

Heston Community School is a co-educational, mixed ability, multicultural school in South West London with a majority of pupils of ethnic minority for whom English is an additional language.

What was the school trying to achieve?

The teaching mentor and other colleagues value the opportunity to learn from new students who are talented specialists with recent experience of the creative industries. Trainees are actively encouraged to develop their own Schemes of Work and to resource and plan projects themselves, take risks and learn from their mistakes. Students on the current PGCE Course have benefited from the tutor's role as a Regional Subject Adviser for the new National Curriculum and have had opportunities to develop work in line with the new statement of importance for Art and Design.

In this case, the trainee took the opportunity to re-invent the somewhat clichéd 'African mask project'. She started to develop a project inspired by the recent visits to the British Museum and October Gallery as part of the PGCE course, that would use her skills as a theatre and film set designer. She believed that pupils would be engaged by referring to the work of contemporary African artists and liberated by using found materials and methods of construction that used power tools and inspired by a focus on their own identity and a wider cultural awareness. The key concepts of the new National Curriculum in Art and Design addressed are Cultural Understanding and Critical Understanding.

How was the learning organised?

The PGCE student worked closely with museum and gallery education services to resource her project – using images from the British Museum African Gallery website and referring to contemporary African artists who have exhibited both at the October Gallery and the British Museum, in particular, Romuald Hazoume and Calixte Dakpogan whose work refers to the relationship between the Western world and Africa. Images and information can be found at www.octobergallery.co.uk and www.caacart.com.

The student combed the local streets and light industrial estates for junk and found materials to spark the imaginations of her pupils. A notable find was a collection of shop mannequin body parts that had survived a factory fire! Without a strong culture of interest in non academic subjects from pupils and their families she initially provided most of this material herself but was delighted when pupils began to bring in materials that had some personal resonance.

Pupils were encouraged to not only construct masks using traditional art classroom materials such as papier mache, glue and tape but also power tools borrowed from the Design Technology department. Pupils used drills, files, hammers and nails to make their masks and were taught some prop making skills including a secret recipe for rust!

How well was it achieved?

The project was one that was devised and delivered by a PGCE trainee during her first teaching practice. The project and the trainee impressed staff and pupils alike because of the way in which a traditional multicultural art project had been updated and made relevant, personal and exciting; exploring new art and encouraging new ways of working.

The possibilities for development are beginning to be explored: The October Gallery run outreach workshops with exhibiting artists and artists in residence could work with the school in the future. The drama and history departments could work alongside the art department in creating a performance and exhibition linked to the history of slavery and the issue of human identity.

This project was developed and taught by **Helen Wygendlacz**, a 2007-2008 PGCE trainee at Roehampton University.

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