

## **Digital Footprints and a Museum of Wheels, an article published in AD: The National Society for Education in Art and Design's magazine (Issue 5, Autumn 2012)**

Two years ago, I took on an incredible creative learning challenge which continues to pay dividends to this day. The challenge was issued by Ewan McIntosh who is regarded as one of Europe's foremost experts in digital media for public services. My pledge to Ewan was to embrace something new for an hour a day for 100 days and to use new technology to document and reflect on the experience.

The challenge was issued at a virtual network training day facilitated by Creativity Culture and Education which I was invited to attend as Fulbridge School of Creativity's Creative Agent, (through the Creative Partnerships programme). Fulbridge School is a large primary school in Peterborough with an established creative curriculum and amazing themed corridors which transport children from the pyramids of ancient Egypt to a WW2 bunker and almost everything in between.

With ten years experience of working as a creative learning practitioner, project manager and consultant in schools, galleries and museums, I was confident that I could take Fulbridge a step further on their creative journey, but as a self-confessed technophobe I felt sure that I was missing a turning that would take us to a world of new possibilities.

I decided to invest my 100 hours in embracing social media; I wanted to know how different spaces were used, for what and by whom. I was interested in how my challenge could support the young people, teachers and practitioners that I was working with to document, reflect and share their creative learning and if it would change my practice.

I gave myself permission to fuff, tinker, explore and play with social media. I allowed myself the luxury of indulging in obsessive behaviour if I found something that I connected with and applied equal effort to master the stuff that I found impossible. By my 100<sup>th</sup> hour I had created a digital footprint through engaging with a myriad of social media platforms and had connected with an army of like-minded people online.

My next challenge was a self imposed one, that being to package this new knowledge up into a desirable form to pass onto the schools that I was supporting. I had an ideal opportunity with a year-long Early Years project run in parallel with Fulbridge School and St Mary's Primary School in Grantham. Each school's reception teachers had been paired with creative practitioners to explore child centred learning. I suggested that they each set up a blog to reflect on and document their learning and with a day's training to get to grips with Wordpress, they were on their way.

The blogs went far beyond creating a digital archive for the project. They allowed planning between the teacher and practitioner pairings to happen virtually, encouraged a cross pollination of ideas between schools and provided transparency for parents and the wider school community. They gave the teachers a positive view of social media and demonstrated the benefits effective digital citizenship.

To take my social media quest further I also developed We Found Art, a self funded online project. Its purpose was to explore if creative interactions online could challenge the traditional concept of collaboration, participation and engagement and was inspired by my son's obsession with collecting pavement treasure; tiny objects that have been lost, forgotten or discarded.

I set up a Tumblr blog, facebook page and Flickr gallery and between March and August 2011 I invited people via Twitter to post their found treasures to me along with a note of where they were found and why they were chosen. I photographed the objects and accessioned them as if they were joining a gallery or museum collection. I also invited participants to upload their own content in the form of poems, stories, photographs and sound clips to the project blog.

A thriving We Found Art community soon developed which extended to a small core of dedicated supporters who offered their specialist skills offline. By August 2011 We Found Art's crowd sourced collection had grown to 210 objects and I decided to take it on tour in my caravan, The Moveable Museum of Found Objects. My first outing was the Bathing Beauties Festival in Mablethorpe where unsuspecting visitors peeped with curiosity and intrigue into carefully curated cupboards.

The We Found Art collection boasts an eclectic mix of tiny treasures from an equally eclectic mix of finders; from Lord Voldemort's body double to a museum curator, a doctor of philosophy to a proprietor of an over 50's dating agency. A collection of 46 post office issue red rubber bands made by a small boy in Manchester is a particular crowd pleaser and sits alongside tiny doll parts, the bristles from a broom, a bent nail, a headless plastic army figure and much, much, more. The Museum also features a 'golden closet' a gallery space which will host a rolling programme of photography exhibitions.

With more tour dates planned in the summer, I was tempted out of hibernation to brave February's snow to pitch up at the Lincolnshire Art and Design Conference which I hope was the first of many opportunities to 'show and tell' art and design teachers about the positive impact social media can have on the creative learning environment.