

**WATCH THIS SPACE 6
Report**

Supporting creative engagement with textiles and the crafts at KS3

**in partnership with the Embroiderers' Guild,
the Royal School of Needlework & Esher CofE High School**

by Natalie Kay



INTRODUCTION

Organisations

Founded in 1872, the **Royal School of Needlework (RSN)** is the international centre for hand-embroidery teaching based at Hampton Court Palace. The **Embroiderers' Guild (EG)** is the world's leading independent charity promoting and preserving embroidery. It is also based at Hampton Court Palace. Both are exciting, forward-looking organisations dedicated to keeping the art of modern textiles and hand embroidery alive in the 21st Century. They do this by collecting artwork, by exhibiting artwork, but most importantly by helping young, creative people find careers within the textile industry. This could be as artists, embroiderers, fashion designers, printmakers conservators...the opportunities are endless!

I am an employee of the Embroiderers' Guild and a freelance artist and gallery educator working with several arts organisations in London and further afield to deliver gallery education projects and workshops.

AIMS

In conjunction with RSN/ EG, these were to

- Engage teenagers with contemporary art textiles and embroidery
- Learn more about the practical aspects of working with schools, such as risk assessments
- Provide the experience of a tailored school visit, with guaranteed feedback from pupils and staff
- Identify and seize professional development opportunities for staff and affiliated artists
- Improve knowledge of the current KS3 curriculum
- Create a resource-kit of cross-curricular workshop ideas to be used to help to plan for future projects & partnerships.
- Reinforce the potential for a complimentary relationship between the two organisations
- For school pupils to keep stitching, motivated by a positive experience!

Personal CPD

Improve verbal communication and evaluation skills

Gain experience of building partnerships between multiple agencies

WORKING WITH ESHER CofE HIGH



'Esher High is an outstanding school'
(Ofsted, 2009)

Esher CofE High is a co-educational secondary comprehensive school in Esher, Surrey taking students from 11 to 16 years of age. It is oversubscribed, with more girls than boys and had a below average intake of SEN and ESL students. The school has Specialist Status in the Performing Arts, it is a Leadership Partner School and a lead school for Gifted and talented students. and has a history of visiting art galleries and museums but has never visited the RSN or the Embroiderers' Guild.

Target group

Following discussions with the Head of Art at Esher high, it was decided that I would work with two year 9, higher ability groups. If the project was a success we would roll it out to those of mixed ability. I spent time observing these children's classes and others across the creative department, including DT & Textiles. I assessed their existing skills and knowledge, looked at current work and entered into discussion.

My Partner Teacher and Esher High Staff

My partner teacher throughout the placement was Gabby Roberts – an experienced educator, but unfamiliar with new protocol regarding trips. I took the lead in our joint learning and developed in assertiveness. During the project we also liaised and exchanged ideas with the heads of Art and Technology, Kate Hughes and Hillary Williamson and the assisting technician and LSA to both departments, Caroline. I ensured that each of these staff members received minutes following all interactions.

Observations, establishing knowledge and aims

Observations

Pupils have one hour of art each week

The current year 9 topic was 'still life'

Textiles and embroidery play no direct role in the delivery of Art education at Esher High, likewise, textile students do not refer to artists

Pupils have not studied artists, who have practiced beyond the 1960's

Pupils study Textiles (D&T) from year 7 onwards. They are introduced to hand embroidery at GCSE, but will not necessarily use it in their coursework products

Pupils did not view art or textiles as viable career options

Most pupils have little confidence with drawing skills

Demanding teacher schedules mean that there is little time for pupil-led experimentation

Pupils have a good understanding and use of 'art language'

Pupils are adept at responding to colour/ form/ medium of artworks, but rarely appear to consider conceptual meaning

Establishing knowledge

Pupils were issued with a questionnaire:

What is contemporary art? - Pop art / I don't know

What is embroidery? - A knitting technique / Something where you can use material such as cotton
Sewing clothes

What is textiles? - Creating products using fabrics and materials / Making cushions / Pieces of material sewn together to make blankets, quilts and curtains

What careers are possible for me to undertake within this industry? - Fashion designer / Making quilts, cushions, curtains etc

Would you consider studying for a career in embroidery or textiles? - I might consider studying textiles, but I am not very confident within the subject

What is the Royal School of Needlework? - No clue

Aims

- To give pupils a broader perspective of what art & textiles can be, prior to their choosing 'options'
- To examine art work up close, to meet artists & learn of career options
- To BUILD CONFIDENCE, develop new and existing skills that will assist their current practice and that can be taken forward to GCSE
- Apply their skills of analysis to contemporary embroidery
- To generate useful resources with links with creatives
- Evidence of enjoyment, inspiration and creativity

PROJECT WORK

In reaction to my observations, discussions with Esher CofE staff and students, I prepared outline project plan. I delivered a short presentation to the target groups. 14 children (one boy) signed up to the programme. A series of after-school workshops commenced shortly after. These are detailed below.

Sustaining engagement between workshops

Accompanying each workshop I created hand-outs containing useful info – creative tips, websites to explore, tv programmes to watch and such like. These acted as topics of conversation during project work in the weeks following.

Free Resources

Following each workshop, each participant was armed with a tool-kit of reference information and practical materials such as drawing pens, needles and threads to help them continue learning and creative experimentation

Workshop 1 - What is contemporary embroidery and drawing skills

Aims

To relax pupils
Explore new methods of formulating ideas
Relate pen marks to embroidery stitches and trends in contemporary art
To exercise hand/eye co-ordination and improve observational skills
Encourage team work

Activities

What is contemporary embroidery?

Throughout Watch this Space we looked at the work of many contemporary embroidery artists. Our focus was on artists who use embroidery - stitched lines and patterns - as a method of drawing.

Automatic drawing

During the Watch this Space 6 project, we spoke about how many artists, writers and musicians, use these free writing and drawing techniques as a starting point and inspiration for their works of art.

Becoming still life objects

Year 9's topic for the Autumn term 2009 was 'Still Life'. WTS6 participants became still life objects, positioning themselves to reflect the lines and contours of objects such as bottles, teapots, cables and tables. Working in pairs, they completed one-minute line drawings of each other.



Pupils experienced these techniques for the first time
If you're stitching with a machine, then you have to keep going, like we did when we did free-writing and drawing.

will do this again when looking for techniques and inspiration in textiles and art

Workshop 2 - Sound, Collage and Stitch

Aims

To use free-writings & drawing as the inspiration for new artworks
To experiment with a variety of media
To gain confidence in sharing ideas with the group
To experience creating a 'finished piece' within a set timeframe

Activities

Sound art

Each pupil had 10 seconds to choose a word or phrase from their free-writing. Individually they shared their words with the group, then we stood and in unison shouted our words. In isolating and articulating the thoughts of the moments before, we made them significant.

Collage

Pupils created 10-minute collages (using limited materials), inspired by words found within their free-writing.

Stitched artworks

We traced a section of our free-writing or drawing onto calico, then layered this upon other materials before hand-stitching over our traced lines in order to create our stitched artworks.



Peer & Workshop Evaluation

*Everyone's work looks really cool!
 The drawings and collages work well together - it looks like art! Everything was new!
 It was difficult at first, but soon you can't stop!
 It was fun creating collages of the first things that came into our heads and turn it into art.
 I like it when you are given materials and you can do what you want to with them (collages)
 It was interesting shouting and making things out of what we had done
 I enjoyed stitching after school, because it was really relaxed, which made it fun
 I learnt how to use inspiration to make art*

Visit to Royal School of Needlework

On 23/11/2009 WTS6 participants visited the RSN at Hampton Court Palace, where we met embroidery artists and students. We examined contemporary artworks and learnt how to hand-stitch using an embroidery hoop! I began the visit with a tour through time, relating to the history of embroidery to that of Hampton Court Palace and the RSN. The rest of the day played out as followed...

Meeting the course leaders - James Hunting & Nicola Jarvis

James Hunting is the Head of the new Hand Embroidery Foundation Degree course at the RSN. He is a practising embroidery artist and a previous Embroiderers' Guild Scholar and exhibiting artist with Art of the Stitch. Nicola Jarvis is Head of Stitch at the RSN. She is a practising embroidery artist and has held a variety of jobs within the embroidery and textile industry. She spoke about these career options to the pupils.

A view on embroidery artists

Together we analysed artworks & technique of contemporary embroidery artists who have passed through the RSN & Embroiderers' Guild. We entered into the RSN studios, where pupils had the opportunity to meet RSN students, to examine their work and ask questions.

Learning to stitch

Nicola Jarvis showed us how to thread a needle and begin a stitch the 'RSN way'. Using a machine called a visualiser, she projected a live video stream of her demonstration onto the studio wall. Pupils sketched and stitched a still life composition of historical threads, accompanied by some of the RSN students. At the end of the visit pupils analysed their work under the visualiser and there were smiles all round!

Post-Visit Analysis

What did you learn?

*I learnt different meanings of pieces of art
 I learnt the correct way to thread a needle and begin a piece of stitching
 Traditional methods of embroidery and how these can be used in modern art
 The history of the RSN
 About different types of embroidery & the names of stitches
 About the people who are embroidering now*

What did you enjoy or find interesting? Why?

*Looking at the work of others and around the artist's studios
 It was great to get an idea of what the students are learning and doing
 I thought the artists work was amazing!
 I liked doing the practical work because I learnt new stitches
 I found the sewing very enjoyable as my piece looked quite good!
 I enjoyed the stitching at the end most. I had never used an embroidery hoop before and found it easier using them*



What didn't work and how I could have done things differently

The lecture was a bit long

A problem within the RSN, meant that I was unable to run a scheduled practical activity, focusing on the work of Course Leader, James Hunting. In replacement, Nicola Jarvis gave an extended talk about the history of the RSN and related artists work. This re-told some of the stories relayed by myself on the initial tour and information session and pupils grew restless. I did not take enough control at this point. Options would have been to do some more sound work, to further explore the work on display or to enter the artists studios early.

The visit seemed quite short

Pupils were out of school periods 1-4 & lunch break. We returned for their final lesson and re-convened after school. This was planned around staff/ vehicle availability, but everyone agrees that a full, uninterrupted day at the RSN would have been more beneficial in terms of skills development and enjoyment. It was agreed that this would be emphasised as ESSENTIAL during future visit planning.



Stitched stories

We saw Miss Roberts in John Lewis on the weekend, when we went to buy embroidery hoops

I made my Mum buy me loads of thread!

My brother got jealous of my stitching so we bought him a little hoop and we stitched together in front of the TV – he's only 9!

I'm going to stitch all my Christmas presents this year

I making my friend a stitched badge for her birthday!

Workshop 3: Presentation, planning an exhibition and certificates

The pupils and I spoke about the importance of presentation to both the conceptual reading and professional impact of artwork. Students used 'Exhibition planning kits' to 'curate' their own exhibitions on paper and to, as a team, plan for their Watch this Space exhibition - *It looks really cool & different to other displays*

Certificates

Having hung the exhibition, I arranged a presentation event in which participants shared their achievements with their peers and were awarded certificates. - *These give pupils a real sense of pride and achievement and will be useful if they decide to apply to be prefects and for entry into college – Partner teacher*

EVALUATION of visits and workshops

WTS6 was evaluated throughout its run. This evaluation took the form of discussions, verbal and email; visual documentation; observations and questionnaires.

Pupil's Evaluation

It was fun and interesting and it was different from our normal art lesson

I learnt that art doesn't always have to be neat!

I learnt how to find messages within contemporary art and how to create my own pieces

There is a lot more that you can do by sewing, than making cushions and curtains.

I have really learnt a lot about contemporary art, which I had not been particularly familiar with prior to WTS6.

These skills will definitely help with GCSE textiles and art.

I will definitely continue stitching. I find it really relaxing and I do it while I watch tv.

I'd love to learn more types of stitch.

Natalie and the RSN students are very talented and seeing their work has definitely opened my eyes

I never really thought about embroidery or a career in it, but now it has definitely made me think.

I would like to go back to the RSN and to see the work that the students make (degree show) &

I would consider studying at the RSN as I would like to work in fashion

Organisations' Evaluation

Esher High

WTS6 has been a fantastic project for the school to participate in and a very beneficial experience for the participating students. They have learnt new technical skills, ways of thinking and creating artworks that will be invaluable as they head towards GCSE. I'm amazed at how engaged and committed they have been throughout, the way in which they have taken to embroidery and their openness to contemporary art. We think that a similar project would work well with GCSE students and hope to continue working with Natalie and the RSN in the future.

RSN

WTS6 has been a first for the RSN and we're delighted that the children had a good time. It would be great to work with them and Esher High again and to have the older children come over next year. It is important that young people recognise hand-embroidery as a relevant and exciting contemporary art form, in order to secure its living future. The visit has also been a valuable experience for our own students in terms of talking about their work and CPD

Embroiderers' Guild

It has been invaluable to receive a local response to our organisation and to strengthen our relationship with the RSN. We are pleased that pupils and staff of Esher High demonstrated such a positive response to embroidery, WTS6 and Natalie and we hope that these partnerships will continue to flourish, regardless of the Guild's structure or location.

Hampton Court Palace

The visit ran very smoothly and without interruption to other HCP events and visitors.

EVALUATION of Gallery educator development

WTS6 has been very enjoyable and fantastic opportunity for professional development

Achieving my goals in conjunction with the RSN/EG, I have...

Successfully engaged teenagers with contemporary art textiles and embroidery and have overcome my fear of this age group!

Improved knowledge of the current KS3 curriculum & how the RSN/EG can compliment & find a place within it

Reinforced the partnership between the RSN/EG and created a sustainable link with a local school

Learnt more about the practical aspects of working with schools, staff and pupils

Experience of a tailored school visit, with extensive feedback

Generated CPD opportunities for RSN pupils.

Created a resource-kit of cross-curricular workshop ideas to be used to help to plan for future projects and partnerships.

Achieving my personal CPD goals

Effective Communication & Engagement: Communication skills – verbal & evaluation

Multi-Agency Working: Skills in partnership working

A turbulent time at the Embroiderers' Guild meant that I was required to seek a support partner arts organisation to collaborate with during WTS6. This was a challenge, but ultimately a blessing. In working with Royal School of Needlework, I was afforded the opportunity to learn the intricacies of an other organisation and to provide a resource and outlet for them to facilitate school groups – something which had never before been trialled. It was essential that I find ways in which the collaboration – project delivery and evaluation - could incorporate and benefit all parties and the relationships between the organisations has been strengthened as a result.

Esher High School were very receptive to alterations made to the programme.

I feel that the above experience, accompanied by workshop delivery to pupils, inter-departmental work within Esher High and negotiations with Hampton Court Palace has improved my skills in partnership working, verbal

communication and evaluation.

Safeguarding & promoting the welfare of the child: Knowledge of risk assessments

I experienced the preparation and writing of these when planning the gallery visit with my partner teacher and school administrator.

Additional Benefits

Greater Confidence

Although consulting with many parties, I was very much the leader of this programme. I entered into it, worrying that my skills would be inadequate...but it worked. I feel that I could successfully approach a variety of organisations, assess their needs and produce an interesting programme and resources in reaction to them.

Appreciation of Teachers and school staff

I have huge respect for the dedication that teachers and schools staff offer to their pupils and institution and now have a greater understanding of what is required of a teacher and how amazingly skilled they are, in terms of planning and effective delivery. I believe there is much that gallery educators can learn from teachers and through open exchange and partnerships.

Benefits to Youth Work Practice

Experience of KS3 has improved my understanding and aided my support of the youth group whom I work with.

Benefits to magazine design

I am the designer and content editor of a children's textile magazine, aimed at 5-17 year olds. The WTS6 experience will benefit my competence in creating suitable projects, adaptable by those of various ages.

Problems

Timing and knowledge

In addition to the precarious situation at the Embroiderers' Guild, Esher High itself was in a state of flux and staff shuffle. My partner teacher was less experienced in terms of orchestrating a gallery visit, but the school was very keen to be involved and we learnt together.

Communication

I found that my partner teacher, being incredibly busy and in demand elsewhere, was occasionally unresponsive to enquiries and suggestions. I found persistency, consistency and repetition to be the key and to ensure that all communications passed via the Head of Art.

Thoughts for the future

If I had the opportunity to take part in such a project again, I would make GCSE/ A-level students my target audience. I would increase the number of practical activities that took place during the visit and would also run additional after-school arts workshops that incorporated and introduced participants to other areas of contemporary art, such as film and performance and their potential connections to embroidery.

Partnership planning

Maintaining contact with Pupils - Mailing list

I have created a WTS6 e-mailing list in order to continue updating pupils about all the exciting happenings within the world of contemporary art & embroidery. All WTS6 pupils will be invited to the RSN degree show in July.

Resources

Throughout WTS6 I have assembled information packs pertaining to each organisation between which I was developing partnerships. Also created were resource kits containing materials, images, cross-curricular workshops ideas, useful information sheets and such like. These have now been disseminated and I hope will assist to sustain partnerships.

Future workshops

Esher CofE High's Art Technician will commence an after school stitching club for lower school next year, using my WTS6 resource kit and previous workshops as a template. I will return to Esher High to re-run the programme for Creative Media Diploma and Art/Textile GCSE students in 2010.

CPD for RSN students

I hope to accompany and support the RSN students in delivering a series of workshops for Esher High pupils.

Partnership meetings

I have arranged meetings to be held between key members of the partner organisations (inc pupils) in 2010.

Branching out

I plan to approach other local schools and/or organisations who may benefit from a creative partnership with myself, the RSN or EG.



AND FINALLY...

WTS6 has been an extremely enjoyable and rewarding experience. It has demonstrated to me that creativity is becoming increasingly acknowledged as intrinsic to a young people's learning and personal development and that within this lies a place for contemporary art. I am excited by this and recognise that the skills and knowledge developed through WTS6, combined with my experiences as an artist and gallery educator, leave me well placed to offer exciting opportunities for creative development to any number of young people and their teachers. I plan to approach schools, organisations, agencies and other artists who may be interested in fostering a creative partnership with myself and seek further opportunities to develop my educational practice. I cannot wait to get started!