Inspiring jewellery

1. Introduction

This project aimed to inspire learners, using plants as a stimulus, to create interesting and imaginative jewellery designs.

It was inspired by an event run by a local authority and the Scottish Arts Council called The Welcome Gait. The project was an opportunity for the school to work with partners from the Creative Industries sector. Professional jeweller, Suilven Plazalska, was approached because she used aspects of scientific research as the starting point for her own work. This provided relevance to the activity as the S1 pupils who took part in the project could see connections between their own designs and the world of work.

2. Process

The science and art departments planned the project together and agreed the priorities and tasks, for example:

- exploring aspects of plant reproduction
- arranging a visit to the Botanic Gardens for the pupils
- onsite classroom activities at the Botanic Gardens
- discussing the project with the pupils.

Input from the experts - The Botanic Gardens education officer

Pupils visited the Botanic Gardens to reinforce and consolidate their prior learning on plants and cells and to explore different forms of plant structures.

The Botanic gardens education officer conducted a tour including:

- the Kibble Palace Glasshouse (an ‘A’ listed 19th century, curvilinear iron structure)

- the main greenhouses, originally built in teak in the early 1880s, which have recently been restored
- significant plant collections including a large collection of tropical orchids
- the national collection of begonia species
- the national collection of tree ferns (Dicksoniaceae)
- the tropical plant collections, including economic plants
- a large collection of tree and shrubs in the grounds
- marble statues in the Kibble Palace.

Input from the experts - The jewellery designer

Back at school, Suilven Plazalska met with the pupils and staff to discuss her work and explain her influences. She demonstrated a range of jewellery techniques such as curving, scoring, folding and layering and explained how they related to her jewellery designs.

3. Implementation

Stage 1

Nature is an endless source of creative inspiration. By studying and analysing nature's forms, pupils explored how plant shapes could be used in their designs.

During the visit pupils were given the opportunity to collect digital images of interesting and unusual natural forms which would then be used as stimuli for their jewellery designs. Using these images of natural forms, they created a visual resource bank which could inspire their jewellery designs.

Listen to Audio 1 in the zip file.

Stage 2

Throughout the project, pupils also learned about aspects of science and developed their curiosity about the natural environment. They had opportunities to investigate the factors affecting plant growth and develop their understanding of why plants are vital to sustaining life on Earth.

Back in the art and design department pupils were asked to identify a shape which they could repeat to produce a pattern or motif, based on the digital images they had collected. Expressing ideas, thoughts and feelings through creativity and self-expression were at the centre of this activity.

Using their problem solving and analytical thinking skills, pupils selected and described, both verbally and through observational drawing, the chosen forms to be used in their design.

In the example above, the pupils considered the extent to which certain leaves of the plant were interesting and had the potential to inspire a piece of jewellery. The selections were then translated into paper form and the pupils considered how these could be incorporated within the jewellery design.

Stage 3

The visiting jewellery designer and teachers taught basic jewellery making techniques through a jewellery design workshop using ‘cells and flowers’ as the theme. Pupils were then given opportunities to practise different techniques before embarking on their final piece.

The pattern or motif was developed into a piece of jewellery using only paper, card, string, staples and masking tape. Throughout the project pupils were encouraged to make their own choices and decisions. The final design incorporated the shape they selected from the digital photographs.

Pupils were asked to critically evaluate their work as it progressed and to continually consider what changes could be made.

In the attached audio file a pupil sums up how much she enjoyed the project.

Listen to Audio 2. In the zip file.

4. What was the impact?

The learners' experience

Listen to Audio 3 in the zip file.

The project encouraged the learners to tap into their natural curiosity . It offered them opportunities to be creative and imaginative, progressively developing skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes by making connections across learning in art and design and sciences.

Throughout the project pupil evaluations highlighted the development of new knowledge in a range of areas, from pattern making to design processes. Pupils also stated that the project had helped them understand how knowledge in one subject can be transferred and built upon in another.

The teachers' experience

Listen to Audio 4 in the zip file.

The teachers highlighted that the project had provided a great learning experience for all involved because it:

- promoted collegial working
- offered opportunities to involve external partners
- offered opportunities to contextualise learning
- made learning relevant
- offered a CPD opportunity for colleagues.

The science department noted that pupil interest and motivation had improved and that the profile of biology had been raised in the school. Staff felt it had inspired them to try to develop further opportunities for making connections across learning.

The pupils' learning experiences were enhanced through their interaction with external organisations and individuals. It also provided a valuable opportunity to foster partnerships and share CPD opportunities.

5. Next steps

The following improvements were suggested:

1. Some adjustments to be made to the pace of learning in the jewellery design task, which will result in more time being allocated to investigating and developing ideas.
2. Consideration to be given to broadening the choice of materials used, for example, 'found objects', plastics and other recyclable materials (reflecting those used by the professional designer).
3. Learning activities to be reorganised to allow more scope for group work and opportunities for pupils to evaluate their work and the work of others.
4. The school to arrange for input from the designer at the start of the project to facilitate the generation of ideas at an earlier point in the process.

Consideration to be given to providing opportunities for the display and presentation of pupils' work.

6. Resources

The Botanic Gardens education officer

By visiting the Botanic Gardens the pupils had the opportunity to see plants from around the world and to choose their own images for future reference using digital media.

Digital images

Stimuli could be drawn from a variety of sources, for example:

- online resources
- digital images
- pupils' own drawings
- books or magazines
- the environment.

Reading

Some helpful books on this subject include:

- The Complete Metal-smith – Tim McCreight
- Handbook of Jewellery Techniques – Carles Codona
- Jewellery and Silver-smithing Techniques – Carles Codona
- Fabulous Jewellery from Found Objects: Creative Projects, Simple Techniques – Marthe Le Van