

1. Observing the pupil(s)

See what interests the pupil has and what activities he is interested in, or for more group based work as in drama and dance (and possibly music) you might write a strengths needs chart based on the group dynamics and elements which are strong or need working on. Try working on this in a multi-disciplinary way so that you employ the ideas of support staff, SaLTs, Physios and OTs (the latter two especially if movement and space is involved). With group work it is important to get a collective feel as much as you can and look for pupils to feed off each other. Remember, with the arts perhaps more than any other teaching – it is not about you as the teacher, it's about them as explorers.

It may well be that some more able pupils will appear to dominate ideas and exchanges, especially if they are verbal and reasonable communicators, but this position can be a strength for the group, as those less able (and probably less confident) can take their own time to increase their involvement levels. It is interesting to note that experienced practitioners such as Keith Park, quite deliberately use their more able learners to model what is possible (Pilcher, 2009; Park and Pilcher, 2010).

Penny Lacey suggests writing a Strengths/Needs chart with the Needs being divided into needs 'right now' and needs 'next' (Lacey, 2010). These are definitely not SMART targets (she much prefers to call them **SCRUFFY Targets**) but might be considered to be learning intentions, so that you have a loose idea of the learner's direction of travel. Be prepared for that direction to change however, and if the learner decides to take their learning east instead of west, you need to be co-active in going with that. Carpenter et al's (2010) **Engagement Scales** may also be helpful here as a means of finding the optimum levels of engagement for the pupil.

Karkou and Glasman (2004) suggest that teachers need to have a flexible approach to what might be considered to be music or art or dance or drama. It is really important that teachers provide their pupils with as many opportunities as they can to use the arts as forms of expression and communication.

Know where the pupil is functioning. Don't expect sharing if the young person is functioning at the sensory motor level, but be prepared to stretch learners as much as possible. Establish the comfortable, but don't stay there indefinitely.

Work at the child's developmental level not at their chronological age – but there is no reason to use childish resources when working with those who are no longer children. A 14-year-old may well want to sing the The Wheels on the Bus in an open mic session and this free expression should be encouraged, but perhaps, with support the student could work on a rap version for future renditions?

2. Find the Motivators

The creative arts are often the most pertinent areas for teachers to use what already interests, since this is likely to be an existing strength of the child. It may be that a

child has a favourite ‘flapper’ that can be used a base for a class’s dance sequence; prefer particular musical instruments; prefer particular genres of music that might be used in rotation for music or dance; learners will probably prefer particular art media that interests them but may well shy away from others, especially if there are sensory difficulties. Hinchcliffe (1996 and 1999) and Peter (2009) urge the use of ‘real life’ situations in drama, so that learners can make sense of scenes and have an understanding of context.

In any event, there is a common consensus that most learners find the arts intrinsically and inherently motivating, perhaps because there is ‘strong notion of empowering pupils to take control and responsibility in the learning process’ (Peter, 1998b) but also because the arts are so much fun to do. They are, as Sherrat and Peter (2002) suggest, an extension of play.

3. Adopt a careful approach

It may well be, especially if learners are new to the artistic experience and especially if there are sensory issues around proximity and noise for example, that you will need to minimise the possible anxiety experienced. Set up a repeatable routine as an introduction and have a clear and repeatable structure for each session.

Adults must be prepared to model first, whether that be a movement, or a scenario, or a rhythm or an art form.

Using repetition minimises anxiety. Don’t change wholesale from week to week, session to session, but change only small parts and build these changes up around the familiar until they too become familiar.

Using the familiar minimises anxiety. Adopt settings, scenarios, materials, instruments, movements that have a context for the learners, and keep that context going from week to week and session to session.

Think about your language so that the learners can become familiar with the words and phrases used to indicate different parts of the structured sessions.

4. Create structure

The arts are excellent opportunities to work on problem solving and thinking, but these will almost inevitably involve making choices, which will in turn produce consequences. We must recognise that this is potentially stressful.

Offer ‘irresistible invitations’ to be involved in the art by stressing the fun element and giving as much control as you can to learners who need it.

Progress **SLOWLY** – only bring in one or two changes per week.