

case study

MediaMaker at Qube,
Oswestry



partner organisations:

Kingswell Centre (PRU), Craftspace Touring, ShYAN (Shropshire Youth Arts Network) and ALISS (artists learning, information and support service)

location:

Oswestry

young people:

8 x 14 – 16 year olds who attend the Kingswell Education Centre, at Oswestry

context:

Qube is a small rural contemporary gallery space, in North West Shropshire. Qube is the home of Oswestry Community Action which offers a number of services including an accessible transport service, learn direct and multi media facility and a volunteer bureau. The combination of activities draws new audiences into the gallery space and the innovative architecture uses light space and interconnectivity to encourage interaction. We were involved in the project because of our interest in encouraging young people to use Qube and in the partnership with Oswestry Pupil Referral Unit where it was obvious that quality art provision was totally lacking.

en-vision research question:

To identify the role that involvement with Qube can have on the lives of rurally isolated young people, and those who are marginalized.

proposal:

Collaboration with young people attending a Pupil Referral Unit, supported by the expertise of artists, Craftspace Touring and ShYAN, the regional youth arts network. The action research aimed to support the young people's learning and development and, will aim to inform the development of new strategy within Qube defining the venue's future work with young people.

project aims:

- To develop new audiences for Qube and maintain their involvement
- To develop an integrated digital media and craft project leading to an exhibition at Qube
- To raise the self – esteem and confidence of the young people involved through participation in the project and the final exhibition
- To engage young people in new art forms and processes and develop skills in curating and developing exhibitions
- To develop ShYAN's profile in North Shropshire

summary of activities:

- 8 young people participated in a series of animation, media, technology and craft workshops at Qube, led by a digital and a textile artist over a 5 month period
- They explored issues relating to themselves and their experience (if any) of cultural venues and created their own work which was showcased at the gallery in spring 2004 in a fantastic multi-media exhibition called Game On – which represented their feelings about having lives that had for many reasons been interrupted but now were feeling more positive and – game on
- The exhibition included colourful textiles, giant hangings, photography, an interactive computer projection creating a virtual gallery archiving a huge library of work, and a video projection with music
- The young people showed visitors proudly and confidently around the launch

of Game On

- It was particularly evident that appreciation and interest of family members and peers was hugely important to the participants
- Game on then toured to Belmont Arts Centre Gallery in Shrewsbury during June and July.
- Pupils and staff steered the development of the project, including the selection of artists, project content, planning the exhibition and display, publicity material showcase event, and stage 2 activities

time-scale: November 2003 – July 2004

summary of outcomes:

- Due to the success of the project and partnership, and an eagerness to work together to further explore ways of using the arts within the PRU curriculum, we secured additional funding from Gulbenkian Foundation and carried out:
 - A pilot scheme involving 6-8 of the participants in continued individual mentoring and vocational training with 3 artists.
 - A Training event in July (Game On: Facilitating Creative Activity in Pupil Referral Units) for regional artists and PRU teachers supporting future collaborative work.
 - A sell-out regional Seminar for arts and alternative education professionals (Young People at the Edge: Pupil Referral Units and the Visual Arts) providing an opportunity for workers to come together to explore and share good practice.
 - Further research to compile case studies and resources supporting work in PRU's and LSU's, now housed on the en-vision website
- A report about Qube's work is housed on the en-vision website

changes from original proposal:

- Additional stage added

success factors / learning outcomes:

- Taking risks with positive outcomes –

At one point the group decided not to exhibit at Qube and the venue were faced with the prospect of an empty space exhibiting only a statement about why this reaction happened quite early in the project before much practical work had been completed. It was a direct reaction to the Printers Inc exhibition (containing work by Artists such as Damien Hurst and Tracy Emin). The young people were very negative about this work and it made them very conscious of the exposure to opinion in putting on an exhibition in a public space. Could they actually risk public ridicule? As curator I have the flexibility to risk an event going wrong or simply changing. I see Qube, because of our independent status and small size as a place that can take risks. This response from Qube resulted in increased trust from participants. The young people eventually decided to exhibit at Qube

- I found it very beneficial to be working with a group of young people who came to Qube as part of their curriculum. Often recruiting this age group can lead to compromise and massive expenditure and time input
- We needed clearer outcomes for the artists and more discussion and analysis of sessions to aid progress
- Staff at Qube were fully briefed about this project nevertheless there were some tensions (smoking outside the front door and so on)
- Turning a tense situation into one which built bridges between staff at Qube and the young people – Staff responded badly to the group hanging around the entrance smoking etc. Martin Sumner (our lead artist) dealt with tensions immediately by organising interview sessions with the staff by the young people about their role in the building
- Reliability of the artists has to be 120% so that we aren't letting people down
- Game On was received incredibly well by visitors. Some of the many positive comments in the visitors book include:

'game on guys', ' Best exhibition at Qube ever. Clever and mobile. Well done', 'Excellent', ' Great stuff', ' Brilliant! I wish I could have a go', 'Very Exciting for people of all ages'

challenges:

- As a management partnership there were four partners plus the artists and engage. We were geographically spread out and the management was a bit loose for the first part of the project
- Dealing with staff tensions about the groups loitering and smoking activities at the front entrance. This was turned into a positive as described above

outcomes for young people:

- 'At the Belmont opening the mother of (one young man) told me that there had been such a significant change in him since he started the project that she could not believe what a massive impact the whole involvement had had on his attitude and behaviour towards everything' (project partner)
- 'When I first saw this young man he wore a hooded jacket, with hood up and a peaked cap with peak pulled down over his eyes. When he was showing people around his exhibition he wore no jacket or hat, just a proud expression on his face' (project partner)
- 'We have learnt a lot and people are nice to us'
- 'The best thing about this project has been making the computer projection, but I liked the whole thing'
- 'There are some staff who look at me like I am dirt. Is it because I am young?'
- 'I have enjoyed working at Qube and my time with some of the artists, some of the work I have produced I am proud of and would happily come back to Qube again'
- Young people have returned to Qube to look round the gallery and attend other provision including – learn direct and video, multimedia and animation course

outcomes for partners:

Kingswell Education Centre;

- 'I see that the young people are different because of the artistic opportunities they have had at Qube' (teacher)
- Staff recognized the value of the work in

terms of evident 'vastly enhanced self-esteem' in participants, 'activity tailored to their particular needs', 'the positive impact of using an alternative kinesthetic, visual and practical learning style', 'the value for participants of cooperating with a wider range of role models', and the 'opportunity for participants to excel, showcase and celebrate achievements in a public space for young people whose school life is usually an experience of failure'

- Staff are keen to explore how the scheme could become a sustainable model offered to pupils as a formalized careers initiative which could form a significant part of the curriculum, and could potentially be used as a model and transferred to other curriculum areas
- Both the staff at the unit and the artists involved gained a greater understanding of using the arts within PRU's and have increased understanding of the culture of each other's sector. The scheme will hope to pave the way for future relationships between PRU's and local creative businesses and professionals

arts network partners:

- Felt they had benefited from 'the partnership approach, professional development, new skills, expertise and approaches'

outcomes for the gallery:

- I think that as a venue we have overcome the 'fear' that often accompanies projects with young people.
- We have continued our relationship with the Pupil Referral Unit and have tried to include students in mixed projects involving other Qube user groups
- Project participants keep coming back to Qube – wandering through the gallery, talking with staff and 3 young people are attending other things
- As always sustained involvement requires sustained funding, and we now have a small grant from The Crime Reduction Partnership to work with the students this Summer to

produce two permanent pieces for their new premises

- Other work has involved participation by staff and students from Kingswell on a computer generated animation course, which will continue through 2005

what next?

- Continuation of working relationship with Kingswell Centre
- Genuine commitment from Qube to sustain an active youth voice in its gallery. Given the immense success of the process and product Qube has the strength and foundation to promote a youth friendly ethos throughout the practice of the whole organisation. There is a positive commitment that this is just the beginning of a sustained policy of youth involvement (partner organisation)
- Other work has involved participation by staff and students from the centre on a computer generated animation course, which will continue through 2005
- We would be very open to a more structured relationship with Oswestry PRU. The partnerships are in place and the projects to date have demonstrated an extremely positive outcome for the young people
- I would like to work towards a funded and sustainable slot in the curriculum that involved students in a placement or project time at Qube that became built into their timetables and assessments (probably pie in the sky)

More information from Jo Davies at Qube
qube@wnsc.ac.uk