

enquire about learning in galleries



Briefing note 3: diversity

This is the third in a series of briefing notes about how gallery education is addressing key issues in current social, cultural and education policies.

engage is the National Association for Gallery Education, representing visual arts organisations, gallery educators, teachers, artist educators and curators. We carry out research, training and advocacy and have a powerful network of people who work with millions of gallery visitors, developing interest in and enjoyment of the visual arts.

enquire is a major research programme in partnership with Arts Council England and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.



When it reports in July 2008, the **enquire** programme will publish detailed research findings. At the interim stage we are already seeing how high quality, sustained partnerships between young people and creative professionals can inspire learning and develop life skills. This briefing focuses on **diversity**, and the part gallery education can play in developing tolerant citizens and cohesive communities, capable both of sharing common values and celebrating difference.

Key findings

Through working with galleries, contemporary art and with artists, children and young people:

- encounter art that has been made in diverse cultural contexts,
- are encouraged to discuss a broad range of social and political issues,
- engage in debate that engenders understanding and respect for different points of view,
- draw on the experiences and cultural diversity of the adult and young participants as a rich resource, respecting and appreciating difference,
- experience opportunities for role change in a new context, that can open up new ways of seeing their own potential.



And the visual arts can be a powerful tool to tackle issues of diversity, such as:

- local communities, and the relations between different groups,
- identity and self-expression,
- heritage and continuity,
- nationality and a modern idea of “Britishness”,
- the meaning of images and artefacts, and the importance of interpretation.

Through the **enquire** programme, **engage** is developing a unique knowledge-base for policy-makers and practitioners. And through our networks, we have the capacity to drive up the quality of activity in galleries on a national scale. For further information on how schools and others can take advantage of this fantastic resource visit **www.engage.org**

Case studies

“Through this project, the young people looked at themselves in a different way – noticing difference amongst themselves and developing understanding of their identity. Plus they increased their drawing skills, I would say, triple-fold!”

Tanya Skillen, Gallery Educator, SPACE



‘No Programme’ Plymouth Arts Centre

Young people from Hele’s School and Lipson Community College took part in an **enquire** project at Plymouth Arts Centre, working with the exhibition *No Programme*.

The Gallery Educator, herself an immigrant, planned a series of exercises with a strong emphasis on group collaboration and democratic learning. Each group approached the exhibition differently, but each day they discussed diversity, race, racism and challenging injustice.

The young people worked with artist members of The Monitoring Group, a racial justice organisation based in the South West. The artists used creative ways to address issues of racial injustice and violence, drawing on their own experience, and the resulting ideas were displayed in the gallery spaces as a Dub Poetry installation.

The project began with a tour of the Gallery and discussion about the content of the exhibition and the issues the exhibition raised. The young people discussed the concept of peaceful protest against injustice and then created banners and took part in a short protest march.

The young people also worked with a member of the local community, Sarah Singh, who is a British born Sikh. She talked about the relationship between racial abuse and bullying, and discussed her own experience of moving from a multi-racial society (Birmingham) to a relatively mono-cultural city (Plymouth).

Sarah showed the participants how to put on a turban. Four young people then walked around Plymouth wearing turbans and Sikh headscarves and discussed their experiences with the rest of the group, raising ideas about visibility and freedom.

Self-portraits and identity SPACE/Hackney Museum

Sixth form students from Skinners and Cardinal Pole Schools in Hackney worked on a project about the bi-centenary of the abolition of the slave trade.

Hackney Museum provided the historical context and SPACE provided expertise in contemporary visual arts to develop a project that would not only inform the young people about the slave trade, but explore their own identity through the notion of self-portraits.

Artist Godfried Donkor discussed issues about slavery and the conditions that slaves were transported and lived in. He showed the students his own work and took them to see how black people were depicted in seventeenth and eighteenth century portraiture before producing their own self-portraits.

Godfried worked alongside the young people so that they gained skills and confidence in drawing and explored ideas of accuracy and representation.

Together they produced an installation to go alongside the Museum exhibition, and the project was celebrated with friends and family. Best of all, the display has become a permanent part of the Museum, representing members of the local community and their place in history.