

Exploring Emotional Literacy *through the Visual Arts*

with embedded literacy and numeracy skills



by Clair Aldington M.A.

developed as part of the Creative Arts Development Project in Youth Justice
Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Youth Offending Services

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank the Youth Offending Services in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire for their encouragement and interest in the use of the arts in working with young people at risk. Also, to the Ark T Centre, Cowley, Oxford, where I first started using the arts to work with young people on court orders. All of you have been part of a creative journey which has enabled me to develop and pilot the ideas and projects contained within this resource which is now available for you and others to use.

Clair Aldington
October 2007

Introduction for leaders:

The art based work that has been most successful within Oxfordshire Youth Offending Service has involved the young person exploring how he/she feels about themselves and their offence or an issue in their life, such as alcohol or drug use, or their home situation, etc.. This work has usually been carried out with the young person working alongside a professional artist and as a series of exercises or projects leading into a larger piece of artwork.

This resource has been developed to enable staff who are not Arts practitioners to carry out this work. They are designed as individual projects but can equally be extended into small group activities.

It is important to bear in mind that if you are leading this type of session you should have explored these exercises for yourself in order to be able to lead the young person appropriately and with understanding of what you are asking them to do. The leader needs to recognise that these may be difficult exercises to do emotionally but can help significantly in aiding communication and the relationship with the young person. The aim is to encourage the young person to express visually emotions that are difficult to articulate verbally. A young person should, therefore, be assessed as suitable to undertake work at this level. From experience, the exercises are most appropriate completed at the beginning of a relationship with the young person.

In preparing this resource, I have tried to keep the materials used for each project as straightforward as possible. Many materials are readily available in any office. Other, more specialist art materials, are easily available from an art shop or educational suppliers.

Clair Aldington



'Blaze' mosaic by 15 year old male, representing the angry feelings he had which caused him to smash and break things, leading to criminal damage offences.

Project One:

(with special thanks to Rachel Edwards-Grundy, artist and educator, who helped write this section)

Mask Making

expressing feelings using facial expressions



Learning outcomes:

- Expressing feelings.
- Identifying and representing feelings surrounding a difficult situation through the creation of facial shapes and expressions.
- Reflecting on a difficult situation.
- Potential to promote empathy with others.

Materials:

- Any of the following drawing media can be used for this activity: pencils, pastels, coloured pencils, felt tips, paints.
- A4 or larger sheets of paper.
- Tracing paper (optional).
- Plain card.
- Elastic or string.
- Hole punch.
- Feeling faces templates (included in this resource pack).
- Scissors.
- Glue stick, eg. pritt stick.
- Cardboard.
- Ruler or measuring tape.
- Compass (optional).

Method:

- Ask the young person to discuss the situation you wish to explore with them and how they feel about it.
- Ask the young person to select facial expressions that represent it best.
(Encourage the young person to select a number of faces and then photocopy and enlarge them to life size.)
- Ask the young person to colour in the faces in a colour which echoes the emotion they are trying to express, e.g. using different reds/ blacks/ purples on an “angry” face or blues on a “sad” face.

Option One (basic):

- Gather together all the faces and allow the young person to arrange them on a large sheet of paper and stick them down.
- Use this sheet of facial expressions to aid discussion about the situation.

Option Two (more advanced) – creating a face mask:

- Ask the young person to draw an oval face shape/s onto a piece of card by measuring the proportions of their own face with the measuring tape or ruler. They can do this by drawing a horizontal line that is the diameter of their face, ie. From ear to ear and then a vertical line that is the length of their face, ie. From forehead to chin. The 2 lines should form a cross. It is then easier to draw an oval by connecting up the points of the cross with curved lines.

(You can point out things like the fact that the diameter of your face is two of your hand spans.)

- Ask the young person to cut out the oval/s they have just drawn.
- Give the young person the options of either tracing the enlarged photocopied faces they have just coloured in onto the oval face shapes OR
Drawing their own facial expressions onto the oval face shapes using the photocopied ones as a guide.
- Ask the young person to hole punch either side of the mask/s.
- Ask the young person to measure the circumference of their head and divide it by 2. Ask them to measure a piece of elastic or string and cut it to that length. Attach elastic or string to mask by knotting it through the holes on either side. (String will need to be tied at the back.)
- Ask the young person to write or type a short paragraph about their experience and the process of making their mask/s.

Literacy skills:

- Discussion with the young person about the process of making the masks.
- Listening during discussion.
- Understanding and following instructions.
- Writing about the process of making the masks.

Numeracy skills:

- Looking at different proportions, e.g. your face is 2 of your hand spans.
- Measuring the diameter of their face compared to the width of their hands.
- Measuring the circumference of their face and dividing by 2.
- Looking at the differences between the diameter and circumference of the face.
- Applying these principles when designing and making the mask.
- Looking at differences between ovals and circles.



AGGRESSIVE



ABOMIZED



ANXIOUS



APOLOGETIC



ARROGANT



BASHFUL



BLISSFUL



BORED



CAUTIOUS



COLD



CONCENTRATING



CONFIDENT



CURIOUS



DEMURE



DETERMINED



DISAPPOINTED



DISAPPROVING



DISBELIEVING



DISGUSTING



DISTASTEFUL



EAVESDROPPING



ECSTATIC



ENRAGED



ENVIOUS



EXASPERATED



EXHAUSTED



FRIGHTENED



FRUSTRATED



GRIEVING



GUILTY



HAPPY



HORRIFIED



HOT



HUNGOVER



HURT



HYSTERICAL



INDIFFERENT



IDIOTIC



INNOCENT



INTERESTED



JEALOUS



JOYFUL



LOADED



LONELY



LOVESTRUCK



MEDITATIVE



MISCHIEVOUS



MISERABLE



NEGATIVE



OBSTINATE



OPTIMISTIC



PAINED



PARANOID



PERPLEXED



PRUDISH



PUZZLED



REGRETFUL



RELIEVED



SAD



SATISFIED



SHOCKED



SHEEPISH



SMUG



SURLY



SURPRISED



SUSPICIOUS



SYMPATHETIC



THOUGHTFUL



UNDECIDED



WITHDRAWN

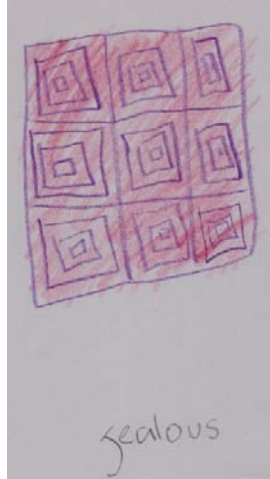
Project Two:

Abstract Art

expressing feelings using colours and shapes



'Anger' by 16 year old female



'Jealous' by 14 year old male



'Anger' by 14 year old male



'Sadness' by 16 year old female

Learning outcomes:

- Expressing feelings surrounding a difficult situation.
- Representing those feelings using shape, pattern and colour.
- Reflecting on a difficult situation.
- Potential to promote empathy with others.

Materials:

- Any of the following drawing media can be used for this activity: pastels, coloured pencils, felt tips, paints.
- A4 or larger sheets of paper.
- Geometric shape and line templates (included with this resource pack).
- Tracing paper (optional).

Creating a 'feeling' shape:

Method:

- Ask the young person what they love doing most (legally!).
- Ask the young person how they feel when they are doing that activity.
- Ask them to think of a 'feeling word' that best describes it, eg. excited, happy.
- Talk about how colours, shapes and symbols have direct meaning in the world around us and in our everyday lives. Eg. traffic lights; the red on a traffic light means stop/ danger and green means go/ safety. Red is often used to express danger or it can signify love and romance, eg. red hearts, red roses. Or, colour is used in language, ex.'s want to paint the town red', or, 'I'm feeling blue.'

- Ask the young person what colour they might use to represent the feeling word they have chosen.
- Once they have decided a colour, ask what shape that feeling might look like. Eg. an angry feeling shape might be pointed and spiky rather than rounded and curved.
- Ask if they are able to draw the shape they have just thought of. Stress that it does not matter what the end result looks like and that there are no rights or wrongs in this exercise. It is more about the process than the outcome.
- Ask the young person to draw their 'feeling' shape and colour.

The supervisor should also complete the same exercise and have an example in mind which they can then draw at the same time as the young person.

The 'feeling' word game:

The above method can be extended into a game. The leader and young person take turns in choosing a 'feeling' word and each draw the feeling at the same time. After each person has completed their drawing, compare the two and talk about why you have each chosen certain shapes and colours to represent your 'feeling' words.

When a few rounds of this have been played, you are ready to proceed to the next level!

Developing a collection of 'feeling' shapes

Method:

- Ask the young person how they feel about the situation you wish to explore with them.
- Explore their different emotions around this and ask whether they are able to draw these using the techniques learned above.
- If this is not possible, ask what the emotions are that they feel most often. You might find that these are 'anger' and 'sadness'.
- Ask them to draw these feelings.
- After each drawing, have a discussion about the shapes, colours and emotions expressed.

Once the young person has completed a collection of 3 or 4 'feeling' shapes, they begin to create a piece of artwork using the shapes as a starting point. For eg. the shapes can be combined to form a colourful piece of abstract artwork.

Creating a piece of abstract art

Method:

- Ask the young person to start combining their 'feeling' shapes into a pattern or design by overlapping them, laying them next to each other, etc.. This can be done by tracing the original 'feeling' shapes, by cutting them out, or by re-drawing them freehand.
- Once a design has been decided upon, ask the young person to draw the design onto a clean piece of paper.
- This design can then be transformed into a painting, mosaic, drawing, textile, etc..
- Ask the young person to write or record their 'story' behind their piece of artwork.



Weaving combining several 'feeling' shapes by 15 year old male, representing how he felt about himself and his offending. It was created on the premises of the victim, which was a church, and presented to them as a gift.



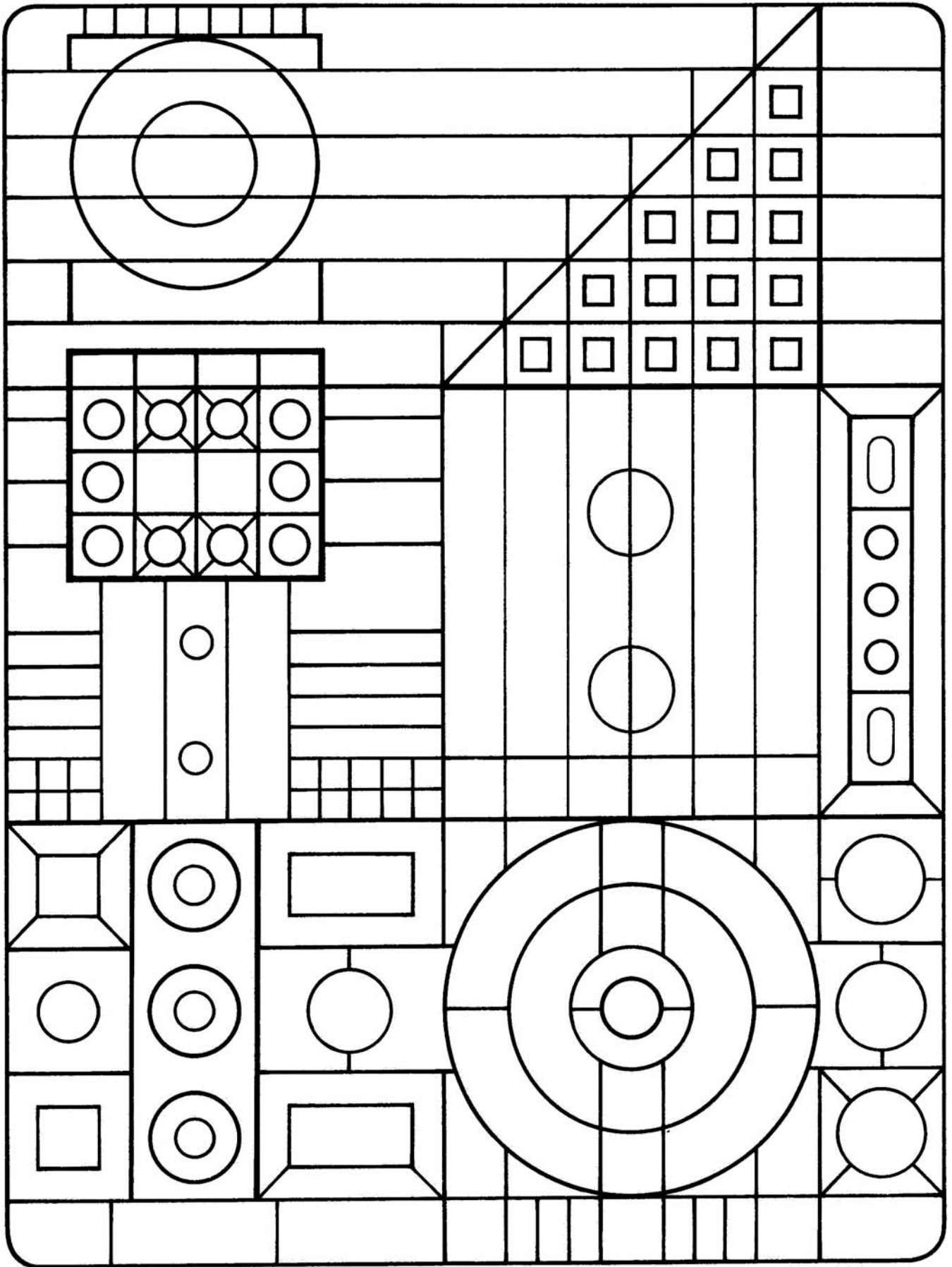
'Confused, calm and angry' mosaic created by 11 year old male.

Literacy skills:

- Speaking, listening and discussing.
- Using 'feeling words'.
- Story writing.

Numeracy skills:

- Looking at different shapes: symmetrical and asymmetrical ones.

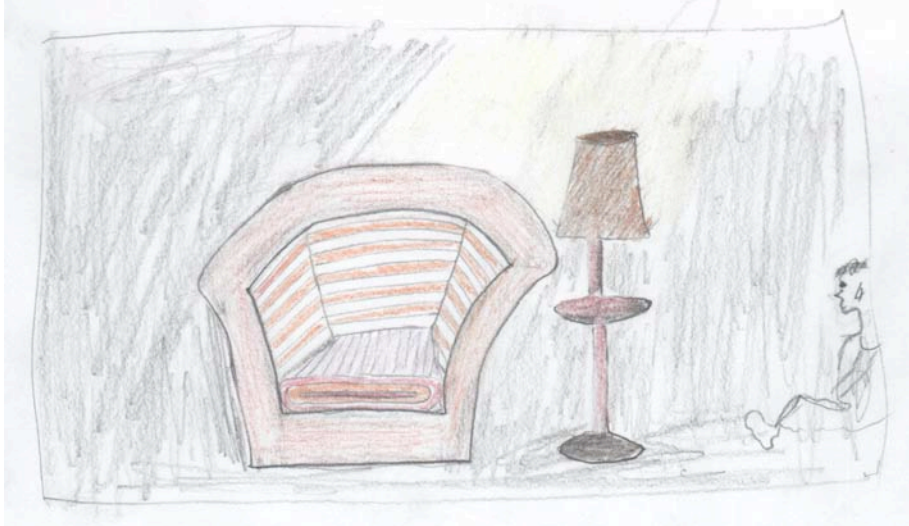


Geometric shapes to name and trace round
The lines may also be traced and used to create patterns and abstract shapes

Project Three:

Designing a Chair

expressing how I feel about myself



Drawing of a chair designed by a 17 year old male.

The figure on the right represented the young person who felt he wasn't 'good enough' to sit in the chair. He also said that the chair was in the light from the lamp, but that the figure (himself) was sat in the dark. He created a model of the chair and of himself in wire and by the end of several sessions, he felt able to place himself in the chair.

Learning outcomes:

- Expressing how the young person feels about him/herself.
- Representing those feelings using design and form, structure and texture.
- Reflecting on how the young person feels about him/herself.
- Potential to see the possibility for change in their life.

Materials:

- Any of the following drawing media can be used for this activity:
Pencils, pastels, coloured pencils, felt tips, paints.
- A4 or larger sheets of paper.
- Plastic coated (for health and safety) garden wire.
- Wire cutters and pliers.
- Scrap fabric.
- Glue gun and glue sticks (or other strong glue).
- Scissors.
- Modroc plaster scrim rolls (optional).
- 2 shallow plastic tubs filled with warm water (only if using modroc).
- Paper towels/ cloths.
- 3 chairs of varying designs, eg. deck chair, arm chair, office chair (or whatever available in venue).
- Tape measure.
- Ruler.

Creating a personal chair design

Method:

- Ask the young person to sit in a number of chairs of different designs.
(If different chairs are not available, use the pictures of chairs included with this resource. Show the young person the pictures of different types of chairs ranging from traditional to modern.)
- Ask the young person the following questions:
 - What does each chair make you feel like?
 - Does each chair create a different feeling?
 - How easy would it be to relax in each chair?
 - Are those feelings to do with the design of the chair, the colour, or the materials it's made from?
- Ask the young person to walk around the room and select 5 different textures, eg. curtain/ blind fabric, metal radiator, wall, wooden chair frame, etc.
- Ask the young person to describe what each texture feels like when they touch it and how it makes them feel.
- Ask the young person to look at the different items of clothing they're wearing and ask the following questions:
 - How many different textures are you wearing?
 - How does each texture make you feel?
- If the young person is struggling to think of words, ask them to select one of the following:
 - Awkward
 - Comfortable
 - Safe
 - Relaxed
 - Warm
 - Nervous
 - Fidgety
 - Insecure
 - Unsafe
 - Cold
 - Uncomfortable
- Ask the young person what words they would use to describe themselves, eg. maybe they feel totally comfortable with themselves, or maybe there are things they are uncomfortable with and would like to change. Spend some time exploring this together.
- Remind the young person of the exercises above and how different chair designs, textures and materials made them feel.
- Ask the young person to keep all those things in mind and to try and draw a scaled drawing of a chair design that reflects how they feel about themselves.
- Before they start the drawing, ask them to imagine how big they would like their chair to be in reality. Work out a scale that reflects this, eg. 10cm = 1m. Use this scale to create the design drawing.

Creating a model chair

Method:

- Ask the young person to cut lengths of wire that match the measurements in the scaled drawing of their chair design.
- Begin to assemble the basic structure of the chair by connecting pieces of wire together. Lengths of wire can be joined by twisting pieces together with your fingers or with the pliers.
- Once the basic shape has been created and the structure is stable, ask the young person what kind of materials they imagined their chair to be made from, eg. leather, fabric, wood, metal, etc.
- Start attaching the appropriate scraps of fabric/ materials to the metal frame work with the glue.

OR

- Cover the wire structure with the Modroc* cut into small strips.
- Once the Modroc has dried the young person can then paint the structure or attach the fabrics/ materials of their choice.
- Once the chair is finished ask the young person to write/ record the story of their chair and what it represents.

* Modroc is scrim soaked in plaster dust. It can be purchased in small rolls from art shops and when dipped in water becomes pliable. It is the same material used for broken limbs.

Literacy skills:

- Speaking, listening and discussing.
- Describing.
- Using 'feeling words'.
- Story writing.

Numeracy skills:

- Measuring.
- Creating a scaled drawing.
- Cutting measured lengths.
- Visualising in 3 dimensions.



Examples of different chair designs



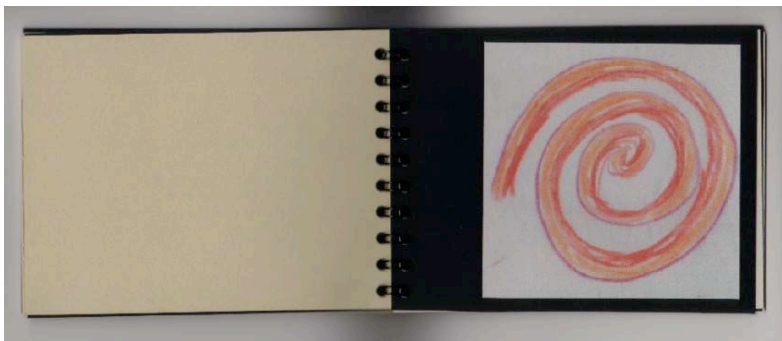
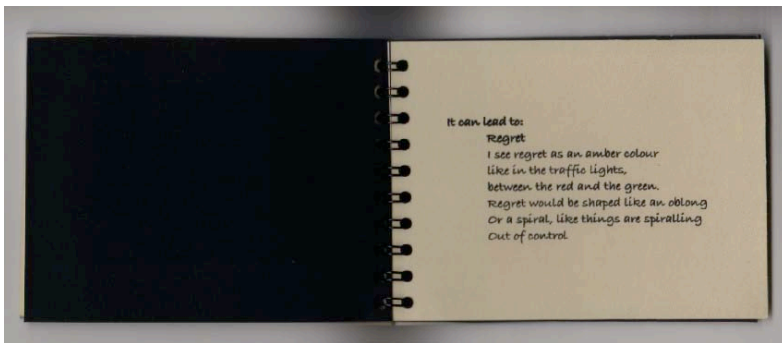
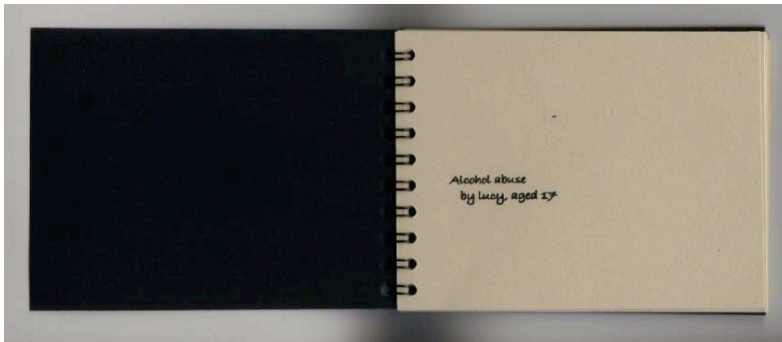
Some more chair designs



Project Four:

Creating a Book

*expressing how I feel
exploring what I know
about an issue in my life*



Book created by 17 year old female about the dangers of alcohol as all her offending was alcohol related. The red spiral shape represented how she felt her life spiralled out of control when she was drinking.

Learning outcomes:

- Expressing how the young person feels about a particular issue in their life.
- Representing those feelings using words, design and form.
- Improved knowledge, education and research regarding the issue.
- Improved IT / writing skills.

Materials:

- Thin card (any colour) for the pages of the book.
- Any of the following drawing media can be used for this activity:
Pencils, pastels, coloured pencils, felt tips, paints.
- A4 sheets of paper.
- Glue, eg. pritt stick (optional).
- Computer, scanner and colour printer (optional).

Creating an issue based book

(I have used the theme of alcohol as an example. Other themes could also be explored in this way, eg. drug use, truancy, bullying, etc..)

Method:

- Discuss with the young person the issue you would like them to look at and to create a book about.
- Suggest that the book could be used to help other young people facing similar issues.
- Decide on the size of the pages. This is especially important to do at this stage if you are not using a computer as you will need to know what size of paper to use for the text and drawings. Try suggesting an unconventional size, eg. the book could be quite small. The example above was about 15 x 12 cm. This will make the end product more interesting and creative.
- If you are not using a computer, ask the young person to measure and cut the card to size using a safe cutting device, such as a rotatrim.

Gathering the text for the book

- Once an issue has been agreed, ask the young person what facts they know about the issue, eg. alcohol affects your reactions, can harm your liver, etc. and either ask them to write these facts on a piece of paper or type them on a computer. If you are not using a computer, the young person can write the facts directly onto the pieces of card you have just cut.
- If they are struggling, suggest researching the topic on the internet, if this is appropriate, or in any leaflets/ books that may be available or in a library.
- Once some facts have been gathered, ask them about how the issue affects them, eg. do they become aggressive when they've been drinking? Ask the young person to write or type their responses.
- Next, ask the young person to describe how alcohol makes them feel. Ask them to write or type their responses.
- Finally, ask the young person what alcohol makes them do. Again, ask them to write or type their responses.
- Decide together how best to design the book. The following is a suggestion:
Title page, eg. 'Alcohol' by Lucy, aged 17, or 'How alcohol affects me' by John, aged 14.
Section 1: 'some facts about alcohol'
Section 2: 'how alcohol affects me'
Section 3: 'how alcohol makes me feel'
Section 4: 'what alcohol makes me do'.
- Divide the information they have written/ typed into the appropriate sections.

Designing the illustrations for the book

Option One (basic):

Gather images from the internet, magazines or newspapers, regarding the issue, to illustrate the text above.

- Either: cut and paste them onto the pieces of card or download/ scan them onto a computer (check copyright on any images used first).

Option Two (more advanced):

- Ask the young person to choose 3 feelings that the issue most commonly raises within them and go through the stages in Project 2 'Abstract art' 'creating a feeling shape' section of this resource pack to enable the young person to create a series of colourful shapes that can then be used to illustrate the text. These images can then either be scanned into a computer or glued onto the pieces of paper/ card.

Creating the book

- Ask the young person to place the text and illustrations they have created in the order they would like them to be.
- Or, if they have used a computer, print out the text and illustrations making sure that all the page dimensions are correct and the same for each page.
- Ring or spiral bind the pages together (as in illustration). It is very cheap to get this done at any commercial printers or somewhere like Staples/ Office World.

Literacy skills:

Speaking.

Writing.

Research.

IT and typing skills.

Numeracy skills:

Measuring of page sizes for the book.

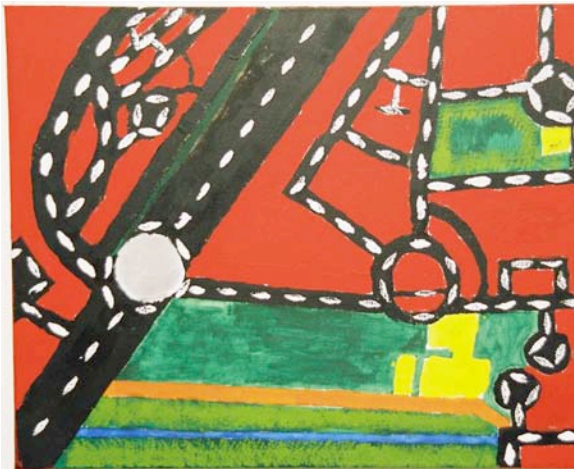
Designing page layout.

Project Five:

(with special thanks to Aik Saath, 'Together as One', a young people's peer mediation project in Slough, www.aiksaath.com, who first gave me the idea for this project)

Drawing a Neighbourhood Map

exploring safe and unsafe areas where I live



Above: abstract paintings created from maps 3 young people drew representing the safe and unsafe areas where they live.

Learning outcomes:

- Expressing how the young person feels about the area/ community in which they live.
- Representing feelings using colour shape and pattern.
- A greater understanding of the area/ community where they live.
- A greater understanding of why they are attracted to certain places within their locality.
- A greater understanding of the safe and unsafe areas where they live and the influence of those places on their lives.

Materials:

- Any of the following drawing media can be used for this activity:
Pencils, pastels, coloured pencils, felt tips.
- A4 paper.
- Tracing paper or acetate (OHP) sheets (optional).
- OHP pens (optional).
- Larger than A4 stretched canvas frame (optional).
- Acrylic paints (optional).
- Paint brushes (optional).
- Ruler or tape measure.
- Road or Ordnance Survey Map of where young person lives or access to internet.

Method:

Creating a line drawing of a neighbourhood map

- Ask the young person to describe where they live and what it's like to live there.
- Ask them where the unsafe and safe areas are. Are there any unsafe areas? If they are struggling with this, ask them whether who they are depends on whether the area is safe or not, eg. would they let their sister/ girlfriend/ younger person/ child/ Gran/ Grandad go there?
- Find a map of the area where they. This can easily be done through the internet or with a road/ ordnance survey map.
- Ask them to draw the immediate area around where they live. Depending on ability, they can either do this from memory, by copying, or by tracing the map.
- Ask them to mark on the map they have just drawn the safe and unsafe areas using a key with symbols. Suggestions for this might be: a bottle for areas where alcohol is consumed, a needle for drugs, fist for violence, etc. The young person can also use colour for their symbols or keys.
- Once they have completed the above, ask the young person to draw a timeline of each of the different places they have marked on their map. The timeline should detail the times of day or night when it is safe or unsafe to go to those places they have marked on their map and what happens at the different times. Eg. it might be safe to go to the shops in their neighbourhood at 12 noon but it might be unsafe to go there at 12 midnight.
- Ask the young person about the times of day or night they visit those places on their map and why they are drawn to them at particular times. Try and develop this into a discussion and an opportunity for learning and understanding a bit more about themselves.

Developing the line drawing into a painting of a neighbourhood map

- Ask the young person to draw a grid of 3cm squares covering an A4 acetate (OHP) sheet or A4 tracing paper.
- Lay the completed grid over the line drawing of their map.
- Select a canvas larger than the piece of paper you are using and ask the young person to similarly fill the canvas with squares of 5cm drawn lightly in pencil.
- Ask the young person to copy the line drawing of the map they have just drawn on to the canvas using the squares as guidance. This will enlarge their map proportionally.
- Once they have successfully transferred their map to the canvas, ask the young person to paint the map using blocks of colour and marking on the canvas the safe and unsafe areas. (See above paintings for ideas)
- Ask the young person to write or type a short paragraph about their drawing/ painting. (See eg. below).

Literacy skills:

- Speaking and writing.

Numeracy skills:

- Measuring.
- Enlarging a section of a drawing/ map proportionally or to scale.
- Spatial awareness.



*'Green is the grass
Brown is the shops
The 'G' is for Good and the 'B' is for Bad*

My art is to show the good and the bad bit of where I live and the roads where I live.

The bad parts are the side streets and the graveyard. The good parts are the park. The side streets and grave yard are bad because there is drug dealing and muggings, shootings and people getting hurt and doing drugs.

The park is good because it's where the kids go and play and have fun.

*The yellow 'B' shows the bad signs.
The pink 'G' shows the good signs in Cowley.'*

15 year old female and young mother writing about her neighbourhood map.

Clair Aldington, Creative Arts Development Worker in Youth Justice (2006 - 2007)

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