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Outstanding promotion of equality and diversity through the visual arts: Barton Peveril College

URN: 130701

Area: South East

Date published: 8 April 2011

Reference: 120308

Brief description

This example shows how students develop a sound understanding of equality and diversity through their personal exploration of themes in their art and design work.

Overview – the college’s message

‘There are two main strands to the promotion of equality and diversity. At one level, it is threaded through how we work with our students, with a strong focus on their individual needs and interests, from when they first come to open days and taster sessions right to the end of their course. The second strand is using opportunities through our teaching to help students to explore themes and issues related to difference and diversity. We don’t generally devise specific ‘equality and diversity’ projects, but support students to tackle some difficult and often challenging themes in their choice of subject matter, and by reference to the work and practice of a wide range of historical and contemporary artists and designers. When introducing projects, we make sure we include visual examples which reflect very diverse periods and cultures to stimulate discussion and debate, which challenges students to think beyond the obvious. We use contextual studies to encourage students not only to analyse the formal aspects of art and design work, but to understand the context in which the work is made, and to explore its possible meanings and the impact of the artist’s circumstances and experiences on the work produced.’



Lynne Milton, Head of Art and Design

The good practice in detail

Equality and diversity themes are integrated into projects in all art and design courses. Teachers draw on wide-ranging cultural references to create lively visual presentations which help students to appreciate how contemporary practice is affected by, and respond to, a broad range of social, political, cultural and economic influences. Staff use large displays in the art and design studios to highlight multicultural influences in the history of art, and display examples of work by artists who have experienced various physical disabilities or mental ill health, or whose work explores such themes. Students are also made aware of artists whose work explores various aspects of personal or social identity, including race, ethnicity, and sexuality.

Equality and diversity in action – examples in lessons and practical work

Students in textiles explore the varied multi-cultural influences on western fashion design. Lorna Miller, the course leader for textiles, is very keen that students develop their understanding of the different cultures they refer to in developing their own [work](#). When students use African art or bead work as inspiration for their own designs, Lorna ensures that students explore the symbolism and meaning inherent in this work, as well as analysing the more formal aspects of use of colour, structure material and technique. They also discuss different western interpretations of African culture and consider how these views are mediated through tourism and the media.

When considering the work of different designers, students are introduced to the varied historical and cultural influences, which have informed designers' work. Teachers make good use of a 'split-screen' slide show to highlight the visual connections between the work of contemporary designers and their sources of influence. These images stimulate debate and discussion of the different ways that designers use their source material, but also the extent to which contemporary designers understand the cultures they borrow from, or whether they are simply using the bits they want, without regard for the original context. For example, students discussed the criticism levelled at John Galliano by Bob Marley's daughter for using Rastafarian imagery and colour, without appreciating its symbolic meaning.

The first [project](#) of the AS-level graphic design course, exploring different treatment of a letter form, includes a section on 'designing for the blind and visually impaired'. Joel Horner, the course leader for graphics, has overseen this project which was created by Sarah Bridger. Students explore different ways of making images and information accessible to blind or visually impaired people, for example by experimenting with low relief and embossed letter forms, raised surfaces and texture and working with the Braille alphabet. They also explore the importance of colour and tonal contrast in making text easily readable. Joel says, 'Thinking about the qualities of good design which are accessible to the visually impaired feeds into other projects and supports better reflection and more mature decision making in students' personal work. We think this has contributed to the improvement in the quality of students' work and in their grades over the last few years.'



In fine art, a presentation on sculptors' different approaches to the human figure brings together historical and contemporary images and provokes discussion about artistic intention and the interpretation of different artistic responses. For example, students explored similarities and differences between two fragmented female forms, one being the classical sculpture 'Venus de Milo' and the other a contemporary sculpture of 'Alison Lapper', a physically disabled woman, which Quinn exhibited on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square. This opened up a discussion about the use of Thalidomide, and a debate about the politics of public art and public spaces as well as issues of access to spaces and the accessibility of modern art. Rob French, course leader for fine art, commented that students really enjoyed the intellectual challenge posed by such discussion and were highly motivated by exploring complex, and sometimes controversial, ideas and imagery.

In **textiles**, students work on a diverse range of themes, derives from their own individual interests. One student with a particular interest in folk music researched British folk traditions, using Morris dance and costume as a starting point for experimental samples with materials and techniques. Another chose to explore punk rock and the designer Vivienne Westwood's work of this period. This led to research into a range of cultural and historical references, including the social and military use of tartan, the Anglo-Scottish wars of the 18th century; the politicisation of tartan as a form of expressing identity and rebellion; and the prevailing social and political climate of the 1970s which influenced punk rock and anti-establishment music and design.

Themes for students' collections for the recent fashion show included British and multicultural heritage; inspiration from Jamaica, Africa and India; women's roles in the 1950s; and personal identity based on memories and family history.

What do the students say?

Students say that their exploration of often complex and challenging themes comes naturally out of their work, as a product of their research, experimentation and their own experiences. Some students also make use of the extended project as a way of exploring a personal interest in more depth. For example, one student chose to research female self-portraits, which led her to explore the role and treatment of women artists in different historical periods, and in contemporary art, as well as how male and female artists represent themselves and how this is viewed by audiences and critics. Another student's project based on her family history involved exploring religious and racial persecution during the Second World War, the effect of immigration and internment and assimilation into a new, but foreign culture. A photography student used the theme of 'measurement' to explore highly personal and sensitive issues related to female **body image**, media representation and pressures experienced by teenage girls.

What's the impact of all this work?

The ethos at the college is strongly focused on supporting students to devise their own work in response to open-ended themes, with their work becoming increasingly personalised as they move to the second year of A level. A number of students, especially those taking two or more art subjects, research areas of personal interest through completing the extended project.

And it shows in the results achieved by the students. Over 400 take AS-level courses in art and design and around 300 students take A-level courses each year. Students' achievement in art and design subjects is consistently above the national average. In 2010, success rates

on AS and A-level art and design courses were above the already high national averages for these subjects, and the proportion of students achieving high grade passes (A and B grades) was also significantly above that seen nationally. In the college's most recent [inspection](#) in February 2010, art and design was judged outstanding, as was the promotion of equality and diversity within the subject.

The college's background

[Barton Peveril College](#) is a sixth form college in Eastleigh, with around 2,400 full-time students aged 16 to 18, and 1,200 adult learners, most of whom study part-time. The vast majority of full-time students take advanced level courses. The college offers a wide range of AS and A levels in both academic and applied subjects. Art and design subjects include fine art, photography, graphic design, textiles, moving image, sculpture and product design.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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