

## **Dreams, Hopes and Wishes.**

### **A Case Study in Community Media**

*This Case Study is an Extract of the Paper ‘Practical Design for Social Inclusion’ written by Steve Thompson (University of Teesside, UK) Carrie Singleton (University of Teesside, UK) and Paul Davies (Destinations, Saltburn, UK) and presented by Steve Thompson at the 5th Community Informatics & Development Informatics Conference 2008 Monash University – Prato. The Paper was supported by the Arts & Humanities Research Council project Practical Design for Social Action (PRADSA)*

The project aimed to engage Year 9 Middlesbrough-based school pupils in creating a multi-media digital arts installation, to run in the University of Teesside’s Octorama. The theme for the exhibition was ‘Dreams, Hopes and Wishes’ and pupils worked on the project using voices, music, images and animation to create an immersive experience within the octagonal installation<sup>1</sup>. The exhibition took place at their school in March 2008 and received hundreds of visitors.

Data was collected from the pupils through an evaluation survey and they were asked to contribute to a project blog.

The school is based in East Middlesbrough and data for the Ward (Beckfield) shows high levels of economic inactivity, poor health and deprivation. The school is located in East Middlesbrough’s Education Action Zone (1 of 12 zones in the UK; 1 of 20 schools in the EM EAZ). According to the website:

‘The Zone serves an area of severe socio-economic deprivation. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is approximately 60% overall, and unemployment rates are very high. Parental expectations of education are low, and pupils

generally lack confidence in themselves and also have low expectations.'

<http://www.millenniumschoools.co.uk/pub/middlesbrough/eaz/>

(downloaded 24 September 2008)

The project began following discussions between the Community Media Coordinator and the Head of Art and Design at the School. The latter expressed a desire to 'put art on the map'; to present art as a life skill rather than as a hobby. The design parameters were to provide something that would be challenging, inspirational and rewarding with a high profile for the students. The CMC started the project with a presentation to the pupils which included a mock-up of the Octorama, followed by his facilitation of a discussion about designing a media exhibition. The CMC supported the pupils to make a decision on the theme of their exhibition. At the time they were studying the work of the surrealists and they suggested, and agreed upon the theme of Dreams. They identified a broad range of meanings within the theme including dreams and nightmares but also 'Dream home' and 'Dream job'. The latter had a more aspirational quality so it was agreed that the theme would be extended to include hopes and wishes. This process of decision making grounded the project in their current school-based topics of interest and also the personal interests of the children (aspirations).

The CMC adopted an approach which emphasized the pupils as project workers and collaborators. They were asked to take responsibility for the success of the project, a process which is reflected in the evaluation data:

I found a sense of responsibility by acting as an adult

Amazed that it had actually done up because I didn't think we would be finished in time

Happy and shocked to think that we had put this together

Taking responsibility for personal role on the project, delegation and negotiation were important elements of the learning process (particularly related to ensuring the success of the exhibition), as well as learning about the digital media. However, one event regarding identifying project representatives to take to the BBC also demonstrates the tensions involved in taking responsibility and negotiating roles within the project. It was not possible for all of the pupils to visit the BBC studios and six representatives were selected which caused tension and disruptive behaviour within the class from non-attendees, as the Community Media Coordinators's blog illustrates:

The following week the normal session at school took place. I viewed it with some trepidation... I expected the rest of the class to be totally rebellious. However, just the opposite was true. The kids that had shouted me down the previous week were polite and professional and wanted to know what I needed them to do to move the project forward. They had learned something about negotiation and how to get on.

### **Collaborative use of ICTs**

Both sets of participants were enthusiastic about the collaborative nature of the projects. They seemed enthused by group work towards a common goal rather than more individualised tasks.

The Dreams blog, which the young people contributed to after their trip to the BBC, documents the young people's enjoyment of sharing their project ideas with members of the public (the audience was mainly comprised of participants of the wider SID project [*Social Inclusion Demonstrators*]). As the following students said:

I think that it went really well and we have gained some more people to help us create the Octorama!!! (Bethany)

We got asked many questions and many people of the public were willing to help us in our project... They are going to help us by doing open days and workshops to help us to create the images and audio. I am very happy and I think we could create all the 5000 pictures we need...they were very helpful and they are trying to get many more schools and communities [involved] and I am confident we will complete this project. (Mark)

It was one of the best trips I have been involved with. I am so glad we got to be chosen to be part of the Octorama project. (Ricky)

## **Enhancing digital inclusion?**

### **Identity, well being and self-esteem**

One of the most common themes to emerge from the DHW evaluation was a sense of pride at the finished piece of work. There was a sense of pride that each individual's artwork appeared in public but a more collective sense of pride that the all class members had been involved in a large and successful project.

I felt quite proud that we were able to produce something excellent with hard work put into it (DHW16)

In addition, it was clear from the evaluation that the pupils were pleased that they could contribute positively to the school's identity within the local community.

The good things to come out of the exhibition were that [the] school got great recognition and were put on the map (DHW16)

We received publicity and recognition for our hard work (DHW17)

Sense of pride in their achievements overlapped with enhanced self-esteem. The data shows that project participants were delighted by the positive comments from visitors and felt that they had personally gained from participation in the project.

### **Skills development and qualitative outcomes**

DHW participants were asked to comment on what they had learned from the project. Learning about the technology (skills development) was an important aspect of the project, particularly the media applications:

How to make pictures on Photoshop (DHW12)

How to use computers to make art (DHW18)

How to run the main screens and electrics (DHW03)

There were also important qualitative outcomes including:

That you can achieve (DHW06)

That timed projects are hard (DHW08)

How to be responsible (DHW13)

That anything can be possible (DHW15)

### **Indicative Links**

[www.octorama.co.uk](http://www.octorama.co.uk)

[www.tvcm.co.uk/AV/dhandw.wmv](http://www.tvcm.co.uk/AV/dhandw.wmv) Video of the build and exhibition content

[http://www.tvcm.co.uk/AV/ormesby\\_voices.wmv](http://www.tvcm.co.uk/AV/ormesby_voices.wmv) Interviews with participants

<http://tvcm.co.uk/2007/10/ormesby-dreams-of-octorama/>