

Raising Pupils' Self-Esteem through Leadership Activities in Art

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Abstract

This article is about the ways in which young people who have disengaged from learning in school can find a way back through leadership activities in art. It is based on a project which was funded by a small grant from the Wallenberg Foundation. The project explored the potential of an approach to developing positive leadership qualities in pupils who were not consistently committed to the school's learning purposes. This account describes and comments upon two pupils' guided attempts at peer teaching in art and its subsequent effect upon their self-esteem and attitude towards school. It was

found that pupils who taught art to other pupils had an increased sense of self-worth and were more positively affected towards learning. However, broader issues, such as the negative nature of some school systems and their role in de-motivating pupils were highlighted.

Introduction

The effectiveness of the art-related activities in developing a sense of identity and self-esteem has been well documented [1]. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that leadership activities, such as peer mentoring, help reorientate pupils so that they become more positively affected towards learning [2]. This article reports part of a study which combines these two elements – art and design activities and leadership activities – to help re-engage disaffected pupils. The study focuses on two artistically inclined but otherwise disengaged pupils.

Mark and Jason [3] attend a large state school in the UK; they were in year 9 (age range 13–14) at the beginning of the study in 2003. Jason was suspended from school during the initial period, but the study follows his progress into year 10. I worked with two teachers, Sharon, the head of the art and design department, and Diane, at that time a trainee teacher of art and design. Their school is an apparently welcoming and highly regarded institution. Its pupils appear to be happy and motivated but with the usual complaints about lessons and school regulations; it was suggested to me by a year 10 pupil, for example, that the school could be improved by 'getting rid of lunch time detention, especially for things like untidy uniform'. The school is seen, in terms of examination results and other measures of performance, to be a high achieving establishment. In particular, the art and design department has been very successful in raising standards and attaining well above average examination results. The art and design department, and the school as a whole, are efficiently run and effective in terms of their stated goals.

Although not badly behaved when compared with the behaviour of pupils in some other schools, Mark and Jason stood out as being rather difficult. They were selected because they showed promise in their performance in art and design lessons while being disaffected with other aspects of school life. This account describes in turn our experiences of them as negative leaders

whose leadership qualities we attempted to make use of through peer tutoring in art. The overall aim of this study was to explore the potential of an approach that focuses on and develops the positive leadership qualities of pupils who are currently leading their peers in a negative way.

Young people are increasingly provided with opportunities for self-expression and exploration of personal identities out of the classroom, living the most important and significant parts of their lives outside of the school environment. Subsequently, this lack of opportunity for expression leads to further disengagement of some pupils. As a result, it is of little surprise that some are disengaged with school's learning purposes. Art and design is one subject area that can offer many opportunities to re-establish this engagement, through its very nature it can encourage self-expression and address issues of personal identity. However, as with the rest of the curriculum, the pressure associated with raising the school's profile through academic achievement and test results can often squeeze out any such aim. It was felt, nevertheless, that involving pupils directly with the establishment of learning conditions is a purposeful way of achieving pupils' engagement with the process of learning.

Through placing the focus of this study on the development of positive leadership qualities within disengaged students, I wanted to find out whether a change in personal status, through leadership in art, would provide the successful conditions for learning and improve individual levels of self-esteem and self-motivation. In this way, we could begin to promote a stronger sense of the school as an inclusive learning community.

Method

The principal research method used was participant observation; use was also made of semi-structured interviews. Action research of the kind undertaken in this study is fraught with difficulties regarding the legitimacy and validity of the data obtained. It is acknowledged that in this

piece of fieldwork the observer as participant would inevitably have had an effect upon the phenomena observed (known as the 'Hawthorn effect'). This particular project had also to confront ethical issues – we were tacitly criticising the institutions structures which had welcomed us – in addition, there were issues with regard to safeguarding anonymity of both pupils (who had parental permission to participate) and teachers. I had to rely quite heavily upon my own personal resources in coping with the teaching and learning situation whilst simultaneously gathering evidence which was reliable and valid. The use of recording equipment and note taking will in itself have an effect and this kind of ethnographic study has its limitations. For example, the participants may be 'falsely conscious' (unaware of the real situation, deliberately distorting or falsifying information, or highly selective [4]). Its strengths – principally in terms of the richness of the data and the subtleties which could be discerned, outweighed the potential difficulties.

When attempting to identify pupils who might benefit from participating in this study, it was felt to be important to consider four areas. Firstly, I looked into whether they had 'unschooled' art skills, and had an active interest in producing art work outside of the school situation. A second area for consideration was whether they were already demonstrating a negative leadership role amongst their peers. Thirdly, what their social behaviour was like in and out of the classroom was considered, and finally, how they behaved in other classes outside of art.

Taking the above into account, Mark, from year 9, was the first one to be identified. He had been designated by the school as a 'gifted and talented' pupil from his year 8 art group, but had become disengaged during year 9, achieving average attainment and effort grades. However, he continued to develop a high level of detailed observational drawings outside of school and kept a sketchbook of these.

Within school, although potentially he was a high achieving pupil, he could often become

involved in off-task behaviour and was at times the catalyst for disruptive behaviour amongst his peers. Within art lessons he occasionally appeared to take his status as a gifted and talented pupil for granted, and was easily distracted; at times he showed negative leadership qualities, particularly amongst his male peers.

Preliminary research was made through observations of Mark throughout a school day in other curriculum areas, as well as informal discussions with him about the nature of his out of school art making. As a consequence, further informal, taped interviews were made, in which the notion of teaching the rest of his class was introduced.

Mark's teaching episode

The following extracts are from an interview with Mark, conducted by Sharon with Diane, and give an insight into how Mark perceived himself in the school context and his thoughts about the nature of teaching art. Mark was keen to take on an art teaching role because in his art lessons he had become frustrated with his peers' progress, particularly in a lesson which involved experimenting with various marks:

I was talking to them when we were doing the clay fish and some of them said that they just wanted to get on with making the fish and didn't want to do the mark making because they thought it would ruin it.

I want to do it step by step and on a big scale using part of the big composition. I want to demonstrate on a big scale drawing on the table so that the children can see, using block colour and tonal work [...] they've got to understand how to use tone and light. I have the idea that they should practise mark-making of a sphere first as there are a lot of rounded shapes in the montage, this will help to blend in the idea of mark making.

When asked about his feelings about teaching this session to his peers, he mentioned that

other people are always asking me for help during the lesson, because I am 'gifted and talented', I find it pretty easy telling everyone else what to do. I am worried that they will not listen to me as I am the same age as them.

He was asked about whether taking on a teaching role would change his relationship with the class he replied

I think it will change especially with my friends; they will look up to me more and ask me what to do more. I won't mind telling them what to do.

And so Mark had decided to do a rather conservative 'mark making' exercise, focusing on form, contour and plane. This type of lesson is commonplace in schools and reflects a particular kind of orthodoxy with which Mark was clearly familiar. Two meetings were arranged between Mark, Sharon and Diane, with the intention of planning the lesson, including the preparation of any resources and exemplary work required. Mark decided that he felt it would be effective to make exemplary material – he actually said that he thought that 'if the kids can see how I have done it, it will be easier for them to understand'. He displayed a high level of understanding about the teaching strategies that would be effective. He suggested ideas and spoke about lessons he had experienced which he felt had worked. In preparation for the lesson, Mark created a worksheet for the pupils to use to practise mark-making techniques, concentrating on form, contour and plane.

Mark demonstrated some insight in his planning for the lesson, and a capacity to analyse in a constructive way the nature of teaching and learning. For example, his choice of subject was due to his feeling that

the children [sic] do not take much notice of mark making that I do, they do not take it on. I don't think they took it on in the last project.

He also decided to structure the activities in step-by-step stages and use his own artwork as an exemplar resource and to demonstrate each activity himself:

I want to do it step by step and on a big scale using part of the big composition. I want to demonstrate on a big scale drawing on the table so that the children can see.

Despite this level of understanding of teaching strategies, he appeared to be taking on a role that he perceived to be a teacher's role; how he felt a teacher would teach the lesson. It is interesting that he chose to refer to his peers as 'the children', reinforcing the 'us and them' structures of schooling.

Mark's lesson took place in his normal teaching room, at the normal lesson time with the rest of his usual class. It became clear during the lesson that the initial intentions of allowing Mark full autonomy for the lesson would not be achieved. Although he was able to lead part of the lesson, further delivery of information, direction of pupils and class management were considered by Sharon to be required. At the start of the lesson, his peers displayed a cynical attitude towards both the situation and Mark. The novelty of the situation for the pupils may have affected the attitude of some of them. They audibly directed questions at the teachers who were present such as 'Who's going to be the teacher today miss?' and 'I don't get it miss, he's rubbish, can you explain it?'

This questioning was most apparent from his close friends. During this initial phase, Mark's nervousness was apparent. The pupils in the class were amused and unsettled due to the change to the lesson format. Some became restless, saying they did not understand what he required them to do. However Mark remained calm, but did appear uncomfortable. It was at this stage that Sharon and Diane took more of a classroom management role. It is likely that the very presence of the class's usual teachers affected

the dynamics of the lesson and took away Mark's authority. Once the pupils were on task, Mark visibly relaxed and chose to walk around the class and help with any queries. At this stage the pupils responded well to him, some asking for advice and others pleased to receive his attention. Mark then demonstrated transferring the learning about mark making on to the composition. He chose to sit at the table to do this, where he was amongst his peers. Mark had difficulty in explaining his demonstration and elected instead to say very little. He also enlisted the help of one of his peers to work on the larger piece with him.

At this point his role within the classroom shifted from a leading role, back to being on the same level as his peers, abandoning his role as leader and taking on his traditional role within the group. He re-established his position as 'one of the pupils', again reinforcing familiar divisions. Following this he took no further part. Apparently, he felt that after the starter activity and the demonstrations, his role in leading the lesson was over. As a result, he concentrated on finishing the larger scale piece with another pupil, and spent very little time observing and looking around at others' work. This may be due to Mark feeling that he needed to achieve some work in the class. His manner also shifted from being serious to becoming more disruptive and clownish, possibly to reinforce his position within the group and to indicate to his peers that he was still one of them.

Most pupils did successfully complete the worksheet and started to transfer this understanding to their composition, demonstrating that learning was taking place. Following the lesson many pupils were interested to know how I felt Mark had performed, and two girls had commented that being a teacher must be quite hard if you have to stand up in front of a class like them.

Mark was encouraged to reflect upon the lesson and a formal review of it was documented through a follow up interview with Mark conducted by Diane:

How do you think the lesson went?

I was very nervous at the start of the lesson, especially because people kept asking me questions. The questions helped me a lot, because I could deal with their questions pretty easily. When I was doing the big picture at the front table [large scale demonstration], I think the pen was too thick for doing the contouring but it worked on the stippling and the controlled scribbling.

Do you think you would have preferred to have practised with the thicker pen first?

Yes, because I had done it with the thin pen before hand. It did work though and Adam [friend] helped me do it – he liked doing that!

Do you think everyone was listening?

I don't think any one talked when I was teaching, so that was good, yeh, it was a good lesson.

What do you think the students learnt?

They learnt much more about the type of work, all about the dimensions like flat, plane, shape, contour and form and when I was in the picnic area [during break after the lesson] they said it was good how I had shown them different ways of using tone around plane and form.

So, have they said to you that they found the worksheets helpful?

Yes, because instead of them listening to me and watching me do it, they could then do it and then as I walked around they saw that it was like mine so they could see it could work, so they had listened and it worked.

Do you think you should have talked more about how the direction of light affected the tone? [It was felt this was an important aspect that Mark had omitted to talk about during the introduction.

Therefore, to avoid misunderstanding, Sharon raised this issue during his introduction to reinforce this point.]

I think if I did the lesson on my own it would have been a lot different if you didn't help me.

Do you wish I hadn't helped you?

No, I found it helpful because I hadn't done any thing like that before, and it was all new to me, so you helped me, that helped me a lot.

How do you feel now you have completed the task?

I think it helped me, not in the ranks, but in the class because they look up to me now and they saw me take a lesson.

Did they not look up to you before the lesson?

Yes they did because they knew I was 'gifted and talented', but now they appreciate me, they did appreciate me showing them how to use tone and dimension.

Do you think they appreciated how hard it was to stand up in front of them and take the lesson?

No, they didn't work it out at all.

Do you feel your relationship with your peers has now changed?

It has changed, it's on the better side now because they look up to me more, in our last lesson [Charlotte] was asking me what to do and I thought it was exactly what I would normally do with you.

Do you feel you take on a new role in the class now?

Yes.

Overall, it seemed to have been a very positive experience for Mark and he seemed keen to try a similar activity again.

Some reflections on method

Reflection upon this early phase of the project was crucial, in order to inform any subsequent studies. There were some aspects of the peer-teaching event which needed addressing. In particular, the traditional roles adopted by teacher and pupil were reinforced by familiar dividing structures of pupils and teachers. This was compounded by the fact that the lesson took place under the usual school conditions including the time, lesson duration – complete with bells – and the fact that the group of learners were in the same location as in a normal art lesson. Two teachers were present in the room throughout session and it was felt that this reinforced expected constraints.

Further to this, it was felt that more attention needed to be given to lesson content, especially with regard to involving other pupils more actively in determining it. Mark planned the lesson with teachers without consulting other pupils and the planning sessions were confined to only two meetings. Mark had chosen a subject which he felt a teacher would choose and was not given the opportunity for complete autonomy with regard to lesson content; it was not surprising therefore that the group was neither excited nor engaged by the topic chosen. It was a 'schoolish' kind of lesson without the benefit of being delivered by a school professional.

As a consequence, it was thought to be desirable in subsequent phases of the study to allow further time for the planning and the preparation of the activity, involving other pupils in addition to teachers, permitting a more natural response and contribution from the pupil, teaching what they think their peers would enjoy. Mark had mentioned in the first meeting that he felt the boys would like to draw cars. This could have been encouraged, with Mark leading a smaller group of pupils interested in this style of artwork. To take

this teaching outside of the usual structures of the classroom or time could also have encouraged engagement and meaningfulness of the activity, and create a less cynical atmosphere. Leading a group of thirty places extra pressure on the pupil to manage the class; a smaller group may also decrease the likelihood that pupils would refer to adults when asking for advice and help.

I felt it important to consider allowing for greater pupil autonomy in the selection and the planning of the activity, particularly with regard to what the pupil/teacher feels other pupils will enjoy. This would entail encouragement of collaborative planning between peers and teachers. After evaluating Mark's lesson, it was also felt that initial lessons should be taken with smaller groups, outside of normal lesson time, away from familiar conditions and their associations. I noted also that Mark's pedagogic role was diminished because of his relationship with his peers. He would have commanded greater authority with a younger age group, indeed, it has been suggested that 'the optimum age gap is two or three years' [5]. Kelehear and Heid [6] found that positive 'mentoring relationships' were formed between older (high school') and younger ('first grade') pupils when the former were mentoring the latter in creating a tile mosaic. I resolved to ensure that future sessions involving pupils as tutors would be between an older pupil/teacher and younger recipients.

Further investigations

Our other chosen pupil was Jason, who was designated as having special needs (dyslexia and attention deficit tendencies, together with hearing problems). He had, however, shown signs of high achievement and interest in aspects of art. I decided to observe Jason throughout a typical school day, focusing on his behaviour and attitude during lessons, and whether this altered during the day and/or according to the level of expectation placed on him. The nature of any interaction between himself and his peers was also noted, with particular reference to the impact

of his behaviour upon his peers. I wanted to find out if he had a positive or negative leadership role among his peers.

Additionally, where possible, I sought to gain information and viewpoints from both teachers and Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), arising from their experiences in teaching Jason. As a consequence, all relevant teachers had been notified that he would be shadowed during this day. However, Jason was not made aware of the exercise. Despite this, it was notable that he almost instantly recognised that he was the subject of the shadowing. Within the school, there is a strong concern regarding his behaviour and attitude in classes. He is extremely conscious of this and appears to be sensitive to this nature of observation. This contrasts significantly with the reaction of Mark, who, although aware that an observation was taking place, did not make a personal connection.

This level of self-consciousness seemed to underpin Jason's behaviour throughout the day. His attention span was extremely short in all lessons and he spent a significant proportion of the lessons off-task. However, it became clear that he would often attempt to appear to be working when he was aware of being observed, but on closer inspection will have only made an initial start to the task and then started to doodle. Through this strategy, he avoided attention, and therefore any further disciplinary action from the teacher. It is clear that teachers and support staff are aware of this; an LSA described him at the time as being despondent, easily off focus, and not appearing to care anymore. In all lessons throughout this day, he was seated at the rear of the classroom, further enabling off-task behaviour. It is important to highlight here that Jason has hearing difficulties, and therefore may experience difficulty in noting instruction or information within a large classroom and class size.

When working within a smaller group, his attention span was longer and his contribution to the group was significantly higher. Within the large group sizes, Jason made no voluntary contribution

and received only one request to answer a question during the whole day. In contrast, within a small group of five in an English class, Jason made frequent contributions to the lesson, encouraged positively by the LSA. Despite this, Jason seemed to exhibit low self-esteem, being very negative about his abilities and at times becoming defensive – answering back to his teachers and mumbling. (He has a reading age assessed as that of an 8 year old, and English is a particular challenge to him.) However, he demonstrated more self-confidence when discussing the progress of a poster design he was developing. The LSA used his design as an example and flagged up his achievement in this task. She encouraged him to discuss his artwork, asking if art was a subject he enjoyed. He reacted extremely positively to the praise and replied that he very much enjoyed art and went on to describe the current art project he was undertaking in school.

Following a mid-morning break, where Jason had been playing football, his attitude toward the period three lesson and teacher had notably worsened. He almost immediately challenged the male teacher, who was a few minutes late, and became verbally disruptive. As a result, he was requested to leave the classroom and stand outside the door. All interaction with the teacher was negative, and Jason appeared to expect this response. Within this particular group, Jason exercised a more negative leadership role amongst his peers, showing that he was not committed to any learning. He played to the crowd, living up to the expectation of both the teacher and other pupils. At this point, an incident occurred in the school. A fire alarm was smashed next to where Jason was standing, resulting in a whole school fire drill (the second that day). This later transpired to be a false alarm. As a result, Jason (along with another boy) was questioned about the incident.

This had an effect on Jason throughout the remainder of the day, as other pupils were keen to discuss the incident with him, and he was equally keen to respond. Although Jason was not subse-

quently disciplined for this incident (whereas the other boy questioned was), pupils held an expectation at the time that Jason must have been to blame. Indeed, Jason said later in the day that although he didn't do it, everyone thought and expected that he did. This is an indication of the level and kind of expectation experienced by Jason within the school environment.

This expectation was most clearly demonstrated later in the day. The teacher was aware that he was the subject of the observation and described her experiences of teaching Jason to Diane, within earshot of Jason and several other pupils. Jason seemed unsurprised by the comments made regarding his lack of attention and low ability.

However, these observations describe Jason as a school pupil, not as a whole person. It mentions nothing of his sense of humour nor is his creativity recognised; his insecurity with many aspects of school culture appears to go unnoted, being noticed only when it shows itself in challenging authority. He is clearly popular with some of his peers and so it makes sense that his energy could be focused upon developing positive relationships with others in the school environment, including his teachers. To do this he needed to enhance his self-esteem and confidence and also develop a greater degree of empathy with those around him, especially those not in his immediate social circle.

I had first met Jason when he was in year 9. It is a measure of his reputation in the school that when I said to his teachers that I wanted to work with him in the classroom, they saw it as a kind of baptism by fire for me, and appeared to take an almost gleeful delight in the prospect of my having to deal with him. However, as it turned out, although he was rather shy at first, he warmed to the idea of being special and leading a class in learning about graffiti. Jason had previously expressed an interest in graffiti art and as a kind of ice-breaker, I showed him ways of drawing cartoons and some graffiti styles. He was initially interested but as the implications of the project

dawned upon him, he became reluctant to commit himself. I arranged to supply him with some materials and books and he gradually became more involved; he was especially looking forward to taking on a leadership role within the school. It is interesting to note that when I wrote to parents asking for permission to work with their children on this project, Jason's mother expressed the opinion that Jason would not be up to it; it was therefore not surprising that he seemed to lack confidence when it came to performing a task which required some skill. Jason appeared to gain his self-esteem from having a reputation for being 'difficult' in class.

In art, Jason tended to attain an average level of achievement in class, but he regularly failed to complete and submit homework. He was found to have a short attention span, and became easily distracted and bored during most lessons. Consequently he was often seated at the front of the classroom and monitored closely throughout the lesson, requiring constant refocusing and discipline. However during one lesson where the pupils were required to make a design to decorate a ceramic pot, he showed an eagerness to tessellate a design using a computer program. This activity was offered to the group as an alternative method of developing their design. He worked on task through the lesson and succeeded in producing a strong outcome for his design. He expressed interest in working with computers again, as he had access to a suitable package at home. In later lessons, the group used images of fairground rides to investigate movement and speed, linking to the work of Futurists. Jason was fairly motivated by this theme, especially as he had the opportunity to incorporate some designs based upon graffiti styles.

I did not have the opportunity to pursue this initial contact with Jason as he was suspended from school. However, as he had opted to continue to study art in year 10, I was able to follow up his progress during the following academic year and see how he could develop as a positive leader. My next meeting with him was by

accident: on a school visit to discuss the progress of the project, I witnessed him being told off in the corridor. It was obvious that he had been sent out of the classroom. At break time, I stopped him in the corridor, saying 'Remember me? We were doing some graffiti designs together last year.' He seemed quite pleased and offered to show me some of his work in a sketchbook. It appeared that I was on course to do some more work with him as a positive leader, despite his continuing track record of negative attitude towards many aspects of school.

I met up with Jason again a couple of weeks later and talked with him about the possibility of him teaching a group of younger pupils. Prior to this, I observed him in his art class, noting that he appeared to be disengaged from the class, not listening to the teacher, but absorbed in his own art work, which was based on graffiti-style designs. After discussing ideas with other pupils and with the head of art, it was agreed that Jason should do a kind of 'masterclass' in graffiti design with an after-school art club for year 7 pupils. Following on from what I had learned by working with Mark earlier, I began to plan some kind of activity involving Jason in a positive leadership role. By identifying his strengths and using these as a starting-point, much could be achieved.

Graffiti is seen as an anti-social phenomenon and indeed it can often be; I am not concerned here with trying to make a case for it being 'art'. Graffiti is often studiously aggressive and would lose its reason for being if it were not done on other people's or public property. Where time and effort has been put in there is some artistic merit but this misses the point, it is the fact that time and effort and consequent skill is involved which makes graffiti worthy of our attention in this context. It is not a case of saying to someone like Jason 'I value your graffiti work, but do it on this board not on the school's walls', rather, I am saying implicitly 'Why not put your skills towards making others feel better rather than worse?' – the graffiti is not the focus of learning, attitude to others is.

Although Jason was interested in graffiti and had expressed a willingness to be involved with teaching others, I sensed some reluctance from him to commit himself too much and, not surprisingly, a lack of confidence and a feeling that he might be out of his depth. He appeared to have no awareness at that time of the need to plan, or for the need to practise his painting and designing skills for a particular audience. I was feeling more worried about the potential for a disastrous lesson than he appeared to be.

Jason's teaching episode

Jason was naturally nervous about the prospect of teaching others and had continued to be ambivalent about the whole project for some time, largely, I believe because he was not confident in his ability. This was someone whose self-esteem was derived from negative (in school terms) behaviour and who now was having to gain success in an arena which for him was alien and in an area which had the potential to confirm his self-doubt. The opportunity for Jason to demonstrate positive leadership qualities was for him yet another opportunity to demonstrate failure and an occasion for an enormous shift of self-identity. Would his nerve hold?

Before the session there were signs of nerves – beads of sweat on his forehead and a reddening around his neck – but these were hidden by the hood which he had decided to wear for the occasion. He wandered nervously around the room checking that every thing was in order. His group of learners dribbled into the art room with varying degrees of anticipation and amusement. Jason adopted a teacherish mode and stiffened his stance.

He started falteringly enough but soon gained confidence. As his group of learners became involved in the activity he adopted his own teaching style – one which combined a gentle authority with a genuine empathy and concern for his pupils. They spent the session producing graffiti-style designs, using templates and experimenting with colour mixing, using spray paint. Jason's

confidence grew, especially when his younger learners were beginning to produce designs.

Further reflections

Empowerment of school students can be linked to empowerment issues associated with other groups. For example, Thurber and Zimmerman [7] use a framework featuring three aspects that may lead female art teachers to become empowered as leaders: knowledge of subject matter, building self-esteem and allowing choices. These allow for self-empowerment and can eventually lead to collaborations with others resulting in a 'community of caring professionals' [8] (p. 7). In the case of school students however, it is unlikely that such an outcome would be possible as they have to operate within the existing system that militates against true egalitarian ideals, even when the 'three aspects' are in place. Kelehear and Heid [9], however, taking Noddings's notion of the 'caring professional' [10], studied two learning communities, with the older group mentoring the younger in an art class. They found that the art making became secondary to the interpersonal development which took place amongst the school students:

Rather than seeing art learning in terms of art content, learning, in this case was better characterized and deeply seated as an interpersonal development. Through the use of mentoring the social nature of learning was enhanced [11]. (p.76).

It is this more than anything which characterises the positive aspects of the peer tutoring sessions led by our student 'leaders'.

I caught up again with Jason a week or so later. Depressingly, he had to be summoned from the 'isolation room' – an innovation by the new Head teacher – where miscreants could be isolated from the rest of the school community and be observed by closed circuit cameras. Reflecting upon the session, Jason felt that it went 'alright', despite initial nervousness. He seemed to have

gained in self-esteem, but more importantly, I felt that he had developed a greater empathy for others. He spoke of how he had more respect for, or at least sympathy with, teachers. He said that teaching was 'hard, but you get used to it' and that forward planning for lessons was essential. I asked him what he liked and did not like about school and what he would change if he could. He said he liked being in the art room because 'I can get on with work and talk at the same time.' He did not like the teachers elsewhere 'having a go at you for nothing'. As for changing the school, top of his list was 'get rid of the isolation room', adding that this would not happen because 'I don't think they would listen.' He was then escorted back to the isolation room.

Reflecting upon the whole project within this particular school, I felt slightly uncomfortable with the notion of taking someone with challenging behaviour and manipulating circumstances so that the challenging behaviour is channelled into something 'positive', that is, socialisation into the accepted norms of the institution. I tend to think that if I were in Jason's or Mark's situation, I too would want to challenge the authority of the school. Schools may espouse democracy and egalitarian ideals, but many are at best benignly authoritarian and are essentially hierarchical. Pupils being given a voice will do nothing to change this unless there are changes in attitude on the part of those in authority and in the structures and systems currently in place.

Conclusion

Action research, by its very nature, can be messy and yield unexpected results. In the case of Jason, it is not surprising that he was suspended from school and was often either absent or 'in trouble' when I wanted to work with him on this project. From my own observations and what he has said about his experience as a positive rather than negative leader, it seems that his confidence grew as a result of taking on a teaching role with a younger group and he consequently became less disengaged. Perhaps if his involvement in the

project had been earlier in his school career and more sustained, his experience of school life would have been rather different. I feel that both of the pupils' experience of being involved with this research has had a positive effect, in terms of individual self-esteem; the effect on their school was negligible, but it is only from these small beginnings that fundamental change in schools can occur.

References

1. Professor Nick Stanley has, for example, noted that photography can be used to empower and engage young people: see Stanley, N. (2003) Young People, Photography and Engagement, *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 134–44. A study authored by Francois Matarasso found that 80% of those questioned (513) felt that participation in arts activities increased their confidence and sense of self-worth: Matarasso, F. (1997) *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*. Stroud: Comedia). See also Harland, J., Kinder, K., Lord, P. Stott, A., Schagen & I., Haynes, J. with Cusworth, L. White, R. & Paola, R. (2000) *Arts Education in Secondary Schools: Effects and Effectiveness*. Slough: NFER; Hickman, R. (2005) *Why We Make Art – and Why it is Taught*. Bristol: Intellect.
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3. All of the names have been changed.
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