



Case Study – The Drumcroon Gallery Artists in Schools Project

Who do we think we are?

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What were we trying to achieve?

The Drumcroon exhibition ‘Who Do We Think We Are?’ showed the work of three artists who, in very different ways, explore issues around identity, locality and community cohesion. It provided the stimulus for a project that involved five Wigan primary schools in areas of significant deprivation and without have easy access to cultural institutions and with populations who do not generally participate in cultural experiences.

Community Cohesion and exploring the relationship between local and global concerns were at the heart of each artists work was a central element in the development of the works of art produced by the children.

The project aimed firstly, to increase the confidence and knowledge of teachers and children in engaging with works of art as the evidence of human achievement; secondly, for children and their teachers to understand that the Visual Arts are a powerful form of communication in all parts of the world; and thirdly, to reinforce the links between the school, the gallery and the local community in order to raise the aspirations of all through increased levels of engagement.

How did we organise learning?

Before the visits, children from each school selected works of art from the Drumcroon Collection for their own gallery in school. A KS1 and KS2 class from each school then visited the exhibition, following detailed discussion with class teachers to ensure connections were made to other areas of the curriculum in order that visits made learning more meaningful.

Each class spent a day in the gallery, involved in an enquiry-based learning experience of the artists’ work. At the beginning of the visit, children were asked by the gallery staff to work independently in order to generate questions and responses. These then became the focus for sustained enquiry, and the children created investigative journals to capture their learning. Practical gallery workshops enabled the children to build on initial experiences, and they used paint, textiles and mixed media to explore the idea of journeying, self discovery and collaborative connection, so tangible in the work on display in the exhibition.

Individual development projects following the gallery experience were devised for each school, informed by the school planning and in discussion with teachers. These were led by the Drumcroon artist-educator Emily Cheetham-Foy.

‘The Same Sky’

The children explored the idea that the sky encompasses the whole world and that all humanity shares the same sky and the same resources of sun and water. The two umbrellas suggest ideas around collecting and gathering these resources to ensure the safety of the planet and the wellbeing of all its inhabitants.

‘Storyteller's Chair’

‘The Storyteller’s Chair’ is inspired by creation stories from all over the world. Its four legs are rooted in the ground, enabling it to confidently soar upwards to the sky. It celebrates the power of the imagination to connect diverse ideas, cultures and people – to examine commonalities as well as differences.

‘Magic Carpet’

During their visit to the exhibition, the children worked on a structure to capture their explorations of the artists’ work on display. Building on this experience, Emily encouraged the children to imagine their own flying carpet. Their carpet enables them to fly from the ground to the heavens, to make connections to all humanity and to enjoy all the elements of earth, air, water and sun.

‘Journeys’

This work explores the different manifestations of what a journey can be and promotes the idea that all humanity experiences a journey through life. The children created box like structures to communicate a sense of journey, collaging with maps, photographs and directions. Both back and front surfaces have been worked on, with the older children supporting the younger ones, to reinforce the sense of a shared journey, encourage feelings of protection and promote a sense of empathy.

‘Helping Hands’

The children built on the gallery experience by exploring the idea of supporting others by finding ways to work co-operatively and collaboratively. The children created huge utensils which were far too big for them to be able to use. Emily encouraged them to understand that they needed to work together to make the utensils useful. They created beautiful silk-screen printed fabric surfaces using hand prints as a repeated motif to communicate the idea of sharing and empathy. These were further embellished with paint, metallic threads and sequins, adding to the atmosphere of celebration. The utensils were then woven into the fabric lengths to create a structure that is full of tiny ‘helpful’ hands interacting.



Journeys

How well did we achieve our aims?

The project engaged the thinking around how to contribute to more interactive, sensitive and thoughtful communities, who care about the local and global communities and environment. The Visual Arts are a powerful form of communication and in all parts of the world human beings have marked and communicated their existence and experience in visual terms. The project was an opportunity for the children to engage with the visual arts, building an understanding that this mode of thinking can provide another language with which to communicate, breaking down barriers to knowledge of and empathy with others.

Engagement and enjoyment were evidenced throughout the learning journey. The children’s selection of works of art for their school based exhibition led to a greater sense of ownership. The enquiry based learning experiences and practical workshops enabled the children to ‘go inside the heads of artists’ inspiring them to explore ideas and to experiment and explore different media. The school-based workshops enabled the children to work more intensively in a smaller group, exploring ideas and realising intentions in quite spectacular ways.

During the project different ways of engaging parents were explored in the belief that, if children are to become the beneficiaries of sustained cultural experiences, their parents will need to be engaged.

The exhibition of the children’s work at the Turnpike Gallery was an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of all. In providing a professional context for young people’s work, children and their families can begin to see that they too have a place and a voice in cultural institutions – a tremendously empowering experience. The project as a whole embodied the Drumcroon ambition that children should be given opportunities to think, act and exhibit like artists.

For more information and images of the projects click on: Images and Reflections from The Drumcroon Gallery Artists in Schools Project