

Since beginning the Art Start program, not only have I noticed a difference in my class, but a difference in myself too.

In September I found that I had 28 very noisy, chattery and immature children (I suppose a typical Year 3 class). Each day I was giving more and more, trying to shape them into a disciplined and sensible group, and each day they proved so difficult to contain, leaving me exhausted and exasperated. As an energetic, enthusiastic and positive person, I couldn't believe how despondent I was beginning to feel about being a teacher. I was beginning to wonder if I'd be able to stick at it for the rest of my working life. Getting myself out of the classroom had become a serious consideration.

Then along came Art Start. I'd heard a bit about it and I'd been to a couple of Inset sessions, and finally my school really seemed to get enthusiastic about it and so all the teachers started to experiment. At first I focussed on 2-D/3-D art activities as that's where I felt most confident, working on these about 3 mornings a week. It seemed to take forever for the children to finally embed the rule of silence during Art Start, into their heads. But with perseverance, they stopped the chatter and turned on the concentration, and finally you could hear a pin drop in my room. As time progressed and after some fantastic courses with Martin Bright about rhythm, I started to experiment with the other elements of Art Start, and am now at a stage where I begin every day with one of the five disciplines.

I can happily say right now that I am content with teaching again. I feel like I've found another way in, another way to teach and guide my 28 young people. I feel that I have a tool that really works. I know that as soon as my children get into class, regardless of the goings on at home, I can get them started on the right foot. I know I can have them quiet immediately. I can have them concentrating, thinking, calm and switched on to learning.

When the Art Start ends, I'm not having to leap on my children like a tonne of bricks to keep them with me. They aren't looking round the room to find opportunities to talk, fiddle or cause a disruption, as they were all too frequently in the past. They seem to be peaceful, relaxed and ready to settle to work. The children respect their Art Start activities and frown upon those who sometimes forget how to conduct themselves. I have seen children who

normally can't keep themselves or their mouths still, relax and focus on me as opposed to their friends.

There have been no miracles and my classroom has not become an isle of tranquillity, but we are happier and we are loving the things we're making and doing with our hands, our mouths and our bodies. I don't dread the mornings anymore. I look forward to them and the chance to be creative as well as engage the minds of my children with their learning. Art Start has shown me how to grab a moment of pure enjoyment each day, where minds are switched on to pattern, music and movement, awakening sensitive reactions and responses from children that often leave me smiling and amazed.

Finally I would just like to say how much I have learnt from the rhythm workshops given by Martin Bright. I look at the percussion trolley now with excitement and have never got so much pleasure out of teaching music. I have the confidence now to teach the children how to compose their own music from a stimulus such as a story or a painting for example, and know how to help them progress their skills. I'm thrilled to think that I've taught children how to play a rhythm and create their own, putting sounds and rhythms together to achieve a particular effect. The pride the children have in what they've done speaks volumes to me. I feel a far richer teacher now that I have made friends with the percussion instruments. I have a new found confidence in my abilities.

So all in all, my experience of Art Start and the support given to enriching the skills of teachers, has been a very positive one. I feel very grateful for the program and how it is benefiting all of us.