

Teaching and Learning Project

The first part of this report will look at some of the philosophical debates which have surrounded the teaching of art and design since the Second World War and attempt to outline the elements which make up the more recent debates about the direction of the subject.

Literature Review.

The reasons for teaching Art and Design have been debated for many years. It was Herbert Read, the philosopher, poet and art critic, who first championed the role of the expressive arts in the education of the better citizen. In his book "Education through Art", published in 1942, he argued that art education fostered 'growth of what is individual in each human being' Read (1942, p.8). He believed that the suppression of creative ability was a cause of some of the social ills of the time.

Herbert Read started a process of the discussion of the Rationales for Art Education which continues to this day. In Chapter 1 of "Art Education 11-18" edited by Richard Hickman, Senior Lecture in Education at Cambridge University, Hickman (2008, p.2) discusses the various rationales put forward since the Second World War. He identifies a number of elements of Art Education which have been debated by educationists, specifically the work of Brian Allison and his article "Identifying the core in Art and Design". Allison identified four 'domains':

- Expressive/productive
- Perceptual
- Analytical/critical; and
- Historical/cultural

(Allinson quoted in Hickman, p.4)

These four domains relate specifically to the Assessment objectives in both the National Curriculum for Key Stage 3 and GCSE Art and Design as will be discussed in more detail below.

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Hickman (2004, p.5) also discusses the three distinct philosophies of art education, the expressionistic, the reconstructivist and the scientific-rationalist. The expressionistic approach, he comments, is bound up with the notions of creativity, imagination and self expression. This approach is characterised by a belief in the individual, and the desire to enable students to take control of their own learning and develop self-expression and self-determination. This approach has been common in art departments for many years and has arguably led to the view put forward by Sikes (1987) that for many students the art room became a kind of oasis away from the normative atmosphere of the rest of the school.

The reconstructivist view sees art education as more of a means to an end, that end being social change, using art to challenge the status quo. Herbert Read's philosophy was a combination of the expressionist and the reconstructivist as he saw the creation of a better citizen being fostered by expressive and creative activities in school.

The main exponent of the scientific-rationalist approach is Elliot Eisner and as Hickman (2004, p.6) notes:

Elliot Eisner has for many years advocated an epistemological basis for art education, rooted in the notion that art is a way of knowing with its own characteristics, and which provides a route to latent cognitive processes.

In other words Eisner believes there are artistic modes of thinking, and believed that more attention should be paid to the cognitive aspects of art activity, cautioning against the view that the practice of art is motivated by emotional or expressive forces. He believed that artistic training helped develop problem solving skills and was therefore more properly allied to the cognitive.

Some educationalists argue for more emphasis to be put on the critical/analytical aspects of the subject. Michelle Tallack argues that critical studies, as she calls it, is subservient to the practice of art making in English secondary schools and that this situation should be reviewed. She comments that:

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Not only is it the problem that critical studies is almost exclusively tied to practical work, but also that it is seen in very limited cultural terms. In the exemplars of good practice' model, teachers draw, naturally enough, on the cultural heritage to which they have had access through their education. For example when choosing examples from art of the past, white western teachers tend to draw on white western artists. Tallack, M (2004, p.109).

She argues that there is a danger in using critical studies to inform art making activities. Without careful consideration of the social, historical and cultural context of the work being used, it can lead to a form of pastiche of an artistic style – such as self portraits in the style of Van Gogh. She mentions specifically a project praised by OFSTED (1998) in which native Australian art was used as stimulation for high quality practical work, but comments that “no mention was made of how native Australian art was discussed, what concepts, information and issues were raised in relation to it”. Tallack (2004, p.109).

Her view was that the work of the native Australian art was simply used as a design source. Her argument is that critical studies should be delivered within a historical context in which students properly evaluate works of art to elicit interpretations of meanings, ideas, beliefs and personal, social, and cultural values, particularly when studying the art of other cultures.

Hughes (2005) takes up this discussion arguing that what is desperately needed in the subject is neither an artificial division between the practical and the theoretical, nor a forced marriage of the two, which so frequently leads to the sort of pastiches mentioned above. In this passage he is arguing for a genuinely holistic art and design curriculum.

Through a lack of rigorous thinking about critical studies, let us not chain our young people to one, given and officially accepted artistic environment but seek to empower them to make meaning for themselves. To do this, we will need more than an armoury of good lesson ideas. We will need a philosophy about critical studies and a clear idea of its educational purpose. Hughes (2005, p.39)

He is referring to a need for the students to use their own interests to find, research and develop works of art, relevant specifically to themselves, in their own and other cultures, which will inform

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their work without the artist to be studied being imposed on them by teachers or the examination syllabus.

OFSTED (2005/08) also backs up the need for rigorous thinking about planning for critical studies. Inevitably the increased emphasis on this aspect of the subject has led to more writing being done during art projects and how this was a disincentive for some students (OFSTED mentions boys and the less able in particular) to take up the subject and comments that: “several students were critical of the academic emphasis given to some art and design courses, and the way in which this was exacerbated by undifferentiated writing tasks” OFSTED (2005/8) Art and Design teachers are not always trained in the teaching of writing skills.

The combination of the two areas of making art and critical studies is now very much entwined in the delivery of art in English Schools. When the national Curriculum for Art and Design was introduced the original orders revolved around two attainment targets: investigating and making, and knowledge and understanding; the new (as of 2000) orders for Art are little changed in essence but conflate the two attainment targets into one, with four strands: skills knowledge and understanding; experimenting with and using media; reviewing and adapting work as it progresses; and investigating others work and applying knowledge and understanding. Over these attainment targets are four key concepts which are:

- Creativity
- Competence
- Cultural Understanding
- Critical Understanding

When students move from Key Stage 3 to GCSE Art and Design these two strands of making art and critical studies are again intertwined. The AQA GCSE Specification 2010 uses the following four Assessment Objectives.

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- Record observations, experiences and ideas in forms that are appropriate to intentions;
- Analyse and evaluate images, objects and artefacts showing understanding of context;
- Develop and explore ideas using media, processes and resources, reviewing, modifying and refining work as it progresses;
- Present a personal response, realising intentions and making informed connections with the work of others;

AQA (2010).

These can be seen as relating specifically to Allinson's four domains mentioned above. In conclusion therefore the main debate over the last fifty years or so about the future of art and design education has revolved mainly around the two strands of making art, which is tied up with self expression and creativity, and the critical studies aspect, which is more focussed on the understanding of the work of others. We now have a situation both with the National Curriculum and GCSE where these two strands are interlinked and art work made by students is expected to be informed by the work of others.

Research Methods.

In thinking about the question of the relationship between the making and the studying of art I was interested in doing some research which would focus more on the students and their reasons for choosing to carry on studying the subject post- 16. The best way to do this was in the form of a questionnaire as I wanted to elicit directly the views of the students. I could have done this by an interview technique but this would have been time consuming and probably provide too much information that was not specific to the question I wished to focus on. In order to have an approach which was between the two I included a section in the questionnaire where students could add comment of their own. I also included a question as to whether the individual intended to follow a career path in this area to see if this had an impact on their reasons for choosing the subject. In

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order to gain a wide range of opinions the questionnaires were used with college students who were following an art course post 16(11) prisoners who had chosen to take art as an educational option in prison (8) and adults who chose to study the subject in their own time (2). There were 22 responses (see appendix1)

I also did not want to carry out this research in isolation and wished to have some other research results with which to compare my findings. Richard Hickman did some similar work with beginning teachers' based around eight rationales for the teaching of art and design and so I decided to base my research on these rationales also. The comparison of the two sets of results was not as straightforward as I hoped as will be explained later.

Hickman's eight aims are:

- To enhance students' understanding of their cultural heritage.
- To enhance students' understanding of the cultural heritage of 'others'.
- To develop students' perception of the visual world.
- To develop students' understanding of their inner world.
- To develop practical problem-solving skills through manipulation of materials.
- To facilitate creative behaviour and lateral thinking skills.
- To promote inventiveness and risk taking.
- To enhance students' ability to make informed judgements about the made environment.

Hickman (2004, p.165)

I simplified the language of these eight aims and made the statement "I chose to study Art and Design because I want to:" followed by eight statements which had to be numbered 1 to 5 with 1 being agree strongly and 5 being disagree strongly. The statements were as follows:

1. Understand more about my own culture.
2. Understand more about other cultures.

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3. Understand more about the media and the manipulation of visual images.
4. Understand my own inner world – learn to understand and express my own feelings.
5. Learn and develop new practical skills.
6. Be creative.
7. Be inventive and take risks.
8. Learn more about the environment and the world in which I live.

Findings.

With reference to my own research the findings were really quite clear. With the help of Learning Support at the Isle of Man College I interpreted the data in a number of ways. (see appendix 2)

Mean, median and mode are three kinds of 'averages'. The mean is the average most commonly used where you add up all the numbers and then divide by the number of numbers. The median is the middle value in a list of numbers and the mode is the value that occurs most often. Finally the range is just the difference between the largest and the smallest number.

For the purposes of this report the mode is the most useful average although I will sometimes refer to others for clarification. From my data therefore I have produced a column chart of the mode, or the number that occurs most often in the questionnaire responses (see appendix 3). The three questions which received the most number of 5's (agree strongly) were Question 3, Question 5 and Question 6. Of these Question 6 had the most number of 5's (77%) Question 5 next (45%) and Question 3 last (32%) These figures are taken from the very last line of the statistics (highlighted)

Of the sample surveyed the most common reason for choosing an art course was to be creative, the second to learn and develop new practical skills and the third to understand more about the media and the manipulation of visual images. The next two questions were 4 and 7. 4 being about self expression and 7 being about being inventive and taking risks. Question 2 and question 8, about learning about other cultures, and the environment, came next. Question 1, learning about their

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own culture, coming last as a reason to choose art. Interestingly question 1 comes below the mid point marked by a red line on the graph which represents the frequency of response. In other words a total of 81% answered 1 or 2 for this question – 1 being disagree strongly. Interestingly Question 6 has 5 as the median and also has the highest value mean average (4.6). Q 6 also has the narrowest range (responses were from 3 to 5).

The rank order of the questions from my research is: 6 5 3 4 7 8 2 1.

In summary according to the results of my research students are choosing to study art to be creative, learn practical skills, to understand the media and visual images and less so because they want to know more about the world in which they live, their own culture or the culture of others.

I came across Richard Hickman's research in his book "Art Education 11-18" where he states "I conducted a questionnaire survey in three institutions to find out about beginning art teachers' perceptions of the aims of art education". He kindly sent me the results of his research (see appendix 4). The questions were in a different order, although based on the same rationales, and the column chart he had produced showed the mean average rather than the mode. The priorities were also reversed – number 1 was high but in mine number 1 was low. I therefore decided to reinterpret the data changing the priorities and the order of the questions to reflect my own research and produced a mode average bar chart. (see appendix 5)

The bar chart shows clearly that question 3 and 6 are again in a high position but question 4 has a low priority. The two questions about our own and other cultures come some where in the middle with no strong feeling either way. The results for question 4 however need a bit of further analysis. This question is about self expression, and came quite high on the students' priorities, but appears to be the lowest with the beginning teachers. The figures are however the most polarised of the two surveys with 11 respondents giving a 1 but 10 respondents giving an 8. Using a mode average this

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comes out as 1 but the true picture is more complex. Question 8 about the environment is lowest with 16 responding with 1.

The rank order for this survey is: 3 6 5 7 1 2 8 with 4 as a wild card as the results are too polarised to rank.

The transcript of the general comments made by the respondents can be found in Appendix 6. They all give a feeling that the subject is enjoyed and taken as an end in itself rather than what it could lead to career wise, apart from one student who mentions architecture. Self expression in one form or another is mentioned a number of times.

Conclusions.

The students and the beginning teachers alike regard creativity, or the chance to be creative, as an important element in art and design education. This is interesting and important for a number of reasons not least because “creativity” in its various guises crops up in many areas. On the DITLLS course creativity came up in the context of curriculum design and in the business world the term is often referred to as an important element, often disguised with such language as ‘blue sky thinking’ or ‘thinking outside the box’. Here is a definition of creativity from BusinessDictionary.com

Mental characteristic that allows a person to think outside of the box, which results in innovative or different approaches to a particular task. "Amy's creativity is the main factor that landed her the job at the design firm."

Creativity is, it would seem, a valued commodity in the outside world and it is interesting that both art students and teachers value it highly. Hickman (2004, p.165) also comments “It would seem that if we consider innovation, challenging the status quo and other aspects of creative behaviour, then creativity ought to be a desirable goal for all subjects.” Making the point that creativity is not just confined to art.

Question 3 was third in my survey and first in the priorities of the beginning teachers. It is about understanding the visual world, dealing with television, the internet and advertising in all its forms.

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Newbury (2004, p.85) clearly links this with creativity and comments on the issue of whether, in choosing to study art, one's aim is to become an artist.

The economic importance of the cultural and creative industries implies that an increasing number of people will find themselves working in the creation, support, distribution, marketing and interpretation of visual cultural products. Whilst clearly only a minority of young people will become 'artists', that is to miss the point. Only a minority of school students become scientists, but the practice of science is so fundamental to contemporary society that an understanding of this is a democratic right and responsibility.

He is arguing for the study and understanding of visual culture to carry the same rights.

The findings that are most interesting in terms of the above literature review are those that pertain to the understanding of one's own culture and that of others. The priority given to questions 1 and 2 by the students was low and the beginning teachers did not rank it more highly if we take into account the special status given to Q 4. Given that both the National Curriculum orders for Art and the GCSE Syllabus apportion equal weight to learning about art and making art this is in itself surprising. One can only conclude that this aspect of the subject is being approached in a way that does not interest or engage the students. The teachers also, coming mainly from the studio background of art school, are also not inspired to build interesting examples into their lessons, or that the question was worded badly. I will return to the last point in my evaluation.

Tallack, as discussed above, argues for the centrality of cultural studies in art education. She believes that art cannot exist or be created outside the culture of the artist who created it, and that all art is influenced by that culture and cannot be understood without an understanding of one's own culture. Similarly the art of another culture cannot be properly understood without an understanding of the cultural context within which it is made.

We need a model of critical studies that evaluates artists as art producers who work within the framework of given cultural values; whose works are the result of the interaction between their values and the values of the culture they belong to. By evaluating these

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interactions, students will be able to see that artists' values can either reflect established cultural values, ideas and beliefs or challenge them. Tallack (2004, p.114)

As Tallack goes on to argue it is impossible for people to create art, which would include the students and beginning teachers in these surveys, without the influence of their own cultural value system and to some extent the values of other cultures, and that they need to be critically aware of this. I would further argue that art lessons are planned within a given cultural context and the teachers doing the planning need to be critically aware of this also.

The responses' to question 4 also merit some discussion. Self-expression has long been one of the main rationales for art education. Herbert Read in the 1940's put forward five areas for aesthetic education, one of which was "the expression of feeling in communicable form" Read (1942, p.9).

To return to Allinson quoted above, self expression is one of his four 'domains' for art education which also include the perceptual, the analytical/ critical and the historical/cultural. (Allinson quoted in Hickman, p.4)

Hickman (2005, p.103) argues that "some commentators on art education continue to belittle the importance of creative self-expression and its value in promoting outcomes that are self-evidently valuable, such as heightened self-esteem."

The trend in recent years as seen by the emphasis in the National Curriculum and the GCSE courses has been away from art as a form of self-expression to more emphasis on the other three domains. Students however are interested in expressing themselves through their art and self-expression (Q4) comes high in their priorities. The teachers on the other hand are divided with 11 giving it a low priority and 10 giving it a high priority. This perhaps reflects the difference of opinion surrounding the current debates about the future of the subject and the arguments about the relative importance making versus understanding.

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Recommendations.

The low priority given to questions 1 and 2 about their own and other cultures could relate to the way in which critical studies is delivered in the classroom and whether or not the critical studies work, or the artist used as examples, inspires or interests the students. It is self evident from the responses of the students that practical art making is their main interest. In "Drawing together: art craft and design in schools" Ofsted comments that in weaker schools:

There was a greater tendency to impose culture rather than to tap into what interested and enthused pupils. For example, of the teachers observed, some persevered with their favourite themes, such as still life, despite students' obvious lack of enthusiasm. In one school, students were absorbed by Japanese 'manga' cartoons but the teacher had no understanding of why or how this might be used as a stimulus for other work. Ofsted (2005/8, p.24)

1. Examples need to be found which engage young people and new ways of presenting old themes should be explored in order to bring new life to traditional media, perhaps by making more use of ICT.

Another problem with studying ones own and other cultures is that it involves reading and writing.

One of the art students makes explicit reference to this in his comment box. (appendix 6).

Ofsted comments:

The boys interviewed during the survey often expressed their disappointment at finding they were expected to write in a subject they had chosen because it was practical

And

Most of the written tasks were not matched sufficiently to the pupils' literacy levels. They neither challenged the more able nor supported the least able. Ofsted (2005/2008, p.32).

2. Writing tasks in art lessons need to be differentiated and purposeful.
3. Ways of presenting the art of other cultures should be explored that reflect the values and traditions of those cultures. These cultures should not necessarily be historic.

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Both the students and the teachers put a high priority on creativity. This very positive aspect should be exploited. Ofsted comments “national data and reports indicate the remarkable expansion that has taken place in the creative industries over the last decade” Ofsted (2005/2008, p.35) and creativity is also valued in more traditional business’s and industries.

4. Awareness should be raised about the value of creativity. See the following publications:
Expecting the unexpected: developing creativity in primary and secondary schools. www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/1612
Creative partnerships: initiative and impact
www.ofsted.gov.uk/pulications/2517
All our futures: creativity, culture and education. National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, DfEE 1999.
5. Self expression is seen as important by the students and should be valued for outcomes such as heightened self-esteem. Lessons should be planned to allow for students to express themselves and not just copy the art of others.

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Evaluation.

In evaluating this project I would make the following points.

1. I would revise the wording of the questions, some of which are a bit ambiguous, particularly Q's 1 and 2 where I use the phrase "understand more about" What exactly does this mean and what am I trying to get at? This very wording may have contributed to the low priority given to these questions by the students
2. I would target the audience more precisely, perhaps taking bigger sample from more specific categories. For example 10 Prisoners, 10 Adults, 10 16 year olds 10 Art Student 10 Art Teachers. This would have made for interesting comparisons in the changing attitudes towards art education.
3. I would conduct some one to one interviews.

I have also personally learnt a number of things which will help me with my professional development.

Firstly I was aware that there was a lot more writing involved in Art courses and often students struggle with this and art teachers are often not well equipped to deal with it. One of the students on a Btec course at Ballakermeen came to my lesson with a support teacher to help with learning difficulties. I intend to be more aware of the help available from support teachers and find out more about differentiated writing tasks.

When planning lessons and choosing artists for critical studies I will be more aware of the interests of the students and avoid picking obvious white western male artists as examples.

When dealing with the art of other cultures I will be careful to fit the art into its cultural context and not just use it as a design source.

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