

Balancing Observational & Experimental Drawing

By [Paula Briggs](#).

Drawing takes many forms, and facilitating drawing encompasses a wide variety of activities. To ensure that learners receive a varied and balanced art education, it's important to introduce them to different ways of drawing. We would recommend a balanced approach between activities that develop observational drawing skills and activities that promote more experimental, explorative activities.

It can seem like these two areas, observational and experimental drawing, are opposites, but you will quickly see that actually, 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 judgment 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 around them.

Seeing and drawing are closely linked, and we need to help learners slow down and really see, to enable them to draw.

Explore [drawing activities](#) that help learners develop their observational drawing skills, hand-eye coordination, and build an understanding of what drawing can be.

These activities can be revisited 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

From a child's first scribbles as a toddler, their drawings are experimental. Continuing to feed this natural impulse is vital. Many of our resources help facilitators and learners continue this exploration. You can visit a list of some of our

[experimental projects here.](#)

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



Which Comes First: Observational or Experimental?

We would suggest weaving activities that 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 [Ten Minutes, Five Times a Week](#) in the morning, or use key drawing exercises to [warm up](#) before a more experimental drawing session.

Generally, 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: Paul Cezanne



talking points: Contemporary still life



talking points: Flemish and Dutch Still Life Painters



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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[This is featured in the 'Mixed Media Land and City Scapes' pathway](#)

Talking Points: Vanessa Gardiner



Talking Points: The Shoreditch Sketcher



Talking Points: Kittie Jones

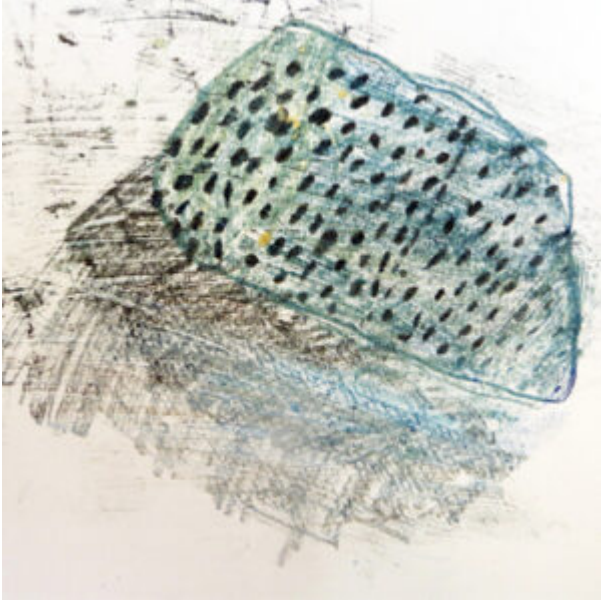


Using Colour to Develop Gestural Drawing

Backwards Forwards Drawing Exercise

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This is featured in the 'Exploring The World Through Mono print' pathway

Drawing Large



Drawing small

