

**David Barlex,  
Julie Messenger  
and Rosalind  
Simmonds**

## This article

- focuses on two perspectives on designing and making activity, the teacher's and the pupil's
- draws conclusions about the 'success story'.

The teacher's view of a task sequence and the associated learning is sometimes quite different from the pupil's perceptions. Here David Barlex interviews a teacher, Julie Messenger, Head of Technology at Sawtry Community College in Cambridgeshire, and one of her pupils, Rosalind Simmonds, about the textiles work carried out over the last two years using the Nuffield approach and its Key Stage 3 materials.

### The teacher's view

*David Barlex*

"So tell me what Rosalind did in Year 7."

*Julie Messenger*

"It wasn't an encouraging start, really. In Year 7 she was a quiet student who found asking for help very difficult. Rosalind's Year 7 Textile course was based around the Nuffield Project Textile Resource Task TRT 3 (Making a glove puppet). She learnt several textile skills through the production of a simple wall panel. They were: pinning, tacking, using transfer crayons, using the sewing machine and adding texture to the surface of a fabric through simple embroidery stitches. She produced a simple glove puppet that lacked finish; it looked grubby from her sweaty hands during the making. Rosalind's making skills were weak; she found using the machine a frightening experience. She was definitely below average for the class."

*David Barlex*

"So what has happened in Year 8?"

*Julie Messenger*

"She has just finished her Year 8 Design and Technology course and this has been really exciting. A complete contrast to Year 7. Rosalind's self-confidence has grown and this has helped her to develop her designing and making skills. Through the Nuffield

capability task Children at play she has produced a most impressive play mat – a product that developed during the making with adaptations and adjustment from the design stage.

She became totally involved in this project and spent hours producing her play mat. I spoke to her about the production and she told me that she had had some support from mum but this was only in helping her to master the threading up of the sewing machine and attaching the backing fabric, when she had difficulties. She worked out how to pleat the fabric to create ripples on the duck pond and she placed a plastic carrier bag underneath to try and create a water sound. The best effect was still to come. When I lifted the roof of the house I was met with spiders complete with spiders web and a collection of appliquéd bats. The spiders were on elastic and could be pulled out from the roof and then returned. I could see this would be exciting for young children to play with.

I arranged for Rosalind to test out her product at the on-site nursery school. She set out complete with school camera to record her findings. She returned an hour later bursting to tell me all that had happened. She had watched children from 2 to 4 years play with her mat. She found that only the older children were able to play with it. She found that the spiders were a little small for the younger children, but the older ones realised that they were on elastic and could be pulled out from the roof."

*David Barlex*

"What's been the cause of this progress?"

*Julie Messenger*

"Her progress has been very rewarding.

I believe that the completion of resource tasks has provided Rosalind with the designing and making skills to produce work of this standard.

The course followed this plan. Some pieces of work were completed for homework, others were completed in class.

- 1) Nuffield textiles resource tasks TRT 8 'Choosing fabrics'. Here we looked at the importance of selecting the correct fabric for the situation by considering its properties. We then produced an appliqué sample. I demonstrated to three small groups, others worked on the strategies resource tasks.
- 2) Nuffield strategies resource task SRT 1 'Selecting recording tools'. We looked at recording information about young children so that it matched up with the situation for which we would be designing.
- 3) Nuffield strategies resource task SRT 3 'Interviewing skills'. I adapted this task. We worked in pairs to produce interview questions; one of the pair interviewed a nursery or primary school teacher and the other interviewed a child between the ages of 2 and 5 years. Some children returned to their old primary schools to get the information. Some students taped their responses.
- 4) Nuffield communicating ideas resource task CRT 5 was completed for homework giving the students an opportunity to learn how to present textile products.
- 5) I suggested a layout for design sheets for presenting their design ideas so that they could be developed. The layout was a series of boxes.
- 6) The final design sheet reflected exactly what the student wanted to make.
- 7) We then worked on the production of the designed play mats.
- 8) On the completion of the play mat, it was planned to test them using the user trip approach with the nursery on site."

*David Barlex*

"What is Rosalind doing now?"

*Julie Messenger*

"As Rosalind has finished early she will be able to go on to consider the cost of making the play mat and how the play mat might be packaged and possibly how it could be adapted for a larger scale production. This project will then be picked up by the modern languages department and the students will use the Internet to communicate to students in our exchange schools. Maybe they will be able to have a international view point on the evaluation of the products."

### The pupil's view

*David Barlex*

"What did you do in textiles in Year 7, Roz?"

*Roz Simmonds*

"I did this hand puppet to amuse young children. It was a bit naff really."

*David Barlex*

"What did you learn?"

*Roz Simmonds*

"It was the first time I'd used a sewing machine and I found it quite hard but I enjoyed the fabric dyeing and I did learn about the sorts of things young children liked."

*David Barlex*

"I'm interested in the play mat you've done in Year 8. How did that start?"



*Roz Simmonds*

The play mat ready to use



*Roz Simmonds*

"Mrs Messenger talked to us about doing something else for the children at the playgroup and showed us some play mats that last year's pupils had made. She told us to design a play mat. We did some resource tasks to learn about bondaweb and using the sewing machine. At first the sewing was difficult but it came back to me as I tried. We also looked at the different sorts of fabrics that would be useful for clothes to wear in different weathers."

*David Barlex*

"Where did you get your ideas from?"

*Roz Simmonds*

"In thinking about the design of the play mat I tried to imagine what young children would like. I decided that they would be interested in a farm because of the animals there and a house because they could open windows and doors and look inside. In the end I decided to go for the house but I put some of the animals that were in my farm in the

The play mat with all revealed



house. In the farm barn I'd had a spider and a bat; I put this in the roof of the house."

*David Barlex*

"How did you feel about making something so complicated?"

*Roz Simmonds*

"To begin with I wasn't sure whether I would be able to make it; I couldn't tell with just my design drawing in front of me. When I had the fabric there it was easier to work it out. The order in which you do things is very important and Mrs Messenger made everyone do a time plan of what they would do each lesson in order to make their design on time. To begin with I found that I didn't get all the plan finished. This was because I was still learning how to be good on the sewing machine. Once I got good I could do more than I'd planned to do so I was able to work faster. As a result I finished two weeks earlier than I thought I would so I was able to take the play mat and show it to children at the play school. I also did some work on it at home. I added things that weren't on my design. In the end what I made was better than my design."

*David Barlex*

"Mrs Messenger told me you've shown the play mat to the children. What happened?"

*Roz Simmonds*

"When I showed the play mat to the 2-year-olds they seemed more interested in my camera and me taking photos of them than in the play mat. When I showed the play mat to two 5-year-olds they played with it for a long time and weren't bothered by my camera. They liked opening the windows and the doors and finding the animals in the house. They really liked the noises they made. I'd fitted some of them with bells and squeakers. I wanted to talk to these children about the play mat but one was very shy and the other one wouldn't stay still long enough."

*David Barlex*

"Did you get help from anyone?"

*Roz Simmonds*

"Well apart from Mrs Messenger my Mum helped me choose some of the things I needed – Velcro, squeakers and bells but she wouldn't help me with the sewing machine even though I asked her to."

*David Barlex*

"What do you think you've learned from all this?"

*Roz Simmonds*

"I think I've learned more about what young children like. I've certainly got better on the



*A user trip*

sewing machine; when I started I was really nervous now I'm much more confident. I've also learned a bit about choosing fabrics. I chose white fabric for the backing and when I was hand sewing sitting on the floor at home I noticed that it got dirty quickly. It would have been better to make the backing from a darker fabric."

#### Some comments

A success story and remarkable agreement in teacher and pupil perception. I believe that this is because

- the teacher had a very clear view of the sequence of tasks and activities making up the capability task.
- there was a range of focused practical tasks to support the learning of a relevant mix of knowledge, skill and understanding. Their influence on the pupil's progress is apparent.
- It is noteworthy that the teacher structured the capability task as it progressed.
- Although Julie does not mention the time plan in her account it helped Roz a great deal and she gained considerable satisfaction and confidence in getting more done than was on the plan.
- Perhaps the most significant feature of Roz's account is her ability to explain the origin of her design ideas and their combination into a final solution.
- The work on evaluation strategies clearly paid dividends in Roz's approach to the children in the play group.
- Julie is convinced that she gave the class a choice in the type of product they could design and make and cites evidence of products other than play mats. Roz is convinced that she was told to make a play mat. The sensitivity with which she has responded indicates that ownership of, and deep involvement in, a task need not necessarily be dependent on originating the task.

However I would argue strongly that her success in the task is due to the following features:

- clear identification of the sort of knowledge, skill and understanding likely to be required for success;
- teaching this knowledge, skill and understanding as part of the larger task;
- providing a structure throughout the larger task that enabled the pupil to move through the task successfully.

And the quote of the article from Roz – "In the end what I made was better than my design."