

Arts Award in Museums: Case study

The Higgins Art Gallery & Museum, Bedford

Arts Award programmes:

Medieval Manga

SAW (Saturday Archaeology Workshops) Arts Award

These programme were offered by:

The Higgins Art Gallery & Museum, Bedford

The Art Gallery & Museum brings together incredible collections of archaeology, social history, ethnography and fine and decorative arts including a nationally important collection of 19th and 20th Century prints and watercolours.

The Learning and Access team offers formal and informal education activities in schools and the community. We are currently operating as an outreach service since the Art Gallery & Museum is closed for refurbishment.

Who took part in the programme?

Medieval Manga: 14 young people aged 10 and 11 enrolled on the programme, 2 dropped out after a few weeks for family reasons.

SAW Arts Award: 5 young people aged 12 to 14 enrolled on the programme and all successfully completed moderation in February 2012.

Description of the programme:

Medieval Manga: The programme was run as an after-school club in response to a need identified by a local extended schools co-ordinator. It was done as outreach in the school and supported by the head of art who gave us access to his classroom and was present in the room (although not part of the group) for additional supervision if required. Targeted pupils were invited by letter to participate. The target list was draw up by the school's Family Support Worker and the Head of Art and they chose children who were interested in art but either underachieving or who had family circumstances that meant they could particularly benefit from the opportunity.

A ten-week programme was designed to include a visit by a local comic book artist, learning and retelling the story of The Great Siege of Bedford Castle, learning two printmaking techniques and developing drawing skills to create a comic book of the story – plus a visit to a museum and a session making collages to present research on art heroes and heroines. The participants created scrapbook portfolios as they went along.

As time each week was very limited, and the students were unable to do much work independently, it became clear that additional sessions would be needed to complete everything required for the Award. Two extra sessions were arranged – particularly to get all the evidence together in their scrapbooks.

SAW Arts Award: This programme was delivered through our existing Saturday Archaeology Workshops project. We offered 5 young people, with whom we had built up a relationship over 3 or 4 years, the chance to use the creative activities that form part of five 2-hour monthly sessions, as a basis for a part of their Arts Award activities.

Responses I received at an early planning meeting with the children, pointed to the fact that this group wanted to use the Arts Award as a means to pursue their own individual artforms, or arts-related study projects. This had a two-fold impact: it meant that the activities that happened as part of the regular SAW sessions took on a secondary role for the young people as work in their portfolios, and that they pursued their interests mostly at a distance and in their own time. My role as adviser became more of a monitoring and distance directing one rather than the 'workshop leader' role that I had anticipated. There was a further impact in that the group had to spend time beyond the regular SAW sessions in discussions and in planning activities.

The diversity of interests of the young people meant that I was helping to direct them to talking to samian-ware specialists, a watercolour-artist and museum conservators, but it meant that in the truest sense they were making it their Arts Award tailored to their individual interests.

The Moderator commented that: "The young people's portfolios demonstrated a fabulous variety of activities, truly demonstrating the individual spirit of the Award. ... The high level of independent working shone through."

What was the impact of the programme?

Medieval Manga: nine successfully completed the award and were moderated in February 2012 and three, who were not yet 11 will complete and be moderated in September.

Knowledge & Understanding:

"[I learnt] each picture is part of the story"

"I looked at information about [how] etching is done"

Now I can ... "Explain about manga and show demonstrations"

Skills:

The Head of Art has fed back that he has noticed improvement in drawing skills and increased confidence in members of the group. The students also say that they have got better at drawing. Now I can.... "draw better".

Activity, Behaviour and Progression:

I am going to.... "practice (sic) and do a lot of sketching"

I wanted to get better at "drawing because I'm a weak drawer"

One girl who was encouraged to attend by the Family Support Worker, grew significantly in confidence from hardly speaking in the first few sessions to being very articulate about her admiration for Leonardo Da Vinci and having the confidence to show others how to screen print.

Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity:

" I wish I could draw like that"

The best bit was... "drawing the weapons"

"all of it the whole lesson I enjoyed"

At the beginning I was "very excited to come and look forward to know how(sic) was coming"

Attitudes & Values:

One boy chose a French artist from the 16th Century as his hero, having seen his work in one of our gallery catalogues. He had a real breakthrough one week when he suddenly realised what he wanted to say about the artist's work. After he had written up his story cube, he said "I'm really proud of that".

The group became very supportive of one another as the weeks passed and came together particularly when we went on a museum visit together. They demonstrated respect in listening to one another's opinions and in giving feedback in the skills sharing sessions.

SAW Arts Award: All five successfully completed moderation. At least three would like to go on to do the Silver Arts Award. The children bonded together as a group and grew in confidence as they shared opinions with one another.

Knowledge & Understanding:

Jack – “A lot because we had to speak to another artist and I learnt a lot off them.”

Oliver – “...it has helped me to expand my knowledge and understanding on the processes involved with making pots and expanded my skills of making them.”

Charlie – “I really like doing it with other people, to explore ideas, chat about what you were doing. It was really good to hear their ideas too.”

Aidan – “I have learnt to plan better, more in advance.”

John – Understanding pyrography, burnishing and tanning leather.

Skills:

Jack – Layered washes and archaeology material drawing codes

Oliver – “I have found out how to make a moulded bowl successfully...”

Charlie – “How papers made, how’s dyes are made, book binding and the great thing of parchment makers.”

Aidan – Using an HD camera & editing with different sorts of software

John – pyrography on leather using a soldering iron

Activity, Behaviour and Progression:

Jack – “Given me more confidence in my work.” Practice at doing project work pre-GCSE;

Oliver – “I would like to have a go at making a more challenging moulded bowl and I would like to try and glaze a bowl like the Romans did.”

Charlie – “It has inspired me to try new things and not be worried about it.”

Aidan – Greatest personal achievement: “The comments I got from doing the skill-sharing.”

John – “I can now do many different things with leather.”

Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity:

Jack – Liked - “Getting positive comments from other people about my paintings.”

Oliver – creativity demonstrated in problem-solving – motivated by passion for subject

Charlie – “It has inspired me to look at illustrations for my silver arts award.”

Aidan – ‘amazing day’ – visit to LAARC – organised specifically for AA. “Film-making with James.”

John – Most enjoyed: “Burnishing the leather.”

Attitudes & Values:

Jack – “It gave me more confidence in my work.”

Oliver – “I have a bit more confidence in my art form and I feel very proud of being able to do my Arts Award.”

Charlie – “I feel that I achieved something good and I can do something else with more confidence.”

Aidan – How have you developed as an artist? “I’ve met people through it who have helped me and given me tips so I now know more about film making.”

John – “I think it bonded us together more, as we all helped each other.”

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

Medieval Manga: The original ten-week plan was too much to cover and while the printmaking using press print had been included to make more connections to our gallery collections, I would drop this next time in favour of more time exploring drawing techniques.

Using manga as a hook was done specifically to appeal to boys as they were perceived to be

less likely to sign up for an art club and it worked, but we needed to incorporate a wider variety of manga styles in order not to alienate some of the girls. They were less excited by the opportunity to draw siege engines, crossbows, etc. and to create a comic book of the siege of Bedford Castle so thought needs to be given as to how the course content could be broadened without patronising the girls or reinforcing gender stereotypes. Some anxiety about celebrating violent images.

We needed more time. Our sessions were very rushed – particularly as we could not get into the classroom until after the last class finished so had to set up while clearing was still going on and children had arrived. Although billed as 90 minutes, we only had an hour of productive time with most children and two had to leave early to catch a bus. It would have been even harder without the support of very experienced museum volunteers. Next time I would spread the course over two terms and focus on the development of art skills exclusively and part A in the first term (with embedded processes for review, planning and gathering evidence of progression) and undertake parts B, C and D in the second term. The students I had did not know enough about Arts Award to understand what they were signing up to before the course started so had not made an active choice to undertake the independent study required. I would spend more time setting out what would be required before they chose whether or not to go forward.

One of my volunteers encouraged me to use a variety of feedback prompts (e.g. From last time I remember....., I want to do more.....) to encourage reflection by the group and these worked well. I turned them into pro forma stickers that could be filled in and put into their scrapbooks. The Arts Award Moderator encouraged me to use more of these to generate more reflection and self-evaluation – particularly at the end of the course.

I would get students to divide the scrapbooks into the four Arts Award sections at the beginning as the Moderator reported having trouble navigating evidence that was mixed up and I would make sure they produced very clear descriptions of the activities and skills covered as big headings for sections of evidence – using pro-formas again if necessary. Although we had focused on looking at art and images in our museum visit, this was not very clear in the evidence so I would work with students to make that more explicit.

I hadn't picked up on the need for students to write their own review of the event/ visit before holding a discussion with the group so some failed this section. I would give them a sheet of questions to consider during the visit and build time to create a personal review on the day of the visit.

Sending letters home with children to get parental consent for photos, the trip to the museum, bringing children to moderation, etc. was difficult and next time I would require parents to give me a home address and agree to be contacted by me as part of the sign-up process.

SAW Arts Award: What worked well was that they were able to see how pursuing an art-form alongside their interest in archaeology could inform their knowledge and enjoyment of both. Not being on-site did present its own set of challenges with regard to being able to offer extra sessions and extension activities for individual candidates who failed to attend all booked sessions.

Communication was already established with the participants and their parents, so proved the best channel for keeping in touch with candidates – it would have involved a lot of evening phone calls otherwise.

The SAW blog provided an ideal platform for SAW members to share their experiences and opinions of visiting other arts venues and to receive comments back from other candidates and the wider audience.

We needed more time. I knew there would be the need for extra time and sessions beyond the regular SAW sessions, but even despite them being very motivated they still often lost the thread between meetings, forgetting what they were supposed to have done, even if they'd written it down. On the other hand with some candidates it was difficult to say to them – 'that's enough' – they just kept producing.

I had hoped that the creative activities within the planned SAW sessions, which are organised in collaboration with Albion Archaeology, would form the core of the young people's creative work but they were inspired by their own subjects of investigation, so the SAW sessions, provided only supplementary activities. This meant longer 'catch-up' and planning sessions after the regular SAW hours.

If one member of the group had chosen 're-creative archaeology or exhibition archaeology' as their art-form, then it would have mapped onto the pre-planned session activities, (natural dyeing and weaving, Christmas cultural crafts, presenting and film-making, archaeological drawing and model-making).

If I was to organise this group to do Arts Award again, then I would arrange an extra monthly session for a longer time exclusively for them to plan together, share their views and experiences and to assess how they had done, so they wouldn't be doing so much of this in their own time.

What are your plans for the future?

Medieval Manga & SAW Art Award: If we were to offer Arts Award exclusively as a service that families could buy into on our premises, (without a school partnership), we would certainly not reach the majority of the young people who participated in this pilot as very few would be supported to take part. We therefore see a need to find funding to be able to offer the Bronze Award again as an outreach service, as part of continued audience development work with under-represented families. An on-site Arts Award able to be pursued at regular sessions throughout the Art Gallery & Museum, including through participation at SAW or with similar groups, would be feasible as part of our anticipated future programme, and could perhaps follow-on from an initial outreach intervention.

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

Visit another museum or gallery that is already offering the Arts Award and see how they have put it into action. Be prepared for the fact that it will inevitably take more time even than you plan.

If you haven't undertaken accreditation and 'marking' work before, talk to experienced teachers (particularly if you have retired teachers as volunteers) about how to build the gathering of evidence for both their portfolios and your final reports into sessions from the beginning. Recruit a couple of volunteers to support you regularly so they get to know the group too.

Get clear in your plans how you will incorporate art skills and sufficient arts content to any museum based visit and how you will make this explicit to the moderator.

Create simple pro-formas for children to use to engage in self-evaluation and generate evidence of both what they plan to do and what they have achieved.

Any other comments?

This has been a steep but invaluable learning curve for us as Arts Award Advisers, but we are now encouraged by the results and are looking forward to delivering Bronze and Silver Arts Awards in the future.

Completed by:-

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