

Nadine Stone's Development Work: **Developing creativity in art** at Fearnhill School, Letchworth

Nadine Stone was a member of the Art Department and a Student Development Leader for Year 10 at Fearnhill School when she carried out her project. She was concerned that the examination pressures in schools encouraged teachers to focus on transmitting information rather than on releasing their students' potential for creative learning. Her aim was to consider strategies that would enable staff and students to come to a greater understanding of what is meant by creativity so that they would place greater emphasis on it in teaching and learning. She hoped to foster a sense of autonomy in the students so that they would become more confident and creative learners.

Nadine's critical perspective on art education had been sharpened through her reading. For example, in his exploration of why we teach art, Richard Hickman quotes a teacher who said the following:

School and creativity/teaching and art making are not comfortable bedfellows. Indeed the role of schools appears increasingly to be to manufacture mediocrity. We teach an edited filtered version of the arts and art history to suit society's need to produce drones – not thinking individuals. I believe teaching and making art is about generosity, sharing of concepts and enthusiasm for the craft and for life, and seeing a student's victories as their own.

(‘Jade’ in Hickman, 2005:93)

This stance resonated with Nadine's school's priorities; the recently appointed Headteacher had identified the school environment and the encouragement of creative thinking in the classroom as being two key priorities for development.

Nadine began her project by conducting a tour of the school with the Headteacher to gain an overview of the school environment. Their observations underlined the view that the school environment was not conducive to creative thinking. In order to investigate further, Nadine organised a meeting with a student consultation group made up of representatives from each year group. Two key suggestions

were made: firstly, that the display in the art department should draw from a wider range of work, particularly pieces which reflect creative ideas rather than basic skills; secondly, that students should be given greater choice in their work. This second point echoed the project described in Tony Delaney's article in a previous issue of this journal (Delaney, 2007).

As a response to these suggestions, Nadine experimented with providing two Year 7 groups and a Year 9 group with a range of creative activities. Some of these were simple but powerful, for example, at the beginning of one lesson she gave students a set of cut-out circles and asked them to see how many objects they could make with them. Another exercise involved a piece of paper on which Nadine had drawn a 'squiggle'. The students were asked to build on to the random squiggle to make a drawing of whatever came to mind. Nadine asked her students to draw a 'creativity thermometer' as a device to structure their reflection on the place of creativity in their learning.

Nadine asked the students to share their views on these activities with her. The reactions from the students to the activities were interesting and often surprising. During the starter activities Year 7 and 9 students were engaged and the fact that the activity did not have an expected outcome seemed to cause a buzz of excitement. However, during the main activity, a number of students, mainly girls with high predicted grades, did not want to start until they were told exactly what to do. These students manifested an anxiety that Nadine had not expected. On reflection, she understood that these students were accustomed to achieving a high quality outcome by following the example they were usually shown. Their work was generally technically skilled but lacking an individual element of creativity. In contrast, the reactions to the later Year 9 project on Surrealism were overwhelmingly positive with the students valuing their own work for its individuality and difference.

Nadine then selected one of the Year 8 students from the consultation group to participate in a focussed investigation into her perception of creativity and how she would manifest this in her work. To do this the student was set a title 'I', which she was to make into a piece of artwork. She then fed back to the consultation group her responses to the activity and during the discussion which followed, the development of a concept map of creativity began.

Nadine concluded that her teacher-led development work had contributed to the students developing a more independent approach to their learning. One indicator of this was that Nadine's 'A' Level students decided to create their own space in the department. The project also contributed to development in the department as a whole. The Head of Department experimented with some of Nadine's strategies in her own teaching and at the end of the project a concept map of creativity was created and displayed in the Art Department. Nadine shared what she learnt with the other schools in Letchworth at a local conference and at a professional development session in her own school. This was the beginning of a review that would lead to a new policy document for the whole school.

References

Delaney, T. (2007) Portrait of an art class: redistributing power in the classroom. *Teacher Leadership*, 1(2), 6-21.

Hickman, R. (2005) *Why We Make Art - and why it is taught*. Bristol: Intellect Publications.