

Case Study 15: The Arte Project

Cults Academy, Aberdeen, Aberdeen City

This case study describes an initiative involving a number of European partners designed to explore the potential of online European connections in art education.

The Arte Project came about through a European-funded initiative under the Socrates Programme. Initially a two-year project, the development attracted a third year of funding because of the significance of the principles and developments involved.

Begun in 1998 the initiative was concerned to link a pilot group of schools and teachers across Europe by using ICT and the development of open and distance learning materials and approaches. Six countries were involved:

- Scotland
- Sweden
- Belgium
- Holland
- Germany
- Italy.

The scale of involvement varied from country to country with some putting forward one or two specialist school establishments whereas Scotland represented by Aberdeen City put forward a group of six secondary schools. The objectives of the initiative were to:

- enhance the skills of art teachers and students in the use of open and distance learning (ODL)
- promote the use of ODL in art education
- foster a European dimension in art education
- encourage the use of ICT for teachers and pupils to develop virtual mobility and exchange
- promote the exchange of information, experience and material on contemporary art throughout Europe
- move towards the adoption of some common curricula for the teaching of contemporary art in Europe.

The planned outcomes included:

- enhanced transnational cooperation between European schools in the field of art
- the development of a project website as a meeting place for schools
- online availability of a guide to the use of ODL and multimedia for education
- the production of a CD-ROM on *Contemporary Art in Europe*.

The involvement of Cults and the PT Art Jim Scott arose because Aberdeen City Council sought volunteers from schools to participate in this development work. Some six schools responded and Jim Scott was nominated as lead

officer following some recent secondment work for the development of Higher Still materials and his role as coordinator of the principal teacher network. He together with a local authority officer eventually became the Scottish representatives on the European steering group.

We really didn't know too much about how the project was going to work out. The Italian coordinators seemed to have based their initial thinking on the Italian approach to art education which still has a Renaissance feel to it – a fine-art approach whereas we in Scotland are very much of the art and design and technology mode. The premise seems to have been that art teachers were not often in contact with ICT. This just was not true for us. However that was just the start of the learning experience and the awareness of different approaches across Europe.

Jim Scott, Principal Teacher of Art, Cults Academy

The initial meeting of the steering group in Florence, which involved only Jim Scott at that stage, set up the aims and objectives noted above and the schools set about making introductory videos of themselves to share with each other. At this early stage e-mail connections between schools were good and initial contacts using computer-conferencing were promising.

A major feature of the work involved the creation of a CD-ROM that married well with Jim Scott's role as a national trainer for Higher Still and the need to develop technology approaches in support of that exam structure.

We had students who, for the first time, were about to take part in the new Advanced Higher. Contemporary art and design is a compulsory element and so this was a significantly important development. It was an opportunity for students to look, gather and present material which other students could use. It was a great opportunity for the teachers to develop their technological skills and online distance learning possibilities in particular.

Jim Scott, PT Art, Cults Academy

A major impetus behind the initiative was the requirement in all countries to build up a better awareness of contemporary artists and their art for examination purposes since lack of available resource material was identified as a common problem. It was agreed that all six countries would collaborate and share the products of individual research and that the research would include not only art but also design and architecture. The research evidence would then form the content of the multimedia CD-ROM.

In Scotland this part of the initiative manifested itself in pupils at the involved secondaries, researching and recording local contemporary artists across a range of styles and media including, painting, jewellery and sculpture. Pupils and teachers conducted interviews with artists and the research was shared by way of the internet. This element of the project was designed to allow art teachers and students to demonstrate and develop their ICT skills and become confident in use of the internet, online conferencing and multimedia

production.

In order to introduce these skills one member of staff from each of the schools was given a three-day course in distance learning training in Florence. This was followed by a further training session some five months later.

Following this training we decided as a group of Aberdeen schools that each of us would take on a project. A driving force in the choice of projects was to try and meet the areas of coverage demanded by Higher Still. The schools became involved a wide range of contexts. One school looked at architecture and the new maritime museum in Aberdeen. Another looked at jewellery design whilst another looked at painting. Bankhead Academy considered sculpture with a focus on the 'Tyrebagger Forest Sculpture Trail', which is close to that school. My own school took on two or three projects one of which focused on students at Gray's School of Art working in textiles and ceramics and another which featured an artist doing a postgraduate qualification who was working with postgraduate students.

Jim Scott

Each school involved a group of S3–S6 pupils who undertook interviews and made written, photographic and video reports. The research links developed by the students grew outwith the project. For example the Maritime Museum put on an exhibition of Torry Academy pupils' work connected with their architectural research into the museum building. The Bankhead pupils went on to develop close working with the sculpture park.

Because of technical glitches we focused more on the non-computer aspects. We concentrated on environmental artists. Pupils interviewed students at Gray's School of Art and did in-depth work on the forest sculptures at Tyrebagger Brae. We took photographs and in fourth year some wrote about the forest sculptures and e-mailed artists about their work. Pupils wrote up diaries and interviews, used dictaphones to record interviews and put in photographs. From these researches we put together a video/photographic presentation for the Arte CD-ROM. Some of the work was done in personal time by both students and myself but we all became very interested in sculpture.

Rachel Morland, Art teacher, Bankhead Academy

There were issues.

I suppose that we were constrained a bit by timetable arrangements. The nature of the work meant taking pupils out of school for blocks of time and it is only so often that you can do that before it impacts in terms of what they are missing in other subjects.

Rachel Morland, Art teacher, Bankhead Academy

Later, the work at Tyrebagger led to Rachel Morland being asked to evaluate a teaching pack that had been in a rough form. Originally drafted by the Art in Partnership group part funded by Aberdeenshire Council and Forest

Enterprise this resource set out to provide support for teachers across the sectors in making use of the Tyrebagger Forest and the sculpture trail.

I knew what I wanted in terms of teaching resources so I really went to town – wanted to know about the artists, how they developed their ideas, what their inspirations were. The group took on the ideas and has produced a wonderful resource. We will now use this as part of the course structure. For example in Standard Grade critical essays it is much better to be able to write about artists and their work when you can actually see works in their locations.

Rachel Morland

Every country had to provide a video case study of its research on a contemporary artist to form the basis of the computer-conferencing exchanges. It was agreed that the Cults Academy research on the artist Frank Boag would be the Scottish offering. Videos were sent to Florence, copied and then sent to the other partners who then joined the online conference. Students prepared questions as well as presentations for the computer-conferencing sessions that were planned to link the schools. Every country did a host conferencing session and we prepared by doing a mini-conference on the network within Aberdeen city.

We did unearth problems – and that was part of the value of the experience. For example we discovered that as the authority's new computer management system rolled out it prevented pupils entering open-dialogue conferences. It did this for the best of child protection reasons in terms of preventing internet abuse but nonetheless it hampered the conferencing dimension for us. We are working on ways to get round this technological problem.

Jim Scott

The pupils who did engage in computer conferencing responded very well. Schools had to set the structure and manage the conference like any other conference. It did involve a high measure of informal team working with those expert at keyboard skills entering text whilst others devised questions and answers. The schools quickly came to appreciate that, despite some technical problems, their authority support systems and the investment in computer infrastructures gave them quite an advantage over other partners in terms of the scale and interconnectivity of their working.

The first two years of the project were focused on skills and encouraging these in the pupils and teachers so the build up was gradual with these conferences happening every couple of months. The pupils came to realise that contemporary art meant many different things. For example the Swedish project focused on an Eskimo artist and an ice palace. Similarly the Dutch, Italian and German ones were each very different.

Jim Scott

Clearly an important development was the customisation and representation

of the teacher/pupil research as high-quality Higher Still support materials.

The success of the project lies in two fields – the work done at the time by pupils and teachers and the lasting resources which will have a shelf life for some time to come. The resources were further developed to a high presentational standard and made available to all City schools. It was an agent to enhance links and there were hard resource benefits such as the part funding of hardware.

Jim Scott

These materials and access to the Arte CD-ROM and website have enhanced the resources available to teachers and pupils.

There is no question that the project has enhanced the awareness and proficiency of some art teachers with ICT and the opportunities for exploiting the technology. We developed a website as part of the project and I use it a lot with students. We put an art gallery of students' work on to the site and this can be accessed easily for teaching purposes. I can show students examples of other pupils' work at the same stage as themselves. We have also used the information on artists and designers, which is also on the website as a resource for Higher Still studies.

Jim Scott

In the final year of the project the thrust was on dissemination but as most of the other partners tended to limit participation to one or two schools Aberdeen was already the flagship in spreading word of the development. Information was disseminated across the thirteen secondary schools in the authority through the Art Principal Teachers' network and in the publishing and distribution of resources for Higher Still. CDs were also distributed to two neighbouring authorities and the material was discussed nationally at the Art Teachers' Directory in Glasgow. The fact that materials on contemporary art are the most difficult to get made meant these outcomes were very much welcome. The website art gallery has also become a well-used and valuable resource.

My headteacher has been enormously supportive of the staff time commitment and in helping me to facilitate the development. The same support has come from the authority and without that commitment such a development would be much harder. Certainly the links with some of the partners have been maintained and the teachers' chat café part of the website is active.

Jim Scott

The Arte project has necessarily taken time to develop and this is no surprise given the scale of operation. It has certainly had both positive and problematic features but it has been a significant development tool.

The project has had its weaknesses but these are outweighed by its benefits. It has given us a different dimension to teaching art and

design. It has developed shared understandings and furthered our technological confidence as teachers, which can only benefit future students. We have established a good format for producing resources. Pupils are taking more responsibility for their own learning and in developing their own research skills. The artists involved are now being discussed as part of an external examination and are on a website with European-wide relevance.

Jim Scott

Overall this interesting initiative, which has had different outcomes for the involved schools, has revealed a number of interesting facets for the development of creativity through new ICT approaches including the:

- importance of agreed standards for ICT elements, both hardware and software, at an early stage
- need to resolve the issues of open and closed communications from a child protection stance
- exploitation of the potential of teacher and pupils' research to form the basis of training and development materials.

Other features of creativity at work are also highlighted.

- A willingness to take a calculated risk in an unknown area of potential.
- Involving pupils in higher order skills work.
- Giving pupils a chance to use their initiative.
- Linking with a wider community in partnership development.
- Support from management for developments.
- Engaging in staff development activity appropriate to development needs.