



A year of exploration, growth and development 2006-2007

An independent evaluation of The Art Room's NESTA project
by Lizzie Haines funded by NESTA

'The fact that some of the children would rather be in the art room on Christmas Day instead of getting presents from Santa shows me that it has more of an impact than I could ever have imagined.'

Jo Wright, art room practitioner at Leamington School

The Art Room

The Art Room is a pioneering charity based at Oxford Community School in East Oxford aimed at working with 7 to 15 year olds to raise their self-esteem and self-confidence through art. Based in Oxford Community School, a secondary school in a socially disadvantaged area, it aims to enable each child to re-engage successfully in school and to manage better the pressures of their daily lives.

The NESTA project

Since opening in 2002, The Art Room has had mounting recognition of the value of their work and enquiries from all over the country about how to use their methods in other areas. So in 2004 The Art Room approached NESTA for funding to explore how their model of art as therapy could be transferred elsewhere. NESTA put them in touch with Leamington Primary School in the north of Nottinghamshire, who were also interested in using art as a therapeutic tool. Funded by NESTA, Leamington School became the location for *Project Transformation*, a yearlong experiment to replicate The Art Room's unique setting and techniques into another situation, and to learn from this how best to widen the reach of The Art Room's ideas.

'The NESTA project has proved to be a tremendous opportunity for The Art Room to move on from the successful prototype in Oxford. We have tested the model elsewhere and shown that it works and have produced the publications other people will need to help them set up projects. No longer can anyone suggest it can only be done in Oxford.'

Pat Norman, Art Room trustee

The plan

Leamington School had already developed some work in art as therapy, with a teaching assistant, Jo Wright, working one to one with children in a small room dedicated to the purpose. The Art Room planned to set up and equip a large sunny room in the school with exactly the same facilities as Oxford, and to train Jo to use the same techniques and routines as had been developed there. This would give Leamington the chance to expand and develop their own practice, but most crucially, it would give The Art Room the chance to explore what lay at the core of their success in Oxford, to answer the vital question of whether that success was transferable, and thus to develop a strategy for expanding the work of The Art Room.

Setting up the Leamington project

Jo Wright spent 42 days being trained in Oxford, observing and then participating in Art Room sessions, taking part in all the staff meetings, discussions and training, and having one to one sessions with senior Art Room practitioners. At the same time, Jo and the Art Room team worked in Leamington to set up the new room with all its equipment. In autumn 2007 the Leamington room opened to children. Juli Beattie, Art Room director, and Lara Cramsie, senior practitioner, came up to support operation one day a week. The training had been so successful that this support was needed for much less time than had been planned, and in March 2007, after 12 days of Art Room support, the Leamington art room was running independently, with much support and continued contact by email and phone.

'If you walk into the room at Leamington it is without a doubt that you recognise our style with Jo Wright's stamp on it. Ultimately, this is what we wanted.'

Juli Beattie, Art Room director

Leamington School now plan to continue to operate an art room and are receiving considerable interest from local schools and the local authority. They have also had outside validation of the worth of their therapeutic work from OFSTED.

'The school's promotion of art as therapy is having a significant effect on pupils with learning or emotional difficulties. In the art room the calm and positive ethos enables pupils to benefit from the therapeutic benefits of art in raising self-confidence and improving attitudes towards learning.'

Unpublished OFSTED report, November 2007

The publications

The NESTA project was an opportunity for The Art Room to define what made their practice unique and conversely, what could be adapted and changed for different circumstances. As part of the project they developed two publications. The Art Room handbook sets out exactly what Art Room practice is, defined and refined out of the experience of the project, and will be used for training others in The Art Room methods. A second publication, due out in 2008, offers twelve Art Room projects for twelve months, for any children's organisation that wants an initial taste of Art Room techniques.

Learning from the project

The whole NESTA process has been a hugely productive learning time for The Art Room. Installing a new operation from scratch and explaining it to others through training enabled them to define what was at the core of their practice and to examine how much adaptation of their ideas and methodology they would be able to accept.

They learned that any new room would have to be set up as near identical to the Oxford Art Room as possible, to provide the same calm settling environment; it was also crucial to have the same settling routines and session structures. However, most importantly, they confirmed what they had already known, that the language and values used in everyday exchange with the children was the core of the Art Room's practice, and they learned how to train others to use the same language to the same effect.

The project's outcomes

- ✓ The Art Room has proved that it can transfer the methods developed in Oxford to other schools, other situations. It has proved that the method of training used in Leamington can successfully train practitioners to deliver the benefits of the Oxford Art Room elsewhere.
- ✓ It has defined for itself and others exactly what constitutes Art Room practice, and now has that definition encapsulated in a publication.
- ✓ It now has a strategy on how to widen its influence and at the same time, protect its own ideas, through branding, trademarking and a system of quality control.
- ✓ The Art Room is now able to develop a strategy to establish satellites, based firmly on clearly defined practice, and will make a start by opening its first satellite, Pippa's Room, at Rose Hill School in Oxford in late 2007.
- ✓ A programme of training is being developed that will help the growing number of schools, local authorities, teaching institutions and others to incorporate Art Room practice into their work.
- ✓ Thinking has greatly developed on how to sustain financially their programme of expansion.
- ✓ The open day at Leamington School in February 2007 and the national symposium held in London in December 2007 will both widen the influence of The Art Room among practitioners, educators and policymakers.

And at the same time, in Oxford

- ✓ Interest in The Art Room's ideas continues to grow. The Art Room conducted successful training this year for Dudley Local Authority and Oxford County Council and has had enquiries asking for support or training from all over the country. Additional interest has also come from the Art Room's operations in Nottinghamshire.
- ✓ The home base has gone from strength to strength. With new staff appointed and trained, the staff team has been able to take over responsibility for daily delivery, and the director, Juli Beattie, has been able to move her attention to focus on the NESTA project and on strategic development.

And finally,

- ✓ Leamington School now has a large sunny art room, their practitioner has greatly developed her skills in helping children in difficulties, and they are able to help a substantially greater number of children than before.

'We are delighted to offer art as therapy to our children. Every school should have an art room.'

Paul Aspinall, head teacher, Leamington School

The future

After a year of intensive piloting, examination and strategic thinking, The Art Room is now in a strong position to expand its sphere of influence and plans to do so both through opening a carefully planned series of satellite operations, which will operate in exactly the same way as the original Art Room, and by training other organisations to take on and adapt its ideas.

A note about this evaluation

The evaluation was a core part of the NESTA project, commissioned from an independent evaluator to give feedback throughout to steer thinking and development, and to produce evidence at the close of the lessons learned. It was based largely on observation of the project, interviews with participants, and regular review meetings developing thinking.

Further information

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