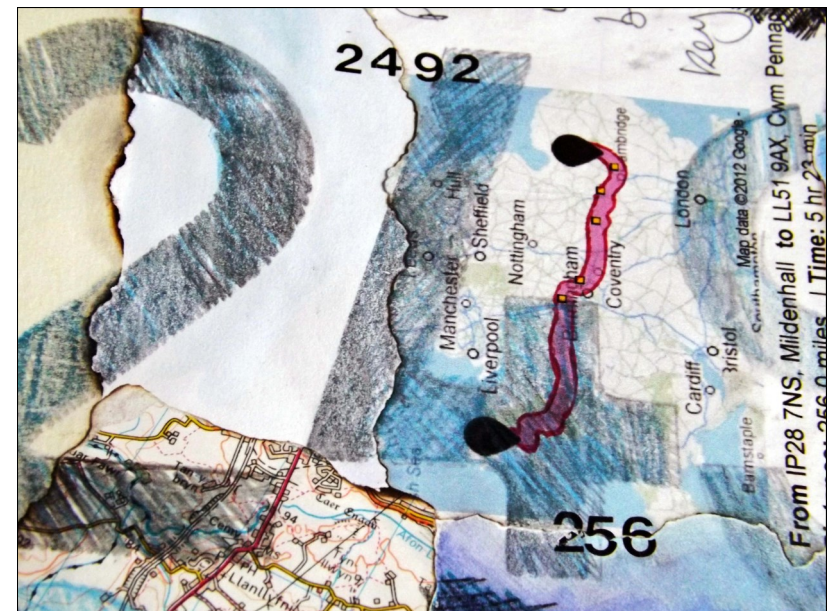


Sketch book Circle:

The 2012 Ofsted report on Art, Craft and Design Education "Making a Mark" clearly states that 75% of art teachers had not had any subject specific CPD in the two years previous to the report. The "case for change", (Department for Education, 2010), noted "convincing evidence that collaborative professional development is more strongly associated with improvements in teaching and learning...(and)...appears more likely to produce changes in teacher practice, attitudes or beliefs and in pupil outcomes." As the TEA programme developed we saw the need, more and more, to create opportunities for teachers to work together.

Sketchbook Circle began as a conversation between myself and Elinor Brass. She already exchanges sketchbooks in a small circle of artists and I suggested that we offered this collaborative idea to TEA participants. The first Circle which ran from January 2013 to January 2014 involved 29 participants. The second Circle currently running has over 100 participants. Many local art teacher networks have adopted the idea too, so we have a Circle in the North of England and a Circle in the South West of England, for example. Some schools have set up Circles for their students to work in.

There is an element of initial organisation that precedes any Circle, large or small, and once that is done, the Circle should self generate and support itself. The use of a social media platform to support the work (in this case, Facebook and Twitter **#teacpd** **#sketchbookcircle**) allowed playful exchanges between sketchbook partners and also served as a record and archive of the work produced month by month. It also encouraged reflective practice. As defined by Donald Schon, reflective practice involves thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while being coached by professionals in the discipline (Schon, 1996).



Sketch book Circle:

Setting up a Circle:

Start by inviting participants. Set a deadline for responses. Email everyone a copy of a form which asks for contact details, explains the project and also acts as a kind of a contract between participants. These extracts are from our recent Circle project:

Description:

This projects operates on a monthly cycle and begins on....(insert date)

A circle of artists will be arranged so that everyone has an artist either side of them who has a different artistic discipline.

Everyone starts with a book of their choice to work into (the only criteria is that it should fit through a letterbox). They make a piece of work (or a few pieces) in the book and then they post it to the person next to them in the Circle (so everyone posts in the same direction).

There is then a month for everyone to make a piece of work (or pieces) in response to the work received, in any way that you choose. Then, you post it back to where it came from.

Your sketchbook is just a place to document the making.

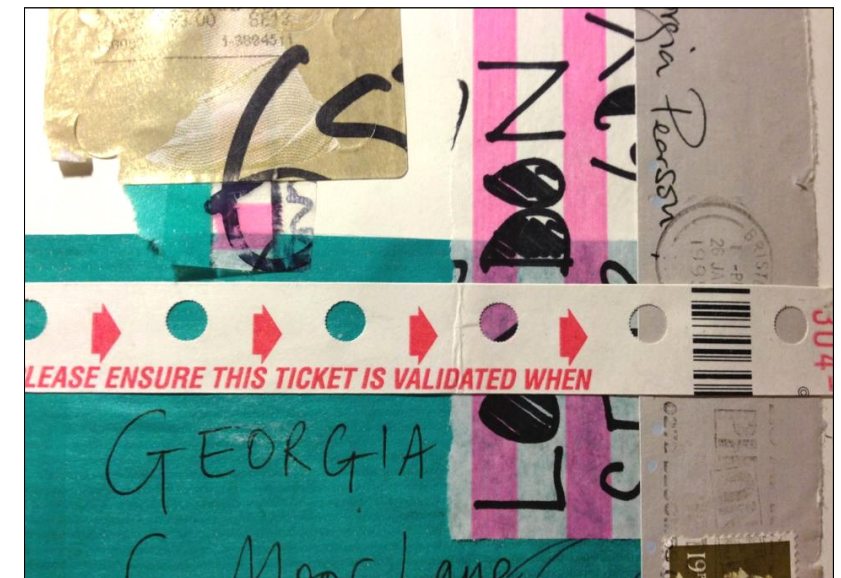
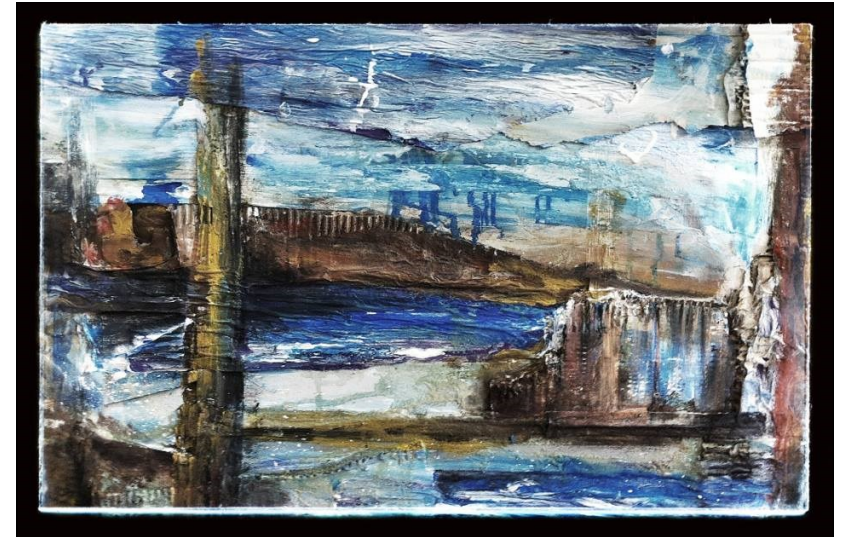
You do not have to work directly into it.

The idea is that you are having two in depth visual conversations with those two artists who are either side of you.

We ask everyone involved to sign up to the conditions of the Circle, which is that you must send your sketchbook back every month. Some months there will be time to make a large amount of work, some months it might just be a few marks.

Ownership:

Ownership is collective until the end of the year. The project will end in (insert date) and, at that point, all sketchbooks are returned to the initial owners. It is a good idea to document your work each month by scanning or photographing it. Use the Facebook page to create a gallery and an archive.



Sketch book Circle:

Communication:

Please exchange contact details with the two artists you are collaborating with. It might be a good idea to send a message if your sketchbook is going to be a day or two late.

We will use a Facebook group as a place to share our work, so that we can get a glimpse of what is happening at the other side of the Circle, and we can comment and encourage. It is also the chance to ask questions, share thoughts and opportunities."

The agreement form encourages a code of conduct between participants and they are expected to keep to deadlines or inform each other if they can't meet a deadline. It's a professional dialogue, a trusting partnership. Sketchbook Circle does need the organiser to make some decisions about how to partner participants. You might request information in the agreement form about their current practice. So, for example, partnering a Photographer with a Textile artists might be more interesting, for obvious reasons. You could also consider geographical locations and partner people who are physically distanced from each other.

Participants keeping a record of their work does help in the very odd instance that a sketchbook becomes lost in the post. It is advisable to have books sent by recorded delivery to ensure that they arrive. In the early stages books are quite light, but they can "grow" and then require more care with packing and sending. An online archive of images using a platform such as **Flickr** is useful, although Flickr has a size limit on a free account.

<http://www.flickr.com/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/teacpd/sets/72157635257182066/>

The direction that the work goes in is unpredictable, so participants might develop ideas as film, animation, photography, installation and record these inside or outside of the sketchbook.



Sketch book Circle:

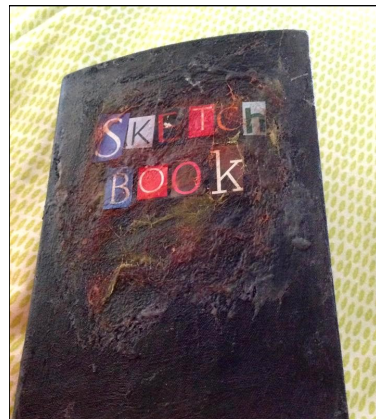
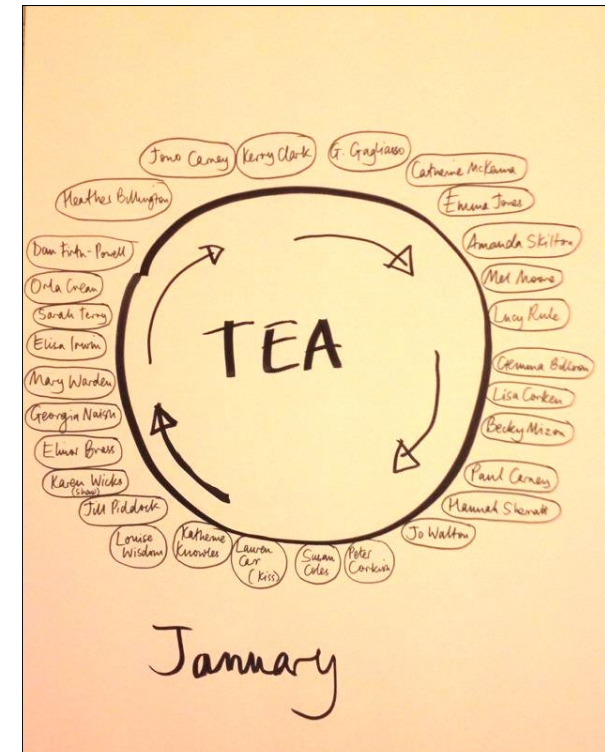
Creating the Circle:

It is a Circle but you only interact with two people. The organiser should either draw a diagram or create a visual format which puts everyone into a circle. This would involve any criteria you choose for selecting partners. The group don't have to know all the other Circle participants but the organiser needs a record of this and also an email contact list. This information needs to be collated from the returned participant form.

The best way to describe it is that it works like a pendulum on a clock. You (as participant) send one to the right and receive one from the left. You should always have a sketch book, sometimes the one you started, sometimes the one you were sent to respond to.

If all participants choose to communicate via Facebook then you operate that as the platform for communication. But, use email for those who don't and also use email as a back up.

Sketchbook Circle works better over a longer period of time. We have set it as a year long cycle with monthly exchanges, but there are many possible variations, according to the needs of the group and the project aims.



Sketchbook Circle: Teacher comments

Lauren Carr: "The project has helped me to deepen my understanding of the possibilities of the sketchbook, which in turn has enabled me to share my experiences with students and to understand theirs more fully. It has opened my eyes to small things around me that I again share with my students. I feel, finally, in my fifth year of teaching that I truly am an art practitioner and artist teacher rather than a teacher with art training. It has reminded me that I am more than a teacher and how important my own experiences of making & responding are to me as an art teacher & as a person".

Joanna Walton: "I have been totally fascinated by the process of sharing sketchbooks. The element of anticipation and then so much pleasure when one arrives in the post with new additions has provided real motivation to develop my own practice and consider new approaches to drawing beyond the shared sketchbook. Wary at first of working in the travelling sketchbooks because of it coming under scrutiny from an 'unknown source' I have become more confident in making responses as time has gone on. I don't know yet if I feel I have changed my ways of working too much, but it has opened my eyes a bit wider and I've found inspiration in unexpected places through the link with someone else. Sharing imagery via the Facebook site has been motivational too and it has been so absorbing seeing such a vast range of sketchbook thoughts and ideas".

Paul Carney: "It's helped me to get back in the saddle as an artist and learn from other artist teachers. It has been great to be part of the two way sketchbook sharing, I have been very influenced. It's been great fun, a burden at times.... but always thrilling and engaging and such a learning experience and it's helped me as an artist to be more experimental and confident".

Amanda Skilton: "Developing my own practice has enabled me to make stronger links with the students I work with, as they can see I am working on my own sketch book as well as sharing ideas with others to strengthen my practice and inspire me with alternative ideas".

