

CASE STUDY 3

EXPLORING CULTURE IN ART AND DESIGN BY JUXTAPOSING EXPERIENCES OF CULTURALLY DIVERSE URBAN LONDON AND RURAL WHITE WARWICKSHIRE

Aim: through working with photography and video to explore representations and perceptions of contrasting cultural experiences

Objectives: to build relations between young people in rural Warwickshire and an artist from a culturally diverse, urban background

To look at representations of different localities and reflect on what they say about culture.

To explore and compare differing perceptions of urban and rural localities.

To develop skills in using photography and video to document and represent experiences.

To increase pupils' sense of value and confidence in their own cultural backgrounds and interests



2 Project outline

As part of a wider programme of work addressing cultural differences between London and rural Warwickshire, filmmaker and installation artist Trevor Mathison has been working with year 10 / 11 students from the Seymour Centre, a pupil reintegration unit based in the small village of Great Alne. Pupils have been interrogating their own cultural background using video and photography. A film making team has been interviewing other pupils and adults about their likes and dislikes, backgrounds, vocations, home environments and landscapes, going out on location to gather evidence. Visits include a boar farm, a thatcher, a dairy farm and the Young Farmers Association. Pupils have also been using cameras and DVD equipment to photograph things they like and don't like in their own environments – acknowledging that these all contribute to the cultural experience they are growing up with. Discussion has centred on differing perceptions of what is seen as desirable - the idyllic picture of a quiet rural existence or their positive perceptions of life in London. Photographs are being manipulated using photoshop, with consideration given to what they wish to portray and how they will be interpreted. A trip is planned to London, when the artist will introduce pupils to his life. They will talk about their perceptions of his cultural environment as well as looking at his work, which represents this context. An anticipated outcome will be a panel of images that make evident the contrasts and parallels between different cultural worlds and our perceptions of them. For one pupil, this work will contribute to her GCSE art and design.

Part of the programme involves a link with the neighbouring primary school where pupils have been working with artist Charlie Dark who is producing a sound installation for Rugby Art Gallery and Museum. These children have been looking at how different cultural experiences are manifest in the ways we use words and sound.

3 Project management

The project came about as a result of contact between *Artists in Warwickshire Education* (a local education authority service) and the Institute of International Visual Arts (INIVA). It forms part of a wider project with a range of partners that takes as its starting point the depiction of cultural representation and diversity in the themes of enchantment and characterisation in Shakespeare. The project is also using this theme of 'another country' to address links between the PRU, the school and the village. Other groups such as the women's institute and the cricket club have also been invited to reflect on their perceptions of their own and other cultures, landscapes and environment.

The project represents an experiment with a new approach to cross-cultural education in Warwickshire, in which pupils have contact with real, rather than artificial versions of different cultures and in which they consciously consider how our perceptions of different cultures are forged. Because of the experimental approach, the project is being treated in an open-ended way in terms of final outcomes. Opportunities for shared reflection and planning between all parties have been very important, as has been a set of shared and clear aspirations for what the project will achieve in terms of learning. However the process manifest in outcomes, arrangements have been made to document and showcase work at partner venues including Rugby Art Gallery and Museum.

4 Analysis

This exploration of culture is proving significant for learners because:

- It has challenged their own perceptions of diverse cultures and provided them with a more real picture of what it is to be from a different culture and live an urban existence
- It has invited pupils to consciously consider their own culture and look with new eyes at their own environments and cultural backgrounds, seeing how this is perceived by others
- It has shown pupils how their own cultural backgrounds are valued and of interest to others, giving them a sense of self-knowledge and empowerment.

Exploring culture in this way is proving significant for the school (and others) because:

- For the schools involved and for the LEA it is an experiment with a new approach to cross-cultural education, which will inform future projects and ways of working

Key issues that other schools might consider in exploring culture in art and design are:

- to think about a key element of cross cultural work being the idea of inviting pupils to consider the very idea of what we mean by culture and to acknowledge that all of us have a cultural background and context that may be perceived very differently by others to how we perceive it.
- That working with an artist with a cultural background that contrasts to pupils' own is often an a much more effective route to pupils seeing how differing cultural experiences can be represented in visual imagery rather than attempting to represent other cultures, which inevitably often results in stereotyped, simplistic or exoticised depictions of cultures.

School: Seymour Centre Pupil Reintegration Unit
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