

Take your partner

Art and Words Group



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Background Information

This particular group was a pilot group for a First Steps course, delivered by Kirklees College. It had arisen from an initiative from the Kirklees Skills for Life Working Group, aimed at trying to reach learners who are traditionally difficult for the colleges and other providers to reach. They were all recruited from SHAP/Inroads. All were 16 to 19 years old. Two had been learners on Inroad courses, whereas six were from Home Start, via Inroads. One of the aims was to improve partnership working and Paddock Village Hall, a local community centre, provided the venue. It was important that learners were introduced to a new environment away from Inroads, but without having to attend a class on college premises at this stage. The course was funded by DIUS via NIACE in a programme called "Reading for Pleasure", which was aimed at young people and adults who had not developed the habit of reading.

Art and Words Course

The course was delivered by two college tutors, one, Hazel, a literacy specialist and the other, Michelle, an Art/design specialist. Support was also offered by staff from Paddock Village Hall, who provided the room, laptop, digital camera and other support as required.

The course ran for five weeks (two hours each week) in January/February.

Two learners attended all five sessions, one attended four, one attended two sessions and the remaining four came to one only. Childcare was provided by communicreche.

What did we do?

We aimed at providing an introduction into learning, using Art and books each week. We specifically wanted to deal with the literacy needs of the group. In the introductory week, we looked at a variety of art books and linked various emotive words with paintings and pictures. The second week, we used books provided by the local library to find out about Van Gogh. We tried to not limit reading to books only. For



example, we used Paddock's laptop to show *Starry Starry Night* on YouTube, where a series of paintings were shown alongside the song. The learners were provided with the lyrics of the song to take away.

The learners used books provided by the library service to provide some facts about Van Gogh. (These facts were, in a later session, sorted into “True or False” statements.) Everyone produced a version of *Sunflowers* using sponges. These paintings are to be exhibited in the local library.

Other sessions included making a collage around a family member and, as these were children, pictures from children’s books were included. These books are ordered now and will be given as gifts to the learners for completing the course. One week the learners designed a photo frame. The final session was spent designing cards and considering the verses to be printed inside, using standard format verses from a website as a prompt.

How did it work?

It was often very difficult to incorporate literacy into the sessions. Learners were reluctant to spend much time reading, even less time writing and wanted to concentrate on the “Art” aspects of the course. Giving books as a prize for attending was popular, though, especially children’s books that could be shared at home.

Five weeks was a very short time and it required most of that time to build a relationship with the learners. One session had to be cancelled because of snow, which took the course beyond half term week. Even so, learners continued to attend. There were issues around funding for taxis and childcare. A future course nearer to the learners’ homes through the Family Literacy Team is being investigated for some of the learners.

Two learners who had been very reluctant to come to college to collect ID badges did eventually agree to meet one of the tutors and seemed proud to have their badges and student status. Learners received College certificates of attendance and two learners received 100% attendance certificates, as well as advice and guidance from the college’s Careers Officer.

The biggest surprise was that learners who found it difficult to attend a course regularly, for a range of reasons, were willing to put effort into attending if the interest was there. One learner even had her benefits (incorrectly) cut due to attending the course and yet she continued to attend. A learner who had tried to join a college course earlier and failed proved that she could attend regularly. Her previous “attitude problem” was probably more a defensive shield, as with so many learners with literacy needs. She became the official photographer of the group, using the digital camera each week to record the work.

Feedback

The learners most enjoyed the sessions around “family”. They were interested in a further course which could include some use of digital photography and designing a jigsaw. This future course is now being planned.

The work was not easy; working with learners who have been categorised as “hard to reach” are always going to be challenging. Signs of improvement with such learners are often difficult to quantify. Yet two learners continued immediately with an IT course at Paddock Village Hall, while waiting for the next Art and Words course, so it had encouraged them to continue with learning. The partnership work between Kirklees College, Inroads/SHAP and Paddock Village Hall will continue, as will the close work with Kirklees library service, which provided a lot of help and support in finding suitable books.

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The Reading for Pleasure suite of materials:

- CPD modules: Reading for pleasure in a number of contexts
- Storytelling: CPD unit with lesson ideas
- Families, Learning and Storytelling: Using archives for community cohesion
- Take Your Partner: Engaging emergent adult readers
- Technology and Reading: How to use blogs, wikis, iPods and e-books to promote reading
- Putting two and 2 together: Creating a bridge between literacy and numeracy learning
- Resources for libraries: Guidance on how to engage families to read for pleasure