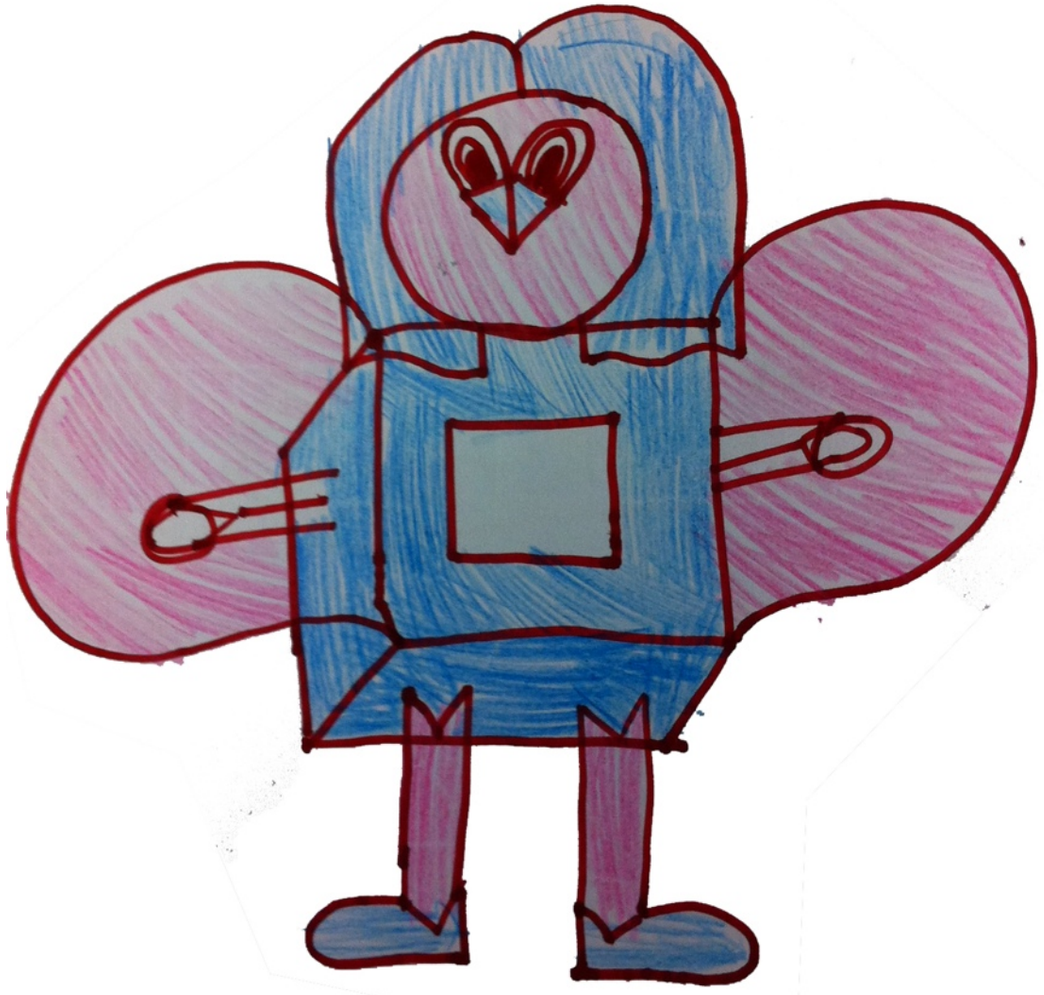
Baseline Testing

in Art & Design

by Paul Carney AST

www.paulcarneyarts.com



Defining starting points - Baseline Benchmarking

One vital component from the advice given in the Ofsted framework is:

'Pupil's make progress relative to their starting point'

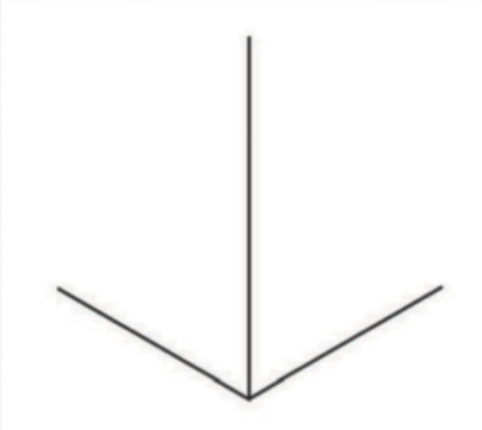
You can't show progress accurately if you haven't clearly shown what their ability was at the beginning. In fact, you can't teach anyone anything unless you find out what they know already. Now many Secondary schools do a baseline test at the start of year 7 and it usually involves a drawing from observation. If your current baseline test is simply asking everyone to draw a shoe or a similar object then what are you actually finding out is simply their general drawing ability. This is great and a good barometer of art ability in many areas, I even to used do it myself. However, if you study the new curriculum for art and design in the UK (and most other curriculums around the world) what you need to teach is; making skills, understanding of art, developing ideas, evaluation. These are essentially the same things as you need to be successful in exam art. So it makes sense therefore to have a baseline test that looks at levels in skills, imagination, literacy and independent learning ability. If you test to these four areas at the start of the year you can more accurately show what progress has been made.

To find my students current making skills level I rely on drawing skills. Now you might just ask them to draw a still life object and mark them, which is fine but there is a quicker way! My test requires students to demonstrate that they can construct a 3D shape in 2 dimensions, which is an important

function for spatial awareness, higher cognitive thinking and is an advanced drawing skill.

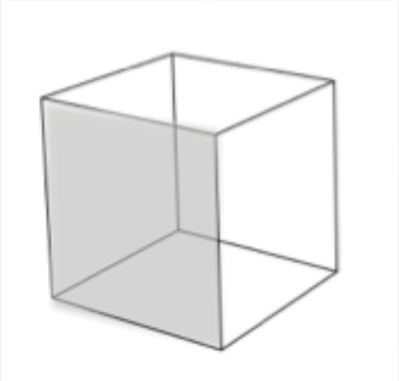
Making skills - Drawing test (ten minutes): Draw or show the arrow diagram below on the white board. Get the students to copy this onto A4 paper. Do not allow students to use rulers and leave space at the top of the paper for further drawing.

Task 1:. Turn this diagram into a 3D cube (10 minutes approx.) note: It is important that you don't help the students to do this.

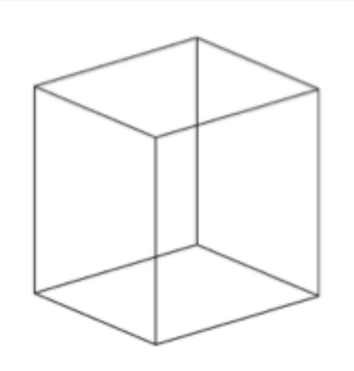


Results:

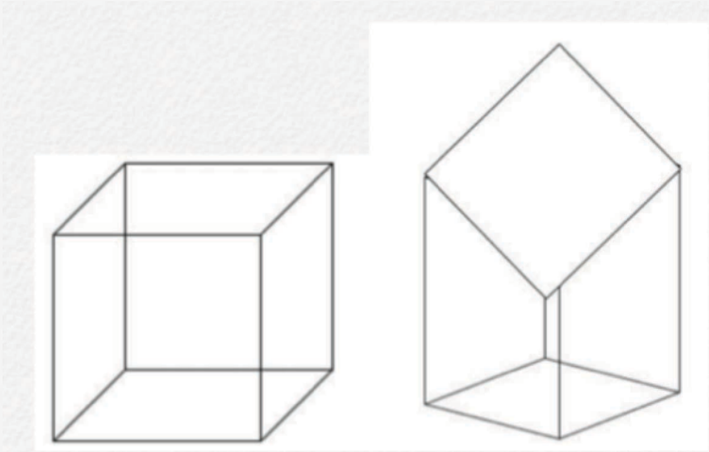
- Advanced spatial awareness - potentially has exceptional drawing skills. Draws the cube quickly and/or with skill and accuracy, using perspective different to the one suggested (might even ignore the whiteboard diagram)



- Confident spatial awareness - High/average ability. Constructs a cube in the correct perspective, connects all or most corners correctly and lines are approximately parallel. Can draw lines freely without using a ruler.



- Struggling with spatial awareness - Average/ Lower ability. Numerous efforts to attempt the task fail to completely convince or there might even be an adaption of the task to suit an easier method, such as front view perspective where two 2D squares are overlapped and the corners are joined. A cube might have been completed, but the lines are not parallel and deviate considerably from the correct angles.



- Weak spatial awareness - Low ability. Unable to complete the task without assistance.

This simple test is a very revealing one. Most students in the UK learn to draw 3D shapes in Mathematics lessons at about the age of seven or eight years. Perspective isn't taught at all to my knowledge, until it is taught in technology lessons from about the age of 11 in Key Stage 3. Therefore, if a student uses perspective techniques in Key Stage 2 this would indicate very high drawing ability. If students draw using perspective techniques in year 7/Early 8 would still indicate higher ability, though it should not be unique later in year 8 or 9 as art and technology lessons, combined with physical maturity should make it easier. Usually, about 5- 10% of Year 7 students draw the cube using advanced perspective, (less in KS2).

The remaining students will usually be spilt between typical and struggling spatial awareness, depending on the ability of the class and a tiny proportion will be unable to do it. What this reveals is that those who draw the cube correctly will be able to access most or all of your curriculum and will generally do well in art. Those with spatial awareness problems by Year 6 or 7 are usually going to struggle with realistic drawing and will need more specialist help. Interestingly, students with spatial awareness drawing problems also struggle in maths lessons at questions involving symmetry, rotations, reflections, 3D shape or visual mathematics.

Crikey, that was only the first part of the test and it should only have taken ten or fifteen minutes, yet the results are already very revealing.

Ideas test part 1 - Imagination (On the reverse side of the drawing) Set the pupils the task to list as many objects they can think of that the cube could be turned into. Note: It is important that you don't help the students to do this. For example: You could turn the cube into a TV, a House or Dice, (15 minutes).

Marking this section is always done as peer marking in lesson, where we swop answers and typical scores are usually similar to this:

0-10 = below average imagination. 10-20 = average imagination.
20-30 = good imagination.
30 or over = very good imagination. 40 or over = exceptional imagination.

Eliminate any answers that are wrong, duplicated or completely random or unclear. These results give you a good idea about a person's ability to think visually and the breadth of their visual literacy. The higher the score, the more visually literate they are. Quite astonishingly, very highly skillful artists often struggle with this task.

Ideas test part 2 - Imaginative realisation Draw a new cube of any size, onto a fresh sheet of paper or you can draw on top of the first cube drawing. Now, look at the list of objects you have just made. Create an imaginative picture from the most original and interesting object on your list. Create a whole scene, including background, there no rules to this except that you should be able to make out where the original cube was. For example: You might have written TV on your list, therefore you might create a picture of a TV in an interesting and unusual scene.

You begin to see patterns emerging when you look at whole samples. One idea might have 'caught on' and spread around the class or you see repetitions of X-Boxes, Playstation's, CD players, Houses and vehicles. When you get original ideas they stand out. Clearly, some people might be weak at drawing but have original ideas and vice versa. Many of the most talented artists in my classes have very weak imaginations and this test brings this to light. When a student has added rich details, back- grounds, perhaps even colour and have cleverly adapted and manipulated the cube you should score highly.

It is fairly straightforward to separate the outcomes of this task into these ability strands:

1. Highly Skillful and Imaginative. Creates a highly imaginative and skillful picture that is original and well executed. The picture makes use of space, considering background, detail and perspective.

2. Confident level of skill and imagination. A good outcome has been produced that adapts and manipulates the cube to suit the student's intentions. There is evidence of consideration given to background and detail, though some of the quality of the execution might be a little lacking.

3. Developing level of skill and imagination. The drawing is highly dependent on borrowed ideas or there might be a considerable lack of skill in outcomes or little evidence. Evidence of a struggle to achieve the standard.

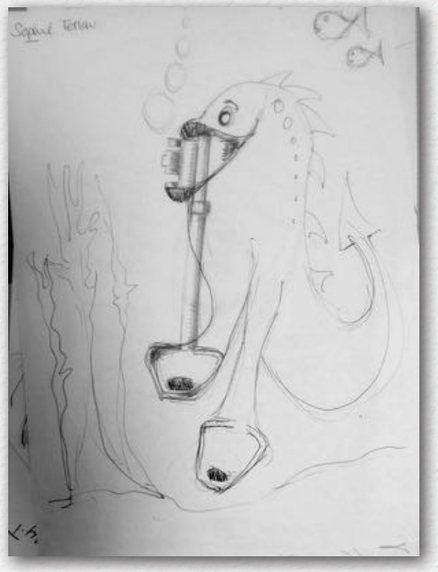
In the imaginative realisation drawing you should give consideration to:

- Adapting and manipulating the cube to conform to their own idea.
- Using multiple and repeat cubes to create more complex ideas.
- Consideration given to background to make the cube part of a scenic composition.
- Creation of depth, perspective and spatial awareness.
- Consideration of the whole drawing.

I usually mark this in class with the pupils in a discussion/peer/self informal manner. Then I would record only one mark in my marks book from an average of the two test scores as exceptional, high, middle, low, SEN.

Alternative exercise to the cube drawing

The cube drawing exercise is insightful, but if you're looking for something more exciting, then try this one which does the same thing. Have a rummage through that draw you have in your house that's full of junk and assorted rubbish and collect a box full of small objects such as; curtain hooks, pen tops, brackets, old keys, hair pins etc. You give each pupil an object such as this and you ask them to draw it on A4 paper using traditional realism techniques, pencil, shading, measuring etc. Then you ask them to turn the drawing into an imaginative picture where the object is part of the composition. Mark this in two parts; drawing skills and use of imagination in the same way as before.



Knowledge test The pupils are given a question on the board which they must write down then complete at home. The question is:

"**Who is the mysterious stranger in the painting 'the bar at the Folies-Bergére' by Edouard Manet 1881".**

Present your answers in the most creative manner you feel appropriate.

What I'm asking my students to do is to find out what this painting is (a quick browser search), read about it, identify that there are many different opinions on who he is but no one really knows and then present this answer creatively in their own manner. Yes they can ask their mate in form time but they'd still score low/no marks because the quality of their visual response is poor. The ability to do this is crucial to the type of work they will need for GCSE. You are testing their ability to work independently and form critical opinions about art. I mark mine as a simple exceptional, high, middle, low, SEN and no mark. Of course, you can simply change this question for something you feel is more appropriate, but make sure it is one that is hard to Google a direct answer to.

Evaluation test This is easy because I simply ask the English department for the pupil's reading age. This gives me vital information about the literacy level of the pupil (and the class) that tells me how able they are to access my teaching materials, how good their written and verbal responses will be and in short, how effective their evaluation skills are. I'll record them again as; exceptionally high reading age, high reading age, normal average, low and very low SEN.

Summary So now you will have scores of High, Middle or Low in each of the four areas of making, ideas, knowledge and evaluation and it's only taken one quite interesting lesson and we've marked it in class. I'll get the homework scores the following week and add the reading ages later. What I am now able to tell though is; which students have drawing ability as I could with traditional observation drawing but also who is imaginative, who has the ability to critically find information and process it and what the literacy level of each pupil is, which in turn informs my pupils ability to evaluate (and my own teaching materials!).