THE PHOTOGRAPHY MOVEMENT

SOPHIE HERXHEIMER: POSTER AND INTERVIEW

CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND ANTI-RACIST AGENCY

UNLOCKING CULTURAL CAPITAL

The National Society for Education in Art and Design magazine
Summer 2021
Issue 31
A new Special Interest Group for Advancing Anti-ableist Pedagogy (AAP)

Art education is acknowledged widely for its inclusive nature. Many of us experience the distinctive environment that the art room can provide.

However, approaches to learning, teaching and assessing can reveal ableist assumptions that create barriers for disabled children and young people and devalue the creative capacities of the subject. This Special Interest Group (SIG) will explore the relationship between disability and art education at curricular level in order to advance anti-ableist pedagogy.

If you would like to know more about AAP or are interested in joining it, please contact Dr Claire Pentikainen by email: penkeli@hope.ac.uk

Contact the NSEAD team or info@nsead.org if you have any questions about your NQT membership

Editorial

Last year, I was both surprised and honoured to be asked by Scott Shillum and Steve Wallington, founders of The Photography Movement, to be a judge for their Show and Tell photographic competition (p. 02). An even greater surprise came when, during the third lockdown, the submissions arrived. I was blown away. Isolated, Trapped, Fear, Jumbled and Down were just a few of the words the young artists were using to describe their powerful photos taken during the height of the pandemic. My 15-year-old daughter helped with what was a close to impossible selection but, as we looked through each, she shared how many of the entries deeply resonated with her. At a time when many of our freedoms were removed, those courageous artists had, through words and images, brilliantly articulated the loss of their freedom and structure, as well as their hopes and fears for the future. They were speaking for us all but especially for young people who, on top of navigating childhood and teenage years, have experienced a high level of isolation and uncertainty. The Show and Tell exhibition is available online and is a great curriculum resource, helping us to better understand the healing power of photography, images and words.

Sophie Hershheimer also notes words! She has a great listener too. Her interview (p. 18), we learn how making books, puppets and “Dedicated Listening” with her learning-disabled son helped his acquisition of language. She also describes how art, words and poetry have helped her to process feelings of loss, change and grief.

I want to give a shout out to Jo Barber who explains (p. 06) how art, racial literacy and critical consciousness can give us agency and how we can use this agency for social and racial justice. Jo is also a member of NSEAD’s Anti-racist Art Education Action Group, which will shortly be publishing new resources that will help every art educator to be actively anti-racist.

Finally, I want to dedicate this issue of AD to Dan Shillum (1966–2015), to my sister Rebecca Leach (1963–2000) and to so many people who, far too young, have lost their lives to the illnesses that is mental health. Please do visit the links to the organisations shared by Scott Shillum at the end of his article. And, in the weeks and months ahead, and as part of the process of recovery and revival, let’s keep using both art and words to change lives.

Sophie Leach, Editor, AD  sophieleach@nsead.org

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Natalie with Frank during the Ship of Truth Photo Project by Charles Cliff. Copyright by Kate Flood

Newsletter from Let’s Talk. Photography by Charles Cliff. Letching by Kate Flood

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February 2021
The Photography Movement

Following the death of his twin brother Dan, Scott Shillum, together with best friend Steve Wallington, founded The Photography Movement, a not-for-profit organisation aimed at fostering a community where mental wellbeing could be discussed through the medium of photography. Scott describes how the movement’s latest project has inspired secondary school pupils during lockdown.

It was 10.15am, February 26th, 2015. I remember the moment with absolute clarity, although the details of the conversation in a bar. I knew that Dan, my identical twin brother, best friend and business partner, was ill. He had been for a while. I also knew the illness from which he suffered can often be terminal. At the time of the conversation I was in the open-plan office of Vismedia, the visual communications agency that we had founded together in 2000. The staff also knew Dan wasn’t well, and after the voice on the phone broke the news to me, I replaced the receiver and addressed the team. “I’m sorry to say that Dan took his life this morning. I’m going to be off if you were no longer around. You often cannot function and, at its worst, suicidal ideas are ever present. Both Dan and I had suffered from infrequent, mercifully short but often severe, bouts of it throughout our adult life. They had never manifested in parallel before but there had been some overlap during this particular period. However, I was through the worst of mine when that tragic day arrived and I continued to get better despite what had happened. I haven’t had it since.

In the UK, a man takes his life every two hours and a woman does so every eight. Countless more attempt it. Men aged 45-49 have the highest rates of suicide. Dan was 49 when he took his life. Sadly, suicide rates among young people have been increasing and it is now at its highest on record for young females. A recent Young Minds impact report cited nearly 3,500,000 visits to their website’s Find Help pages in 2020, a 40 per cent increase on the year before. Of course, depression is but one on a very long list of mental disorders and nobody will go throughout their entire life having not experienced poor mental health in one form or another. So far, so depressing, you might say, but I wanted to contextualise what follows next and I promise that the reading gets lighter from now on.

Clinical depression is the predominant mental health condition worldwide. It is a terrible illness, excruciatingly painful and you feel dead inside. There’s no escape from a crushing feeling of emptiness and worthlessness. You feel sub-human and genuinely think that everyone would be better off if you were no longer around. You often cannot function and, at its worst, suicidal ideas are ever present. Both Dan and I had suffered from infrequent, mercifully short but often severe, bouts of it throughout our adult life. They had never manifested in parallel before but there had been some overlap during this particular period. However, I was through the worst of mine when that tragic day arrived and I continued to get better despite what had happened. I haven’t had it since.

The good news is that, in recent years, the stigma around mental illness has started to erode as people are now more at ease talking about it. The junior royals with their Heads Together campaign played a large part in reshaping the narrative and should be applauded for their openness on the topic. There are also some fantastic charities doing great work in their respective areas, and one that I connected with after Dan’s demise was the male suicide prevention charity CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably). They have a dedicated helpline with highly-trained support staff available from 5pm to midnight, 365 days a year. Like many amazing charities, they are underfunded, so once I was through the fog of grief, I was determined to do my bit to help. This is where serendipity played its part.

I am incredibly fortunate to have a wonderful supportive family alongside some really close friends and work colleagues who carried me through those difficult months with an enormous Dan-shaped hole in them. One of my very best buddies, Steve Wallington, a friend of myself and Dan since our college days, took me for a beer one evening and I mentioned that I had connected with CALM and wanted to do something to raise money for them. On one thing I was certain – having been a rugby prop forward in my formative years, I’m not built for distance running, nor that suited a marathon. However, Steve and I both have a shared love for photography. I had been a national newspaper picture editor throughout the 90s and the early Vismedia offering provided photographic services to corporate clients. In parallel, Steve worked as a senior creative director in ad agency land and had run his own creative agency for many years. In those combined 50 years of work life, we collectively built up a fantastic network of top-flight reportage and advertising photographers, some of whom have become personal friends.

That very evening, over a beer or five, we came up with an idea to we could use our contacts and experience to host a photography exhibition on modern masculinity with prints being sold at auction and all money raised going to CALM. ‘Men are notoriously bad at talking about their problems, as the broader idea was to create a photography ‘movement’ which would help men have conversations around mental health and wellbeing through the medium. If we could raise money for CALM at the same time, then this would be a win-win. Six months later, in May 2017 and with the help of CALM’s...’

Top left: Scott Shillum from Let’s Talk. Photography by Charlie OTL. Lettering by Kate Finburn.
Left: display at Let’s Talk. Photography by Charlie OTL. Lettering by Kate Finburn.
Right (top): Danny by Dave Hughs from CALM and Dirty Images Graphic.
Right: Freedom, Back at school with my friends, by Bushra, aged 15, from Show and Tell.
Men are notoriously bad at talking about their problems, so the broader idea was to create a photography ‘movement’ – one that would help men have conversations around mental health and wellbeing through the medium.

We decided to create four video workshops to impart photography tips and tricks using just a smartphone. Once again, Rankin agreed to do one along with Daniel Regan, Francis Augusto and Emma Hardy. After watching the films, viewers are encouraged to practise their new skills and submit a photo to be part of our online Show and Tell exhibition titled ‘How are you feeling?’

We have created a school pack with an easy-to-follow ‘how to’ guide, designed to fit seamlessly into school lessons. We have been lucky enough to have had Cisco Webex’s support for this project, giving us the ability to host live video feedback sessions for participating schools. Our broader ambition is to see conversations around health and wellbeing embedded into the broad curriculum. The Photography Movement’s aims and resources can help to achieve this, especially in and through art and design. Indeed, we have been genuinely blown away by the positive feedback we have received from several schools that have participated thus far.

Steve and I have been blessed to have had the backing of several individuals who have come together to make this and other The Photography Movement projects happen. Rebecca and Nicole from Constance agency are the shining lights in our journey and, of course, the amazingly talented network of professional photographers and sponsors who have supported us.

I am acutely aware that The Photography Movement may not exist without the tragedy of Dan taking his life six years ago. Personally, it has been a cathartic and rewarding journey and it feels good to be doing something that is tangibly making a difference. The mission statement of The Photography Movement is Photography / Conversation / Wellbeing. It’s more important than ever that we look out for one another and, if by doing what we are doing, we can collectively spark more conversations that help improve mental health in some small way. That makes it all worthwhile and Dan would be very proud of what we have achieved.

judges’ choice

Find out more

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our projects and organisations we’ve partnered with

#calm, #photography, #movement

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sponsorship from Lynx (part of Unilever) and the free use of the Getty Images Gallery in Central London, we held a Photography Movement exhibition for two weeks featuring 80 incredible photographic interpretations of modern masculinity. The stellar list of contributors included photographic luminaries such as Rankin, Martin Parr, Nick Knight and Uli Weber. The exhibition was extensively covered in the national media and, on top of the awareness raised, we were able to present a cheque to CALM for over £20,000.

We quickly realised that photography was indeed an excellent conduit for conversation but we shouldn’t just be limited to men to be a genuine movement. In 2018, we broadened the scope and inceptioned The Photography Movement as a CIC (Community Interest Company). Since then we have held many more exhibitions and panel discussions that talk to all audiences. We also have a travelling exhibition titled ‘How are you feeling?’ which is currently showing in several outdoor exhibitions. It was incredibly powerful, and both Steve and I took part.

Fast forward to 2020 and the dreaded lockdown when our lives changed forever. Unfortunately, the impact of the pandemic and the ongoing restrictions will inevitably result in an increase in poor mental health across the world, and the younger generation especially so. What could we do to play our part? After many lengthy brainstorming sessions via video chats, we hit on the idea of asking 11-18-year-olds to express their feelings via a photo in a project that we have named Show and Tell. These days, most youngsters have access to a smartphone and therefore continually carry a very powerful camera around with them, regularly interacting with it, albeit with the said camera too often pointing towards their own face!

Above: Reproduction from Juan Francisco Gomez from CALM and Getty Images Exhibition

Opposite page

1 Face Calm
2 Unemployed Joshua
3 Unemployable Joshua
4 Trapped Ava
5 Work Stpped upside down, Joanna
6 Suffering. Mona
7 Escaping to my world. Willow
8 Alone. Hellebaas
9 Jumbled. Max
10 Dismantled. Anna
11 Free Broxy
12 Dismantled Arnold
13 Sweet & sour. OrI
14 Bored. Anna
15 Beware Adrian

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Judges’ choice

Show and Tell Exhibition

Find out more

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Atkinson.

Men are notoriously bad at talking about their problems, so the broader idea was to create a photography ‘movement’ – one that would help men have conversations around mental health and wellbeing through the medium.
Essentially, as art and design educators, we need to navigate ourselves away from unconsciously and unintentionally perpetuating racial inequalities. This involves being mindful of how our socialisation, gender, positionality and privilege affects implicit assumptions, as well as ensuring we don’t unintentionally disempower and exclude diverse students. It also means exploring our racial identities, constructed perceptions of race and becoming cognisant of what has influenced our perceptions and practice.

As art and design reveals introspective aspects of ourselves, so too can it challenge our usual frame of references and provide us with rich visual sources to contextualise, explore, discuss and question taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs about race. Through using counter-narratives we can reflectively critique privilege and unconscious bias. By developing our receptiveness to different truths and experiences, we can demystify hidden meanings, making visible the often-invisible narratives and power structures. Acknowledging that assumptions are based upon socially inculcated messages, we can deconstruct stereotypical misconceptions and unlearn misrepresentations of racial identities. United with individual reflection, we can develop our critical consciousness and racial literacy. In so doing, we provide opportunities for our students to develop students’ cultural confidence for better educational outcomes.

‘Business as usual’ will not suffice for art educators if social and racial justice is to be achieved and unspoken norms, knowledge and assumptions within education are to be challenged. Jo Barber, assistant head of school at Aspire Alternative Provision in Buckinghamshire, and a member of the NSEAD Anti-racist Art Education Action Group, explains how art can give us agency in creative anti-racist praxis.

As art educators, if we intend to be agents for social and racial justice, ‘business as usual’ schooling will not suffice. Art and design provides us with great opportunities for anti-racist practice, to challenge unspoken norms, knowledge and assumptions about culture, power and identities.

In challenging misconceptions of racial identity, artist Peggy Digg's makes ‘whiteness’ visible. Digg unveils hidden racial assumptions to encourage anti-racist agency. She engages observers through dialogue, interviews and overheard conversations around ideologies of ‘whiteness’ and leaves the spectator to question the problematic of the dominant ideological constructs of race. With Cost of Privilege, her pixelated portrait reveals no detail of personal identity, but is obscured and unseen, leaving a vague reflection of reality. This ambiguity with the bold texted message powerfully reminds the viewer of their obliviousness to ‘white’ privilege.
Diggs further develops these predilections withObjetivos from her Being White series. The white paper clothing and text from interviews form basic protective wear—like skins which are fragile yet simultaneously restrictive in quality. It serves as a reminder that socialisation forms a safety barrier, protecting the dominant ‘white’ ideology and stereotypical understandings of racial identity. Only through demystifying the hidden, implicit, socialised norms and unconscious biases can we begin to consciously see a different perspective and reframe constructs of race.

Firelei Baez challenges the arbitrary constructs of racial identity based upon the fluid categorisations of skin colour and hair texture. In her series Can I Pass?, Báez explores these measured identity markers as a psychological and personal journey through self-portraiture, influenced by ‘Casta’ paintings which originated in colonial Mexico during the 18th to 19th century. Historically, these paintings implied a hierarchy of social status according to skin colour—the lighter hues awarded the higher status. This is a concept which Baez interconnects with the ‘paper bag test’ of the USA, which qualified black Americans access to ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag. Similarly, the hair of a person possessing ‘white’ privileges if their skin tone matched or was lighter than a paper bag.

When media narratives. Her exhibition seriesEBONY Patterson challenges cultural imagery and sociological context, Jamaican visual artist Ebony Patterson challenges cultural imagery and sociological context, Jamaican visual artist Ebony Patterson challenges cultural imagery and sociological context, Jamaican visual artist Ebony Patterson challenges cultural imagery and sociological context, Jamaican visual artist Ebony Patterson challenges cultural imagery and sociological context, Jamaican visual artist Ebony Patterson challenges cultural imagery and sociological context, Jamaican visual artist Ebony Patterson challenges cultural imagery and sociological context, Jamaican visual artist Ebony Patterson challenges cultural imagery and sociological context, Jamaican visual artist Ebony Patterson challenges cultural imagery and sociological context. Patterson conjures a celebratory feel, reclaiming innocence and visibility through the representation of racial identity. With this, Patterson challenges stereotypical images of homogenised, hyper-masculine males, he gives his models individuality, solitude, gentleness and grace. He raises the status of those men, their unavoidable presence and personhood through realism and monumentality, and reclaims a new position for black men in the history of representation and politics of racial identity.

These are but a few examples of artists that we, as educators, can utilise to critique histories, reframe and challenge implicit racialised assumptions. Through our resolute openness, development of our critical consciousness and racial literacy, art can give us agency in creative anti-racist praxis.

“As art reveals introspective aspects of ourselves, so too can it challenge our usual frame of references and provide us with rich visual sources to contextualise, explore, discuss and question taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs about race.”
In conversation with deputy general secretary of NSEAD Sophie Leach, award-winning writer, artist and poet Sophie Herxheimer reveals the inspirations behind her many artistic and literary projects, and discusses how family and heritage have influenced her work.

Sophie Herxheimer: I’m in a continuum of quite a colourful background and foreground. I grew up in South London, not far from where I live now. My mother, Susan Collier, was a textile designer and, together with her sister Sarah Campbell, created some of the most iconic printed textiles of the late twentieth century. My dad was a pharmacologist. He came to London aged 12 with his sister and parents in 1938, after escaping Nazi Germany.

Both my parents were Jewish and, whilst that was never mentioned, there was a cultural flavour to my childhood that felt more continental than English. My parents separated when my sister and I were kids. Our mum lived in a bohemian world of chatter and clutter and fury and laughter; pattern and paint raised us. Both parents were subversives in many ways and certainly unconventional. They were both incredible grafters and absorbed in the ways they could add their particular vision to this world. Colour, in nature and in art, was my mother’s abiding interest and I am so grateful that I am similarly thrilled by it – I know my Scarlet Lake from my Alizarin Crimson and my Swallowtail from my Brimstone.

Language fascinated my dad. He spoke at least five languages and was a compulsive and terrible punner in all of them. My poetry, with its games and experiments, is strongly related to this obsession in him, though he was not in the slightest lyrical, in temperament but a committed rationalist. Nobody in my family suffered fools gladly and it was a hard place in which to be a directionless fool, which is something I have certainly been on and off over the years. Being ignored could make one resourceful and in the era when I grew up it could make one quite a keen reader, artist and writer. My kids have also shaped me, which is what I mean by foreground.

Your poems are artistic and your artworks are often inspired by fairy tales, storytelling and conversations. How has such a flourishing relationship between words and images come about?

I always loved books and print and, of course, I still do. Books are an escape and in them words and pictures can behave in similar or parallel ways. Books contain parades of images, images and ideas to pile up in one’s mind, page after page, making impossible things real, making time stand still or fly. I was always thrilled with old books like Andrew Lang’s fairy tale anthologies, where you had to thirst for a picture and when it appeared it would have a line lifted from the text underneath. Fairy tales are an endless source material and open to any amount of interpretation, like collective dreams. I love their creaky world of cardboard, gold and glass. There is a lot of down-to-earth horror and absurdity in them, where people are slain, then put back together – phew! The peasant gets the last laugh on the king or a girl vanquishes evil with the advice of a doll.

‘Our mum lived in a bohemian world of chatter and clutter, and fury and laughter – pattern and paint raised us’
language. We also often make little books together when he was growing up, trying to draw and piece together words for what was happening. We made puppets that could help explain things in their small (unthreatening) voices. The fact that I grew up drawing every day means that I’m very quick at it. The combination of being able to picture stories and draw fast, together with the practice of listening, meant that I could trust myself to collaborate with strangers in the depiction of their real experiences.

The more I did this, the closer my ear became for the particular words they’d choose, and the harder I’d listen for the images revealed within their streams of narrative. These were often metaphors for who they really were or were – a silver knife found on a beach, a rose blooming strong from the nourishment of slaughterhouse blood next door, a mountain of brownies! This threw me further into poetry, which I’ve always loved as well. I used poetry workshops to mend the inarticulate gaps that had nibbled through me like the rancid moths of ‘what’s all this’ from art school. I found that writing and reading poems was also the only way I could process the feelings around my son’s disabilities, my mother’s cancer and death, loss, change, grief and all the usual difficult human stuff.

You teach in both the Poetry School and Royal Drawing School in London. Do you use any of the same teaching approaches for each subject?

Yes. I try to create an atmosphere in which play and experiment are tools to unlock/ unblock the imagination. I use quite simple and loose exercises to get people writing poems and exploring ideas, which I’ve always loved as well. I used poetry workshops to mend the inarticulate gaps that had nibbled through me like the rancid moths of ‘what’s all this’ from art school. I found that writing and reading poems was also the only way I could process the feelings around my son’s disabilities, my mother’s cancer and death, loss, change, grief and all the usual difficult human stuff.

You collaborate extensively and have an ongoing project of collecting stories with people, live with ink? Can you describe the process of exchange and co-creation?

It’s true that the story collecting relies on collaboration and sharing stories in a real time. It also has a performative aspect to it. People love to watch the drawing appear in front of their very eyes. The performing of poetry is something I love to do. My mother’s mother was an actress and that is something I grew up with, too, a shamelessness and lack of inhibition about getting up and using my voice. People always called me a show off and I’m trying to turn it. I mean, obviously I’m a bit nervous and worry that I have nothing to add or that I’m going on a lot (and I’m doing it now) but historically there have just been too many centuries of trying to get women to sit down and shut up. Speaking and listening are both essential tools.

At a time when students, educators, schools and universities are increasingly judged on examinations and ‘performance’, what a joy it is to hear ‘uncertainty’ described as a quality, a space where ideas bloom. For a young person, or a learner who might be at fault of these gaps and the uncertainty of the blank page, what advice would you give them?

My advice to learners might be similar regardless of the stage they are at. We are all beginners again at the dawn of every day. There is never anything wrong with what we do, and we can allow ourselves to be led by a desire to discover, play or respond. We should respect the materials too, letting ourselves be led by materials towards ideas rather than trying to have ideas alone with a blank page. I think trying to please others or second-guess what they want is an unfortunate trap and can create blocks to the creative process.

Confidence in one’s innate imagination can be built by using materials, constraints and observation. This helps take the burden of responsibility and fear from the budding maker, so that they can lean into and become absorbed by a process of responding rather than trying to create an outcome. There must be room made for flexibility, spontaneity and patience with oneself, trust and innocence.

If one is writing a poem, it helps to imagine a reader, even if that reader is just edifient part of oneself. I separate myself into different aspects and get the constituent parts to look at each other’s work. I ask myself ridiculous questions like, what would you do if this was YOUR painting? (when it IS my painting? The reader part of myself has read a lot of poems and knows the pitfalls of abstract knowns, clichés or meaninglessness. Observation and listening are the obvious ways in – so are formal constraints. I love collage as a path to visual art making. It can be used to make both poems and wordless pieces and allows for the use of colour and texture which can literally add layers of meaning. It’s also a superb foil to ‘going wrong’ – the throwaway nature of it, the cyclic nature of ideas. Round and round we go, making things out of rubbish.

Art and poetry are all about transformation after all. I emphasise an approach in which mistakes are the stepping-stones and perfection is not the goal. I’m all for making a space for uncertainty and negative capability. Ideas bloom in wasteland and gaps.

I used poetry workshops to mend the inarticulate gaps that had nibbled through me like the rancid moths of ‘what’s all this’ from art school.

You collaborate extensively and have an ongoing project of collecting stories with people, live with ink?
Vincent’s treasures

Following its renovation, Van Gogh House in Brixton, South London, has become a rich resource for cross-curricular learning opportunities, particularly for Lucy Hall, arts leader at nearby Reay Primary school. Lucy and Janet Currier, special projects manager, describe the ongoing collaboration between the school and Van Gogh House.

Van Gogh House, Brixton, is on the same road as Reay Primary school, where I have worked for many years. I’ve walked past it often and been fascinated by the house with the blue plaque where Vincent Van Gogh once lived. I watched with avid interest as the house was bought and renovated, and visited as soon as it became open to the public.

I was therefore thrilled to learn, on contacting the house to see if they’d be interested in making links with Reay, that they were keen to begin developing an educational programme. It was exciting to meet with Janet Currier, special projects manager, and Livia Wang, creative director, to learn more.

The building has been sensitively renovated and is now a beautiful, contemporary space which still maintains an authentic sense of times past.

Top Van Gogh house
Photography by Tom Parsons © Van Gogh House

‘My main question as I look at my work or someone else’s, whether it’s a sculpture or a painting or a papercut or a poem, is ‘is it alive?’”

We wrote poems and made collages and The Practical Visionary appeared in 2018.

All the residencies and projects I have undertaken have involved collaboration. After lonely times trying to get somewhere on my own with painting, at art college and after, I have found it a relief to get to know people with whom ideas and work can be shared, discussed and expanded upon. I think I needed this too because having a child with disabilities was immensely isolating, difficult and also extremely full time.

Having said this, during my most recent residency in California, I found total solitude to be transformative and deepening as it gave me a much-needed time to go inside myself and make work that had no knowledge of, no project guidelines for and no real parameters. It was like falling off a cliff and landing amongst perfumed flowers. I painted and explored colour in a way that I never have before and surprised myself with some new ways and depths of writing. Connections with others include those with readers and viewers of the work, as well as the admired or remembered dead (mum! Emily Dickinson! Basquiat! Goncharova!). Collaborations ultimately keep the work and the doing of it alive.

And finally, ink or paint? Which comes with you on your desert island?

I imagine I’ll be able to make inks on my desert island, possibly paint as well. I’ll just keep hoping that there are pigments in the plants and stones, and binders in tree resin or other naturally occurring glues. It will be full-on experimentation. So, the answer is perhaps a limitless supply of paper and notebooks which I feel might be more of a faff to construct!

sophieherxheimer.com

for you, for me and for that bright blackbird in the tree, and what is more wonderful than being seen and heard?

I’ve had many excellent opportunities to collaborate. I have learned a great deal about story from Sally Pomme Clayton, who is a storyteller, writer and friend. We’ve made four books together so far and are going to be working on one about goddesses for the History Press next year.

In the context of story and theatre, I’ve also made work with and for The Unicorn Theatre, which pleased me no end as I’d gone to shows there as a child. And recently I’ve been working with Marina Warner on her memoir Inventory of a Life Mislaid: An Unreliable Memoir, which came out in March 2021. I’m also proud to say that I’m getting involved with the organisation she set up to support refugees in Palermo called Stories in Transit, which offers story-telling workshops in the UK and in Palermo, bringing young migrant students together with artists, writers and musicians.

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During the renovation, many objects and artefacts were discovered, and both Janet and I created engaging stories of their previous residents, such as James Wigram, a young boy who lived in the house from 1858-61. Under the floorboards of what was to become Vincent’s bedroom just over a decade later, James left a treasure trove of items including hand-painted playing cards, tin toys and pages of handwriting practice with rousing sayings such as ‘Embrace every opportunity of acquiring knowledge’. Clearly, Van Gogh House was a rich resource for a wide range of cross-curricular learning opportunities just waiting to be utilised.

Our initial meetings comprised of exciting brainstorming sessions in which many possibilities for educational projects were considered. We decided on an initial pilot workshop, an all-day session with a mixed age group of year 6 (ages 10-11) and year 1 (ages 5-6) pupils, beginning with a tour of the house. The children were captivated by stories of past residents and were thrilled to explore the house and its unusual art works and objects. A highlight was getting to lift the floorboard where what was to become Vincent’s room just over a decade later, who lived in the house from 1858-61. Under the floorboards of the Victorian times. This included writing contemporary sayings using ink dipping pens, painting and writing postcards from artist Kate Bright and her beautiful paintings that were displayed throughout the house, full of ideas to do at home or in the classroom.

Despite the challenges of Covid-19, the project has had a great success and I’m sure it will continue to thrive. For me personally, it has been a real privilege to spend so much time in this wonderful place and to work alongside such creative and capable people. Working together we have now got the project up and running. Long may it continue.

Lucy and I created a learning programme called ‘Vincent’s Treasures’ and are building a network of art specialist teachers. We have learned that our exhibitions programme at VGH can have real relevance to teachers and enrich their professional development. The space away from school means that the children are away from day to day feel. Teachers get the chance to do something creative that perhaps isn’t always on offer in their schools, which is a good thing for the children. It brings them to a new audience and lets them see the application of their work. The project has also been used as a test out and develop new teaching materials, including some lasting downloadable resources that anyone can use in a classroom or at home. As an organisation we have learned a lot from Lucy and OLC. Each of us has different expertise that has brought added value, not just in creating more area-based learning opportunities for children and families, but in creating lasting legacy by building infrastructure between teachers and schools.

The children were captivated by stories of past residents and were thrilled to explore the house and its unusual art works and objects for pupils and families. Lucy has been key to our partnership from the outset and her extensive knowledge of fund raising and writing bids has been crucial in developing our programme, now called ‘Vincent’s Treasures’.

We received our Lottery funding for the programme in September, which will enable Janet and I to commit more time and resources to the project. Despite the ever-changing Covid-19 situation, we’ve carried out two further workshops at Reay with years 5 and 6 (ages 9-11), incorporating activities as diverse as button making, exciting and writing poetry, and learning and creating maps. Sadly, we have not been able to take these pupils to visit the house but Janet has still taken them there through her captivating stories of its history. We were also able to develop a ‘Learning Area’ on the Van Gogh House website, full of ideas to do at home or in the classroom.

‘Vincent’s Treasures’ is open to all schools and nurseries in the Lambeth area and beyond. The sessions run from September through to March, and are available for 9-12 year olds. Each session is designed to help teachers introduce the theme of Van Gogh’s life and work, and is aimed at helping teachers to engage with Van Gogh’s life and work.

Van Gogh House
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The children were captivated by stories of past residents and were thrilled to explore the house and its unusual art works and objects.

1 First workshop with artists from Oval Learning Centre
2 Object hunt under the floorboards of RFH Hasted Road
3 Lisa Wang chats with year 1 pupil
4 Creating artwork in response to Kate Bright’s Van Gogh paintings
5 Ceramic tufftuts made during a pottery workshop

Janet Currier, special projects manager

When Van Gogh House opened to the public in June 2019, we wanted it to be a focus for learning and research, and to support living artists to make work. Part of that mission was to provide learning opportunities for local school children and families, especially those who might find it difficult to access arts and heritage due to economic hardship and social exclusion. Our big advantage was Van Gogh’s story. He can art that people from all walks of life can connect to. We knew that it would be easy to engage children in that story – if only we had the resources and expertise.

There were many challenges. We are a small organisation, with the equivalent of one paid worker and a very dedicated creative director. We are a private organisation so attracting money from the public sector is challenging. So we were very lucky that Lucy Hall from Reay Primary and Lucy Swanson from Oval Learning Centre approached us wanting to develop educational workshops. Both have a wealth of experience in creating imaginative and engaging projects, and have connections with families, teachers and heads that were essential to the project going. This project would never have been possible without the legal framework of OLC, which has meant we could raise funds.

We felt that the pilot had been a real success and were keen to keep the programme running. Long may it continue.

Lucy and I created a learning programme called ‘Vincent’s Treasures’ and are building a network of art specialist teachers. We have learned about the importance of sharing creative and the sharing of ideas for cross-curricular lessons linked to the history of the house. It felt as if the pilot had been a real success and we were keen to expand the programme further, developing a range of workshops and reaching out to more schools and the wider community. It was fantastic to have Lucy Swanson, manager of the Oval Learning Centre (OLC), to help. OLC was a local school community together to achieve wider opportunities.
Unlocking cultural capital

Sarah Phillips, chair of the NSEAD Special Interest Group for Cultural Capital and head of History of Art at Goldsmiths College, argues that cultural capital can not only encourage teachers and pupils to find their own voice and sense of belonging but can offer a way to bring communities together.

‘Cultural Capital’ was a term first coined by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in 1977 to describe the education, understanding and skills acquired by an individual, which are used to achieve economic advantage or social mobility. Bourdieu used the term to explore and understand the many different ways cultural capital is, or could be, measured and graded.

In 1977, the term ‘cultural capital’ looked like – or might look like – in their education, industry or community. Across the UK and beyond, teachers have shared their conviction that cultural capital is important – and different – in all environments but that those ideas can and should be shared to motivate us all.

Jonathan Sacks writes of the need to rebalance our communities away from the ‘I’ and towards the ‘we’. Perhaps more than any other time in our humanity (and humility).

Sarah Phillips argues that arts and cultures should be seen as a golden thread woven throughout the curriculum to bring a sense of purpose and belonging. To this end, resources offered by mylearning.org will be useful to many.

Clare Stanhope’s Conversation around Cultural Capital (fig. 3) explores her ongoing journey through the world of art education and cultural capital. From the fundamental right of every individual to explore their creativity, Clare looks at how cultural capital can open up opportunities to those involved in the ‘art adventure’, in addition to the difference cultural capital makes to our lives, industry and economy.

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Honey Dearsley, founder of The Art Hive, was a primary art and design teacher before becoming a freelance art educator and wellbeing collaborator. She describes, in a time of nationwide lockdown, how she returned to making her own art, with inspiration coming from unexpected online conversations.

This time last year there were definitely days I woke up asking myself whether I was awake or in a dream. Minute by minute plans and expectations were changing, merging into one big blur. I wondered if I had accidentally zoomed down a rabbit hole by mistake, not unlike Alice in Wonderland. Everything I thought to be clearly defined in my life was turned upside down. If, at that time, I had been asked by a pipe-smoking blue caterpillar ‘Who are you’, I would have probably muted myself in confusion. Indeed, who in the world am I?

In my pre-pandemic life, I had a great many things. A confident, resilient, intuitive art teacher, as well as a mentor, volunteer, head of art at a great school and a gallery workshop facilitator. I had also just set up my new business The Art Hive, which offers art clubs to local school children. Following the start of the crisis, like many other freelance artists, I suddenly found myself displaced, isolated and struggling with staying safe at home, shielding my family whilst also desperate to contribute, thrive and survive in an unfamiliar world. A global pandemic was closing in and this was not a dream. Our normal lives were about to be hijacked.

In my search for dialogue and distraction, I actively engaged with social media, flowing from one network to another. My posts got noticed and people’s comments filled me with some of positivity, kindness and creative camaraderie. I had found a tribe, a Twitter campfire where I was encouraged, supported and inspired. Like most things, making art requires practice. It takes a person then’, but I can look forward to the future with more creativity, collaboration and hope.

Top left: Lockedown marks, 2020
Above: Setting my voice into type with TYPETOM.com
Above: Organis msan play

‘Having the confidence to paint again, without judgement and for pleasure, is an acquired “wisdom without fear” that perhaps comes with experience’

I felt stuck in the mud. I was frozen by an internal monologue of self-doubt and hoping someone else would ‘unlock’ me. I didn’t recognise myself except when I was making art, so the truth of Bob and Roberta Smith’s words ‘Make Your Own Damn Art’ lit up like a beacon for me. I was born an artist, so that’s exactly what I did.

In my role as a primary teacher and head of art in primary schools over the years, I had forgotten the ‘artist teacher’ balance, that intuitive hybrid existence as both practitioner and educator. Most of my own art practice was unpacked on holiday or family days out. On reflection, I was just consumed with surviving life, grief, loss, parenting and teaching to really focus on progressing my own artistry. The days were full and that was enough, and I regarded teaching as my most important ‘work of art’.

Like most things, making art requires practice. It takes a little bit every day until you get really good at it, and to improve you just need time, which I had ironically mismatched with fragile mental health and low self-worth. I missed purposeful work and I felt the grief, wanting to be productive but who for?

My art was becoming my voice and I was beginning to draw, paint and print what I wanted to say. Having the confidence to paint again, without judgement and for pleasure, is an acquired ‘wisdom without fear’ that perhaps comes with experience. After years of not painting, I wasn’t agonising over whether my paintings would be commercial, profitable or liked. I just loved the flow and the happy place it took me to where all track and trace of time disappeared. I was practising what I had preached.

Give Up’ motivated me to print again, summarising how I felt we would all win through this pandemic. My art was becoming my voice and I was beginning to draw, paint and print what I wanted to say. Having the confidence to paint again, without judgement and for pleasure, is an acquired ‘wisdom without fear’ that perhaps comes with experience. After years of not painting, I wasn’t agonising over whether my paintings would be commercial, profitable or liked. I just loved the flow and the happy place it took me to where all track and trace of time disappeared. I was practising what I had preached for years to my students and turning my mistakes into successes.

My resilience and confidence started to return. With encouragement I began to make the leap into filming tutorials. The Watts Gallery – Artists’ Village had offered me my first commission to create a video on collagraph printing. With this patronage and encouragement I found my teaching confidence again and have now completed several commissioned videos, including a Mini Pocket Watts Gallery!

Since then, I have created a variety of new online content for families, teachers and wellbeing forums. I am also most proud of collaborating with clinical psychologist Dr Hazel Harrison, devising an Origami Brain House, helping to support young people’s mental health at this time and presenting online activities for professional educator networks on social media. As I write this, a third lockdown is upon us and yet I feel stronger and better prepared to meet the challenges ahead. Like Alice, ‘I can’t go back to yesterday because I was a different person then’, but I can look forward to the future with more creativity, collaboration and hope.

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This is the new normal, this is the new Adversity Creativity Victory.
Our Curiosity Cart

Teaming up with artist community Bow Arts and designers Make: Good, assistant headteacher, describes the process

What is curiosity and how can we nurture curiosity within schools? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, curiosity is ‘a strong desire to know or learn something. Or an unusual or interesting object or fact.’ At Lansbury Lawrence Primary School, we embarked on a project with Bow Arts and designers called Make: Good to embody this definition through the creation of the unique and wonderful Curiosity Cart.

Lansbury Lawrence is located in Poplar, Tower Hamlets. We are a two-form entry community primary school with a large nursery. Our school was built as part of the Festival of Britain in 1951 and we are very lucky to be surrounded by exciting design and architecture. We’re very proud of our creative offer and the arts are firmly embedded within our curriculum. We have established relationships with several local arts organisations, including the artist community at Bow Arts.

Each year, we join together with a consortium of local schools to commission a bespoke project through Bow Arts. In 2018-19, we knew we wanted to run a project led by our school arts council, who are made up of a group of pupils, aged 6-11.

We set up the arts council at Lansbury Lawrence a few years ago because we wanted to strengthen pupil voice within the arts. We wanted to develop young creative leaders, for our pupils to shape our arts curriculum. Pupils apply annually and it is very competitive. Last year there were 90 applications for 15 places. Pupils must explain why they want to join the arts council and how they think the arts could be improved within our school. Benefits include collaboration across phases, how the pupils take such pride in the responsibility, and developing confidence and problem-solving skills together.

We also knew we wanted our arts council to design a creative resource to inspire our youngest pupils. After initial conversations, Bow Arts gave us a shortlist of potential artists and designers who could help us realise our vision. Architecture and design studio Make: Good stood out on the list as the designers who would be the right fit for this project.

The arts council began the project by exploring the school environment and researching what our early years children liked to play with through going in to their classrooms, watching them play and interviewing them. They worked with Make: Good, undertaking aite analysis, exploring architectural scale, pattern and textures, and capturing what the resource would need to include. The designers from Make: Good were great at embracing the ideas the pupils were bringing to the table and created an atmosphere of professional collaboration.

After drawing designs and building small models, the design of the cart began to take shape. From research, the arts council knew it needed to be on wheels to move around, have a handle to push and pull it, be narrow enough to fit through doorways and sturdy enough to be used by children. It also needed to be lots of fun! The Curiosity Cart was to be a mobile junk modelling storage unit, with surprising accessories and multi-sensory activities included within the design. This included a periscope, a soundblaster and flying string shapes. It was empowering for the arts council to see their ideas beginning to take shape.

The completed Curiosity Cart exceeded expectations and the arts council were incredibly proud of their creation. We now have an accessible resource for our youngest children to use, explore through and create three-dimensional work. Curiosity can be satisfied through making something with the junk modelling materials stored within the cart and the actual vessel is both an unusual and interesting object in itself – full of fascinating curiosities at every angle. The final colour scheme was chosen to match our Peggy Angus tile mural in our reception area where the Curiosity Cart now lives. The resource has fitted right in and is a perfect way for our young pupils to begin their journey on our creative curriculum.

By entrusting our pupils with the responsibility of design we have captured an essence of childhood play and wonder. The Curiosity Cart is obviously and proudly created from the imaginations of children. Make: Good did an excellent job of encapsulating this integrity and we’re grateful for their commitment to the project. How else can we improve our learning environment if we enable children as the designers? This is something we continue to explore at Lansbury Lawrence and we’re excited by the possibilities.

To find out more please visit the Make: Good studio website. For further information about Make: Good’s work visit their website.

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The project included a visit to the Make: Good studio to see the Curiosity Cart in production. The students on the arts council helped with sanding the different components and gained an insight into how designers work together and the different stages of the creative design process. Working with professional practitioners is always inspiring, and through this project our pupils learnt about teamwork, enabling the progression from initial ideas to the final product.

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Kerri Sellens, assistant headteacher, describes the process of play.

Kerri Sellens, assistant headteacher, describes the process
Planning, preparing and providing – what happened next?

In 2016, the first Plan, Prepare, Provide: Art Teachers Residential course for art history educators at the University of Leeds was held. Five years on, Anne-Louise Quinton, freelance art education consultant, Abigail Harrison-Moore, professor of Art History and Museum Studies at the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, and Dr Sarah Harvey-Richardson, AFAEA, Outreach and Saturday Club project officer, offers an update on its progress and funding.

In spring 2016, Sarah Phillips, head of History of Art at Goldsmiths College and author of the Pearson A Level History of Art specification, wrote a feature for 3D magazine called Art History prepared, planned and provided about a three-day residential course, set up in 2016 by the University of Leeds for art and art history teachers. She explored how art education had collectively responded to the 2016 loss and the subsequent ex-Birth of Art Level. She also looked at the crushing impact of the Education from which to develop, in association with the Partnership for Art History and Susan Coles, arts, creativity and educational consultant, a programme for teachers to work positively, creatively and supportively together.

Now in its fifth year, the Plan, Prepare, Provide (PPP) Art Teachers Residential course has received further funding to enable us to continue to deliver PPP, for free, until 2024. The fundraising effort has required us to reflect on and develop our approach to partnership with over 100 teachers, and to evaluate the impact and plan for the future. This time, therefore, a perfect moment to share our learning and experience.

The residential course originally began as a one-day conference held at The School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies in 2014. By luck, one of the first participants was Anne-Louise Quinton, an art and design teacher in Bradford, who shared how she brought art history into her art room. Thinking about how we might develop our teacher training to make it useful, current and, importantly, produce planning and resources, we asked Anne-Louise to chair the next conference. The key to its success was her ambition to enable teachers to reconnect with their practice as a part of thinking critically and creatively about their teaching. This was how PPP was born.

Since 2016, the residential course has offered fresh ideas, resources and opportunites to inject new ways of working for 30 teachers a year. The sessions are designed to share knowledge, in practical and interactive, and provide time to think together.

During the pandemic, the PPP programme evaluation, including pre- and post-event questionnaires showed that 94 per cent of participants rated the sessions 8/10 or higher, while 100 per cent of participants strongly agreed that PPP provided ideas and resources that they are going to deliver in their classroom, which cemented their desire to attend the residential in the future. Post-PPP we saw a 36 per cent increase in participants who strongly agreed they felt valued as a teacher, and a 24 per cent increase in participants who strongly agreed they were interested in delivering the History A Level in their school.

As one of the attendees Laura Stewart- Thomas, a subject co-ordinator for art, said: “As a subject leader department for the best part of 15 years, it can feel creatively isolating at times. Finding the Plan, Prepare, Provide course in 2010 has given me new energy for my own practice and teaching. This is a course that keeps on giving beyond the intensively filled three days, a rich network of colleagues has been opened up to me, with whom I still share ideas (and struggles!) with regularly.”

For all those interested in PPP, the Plan, Prepare, Provide website is updated with case studies and feedback at the end of the course every year. For more information and contact details please visit: www PPPonline2020.com

The teachers find inner strength and are rejuvenated. Before the first evening is over, they have created, played and participated, and become art students themselves again.

To date, 155 teachers have engaged in PPP, with a combined average weekly student reach of over 20,000 pupils. Teachers have travelled from across the country to join, and 2020’s digital offer saw delegates attending from Nigeria and Moscow. The year 2020 also saw us enhance our programme evaluation, including pre- and post-event questionnaires. We found that 94 per cent of participants rated the sessions 8/10 or higher, while 100 per cent of participants strongly agreed that PPP provided ideas and resources that they are going to deliver in their classroom, which cemented their desire to attend the residential in 2021. Post-PPP we saw a 36 per cent increase in participants who strongly agreed they felt valued as a teacher, and a 24 per cent increase in participants who strongly agreed they were interested in delivering the History A Level in their school.

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As an art and design consultant, a member of the expert subject advisory panel for Ofqual and now president of NSEAD, Liz Macfarlane applauds how the NSEAD community has risen to the challenges of last and this year, and argues that the curriculum should be used to support pupils’ mental health and wellbeing.

I have never had a career plan. Everything I have done professionally has been a response to circumstances at the time or a leap of faith. I see myself as very fortunate as I have ended up being involved in all sorts of interesting, challenging and valuable pieces of work, all the time keeping faith with my own belief that high-quality art, craft and design education is a fundamental right for everyone.

I can’t remember a time when I haven’t been engaged in one form or another of drawing, painting, stitching and making. All through secondary school and beyond, I should be soulfully desirous to go to art college. The progression to becoming an art educator was the result of signing up for the PGCE to keep my parents happy when, during my final year at Loughborough College of Art and Design, they started to inquire about my employment intentions. Neither of my parents went into higher education – they both went straight into jobs on leaving school, taking professional intentions. My childhood was happy when, during my final year at Loughborough College of Art and Design, they started to inquire about my employment intentions.

I have taken over the presidency at an exciting time for NSEAD. The pandemic saw the Society accelerate plans to implement a ‘digital first’ strategy and is now bringing on board new officers to increase support for the growing membership and online presence. As it grows, I hope to see the Society extend its reach across all four nations of the UK, building new audiences and working alongside all our colleagues, locally, nationally and even internationally, can access and thrive through and in our subject.

Liz Macfarlane
president of NSEAD

Writing the textbook for the International AS and A level really made me think beyond my own experience of art and design education in a much more culturally diverse and sensitive way. I was challenged to confront my thinking and had a great deal from the process. Since then, I have never had a career plan. Everything I have done professionally has been a response to circumstances at the time or a leap of faith. It’s times like this that make me really proud to have served on council and as vice president and president elect and can safely say that what the Society has achieved over a very short time span during the most difficult of times has been quite astounding. As well as managing increased demand to support members, articulating to funders and working on charitable projects and assisting with the running of the charity to support key national and international initiatives for which charitable funding was essential, I have contributed to discussions with policy makers in response to the ever-changing educational demands. Throughout, I have been working with and, chairing the Examinations Special Interest Group [SIG], meeting regularly and often at short notice, to discuss issues, respond to consultations and ultimately shape NSEAD’s standpoint in response to changes to government policy and to make a difference.

‘We have a massive job as art educators to bridge gaps of attainment and opportunity when normality is finally re-established, never mind addressing the mental wellbeing agenda that our subject can contribute massively to’

I have never had a career plan. Everything I have done professionally has been a response to circumstances at the time or a leap of faith. I see myself as very fortunate as I have ended up being involved in all sorts of interesting, challenging and valuable pieces of work, all the time keeping faith with my own belief that high-quality art, craft and design education is a fundamental right for everyone.

I have taken over the presidency at an exciting time for NSEAD. The pandemic saw the Society accelerate plans to implement a ‘digital first’ strategy and is now bringing on board new officers to increase support for the growing membership and online presence. As it grows, I hope to see the Society extend its reach across all four nations of the UK, building new audiences and working alongside all our colleagues, locally, nationally and even internationally, can access and thrive through and in our subject.
Seeds and Stitches

Keen to enhance inclusive and diverse approaches in art and design education, BAEd and PGCE primary art pathway lead Suzy Tutchell and Mel Jay, secondary art lead, both at the Institute of Education, University of Reading, came up with two cross-phase projects to promote collaboration between partner schools, trainee students and teachers, whilst recognising wellbeing and mindfulness as a consideration for the current times.

1 Raku firing workshop with Grant Pratt of Blue Matchbox Gallery
2 A secondary art teacher trainee and her final projects
3 Felt-making with three specialist trainee teachers
4 Yarn sculptures – student collaborations
5 A university tutor’s raku-fired ‘seed of diversity’

At the University of Reading’s Institute of Education, we have a vibrant and inspiring art department used by staff and students across all phases of art education. We are very fortunate to work with fantastic, top-of-the-range facilities which have helped to instil and maintain a proactive, dynamic and contemporary art-based culture for our courses and programmes. We actively engage with and inspire participation from students and staff across all our teacher training programmes, in order to make vibrant and real the expressive wonders of art and design education. As art and design tutors working with both primary and secondary trainee teachers, we were keen to devise projects to enhance cross-phase, inclusive and diverse approaches, modelling good practice for our partnership schools.

With the help of internal funding from the university, we rolled out two projects over two years. Seeds of Diversity and Stitches in Time: Inclusive Threads of Learning.

Seeds of Diversity was an ambitious and enriching initiative, drawing together the University of Reading’s community of teachers and learners to produce a collaborative and evolving sculptural installation. The project celebrated the university’s roots and growth over the past 90 years and reflected future aspirations. Sculptural ceramic seeds were created over ten months and planted within the campus grounds as an installation and a final cross-disciplinary celebration at the end of the academic year.

Seeds of Diversity is now a prominent feature of our campus grounds, showcasing hundreds of individually designed ceramic seed pods created by partnership schools, staff, students, pupils, community groups and visitors. The creation of the pods was overseen by us as art and design technology tutors and inspired by contemporary ceramic practices. Participants were invited to sculpt a seed in clay or to decorate aready-made form with a design which reflected their connection to the university.

The workshops also involved our ceramicist-in-residence Sue Mundy. Sue, who is a prestigious artist in the world of ceramics and an integral part of our ongoing vibrant artist-in-residency programme at the IoE, enriched the project further with her professional expertise and knowledge base. The project naturally evolved over the duration of the year in response to a widening community interest stemming from our initial workshops. This development included working with Grant Pratt, a renowned raku expert and owner of the Blue Matchbox Gallery in Tilehurst. Two raku firings provided participants with the opportunity to experiment with glazing and firing their pods in an outside kiln – this was a magical experience for all involved, even on the coldest of days. “It was like a multi-sensory experience, the smell of the wood and burning materials was evocative of a smoke-house in Whitby!” said Andrew Happle, lecturer in science education.

As Brian Murphy, former head of art of the Pigott School in Wargrave, remarked, ‘Raku is all about community, and as the clay transformed and the bisque reached a new stage, the bond of the people in the group grew closer. It was an equalizing activity as all ages and abilities learnt together.’

The legacy and impact of the project has been rewarding for all involved. One university tutor commented, ‘Every time I arrive in the mornings, no matter the weather, it’s such a treat to see the pods dotted around the campus and remember their creative beginnings.’ Importantly, the cross-phase project lives on as new students and visiting pupils continue to add their pods to the evolving installation.

‘The participants, and particularly our trainee teacher students, learnt how to become accepting, respectful and patient, working at each other’s pace and appreciating diverse responses’

Building on the success of our Seeds of Diversity project, we launched our second cross-phase project called Stitches in Time: Inclusive Threads of Learning. Over the past two years we have seen an increase in the number of students with a variety of needs and, more recently, mental health issues. This sensory and somatic textile-based project offered a learning ‘space’ and teaching environment which recognised an inclusive, mindful and wellbeing approach. We explored tactile, visual and aural stimuli.

The textile installation will be another living legacy of our cross-phase creative approach to art and design in education.

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Students and staff from across our undergraduate and postgraduate programmes worked with partnership schools – primary, secondary and SEN institutions – over the course of the year. Activities included yarn-bombing, story sticks, branch weaving and felt making. Due to Covid-19, the project was brought to a premature close but we have every intention of reigniting it when restrictions lift. Our aspiration is to replicate the success of our Seeds of Diversity installation and curate an evolving and diverse textile installation made up of participants’ individual work. ‘The textile installation will be another living legacy of our cross-phase creative approach to art and design in education.

The project also recognised that people bring a wealth of diverse responses. The collaborative-textile project aimed to be both democratic and peer supporting, requiring the participants to contribute in a whole-heartedly possible, without fear.

As future teachers, we feel it is vital that all our trainee students have the opportunity to work with young people of all abilities. This peer-teaching project offered a unique opportunity for students to be immersed in an inclusive creative project where they worked alongside each other and pupils from partnership schools. The project also recognised that people bring a wide array of skills and interests which they have gained from all sorts of experiences in their lives to date, regardless of their particular circumstances. The participants, and particularly our trainee teacher students, learnt how to become accepting, respectful and patient, working at each other’s pace and appreciating diverse responses. The collaborative-textile project aimed to be both democratic and peer supportive, requiring the participants to contribute in a whole-heartedly possible, without fear.

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Seeds and Stitches

Keen to enhance inclusive and diverse approaches in art and design education, BAEd and PGCE primary art pathway lead Suzy Tutchell and Mel Jay, secondary art lead, both at the Institute of Education, University of Reading, came up with two cross-phase projects to promote collaboration between partner schools, trainee students and teachers, whilst recognising wellbeing and mindfulness as a consideration for the current times.
The accompanying forums were designed to build a community of shared learning and discussions as a means of valuing what students bring to learning. There are no quizzes, no links to Wikipedia and no TED Talks. Each lesson shows how websites, not least my own Feminist Art Journal, was an experiment in online feminist education in the USA: feministic online education in feminism in the USA: Feminist Art Manifestos (1969-present), which is based on my Feminist Art Journal (n.paradoxa.com 1998-2017). This image shows a wider frame.

As part of his continuing series, Chris Francis unpacks his tin box to reveal another Threshold concept and some dangerous, fun and inspiring words for our challenging times:

I’ve a tin box where I store the dangerous words. Stand back and I’ll show you. In fact, whilst we’re here – in the dark, in the art room (where breaking in wasn’t exactly easy) – let’s try this with today’s lesson.

Don’t look at me like that. SCHOOLS ARESAFE. Honestly. I heard it on TV. Plus, we did agree that it. Home-schooling and constant screen time is draining everyone’s creative energy. So, doing, demonstrating, making something – mishap, a conversation, a radical practical action – might be the inspiration our art students need right now. And 3. Filming this bloody in the art department – at night – would be exciting. We did agree that too, right? We share the materials, space and inspiration, plus a chance to affect all the cardboards and masking tape we need to build our own home-school offices, to hide from our own kids, to teach all the others.

Let’s explore the level on the tin for then. Perfect! Camera on and action! Let’s see what we’ve got.

Who’s Check this frisky falls – it’s PLAY! This word is like putty in my hand. An amorphous morpheme indeed! Mired in verbal undervaluing, energizing, I love to share this spiky wider. Everyone should handle PLAY – it’s not childish as it seems.

What’s next? Ouch! This one’s bruised and prickly. Look – RISK TAKING. No wonder it’s defensive. It’s been bandied about, misapplied and misappropriated. But wait. RISK TAKING is warning us. It’s not what we thought. It’s not as bad as it seems.

Hold on, don’t run off. But you’re sharpening my senses. I’ll handle you with care. TAKING is warming to us. It likes what we’re up to. Hey, RISK TAKING! I’m getting to a dangerous, fun and inspiring words for our challenging times.

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As I write this, I am sitting in an almost empty school, huddled up against a radiator. Lockdown three is about to kick in and, although this is familiar territory, the culture shock is palpable. My class are at home, messaging me from time to time and I am looking forward to seeing what they submit later on today. A year ago this was challenging. The process helped us to evaluate our own practice and become more reflective and analytical about what we make. As a group, we are quite diverse, both in terms of working lives, family lives and artist lives. And this is the thing - we were comfortably refer to ourselves as artists. We no longer feel guilt when we scurry off to paint or sculpt, and we have the huge support and friendship from each other and from our course leader, the unstoppable Rachel Payne (fan girl moment).

Fortunately for us, we had all staged our exhibitions by the time lockdown hit in March. Unfortunately for us, it meant no more glorious shows - the lively discussions and flowing conversations were absent due to the whole mute/unmute protocol. On the plus side, it’s easier to attend meetings and meetings are efficient. As we spent the summer term writing essays and completing a module on research methods, we relied heavily on the copious amounts of online support, tutorials, group chats, drop-ins and ephemeral videos (look it up, it’s a thing), and any opportunity to connect and share was greedily grasped. Our WhatsApp group chat is our off-the-record lifeline. Tentatively begun in our first year, it has gained confidence and is now a rip-roaring lifeline. Tentatively begun in our first year, it has gained confidence and is now a rip-roaring lifeline. Fortunately for us, we had all staged our exhibitions by the time lockdown hit in March. Unfortunately for us, it meant no more glorious shows - the lively discussions and flowing conversations were absent due to the whole mute/unmute protocol. On the plus side, it’s easier to attend meetings and meetings are efficient. As we spent the summer term writing essays and completing a module on research methods, we relied heavily on the copious amounts of online support, tutorials, group chats, drop-ins and ephemeral videos (look it up, it’s a thing), and any opportunity to connect and share was greedily grasped. Our WhatsApp group chat is our off-the-record lifeline. Tentatively begun in our first year, it has gained confidence and is now a rip-roaring lifeline. Perhaps that has also given us better insight into the lives of our students. As we embark on our final year there is a sense of achievement mixed with trepidation and a touch of sadness. That’s one hell of a cocktail.

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Fortunately for us, we had all staged our exhibitions by the time lockdown hit in March. Unfortunately for us, it meant no more glorious shows. For me it meant all the plans I had put in place for the rest of the year in terms of developing the artist side of my career were put on hold, indelibly it now seems. The move to online learning was an interesting turn as most of us were also providing online lessons for our students. To be on the receiving end was challenging. Whilst it was good to see each other via Zoom, the lively discussions and flowing conversations were absent due to the whole mute/unmute protocol. On the plus side, it’s easier to attend meetings and meetings are efficient. As we spent the summer term writing essays and completing a module on research methods, we relied heavily on the copious amounts of online support, tutorials, group chats, drop-ins and ephemeral videos (look it up, it’s a thing), and any opportunity to connect and share was greedily grasped. Our WhatsApp group chat is our off-the-record lifeline. Tentatively begun in our first year, it has gained confidence and is now a rip-roaring lifeline. Perhaps that has also given us better insight into the lives of our students. As we embark on our final year there is a sense of achievement mixed with trepidation and a touch of sadness. That’s one hell of a cocktail.

Looking back, it is clear to see how much we have all grown in the world of academia. Through this, I have gained confidence and have a lot of fun. By the end of the year, we had all secured spaces for our exhibitions, ranging from a local library to commercial gallery space. The sense of personal pride in what we had achieved and learned was evident. The process helped us to evaluate our own practice and become more reflective and analytical about what we make.

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The conversation continues

3 Saturday July 2021

Save the date for the 2021 NSEAD annual conference, to be held in partnership with the National Gallery, London

#NSEAD21 will be part of our summer festival of online and face-to-face events for art, craft and design educators

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