

Balancing Observational & Experimental Drawing

[By Paula Briggs](#)

Drawing takes many forms, and facilitating drawing encompasses a wide variety of activities. At AccessArt we have always tried to advocate taking a balanced view between activities which develop observational drawing skills, and activities which promote more experimental, explorative activities. At the beginning it can feel like these two areas, observational and experimental drawing, are two opposites, but you will quickly see that actually the one feeds into the other, and very soon pupils will be drawing on *all* the skills you have taught to develop their drawings.

Observational Drawing

When children (and adults) say they can't draw, or that their drawing isn't going well, they are often making that judgement because they imagine drawing is about accurate representation. As we will see, drawing is also about experimentation and expression, but to help those who would like to develop observational drawing skills, we need to teach skills in developing how they see the world about them. Seeing and drawing are so closely linked and we need to help children to slow down and really see, to enable them to draw.



Explore [Drawing](#) on AccessArt for plenty of opportunity to help your pupils develop their observational drawing skills, develop hand eye coordination, and build an understanding of what drawing can be.

These activities can be re-visited time and again (much like a warm up exercise in a PE lesson), and can be adapted for all year groups.

We'd also strongly advise that you try the activities yourself!

Experimental Drawing

Of course from a child's first scribbles as a toddler, his or her drawings are experimental in nature. Continuing to feed this natural impulse is vital. Many of our resources help facilitators and pupils continue this exploration and you can visit

a list of some of [experimental projects here](#).



Our experimental drawing projects are generally about enabling children to develop their own drawing language and to make and follow their own drawing decisions. This can only begin to happen when pupils begin to build familiarity with materials and techniques, and begin to develop an understanding of what each media can do for them. So for this reason, we advocate enabling children to explore medium from a very young age, in a loosely structured session.

Which comes first: Observational or Experimental?

AccessArt advocates weaving activities which support the two types of drawing amongst each other, as both activities will help develop skills in the other. Try to fit in activities from the Key Drawing Exercises during the school day or

week, i.e. a ten minute continuous line exercise in the morning, or use the key drawing exercises as warm up exercises before a more experimental drawing session. Generally the more experimental activities will take longer, so plan for these to take place during art-based projects.



This is a sample of a resource created by UK Charity AccessArt. We have over 1500 resources to help develop and inspire your creative thinking, practice and teaching.

AccessArt welcomes artists, educators, teachers and parents both in the UK and overseas.

We believe everyone has the right to be creative and by working together and sharing ideas we can enable everyone to reach their creative potential.

Teaching for the Journey not the Outcome

**Screen Printing using
Overlaid Pattern**

**Sketchbooks Made with
Screenprinted Papers**

**A “Wallpaper” Sketchbook –
Enabling Drawing by Getting
Rid of the White page**

**Layered Landscapes: Working
in Mixed Media on Location
with Kittie Jones**

Fabulous Fish

Fabulous Fish was a Brilliant Makers workshop, for year four pupils, led by Sheila Ceccarelli, raising ocean awareness at Ridgefield Primary School, Cambridge.

Wave Bowls

In this session children make 'wave bowls' with Paula Briggs – a session where the pieces literally 'come together'.

Collagraphs Inspired by Architecture

Ink & Foamboard Architecture

Inspired by "Amphis" by Folke Köbberling and Martin Kaltwasser at Wysing Arts Centre, this post shares how the children went on to make architectural models based upon their exploration with Paula Briggs.

Under the Ocean Mirrors

This was an afternoon session for year four pupils at Ridgefield Primary School, Cambridge, and part of AccessArt's Brilliant Makers Club, a campaign supporting and championing making experiences in schools. By Sheila Ceccarelli

Making Shells

This was an afternoon session for year four pupils at Ridgefield Primary School, Cambridge, and part of AccessArt's Brilliant Makers Club, a campaign supporting and championing making experiences in schools. This session was aimed at children who love making, and was limited to eight pupils, to allow for a rich, and rewarding experience and plenty of time to play with, and explore materials.

Graphic Inky Still Life!

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Pathway: Exploring Still Life



[This is featured in the 'Explore Still Life' pathway](#)

talking points: Flemish and Dutch Still Life Painters



Talking Points: Paul Cezanne



talking points: Contemporary still life



Making Boats that Float Out of Everyday Materials

What Makes a Boat Float? This was an afternoon session for year four pupils at Ridgefield Primary School, Cambridge, and

part of AccessArt's Brilliant Makers Club, a campaign supporting and championing making experiences in schools. By Sheila Ceccarelli

Sculptural Constraints Workshop by Susie Olczak

This workshop, for students at AccessArt's Experimental Drawing Class, looked at the idea of the constraints that might come up when creating a sculpture for a gallery or public space, and hoped to give a sense, that often the things that might initially hinder a project, can actually be a source of inspiration and good starting points for creativity.

Self Portrait in Acrylic

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Talking Points: Kittie Jones



Talking Points: Vanessa Gardiner



Talking Points: The Shoreditch Sketcher



Using Colour to Develop Gestural Drawing

Backwards Forwards Drawing Exercise

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Drawing Large



Drawing small

