

Watch This Space 4
Gallery Educator Case Study

Natasha Morrison
Freelance Artist Educator

Gallery: South London Gallery
School: St Saviour's and St Olave's Secondary Girls School

Weaving Minds:

An education project with artist Natasha Morrison. Year 8 and Year 9 students from St Saviour's and St Olave's School made creative responses to the recent Eva Rothschild exhibition at the South London Gallery.

Context, aims and objectives

I am a freelance Artist Educator who had previously only worked with Primary Schools and Key Stage 1 and 2 children. I wanted to use my WTS4 placement to work with a Secondary School and Key Stage 3 students in order to wider my experience and knowledge. I chose to work with the South London Gallery, as I knew they had an extensive history of exciting education projects and strong relationships with schools. I chose St Saviour's and St Olave's as a local school with a great history of visiting galleries and participating in education projects with the South London Gallery in particular. Through consultation with the departmental Head of Art I decided to work with ten Year 8 and 9 female students from the school's Gifted and Talented programme. These students were identified to me as those who could benefit hugely from having that extra input into their arts and general education by taking part in my project. It was discussed that often this participation and first hand experience of working with galleries and artists can in fact directly lead to a raise in their grade for Art and Design.

The Weaving Minds education project was designed to engage these students with a contemporary sculpture exhibition. The students would then go on to create their own visual and sculptural responses to the work of Eva Rothschild. The project was designed to lead from a gallery visit and in-situ workshop towards creation of artworks to be displayed in the student's own exhibition at a contemporary gallery. It was hoped that this would subsequently lead to further gallery visits by these students and others from the school with the prospect of continuing participation in education projects. The experience had by the students, teachers, gallery staff and myself could then be used as an example of best practice for non-visiting schools in the borough and those wanting to work with them.

My other aims were to gain a greater knowledge of secondary Schools in general and their place in the 21st Century. I wanted to learn about the inner workings of the school and in particular the teaching methods and curriculum used in the art department. I wanted to learn about how gallery visits impact on teaching in order to learn how I could work to encourage new schools to work with artists and museums and galleries during my future

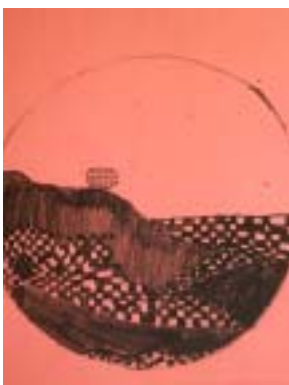
career. The engage gallery educator training sessions enabled me to become familiar with specific methods of auditing my skills as an educator and evaluating my work. I was introduced to the Common Core Skills Audit and the use of Generic Learning Outcome's and was able to implement them into my project in order to build on my continuing professional development.

At the outset of my project I carried out an audit of my skills using the MLA's Common Core Framework and was able to identify gaps in my skills and knowledge. I identified a need to familiarise myself further with secondary school curriculum, teaching methods and best practices. I also identified a need to raise my confidence in approaching schools, talking to teachers and pupils and using technical equipment used in schools such as electronic whiteboards and PowerPoint presentation.

Project content, learning outcomes and evaluation

The first stage of the project was a two hour visit to the South London Gallery to see the recent Eva Rothschild exhibition. Prior to the visit I familiarised myself with the Teacher's Notes provided by the gallery to accompany the exhibition and found this helpful. The students were introduced to the gallery and the exhibition content by myself with input from the South London Gallery's Schools Programmer. I felt it was important that the students identify with both myself as a visiting artist as well as the staff in the gallery itself who they might otherwise have felt were inaccessible. The girls were split into pairs to do 'blind-folded' drawing as part of an icebreaker activity. They then were free to investigate the exhibition space and create observational drawing of their choice. I felt it was important to not be too precise with instructions on what and how they were to draw as I believe giving them freedom makes room for their own individual learning. We engaged in informal discussion about the artist and works on display.

The South London Gallery is closed to the public on Mondays and therefore open exclusively for school visits. I think this is a fantastic tool for schools as it enables students to feel valued on their visit and gives them the freedom to explore the gallery without feeling inhibited in anyway. In the public eye students may feel less confident to explore and teachers may feel more anxious about controlling and maintaining their students behaviour. I had initially wanted to take more than ten students on the gallery visit. However I learnt from the teachers that this is often a problem for a school as higher numbers means having to take more staff out of timetable to accompany them. I was able to learn that in the future I can encourage schools to work with me by only suggesting small group visits. I had also wanted the students to have 3 days of workshops with me back at the school and learnt that often a compromise needs to be reached with the school management. The Head of Art and myself were only able to secure two days workshops back at school. Early meetings and consultation with teachers and schools is something that I learnt is of the up most importance. Another learning outcome of the gallery visit was the use of sketchbooks. I learnt the importance of the students creating work and recording their visit directly into their sketchbooks rather than on separate sheets of paper, therefore minimising the risk of misplacement of work. The students were able to take away leaflets and supporting material from the gallery to evidence their visit including a paper weaving activity sheet designed to accompany the exhibition.



We spent two days workshop time back at school where the students were taken out of normal timetable to enable them to make creative responses to the work of Eva Rothschild. Prior to this the students were asked to collect and bring in plastic carrier bags as part of a recycling initiative. I learnt from the teacher that it often encourages school management's to agree to a project taking place if an artist can show that it involves a wider span of the curriculum, such as Citizenship. I taught the students the skill of paper weaving and rope weaving using the recycled plastic bags. The students decided to use the rope to make their own installation. We also used other materials such as wood, plastic, tape, paper, tubing, wire, plastacine and processes such as digital printing to create sculptural works. Throughout the workshops students were encouraged to work with an awareness that the work was going to be publicly displayed.

The third part of the project was spent working with the education team at the South London gallery to curate and open an exhibition of the students work. The exhibition was titled *Creating Space* and showcased work produced for *Weaving Minds* as well as work produced by Year 9 students from Kingsdale Foundation School in response to the exhibition of Thomas Zipp at the South London Gallery as part of the WTSP4 Teacher Secondment. I felt that the exhibition is an essential part of an education project. Although the process of participation is often a more important learning and developmental element than the finished product of a project – I feel that a showcase of the students achievements is also vital. The opportunity for the students, their peers, families and communities to see their work in a contemporary art gallery is such a rewarding experience for all those involved. That is why I feel it is important for me to choose to work with galleries in the future who have the necessary facilities in order to do this, such as an education space. Although some schools have display space available in school, the showing of work 'outside' of school works more effectively to increase student's self-esteem and empowerment within their lives. It also decreases the pressure and work for teachers having to organise and find space for display. It will also work to increase the visitor numbers to galleries from their local communities.

Review and the future

The placement and project work with St Saviour's and St Olave's School has been a tremendous success. I was able to identify this simply by witnessing the development and interaction of the students involved and the personal journeys they made. The teacher and myself believe we have created a fun and exciting education project whilst at the same time fulfilling the requests of the National Curriculum; such as seeing art at first hand, working with artists at first hand, evidencing research and gallery visits, using the sketchbooks, developing, refining and evaluating ideas, exploring and experimenting with materials, creating final outcomes and linking in Citizenship by looking at social and personal relations to the environment.

Since completing the project I have reviewed my personal aims and those skill gaps identified by using the Common Core Skills Audit. I have been able to see how I have now

been able to use the WTSP4 experience to overcome those gaps. I have developed skills in working with secondary schools, consulting and planning with teachers and galleries and identifying the language to use with teachers and pupils. I feel I have a more extensive understanding of the National Curriculum and how schools work. During my time working with the school I was able to teach myself how to use PowerPoint and use the interactive whiteboard in the classroom as a teaching tool.

I also had an interactive learning experience by joining the Head of Art and the Director of Learning at the ICA in presenting an Inset evening to non-visiting school's teachers from the Borough of Southwark on working with artists, museums and galleries.

I decided to collect evaluation data by asking the students and teacher to complete a feedback form on the project. This included space for them to make a written and / or visual response. The overall response was positive and identified the success of the project.

I was fortunate enough to work with a great school with a fantastic art department and Head of Art. I was able to learn a great deal by working closely with the teacher and building a relationship with her as well as the students and school as a whole. This has provided me with the essential skills to approach and encourage new non-visiting schools to work with museums, galleries and myself as a freelance artist educator.

I was asked to continue working with the school as an Artist in Residence. This provided me with studio space to create work as well as providing the students with a resource and research tool. Students have been able to interview me and I have been able to give tutorials and be a mentor in particular to those studying for their GCSE and A Level. I ran an 8-week GCSE Coursework project with 20 Year 10 students based on my own practice. I am also currently running an Art and Science cross-curricular after school club in collaboration with the Science Department. The participants are learning about my own art practice and sculptural representations of natural phenomena whilst learning about the Science behind them and creating their own laboratory of experiments and artworks.

Participating in Watch this Space 4 has provided me with a significant progression in my professional development. It has enabled me to work for the first time on education projects concerning my own art practice directly. Previous to my current projects with the school I had been predominantly working on projects concerning the work of other artists and exhibitions. Now I have been able to expand my experience to concentrating on my own passion for the natural world and natural history and ignite a sense of excitement about the subject in my students. This is my ultimate aim as an educator, I want the young people I work with to be excited, interested and passionate about the subject they are learning about.



Photos: Natasha Morrison 2008