

Issues in Art and Design Teaching

Reviewed by Alan Cross, Lecturer in Education, University of Manchester

What a pleasure to read a book which challenges and questions orthodoxy in art and design education and which does so in such an articulate and constructive way. The book does have value for design and technology teachers at the level of principles and values rather than ideas which might be directly related to the classroom. This was not the objective of the authors, so teachers of design and technology should approach such a book with a measure of the enquiry that the authors hoped would attract teachers of art and design. With such an audience in mind the book is very successful.

The book is divided into three parts which complement one another well. For myself, a teacher trainer of design and technology and science, it was the second part 'Curriculum Issues' which was the most stimulating. This ranged through a number of the tensions associated with art and design, examples of what the book refers to as interdisciplinarity and collaboration and a useful section on qualitative research.

An interesting theme is developed about our society's limited perspective of art in education. Lesley Burgess makes a compelling case that unconventional ideas and approaches are not always welcomed. She suggests that even through enabling technology e.g. the internet, barriers are created. Some of these barriers are constructed to protect pupils but a consequence, perhaps unintended, is a

narrowing of pupils' view of art and design. Nicholas Addison's chapter, which considers visual images and the challenge to visual literacy of words, is one that is highly relevant to a subject such as design and technology. Does the educational system value the visual world as highly as the world of words? Whether desirable or not what are the consequences for the subject?

The opening chapters in part one: 'Translations and Shifts in Teaching and Learning' provide a useful and stimulating view of the recent history of art and design education in England and the USA. Kerry Freedman's summary of developments in US education provide a useful foil to the somewhat blinkered view of art and design education represented by the National Curriculum in England. In chapter two John Steers questions recent developments in the UK. He suggests that rather than encouraging creative art and design what is promoted is a form of recreative art and design. Such a view could be very strongly mirrored in aspects of National Curriculum design and technology. He argues strongly for us to utilise tensions and debate rather than accept what he calls the 'English way', which he sees as a 'post-hoc rationalisation'.

The third and final part of the book: 'Towards an Ethical Pedagogy' is perhaps the most important part of the book as it raises questions about our views of art and design and how political and economic power

has, in the view of one Henry Giroux, reduced or weakened our participation in what we call democracy. Tom Gretton considers the relationship between works of art, teachers and key cultural values. He argues that art and design education should engage with and make this a contested area. As in other sections of this book Doy's problematisation of multiculturalism in art education raises the level of debate above what can often be a simplistic or tokenistic approach. Perhaps some design and technology educators would find this level of debate useful. The present view of design and technology certainly assumes values, for example, pupils are rarely asked to consider environmental sustainability as a criteria for design. Such assumptions ought, at least to be identified by teachers and perhaps addressed in classes.

This book is well structured and presented. It makes surprisingly little use of visual images. The book has the capacity to inform teachers rather than support their classroom work in a direct way. All teachers need a strength of conviction in their teaching based on a number of principles. The strength of this book is that it takes an authoritative look at art and design education at the start of the new century. The language used is accurate but at times theoretical and whilst this is one of its stronger features, it may be a little intimidating for some readers. Perhaps the real problem for a book of this nature and for the profession is that teachers may feel that they don't have time to read books which may not have an immediate effect in the classroom.

This book will be a challenging read for many, it will be valued by those wishing to get below the skin of a subject, to go beyond the rather bland diet served up by governmental bodies. For those open to challenging ideas it will represent good value for money.

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