

Mandating the Art Curriculum*

The diversities in our educational provision are probably best exemplified in that wide range of activities labelled art, craft and design. The variations in practices, interpretations, roles and goals in these subjects are enormous. A major underlying factor is the idiosyncratic individuality attributed to professional practitioners in these areas. Qualities of originality, inventiveness and, essentially, *being different* are taken as the model not only for what a teacher chooses to teach but also for all aspects of the teaching task. 'To be different' is seemingly a prime consideration in the choice of subject matter, teaching methods, room organisation, exhibitions of work and so on. There are even instances when defined objectives have been phrased differently in order to make them seem original.

One of the outcomes of this situation is that there is, at present, considerable variation (I choose the word variation rather than confusion) between art teachers regarding what they take to be their aims; whether or not they regard their pupils' or students' activities as being self-expressive, creative, problem solving, learning, specialist and so on; whether or not they feel art work should be assessed and on what criteria. Within the present tolerance of the educational system this is a totally permissible state of affairs. In any case, experience has shown that teachers have an amazing capacity to interpret or rationalise any proposed directive in such a way as to require the least amount of change in what they are already doing. The particular ways teachers have acquired their knowledge and attitudes, developed their own skills, and equipped and organised their facilities constitute an investment of often long experience and form, without doubt, a substantial buttress and defence against externally generated change.

It is against this background of cherished autonomy and diverse practices that any considerations of common curricula or curriculum guidelines need to be seen. However, whilst it may be a truism that there is no *one* way of teaching art, it may not be a truism that there is no one way of conceiving what should be taught under the heading of art. It is to the latter that the remainder of this paper is addressed.

The educational as well as economic and industrial climate of this country is changing and by force of circumstances change will occur in the curriculum. Pressures are increasing for the identification of a 'core curriculum' although there is debate as to how such a 'core' might be conceived. It is significant, however, that the indications so far, including the speculations on the vocationally oriented proposed 17+ examinations, are that art is not likely to be included in the 'core'.

Before proceeding further, it may be useful to describe what is to be subsequently meant by 'art' as this will be prerequisite not only to consideration of the curriculum but also to its justification as an essential part of education. Art, as a human activity and subject field, embraces fine art; painting and sculpture; graphic and textile design; a wide variety

of crafts such as ceramics, silversmithing and woodcarving; communication media; photography, film and television; architectural and environmental study; design activities of various kinds including interior design, furniture, manufacturing and product design; design technology including the traditional 'heavy crafts' of wood and metal; and engineering design. Just as much a part of the subject field are art history, the history of design, criticism and aesthetics. Not only does the subject field include all these as activities and knowledge but it also includes all those objects and other phenomena arising from them in this and other culture. The arts of other cultures are important because they exist as art in their own right and, additionally, are essential to the recognition of cultural nature of the art of one's own culture. It is a fact that we now live in a multi-cultural society and it is quite inappropriate to consider art as being only Western European.

Art is multi-faceted yet it is the accumulation of all the facets which constitutes the subject field. What characterises the whole field is that all its elements are concerned with or relate to man-made visual or tactile form which impinges on the senses and sensibilities in different ways and to different degrees depending on how the form is organised and presented. All the facets constitute or refer to the relationships between intentions, processes, materials and images which result in visual or tactile form. As such, art is one of the major forms of *cultural literacy* along with other major forms such as language, literature, science, music and numeracy. To be 'culturally literate' means having access to and an understanding of the forms of the culture and, in this sense, art can be seen as being essential to the development of culturally literate citizens.

However, it is the whole subject field of art which is the form of cultural literacy and not simply some of its component parts. With hindsight, it is regrettable that there has been a traditional major division in education between 'art and crafts' and 'wood and metal crafts', latterly being referred to within design technology and, of course, numerous sub-divisions of each. This presents a long-standing problem which is in urgent need of resolution. As may be expected, the divisions are more clearly seen and exercised by those in the subject field than they are to the rest of the world. Despite the divisions, it is only by considering the whole spectrum and by recognising the multi-dimensionality of art that a realistic approach can be taken to achieving a balanced curriculum.

A balanced curriculum in art is not the same as a balance in the whole school or college curriculum. A balanced school curriculum (and this is at the heart of whatever may be conceived as a 'core') is one which gives appropriate and adequate attention to the major forms of cultural literacy, which includes responding to cognitive, affective and physical needs.

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A balanced curriculum in *one* of the major forms, such as art, is one which pays appropriate and adequate attention to all those facets or elements which make up that cultural form.

There is at the present time some confusion between the two which is manifestly to the detriment of art as a subject field. In the recent Stanley Lecture presented at the Royal Society of Arts, for instance, Sir Alex Smith drew attention to an imbalance in the school curriculum which he identified as being an over emphasis on cognitive activity and not enough emphasis on manipulative activity, which he described as 'making and doing'. 'Making and doing' was implied as being synonymous with design and both this conception (or misconception) and theme is becoming a recurrent one. The multi-signatory advertisement 'Education for Capability' carried the message and it is reiterated in a series of broadsheets recently published by British Thornton under the title 'Towards a Balanced Curriculum'.

A similar emphasis on making and doing underpinned the Design Council's document 'Design Education at Secondary Level'.

Whilst the attention drawn by these events to the art curriculum is valuable, it is, nevertheless, inappropriate and improper to distort a particular subject field to compensate for deficiencies in other subject fields within the whole curriculum. If there is a need for more 'making and doing' in schools, and, it should be added, the justifications put forward for it are questionable in educational, economic and industrial terms anyway, then the need is across the whole curriculum and not solely to be met in one section of it. Art has no more a franchise on making and doing than it has on creativity.

A balanced curriculum in art is one which gives appropriate attention to its essential elements, one and only one of which is concerned with 'making and doing', even though it is an important element. The responsibility of all those teaching in the field of art education is to provide a balanced art curriculum, regardless of what is done elsewhere in the school curriculum, as that is the only way its integrity as a major form of cultural literacy can be maintained.

The problems and difficulties in arriving at what may be described as a balanced curriculum in art are considerable but not insurmountable. Indeed, it is becoming essential that the nettle is well and truly grasped and a realistic, coherent and justifiable framework is drawn up to provide defensible guidelines within which each teacher can recognise and realise his or her responsibility. The following points are put forward to focus consideration on what seem to be some major issues.

In the first place, there is a need for some kind of rapprochement between the various aspects of art, craft, design and design technology and its conception as a whole subject field in educational terms. All aspects of the subject field are to greater or lesser degrees interrelated and interdependent

and it is this conception which can then help to identify the different as well as common roles and contributions of the various specialised aspects. Rather than perpetuate the present educationally detrimental and destructive divisiveness, there is a need for altruistic collaboration between all parties which not only includes the specialist teachers in schools but also in the Advisory Services and HMI. Rather than the Design Council going it alone with its narrow version of design education at secondary level, a jointly prepared Arts Council, Design Council and Craft Committee proposal would better serve the real cause of education and enrich the lives of our future citizens.

Secondly, realistic goals for art education need to be drawn up which not only recognise the range of the subject field but also identify the contributions to the education of our future fellow citizens that the subject field should make. An example of how such goals might be formulated can be given¹ but the important matter is that, once agreed, it should become a professional obligation on teachers to pursue them. Such goals, by definition, would necessarily be the basis for any syllabus specification and form the criteria upon which any examination system or even examination question is devised. In the light of the earlier comment on teacher autonomy, it should be added that goals specified in this way expand the teachers' possibilities at the same time as encouraging, and even requiring, inventive and imaginative teaching.

Thirdly, because the content of the subject field is diverse, a means of structuring the art curriculum needs to be devised which not only identifies the different but inter-related and interdependent aspects of art experience but also, by its nature, exemplifies the essential character of the subject field as a whole. One way by which the art curriculum can be adequately structured is in terms of four domains² which, respectively, give identity and emphasis to the Expressive/Productive; Perceptual; Analytical/Critical; and Historical/Cultural aspects of experience. These four domains are definitive of any aspect of the subject field, whether it be painting, ceramics or engineering design and whether the concern is with making, using, looking at, talking about or simply thinking about it. Because they are descriptive of the multidimensionality of the field of art itself, these four domains serve as clear indicators of the emphases to be given in meaningful art curricula.

The fourth matter concerns the extent to which teacher education courses adequately prepare art teachers to execute their responsibilities to teach art to our future fellow citizens. Again, whilst accepting that there is a wide variety of ways in which teachers can be trained, it could be taken as axiomatic that all art teacher training courses, including those preparing specialist teachers, should exhibit certain common characteristics which reflect the nature of art itself, the realities of contemporary society and the role and function art plays in that society. Suggestions regarding the range of probable

characteristics, such as those under consideration by the CNA, ³ not only imply the nature of the responsibility to be subsequently undertaken by teachers of art but can also serve to identify the extent to which the courses would prepare them to do so.

A fifth but highly important and serious matter is that of in-service teacher education. Some of the most difficult problems in developing the kind of coherent art curriculum alluded to in this paper are the attitudes and practices referred to earlier as presently characterising the field.

If the art curriculum in schools is to be rooted in a multi-dimensional concept of art as a subject field, it is essential for in-service teacher education to be similarly rooted. Indeed the first is significantly dependent upon the second. In-service teacher education provision may very well be the major means by which coherence in art education might be achieved.

Notes:

1. A comprehensive range of goals for the art curriculum.
1. The development of a broad understanding of the meaning, significance and contributions of art, craft and design in contemporary culture;
2. The development of perceptual skills leading to sensitivity to visual and tactile qualities, together with an enhancement of experience in art, craft and design;
3. The development of bases for informed aesthetic judgement; personal and community;
4. The ability to value and meaningfully experience the cultural heritage of this and other societies, past and present;
5. The ability to be able to hold, articulate and communicate ideas, opinions and feelings about art, craft and design.
6. The development of particular individual subject aptitudes and interests, but not exclusively, in production and expression.

The activities implicit in these aims could be taken to include making, looking at, thinking about, talking about, feeling about, knowing about and responding to art, craft and design. The achievement of these aims would be dependent on the formation of a range of fundamental concepts regarding the nature of art, craft and design.

2. Four inter-related and interdependent domains of art activity.
 - a. *The Expressive/Productive Domain.*
The development of skills and abilities which contribute to an understanding of the nature, purpose and process of art, craft and design, and the means to communicate and form.
 - b. *The Perceptual Domain*
The development of skills which expand the capacities to see, feel and comprehend form, colour and texture as part of the encounter with the visual/tactile environment and as being fundamental to aesthetic experience.
 - c. *The Analytical/Critical Domain*
The development of skills in describing, analysing, interpreting and evaluating aesthetic qualities as a basis for both experiencing and being able to communicate meaningfully about, the content and form of art, craft and design.
 - d. *The Historical/Cultural Domain*
The development of understanding and appreciation of the changes and effects brought about by the influence of historical and/or cultural contexts, and the roles played by artists, craftsmen and designers in this and other societies, in relation to their contributions to the development of forms, ideas and values.

No single domain can either logically or behaviourally be conceived of in isolation nor is any one domain of greater significance or importance than another. Further, although all the domains are interactive and interdependent, development in one domain does not necessarily occur as a direct consequence of activity in another.

3. Suggested characteristics of art teacher education courses.
 1. Courses should set out to develop and expand the students' knowledge and understanding of art and design education and of its development as an emergent specialised field of study. Emphasis needs to be given to continuing reference to the literature as being a professional responsibility.
 2. Courses should clearly set out to develop and expand the students' knowledge and understanding of art and design in contemporary culture as a proper foundation for art and design education. Art and design in the 'real' world should be seen as the primary reference source (as against, for instance, those activities which can best be described as 'school art')*. In this regard, courses should seek to promote a conception of art and design which includes and ranges between the fine arts, art and design history and criticism, the mass media and aesthetics to industrial design and design technology.
 3. Courses should make it explicit that the primary *raison d'être* for the inclusion of art and design practices and the development of skills as, for instance, artists, designers, art and design critics or historians is essentially on the basis of their *contributions* to professional practices and understandings as art and design educators and not as artists, designers etc. *per se*. This matter needs to be reflected in the criteria and content of assessment.
 4. Courses should provide instruction and experience in art and design analysis and criticism in order to promote the abilities of the students to articulate ideas, opinions and feelings through language, both written and oral.
 5. Courses should include the study and critical appraisal of differing conceptions and aims of art and design education and the practices consequential upon them.
 6. Courses should provide instruction and experience in formulating and implementing art and design curricula.
 7. Courses should develop a conception of sequentiality in art and design curricula with the recognition that art and design learning at any one level needs to be seen in the contexts of other stages in the learners' development.
 8. Courses should provide instruction and experience in the formulation and application of criteria in the evaluation and assessment of learning in art and design.
 9. Courses should make explicit provision for the consideration of the implications of a multi-cultural society on art and design education as well as the cultural connotations of art and design activities or products.

References

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* 'School Art' is referred to here pejoratively as those child-occupying activities which use art materials but actually have little to do with art and design. Allan Kaprow referred to 'the gap between the world of real art and the nonsense which goes on in schools'. Art in some schools is, of course, very worthwhile'.