

FUTURETOWN AND BEYOND

Phase Two: 'e-topias'

Welcome Back - to the Future.

Lead artist Peter Dunn from art.e @ The Art of Change writes:

For all who took part in the 'You-topias' project last term, I would first like to say how successful it was. There were lots of very interesting and diverse materials for the website and congratulations to both teachers and young people for making it such a success.

We are now moving into Phase Two where participants are asked to explore and develop their 'Future Visions'. This stage will not only include schools but also community groups in the area. It is vital that these 'visions' reflect the specific needs and aspirations of the communities they come from, both to reflect their diversity – across cultures, ages and abilities - and to create the possibility for practical realisation of these 'visions', even if they are set in an unknowable future. In this sense reference to generalised 'utopias' may not be very useful, although we wouldn't discourage any group who feels they need to address the 'bigger picture' in order to express their ideas. These will form the first strata of a database of 'futures' as a growing resource; a 'Monument to the Unknown Citizen'.

Below are the areas we would like schools' participants to explore, not only as an arts project but across the curriculum, from any perspective that you/they wish to adopt. This could be a 'Citizenship' project, design and/or technology, environmental or social studies – or any other area that you would see as appropriate. We would like participants to address the following:

- 1. Changes to the Town Centre:** how do they see the future of their town, what – for them – would make it a better place to be. They should be encouraged to think about projecting themselves into this future, how old might they be, would they still be at school or might they be working or in higher education. How might this 'future' affect the changes they would like to see take place? We would like to see these as specific and practical as possible, without of course limiting their imaginations.
- 2. Changes to their 'home' environment,** what they do 'out of school': this could include the streets where they live, the facilities and amenities, their play activities etc. – what would give them a better life outside school. It should not include, however, any issues related to their intimate personal and family life. This is for two reasons: firstly this material will go onto the website and become public; secondly these should be issues that might be addressed by the borough council and/or similar agencies.

Ideally we would like participants to do both and to make a relationship between their neighbourhood and an element of the Town Centre. This could result in a

form of ‘neighbourhood twinning’, linking the centre and the neighbourhoods. However, if you are unable to undertake both we would like you to prioritise the Town Centre.

Method:

It is important that schools and co-ordinating teachers custom this to their own requirements. However below are some suggestions.

Stage one: Research and Development.

If you are doing 1 & 2, you may wish to explore a ‘local site’ (option 2) before moving on to exploring the Town Centre. Encourage pupils to explore the ‘site’, to look at the above environments critically with an eye to change. To analyse what they see as ‘not working for them’, to establish what options there may be for change. Alternatively they may have an idea which is not about what is ‘not working’ but on an aspiration that has not been recognised or expressed yet. They do not have to take cost into account in deciding whether they should put forward an option (though in some instances – particularly with more advanced students - they may be encouraged to think about whether it might be expensive or not).

Stage Two: Developing the Proposal.

Having established their preferred option for change, they need to think about the best way of presenting this, to communicate clearly and precisely what it is they want changed and how it would make things better. How would the change be manifest, what would it look like, how would people behave or benefit as a result.

For more advanced students it might be worth them exploring the following:

- *A SWOT analysis: the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats of such a scheme. This would involve your pupils in drawing up a list under each of these categories, encouraging them to be as honest as possible – particularly with the Weaknesses of their scheme and Threats against it being realised. This should not be used as a means to limit their imagination but as a means to help develop a sense of what additional information is needed, or other things that need to be in place before it becomes possible. This ‘reality check’ may give them a sense of whether it is something that can happen quickly or in the long term, can give a sense of whether it is an easy thing to do or a difficult one. It should not be used to say the scheme is impossible. For example, if a scheme involved time travel, then we should not say this cannot be done. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that the practical problems of time travel would have to be solved first and therefore the scheme may be very difficult, long term, expensive and the outcome uncertain. And this may encourage thinking about ‘time travel’ in a different, perhaps metaphoric or poetic way rather than discouraging it altogether.*
- *Have they seen or heard of something similar elsewhere? If so, do they know if it has worked well, and if so how. If they think this is unique, what might they put in place to test whether or not it will work.*

• *Who will benefit. Do they think a lot of people will benefit or just a small number. Is it limited to one sector of society (e.g. someone of their age) or does it have wider benefits.*

Stage three: Communicating the proposal.

Ask them to try and break down the proposal into different elements and decide what the best method is to most clearly communicate these to make the scheme understandable to others. Do they need to make drawings, models, diagrams, write texts. How do they then combine these into a total 'package' to excite and stimulate people into believing in their 'vision'? Students might be encouraged to present this material to their peers, to see if it is communicating in the way they think. Where possible and appropriate, students should then amend their proposals in response to this before presenting the material for inclusion on the Website. (Detailed technical specs for this will be provided as before).

TIMESCALE

Unlike last year where we had a relatively short time-scale, we now have a 'rolling programme' across the rest of the school year. So you can organise the projects to suit your own time-scales and curriculum requirements and present the results at any time during the year. Like last year, we will be organising an exhibition and presentation at the end of the year (late June/early July) but we will discuss the timing with you during one of the Briefing Meetings that we will arrange over the coming months.

COMMUNICATIONS

Now that the website is up and running you can raise any questions or problems, put forward ideas, proposals, on the Website in the 'Forum' section.

Access the website via: www.towncentric.co.uk >click on 'Learn' > click on Futuretown > click on Futuretown and Beyond > then in the centre of this page you will see in yellow 'Futuretown and Beyond.' Click here and you go to the 'Futuretown And Beyond' site. Click anywhere on the title page - 'Forum' is one of the options on the top menu bar.

You can call Peter Dunn direct on 020 7987 7921 mobile: 07976 835 133.
Or email him at: <mailto:pete@artofchange.demon.co.uk>.

You can call Brian Portway at TOWNCENTRIC on: (01474) 337315
Or email him: <mailto:town.centre.initiative@gravesham.gov.uk>

Towards the end of the year we are hoping to set up links, not only between the schools in Gravesend (though you can do this now through the website -see above) but with community groups and other schools elsewhere, hopefully including places in Europe.

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