

Interiors 21

Opening the Doors project in partnership with Kingston College funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, London Museums Agency and Homebase.

Evaluation Report

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Introduction

"What did I do today to make me feel proud"

The song by M People playing as the redesigned common room was officially opened, sums up the sense of achievement felt by all of those involved in *Interiors 21*. This project provided an excellent opportunity for teamwork, and mutual respect creating a positive experience in which we could all share.

"A change has happened to a room once cold, it is now beautiful, colourful and bold" (from a poem by Ella).

Aims

This project aimed to work in partnership with "disaffected" young people, inspiring and building confidence through a special interior design project.

To achieve this aim, we intended to involve historic interiors and other historic buildings, promoting access to and creating positive images of museum buildings and collections. Working in partnership with organisations helping young people develop themselves for the future was a key aim, as was popularising historic interiors and interior design. To achieve this aim we would provide an opportunity for young people to work with interior designers and contribute to an exhibition.

For the partner organisation, this project would bring outside expertise and enthusiasm, broadening the experiences of the group and providing opportunities for success and learning.

Process

Participants and Project Team

The Pathfinder course at Kingston College was just a year old when we embarked upon this project during autumn 2000. From discussions with tutor, Katherine Greening, the course objectives and participant profile fitted closely with the aims of *Interiors 21*. Katherine had worked closely with the gallery in her previous post at the Strathmore Centre - the pupil referral service for Richmond, in another project working with young people at risk (1998/9).

Pathfinder offers a fresh start for young people hoping to continue their education. A basic skills course, it aims to provide young people with the foundations needed to go on and complete formal qualifications providing teaching in IT, English and Mathematics, as well as one-to-one support. Many of the young people attending Pathfinder have been previously excluded from mainstream schools, are persistent non-attenders or refugees.

While the participant involvement was being confirmed, a project co-ordinator was recruited through an engage (National Organisation for Gallery Education) mail-out. Following interviews, Catherine Cartwright was selected. Over the last year Catherine has been working towards an MA in Museums and Gallery Education. This project, with the support of curator Rachel Tranter, has given her a unique opportunity to develop project management and interpersonal skills.

The designer for the project Mike MacLachlan was recruited through contact within the sector and the interior design students from the Surrey Institute of Art and Design and Chelsea College of Art and Design signed up to help with the project in response to advertisements sent to design courses.

Planning

Due to the number of people involved in the project and the fact that we were working largely within Pathfinder timetabled sessions, the project was carefully planned throughout.

Meetings took place with the Pathfinder tutors to discuss the schedule for the project and a room was identified for transformation, the main teaching space for the course, Room 214. This room became the focus of the design workshops and the project as a whole.

The role of the project co-ordinator was crucial in organising all the sessions at Kingston as well as the visits to museums and the decorating of Room 214.

Visits

The project involved three visits. The first of these was to Orleans House Gallery in November 2000 to see the James Gibbs designed Octagon Room built c.1720, and also the Stables Gallery where the *Interiors 21* exhibition would be held. The young people took a great deal of interest in the interior of the Octagon, in particular the portrait of Queen Caroline, stucco bust of George I, and portrait medallions of George II, Caroline of Ansbach and Louis Philippe.

In January 2001, we visited Tate Modern for ideas and inspiration. This visit was a good opportunity for the project team to get to know the Pathfinder group. For many, it was their first experience of a large art museum and some found the works on display challenging. The Tate gave the group some ideas for the redecoration of Room 214; particularly inspirational was the work of British Pop artist, Patrick Caulfield. His painting *After Lunch*, (1975) with its fusion of abstract blocks of colour (blue) and photo realism - the landscape "painting" behind the fish tank caught the attention of the group. Donald Judd's galvanised steel with aluminium and blue perspex panels, *Untitled* (1980) struck other participants in the group. The colour and

significance of height in Judd's "Stacks" would also inspire elements of the final design for Room 214.

The visit to the Victoria and Albert Museum on the 1st March gave the group a chance to see a range of interiors such as the Frank Lloyd Wright Room, Gamble Room and Sculpture Court. We also looked at the Costume Galleries and the 20th century gallery. The group found the variety of items and cultural breadth in the V&A of great interest and were surprised that they had enjoyed the visit so much. While Tate Modern had an instant appeal as a visit and was suggested by the group to us, they were more wary about visiting a traditional art museum such as the V&A.

Comparing the two visits, the project team and Pathfinder tutors all felt that the V&A had been more successful and that the young people had been surprised by what they found there and how much they enjoyed visiting. Immediately after the visit some of the students had found Tate Modern boring as they couldn't "make sense of the art" and "because there was barely anything there". Interestingly in the evaluation, in retrospect, many stated that they preferred Tate Modern. Though rather daunting as a first experience of a national gallery, they liked the fact that Tate is modern and fashionable, whether or not they actually enjoyed the experience as much.

Design Workshops

The design workshops took place from January - March 2001. Based at Kingston College as part of Pathfinder course sessions, the workshops were intended to give the group sufficient background to help prepare a scheme for Room 214. Collage work helped to formulate ideas about interiors, colours, structure and texture. This was followed by brainstorming and sketching designs. Mike MacLachlan led these workshops and gradually the design students became involved, getting to know the young people and assisting where necessary.

'Culture' and 'Nationality' were both important themes from the beginning, as many of the participants were refugees and the ethnic mix of the group was varied. Individual identity was also important and the silhouette idea was created as a way of allowing the students to give their "signature" to the room. This was also achieved through the individual tiles which were to form a frieze around the room.

The finalised design was influenced by the museum and gallery visits. Tate Modern provided inspiration for the plain blocks of colour in the walls and silhouettes; the pale pastel tones are reminiscent of the blue walls of the Octagon. The use of portraiture in the form of silhouettes is also linked to the Octagon where the people who lived there are represented in painting and relief sculpture. Just as the windows in the Octagon feature prominently - the new blinds in Room 214 gave a renewed sense of light and space.

Once the design had been agreed upon, the group prepared for the redecoration or "blitz" of Room 214 throughout March. A model of the design was made by one of the students Abi, in order to show the Principal for approval and the silhouettes were created, designs for tiles prepared. Paint testing and measuring also took place at this time as preparations were made for the walls and new blinds.

The Blitz **21-23rd March 2001**

An energetic week with enthusiasm and commitment from everyone involved, which ensured that the new interior was completed successfully on schedule. A large proportion of the group was involved in the transformation of Room 214 and enjoyed the practical nature of the work.

This was an opportunity for us all to get to know each other better, working as a team with a tight deadline. It was also an opportunity for us to encourage some of the students to become more involved in the project than they had previously, teaching them new skills and giving them the further support and encouragement they needed. Working largely without their Pathfinder tutors meant that the group had to behave responsibly and independently reporting to the project team. This was an important experience and preparation for the world of work. The involvement of the design students at this stage was crucial as they helped to execute the technically more challenging aspects of the design such as the silhouettes and the blinds. This was an important learning experience for the design students, their interpersonal skills were tested as they encouraged and supported the work of the group.

The room was officially opened on Monday 26th March by the Mayor of Kingston. This was a very dramatic and special occasion in which all the Pathfinder students were involved. Before the Mayor arrived the young people stood ready in front of their own silhouette, M People playing in the background. There was a sense of excitement as the Mayor cut through the ribbon to declare the room open. The group had much to be proud of and was overwhelmed by the interest which the Mayor, Vice Principal and college governors took in their completed interior scheme. The programme for the *Blitz* was designed by Jacqui and Lukeni made a speech on behalf of the students describing the sense of pride and pleasure that the project had brought as well as new skills and teamwork. Particularly key was the fact that the three Pathfinder groups had worked together and learnt to respect each other's very different ideas and backgrounds.

The Exhibition

Photographs of Room 214 before, during and after the blitz were taken by Stephen Gill. Stephen had experience of working with young people on a previous Orleans House Gallery project and he worked well with the Kingston

students. Together with text panels, preparatory work and a silhouette installation, these were exhibited in the Stables Gallery. A group of young people helped with the installation of the exhibition and arrangements for the private view. The group responded to the Stables as a space, "its quite large and quite informal...a nice place to see your project on the wall and the grounds are really nice too" Ella.

The exhibition was seen by a representative from the London Youth Art Network and as a result was selected for the Take Part at the Start exhibition at the Royal Festival Hall 5 August 2001.

Financial Summary

The total expenditure for this project was £9,759.06. Due to the size of the group, the museum visits were far more costly than previously anticipated. In addition, the design students were travelling from Surrey which also increased our costs. Sponsorship from Homebase helped with material costs which were expensive, and Orleans House Gallery covered the £285.06 overspend.

The catering costs for the Blitz were covered by Kingston College.

Evaluation methods

Observation
Documentation/text by the young people
Group discussions/one to one interviews
Taped interviews
Questionnaires
Video footage/interviews
Photography

Measures of success

- Every Pathfinder student, 60 in total, was involved in this project in some way. 34 students visited Tate Modern "an experience which will always be with them" (Tutor Katherine Greening). Attendance was particularly good throughout the project with a consistent 70% record.
- The help and support which the project team received from Kingston College meant that the project had been effectively introduced and marketed. Without the use of timetabled sessions the project would have been much more difficult to manage.
- The group was proud enough of this achievement that they felt it should be included in their National Record of Achievement. As a result certificates were drawn up and presented to each of the participants as part of their Record of Achievement celebrations at the end of term.

- So excited were they about the completion of the room, an idea has now developed for a roof garden project which the participants hope to create in the coming year. For the Pathfinder course this project has provided the foundations for partnership work with a range of sectors outside the college.
- *Interiors 21* has given individuals the confidence to redesign their own spaces and look at the world in a new way.

Overview: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats

Strengths

- Skills, commitment and enthusiasm of the project team & Pathfinder tutors
- Flexibility of planning to allow for innovative nature of project
- Good relationships between project co-ordinator and students
- Professional input by interior designer
- Visits which gave young people inspiration and ideas
- Support from Kingston College at all stages
- Involvement of interior design students as 'education peers' and additional tutors
- Quality of the finished interior decoration
- Input of photographer Stephen Gill and standard of exhibition

Weaknesses

- Limited opportunities for discussing the final design with the whole group
- Number of participants who were able to attend private view
- Limited press coverage of the project

Opportunities

- To work with a diverse group of young people and new partner organisation
- To disseminate information about this project to colleagues within the sector as an example of good practise
- To use this good experience and lessons learnt for future work

Threats

- Large number of students
- Difficult behaviour from particular individuals
- Lack of commitment from a few participants

Unexpected outcomes & indicators of success

For participants

- Students learning to respect each other's ideas
- Working as a team
- Getting to know other students from the Pathfinder course
- Learning new techniques and skills

- The opportunity to meet and talk with the Mayor, Governors, Vice-Principal at the opening of the room
- Increase in confidence
- Positive feedback from other students at the college, staff, friends and parents
- Increased interest in art and design as a future career
- Increased interest in visiting museums and galleries

For Kingston College, Pathfinder course

- Encouragement to develop other projects in the future such as a roof top garden
- Greatly increased profile for the Pathfinder course which is a new concept in the borough, it began 18 months ago
- Benefits to the students and their Record of Achievement

For the Gallery

- Success of exhibition leading to its inclusion in the London Youth Art Network, *Take Part at the Start* event at Royal Festival Hall in August 2001
- Development of previous work with young people in a new context and new partnership
- Recruitment of Ella to help with gallery art workshops

For the Interior Designer

- Challenge of working with young people in a new context
- Prestige of completed project and interior scheme

For the Interior Design Students

- Developing their interpersonal/communication skills
- Learning for their future studies and careers

Lessons Learned

Working with three groups was not the original intention of the project, and in many ways the outcomes would have been different had a smaller group participated. Given that the three groups existed, the project benefited from the cultural breadth and diversity of participants. The size of the group may have made the design decision process more difficult, but it certainly was a help when it came to redecorating as a constant flow of energy was available.

The freedom and flexibility of the project gave the completed design a magical quality. While difficult to manage, the open approach which was taken greatly assisted the creative process. It also enabled us to involve everyone in active participation.

Projects of this kind take a great deal of energy. There is a direct relationship between the energy expended and the quality of the outcomes. We spent a great deal of time developing, and organising this project and as a result it was a significant success.

Ways forward

This project has helped the Pathfinders course to develop new ways of working to provide students with new opportunities for improving basic skills, which helping to equip them for their future. We hope *Interiors 21* provides Kingston College with the confidence to initiate projects of this kind in the future with new partner organisations.

For the students doors have certainly been opened, and we hope that individuals will remain involved with the gallery as visitors and also volunteers/casual workers. This project gave every student something very specific to be proud of, celebrated as part of their Pathfinder Record of Achievement day.

This project was an important step forward for Orleans in involving a project co-ordinator, developing the skills of a young professional and sharing the load of such a significant project. This has helped to develop the entire education service at Orleans as the co-ordinator has also become involved in other areas of work and other projects. Our work with young people at risk has now become nationally recognised and valued providing us with the encouragement to seek out new partners for future projects. Partner organisations and funding bodies have now begun contacting us in direct response to our project track record.

Conclusions

To imagine how things can change, how the world can be different is a challenge for young people on the outskirts of society. This project became a catalyst for change, showing the group that just as a room could be permanently altered, so too could their lives. For the first time they realised that they could be creative, discovering new skills and above all confidence. Nikki exclaimed, "We actually did this", while Jacquii commented, "We all feel more confident and now I don't mind having my picture taken anymore".

The project has also had a permanent impact upon Room 214 "there's a different atmosphere in the room...its a happier working environment, and its a more relaxed environment" Ella.

Appendices

Budget

Feedback from the participants, tutors and designers

Text and Poems about the Project

Publicity Material

Press Cuttings

Photographs - project documentation and images by Stephen Gill