

A school links with contemporary craft workers to make commemorative wall hangings and stage a community exhibition

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Case study: #16

School Profile: The John Taylor High School is an 11–18 Specialist Science large and expanding school with a good reputation in the village of Barton Under Needwood, East Staffordshire.

What was the school trying to achieve?

The project was a collaborative venture between the Yoxall Community Crafts group and thirty pupils on the enrichment programme, ten from each year at key stage three. The Art and Design department was keen to promote local artists, designers and craftspeople, and also wished to display artwork to raise community awareness of the lively, engaging cultural projects that take place in the vicinity.

The staff wished to give learners opportunities to explore new techniques and processes and 'take risks' with new materials, modifying designs where necessary. They wanted to provide an opportunity for learners to work on a live brief and to become aware of the constraints and demands associated with working for a client. As working within a team was crucial to the development of the overall design, learners would have to accept and reject ideas, and develop their critical awareness in order to complete the outcome.

How was learning organised to achieve these aims?

The panels were planned to show the evolution of the school with subjects representing the rural locality, industrial heritage, and artistic achievements. Sessions took place during and after school with a group of learners that had achieved consistently well in art. Learning was organised flexibly to enable learners to work alongside the craft group, staff, and members of the PTA and feeder schools. The initial input was given by the local group crafts group who presented the outcomes of past projects such as quilts, wall hangings etc.

Student's research was encouraged to expand initial ideas including local features and history. Staff ensured that materials were varied and traditional and modern techniques were used interactively.

How well did the school achieve its aims?

It had initially been the intention to produce one large hanging, but during the process it was decided by the participants that it was more practical to work on five individual panels that could be displayed either side by side. This adaptability demonstrated the extent to which pupils grew into their roles as designers.

Learners successfully modified and refined their own images and ideas at various stages of the creative process. The process of decision-making developed their critical awareness and they were increasingly willing to try new things. Students explored processes and techniques with increasing confidence. The challenge to work with practising craft workers both developed students' interpersonal skills and led to a more expressive approach which explored different processes such as embellishment, stitching and fusing plastic.

Most importantly the project gave the learners an understanding of their role in the local community. They were keen to portray aspects of the local community that were of value to them, whether it was the landscape, industry, or local features.

The wall hangings which celebrated the 50th anniversary of the school are now installed in the school hall exhibiting for a real audience. This led to the next successful art exhibition at the school that involved pupils, staff, and parents, thus continuing and reinforcing the links between the school and the community.

