ProjectBase Case Study: Art Ambassadors

1 Summary
Project Base worked with 42 young people through formal education and detached youth workers in rural districts of Cornwall to discuss arts provision in their area. The project has created new partnerships, new ideas and enthusiasm from young people about how they can make decisions about their cultural provision. This project has become the starting point for future work with each group.

2 The context
2.1 The organisation
ProjectBase (formerly St Ives International) was established in 1996 as an arts commissioning organisation for Cornwall. It aims to devise, develop and deliver multi-site visual arts exhibitions and projects working in partnership with other local arts providers. Organisational partners include the Tate St Ives, Newlyn Art Gallery and the University College of Falmouth. ProjectBase has 4 full time staff and is regularly funded by Arts Council South West; annual turnover fluctuates but was £41,681 for 2005.

2.2 The situation
Project Base wanted to explore new partnerships and audiences outside of the Penwrith district, which hosts Tate St Ives and Newlyn Art Gallery. This project aimed at engaging young people from two other districts not worked with before, to inform a countywide youth arts programme developed with young people.

3 The project
3.1 Planning
The research targeted Kerrier and Restormel districts. Both areas include rural and urban communities facing social and economical challenges due to loss of traditional industry and the seasonal effects of tourism. The project enabled ProjectBase and it’s partners to open up a dialogue with young people exploring ways that they could get involved in future programming, including youth arts forums and the arts ambassadors scheme.

3.2 Delivery
The project was implemented from March – May 2006. ProjectBase partnered with a variety of youth organisations to ensure work with a cross section of young people. Organic planning happened throughout the project, in response to the ideas, thoughts and character of each group.
Redruth School: 12 young people aged 14 – 16, 3 sessions.  
Treviglas School: 10 young people aged 14 – 16, 4 sessions.  
The project included gallery visits, and artist’s lectures and gave an 
opportunity to experience art outside of the school environment. Discussions 
were focused around types of art, place, who the artwork would involve and 
reasons why we should work in this way.  
Cornwall College Cambourne: 6 young people aged 16 – 21, 1 session.  
Due to college timetables and the Easter break only one session was held at 
Cambourne. Discussions focused around ways that ProjectBase could 
develop partnerships with the young people in the future.  
Redruth Detached Youth Service: 14 young people aged 14 – 21, 3 sessions.  
The street based sessions focused on a particular Redruth location considered ‘most in need’ by the youth service. Informal discussions with the young people focused on their experiences and ideas about the visual arts they would like to see and be part of in Cornwall. 14 of the young people have expressed an interest in a future trip to visit Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Park.

For summaries of the discussions see Appendix

4  Outcomes

4.1 Impact on Participants  
• The participants were able to experience new opportunities and insights about the visual arts. “like nothing I’ve ever seen or done before” young person’s comment on being able to meet and talk and attend a lecture with visiting artist Surasi Kusolwong.

• Increasing confidence in the participants to make observations and hold discussions about visual arts, identify what they want, need and require from galleries and public art, and how ProjectBase can support them in making it happen. Treviglas School identified participants as being “noticeably more confident in talking about art work and discussing meanings, this contact has opened and enriched our students understanding of what arts is and can be” (teacher).

• (also see Appendix)

• Participants from every group were inspired to continue the dialogue past the planned sessions through joint forums, gallery visits and a continued relationship with ProjectBase.

4.2 Impact on others involved  
• ‘The whole experience has made me, as a teacher, question how we deliver the art courses and what and how we expose students to artwork. We have been trying to promote student questioning in art but I
feel in light of this project’s experience we can take it a step further’ (teacher).

- ‘Our school being in a semi-rural catchment area limits our students cultural exposure and currently our department does not run any gallery trips due to a historical president’ (teacher). After this initial response the school went on to support the young people to visit Tate St Ives and Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden with ProjectBase.

- Acknowledgement of the success in working in small mixed ability groups

- ProjectBase is just what we need to help our students gain first hand experience of art work, that they would other wise only see in books or on the Internet’ (teacher).

- ‘I see this as a long term link that can help our students in future years as well as existing ones’ (college tutor).

4.3 Institutional Change
- This action research has provided ProjectBase with information about how we will develop our new Interaction community programme for and with young people.

- ProjectBase will be hosting two of the project’s participants work placements within the organisation.

- Following on from this research period we plan to develop a young people’s forum and Arts Ambassadors scheme to help devise and deliver a programme for 2007.

5 Lessons learned

5.1 What worked and what didn’t
- Using the gallery space as a vehicle for discussion was a good idea. This may seem obvious, but as a visual arts commissioning organisation (with out our own gallery space) it was important to talk to young people about ways of seeing art, both inside and outside of the gallery context. By working in partnership with Tate St Ives we have been able to provide the young people with a variety of arts experiences, further the Tate’s outreach, and share information and feedback with them.
• Structuring the project around creating a ‘conversation’ with young people was a very basic and on some levels un-ambitious idea, but it allowed the project delivery to stay flexible and respond appropriately to the dialogue that took place. This also allowed us to start planning with young people from the very beginning and for them to lead us in the direction they wanted without any expectation.

• Utilising what was happening around us was great. ProjectBase organised a public lecture with artist Surasi Kusolwong during the project. Participants were invited and were also able to meet the artist and ask him questions. This provided a unique experience for the young people and enabled the project to include a wider spectrum of experiences for some of the participants.

• Approaching young people from a good cross section of the community allowed the action research to tell us about different ways of engaging different young people and the diversity in environments, timetables and remits of different partner organisations.

• Partnerships with organisations that support established groups of young people were a great starting point. We have been able to achieve more in a short space of time because of these relationships, as well as share skills and knowledge.

• Working with small groups of young people worked well. We now need to consider how other young people who are connected to these groups, can get involved.

• The project has been affected by the short timescale. We were unable to work the detached youth worker for Newquay as planned. Future initiatives will give youth partners as much advance planning time as possible to fit in with their timetables.

5.2 Next steps

The research has created strong foundations for continued collaborations with these young people and supporting them to develop forums for the visual arts in Cornwall. The information and experience of this project will also inform ProjectBase in ways of engaging other young people to create and join these forums, and how to develop a young people’s Art Ambassadors scheme.
Surasi Kusolwong is keen to develop work for a public space with young people and Project Base for exhibition in 2007.

Planned follow up activities:
Detached youth group to visit Barbara Hepworth museum
Camborne College ProjectBase site visit
Redruth visit to Tate and Barbara Hepworth museum
Joint forum between Redruth and Treviglas schools
Treviglas follow up sessions in school
2 young people’s work experience placements at ProjectBase

6 Appendix

6.1 Additional Teacher and Youth Worker Comments:

Redruth School
‘pupils have benefited by linking with an arts organisation that has employees that have various arts administration roles and therefore gained insight into careers in the arts that they may not have known about before” (teacher).

‘There were some issues when choosing the students to be part of the group, once we had decided on taking students from year 10 we decided on inviting the students who were Gifted and Talented in the arts, however we wanted to make the group up to 12 students so we then had to identify students who we thought would benefit from the project, as a result we have a very mixed group combining both Gifted & Talented students and those of lower ability. It has been exciting to see the interaction between these students who normally would not necessarily mix and see them able to discuss ideas and give their opinions in an informal setting’ (teacher).

‘The whole experience has made me, as a teacher, question how we deliver the art courses and what and how we expose students to artwork. We have been trying to promote student questioning in art but I feel in light of this projects experience we can take it a step further. Obviously we do not have the luxury of working with such small and receptive groups, but we can take something from it and put it into practice with a variety of age groups. It would then be good to analyse how it effects students perception of art and the work they create’ (teacher).

‘those who have participated in the project so far have fed back enthusiastically about the project, not only have they expressed their thoughts and opinions, but it has led to some every interesting questioning. The students have really valued being able to have a platform in which they have
been able to express themselves. I have seen a growth and maturity in the attitudes and opinions about artwork, and people working in the arts’ (teacher).

**Treviglas School**

‘If we were to revisit a similar format working with our students it would be great if we could have a longer time scale and look at an artist or group in more detail. I also would like to involve more students so that a whole year group could be enriched by first hand artist experience... ProjectBase is just what we need to help our students gain first hand experience of art work, that they would otherwise only see in books or on the Internet’ (teacher).

**Detached Youth Redruth**

‘Approached in the best way – 100% definitely – being able to get to know the young people on an informal basis and with no expectation of them is essential in getting them involved. Having a good lead in time to just talk directly to them and get to know them before asking them to commit to anything is great. They would have had little response if you had expected too much from them the first time you came, coming on the third session they were all approaching you and asking you questions which is great, you need to show an interest in the long term and this has allowed you to do just that’ (youth worker).

‘I have recognised that when working with a group of this nature it is important and even essential to build a good relationship with each individual young person in order to engage them. In some cases this can only come through showing an interest in what the young people are already doing and often this is initially non art related’ (project facilitator).