

Reflecting on Making a Mark teaching and learning approaches



In October 2013, around half way through the Making a Mark 3 year programme, the Learning Advisor visited all partners to find out which of the Making a Mark teaching and learning principles they were using in their programmes. The aim of the discussions was to identify if any of the principles was proving:

- more useful or relevant
- easier to implement
- more problematic
- more impactful

Discussions were based on a grid, which partners had completed ahead of the visit, identifying where in their programmes each of the principles was used and which activities seemed to offer the most effective way of delivering that approach.

Overview by principle

1 Active learning

The Year 2 programme is excellent at providing active learning experiences. All partners offered a wide range of active learning, giving students first-hand experiences, introducing them to authentic objects and settings and structuring activities so that students are actively participating. Many of the experiences on offer also provide opportunities for decision-making and an element of problem solving.

Examples:

Preston Park: children choose costumes and props to build characters and stories for their photographic portraits

Captain Cook: during a carousel of activities children try using a quill pen, make ship's biscuits and explore grid references on maps

Dorman Museum: Key Stage 1 children learn paper making and Key Stage 2 children make their own wallpaper stencils

CIMM: children role play a Victorian school in costume

Kirkleatham: children role play Victorian children's lives at school and at play, then make a catalogue of Victorian toys

Head of Steam: students physically explore the Museum, its immersive spaces and authentic primary source materials

Hartlepool: children select costumes and devise freeze frames for photo portraits

All partners also use participative led sessions as introductions, often involving object handling, questioning, games or characters in role.

What makes effective active learning experiences?

Engaging active learning seems to involve elements of one or more of the following:

- using more senses than just looking and listening
- engaging with objects and settings with a purpose in mind
- immersing yourself, in a setting or role
- making decisions about how to do something, either on your own or with friends
- following step-by-step guidance that enables you to try something for yourself

Active learning is closely linked to motivation, so across all the programmes, the active learning experiences are designed to be enjoyable (fun, challenging, intriguing), relevant and achievable.

2 Independent learning

The Year 2 programmes offer fewer opportunities for independent learning than active learning. Independent learning is learning where students are given a measure of independence from the teacher and are less guided in both what they should do and how they should do it. This may be individually or in groups. Although this is clearly more appropriate the older students get, nonetheless primary children can begin to take on this responsibility. In more traditional museum visits, where time is at a premium, staff led learning offers good value to schools that have made the effort to visit. With three sessions in MaM, there is more opportunity to offer independent learning time. Each programme includes some elements of this in Year 2. Increasing independence in Year 3 programmes however will be the next challenge.

Examples:

Head of Steam: students are encouraged to explore the Museum's authentic settings looking for material for their writing and inspirational spaces in which to work, with very little guidance. Their final written pieces are usually not pre-scribed

CIMM: in both the village and woodland study children are given more freedom to decide on core parts of their learning, e.g. in the village they choose what to photograph

In all other partner programmes there are times when children are given the chance to work independently, e.g. at the Dorman once children have been told how to make something, they can then go on to make more themselves. Children also use sketch books in the galleries. However as yet, the examples of independent learning are more stepping stones towards independence, with the format, aim

and content of the activity provided by either the Museum or the teacher.

What makes effective independent learning experiences?

Activities that lead to independent learning seem to involve elements of one or more of the following:

- time for students to spend on their own, pair or small group work
- space: to wander, to settle, to work
- range of choices: a wide range of options to engage with
- an open-ended mechanism to record ideas and information: e.g. sketchbooks, but could also be cameras or even an adult scribe
- clear initial guidance: so students can be purposeful when the adult “steps back”

To increase independence, partners might consider offering some pre-visit preparation materials that give children guidance before the visit, so that they can use the visit itself more independently.

3 Enquiry based learning

Some Year 2 programme themes provide more opportunities than others for an enquiry approach. Where the potential is there, partners have begun to use it. For primary students the depth of the enquiry ranges from questioning, to children asking their own questions, developing investigative skills to modelling enquiry techniques. For secondary students, a broad range of enquiry skills are developed. There is potential to go further in framing entire sessions or programmes as an enquiry, although this would be likely to work best with schools that already take an EBL approach.

Examples:

Captain Cook: children decode portraits, interpreting their meaning. Even the youngest children are encouraged to ask questions, e.g. Key Stage 1 children look at a display of Cook's cottage and can ask Jenny their own questions about his childhood.

Hartlepool: children interpret portraits from both the Museum's and NPG collections. They also interrogate the William Gray statue and use primary sources to investigate.

Preston Park: children put portrait postcards in order of importance of the sitter and explain their thinking to classmates. They also explain their reasoning as they critique each other's portraits.

Dorman Museum: as children explore the local history galleries they are challenged to tell Sue what they find interesting and to ask her questions related to the displays. In the Dresser exhibitions they are challenged to not only find Dresser designs but explain what it is that makes them identify them as Dressers'.

Kirkleatham: children develop investigative skills through table-top archaeology activities including sorting, identifying and labelling finds. In the Darwin session they use microscopes and pooters. The portrait programme includes decoding portraits and investigating objects to create a portrait of a time traveller, inspired by the past.

Head of Steam: All Change is an enquiry based programme in which students investigate a specific research question. They use archive source materials and in both Tall Tales and All Change students interview actors to inform their research.

CIMM: Children use primary source material such as photos and census data leading up to developing a Miners' Inquest. Depending on the school Jean also sometimes uses an enquiry question to structure the programme, referring back to it throughout the session, e.g. "Did they cope with flooding better in the past than we do today?" or "Do you think there are any problems with living near the coast?" The groups are paused throughout the sessions to ask what evidence they've found that might inform their opinion. Children then vote periodically, in the light of new evidence.

What makes effective enquiry-based learning experiences?

Engaging enquiry-based learning seems to involve elements of one or more of the following:

- developing investigative skills, using equipment
- developing questioning skills, using a stimulus
- developing interpretative skills, strengthened by the chance to explain your thinking
- sorting information, linked to a clear purpose to do so
- identifying and evaluating evidence
- problem solving
- communicating your ideas, especially explaining
- concluding and making decisions

It's interesting to note that activity ideas from both the NPG sessions and Portrait Box sessions have proved useful in injecting enquiry into programmes. Jean's use of a question that runs through the session, revisited throughout, is useful as an idea for a straightforward way to bring more enquiry into some Year 3 sessions.

4 Social and collaborative learning

Most Year 2 programmes provide strong opportunities for collaborative learning. Some arise through informal atmospheres that allow children to exchange ideas. Whilst this is valuable, there is the potential to include more formalised collaboration too, which ensures that everyone takes part and which can replace some whole group, adult led interaction.

Examples:

Hartlepool: Lisa's new creative writing programme offers lots of small group activities around devising and developing stories. Children read portraits together, decide on their top 4 wow words together and then create a character profile as a group.

CIMM: All Jean's session involve group work. Probably the most effective at ensuring collaboration is "design a creature" in which children have to make quick decisions together and present their ideas at the end.

Kirkleatham: Liz's new programme "Every picture tells a story" involves mainly group work including using the Portrait Boxes to challenge children to create a story for the portrait sitter, first with no information beyond the portrait itself, then with additional contextual objects.

Preston Park: children work in groups to build stories around the scene in the portraits and to develop stories for their own characters. They work in pairs on their portraits taking turns to be the artist and the sitter.

Captain Cook: children work together in an activity to find objects using clues in one of the galleries. They also work in groups to create their own portrait poses.

Dorman Museum: the craft elements of Sue's programmes are informal and allow opportunities for children to share ideas and discuss their choices of colour or pattern.

Head of Steam: with secondary students Sarah's programme mostly allows for students to choose who they work with an dhow. Some more formalised pair and group work is to be developed.

What makes effective collaborative learning experiences?

Engaging collaborative learning seems to involve elements of one or more of the following:

- collaborating to plan and share ideas, ahead of individual work
- collaborating under a slight time pressure
- collaborating to a shared end result, especially if it is to be presented
- collaborating to solve a puzzle or problem

Overall, programmes benefit from reducing time spent with the whole group interacting with an adult. Whilst this has value, even breaking it up by giving groups or pairs the chance to share their own knowledge or form their own questions can be helpful.

5 Creative approach

All Year 2 programmes include creative elements and all either bring students into contact with creative practitioners or model creativity in some way. Creative techniques are taught in a step-by-step approach in some sessions, which seems to be an effective approach. However

these need to be balanced with creative licence in using the techniques to create finished products. There is some variability in how much creative freedom students are given within activities. Sometimes, with time limited, creative response is limited to ensure a completed product. Whilst this may be necessary at times, putting an equal emphasis on the creative process can increase the educational value overall.

Examples:

Kirkleatham: In Liz's new programme "Every picture tells a story" students meet a local graphic artist who shows them his work and talks about getting his inspiration from history. They work in groups to design their own Time Traveller using their own choice of costumes and objects from the Museum.

Dorman Museum: Sue's paper-making and stencilling activities demonstrate a step-by-step approach to these craft techniques, enabling children to develop the relevant skills. Children use the stencilling to design their own wallpaper motifs. In the GCSE portfolio programme students learn about Christopher Dresser's study of Japanese culture as a way to encourage them to research work that could influence their own.

CIMM: Jean's Imagined Lives programme involves an author supporting students to think imaginatively and generate descriptive and relevant vocabulary as they create their character for the Miners' Inquiry. Her woodland and seashore sessions also include creating collages using natural materials, in the mode of Andy Goldsworthy.

Preston Park: children work with both an artist and a photographer in the current programme. The artist explores art materials and gives general guidance around painting portraits, but then supports students to try out any painting technique as long as it captures the "essence" of the sitter. The photographer supports children in posing portraits and in editing techniques.

Head of Steam: In Tall Tales, students work with both actors and an author and question them about their techniques. They use whichever parts of the station, the objects and their stories that inspire them most, to write their own pieces, for which there is no set format.

Captain Cook: Children develop their creative thinking and language skills through activities such as "10 things in a sailor's pocket" that focuses on the use of adjectives.

Hartlepool: the artist takes children through a step by step process to drawing faces, then children try creating their own self-portrait. In the "Portraits and Art" programme, children then go onto look at modern art portraits created through collage and have a go at this technique themselves.

What makes effective creative learning experiences?

Effective creative learning seems to involve elements of one or more of the following:

- enough help with technique that students have confidence to create
- time and space to develop their own ideas
- formal or informal collaborators to share and develop ideas with
- inspiring settings or objects or art works or artists to respond to
- materials and techniques that ensure a reasonable level of success
- modelling of, or explaining, creative processes
- the right kind of challenge, that allows all students to succeed at their own level

Overall, the programme is supporting creativity, but within each programme partners need to always check if they are achieving a good balance of support in developing techniques with freedom to create. Both are central to quality of the learning experience.

6 Cross-curricular approach

Although we only committed to seeking a cross-curricular approach where relevant, all of the Year 2 programme is cross-curricular in nature, to some extent. Where partners have explicitly sought new and interesting cross-curricular links, it appears to enhance the activities. This seems to work best where the subjects are combined in almost equal strength.