

# CHANGING ROOMS:

## South Sydney High School style

*Mersina Acheles, a teacher at South Sydney High School reports on a project undertaken in her school.*

An exciting project emerged at South Sydney High School as part of a Year 9 design and technology unit of work on exploring the built environment. In the early stages of developing the unit I mentioned to the class that we would be focusing on interior design and that the students would need to redesign a room. A number of students suggested that perhaps they could redesign the immediate learning environment, that is “do something to the classroom”. Looking around it was obvious that we had nothing to lose.

I wanted to run the unit using a cooperative learning model, where the students made most of the decisions themselves. We spent a number of lessons learning how to run meetings. One lesson each week was devoted to a structured class meeting, where each group presented their findings, and explained what they were planning to do next. Each student had a specific role to perform and had a specific task for which he or she was responsible.

We then wrote a submission to our school finance committee requesting money for our venture. We identified the problem areas within the classroom, and students selected the areas they were interested in exploring.

We decided that we should seek some advice and assistance from professionals, and a suggestion was made that we contact the television program, *Changing Rooms*. (This program focuses on interior design.) As a class group we wrote to the producer and to our surprise one of their designers, Tim, agreed to come and visit us. What an experience! Tim was incredibly generous with his time. On his first visit he spent four hours with the class. He divided the class into design groups and with his direction they explored the design process.

My students were amazed that a real designer actually uses similar words as their teacher and that the design process that I have been talking about all year actually exists beyond school. It gave everything credibility and authenticity.

By the end of the day each group of students presented their ideas, and after much discussion,



*The end result is bold, a black and white striped room. The chairs are painted silver. The blinds on one wall are decorated so that even Jackson Pollock would be proud.*

negotiation, evaluation and reflection, we reached a final solution. We established a time line and a budget estimate. Ideas had to be developed and more research about suppliers explored.

Tim came back during one of our working days. A reporter and photographer from the local newspaper were also invited and we showed both groups our progress. After this meeting a number of changes were decided upon.

The exercise was incredibly satisfying for both my students and myself. They learnt a lot about the dynamics of group work, teamwork, deadlines and quality control.

Our D & T room is now the most unusual room in the school and is a focal point for our department. Hard work has produced its own rewards for both students and teacher.



*The display boards are resurfaced in red and metallic frames added. The background wall is black. The blinds on this wall feature the silhouettes of each of the students in the class.*

*Thank you to Mersina Acheles for sharing this project with her colleagues. If you have a project you would like to share, please contact Bill Blake on (02) 9886 7542 or e-mail [bill.blake@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:bill.blake@det.nsw.edu.au)*