings about school	6.1	98.8
3. Self Regard as a learner	17.5	98.4
5. Attitude to teachers	5.1	100
6. General work ethic	38.3	95.4
8. Attitude to attendance	1.5	98.5
9. Response to curriculum demands	34.9	99.7

(Personal Development, Behaviour and Attendance)

**Pupil 2**

Described as ‘sullen and angry,’ already had some camera skills, and ‘eventually made active contributions to all aspects of the filmmaking.’ This pupil went on to use computers willingly in ICT, something they had previously refused to do.

**Pupil 3**

‘With very poor attendance and with social and behavioural problems extending out of school...poor concentration levels and distractible behaviour,’ this pupil was challenged by the practitioner to participate. At the end of the module, the teacher commented, ‘It was wonderful to see them playing such a major role in something and being successful.’ The pupil said ‘I had a great time. I enjoyed shooting the bit when I was the angry person. It was great fun.’ Personal Development, Enjoyment, Sense of Achievement, Satisfaction, Behaviour and Attendance)

**Pupil 4**

A pupil with who ‘can be unco-operative’ worked particularly well during

the digital photography module. The pupil profile sheets trace engagement and achievement through each session. In Week 1, this pupil was 'listening if slightly disengaged' whereas by week 4 they kept good eye contact and thought up good questions' (for interview planning) and 'was very proactive.' They 'took the lead' in Week 5. (Personal Development, Enjoyment, Sense of Achievement, Satisfaction, Behaviour and Attendance, Commitment to School or Education)

### **Pupil 5**

Very much affected by their circumstances outside school, not all pupils progressed in the same way, and for some there were much smaller, but nonetheless significant gains. Pupil 5, who has been involved in criminal and anti-social behaviour outside school 'didn't come to the (final photography) session but popped in long enough to see their photos. Seemed very pleased.' (Sense of Achievement, Satisfaction)

### **Pupil 6**

'Seemed withdrawn and didn't want to take part. However, listened and kept quiet during the recording.' For this pupil, cooperation was important.  
(Personal Development, Behaviour and Attendance)

### **Pupil 7**

Pupil 7 'began with negativity, went from partial engagement to full engagement and then 'refused to come to school.' Although manifesting a similar pattern, they re-engaged with the next module and showed pride at their final product. During the animation module, within a group context, 'the solo activity suited them well.'  
(Personal Development, Sense of Achievement, Behaviour and Attendance)

In the final session of the Photography and Journalism module, the practitioner presented the group with several copies of final print outs of the Photo Mosaic Postcards they had worked on during the module. All pupils were noted 'pleased and proud' of their achievement. (Personal Development, Enjoyment, Sense of Achievement, Satisfaction)

The practitioners noted small changes in the pupils' attitude to them as they saw them each week over a five week module and the pupils become more familiar with them. They 'are more polite, they say 'goodbye', 'hello' and 'thank you' and you can have fun with them, playful fun.' (Social Development )This sense of fun is viewed as very important for the young people who are dealing with a wide range of issues in their lives outside school.

All pupils were very much affected by their circumstances outside school, and not all pupils progressed in the same way. For some there were much

smaller, but nonetheless significant gains. The Headteacher at Aconbury, Eleanor Christopher, commented: 'these small bites of success are above rubies for children who don 't often experience success.'

### 5.3 *Specific Learning Outcomes Recorded during the Project:*

- Computer Skills
- Audio Recording
- Claymation
- Visual/Media Literacy
- Camera Skills
- The Process of Editing
- Song Compilation and Structure
- Basic Musical Theory
- The Ability to Listen and Compose an Individual Performance
- Listening Skills
- Communication Skills
- How to Develop Creative Ideas
- Numeracy

(Art Form Knowledge and Skills, Creativity and Thinking Skills)

### 5.4 *The Young People's Views*

In the final session of the two years, the young people spoke to camera about what they had learned and of their feelings about the project. The young people had prepared the questions they would be asked during the previous session. Their responses were thoughtful, and one group chose to forego their break time to continue the work. This demonstrates a strong engagement with the project and respect for the practitioner with whom they were working. (Commitment to School or Education; Enjoyment, Sense of Achievement, Satisfaction; Behaviour and Attendance)

These interviews are recorded in some detail as they represent the experience from the young people's perspective.

*What did you think of **Gaining Ground**?:*

'Fun'

'it was fun making something out of nothing',

'cool'

'Weird with an attitude. Interesting and enjoyable because you're still learning,'

'Weird because it puts you on the spot a bit.'

'I liked the animation because you can do whatever you want. '

(Enjoyment, Sense of Achievement, Satisfaction, Creativity and Thinking Skills)

*What did you feel?:*

'it makes you proud for what you've done,'  
'I thought it looked good I was proud of it. It was mostly the best work I have done here.'  
'Good because it took your mind off everything else, annoying at other times because it was fussy and you had to get it right'  
'proud, shy, embarrassed. Other people might laugh at it.'  
'It makes me less shy – I feel a lot less shy than I did at the start'  
'It was relaxing' (the Music project)  
'Positive'  
'I enjoyed taking the pictures and that.'  
'Gained confidence going on camera (filming)'  
'Anger and then sad. Anger about the subject matter.' (the film they made was about a new boy's expectation of bullying )  
'I did it 'cos I thought 'I can do that,' and then other people joined in....proud, I suppose.' (about team work)  
'You got to have a lot of patience for building things, listening – I can listen when I'm interested'

(Personal Development , Social Skills, Enjoyment, Sense of Achievement, Satisfaction)

*What did you learn?*

'It has given me knowledge of music and animation and experience'  
'It helps music and art'  
'I learned new things about computers'  
'You had to make your own songs and put them on CD'  
'I learned how to make a film'  
'We learned how to focus the camera taking Close Up shots (photography)'

(Art Form Knowledge and Skills; Communication and Expressive Skills; Transfer Effects)

*What did you do and how did it come about?*

'You can make little stories, create effects. You can make effects – you can make them disappear behind a tree'  
'The idea for the animation came 'from my head' - another young person comments - 'It was brilliant.'  
'It was fun making something out of nothing'

(Creativity and Thinking skills; Communication and Expressive skills; Social Skills)

*On team work*

'All of ours' (answer to whose 'voice' is it)

'It's about sharing your work'

'Team work; lots of people putting a film together – it happens mostly in sport, acting etc.'

'All different people have different skills – some people can do things better than others'

'I did it cos I thought 'I can do that,' and then other people joined....proud, I suppose.'

(Social Development)

*What did you gain from it?*

'It gives people another chance, another choice of job'

'It gives you a sense of choice, because if really like it, you might go onto do it at college – you have more choice of what do when you're older'

'I think it's great that people from outside come to teach because they have more experience than just in the classroom'

(Participation and Future Plans; Social Development)

All but one of the 11 descriptors from *Serious Fun* are represented in the teachers' and practitioners' profiles of the young people's development, and in their own reflection on their experience. Reintegration, the final descriptor, due to the pupils' profiles was unlikely. While most of the Year 2 group went onto attend either The Priory or St David's, two progressed to Brookfields Special School.

## 6. Impact on the PRUs

### 6.1 The Aconbury Centre Curriculum

As previously noted, there is a considerable legacy from the project at The Aconbury Centre. In the first instance it added value to already existing work, eg the pupils used to make CD covers in Design technology. Now they make their own music, cut the CDs and place them in the covers they have designed.

The Headteacher, newly returned to Aconbury in Year Two, saw the project as 'a fantastically useful way to demonstrate to staff the benefits of cross curricular working.' It enabled a culture change in the centre. She was particularly keen to embed what had been learned in the curriculum. The centre now offers Media Studies, taught by a teacher and a TA who participated from the RMC training. Teachers use their new skills to support coursework and the RMC's models to deliver Digital Stories, comic strips and other practical activity. Film will be used in History, Art and Drama lessons, and animation using clay will be learned in Art lessons. Resources have been accessed to enhance curriculum delivery.

Beyond this, the Headteacher and the staff made it clear that while the project contributed to the pupil's sense of self worth, it had a similar impact on the school as a whole.

'Gaining Ground was such a boon to the centre – a fantastic investment in what we do here – it has helped us to move forward in a way we couldn't have done without the project. The pupils gained self-esteem, but it worked for the staff and the centre as a whole, because it means people understand the work we do and hold it in esteem.' (Eleanor Christopher, Headteacher)

### 6.2 The Priory and St David's

In Year One, The Priory and St David's took part in all the training sessions offered by RMC. Teachers and TAs learned new skills that could be built into their delivery. One teacher commented that the filmmaking module was especially helpful as she had already been using imovie, and 'it helped join up missing bits.' She found the Animation Inset 'inspirational' because it was new to her. She plans to incorporate it into the curriculum at a later date when she has had time to reinforce her own learning.

In Year Two, these centres were able to choose how to employ practitioner support. They could have training for staff only, or the practitioners would work with staff and pupils for a short session on each of the modules taught at Aconbury. Both chose sessions with both teachers and pupils together. Teachers and pupils were then able to disseminate the learning to other pupils. RMC was 'very available' for

advice when they needed it. A practitioner coming to their centre, rather than teachers having to go out, worked really well. One teacher found the digital photography module particularly effective. She liked the simplicity of what could be achieved in two hours and found the printed 'step by step' information sheet that accompanied the session most useful.

St David's was an excellent context in which to trial the more 'hands off' approach. The PRU already had equipment and, under the leadership of Steve Thompson, now Children's Services, a culture existed where practical media work was valued. One Priory teacher, while most enthusiastic about the training elements of the project, believed the school context made it more of a challenge to embed the work.

The St David's teacher said 'The students I work with ALL benefited. imovie and digital photography are now part of what we do and we all do it.' For them the Music module was less successful as 'it's difficult genre to wean them off their own music.' Both centres commented on the young people's satisfaction when they saw their end products. Teachers saw the immediate benefit to the pupils studying for examinations who could employ the creative approaches learned on **Gaining Ground** to their coursework (eg GCSE Art).

Some of the young people who entered these PRUs had participated in the project at Aconbury in Year One. One teacher questioned whether media work had the same impact on the young people because they had already 'done it'. However, others saw this as a real benefit and one they could build on, using the young people as 'experts.' While some pupils needed reminders about what they had learned at Aconbury, others could work with a greater level of independence, as is appropriate in Year Ten. Teachers from both centres commented on the impact on self-esteem. In addition to the other benefits, one of the teachers found that working on digital stories work with the pupils could be 'therapeutic'. This form provided a structure for the young people's experiences.

## 7. Practitioner Involvement

*'Our kids like working with new people, it makes them feel special'  
(teacher Year 10, St David's)*

All teachers believed that working with a specialist practitioner was beneficial to the young people. These practitioners showed respect for the young people's ideas and valued them. 'It's great because they are not teachers – they have come in especially for them'. The pupils call them by their Christian names.' The young people themselves indicated that they understood the significance of working with people who had different jobs from their classroom teachers. 'I think it's great that people from outside come to teach because they have more experience than just in the classroom.'

The practitioners were chosen for their ability to communicate, inspire and engage with people from variety of backgrounds. A teacher described their approaches as 'not pushy, they are easy, calm, they seem to know how to work with these kids.' Another saw their closeness in age to the pupils (by comparison with their teachers) as a real advantage. One practitioner who ran two modules in Year One developed particularly strong relationship with the group. For some teachers it was a very positive experience being a learner alongside their students. It reduced the perceived sense of hierarchy making everyone a learner, and therefore benefited teacher pupil relationships.

In Year One, two tutors lacked experience of working in a PRU. One did not teach during Year Two, but contributed to the project in other ways. Another misjudged the pupils' abilities when planning the first scheme of work. This practitioner worked hard during Year One to adapt her programme to the needs of the pupils. In Year Two, she completely restructured her teaching to enable the young people to achieve results during each session and she provided detailed notes for the teachers. Her self-scrutiny was completely validated by the success of the modules she taught in Year Two.

'It was very positive to show progress and results by bringing print outs of the pupils' unfinished projects at each session. Participants could then see for themselves that gaps were left to fill and which photo they still wanted to improve on.' (tutor)

'It was great to see them persevere and learn the new techniques to eventually produce results they could be really proud of.' (tutor)

Another practitioner was described by the classroom teacher as: 'extremely skilful at engaging all the pupils and enabling them to both learn and practice new skills as well as addressing important issues

through the content of the film.’ This tutor adapted quickly to the needs of the group, immediately removing any obstacles to group achievement the young people might try to erect. Having chosen bullying a new student – or rather belief by the student that they were about to be bullied, an assumption that eventually proves mistaken -, as the subject for their film, none of the young people wanted to act the student. It was quickly decided that the camera would be the ‘victim,’ hence an approach that took advantage of the medium was taken to the subject matter. This practitioner learned from the young people at Aconbury the importance of seeing results on a regular basis. She changed her practice to ensure regular opportunities throughout the 45 minute sessions for the young people to see the development of their media products. The experience also benefited the practitioner: ‘I realised how much I enjoy awakening something in young people that they had thought inaccessible or impossible for them.’

It was a deliberate strategy by RMC to bring some practitioners into the classroom for a second module in the same year in Year Two. This worked well as the young people learned to trust them during the first module, and were pleased to see them when they returned. The mature approach to the final discussion about what they had learned during the year, reported above, is clear evidence of the impact of working with these practitioners. The young people related well to them and learned from them.

The young people gained skills, but, as is demonstrated above, the practitioners also learned from the experience. Working with pupils in a PRU setting requires particular types of approach. The support from the Rural Media Company enabled two practitioners who were less experienced at working in this context to gain the skills required to deliver a quality programme for the young people.

## **8. Partnership between Schools and Practitioners**

Practitioners reported that the support from the Rural Media Company was excellent. They felt welcome in the schools. The Aconbury class teacher felt well supported by the RMC, as did The Priory and St David’s, albeit in a more ‘hands off’ way.

In Year One, the partnerships between RMC the schools and the practitioners and schools were complex due to differing agendas. Not all practitioners had been involved in full planning meetings. It was felt that the wider staff at Aconbury could have been more supportive and the Headteacher could have promoted the project more fully to the rest of the staff. There was some frustration about timetabling, group size, software that teachers were prepared to work with and support from the school. The ideal approach would involve some elements of co-delivery, but the staff did not feel sufficiently skilled to do this. Finding workable solutions

to the culture difference between practitioners and teachers is perhaps the most complicated aspect, but is also key to the success of the project.

In Year Two, these frustrations were much less in evidence. Practitioners had learned from their experience of Year One and adapted their schemes of work to gain the maximum impact in the PRU context. A new Headteacher took over at Aconbury who was both supportive of the project and clear about the importance of ensuring a legacy. The staff was less apprehensive in Year Two, having worked with practitioners over one year already and acquired some skills. RMC's staff meeting presentation at the beginning of the year ensured investment from all staff. RMC Practitioners were timetabled, seen as part of the school's weekly delivery, and were welcomed into school each week.

There were still some issues about the priority given to the work at Aconbury. Practitioners believed that it would have been useful for teachers to continue some of the work during the week in between their visits. Staff, conscious of short attention spans, and of the need to deliver the rest of the curriculum, did not do this. Staff were keenly aware of the issues that had brought the young people to Aconbury, while practitioners, meeting the young people for the first time, had an open approach and were therefore more willing to challenge refusal to participate. Generally this worked well and the pupils produced good results. One practitioner experienced difficulties when a new student, brought in part way through a project, was defensive about their lack of knowledge and therefore disruptive.

Pupil profiles were initially completed following the RMC visit, but when the free period was not available, this reporting lapsed. However, the lead teacher gave feedback on progress in other ways. Debriefing at the end of each session by practitioners with the lead teacher was most beneficial. Overall the relationship between RMC, practitioners and all three schools was positive and productive. It would have been surprising if there had not been issues due to culture differences between practitioners and teachers. It is the recognition of these and the ability to plan and review with respect for each other's agendas that makes a strong project.

## 9. Wider Impact

It is crucial to the Rural Media Company that the legacy for **Gaining Ground** reaches beyond the three PRUs that gained immediate benefit. Dissemination was built into the project plans. The following will have taken place by Summer 2008:

- Adrian Lambert presentation at ALISS
- Evaluator present at Bedded in not Bolted On conference on arts activity in PRUs
- The Aconbury Headteacher shows the work to LEA officers and to primary heads
- Pupils' work has been submitted to a Schools' Exhibition in the Courtyard Theatre.
- A symposium for artists, teachers and opinion formers, 2008
- Presentation to the MovIES(Moving Image Education Specialists) group, 2008
- The Gaining Ground web site, <http://www.gainingground.org.uk/rmc.htm>
- Distribution of the report

Feedback from the symposium will be reported in an additional document.

## 10. Recommendations for Future Projects

### 10.1 Structure

- Extended projects are beneficial as they enable; long term partnerships to develop; the opportunity to improve and refine a project to achieve the best results; the approach to embed itself into an organisation
- Both models, the regular slot on the timetable and the more 'hands off' approach with inputs from practitioners twice a term have impact on PRU delivery
- Training for teachers and TAs is essential in order for the work to become embedded
- The greatest impact is made possible when there is strong leadership at a PRU, and the Headteacher has the vision to maximise the potential of the project and ensure there is an ongoing legacy
- Practitioners who want to work in PRU settings need training; shadowing for people who are experiencing this work for the first time, and then mentoring when they first take on a group themselves
- Issues to do with compatibility of equipment between the school and the deliverers need to be thought through and planned for

## 10.2 What Works Well in PRU Settings

- Practitioners who can adapt their delivery to the needs of the group
- Understanding that apparently small steps can mean significant progress for a young person at school in a PRU
- Setting small manageable tasks with clear outcomes
- Awareness of the importance for the young people of seeing their progress with media products on a regular basis throughout a session – constant validation and recognition of achievement
- Setting tasks which the pupils can get on with by themselves with teacher or TA supervision
- Ensuring that there are a range of different roles young people can fulfil on a project
- Once a fortnight time for reflection between practitioners and lead teacher
- Projects on which the young people are involved in every aspect of the creative work are best so that the young people feel a strong sense of ownership
- Opportunities to show their work are essential for the young people
- If new pupils arrive in the middle of a project, they be given the necessary skills before participating – not all can fit in easily
- Sustaining activity over substantial period of time

## 11. Conclusions and Longer Term Recommendations

**Gaining Ground** was an important and effective project that has had a significant impact on the young people involved, the staff in the PRUs in which it took place and on the practitioners who delivered it. The two-year timespan has been a key strength. One of the essential aspects for ensuring its legacy has been leadership in the PRUs in which it was based. Another has been the vision, flexibility and the supportive management of The Rural Media Company.

The young people who were involved in **Gaining Ground** over a two year period through moving from The Aconbury Centre to The Priory or St David's, experienced opportunities for progression. This report has focussed on the impact of the work. A future project could look in more depth at the potential for progression in creative media work. Also of importance is provision of a structure for training practitioners for work in PRU settings.

**Gaining Ground** has provided a delivery model that has the potential for use in other PRUs, in mainstream schools and as an vehicle for linking mainstream and PRU delivery. Its findings could significantly inform the new Creative and Media Diploma <http://www.skillset.org/qualifications/diploma/> and the development of stronger partnerships between all schools providing 14-19 education including PRUs in a specific area.

In a media rich world, development of media literacy is essential work in schools today. Practical media work enables young people to directly express issues and concerns, giving them a means of expression in a language they understand. 'It provides the participating pupils with a means of expression they don't get anywhere else. They can make films on their mobile phones now. We've got to harness it.' (Paul Murray, School Improvement Officer for Herefordshire)

## Notes

1. Ofsted, September 2007
2. Ings, 2004
3. Gulliver, Wilkin, and Kinder, 2005, (pp44-46)
4. Adams, 2007
5. Williams, 2007
6. Harland et al, 2000
7. Ofcom, 2004
8. Media Literacy Task Force, November, 2005
9. Jones and Kinder, Lord, Bazalgette, Harland, Potter and Reid, 2007, (p.3)
10. ibid p.5
11. Chapman and Llewellyn, 2007
12. ibid
13. Sayer, 2004, p.17
14. Gulliver, Kinder, Wilkin, 2005, ibid

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**Cathy Poole**  
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