

Constructing History

A cross curricula project 98/99

Context:

Interpretations of a historical collection or character vary depending on the background of the audience, researcher, artist, author. This project aimed to show how meaning is constructed and to question the basis of historical truth.

Description of the project:

This project was conceived in parallel to the London Arts Board Craft Development Network Touring Exhibition *The Artists Journey*. It was clear that the subject was ripe for a long term education project with a strong cross curricula angle and that there would be scope to display the results of this work as part of the touring exhibition.

Aims:

To increase understanding and access to the Sir Richard Burton Collection through artist residencies in secondary schools in two local boroughs. It was intended that the project would develop strategies for cross curricular working. *Constructing History* was intended as an integral exhibition and education project.

Objectives/measures of success:

- Develop links with 3 secondary schools and to facilitate artists residencies.
- To encourage formal and informal visits to Orleans House Gallery, Leighton House, Watermans Arts Centre, St Mary Magdalene Church, Mortlake and other relevant resources.
- To provide the opportunity for students to work with and relate to adults and other young people outside their own schools.
- To use students work as a way of interpreting the exhibition for the public.
- To give students the opportunity to see their work valued in a formal context.

Process:

The project began in June 1998 with visits to the Burton exhibition at Orleans House Gallery and concluded with the final presentation of *Constructing History* at Orleans in September 1999. The project began with an introduction to the collection and involved historical sessions and artist workshops in schools, a pupil conference at Leighton House and two exhibition installations.

Investigating the Burton Collection:

All the schools interested in being involved with the project were invited to *Lady Burton's Gift to the Nation* June/July 1998. These visits were facilitated by myself and Tara Walker.

Burton is known best for his explorations throughout India and Africa and in particular for his part in the discovery of the source for the Nile. Burton often assumed native dress and as a great linguist was frequently able to dupe foreigners into believing he was a native. Several biographies of Burton exist reflecting the

wealth of documentary evidence regarding Burton which survives as well as a fascination for the often perilous life which he lived.

The participants:

30 pupils in each group from years 9 & 10. Cranford in Hounslow and Grey Court in Richmond were selected to participate in the project. Feltham school were so keen to be involved that they agreed to partly fund a third artist to work with their year 9 group.

Artist Sally Hampson who had exhibited in *Lady Burton's Gift* with her Kitty Lake installation was selected to work with Cranford.

Faith Pearson, one of the artists involved in *The Artists' Journey* exhibition worked with Grey Court

Hew Locke who had been considered for *The Artists' Journey* agreed to work with Feltham.

Gallery outreach in schools

In order to understand Burton's place in history, the geography of his explorations abroad, his interest in foreign cultures and foreign languages a number of sessions were devised in school to provide the necessary research which the art work could draw upon.

These sessions were facilitated by Tara Walker and Rachel Tranter between October 1998 and January 1999. They followed a planning meeting held on 15th October 1998 which established the aims and objectives, contractual arrangements, evaluation and timetable of the project. This meeting enabled all the teachers and artists to meet to discuss the residency sessions.

Objects from Burton collection were taken into each school to provide stimulus for thinking about Burton and the exhibition which all the pupils had seen that summer at Orleans. We looked at biography, languages, and provided the pupils with an opportunity to make detailed sketches.

Cross curricula work

Time taken from different subjects language, history, art underlying themes

English/Researcher skills - Feltham

History - Grey Court

both cross curricular were also for teachers with a pastoral responsibility work was able to take place in form

GCSE Art Project - Cranford, became the focus as they were in a higher year group all other elements covered within the art lesson with support from English and History departments

Leighton House Conference

This provided the pupils with a chance to meet each other, to hear Caroline Bartlett, Timothy Hyman and Faith Pearson talk about their work included in The Artists' Journey exhibition, participate in a workshop led by Hew Locke in the Arab Hall and present their progress so far to each of the other schools.

As a result the pupils learnt a great deal from the day and the exploding fragments piece, created from the Arab Hall workshop became the key image for the project publicity material.

Artists in schools:

Where possible, the artists workshops were facilitated by myself or Tara Walker. The artist sessions took place between December 1998 and April 1999. They focused upon making work for the exhibition using the ideas explored in the initial sessions. Time travel and imaginary explorers were the main themes for the work.

Installation at Watermans Arts Centre:

First opportunity working with the artists to install the work, Sally and Hew Feltham working on behind the scenes typing up text
private view speech press public forum
parents involved in pv
issues about the space, security

Installation at Orleans House Gallery

more successful in terms of the space available more satisfactory for artists less pupils involved in install timing of new school year,

relationship of real Burton items helped with the interpretation of the pupils work
responses from the public documented and more positive than at Watermans

involvement of pupils in the private view and speech by a pupil from

deinstallation three pupils opportunity to find out about the whole process -

Evaluative methods

Written reports
Diary entries
Pupil, teacher and artist interviews/discussion
Video of Leighton House conference
Visitor responses/press coverage

Feedback

to the exhibitions by the public and pupils
analysis of questionnaires

Cranford

23 questionnaires were returned from the group. These revealed a high level of response to the increased understanding of exhibitions, all the respondents would like to be involved again and range of subjects thought the project was about interesting, 23 art, 22 history, 13 languages, 12 research, 11 design and technology, 10 geography, 3 work experience, 2 english, 1 citizenship.

What would they change, 5 mentioned larger exhibition, 5 more research time, 2 more resources, 2 nothings and range of other comments such as “I would have made more effort”, worked with “more schools”. They liked the artist involvement and cross curricula element most with the exhibition, leighton visit and interaction with the Burton Collection and Orleans House Gallery close 3/4/5. The other comments were dominated by remarks about how fun the project was and how they had learned new skills, used their imagination and enjoyed contributing to an exhibition.

Budget

We had

Overview: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Strengths Ambitious Creative Cross-curricula Two Exhibitions Artist & school commitment Enhanced understanding of Burton collection Positive response of the public Multicultural project Number of partnerships involved	Weaknesses Number of pupils who installed the exhibition Level of pre-planning Difficulty of organising such a complex project
Opportunities Setting an example for other cross curricula projects Long term involvement of secondary schools in gallery programme Precedent for long term education projects at Orleans	Threats Communication between schools and artists Difficulty of managing such a large project Difference in attitude to the project from each school

Outcomes and indicators of success

Pupil related:

- Over 90 pupils familiar with the Burton collection.
- The pupils own interpretation of the material in their art work which reflected the level of their understanding .
- The willingness of pupils to commit personal time to the project and the continued contact with pupils at the gallery on an individual basis. For some, the project began a lasting commitment to the gallery, one pupil Alex Stearn regularly assists with exhibitions and events.
- The sense of ownership, self confidence and pride which pupils felt about their work.

School related:

- The commitment from a third school this added enormous value to the project, including the funding they contributed.
- Teachers flexibility and positive attitude to pupil time spent on the project.
- Truly cross curricula project: three formal subjects involved in the project, the questionnaires show just how many other subjects the project involved.

Gallery/exhibition related:

- The diversity of the work produced by the three schools which reflected the different ways which the schools worked with the gallery and the artists.
- The positive response to the exhibition from the general public.
- A new way of presenting material from the Burton Collection
- A popular primary schools programme during the exhibition and successful holiday activity sessions.

Unexpected positive outcomes:

- Career development for artist Sally Hampson - further work in secondary education.
- Extent to which the artists learned from being involved in the project.

Lessons learned

- The need for **individual planning meetings** with teacher, artist and co-ordinator to clearly establish aims, objectives and roles.
- Awareness of the **difficulty of contacting and communicating with teachers**, and the usefulness of identifying the lead contacts within schools and obtaining home phone numbers.
- **Flexibility is key** - no formulas for projects of these kind can possibly exist, it is therefore important to programme exhibitions to fit in with the school year where possible and have an awareness of timetabling issues when programming artists sessions.
- Form group and form teacher involvement is very helpful particularly when it involves his/her subject - in some cases it may be more effective to **communicate directly with pupils**.
- **Co-ordinator time commitment** and the amount and type of support required by the artists from the co-ordinator.

- The importance of **relevance to the curriculum** and its new developments.

Conclusions - way forward

It achieved goal of integrating education and exhibition work same status given to professional artists, students work and the Burton collection.

This kind of project could be marketed to the new citizenship schools will have to make links with the community within this statutory in 2002

Key stage 3 & 4 making them more responsible and self confident inside and outside the class room.

Pupils to identify a leader within the project who could liaise direct with the gallery and organise other pupils to help with the project.

Appendices:

Artists Evaluation

Teacher Evaluation

Pupil Evaluation

Photos

Visitors comments

Press cuttings