



Chalice Arts UK Ltd

Using Sketch Books in Primary Schools

By

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The views and opinions contained in this briefing paper are those held by Chalice Arts UK which the author hopes will inform the discussion about the use of sketch book in primary schools and ultimately help lead to good practice in their use.

The 2014 National Curriculum for Art at Key Stage 2 is shown below. You will notice that creating sketch books to record observations and to review and revisit ideas has an important place in the Programme of Study.

Key stage 2

Pupils should be taught to develop their techniques, including their control and their use of materials, with creativity, experimentation and an increasing awareness of different kinds of art, craft and design.

Pupils should be taught:

- *to create sketch books to record their observations and use them to review and revisit ideas*
- *to improve their mastery of art and design techniques, including drawing, painting and sculpture with a range of materials [for example, pencil, charcoal, paint, clay]*
- *about great artists, architects and designers in history.*

With curriculum time at a premium art as a subject has become squeezed. I have been asked recently about the use of sketch books and whether using them is actually going to detract further from the business of making art and other artistic learning.

I do think there is a danger of sketch books being used inappropriately and that is why I have written this advisory paper. The Programme of Study for Art is very brief and lacks detail. However this is not a disadvantage. In the hands of a skilled subject leader and staff team virtually anything can be included as long as it is contributing to pupils' artistic development and progress with processes, techniques, materials and learning about the history of artists, architect and designers. Schools can formulate their own scheme of work and make strong cross-curricular links as they see fit.

The question is why have sketch books been given such a prominent position in the Programme of Study and how should schools develop their approach to creating and using sketch books?

The use of sketch books in the National Curriculum at Key Stage 2 is nothing new. Many schools have been using sketch books since the National Curriculum was first introduced and many prior to that. Many schools have been using them with primary age children from the early years onwards. There is no reason why Key Stage 1 children cannot be using sketch books as part of a whole school policy. Sketch books can provide an inspiring record of a child's artistic journey from early mark making to sophisticated representational drawings by Year 6.

I think we begin to find the answer when we start to think about what sketch books are actually used for, then we can begin to see the contribution they can make to children's education in art.

Adults who make art frequently carry out preliminary work such as sketches, compositional drawings, colour investigations, collecting source materials such as photographs and often these are kept in a sketch book or journal. Sketch books can offer children opportunities to investigate and explore different medium and techniques before committing to a finished piece of work.

Sketch books can also form a link between artwork produced at home and that of school. The sketch book opens up the possibilities for some form of artwork to be continued outside of the classroom and is therefore a good way of valuing the thinking and artistic endeavours from outside of school as well as within. However the sketch book should not be purely used as a home learning tool.

Sketch books can also provide somewhere to record information about artists, architects and designers that they may be studying. The sketch book is somewhere to record research and ideas and very importantly sketch books offer a tool for assessment purposes as well. Sketch books can provide opportunities for pupils to write, recounting visits, writing reviews, formulating lists, writing description etc.

I would hope that sketch books not only provide a record of children's learning in art but they also help them to become more independent and confident artists.

Some examples of the range of sketch book activities

- Drawings and mark making activities
- Use at school and at home
- Investigating the properties of different materials e.g. pastel, paint, charcoal
- Investigating different techniques such as shading, colour mixing strips, tonal strips and notes on how to make different colours.
- Investigating the artistic elements such as line, shape, colour etc
- Making notes about different processes or techniques
- Making notes or drawings about artists, architects and designers
- Making notes and collecting images to show different artistic genre
- Collecting visual information e.g. ideas, photographs, postcards, magazine cut outs, textile samples
- Collecting memories
- Keeping photographs of pieces of their own art for reference
- Writing evaluations and reflecting on their artistic learning
- Providing writing opportunities e.g. recounts of visits to exhibitions, writing instructions, lists, writing reviews, creative writing/ poetry
- A place for teachers to provide written feedback
- Extension activities
- Homework activities
- Private work
- Evidence of differentiation, support for gifted and talented pupils or those with additional needs.

It is a good idea to extend your thinking about the possibilities of using a sketch book. Sketch books can be thought of as journals and this may be a more helpful name. Some artists use their sketch books like diaries or they use them when they are out of the studio for recording. They should not be thought of as scrap books even though collecting ideas to stick in may well have its place and be very useful.

Whole School Sketch book Policy

It would be very sensible to ensure there is a school policy for the use of sketch books. This may well form a section in the Art Policy but it is very important to set out what is expected in a policy statement.

Introducing Sketch books

In the early days the art subject leader should take a lead. Examples of the use of sketch books should be shared at staff meetings on a regular basis. Sketch books need to be talked about and looked at regularly in the beginning.

Some ideas to help subject leaders

- Make sure the head teacher is convinced sketch books are a worthwhile idea and contribute to learning. Having the firm backing from senior staff is very important.
- Lead by example. So make sure your classes sketch books are models of good practice.
- Work with the teachers in your year group to start with.
- Find enthusiastic colleagues in other year groups and coach them so they spread good practice and enthusiasm in their own year group.
- Show examples of sketch books regularly at staff meetings (this only takes a few minutes). Highlight good practices that you can showcase.
- Share example in assemblies.
- Produce sketch book displays in public areas of the school – table top displays of sketch books and wall displays using photographs of children working in their sketch books and colour photocopies of actual pages. Display adult sketch books if you are able to borrow any from parents, teachers etc.
- Give rewards to children with good sketch books.
- Monitor sketch books and give constructive feedback.

Using Sketch Books

The use of sketch books should also be planned into units of work. Not all units of work will make use of sketch books but many can in some shape or form. There will be other opportunities when individual year groups plan to use sketch books, perhaps outside of regular art lessons e.g. home learning or other classroom opportunities that might arise. I stress that year groups should plan! It is important for all teachers within each year group to have equal commitment to the use of sketch books.

It is worth stressing here that sketch books are not the place for a finished piece of artwork. They are used as part of the process of making art and learning about aspects of the subject. They are the place to practice and help develop skills.

Not all work started in a sketch book will be followed through to a finished piece of work. In these instances the work in sketch books becomes a reference point for future work using the same technique or process for example.

I would recommend that work in sketch books be dated and given a title or labelled in some way. This provides a good record of the use of the sketch book but it also ensures that the sketch books are taken seriously. They are not merely rough books! They are artistic thinking books.

Teachers will have the responsibility to ensure that sketch books are used appropriately and contain a balance of children's own workings and thinking as well as collected items stuck in. The sketch book should be neither a glorified scrap book nor a rough book.

If children are writing about the work of artists, architects and designers then it is recommended that question prompts be used so that children include comments that are:

- Descriptive
- Analytical
- Interpretative
- Judgemental

Here are example questions that I use when discussing about works of art. They can be very helpful to children writing about art. You might choose a couple from each category to stimulate a writing activity.

Prompts for Discussion and Writing about Works of Art

Descriptive Question Prompts

- Can you describe the subject or theme of this picture?
- What type of artwork is this e.g. painting, print, collage?
- What is the picture about?
- Was it painted recently or a long time ago? How do you know?
- Is there a message in the picture?
- Can you think of a good title for this picture?

Analytical Question Prompts

- What does the picture tell us about history? Are there any clues in the picture?
- What do you think the intended use for the picture was e.g. a palace, church, temple or wealthy person's house?
- Why was it made and what was it used for? e.g. mask
- What colours have been used?
- How has the artist created textures?
- How has the artist used pattern and line?
- How has the artist created a feeling of space and depth?

Interpretative Question Prompts

- How does the picture make you feel? Is there a mood about the picture? How has this been created?
- Is there a story in the picture? What might the people in the picture be talking about or looking at?
- Is this a good piece of art? Why do you think that?
- What is good art? Who decides? Would you choose this piece of art for a gallery? How do you think people choose which pictures are hung in galleries?

Judgemental Question Prompts

- What do you think of this piece of art? Why do you think that?
- Would you like this picture in your own home?
- Do you think other people would like this piece of artwork? Why?
- If you could meet the artist what would you say to them? Why?

Reference – Teaching Today Art Classics 2 published by the BBC 1995 Written by Stephen Bruce

Choosing a Sketch book

I like the A4 spiral bound books but any hard back book with plain paper (preferably cartridge paper) would be sufficient. I think it is very worthwhile investing in hard back books. The covers can be personalised and will withstand being used frequently and perhaps for more than one academic year depending how many pages are in each book. The investment cost is worth it especially if you have made the commitment to use the sketch book effectively. Good quality A4 size sketch books will be valued the children and school.



Frequency of Use

There is no prescribed frequency of use. I would like to think they would be used every couple of weeks for some art related learning or thinking. There will be periods during the term when they will be used more frequently during an art unit of work and other times when they won't be used. Home learning using the sketch books should also be considered from time to time. Occasionally sketch books will be used for cross-curricular work where drawing or writing about artefacts etc. is appropriate. It is useful for a sample of sketch books to be put on display in the classroom so that they are a constant reminder of their importance by sharing examples of how children are using them.

Marking and Feedback

It is extremely valuable to mark sketch books by writing supportive comments to promote research and investigation and by posing questions, affirming what the children are doing, offering suggestions, giving prompts to provide further opportunities to extend their thinking, drawing, writing etc. Through teachers marking of sketch books they are sending a strong message that they are important.

New Sketch books

As children change year groups it is a good idea to pass the sketch book up to the next year group and to continue using it. I think it reasonable that a sketch book last for two year groups e.g. Y1 and Y2, Y3 and Y4, Y5 and Y6. Sketch books are not cheap to purchase and obviously the number of pages will determine how frequently they are changed. On educational grounds it is desirable to continue using the same book until it is full or has been used for two years. This will ensure continuity and progression over time. Replace the books with a new one as and when required but it is valuable to keep using a partially filled sketch book as the children move through the school.

Monitoring

It is very important that Art subject leaders should carry out a monitoring scrutiny of sketch books to assess how they are being used and to provide guidance and feedback on their use to their colleagues.

If you really want sketch book to contribute to children's art education then this activity is really crucial.

Monitoring Prompts

- Look at the consistency of use across year groups, Key Stages, whole school.

- Look at the type and quality of work in the books. The balance between drawing or other art activities, written work, historical and critical work about artist, architects and designers and collected material stuck in.
- Review the balance between school based work and home learning.
- Asses the quality of marking and feedback
- Talk to groups of children about their sketch books and about their learning through the use of sketch books. Assessing children's sketch book behaviour through talking to them will give you a good insight into how sketch books are being promoted and valued by individual teachers.