

Developing confidence to understand identity – Year eleven disaffected students in an ESC access the new Secondary Curriculum through Art

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Case study: **#01**

School profile: This is a new key stage four referral unit for students who have been expelled from mainstream education. The small group of students have a range of Special Educational Needs including behavioural issues, learning difficulties, a history of weak attendance, EAL, ADHD, Dyslexia, and Dyspraxia.

What was the Educational Support centre trying to achieve?

The teaching groups often change as students join and others leave as their behaviour prohibits them from learning in a group situation. The students are taking nine months to complete a full GCSE course in Art and Design being taught in groups of five. Initially the learners were resistant to learning and saw little value in their work, often tearing work up.

Homework was never undertaken. Behaviour was poor and supervision required consistently.

The purpose of the project therefore was to enable students to produce work they were proud of, develop their self esteem and value their own work. The focus of the project was the new Secondary Curriculum's aim of developing 'successful learners and confident individuals'. This was to be accessed through art and design teaching.

How was learning organised to achieve these aims?

The focus of the project needed to engage the students in a subject they already knew something about and could therefore be built on. Self portraiture seemed an obvious but relevant starting point as trust was required quickly and their work needed to be presented in a way that ensured they could see positive progress being made.

Dynamic imagery from an all female canon of contemporary artists was used to stimulate discussions around self identity and using different media. The value of 'traditional' drawing skills was contextualised as they were enabled to reach high standards by projecting their image to gain accurate proportions. These dramatically large drawings were sited in corridors to entice all the staff and students to discuss the student's progress. Praise was given directly to the students and this directly improved their motivation and understanding of their capabilities.

Quick self portraits using the digital camera were made 'fun'. Students worked together to search out different 'meanings' and 'intentions' in their own work, so when they returned to examine contemporary and historical self portraiture, they felt more confident in their ability to make comments and judgements on others' works.

Body extenders, using the work of Rebecca Horn for inspiration, enabled the students to talk about disfigurement, disability and super-human qualities. Rude and crude starting points were contextualised with Horn's own examples. These in turn, led to serious debate about how they saw their own future – how work and lifestyle might affect their body. These debates were taken up in their ASDAN and COPE courses. An intention to develop greater cross-curricular links was purposeful yet organic. It allowed the students to bring up issues and relate their own practice to others, thus making links as learners and citizens.

How well did the centre achieve these aims?

The students who have been in the group from the beginning have evidently taken more control over their learning. They have shown trust and are justifiably proud of their attainment.

Mobile phones have been used to take pictures of their work to show friends or family and all have used their phones to produce visual homework. New students are being encouraged 'upwards' by their peers and consequently the dynamic of the group does not shift with the changes to the group structure.

The positive working atmosphere and strong visual outcomes have been well received by all the staff, students and visitors. Student attendance has increased when compared to the same period last year and behaviour in the art space has been exemplary. The students have demonstrated that they can be confident individuals and successful learners.

Most significantly, the students have had smiles on their faces and have felt good about their drawing and making. They have enjoyed themselves and working on this project has improved their sense of self-worth. They have achieved what they wanted to achieve, without exception.

'I done good' Year 11 student

