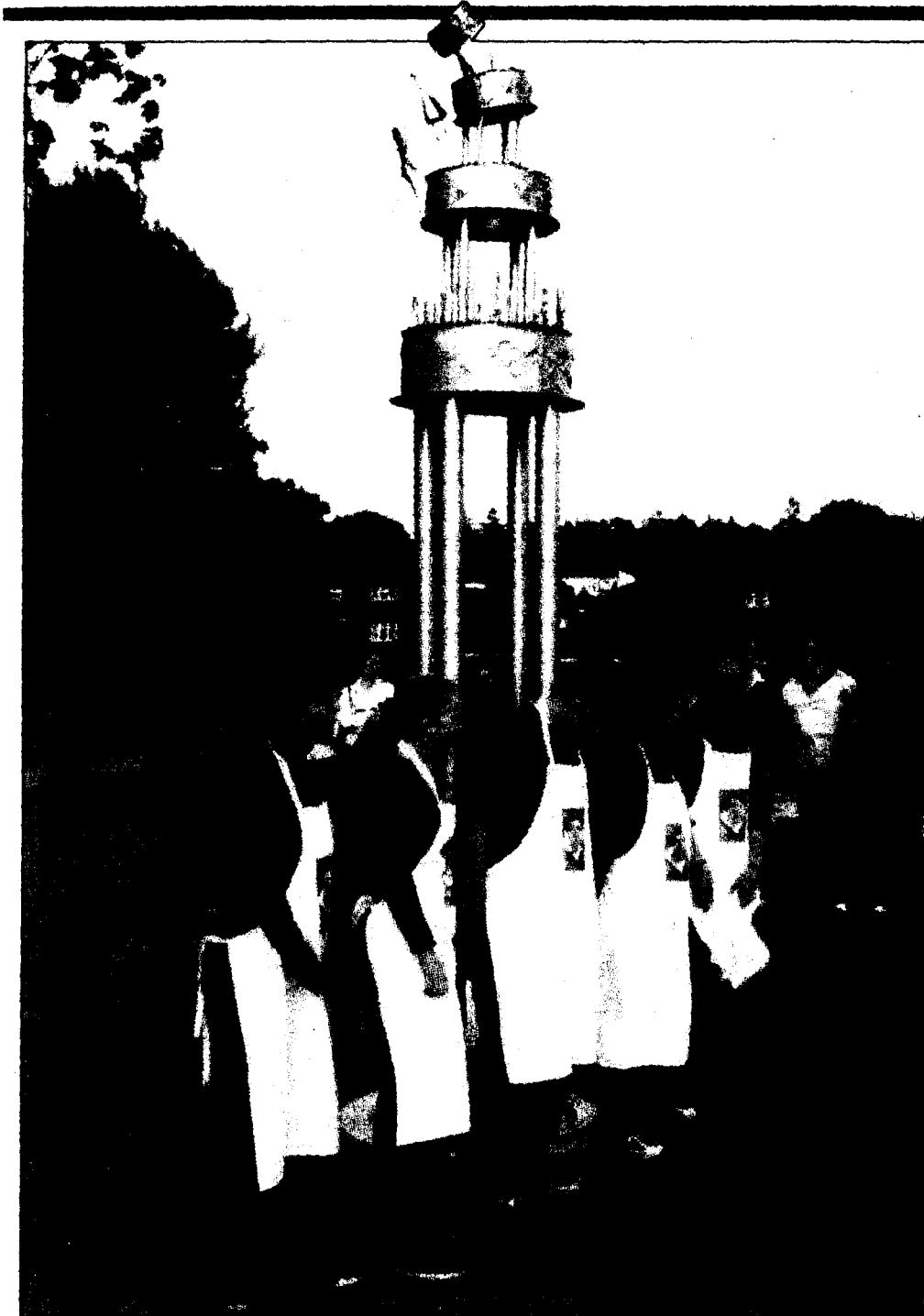


Jayne Stillman

Module 3:

**How have I improved my learning and provision
for the arts using lottery grant funding?**



Cordon bleu: the We All Love a Piece of Cake sculpture is revealed

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Abstract:

My ability to analyse and discuss my own learning has provided the framework for reflecting on a community arts project that I have just completed co-ordinating. By considering my own learning I have been able to evaluate my provision of the arts for other's learning as well. This project grew out of the success of a Sculpture Park being developed in the school grounds last year. It has now provided access to the arts for an even wider audience and for an even bigger menu of activities by working again in partnership with artist blacksmith, Melissa Cole and with the new addition of a theatre production company, Hoodwink.

'Creativity is at the core of my practice and providing the means for it to happen' (Stillman 2001) (PF1 and PF2).

Moving on from the previous arts project and my previous research comments, in this assignment I have reviewed the events of the last twelve months and tracked the improvement in learning and the provision of the arts. It is by considering the opportunities and experiences for creativity that I have provided with a lottery-funded project, 'Forged and Gorged' that I have considered my learning and that offered to others. Using video, photographs, the cookery book and sculptures created from the project and questionnaires to participants and audiences I have been able to question my practice and learning. I have also considered and reflected on the learning of pupils, researchers and the community about the arts.

Through an enquiry of aiming to elicit my implicit values, my living theory, I analysed my learning and that of others. I found that my values are intricately linked to my personal aesthetic make-up, like DNA they are unique to me. I was able to identify three values that strongly shaped the execution of the arts project. They were, that the arts are for all; everyone should have access to them, a need to acknowledge the arts and not underestimate them and my personal aesthetic needs for design and creativity. By relating and supporting my enquiry with educational research and literature my thinking and learning has moved forward.

My findings were that an open-minded view to education, one that offers opportunities and that accesses creativity is a valuable one. Initiatives and partnerships through residencies incite new energy and invigorate learning with a taste of something different. A community arts project such as 'Forged and Gorged' permits these connections beyond the realms of education in school and offers transforming possibilities. As with this project, those involved either as a participator or as a spectator of it cannot have failed to have a lasting impression. My learning and that of others have been elicited with the opportunity of creativity. This is important because it suggests possibilities for accessing future learning. This is particularly poignant as the very act of exercising this project and entertaining the school and the community with it's benefits has put the school in a position to recently

acquire Artsmark¹ status and the school is now organising an application to be a specialist Arts College. My contribution to this is that the provision of these arts opportunities has provided evidence to support an application from the school for such an accolade. I feel that my ideas and achievements are shaping the future of my school.

Background:

I have now been at Westwood St Thomas' school for five and a half years and I have been the Head of the Art Department for three and a half of those. We successfully deliver courses to years 9-13 and achieve good results. A vision I had for the school was to have a Sculpture Park and this was achieved in July 2001. The success of this and the nature of having an artist in residence was to continue and expand into a further arts project that would encompass the wider community of the surrounding housing estate and other art forms. This celebrates my passion for creativity and designing an opportunities culture for participation in the arts.

The arts projects that I have co-ordinated over the past two years have provided the focus for my educational research for my MA (Education). Recently I was involved in talking to some visiting Canadian teachers about my assignments for the MA programme, my practice and project organisation. This was a pivotal opportunity for me as it permitted my ideas to be shared with others beyond my colleagues and fellow MA researchers along with assisting my own reflection of my practice and achievements. It was a validation of my living theory (Whitehead pg. 68 1989).

My methodology for conducting this enquiry employs evidence from my previous MA modules (PF1 and PF2), an evaluation document that I compiled for the lottery funding (PF3), questionnaires to students, staff and the community (PF4), a video of me speaking to some Canadian educational researchers (PF5), project application (PF6) and the cookery book(PF6).

In accordance with the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 1992) I have addressed my responsibilities to all involved in this project and I have negotiated access and considered confidentiality.

The Activity:

In order for me to pursue this enquiry I felt that I had to analyse and identify my living theory. By this I mean the values and characteristics that are unique to me and that shape and influence the things I do. My quest for this will be the skeleton for this piece of research. I will be asking what it is that I do? And how and why it is that I do it as I live my professional values? As a teacher do I not just plan and teach activities in order to bring about learning? The answer to the latter is no, as I always deliver lessons and opportunities that

¹ Artsmark is an award to schools from the Arts council to acknowledge a certain standard of commitment of arts provision.

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embody my values, interests and beliefs. I guess what I am trying to do is to elicit my implicit values and make them explicit. At the core of me being a teacher I am always a learner too. To experience and partake in new information energises my thinking and refreshes my mind. It is by doing this that I also instruct others. I propose that by operating in this way I am 'being a person' as Pring (2000) purports.

In my previous educational research units I have said that creativity is central to my motivation and a Regional Arts Education conference² I attended acted to formalise my ideas for creativity in a classroom context. The result of this was the introduction of an artist in residence to the school and some funding to support community initiatives. It was the key to open up my ideals and work them into my teaching. The conference supported my ideas and determinations. These are that the arts are an integral part of an education and should not be marginalised with the government initiatives and strategies such as literacy and numeracy. Because of this I am defensive of my subject specialism and I aim to raise the profile of art where possible. I believe that this shows a value of mine in action: a need to acknowledge the arts and not underestimate them.

The recent 'Forged and Gorged' project illustrates the 'human goal' element (Whitehead pg.71 1989). My value of raising the profile of the arts is an action that has concomitantly led to educational development: my provision of the arts has also provided learning. In the three and a half years since the conception of my ideas, the development in the arts took a huge leap in terms of what was available and who was involved. My recognition of this fact is witnessed on the video when I am be seen saying, 'It's not what you would expect.'(PF5). I have just spoken to some Canadian teachers about my educational research and as I put a video on the singing and music bursts out and takes me by surprise! From my wanting to shout about the arts I am literally seen witnessing that I have got others to do it for me. I have empowered and committed others to enforce my living theory.

The enormity of the arts project and the power of it are beyond my expectations. My own learning from this is that anything really is possible with vision and energy. I say, 'This is taking creativity into new dimensions using food.'(PF5) Can I attribute this to Jack Whitehead's concept of, 'a living contradiction?' (1989). That is the experience of holding educational values and the experience of their negation. By viewing the videotape of the performance (PF5) in isolation and without reference to what it is actually being

² The conference, "Creativity, Culture and Education: All our futures" (December 1998) aimed to:

- To promote and raise the profile of the NACCCE report.
- To generate debate and discussion.
- To reinforce regional approach.
- To develop and extend creative partnerships.

performance (PF5) in isolation and without reference to what it is actually being achieved. That is, without dialogue or written explanation it does not reveal my educational values or the learning that has taken place. Yes it is a tribute to them but it does not categorically say this. It is when used in conjunction with me talking to the Canadian visitors that my intentions and theories concerning creativity are elicited. I have not negated my values they are just not explicitly revealed. I propose that this does not matter, as the evidence is available when searched for to qualify what has happened. For instance when watching the video of myself showing the Forged and Gorged (PF5) event, I feel an immense sense of achievement. I can see myself talking about the work done by playing an extract of the arts performance. It is at this moment that 'I' am seeing my living theory being observed and discussed with others.

My learning is taking place through the visual record of video. In terms of assisting others' learning it occurs both through participation and observation. I realise that my learning as both an individual and as an education researcher is happening as I advise others about both my practice and my research. My research and knowledge from the community arts project is employed to advise other teachers how they could approach an 'action research' assignment. I am being used as a resource to communicate to some researchers about my learning and for them to learn at the same time. In order to validate this claim, as Whitehead (1989) states, this involves testing my claim about educational development. This is done with a 'unit of appraisal' (Whitehead 1989, pg72). My chosen unit of appraisal that I have to support my claim to educational development is in the form of an e. mail reply from Sarah Fletcher³. "I think the video when you were talking to the Canadians was a fantastic tribute to your work – your professional values and the living theory you are evolving as your understandings of your teaching and how your pupils learn best was so clearly communicated." For me the key to Sarah's comment is 'evolving.' I feel that I am in my research trying to unfold something whilst it is happening. I am unpicking my work to decipher my own learning. Through sharing my ideas I claim that I have knowledge and that others want to hear what I have to say.

Whilst talking to the Canadian visitors I am communicating what education is from an education researcher's point of view. In terms of assisting the students⁴ I am telling them about education in the U.K. and about educational research and how it works in relation to the Master of Arts programme:

Me. "What it did was to help me to think about what I did and achieved, not only for me but students, staff, and the community."

³ Sarah Fletcher is a lecturer at Bath University who accompanied the party of Canadian visitors to my talk on 1/3/2002 and she was responsible for organising the video recording. She was later to comment about this in an e-mail-received on 31/7/2002.

⁴ The Canadian visitors were students enquiring about the masters educational research degrees in this country. They visited my school to hear from some of the students who were pursuing the MA programme with Bath University. I was asked to talk about my research.