

Arts Award in Museums: Case study

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge

Arts Award programme:

Soham Village College Bronze Arts Award

This programme was offered by:

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, Trumpington Street, Cambridge

A collection of artefacts and Arts from around the world from antiquity to contemporary.

Who took part in the programme?

13 year 8 pupils from Soham Village College in Rural East Cambridgeshire, all vulnerable young people with a range of SEN (Special Education Needs).

Description of the programme:

The pupils were selected by the Village College SEN teachers, most were identified as having low self esteem and finding school a challenging social environment.

The programme was initiated in November 2011 and the programme was devised with the school. It was delivered through the Spring term from January to March covering 8 weekly 2 hour sessions in the village college and at the Fitzwilliam Museum. The focus was the Vermeer exhibition which the young people visited and wrote a review about, followed by contrasting this with other Dutch art from the same period in the Museum collection. This led to a Cambridge based artist visiting the school to run a portrait drawing session, followed by a how to draw still lives.

The pupils had a session on how to curate their own art exhibition and designed their own museum through large scale drawing and collage. The students used the internet to research their ideas and then school library to look at arts heroes. Students recorded their experiences, photographs and art work in a sketch book and on a wordpress.com blog.

The sharing an arts skill section was a day in the Fitzwilliam museum running the family drop in activity during half term. The students researched how to make origami paper boats and invited over 100 family visitors to make a boat and then go round the galleries and draw onto their boat. The boats were added to a long 'bunting style' installation in the Education Suite area of the Museum.

What was the impact of the programme?

The young people all passed the Bronze Arts Award and their self evaluation was extremely upbeat about their experiences, many wishing to go on to do Silver. The Teaching Staff were very encouraged by the Arts Award impact on their pupils in the areas of self confidence, social interaction and modified behaviour (concentration and stabilising low moods and aggressive episodes during class).

10 of the 13 students greatly enjoyed their time with the Fitzwilliam and the Arts Award, in particular they cited: Drawing, successful outcomes, exhibitions and teaching others.

They identified new skills as drawing and making techniques taught by artists Sarah Blake and John Wiltshire. 6 students say they would maybe visit the Fitzwilliam again whilst 5 definitely want to visit again.

The activities they felt had boosted their confidence were: Teaching families (9), working together (7), learning new arts skills (7), keeping a sketchbook (5), Research Art (3).

If the students did the arts award again they would like more time (5), to do their own thing (1) and to do more writing (1).

They all thought it was fun and would recommend it to their friends.
The Teacher commented that” Building confidence has been the major positive. Throughout the Arts award there have been little breakthroughs for the students, most obviously when they were delivering the family arts at the Museum.... “The partnership has been fantastic for our students. The students have enjoyed their award and I have noticed many small positive changes in their self esteem. I think they all feel much more valued and involved in school life and that they have been noticed and given a special opportunity.” As the adviser and facilitator of the arts award I wholly echo the teacher’s comments about being valued and boosting esteem.

What did you learn about offering Arts Award in a museum setting?

Many things, that in a Museum context the Arts Award can offer a rich and diverse arts and cultural programme with an achievable end result the participants feel is of worth to them as individuals rather than as part of a larger educational experience. This is particularly true for SEN students.

That the project is hardest to deliver outside the Museum away from the stimulus of the collection and arts resources without become a ‘school’ activity.

Blogging is a good way to record students at work but firewall restrictions in school make the blogsite difficult to access for students.

That the relationship between the museum staff and teaching staff needs to be wholly collaborative (which it was).

That the Arts Award needs support from a couple of volunteers or other helpers to record and document activities that you may well be facilitating.

In an ideal situation I would like to have meet with the students prior to planning the project and get a feel for what they wanted and give them the opportunity to co-plan with staff.

What are your plans for the future?

We are returning to run Arts Award at a Cambridge Community Centre with young mum support group at Romsey Mill. Then I’ll investigate collaborative cross arts opportunities with the Junction, Brittan Sinfonia and Wysing Arts. This may well feed in to a Silver Award.

What advice would you offer other museums thinking of offering Arts Award?

Visit another Arts Award scheme to get a feel for the potential, talk to other experienced facilitators, make it exciting but attainable.

Any other comments?

Great opportunity and offers such a potential for work with young people – thank you for the support it is much appreciated.

Completed by:-

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