

Enquiry Schools

Case Study Slides

Project Name: The Family Treeo

School(s): The Radcliffe School

Partner(s): Jane Higginbottom, Rachel Eyres, Catherine Huggan, Donna Bloye, Hannah Kitchen and Helen Taylor

Local Authority:

Buckinghamshire County Council

Start Date: 14th Feb 2008

End Date: 1st July 2008

Enquiry Question	Context	The Story	Young People's Creativity	Other impacts on young people	Adult Learning	Whole School Change	Learning from the work	Revisiting the Enquiry Question	Next steps
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This year, the Art department at The Radcliffe school took the decision to move from Edexcel's GCSE Fine Art course to the BTEC Art & Design course, which is a much more vocational course best suiting the needs of the learners at our school. Through this course students are introduced to different vocational scenarios that place them in the role of the artist, designer or craftsman rather than the student and they produce artwork for a specific purpose.

The first assignment scenario put the students in the role of the illustrator and designer. They had to produce a range of drawings of fruits and vegetables, which they would use on a brown paper bag. These drawings would then be used on a bag designed for Somerfield to promote their organic foods campaign. This of course was a hypothetical scenario but we often discussed as a department how we felt that students would be much more engaged if we were to make this into a live project by getting in touch with Somerfield and inviting them to come into the school and actually select their favourite bag design.

It was only when writing the second unit and having just finished working with the Creative arts partnership on a sculpture for Wolverton Secret Garden that we decided we would like the next project to be a live one, to see if this would positively impact on the motivation and attainment of our students at KS4.

We felt that throughout the whole of the previous project that we were constantly using the lines "If you were a practising artist you would have to..." or "in industry you would have to..." but the students were not really grasping this concept. For example, we wanted students to sell their bag designs in an oral presentation, explaining that in industry they would have to get out there and sell their work to companies. We felt that if we were to get an artist to come in to school and actually go through this process they would see that we were preparing them for the working world, so to speak. We also wanted the students to be able to engage in new skills that none of the staff in the department could currently offer and be able to apply those skills to future projects, learning and workshops.

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Our original question differed a lot from the final enquiry question, which was “What factors do you need to consider when doing site specific art?” We changed this question into something that would have more impact on the school as a whole and also something that we could actually measure by the end of the project. Our final question was, “ Can you raise effort and attainment levels if students work to a real life brief, rather than a hypothetical one?”

One of The Radcliffe’s main targets for whole school progress is to raise student attainment, particularly at KS4. We hoped that by engaging students in a live project that the Art Department could help to positively impact on the schools overall percentage A* - C at GCSE level in August 2009. Unfortunately despite the schools improving results we are still currently under the 30% A*-C benchmark, including Maths & English and this has resulted in the school being put on a list with real threat of closure.

The school has also, very recently had a negative visit from Ofsted, which resulted in The Radcliffe being put into special measures. Students and Staff have been united in their anger over this decision and feel that the school did not deserve this ‘Special measures’ tag. We wanted the school to finally have some positive press in the local community and felt that we could act on the already positive comments the school and art department received regarding the Secret Garden project and so we applied to become an enquiry school.

We hoped that this project would give the school some good publicity, the students a sense of achievement and help to develop stronger ties with the community. It was also important to us that students got to see how life would be in industry and understand the working constraints of everyday artists. They had to consider time constraints, budget, location, the artist interview process etc.

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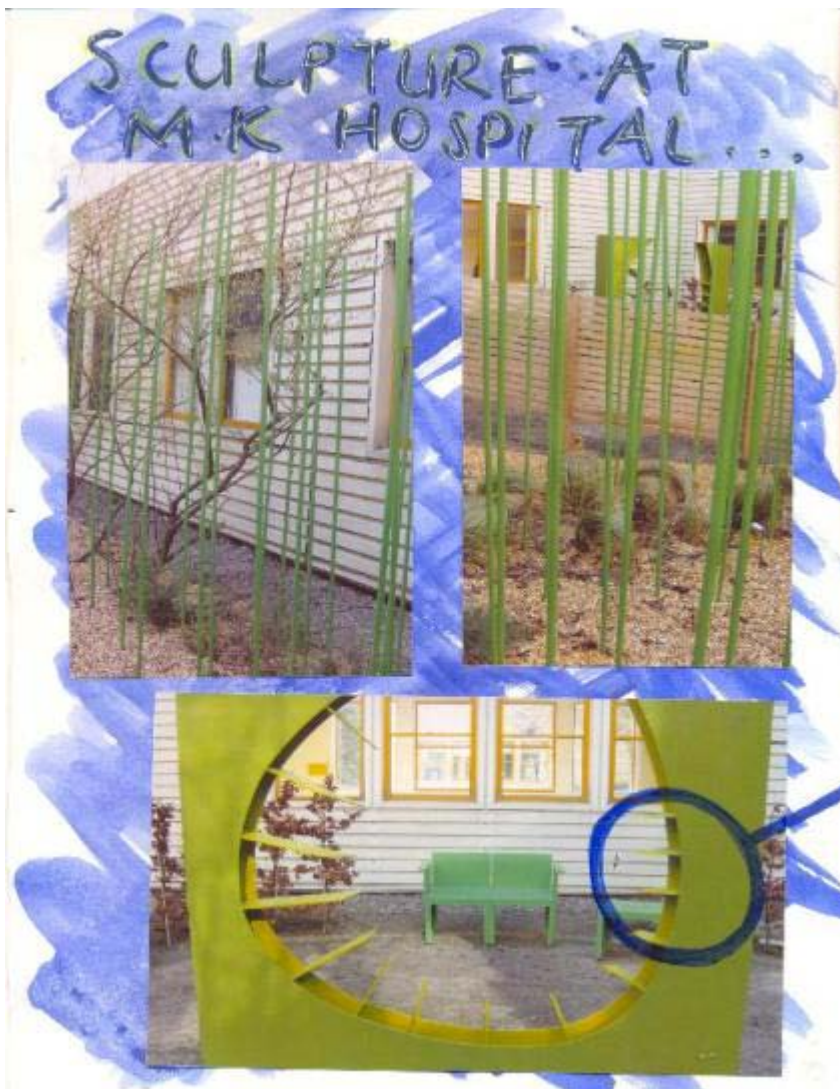
The students at The Radcliffe school wanted a chance to show that they are highly motivated and are prepared to work hard in order to achieve, despite the comments from Ofsted. They are enthusiastic about promoting a positive message about the school and its teachers, and in giving back to the local community in any way that they can.

Seeing what gratification and sense of achievement the students got out of the Wolverton Secret Garden project, and the positive impact it has had on the schools reputation in the local area was more than enough inspiration to get involved with the Creative Arts partnership once again. We had hoped to not only be able to give something back to the local community we could also help to raise student achievement at KS4 and help to lessen the risk of our school closure.

As student attainment is at the forefront of the school's development plan, particularly at KS4, we decided that the year 9 and 10 BTEC students should do a sculpture for the hospital. The title of this particular project was Creative Courtyards and it would see the students going through many different stages; from drawing the human form to creating a simplification or representation of the human form from their drawings, to turning these into sculpture ideas and finally making these sculptures in marquette form. The scenario, given to students at the start of this project was:



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The 'Creative spaces' scheme aims to enhance some of the internal courtyard spaces within the Milton Keynes Hospital grounds. The scheme is part of a national research initiative delivered in partnership with the Department of Health and Estates Directorate aiming to improve staff, patient and visitor experience through the arts. Milton Keynes hospital has been awarded funding to work with a local artist to produce a sculpture to be sited in its grounds. Through the consultation process with patients, staff and external agencies they have developed a brief that asks for a sculpture showing an interpretation of personal health. They have decided that they would prefer some reference to the human figure. As the artist you must propose a series of ideas that show a simplification or representation of the human figure, male or female. The notion of personal health or aspirations towards well-being is seen as being more important than producing an immediately recognisable figure. As the artist you are required to submit drawings that propose a series of possible solutions to the brief.

Students were then informed that this was to be real life brief and that one of their designs would be made, with the support of a visiting artist and would be installed for many years in a courtyard at Milton Keynes General hospital.

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Catherine and Rachel went to the hospital to check out possible sites for the sculpture and report back to the students. Meanwhile, through Hannah Kitchen (Creative Partnerships) and Helen Taylor (MK Arts for Health), advertisements were being circulated seeking an artist who would be willing to work with staff and students at The Radcliffe School to help develop and create the final sculpture.

'After visiting the hospital we had a better idea of what artwork were already there and the kind of space we'd have to work with'

The human form was represented in various sculptures around the hospital but these sculptures were predominantly in stone and only one of the 5 sculptures were made up of more than one figure.

Helen Taylor from MK Arts for Health was invited to join the project when it became clear that we would like to have our sculpture placed in the hospital. Hannah had worked with Helen in the past and we agreed that she would be beneficial in the planning and recruitment of an artist as she had had extensive experience of this in the past.

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- Staff and students at The Radcliffe, with the support and advice from Hannah Kitchen and Helen Taylor invited three artists to come to the school to 'sell' their work and to convince students that they would be the right person to support the design and making of their sculpture. After listening, on rotation to the three visiting artists students decided that Jane Higgenbottom was the artist that they wanted to work with. They were greatly inspired by the work of the other artists but felt that it was Jane who would give them most ownership over the design and making of the sculpture.

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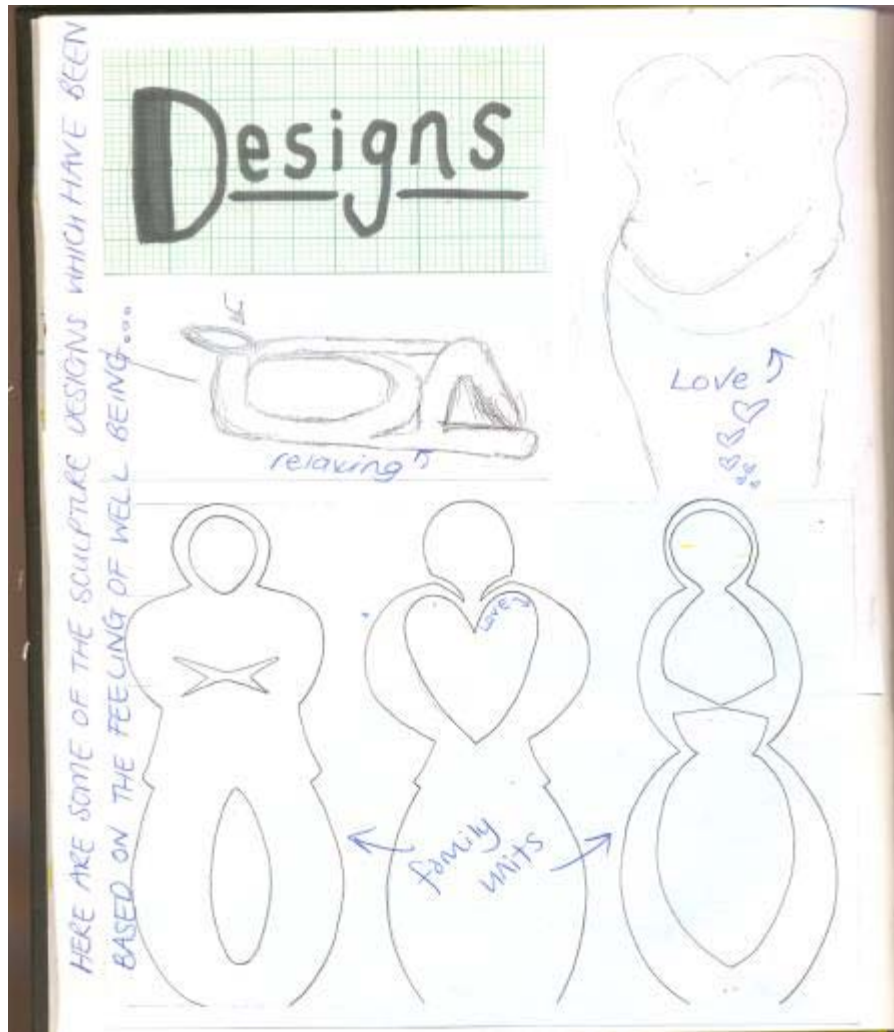


Shortly after deciding on Jane Higgenbottom as our artist students were notified of a site for their sculpture by Helen Taylor. It was to be sited in the Meadow Courtyard at Milton Keynes Hospital and was to be a permanent fixture in the hospital grounds. Students, having completed their observational drawings and simplifications of the human form began to design possible sculptures. They had been notified by Jane that the sculpture would be made using wood and so this had to be taken into account when coming up with possible design ideas.

Jane visited the school on two separate occasions (21st April & 28th April) to run workshops with students on the BTEC art course. These two days involved Jane coming to the school and working on designs and clay models with the students. The students seemed to be getting really engaged in the project at this stage as reality was sinking in that this was a live project and one of their designs, from the workshops would be selected as the final sculpture for the hospital.



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On Thursday 9th May Jane, Helen, Hannah and Rachel went through some of the students refined drawings of possible sculpture ideas. There were approximately 20 sculptures that had been chosen by students as one of the designs that they would like to make. On this day the selection was whittled down to about three possibilities. Jane expressed her concerns with some of the designs and was extremely helpful in suggesting ways that we might overcome these problems. The students were then to refine their ideas, taking into consideration any advice or tips suggested by Jane. Finally a design was chosen to represent the strength we get from family. A sculpture that was to become known as “The Family Tree” or “The Gingerbread men” as it has been fondly named by patients and staff at the hospital. The final design was created by Harrison Moore who is a Year 9 student on the BTEC course.

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On Thursday 22nd May 08 Catherine and Rachel visited Jane's studio in London to see the wooden planks being cut by Jane's friend Arthur. The size of the sculptures was discussed and it was agreed to make the sculptures as near to life size as possible. Both Catherine and Rachel drew out the figures on to the wood using the design that was created by Harrison Moore and they were then cut out by Arthur and his chainsaw. The holes in the middle of the sculpture were created using a drill. Unfortunately the year 10 students who had been selected to be a part of this process were on work experience and there was not enough notice to let the Year 9's take their place.



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Photos of original tree + Arthur

- The wood was taken from a tree that used to be one of the oldest trees in the country. It was a giant 'sequoia' redwood. It was originally in a field in Sussex and developers built housing estates around the tree trying to preserve the tree. However due to bad planning they built the houses too close to the trees thus reducing its room for growth and moisture and it died 18 months after the first building was erected. All 90 feet of the tree has been used in various art projects around the country. Jane completed a series of benches in the wood for the residents' gardens outside the Tate gallery in London and liked the feel of the wood and found that it was a lovely wood to work with.

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Tuesday 27th May saw the students start the actual carving of the sculpture with Jane. 8 students arrived during the half term holidays to work with Jane to see the sculptures through to completion. Each student was given lessons on using the tools, which they had never before used. These included mallets, gouges or Chisels and clamps. They also each learned about Health and Safety issues that we must take into account when working with wood. the students were encouraged to try all of the techniques – they needed to aim to take thin layers of the wood off at 40 degree angles some found this more difficult than other but others excelled when using the power tools – sanders and also with the staining and varnishing. This allowed individual students to all be actively involved at all times.

Day three of carving saw the completion of the three sculptures, which was a welcome relief as many students (and staff) were suffering from arm ache. After finishing the carving process the students then sanded and varnished the sculpture to ensure that they were protected from the elements.

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Harrison Moore and Charlie Gager

We learnt how to carve, and how to create shapes out of wood. It was interesting to learn different techniques and how to use the different tools. There was a lot to remember, but it was interesting. We also learnt about health and safety when using power tools. More time for the would have been better, then we could have perhaps involved more students. Working with the teachers was a good “ice-breaker” and it was nice to see them out of their teaching roles. They were students, leaning just like us. Even though I didn't really get on particularly with any of the older years, we all worked well together. You could see that team work was there for the whole week.

“Going to the hospital and doing the installation with Miss Eyres, was really fun. It was more like the weekend than school”.



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The time had finally come to re-house “The Family Treeo” in it’s position at MK hospital, so on Monday 2nd June Harrison, Charlie, Jane, Rachel and Arthur transported the sculptures to the hospital. They worked solidly in the courtyard to clear the gravel and the groundsheet and then started the onerous task of digging three, fairly deep, foot wide holes to stand the sculptures in. They positioned the male and female figures at the back and the child in the front centre, with their A frames in the holes and began to fill them with a concrete mixture that they had made. After this they returned the soil to the top and put the blue glass gravel over this and around the sculptures.

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There was a large number of students taking part in this process (120) and unfortunately due to the timetabling issues not all students were involved. This was an issue because Jane only visited the school on a few occasions before choosing the sculpture design. Many of the students felt completely left out of the process because of this and shut off from the project. For the 10 students who worked on the sculpture it was exciting and very motivating, particularly for the student who designed the sculpture and saw the process who from start to finish.

Students had very different motivational levels- when speaking to groups, we discovered that some students found Jane rather uninspiring and staff were frustrated that she did not help steer students designs. She seemed intimidated by the large groups of students. However, the 10 students who worked with Jane found her most inspiring and were the most enthusiastic about the project. It seems that she worked best with a small group of students and especially when Jane was in her comfort zone creating the sculptures. For the 10 students this was a really positive process and this is evident in the work that they produced and the journals that they kept documenting the process.



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The students felt that they learnt new skills and in some students the staff could see the rise in motivation and confidence. Once the sculpture was completed, the students seemed really proud of their achievements. They were really excited by the fact that it was something for the community and that it would be seen by thousands of visitors to the hospital. More important to them was that it was made by the special measures kids!

One student said, “ I really enjoyed it, but I would have liked to be more involved with the design choice. I really enjoyed the chance to be involved, I like the fact that it was made for kids, by other kids / teenagers. I feel like I’m giving something back and it benefits others.”

Another student said, “ I really enjoyed the workshop with Jane, she really knew her subject and it was nice to have a different teacher. I thought all the students would be making the sculpture though, so I didn’t see much point in her taking the whole class for a lesson, if only a few students were making it”

The students learnt how to carve and work with different chisels and equipment. They also learnt the health and safety aspects involved when using these tools. After the carving process, they learnt how to sand it down, and treat the wood to make it weatherproof. When we went for the unveiling afternoon, you could see that the students looked proud. When they saw the plaque with their names on it they were so proud.

“I’m really happy that it will be a part of the community for a long time”



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The staff who took part in this project also had a great experience learning new skills. We all gave up time in the half term break to come in and supervise the progress of the sculpture making. We saw the project through from start to finish, through all the process and development stages.

The process has helped D.Bloye, Head of the department with the writing of the BTEC projects. Donna was able to see how to go about the interview process with artists and through discussions with Jane on how she goes about her commissions, she has been able to make vocational project briefs as true to life as possible. Catherine and Rachel learnt the wood cutting, treating and carving techniques. They also learnt about transportation of such heavy materials, the tools that are needed, and health and safety information when using power tools. These skills we can then teach to others (both staff and students) in workshops and after school clubs. We hope to develop these skills and share them with others in future projects and classes and to refine our teaching of this assignment to next years Btec groups.

Catherine and Rachel agreed that the experience, although out of school was worth every penny as they learn more in those few days – shadowing an artist than they would had they been attending a workshop were they would have been the students and not so free to explore and experiment.

“On the making week, I really enjoyed working with other artists, of all ages. It was great to see everyone in a relaxed environment, with everyone involved learning (not just the students). For that week everyone was a student of some sort. Working with my colleagues on this project has given us a chance to work outside the classroom environment. We all feel proud to have taken an active part in this project and of the final result”.

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- I have learnt that you can't take on a project like this and expect that everyone will feel involved. This project would have been more successful had we focused on just one class and not tried to include all the year group. In the future the students need to be more involved in the financial side of the project and to have access to the cost of every aspect of the project. I feel that this would embed the importance of seeing the project through thoroughly and to completion. I would also only do this project again if the funding is secure at the start. It was not apparent that there was insufficient funding available from the school until the project had started and this caused myself and Rachel problems in that we had to find ways to raise the shortfall in money. As the students had already completed the project 'in their eyes' they were not enthusiastic about trying to raise money after the event. As we were not teaching the students who took part in the project only organising it, we then had to use our time and members of my form to raise the outstanding monies which took up a lot of break and lunch times.

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We have made some great connections through the project. We've involved local "craft contacts", created contacts with the local press and had community involvement. We got one of the Wolverton and Greenleys town councillors to visit the school during one of the making afternoons. The town councillor thoroughly enjoyed this as he got to see a 'live' school project and students of the Radcliffe school give up their own holiday time to produce something for their community. The students felt proud to be representing their school in front of local authority. The sculptures were unveiled by the Mayor and this had generated press interest. We were so proud to see our school finally being written about in a positive light.



We would like to involve more local businesses and companies, on a regular basis for sponsorship. Perhaps getting in contact with our local Tesco store and asking them to judge the carrier bags that the students produce. Of course we will have to alter the assignment brief slightly! Or contacting a tile company regarding sponsorship for a school mosaic piece. We would like to extend and continue the real life briefs, involve more curriculum areas in the process, such as design and media.

Helen Taylor of MK arts for Health has been in touch with Donna Bloye in order to work with the department again because she enjoyed working with the students at the school so much. This is a great connection for the school to have made and one that is ongoing.

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This plaque is outside the courtyard next to the sculpture. Students and staff from the Radcliffe have a reminder of the hard work and effort put in. This plaque means that the public know who it was produced by. We, as a whole school feel really proud of this.

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When we do a similar project to this one, we'll choose an artist who is not so intimidated by the large class environment. We'd like the artist to be more involved in the design process. Perhaps to take a few more workshops to teach the students the skills they would use for the final piece of work. Then chose a few students to work with, in the small group for the final result.

The organisation and expectations of the artist would need to be more in depth, and arranging times and equipment for workshop more careful. We would like to arrange for whole groups to be taught in a lecture style way by the artist. Perhaps in year groups, with worksheets, group activities, showing off live skills and demonstrations.

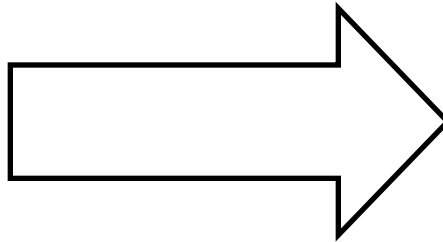
Linking with the hospital again would be great. I think that we worked well in regard to thinking about the size, health and safety restrictions, money and timing. We'd like the publicity of the whole project to be better and greater! Perhaps involving local radio and again the newspaper Add to that an article in the local town newsletter too.



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Our original question was changed:

“what factors do you have to consider when producing a piece of site specific artwork?”



Can you raise effort and attainment levels if students work to a real life brief, rather than a hypothetical one?

There was not a noticeable difference in the attainment and motivation of the students involved, but only the 10 students who actually physically took part in the making process showed improvement. All of these students had gained the pass criteria before the rest of the students. So we answered the question:

“Yes, but unfortunately not with the numbers that we have on the course.”

We found it difficult to motivate some students who felt that they had a bit of a bum deal, in that they had not being involved in the process and that they learned nothing new. In hindsight this could have been rectified by better planning on our part, however we don't feel that Jane could have interacted with such a large number of students.

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Having completed 2 projects alongside Creative Partnership, we can take positive and negative elements from both. We will use the knowledge and skills gathered from these projects in future projects. We think that it would be helpful to have one main person, who organises and liaises with the other people involved. This way it keeps communication simple, and problems get smoothed out quickly. The next stage of this journey will be to incorporate this experience into other projects. We can develop and create ways of putting other real life briefs into students work. This would be possible across the whole school. There are many subjects which we feel could benefit from our experience and have projects and lessons plans set up in a similar way.

We would like to do another community based project and involve the hospital, local businesses and the press. Hopefully in our next project, we can working alongside an artist who can teach larger groups and perhaps timetable the whole of the year group during art sessions when they all coincide with each other.

