

Building for Success – Regent Special School's Team Enterprise

Abstract

Many teachers of students with special educational needs are extremely skilled at taking national schemes and qualifications and developing units of work tailored to the needs of their youngsters. At Regent Special School in the West Midlands, Norma Freeman, Head of Upper School, has done precisely this – working with staff at a local community workshop, Norma has developed exciting learning opportunities for her students based around Young Enterprise and NPTC awards and supported by Nuffield materials.

Introduction

Regent Special School caters for students aged 11-19 with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD). Design and technology has been running successfully at the school for several years, despite limited workshop facilities. During the summer term 1998, the Post 16 students embarked upon a 10 week (30 hour) project to set up and run their own company as a team. A key aim of the project was to give equal opportunities to all, regardless of ability and behaviour. However, it must be stated that the programme made an enormous contribution to both citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE).

There are many schemes available to encourage students in team work skills during design and technology activities. In the past Regent Special School students have participated in the CREST scheme at various levels. However, the 'Team Enterprise', part of Young Enterprise, enabled students to take part in a joint venture whilst developing many of the vocational skills needed to achieve a vocational foundation certificate.

The partnership

Prior to the project beginning, funding was applied for via the Black Country Careers Service (BCCS) residual fund. That secured, Regent Special School was able to buy in Chris Self's time, pay for materials, hire the Square One Workshop and also to pay for registration and certification for the National Proficiency Test Council (NPTC). Subsequently, the students worked on the project once a week at the Association of Community Development Agencies (ACDA) on a partnership basis with Chris Self, who offered technician support to the project.

Chris Self is an Accredited Assessor and proved to be invaluable in making this project a

success. Chris is the co-ordinator of ACDA's practical skills training project. Chris comes from a nursing background and has spent 20 years in the NHS in a variety of caring environments. He specialises in working with people with profound multiple handicaps.

Chris is also an experienced designer and, on leaving the NHS in 1994, set up his own business, designing therapeutic products for Europe's leading supplier of products for people with additional needs. The business is successful and ongoing.

Chris became associated with ACDA in 1995 and in December 1997 developed the Square One training project. This project offers the opportunity to a diverse range of community based groups to become involved in organised practical workshop opportunities using a variety of materials and techniques. The training sessions on offer are divided into the following basic categories:

- Occupational – a range of 'taster' training experiences are planned that will give participants the opportunity to take part in practical hands on learning in a number of trade subjects, for example, painting and decorating, DIY and woodcraft.
- Leisure and recreational – these sessions include a range of art and craft subjects and promote personal development and self-fulfilment through traditional craft work.
- Information sharing – these sessions are designed as basic information sharing experiences that will benefit participants by giving information that can be used in the future to promote the quality of life, for example, safety in the home, survival do it yourself, road safety etc.

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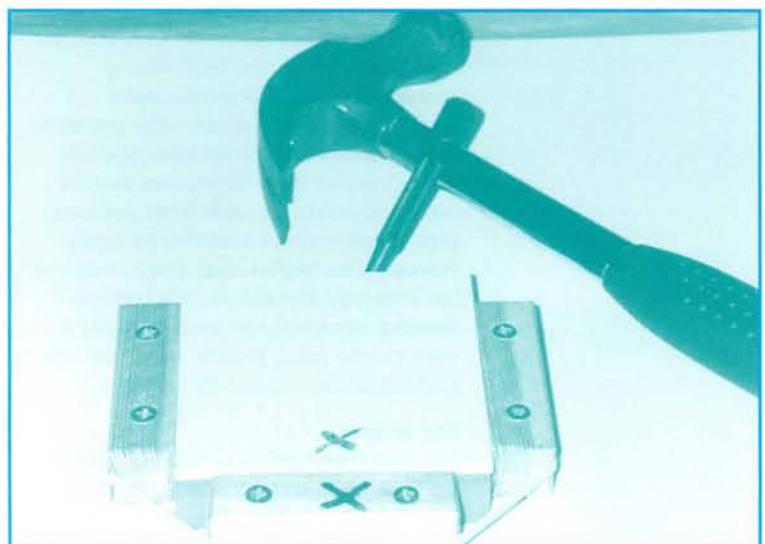


Figure 1: A jig was used to keep the game boards in place.

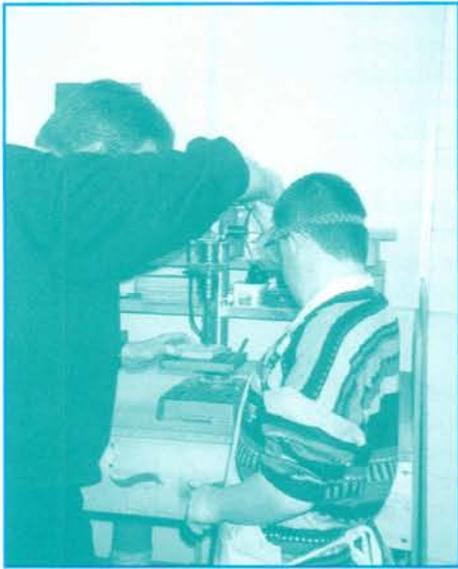


Figure 2: Chris helped students to drill holes into the boards.



Figure 3: The workshop was kept tidy using an industrial vacuum.

Planning the project

The project was started off with the Nuffield Design and Technology materials as a base for teaching the skills required. There were several problems that had to be overcome to enable all students to achieve a successful outcome:

- Behaviour – if students are motivated to make the final product it acts as a positive reinforcer.
- Short concentration span – provide a wide variety of focused tasks to teach the skills necessary to complete the final product.
- Impatience – completed 25 game packs before going on to make another 75 sets. A finished product inspired the students to keep going.
- Poor co-ordination – provide plenty of help and encouragement. Chris' aids were particularly useful in overcoming some co-ordination hurdles.

Nuffield support

As the project unfolded it was recognised that the students would need (and want) a permanent record of decisions made, knowledge acquired and new skills practised. Whilst much of the accreditation would be through teacher observation, more tangible outcomes such as the made items and some paper based evidence were also necessary. Previously the Nuffield Key Stage 3 materials had been used, but with the new booklets designed specifically for younger pupils or students with learning difficulties, there was a ready made tool to assist the students.

The project

The team comprised of 13 students aged 16-19. For three hours each Monday the team headed off to Square One Workshop, to work on their project. The workshop was well stocked with

prototype equipment that the students had not come across before, thus giving them the opportunity to learn and practise new practical skills (levels A and B). The team decided that their company would design and make a unique wooden game for sale. The initial aim of the enterprise was to make 25 completed game packs, although in the long run the team went on to produce 100 packs.

Each session involved a problem-solving task. Inspired by an initial idea from Chris, the students discussed how to produce a game base from the MDF board and how to turn the dowel into pegs. A flip chart was used to draw up a list of tools and equipment needed, and to outline the manufacturing procedure. Chris cut the MDF board to size and the students sanded them down.

The students in the team had a wide range of abilities. This meant that each student had to be assessed on their ability to carry out tasks. Alternative methods were thought up for problem areas, so that each student could participate as fully as possible in each stage of the production. A lack of coordination did not need to obstruct capability. Thus various aids were produced by Chris Self to overcome such problems.

One such piece was a jig to keep the game boards in place. A template was positioned over the piece of board and the nine holes were marked out using a hammer and punch. This helped the students who had difficulty with their hand and eye co-ordination and counting. Using the jig meant that each student could take part in this stage of production.

Next the holes were drilled into the boards using a pillar drill positioned over the punched holes. The students particularly enjoyed keeping the workshop tidy by clearing up the



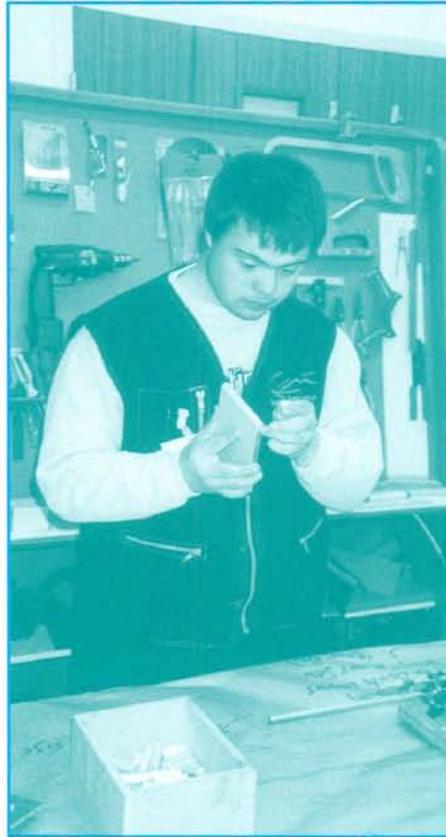
wood shavings using a special vacuum, of industrial proportion.

With the bases completed, it was then necessary to make the pegs. First the dowel was cut down to size using a mitre saw. This saw had an adjustable end stop that ensured that the lengths of dowel were all cut to exactly the same size. Some of the students required physical help with this and this help was offered by Chris who stood behind the student and, by sharing the saw handle, applied downward pressure during the sawing motion. The ends of the pegs were quite rough, so they needed to be smoothed down. Some of the children used sand paper for this task, but for those who found holding the pegs difficult, Chris developed a device based upon a pencil sharpener, which enabled the student to smooth down the peg ends.

Students experimented with several painting techniques, such as spray paint and dyes. The pegs were then dried on drilled out blocks of wood. Pegs stood in blocks – sprayed, dried, turned, sprayed, dried. Each game needed 10 pegs. To avoid the tedium of producing 1000 pegs for 100 games, it was agreed that marbles could be used for some game packs – this reduced the time and work load significantly!

Then the game rules were drawn up, typed and printed from a computer then multiple copies were made using the photocopier. Next the rules were applied to the base of the game board using adhesive spray. Now the game was ready to be packed. Each student was given a specific task and formed a 'production line'.

The games were ready to be sold – through local sales and friends. The profits made were used to buy computer hardware and software to further enhance the project.



Figures 4 and 5:
Smoothing down the
peg ends.

All of the students learnt how to handle new equipment and to create and follow new processes. Other skills gained were:

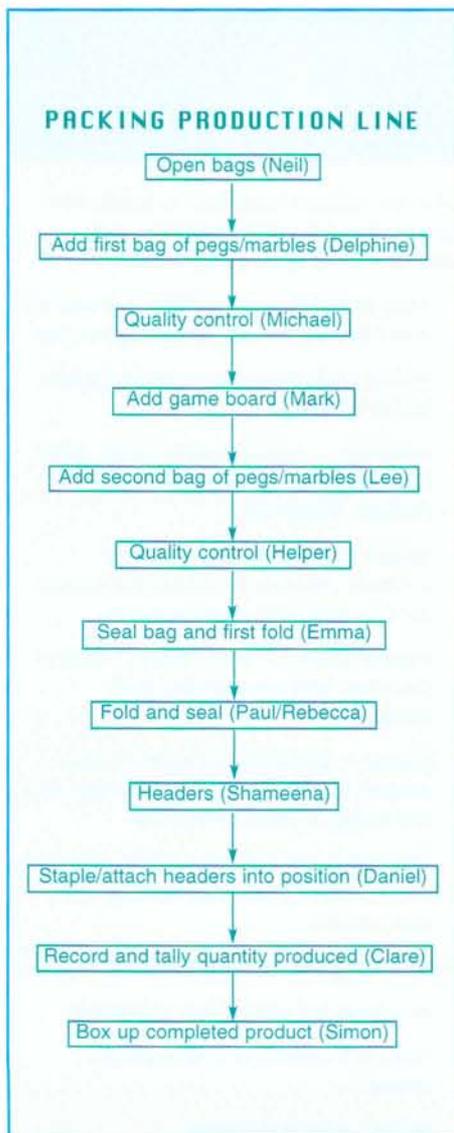
- meal preparation and cooking – preparing own lunch each week, increasing in speed
- getting ready to go out – personal pride and development
- numeracy – counting pegs, boards, holes, finished games. Pricing and selling a product. Measuring.
- information technology – using a computer, photocopier and digital camera for the project and its presentation.
- communication – vital when in a team at work and later when dealing with customers
- science – knowledge of materials and properties related to their uses. Using tools and simple scientific principles
- Personal Social Education (PSE) in a wider setting related to an adult working environment.

Without exception, each student learnt how to:

- recognise and operate new equipment
- work in a methodical and organised manner
- follow verbal instructions



Figure 6 and 7:
The team created a production line to package the games.



- pay due regard to health and safety
- finish materials accurately and effectively
- produce quality products
- work independently and as part of a team
- use ICT to prepare and reproduce instructions/game rules.

These points contributed to the students achieving the Team Enterprise Certificate and the National Proficiency Test Council. Square One is accredited to deliver six elements of pre NVQ certification that is delivered via the National Proficiency Test Council (NPTC). These are:

1. independent living – these elements are very diverse and offer the participant development in a wide variety of everyday living skills, i.e. personal hygiene, housekeeping, and managing personal finances
2. information technology – these elements are centred mainly around the operation of the computer and all of its relevant basic procedures, basic start-up, using a keyboard, accessing programs etc.
3. numeracy, literacy and communication – these elements have been designed to build basic skills in the above and use practical every day concepts to achieve this i.e. use a calendar, measure out volumes, make a telephone call etc.
4. office and reception – foundation skills building in office and reception procedure, i.e. receiving a visitor, operating a photocopier, using filing systems, etc.

Figure 8 and 9: The students learnt how to use several new tools.

5. employment – this offers the participant the opportunity to attain qualities and attributes required in the workplace and takes them through necessary practical workplace procedures, i.e. safe lifting and handling, identifying hazards, demonstrating good time keeping etc.
6. workshop practice – these elements offer the participant the opportunity to develop a diverse range of skills in the workshop environment, i.e. the use of hand tools, painting and decorating techniques, basic woodwork, and health and safety, etc.

The future

Funding has been applied for by Norma to cover a second year. It is planned to visit ACDA Square One for the next project which will bring along some younger students who are now in the sixth form and to take Regent Special School forward for the next two years. The school is reliant of funding for future courses but would hope that this could become a regular part of sixth form courses for students with severe learning difficulties.

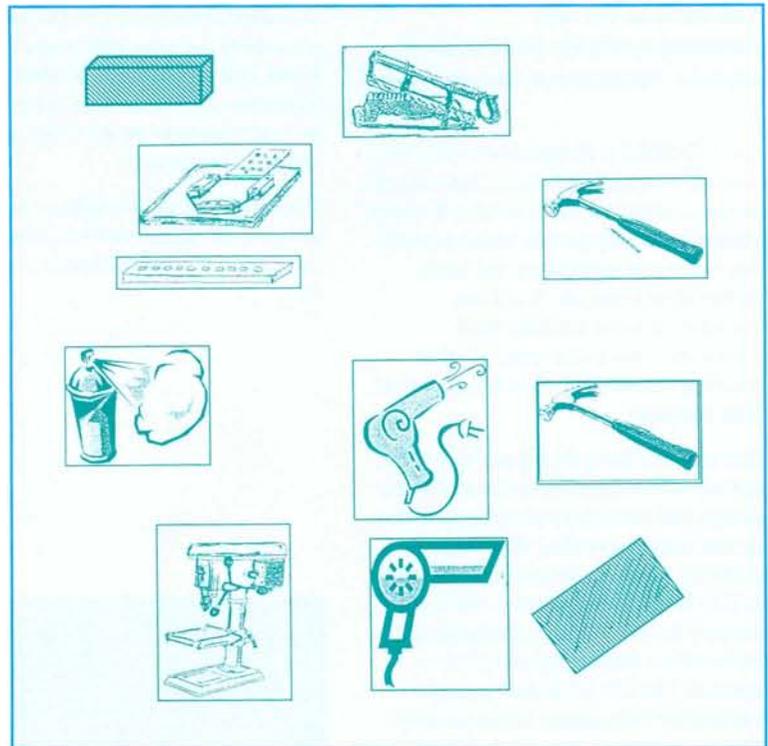
A new project will recap on old skills, develop new ones as well as build together a new team for Team Enterprise with a new project ready to market at the next Trade Fayre alongside mainstream secondary schools.

All of the students are proud of the certificates to add to their Record of Achievement/Progress File. Students who have received a certificate at A’ Level will find this an asset, especially those who are applying to colleges and training agencies. Staff have been closely involved in the accreditation process which they may find useful in their future careers. Successful partnerships have been developed by working closely with ACDA, Square One, the Nuffield Foundation as well as Team Enterprise and the Sandwell Education Business Partnership.

An unexpected bonus to this project was to be nominated and then selected for the Sandwell Quality Awards for Partnership which culminated in a presentation ceremony where the team were awarded the prestigious Gold Award. This was a total surprise and was collected by the two oldest students and was a very proud moment for everyone involved. The project certainly was a great success for the ‘Pride of Lions’ Team.

Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks to Claire Foxall (NNEB Nursery Nurse and Parent).



Designer maker	Form	Date
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My making skills
Use this chart to keep a record of the tools you use and what you can do with them. Each time you use a tool stick its picture on the form and fill in the other information. Use the Tools Chooser Chart on page 214 of the Student's Book for more information.

Tools	What I used them for	In which tasks	Date

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