

I'm rubbish at art

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I'm rubbish at art

When trainee teachers can experience success within their own art, they are able to embrace themselves as artists and go on to help children do the same. **Kaytie Holdstock**, lecturer in Primary Art and Design Education at the University of Worcester, explains how to break the cycle of art anxiety



Art teacher confidence in primary schools has long been cited as one of the many reasons why the quality of art education is said to be on the decline. This is made apparent in Ben Cooper's 2019 report for the Fabian Society¹ that paints a grim picture of the current state of art and design provision in primary schools. As a lecturer in primary art education, the phrase 'I am rubbish at art' is a familiar statement from our undergraduate, generalist trainees when they first enter the art room. This has always fascinated me. Why do so many trainees feel so determined in their perceived lack of ability in art? What experiences have contributed to shaping this negative artistic identity? And what impact does this lack of confidence ultimately have on the children they go on to teach?

Much of trainees' 'art anxiety' appears to be born out of misconceptions around the nature of art and design. Students talk of artistic talent as a gift attributed to the few – a God-given talent that some of us are lucky to be born with, rather than something that can be nurtured and encouraged within everyone. Many trainees recall experiences from their own education which confirmed that they were 'rubbish' at art, and even those lucky few who maintained the love of art into their teenage years were often discouraged from continuing their artistic endeavours by well-meaning parents or teachers in the pursuit of subjects deemed more 'academic'.

With some initial teacher education providers offering as little as two hours focused instruction in art and design, alongside the lack of artistic professional development offered to practising teachers who serve as school-based mentors, little is being done to break the perpetual cycle

Opposite
Reminding trainees that art should be fun and accessible

Below
Experiencing success in their own art breaks the cycle of art anxiety in trainee teachers



where early career teachers enter the primary classroom fearful and ill-prepared to teach art.

Our children deserve an education where art and design holds its rightful place as an essential

primary trainees, many of whom dropped art like a hot potato at the first available opportunity in secondary school.

Understanding the anxieties our primary trainee teachers bring to the art room must go hand in hand with a teacher education that develops trainees' own artistic confidence. We need to challenge trainees' perceptions of art as an exclusive and inaccessible

'We need to challenge trainees' perceptions of art as an exclusive and inaccessible subject by re-engaging them in dynamic artistic exploration, experimentation and play'

and valued part of the curriculum. And for this, we need teachers who are comfortable and open-minded when exploring their own identity as artists. This is unfamiliar territory for most

subject by re-engaging them in dynamic artistic exploration, experimentation and play. Through direct experience, we can guide trainees to see how easily art can be taught, so that all learners

experience success and mistakes, and are then encouraged and valued as part of the learning process. Trainees learn this best by undertaking a journey of discovery for themselves.

One of the key ideas which help students successfully navigate beyond their own perceived inadequacies in art is reframing the idea of observational drawing. A lack of drawing skill in its traditional form is all too often the reason why a student has discounted themselves artistically. By providing opportunities for mark-making, students are reconnected with the dynamic, energetic and inclusive nature of drawing. Giving students opportunities to explore their own drawing by encouraging continuous lines, gestural marks and experimental drawings, whilst also exploring a wide range of tools, scales, orientations and timings, all help make drawing accessible again. It takes the fear out of observational drawing and returns the fun.

When trainees are encouraged to reflect upon their own experiences of primary art, an interesting picture emerges. Many students hold fond memories of making Christmas cards and, of course, using glitter, but few remember experiencing art in any meaningful way beyond a bit of drawing, occasionally 'getting the paints out' and, on rare occasions, making a clay animal (although never one that survived the drying process in one piece). Only once trainees' eyes have been opened to the many other art disciplines – such as the fun of printing, the flexibility of collage and the skill of photography – can the limitless possibilities of a full and rich primary art education be explored. Additionally, this is often the moment a trainee will discover a previously unexplored area of art with which they resonate, leading to the realisation that 'I'm actually pretty good at this!'

When trainee teachers are given the time to experience success within their own art, we give them the tools to move past their own anxieties and embrace themselves as artists. Artists who, by the very nature of overcoming their own insecurities, are uniquely placed to help children do the same. It's time we recognise the pivotal role of quality art provision in initial teacher education as the first step to breaking the cycle. ●

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Reference

1 Primary Colours: The decline of arts education in primary schools and how it can be reversed fabians.org.uk/publication/primary-colours