

## Schools Project Evaluation

### Project Aims

Pupils were given the opportunity to research, design and stitch a panel telling a Diaspora story from their local community. The following conditions applied:

- i. The panel must only be stitched (no appliqué etc) and only 25% of the panel should be stitched by non pupils.
- ii. The basic materials were to be provided by the Trust.
- iii. The panels should be accompanied by supporting evidence to show the process of completing the panel from research to finish. This will give an understanding of the process pupils went through to make the panel and how the project has fit into the curriculum for the school year.
- iv. Particular emphasis should be on the community aspect of the original Diaspora Tapestry project.

Initial outlines were drafted in partnership with EducationScotland to create a project that was both appealing to schools and covered areas of the Curriculum for Excellence. The suggestion of making the project part of a competition was raised as a way of encouraging schools to take part, as well as rewarding pupils for their efforts. With this in mind, various 'criteria' were set out in the initial plans for the judging stage of the competition. It was thought that the panels could be judged on the following:

- i. Research undertaken and options considered along with criteria for final choice – documented howsoever
- ii. The 'design' of the panel, in particular how effective it is at illustrating the Diaspora tale being told
- iii. Embroidered execution, – of which no more than 25% may be contributed by others than the school children involved

The time frame of the project was set out over the first two terms of the school year – September 2016 – May 2017. This was to allow teachers enough time to work it in around other curriculum subjects and/or timetabling restrictions. As some pupils may not have had any experience of embroidery before, this would give them the time they needed to practice as well as research, plan and design their panel.

EducationScotland provided valuable support when it came to the development and marketing of the project to schools, as having their logo attached to documents gave teachers the confidence to go forward with the project. EducationScotland also advertised the project in newsletters which reached appropriate departments in schools and local authorities. Argyle and Bute Community Council made contact directly having heard about

the project through channels associated with EducationScotland and then in turn advertised out to schools in their catchment area. This showed when the highest majority of registered schools came from the Argyle and Bute area. If the project was to take place again, it would be beneficial to contact various local authorities directly with information to circulate, as well as going through the EducationScotland channels.

Exhibiting at the Scottish Learning Festival in September 2016 – one year prior to the project starting – also helped to raise the profile of the tapestry as a learning tool, in addition to the schools project. This was used as the ‘official’ launch of the schools’ project.

The use of Glow was discussed with representatives at EducationScotland as a possible means to share information with participating schools and provide added support throughout the project. This idea was later withdrawn as EducationScotland felt that there would be more suitable platforms for communication considering that not all schools use the Glow network. When asked whether Glow or email was a preferable means of communication; most schools opted for email as per EducationScotland’s opinion.

### **Participating Schools**

In total, fourteen schools registered interest in the project. Of these fourteen schools, five returned a completed panel for the exhibition:

- Dunoon Grammar School
- Port Ellen Primary School
- Kirknewton Primary School
- Hollybrook Academy
- Kilchrenan Primary School

Various circumstances affected school participation in the project. These were as follows:

- i. One returned the design pack as the teacher did not think that their pupils would be able to participate as it looked too complex. There was specific emphasis in the outline that the project was more about the research and design than the embroidery itself; it was not expected that pupils would be skilled embroiderers. However, they continued to be daunted by the prospect and ultimately withdrew.
- ii. Several schools found themselves having to withdraw due to class or timetabling changes which meant they were unable to afford the time to complete the project. One Primary school teacher had initially registered a P6-7 class but was changed to P1-2 just before the summer break.
- iii. One teacher changed schools just before the summer break and was unable to facilitate the project in the new school.

These were unforeseen circumstances that were not taken into account during the planning process of the project.

## **Recognised challenges**

Several schools found difficulty completing the panel within the time frame allowed. An additional two weeks had to be allocated to schools in order to give them the time they needed to complete their work. This then in turn had an effect on the completion of the panels as it gave the volunteer stitcher little time to stretch and back the panels before the planned exhibition in Edinburgh. In hindsight, it may have been advantageous to give teachers the design packs prior to the 2016 summer break in order to allow them more planning time. This was a point raised in one of the returned questionnaires; that the pupils would have benefitted from starting the project just before the summer break.

Due to the mix of both Primary and Secondary schools and the level of involvement from pupils, it made it extremely difficult to 'judge' in terms of a competition. Three of the schools submitted the required portfolio of evidence and, therefore, completed all aspects of the project as requested. The differences between the skill level of primary and secondary pupils also had to be considered, as did the fact that one school facilitated the project with pupils with additional support needs. This meant that the project could not be judged fairly in terms of a competition, and in fact all schools should in some way be rewarded for the amount of work they put into their respective panels.

## **Schools' Feedback**

Evaluation questionnaires were sent out to the five schools which submitted a panel to the exhibition in St. Giles Cathedral. These were sent out to determine the impact of the project and whether it was a useful educational tool to cover areas of the Curriculum for Excellence.

Four of the five forms were returned detailing a generally very positive response and highlighted that the outcomes of the project – such as the community involvement – were met and that the pupils benefitted from taking part in the project as a whole. The questionnaires returned gave a bit more insight into the way that the project was handled, particularly from the two schools which did not submit the required portfolio of evidence.

Of the schools who did not submit their supporting evidence, one had evidenced through the evaluation questionnaire that they had actually developed several links within their community and extended the project to make a series of tapestry panels using textiles and appliqué. These were designed to accompany their Diaspora panel to create an 'Islay Tapestry'. This extension to the original idea meant that their whole school could get involved in various aspects; bringing together all age groups and getting involved in a major creative project. The schools project for the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry inspired the teachers to develop a much bigger project that was of benefit to the whole school and reached out into the community. With this in mind, it is disappointing that they did not submit a portfolio, as it would have been interesting to see the development of their tapestry project from the initial outline.

Of the five panels, only one was of a similar design to the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry panels with the double circle and compass points. The design fit perfectly with the project outline

and the accompanying portfolio showed a well thought out research and design process. The pupils associated with this panel came to the opening reception at St. Giles and talked to many of the stitchers of the Diaspora Tapestry; sharing their experiences of the project and their enthusiasm for both their own work and the original tapestry. Many stitchers commented how much they enjoyed talking to the pupils about their work and felt they had a mutual connection through their similar journeys with the tapestry.

### **Constructive feedback (taken from teachers' evaluation forms)**

- i. Enlarging the template was too difficult.
- ii. The panel was large for the age group making the 25% adult participation challenging.
- iii. Smaller panels or the option to split into smaller chunks so children can design and stitch their own part
- iv. *Diaspora* is not easy for children to understand so provision of links to websites/educational resources would be helpful
- v. Glowmeet at the start of the project or video conference event to talk through the project with participating schools
- vi. Help with finance to attend the exhibition
- vii. Outline too loosely defined; more information would have been helpful
- viii. A list of contacts – stitchers; other participating schools etc
- ix. Simplified template
- x. Funding to buy materials
- xi. Timescale and timing – information sent out earlier
- xii. An SQA event to launch the project
- xiii. Daytime opening event would have allowed more schools to attend
- xiv. Pupils design sent to the Trust for transfer onto the linen to ensure the correct size

### **Taking it further**

In the early drafts of the project outline the ideas for taking the project a step further included schools organising and running their own exhibition:

*Run your own exhibition – we can provide any schools wishing to give pupils the experience of organising, setting up, marketing and running their own exhibition the chance to do so with all the final panels from the competition. Pupils could also look at organising accompanying activities for families and younger pupils, creating merchandise and facilitating tours of the finished work.*

Since the completion of the schools' project, one of the participating schools has expressed an interest in exploring this option further. This would involve a selection of the panels from the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry which represent their community's history as well as the display of their own panel. It has been suggested that the pupils involved in the schools project would take ownership of the exhibition, including choosing the most appropriate

panels for display. This option is currently under negotiation with the school, the pupils and representatives of the possible venue.

## **Budget**

Potential funding was limited and financial support from EducationScotland was unavailable; therefore the project had to be run primarily on readily available resources and in kind donations.

The packs were built using excess linen from the Battle of Prestonpans Tapestry project and wool bundles from both the Battle of Prestonpans and Scottish Diaspora Tapestries. The options for colour were limited and it was decided to send only a small selection of neutral colours as the designs of the panels were not known. Five copies of *The Art of Narrative Embroidery* were also sourced at a cost of £60.00 for all. Postage fees for the design packs were the only other small costs incurred.

Had a small funding package been sourced, it could have been used to help schools with the cost of additional resources to complete the project.

A larger funding package would have meant that as well as help with additional resources, participating schools could have been offered financial support to attend the exhibition in Edinburgh. This could have been in the form of solely travel expenses or travel and accommodation for those travelling from further afield.

## **Conclusion**

The feedback from the schools reiterates that some adaptations would be needed in order to run the project again. Some points, such as the concept of *Diaspora*, was addressed in the original outline, though perhaps not fully enough for younger pupils to gain an understanding.

In comparison to the stitchers of the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry, it is clear that the pupils involved in the schools' project had a much more complex challenge. Where Diaspora stitchers had the support of Andrew Crummy's design skills and the provision of materials from Yvonne Murphy and Gillian Hart, the pupils had little help to produce and complete the panels other than the simple design packs provided. Despite this, the expectations of them to not only embroider the panel but to research; design; transfer the image onto the linen and supply their own additional materials meant that their experience was more than that of the stitchers. They developed an understanding of elements of the artists experience and those of the studio team.

Although the project could be seen as ambitious in terms of our overall expectations, the outcome proved that with the right level of commitment and drive from the teaching staff involved, the project could be a success. Of the five schools involved, Dunoon Grammar School displayed the ideal example of a successful project and showed a complete

understanding of the learning outcomes and requirements set out in the project outline. The commitment of both staff and pupils was abundantly clear and showed in the level of detail of their work.

The project as a whole highlighted that, although the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry is extremely broad as a learning tool, it can be used to facilitate a diverse and creative learning programme that has the potential to be extended further beyond the initial outline. This has been proven on at least two of the five completed projects. This can be attributed to the people involved and how the project outline, even in its broad state, can be interpreted and used creatively in a learning environment.