Project Transfer – shifts in the social and cultural capital of Further Education construction students involved in constructing an artwork

Anna Goulding
International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies
Bruce Building
Newcastle University
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 7RU

Phone 0191 222 7508
E-mail a.m.goulding@ncl.ac.uk

Abstract

The International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies at Newcastle University has been investigating the impact of artists working with young people in cultural sites and schools. This paper focuses on Transfer by the artist Wolfgang Weileder; the construction and de-construction of a full-scale replica of Milton Keynes Gallery at Station Square, Milton Keynes by
construction students. The art project involved collaboration between the artist, two Further Education colleges and a construction company involved in the training of construction students. This paper will investigate how the different cultures interacted during the creative learning experience, concentrating on the impact upon the construction students.

*Transfer* provided training opportunities for the students, who simultaneously developed an understanding of contemporary artistic practice and began to take on ownership of the piece. Insights from this project will be presented in order to draw out implications for future collaborations.

**Key words**: Art, Further Education, construction students, social capital, cultural capital.

1. Introduction

A team of researchers at The International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies at Newcastle University was commissioned by Arts Council England, in association with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, to investigate the impact of artists working with young people (Buckley et al. in press). This paper focuses on one of the six case studies of that research project, the art project *Transfer*, using additional data from follow-up interviews to give a more in-depth longitudinal perspective. The research reported in this paper attempts to gauge the impact of *Transfer* upon the students using the constructs of social and cultural capital.
1.1 The artwork: *Transfer*

*Transfer* was a site-specific installation by the artist and professor of contemporary sculpture at Newcastle University, Wolfgang Weileder. The project was part of Milton Keynes Art Gallery’s Off-site programme. During three weeks 20 male construction students, aged 16 – 26, built and dismantled a full-size replica of the art gallery in Station Square, Milton Keynes. Whilst some walls were built up, others were taken down so at no point was the model ever complete. At the same time, photographs were taken to produce a record and time-lapse film of the project that was later projected onto the walls of the gallery. This was the final piece but the artist also considered the creation process to be part of the art work.

Weileder has completed a number of similar site-specific installations varying in scale, all aiming to contribute to the debate about the function and understanding of central urban public space and concepts of urban planning. The projects actively involve the construction students and Weileder recasts their working practices as art, attaching value to their skills and in some way renegotiating the hierarchies of art:

What I want to do is … value what they do [in] their daily life, and all of a sudden this becomes an art form. So they’re proud to be a scaffolder, and they do it and it becomes all of a sudden, a part of art (Weileder 2007 personal communication).
Weileder’s project can be seen to question the concept of the art gallery, the use of public space and the nature of collaborative art practice. Because the site of the installation is in a public place, passers-by become accidental participants because the building interferes with their everyday environment. Some become more actively involved by talking to the builders about the work and the function of public art. In this way, Weileder is creating a complex multi-layered discourse between artist, construction students, and viewers:

Because of course the project is about an understanding of public space, or how space is constructed or deconstructed. And a builder who takes down his own wall he's just built a couple of hours before definitely questions himself, what he's doing there, he changes his perception. And I hope that I trigger something within those people. For me as an artist it's important to ask questions, not really to answer them (Weileder, personal communication, 2007).

In summary, Weileder had the following aims for the project:

- To contribute to the debate about the function and understanding of central urban public space and concepts of urban planning.

- To actively involve the construction students, who develop an understanding of contemporary artistic practice and also a sense of ownership of the artwork.
• To provide training opportunities for the F.E. construction students.

1.2 Milton Keynes Gallery

Milton Keynes Gallery is a regional gallery employing 11 to 20 staff, mainly funded by Arts Council England and Milton Keynes Council. The project primarily addressed the following organisational objectives:

• To enhance the artistic programme by creating greater consistency in the gallery programme, developing artist’s Offsite Projects and increasing the breadth and quality of educational activity.

• To strengthen the Gallery’s relationship with the city of Milton Keynes, its people and communities and to improve awareness of the gallery in the regional base.

The Offsite and Education Co-ordinator noted that in developing a project in such a public place, the gallery is keen to strengthen and build upon relationships with the public, providing opportunities for public debate and discussion surrounding the gallery programme. This was achieved not only through the artwork itself but through the webcam, public access to the artist, discussions with passers-by and radio interviews with various stakeholders. The work was followed by a final presentation at Milton
Keynes Gallery in May 2007 accompanied by further interpretation material and an ‘In Conversation’ event with the artist.

However, it must be noted that measuring the impact on the wider audience fell beyond the scope for this research project.

1.3 Milton Keynes College Construction Department and R.Bau construction company

This article concentrates on the artwork in terms of the construction students. Sixteen students came from Milton Keynes College’s Construction Department and four were on placements with the Sunderland-based construction company R.Bau. Participation in the project enabled them to gain qualifications towards their National Vocational Qualification in Trowel Occupations (NVQ). Working on an art project is a very unusual way for such students to gain work based experience.

Milton Keynes College offers apprenticeships in many occupational areas. This study focuses on apprenticeships for the Bricklaying industry for learners between the ages of 16 and 24, run in conjunction with the Construction Industry Training Board (C.I.T.B.) and City and Guilds. An apprenticeship can take anything from 12 months to 4 years to complete but this depends on the ability of the individual apprentice, the needs of the employer and the type of apprenticeship. The Training Assessor for the college observed students during the project, gathering evidence towards their Level 2 National
Vocational Qualification in Trowel Occupation. This meant that candidates consistently had to conform to health and safety standards and efficient work practices.

Weileder has worked with R.Bau on previous projects and the students on placement with the company were further along in their training than the students from Milton Keynes College. R.Bau work with Sunderland and South Shields Councils, Newcastle College and the C.I.T.B. to offer apprenticeships.

1.4 Background to the research

The research reported in this paper attempts to gauge the impact of Transfer upon the construction students using the interrelated constructs of social and cultural capital. Newman and Whitehead (2006) have used the framework of capital in previous research projects because:

…it allows for a wide understanding of the ways in which learning processes contribute to the development of opportunities available to individuals in broad social and cultural contexts (Newman and Whitehead 2006: 124).

For example, it enables us to consider:

- what cultural and social factors and knowledge potentialise learning?
What learning experiences might mean in terms of broader structures such as individuals’ well-being and careers, social groupings and lifestyle choices (Newman and Whitehead 2006:125).

Furthermore, this involves a subtle understanding of learning which may involved shifts in behaviour, understanding and affect (DeSimone, Werner and Harris 2002); shifts in self-image, self-awareness and identity; shifts in interpersonal relations; shifts in aspirations (Newman and Whitehead 2006:125).

From a cultural policy perspective this is useful when considering the wider benefits of individuals’ engagement with the arts in terms of broad personal, social and civic benefits (Mason 2004).

In terms of social and cultural capital, there was potential for the students to develop professional relationships with the artist and to interact with passers-by. Explaining the piece may have altered their own perceptions of art. The intention was to explore such perceptions and to gauge whether they changed throughout the project.

*Transfer* brought together people working in completely different professions with different aims and functions. For example, the construction industry combines design and function and is profit-led, whilst the artist and art gallery are publicly-funded and aim to communicate art to the public. Did the cultures of the building site and art world interact? *Transfer* plays with levels of cultural
capital by renegotiating traditional hierarchies of art, in elevating manual skills to high art. Within an art gallery context, manual labour involved in architectural construction has not traditionally been seen as ‘art’. As such, did the participants’ view *Transfer* as a construction job or as an artwork?

Whilst there has been published research on art gallery education partnerships with primary and secondary school pupils (Buckley et al. 2008 (in press), Downing and Watson 2004, Pringle 2002, 2006, Taylor (ed.) 2006), there has been little research into art projects in further education. Research in the field tends to focus on Further Education Art and Design Courses. For example Sari Finch (2001) examined how to educate sixteen year olds for a career in art and design, looking at whether vocational or general art education approaches or both were more suitable. Relevant to this article is Clemons’ 2006 research which looked at how interior design, as a field of study, is a rapidly growing area of interest for teenagers in the United States. She notes that some art educators and curriculum specialists regard the study of this area as a practical application of the arts. Also, the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design carried out a ten year research project using a range of case studies to explore how young people, including students in Further Education, used photography to challenge visual stereotypes of disability (Stanley, 2003).

*Transfer* is unique in the way it provides training opportunities for F.E. students in apprenticeships, so researching this project contributes to knowledge of initiatives in this sector.
The principle research question this paper reports is:

How did the students’ social and cultural capital change and develop in the process of engaging with *Transfer*?

Sub-questions are:

(i) Did bridging relationships form between the artist and the students, leading students to contemplate working on other art projects?

(ii) Did *Transfer* shift students’ perceptions of contemporary art?

2. Theoretical frameworks

In understanding how the students’ attitudes to art developed during the project, the constructs of social and cultural capital were used to frame the research and analyse the data.

2.1 Social Capital

Social capital is based upon the relationships between people, and how people can use certain relationships to advance in life (Bourdieu 1998). Three types of social capital have been identified: bonding refers to links with members of families, ethnic groups or socio-economic class groups; bridging refers to links with distant friends and colleagues; linking refers to relationships between people from different social strata (Putnam 2000, 2004; Healy et al. 2001: 39). It has been argued that the networks associated with
social capital ‘sustain civil society and…enable people to act for mutual benefit’ (Stone 2001: 4).

In relation to *Transfer*, the research will investigate whether bridging relationships were formed between the artist and the students, and whether such interactions helped to develop the students’ careers, perhaps encouraging them to pursue working on other art projects.

Pierre Bourdieu describes how reproducing social capital requires ‘a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 52). The investment on the part of the individual, in terms of time and energy, is not profitable unless:

One invests in it a specific competence…and an acquired disposition to acquire and maintain this competence (Bourdieu, 1998: 52).

Will the students be able to capitalise on the relationships built up in the three-week timeframe and will they have the necessary skills to use them?

This research did not concentrate on how the students bonded with each other as the way they worked followed normal working practice on construction sites and was not specific to working on an art project. It is also beyond the scope of this paper to analyse the bonding relationships that developed when the students told their family and friends about the project, although there is data on this aspect.
2. 2 Cultural Capital

Cultural capital, as defined by Bourdieu, refers to an individual’s accumulated knowledge of, and familiarity with, bourgeois cultural practices which affects how they are able to decode and respond ‘appropriately’ to works of art (Bourdieu 1993, 1994). In museological literature, Bourdieu and Darbel’s (1966) application of the concept of cultural capital to the understanding of the ways in which visitors behave in museums and galleries and the relationship between social class, education and an individual’s ability to engage with high culture, has had much currency. An individual builds up their stock of cultural capital through exposure to these codes within society, particularly within the mutually reinforcing environments of the family, and the education system (Mason 2005: 208). Bourdieu describes how the display of artistic knowledge reinforces boundaries between social classes (Bourdieu 1994). It should be noted that Du Gay et al. (1997) have criticised Bourdieu’s overemphasis on social class structures, whilst Newman and McLean (2005) have used a broader definition of what constitutes cultural capital that goes beyond ‘high’ culture. Therefore, as researchers we cannot judge a participant’s level of cultural capital solely according to bourgeois norms. The approach therefore does not use a rigidly class-based analysis, taking the view that cultural background differs from social and economic class.
The students’ attitudes towards art will depend on the exposure they have gained either through their family or through school – this should affect how comfortable they feel discussing the subject, how much emphasis has been placed on interacting with art in their leisure time, and how much emphasis has been placed on the importance of art in their lives.

Current policy guiding the educational programmes of cultural sites focus on intellectual and attitudinal access, with the aim of benefiting individuals and groups by increasing cultural capital. Investigating impact through the constructs of capital is timely and may help explain the relationship between cultural capital, education and an individual’s ability to engage with art.

It must be noted that social and cultural capital are interlinked and that regarding them as autonomous forms may be misleading (Bourdieu 1997; Coleman 1988; Côté 2001; Buckley et al. in press). For instance, developing a bridging relationship with an artist may lead to encounters that broaden an individual’s cultural capital.

2.3 Project Transfer: construction as art?

It is important to consider how Weileder’s artwork compares to other artists’ and the context within which he is working.

Transfer plays with levels of cultural capital by renegotiating traditional hierarchies of art, in elevating manual skills to high art. Within an art gallery
context, manual labour involved in architectural construction has not traditionally been seen as ‘art’. However, there are artists and designers highlighting the role of humans in the manufacturing process; artists who attempt to undermine traditional notions surrounding fine art; and artists using labourers to expose exploitation. Max Lamb is a contemporary product designer who models, carves and manipulates polystyrenes to form furniture in bold, rugged forms\(^1\). The chairs are then sealed in rubber to make them durable. His aggressive technique (for example, using a claw hammer to carve a chair) characterises atavistic trends in contemporary design which highlight the human maker.

Nedko Solakov is a contemporary artist who makes interventionist installations, using irony and humour to undermine accepted conventions of artistic display\(^2\). Solakov’s *A Life (Black and White)* 1998, involves two painters constantly repainting the walls of the art gallery in black and white, round and round in an endless loop. Like Weileder’s piece, the painters are encouraged to talk to the passing audience. However, Solakov leaves specific instructions for the piece, noting that the painters do not have to necessarily be professional painters:

> The constant repainting of the wall space in two opposite colours with thick, undiluted paint without adequate drying time or periodic removal of built-up layers of paint is absolutely against professional painting standards (Solakov 1998).

\(^1\) [http://www.designmuseum.org/design/max-lamb](http://www.designmuseum.org/design/max-lamb)

\(^2\) [http://nedkosolakov.net/content/index_eng.html](http://nedkosolakov.net/content/index_eng.html)
Santiago Sierra also plays with the idea of artwork as service and uses notions of performance\(^3\). He continues the tradition of Arte Povera and performance work of the 1960s and 70s, by exploring the unfairness of unequal power relations. In one performance highlighting exploitation, he hired illegal workers to move heavy concrete blocks around a gallery, paying them the local minimum rate.

The above artists all include the construction of the work and those who provide the labour as part of the artwork itself. However, in Max Lamb’s furniture, the artist is also the constructor and he harks back to craft production. Solokov uses technicians but he is not elevating their professional skills, rather he can be seen to be lampooning the artworld. Sierra’s controversial performances draw attention to exploitation, but exploits at the same time. In contrast, there is much more reciprocity in Weileder’s work.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

Art projects funded by the government use a few common evaluative measures using quantitative and qualitative data. The ‘Inspiring Learning for

\(^3\) http://www.santiago-sierra.com/index_1024.php
All framework’s generic learning outcomes (GLOs) are widely used. However, there are limitations to the framework’s questionnaires, as, for example, most of the questionnaire items invite a positive response that could result in biased data; there are problems of consistency of interpretation; and collating the results in percentages cannot discriminate between good and bad practice.

This research, in contrast, identifies what students bring to the project in terms of constructs of social and cultural capital and tracks how these change and develop in the process. It uses semi-structured interviews, a more suitable method for determining the students’ meanings (Stone 2001). Unlike closed questionnaire items, interviews allow patterns to emerge whilst not restricting data. This qualitative methodology is more likely to capture subtle shifts in affect (Denscombe 2003: 167). To gauge long term impact, the students are being tracked longitudinally.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were held with nine male participants, aged 17 to 26. Six were FE construction students from Milton Keynes College, and three were construction students on placement with the scaffolding company R.Bau. The students were interviewed at various stages before, during and after completion of the project. Of the post-interviews, one

__________________________

4Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (2004) and
was four months (Ian), four were five months (Daniel, Jonathon, Joel, Simon), one was eight months (Luke), and one was nine months after the project (Adrian). The differences in the time-lapse were determined by the participants’ availability. It was not possible to interview Peter and Mark post-project.

The artist was interviewed during the project to give background information about the aims of the piece and, in particular, the role of the students. The research was independent of the artist, but his stated aims provided a benchmark against which changes in the students’ perceptions were gauged.

The data collection and analysis was guided by constructs of social and cultural capital. Understanding capital within this context requires looking at a number of inter-related variables, and this research used frameworks developed and refined by Newman and Whitehead in previous research projects (Newman and Whitehead 2006).

Stone notes that where social capital has been measured to date, ‘it has often been done using ‘questionable measures’, often designed for other purposes’ (Stone 2001: viii). References to involvement in organised group activities such as team games or volunteering offered indicators of the participants’ types of social capital. References to activities that participants undertook with their friends or family members, gave an indication of ‘bonding’ relationships. For the purpose of this research, only the ‘bridging’ relationships between the participants and the artist and other gallery staff
were taken into account, as this seems more important in terms of policy construction i.e. building a professional relationship with the artist may help develop the students’ careers, a tangible benefit of such projects. The way that participants described the working relationship was used to gauge the type of relationship that was formed.

In terms of cultural capital, attendance or familiarity with concerts and galleries, and reading habits were used as indicators of presence of cultural capital (De Graaf et al. 2000). Like Bourdieu and Halsey et al. (1980), parental educational level was used as a proxy for cultural capital.

The baseline questions related to the students’ life experiences, including aspects such as educational attainment, housing, health, sense of belonging and/or alienation, motivation, leisure time, community life, socialising, membership of organisations, and political involvement.

Questions addressing the participants’ involvement in the project were grouped around the following themes:

- Feelings towards participation
- Motivation to participate
- Skill acquisition
- Attitude towards working with each other
- Attitude towards working with the artist
Using themes rather than fixed questions allowed for some flexibility in questioning so that meanings could be probed and responses followed up.

3.2 Data Analysis

The data was recorded and transcribed, then coded for analysis using NVivo 7 software. The following categories emerged:

- Relationship between students and artist; (S1)
- Engagement with the wider community; (S2)
- Valuing of students’ skills; (S3)
- Shifts in affect/self-esteem; (S4)
- Perceived career development; (S5)
- Knowledge and understanding of art; (C1)
- Perceptions of Transfer: construction or art?; (C2)
- Motivation to seek further engagement with cultural organisations and with art, or to develop own artistic skills. (C3)

The first five categories (S1 – S4) mainly relate to social capital and the later ones to cultural capital (C1 – C3). However, some comments were coded in more than one category and overlaps between social and cultural capital were found. This confirms that the two constructs are interlinked (see section 2.2).

4. Discussion

4.1 Participants’ backgrounds
Note: Pseudonyms are used throughout.

The categories under which the quotations were coded are in brackets.

See methodology section 3.2.

Parental occupations provide an indication of the types and levels of capital that the students brought with them to the activity. These varied and examples of parents’ occupations included: teacher (Ian); estate agent manager and electrician respectively (Peter); long distance lorry driver and care home worker respectively (Mark); gas fitter and carer for the elderly respectively (Adrian); paver and care home worker respectively (Luke); cleaner (Daniel); taxi driver and bar person respectively (Jonathon); director of family Oesteopathy business and assistant within the family business respectively (Joel); lorry driver and kitchen assistant respectively (Simon).

Two of the sixteen parents were professional, one was in management; two were skilled trades people, eleven were unskilled or manual workers.

The apprentices had active social lives and enjoyed socialising and social drinking. Leisure activities in which they participated were mainly physical, including playing football, ice skating and going to the gym. Other pastimes mentioned were playing computer games, reading and drawing. Visiting art galleries or going to concerts were not mentioned as preferred leisure pursuits.

4.2 Social Capital
The construction students interacted with the artist, and were consulted about the building process. Six of the students commented on engaging directly with Weileder. Luke had talked to him about how the project was funded, Adrian discussed Weileder's other projects around the world, whilst Mark had asked him about his arts practice:

**Mark:** Asked him a few and that, like what his art and that’s all about and that … Just asked him like, ‘where does he get the inspiration and that from to do it?’ (S1, C1)

Peter responded well to being given responsibility and described how he corrected mistakes in the design plans:

**Peter:** Just asking [what] he’s doing and that, and how do you think the job’s going? And - yeah he’s all right to talk to, I don’t really talk to him, I just explain things. If he asks I explain what I've done, and how I've done it and why I've done it that way, instead of doing it a different - like 'cause some of the drawings are actually wrong.

**Interviewer:** So have you been responsible for coming up with a solution for that?

**Peter:** Yeah, yeah. I mean it's straightforward anyway, but there's been a couple of hesitations, but we’ve got it done, definitely.
**Interviewer:** Do you feel that your input has been quite valued then?

**Peter:** Oh yeah, definitely. Well [X] looks after the brickwork and that, I look after the scaffold. But yeah it’s - I quite like it, having the authority, I like the authority. (S1, S3, S4)

The position of responsibility seemed to have given Peter confidence. In terms of social capital, the relationships that developed between artist and students can be seen as linking relationships, with Peter asserting his own skill and importance in the project. Likewise, Weileder is able to access the construction student’s knowledge, confirming Bourdieu’s notion that social capital is built upon a series of exchanges (Boudieu 1998: 52).

Ian noted cultural difference between himself and the artist and commented on how discussing the project gave them a common ground:

**Ian:** Obviously [we] come from totally different backgrounds and [a] totally different country, so it was more or less to do with the job, I wasn’t talking to him about music or owt [sic] like that, it was more work orientated like. (S1)

Such observations may suggest that the students had been exposed to a culture differing from the construction industry. In this way, this project
arguably provided a valuable opportunity for participants to experience different cultures, and perhaps broaden their horizons:

Ian: …well just discussing if he had any more projects coming about, and he was saying he had the Barcelona one…obviously I was being nice to him because I was on the understanding if you do – if you’re nice with him and all that and you do a good job you’ll get sent on the other ones, and it’s always better to stay in with people that – he can tell you’re professional and all that, it’s a tick on your CV isn’t it, if you’ve done all these art projects, it’s a bit – you haven’t normal jobs, you’ve done art projects and all sorts. (S3, S5)

This participant perceived a status attached to being involved in art projects, and furthermore, all of the other students wanted to be involved in future projects. It was clear that the participants were looking out for opportunities to further their own careers, and intended to use the project to their advantage. However, it is difficult to determine whether there will be sufficient interaction to sustain and develop this opportunity (Bourdieu 1998: 52).

Simon explained the kind of access to other people and other places that involvement in future projects would entail:

Simon: Because it wouldn’t just be around here it’d be everywhere and different people, to see different people and what they think about it. (S2, C1, C3)
This participant comments on interacting with the audience and is interested in its reaction to the work. He is stimulated by the public debate surrounding such work and wants to bring the project to a wider audience. This comment illustrates the student’s sense of ownership over the project and a curiosity about public perceptions. Again, this quotation supports Bourdieu’s description of social capital as an exchange process (Bourdieu 1998: 52).

Weileder wanted the students to talk to the passers-by, and in doing so, to enter into a wider public debate about architecture in public spaces. He asserts that when the students explain and defend the work to the public they start to invest themselves more fully and gain a sense of ownership:

**Weileder:** It’s not my main intention to teach building students to think differently about art, but this is a very important side effect…The perception of the students definitely changed in terms of what art can be and what art is. At the beginning I think they see it as a job, they have to do, and part of the training programme. But this perception changes quite dramatically over the period of the project, because the students get…they get an ownership of the project, they discover it’s their own thing, they do it, they build it up and they get - people talk to them rather than to me, so they have to defend it in front of the public, they have to negotiate with the public, and it puts them [in the] spotlight.
When Luke was asked if he found himself explaining it to passers-by, he said he did, but was conscious of sounding ignorant:

**Luke:** …trying to explain it as best as you could because you don’t want to seem like a complete dumb arse really…

He expanded further:

**Luke:** …at the time when they were asking me I didn’t really know a lot. I just knew it was going to be an art project…they all seemed pretty interested…and I just couldn’t really tell them a lot about it.

He was asked to describe what he said to passers-by:

I think it’s an art project and it’s being filmed by all these cameras that you can see and it’s going to be played back somehow which I don’t know nothing about… but now I get it a lot better because I seen it.

(S2, C1)

Joel also felt uncertain of his own ability to explain the artwork.

**Joel:** I’d just tell them it’s the new block work system of the future - I didn’t really know what else to say to them really, I didn’t really know what was going on. (C1)
Jonathon described his conversations with some people whom he thought were, ‘working in some kind of business’. He had come up with his own understanding of the work, as described below:

**Jonathon**: …and I explained about the photos and how it’s meant to show things differently; how quickly things have changed and that, because that’s what I thought it was all about so he goes, ‘oh so what is it being recorded?’ I said, ‘I think there’s a camera taking a picture every ten minutes’, or something like that, ‘just showing the wall going up’, and stuff.

He went on to describe another similar encounter:

**Jonathon**: …there was another person who asked me about it, I think he worked, I don’t know what he did but he said to me stuff about all the planning permission and stuff and he goes, ‘I work for a company that does all that and I haven’t heard anything about it’, he goes, ‘have they gone through my company?’ and I was thinking, ‘well, I don’t know, I’m only an apprentice, I don’t know about the planning permission, I just got told to come here and do the job. (S2)

The student has come up with an understanding of the piece, but still views himself as ‘only an apprentice’, not seeing his role extending beyond the physical construction. Interestingly, he describes what he thinks the people’s occupations were, demonstrating how the project has facilitated interaction
with people from a different professional culture than his own. Talking to someone involved in town planning and others who work in business has not necessarily introduced this student to people from a different social strata, but has still encouraged interactions away from the specific world of the construction industry. In this way, the project has facilitated the development of bridging or linking relationships.

In summary, these students offered different explanations of the work to the public, but felt that they were ill-equipped to deal with enquiries sufficiently. This is despite the fact that they all demonstrate an understanding of the work involving a practical description of the construction and the film recording. Adrian, in contrast, felt able to talk to passers-by:

**Adrian:** It was good because we had the community coming up asking us about the project. (S2)

Weileder purposefully does not dictate any messages behind the piece:

**Weileder:** I brief the apprentices very little about the project. What I don’t want [is] to tell them what they should say because in a way they are my main audience. So I leave them alone with the work for a while and of course I’m there everyday and then they start asking me questions and then it grows. I don’t brief them in the beginning, I do that on purpose because I don’t want that they repeat my view. I want
them to learn. It's a kind of learning and then all of a sudden they claim ownership.

At this point there seems to be a gap between the artist’s claims and the participants’ confidence in their ability to explain the piece. This is not surprising since interpreting the piece to passers-by is a sophisticated skill for which they have had no preparation.

### 4.3 Cultural capital - attitude to art

When exploring participants’ cultural capital, it was useful to gauge their attitude towards art. At the beginning of the project, five students stated that they liked art, whilst four were indifferent. Simon said it had been his favourite subject at school, and Joel noted that he had had gained an A in art GCSE. Discussions about art seemed to suggest that most of the students classified art as drawing and did not mention other genres. Five enjoyed drawing and the following examples are fairly representative comments:

**Peter:** I chose art. I used to like art and enjoy it, but …once you started to get into it and took it [for GCSE], it went into it a bit too much… instead of going and drawing a nice picture or doing this, you had to – it went into it too much, you had to proper feel it…(C1)

**Adrian:** Well I mean I like doing a bit of drawing now and again, but nothing serious…But it’s not my sort of scene. (C1)
Only one, the son of a school teacher, (Ian) seemed to have a wider understanding and interest in art. He was critical of conceptual art, and felt that public money was wasted on expensive pieces:

**Ian:** I like art, I love art, I think it’s good, aye, I really do like that, but there’s lots of different forms of art now, isn’t there? I just really like the drawing side, and sculptural side, but you can class anything as art, can’t you?

I think this modern art’s crap these days, you know when they stick these random bits of metal about, and it’s just a waste of money. Down Shields there’s these weebles on the sea front, and like little penguin things, and they cost £100,000 or something and what are they? (C1)

Interestingly, Ian had visited the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead, Newcastle, to look at the building but had not gone into the exhibition spaces. Ian, Luke, Adrian and Joel had visited art galleries in their free time with their friends or family. Additionally, Adrian, Luke and Simon had visited with school. Mark, Daniel, Jonathon and Peter had not visited art galleries, and as already stated, two of these were not interested in art.

### 4.4 Art project or construction job?

5 Juan Munoz’s *Conversation Piece*, 2002, a temporary installation on Little Haven Beach, South Shields
Transfer challenged the students’ preconceived ideas about art. As has already been discussed, Weileder anticipated that at the beginning of the project, they would see it as a construction job but move towards seeing it as a piece of artwork. The research attempted to evaluate this claim. Before the project, four participants saw the project as a straightforward construction job (Ian, Peter, Luke, Joel):

**Peter:** I think I’m doing a scaffolding job, that’s how I feel, I just see it as putting scaffolding up, I don’t see it as a project. (C2)

**Luke:** Mm, more of a construction project, ‘cause like – well it is an art project, but it’s just a building really. (C1, C2)

After completion, two out of the four saw the project as a piece of art (Ian, Luke):

**Ian:** If anything it’s just broadened me views on it really, because I wouldn’t have really classed that as art, but it just shows you the bigger picture, and loads of things drop into that category, don’t they?...in the end I ended up realising it was art. (C1)

Luke was the only student interviewed after having seen the work displayed in Milton Keynes Art Gallery. When walking around the room the participant was noticeably impressed, and pointed to a specific part that he built. He then
tried to spot himself in the film footage. Seeing the work in its final form had understandably altered his perceptions:

**Interviewer:** After having seen it in the gallery, is it what you expected?

**Luke:** No, It isn’t what I expected at all; I thought it’d be like on a little TV or something…it was much more vast than I thought it would be, so yeah it was good

**Interviewer:** What does it make you feel, seeing it, does it change anything?

**Luke:** I don’t know. It changes the fact that like you’ve put a lot of work into it…made it look like really more good. It looks a lot better than I thought it’d do.

**Interviewer:** And what do you think about the idea going around seeing it?

**Luke:** It’s an alright idea…It’s a pretty good idea

**Interviewer:** Is it what you’d expect to see in an art gallery?
Luke: No, it isn’t what I’d expect to see in an art gallery… but it’s something different, and well yeah, something I could see in an art gallery. (C1)

Seeing the work displayed seems to have altered Luke’s expectations about what sort of work is appropriate for art galleries. He is surprised by the work, but his contradictory statement reveals him broadening his view of what constitutes art. He is positive about the exhibition and the quality of the work, and seeing it displayed reaffirms his own values and contribution to the project. This discussion also demonstrates that the process of being interviewed stimulated this student to consider the work in a wider context, away from the confines of his college learning objectives:

Luke: At the time when I was doing it just to get some more experience, I thought it was just another construction job. But seeing it all done and everything, I seeing [sic] the art project side of it as well so art it is really.

Interviewer: Has it changed what you think is art?

Luke: Yeah really, I mean I used to think art was all drawings and everything and paintings, sculptures, but now I think now I see there’s a lot of different forms of art, like there’s a lot of different things to do. Not like what you’ve got at school which was sitting there drawing
something with a piece of paper…that’s one of the things I liked about it really. (C1, C2)

After completion, one of the four saw it as being both construction and art (Joel);

**Joel:** Erm a construction job when I, because I was working on it probably and it was construction but it was…when I saw what it became after when Wolfgang had done all his putting it together you could see there was some art in it, I suppose.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that, is it what you would think of as art?

**Joel:** Erm, not really I always think of art as more of drawing and painting, but no, there’s plenty of different art…sculpture…loads of different art, so yeah I suppose I could see a bit of art in it. (C1, C2)

Peter remained personally unchanged, although he recognised that it was ‘a different type of art’. This suggests that involvement in *Transfer* led to a new way of understanding the wide range genres in art:

**Peter:** Well it’s a different type of art, I wouldn’t really class it as art, I mean we’re just building an art gallery, aren’t we? It’s a [inaudible] the art gallery, its not exactly art in doing it. Fair enough if we were putting
a couple of pictures on the wall, it's just laying bricks and putting up scaffold, that's how I see it. (C1, C2)

During the project, three other participants saw the project as comprising both elements (Mark, Adrian, Jonathon). (Please note that Mark was not interviewed post-project)

Mark: Art and construction project. (C1, C2)

Adrian: A bit of both really but I've also been told what the outcome of it is going to be with the up and down in the room in the art gallery and everything else, so it's a bit of both really. (C1, C2)

Jonathon: A bit of both really. It's a lot different knowing that like, you've got the cameras around and stuff like that, so that makes you constantly think that it is to do with art, then after a while you just stop thinking about it and you just think you're carrying on, like working and learning for your money and all that. (C1, C2)

Interestingly, Jonathon's comment brings in notions of performance art. Luke also commented on the presence of the cameras affecting the behaviour on site, noting that his workmates behaved themselves more:

Luke:...the only difference was there was cameras filming it...it was like a bit they were like acting a bit more sensible. I mean yeah like
they was always talking like ‘rah, rah rah’, but they weren’t doing anything silly. (C2)

Post-project, of the three participants described above, Jonathon saw the project as a construction job, although he could see how other people may regard it as art:

**Jonathon:** Yeah, like everything involved in bricklaying, and people who are involved with art probably see it as art, because it’s like all the different things, like all the different bonds and stuff, that makes seeing it in different ways like in different-

**Daniel:** -patterns and rounded windows.

**Interviewer:** But do you disagree with them kind of? Do you think, what are they talking about?

**Jonathon:** Yeah, I just see it as another place for people to live or it’s another school for kids to go to and stuff like that. (C1, C2)

Like Roland Barthes’ notion of the death of the author (Barthes and Heath 1977), Jonathon has recognised that different ‘readers’ bring different interpretations to works. In rejecting these perceptions he has engaged with the issues that *Transfer* presents.
This participant’s identity as a construction worker may have been reinforced by experiencing and interacting with the art world and consequently deciding that he was not part of it. In this context, his negative appraisal of contemporary art is presented as an act of alignment with the construction industry, and he seems to view the two cultures as distinctive.

Two students (Adrian and Joel) stated, ‘It's not really been my side of the world’. Participants seem to have formed tacit judgements about what knowledge, attitude and behaviour is required to belong to the construction industry or artworld. This fits in with Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm’s (2006) ongoing research into learning cultures in further education which addresses the ways in which specific knowledges, qualities, attitudes and behaviours that are required in professions are implicitly imparted in education contexts.

Interestingly, without being asked directly, none of the students seems to have expressed any ideas about public space or public art, so we do not know whether the work encouraged them to explore such ideas. Perhaps the learning objectives (for the NVQ) confined the learning of the students; because they were not required to engage with art, they did not consider this aspect. The project could have offered a ‘portal’ that led to a previously inaccessible, and initially, if not troublesome, then at least complicated way of thinking about art (Mayer and Land 2005).

Ian, who prior to the project, displayed high levels of cultural capital in terms of his understanding of art, seemed, like Weileder intended, to regard his own
professional practice as a scaffolder in an artistic light. He described paying more attention to the aesthetics of the construction:

Ian: Because it’s more of a – more on view, but with it being on display, people were looking at it so it had to be perfect and all that.
(C2)

His awareness of the audience seemed to help frame his perception of the project. He also took his own photograph of the scaffolding and printed images of the construction piece off the website, thereby creating his own art and record of the project:

Ian: Well you seen how tidy it all was, and we had them other labourers tidying it all up, whereas you wouldn’t get that on here it would just be whatever, there’s stuff all over the scaffold and off the labourers and the brickies and all that, and it’s all messy all the floor. So you can look at it, but you can’t really look at it with no job satisfaction. But on that one you could step back and it was just all finished and it had a lovely finish. Especially at night, I took a photo at night when the wall was up, and it had a lush sky behind it and it looked lovely, it looked like a proper job. (S3, S4, C3)

5. Summary of findings
It is difficult to know how much change in forms of capital could be expected from a project such as this, but the data suggests that *Transfer* could be regarded as a qualified success. At this point, it is unclear whether participants will seek further engagement with cultural institutions, or whether they will only be interested in their own project. Given the differences between the world of art and the construction industry, this personal engagement would seem to be a first step in bridging the two worlds. Reactions to the project suggest a reassertion of the students’ identity as builders, but a developing appreciation of the world of art.

In terms of social capital, five of the students commented on engaging with the artist in some depth and the relationships that developed can be seen in terms of bridging or linking. All were interested in participating in future art projects, one recognising that there was status attached to involvement and that such projects aided his professional development. When considering the benefits of participation in arts projects from a cultural policy perspective, the possibility of career development would seem to be an important benefit. The reciprocal relationship between the artist and the construction students was mutually beneficial, confirming Stone’s (2001) description of social networks. Also, whilst the artists Solokov and Sierra use labour in their performances to ridicule fine art and highlight exploitation respectively, Weileder intends for the students to have a shared interest in the benefits, both through the qualifications gained and through involvement in the debate surrounding the work.
In consciously not dictating his own interpretation of *Transfer* to the students so that they could repeat this to passers-by, Weileder was handing over a considerable amount of ownership and responsibility. However, when discussing the work with passers-by, two of the students underestimated their importance to the project and artistic knowledge. Despite this, engaging in debate with different professionals exposed the participants to different cultures and increased opportunities for learning.

*Transfer* demanded a lot from the construction students – they not only built the piece, but communicated with passers-by. However, the ambitious aims paid off, perhaps best illustrated by the fact that all the students were keen to participate in future artistic projects. Again, personal advantage may be a way into future engagement.

Intensive project work over three weeks allowed the students to engage in the different layers of the project, and other art projects could learn from this. However, although working towards a qualification may have secured a certain level of strategic commitment from the participants, it may have also limited their engagement with the artistic dimension of the project.

In terms of cultural capital, the students who had visited art galleries with their families, friends or school, were more interested in art than those who had not. Most of the students concentrated on the drawing aspect of art and recalled drawing exercises at school – they did not comment on other genres such as installation, performance, conceptual art, for example. After
completion of the project, two of the participants stated that it had broadened what they classified as art. One of the participants, whose father was a teacher, demonstrated greater awareness of artistic practice, including contemporary art. During the project he started to appreciate the aesthetics of the construction and in taking photographs could be seen to have created his own art as a direct result of engagement in the project. This accords with Bourdieu’s notion that cultural capital is passed down from generation to generation. It also confirms the Arts in England survey, which revealed that levels of cultural consumption were higher amongst those in occupations at higher manager and professional level (Chan and Goldthorpe 2006: 11). This has interesting implications in terms of inequality when it comes to accessing cultural opportunities.

Transfer was an innovative participatory art project, in training the students. However, perhaps the greatest potential for change was the fact that Weileder brought the different cultures of the construction and art world together. Even though some of the students were not interested in the artistic aspect, in deciding this, participants cemented their own professional identity.

6. Conclusion

In public-funded art projects which are accountable, using an in-depth qualitative approach to gauge shifts in participants’ levels of social and cultural capital seems to capture subtle changes in affect, comprehension and identity.
This was a particularly innovative project, linking two very different worlds in the creation of an artwork which itself questions the boundaries between the art gallery and art in public spaces. The research shows that there was both some entrenchment of existing identities but also some small and potentially meaningful change. Only one student remained resolutely unchanged in his view of the piece as a construction job. The others began to appreciate the artistic merit of the work, to acknowledge a much wider range of art forms than they had previously encountered, and recognise that others might regard *Transfer* as art. This shift seems to have been achieved through the students’ relationship with Weileder who gave them considerable responsibility and valued their input. In elevating their manual skills to high art and expecting them to interpret the piece to the public, Weileder was inviting them to step outside their identity as technicians. However, self interest and potential advantage may also have been factors in their commitment. In the case of *Transfer*, strengthening the bridging relationships between the students and the artist resulted in mutual benefit. Bourdieu’s notion that to develop cultural capital requires ‘a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 52), seems applicable, but it is uncertain whether the students’ exposure to art will be sustained after the life of the project. For other educational initiatives like this, developments in social and cultural capital may require a combination of idealistic and strategic factors.
References


Weileder, W. personal communication interviewed 11/10/07

Figure captions

fig 1. *Transfer* by Wolfgang Weileder

fig 2. The construction students

fig 3. A plan of the construction

fig 4. The final piece - how the time-lapse film appeared in the gallery

fig 5. Passers-by

fig 6. The construction students

The Research focus/Question is unclear. Questions are posed on page 2, para 1; page 3, para 1; page 4, para 2; page 6, para 2; page 7, para 2).