

# Art and Design in the VI Form

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It is right that I should preface my remarks in this review, as having read the draft through I find that I have placed considerable emphasis upon *art* and not sufficient upon the word *design*, for which I must apologise to readers of a journal devoted to *design* education. My excuse is that my review deals with the education of potential artists and designers and it is difficult at this stage of their development to distinguish between one and the other. Art used in this context is a general term.

Changes in the 'A' Level system of examinations, the advent of the Certificate of Extended Education, demands for two 'A' levels by Colleges of Education for their entrants could be regarded as having considerable bearing upon VI Form education today. These influences, however, are to do mainly with the structure or the administration of education and may well be at variance with the needs and requirements of the students concerned. In my opinion it is no where more necessary than in the area of art and design teaching that an examination and investigation is required, as it appears there is a considerable divergence of opinion between what is regarded as art education by students, by the requirements of art schools and colleges and the syllabii of various examination bodies. Art and design education at the 16-18 age sector is further complicated by issues other than educational ones. Art and design education, by virtue of its origins has been outside the main channels of education and had its own system of examinations and its own colleges, (ensuring among other things that few art students are sullied by contact with their contemporaries in medicine or law or the arts or sciences).

The crux of the problem of the education of the artist between the age of 16 and 18 years is where it should take place? In the sixth form or in a foundation course is only part of the problem as many students do not have a straight choice. The availability of foundation courses vary from one Local

Education Authority to another. Some have to take a course within the local authority, others have to take a Sixth Form course in order to obtain the necessary number of 'A' levels to be able to obtain a grant to start on their Foundation Course.

Within the locality of my school there is almost a bewildering range of choices for the student interested in taking art education. He or she may:-

- (a) Stay in the Sixth Form and take 'A' levels and then proceed to a Foundation Course.
- (b) Go to the local College of Further Education and take 'A' levels and proceed to a Foundation Course.
- (c) Go to a Foundation Course in a College of Further Education in a nearby town.
- (d) Go to a Foundation Course in a College of Technology in a town within easy travelling distance.
- (e) Go to a Foundation Course in a College of Technology, which requires certain 'O' level attainments.

Allowing for the fact that some students at 16 years of age are sufficiently committed to art to wish to start a Design Technician Course at this age the effect of the choice of these courses has been to denude the sixth form art course within the school by 50% of its number. This "creaming off" process has a debilitating effect upon the course in the Sixth Form. Instead of having sufficient numbers to produce a group of students which can generate its own standards, provide numbers to obtain a realistic interchange of ideas and to make its own identity the Sixth Form becomes a small group which frequently have to work as individuals. Within some schools, fortunately not my own, such groups are relegated to a corner of an art room to work out their own salvation aided by their art teacher whenever the demands of the other sections of the school have been met.

Some schools have formulated their own Foundation Course as a rival to a College of Art Course but this I feel a mistake for a number of reasons. Rather I feel the Secondary school should evolve its own Foundation Course which would be a viable alternative to the Art College Course.

One reason for this is that the art Sixth Form Course has to serve a wider range of interests than the Art School Foundation Course. The interests of many sixth form students taking 'A' level range from, within my own experience include and range from potential architects to potential teachers of infant children, to those who have become social workers and who have left school to follow a secretarial course.

The emphasis laid upon draughtsmanship in many 'A' Level Art syllabii is often inappropriate for these students while those who intend to enter a Foundation Course may find the course insufficiently demanding. A pupil who has natural ability is able to obtain a pass at 'A' level after one year, then the examination tends to be a test of performance rather than a test of attainment. For some pupils this may be an advantage — it enables them to concentrate on the other two or three 'A' level subjects that they are taking, but is of no credit to the examination itself.

It appears to me that the object of an 'A' level examination should be to assess a student's progress in a period of two years full time education as part of his or her general education. Too frequently it is used by many in further education as a means of predicting potential ability rather than as an assessment of work done. Within this objective there should be certain aims, such as:-

- 1) A maturity of vision and perception achieved within an artistic area: such as painting or a range of design studies or a craft such as pottery.
- 2) An intensity of study: to be able to find out how committed the student is to art

and if there is already a particular sphere which is of interest to a student.

- 3) From work displayed to see how a student's mind works — in an intuitive way or in a methodical way, for example.
- 4) A critical understanding of art and the visual aspects of his or her surroundings. This should include a study of the History of Art but not as a strictly academic study bounded by dates, styles and periods.

A framework for an examination outlining various aims and objectives could provide for a more realistic "target" to aim at.

- 5) Exploration of media — (this is an overworked art cliché as everybody from infants to Art and Design students seem to explore and develop media) but at this stage one sees it as a student "pushing the frontiers of his knowledge" and use of various materials.

To quote from the Memorandum on Courses leading to the award of Diplomas in Art and Design issued by the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design.

"No target is set for the subsequent two years" (from the age of 16 years onwards) and this lacuna erodes the credibility of art/design in these institutions as serious and important study."

There is no reason why techniques evolved by the Certificate of Secondary Education in assessment particularly by visiting teachers should not be used. Suitable assessors could be drawn from not only sixth form teachers but also those engaged in art teaching in further education, thus indirectly helping to bridge the great gap that there exists between secondary and further education. Within a loose framework it would be possible for students in secondary education to spend part of their time in schools and colleges of art. It would be possible for a student to work in several areas of study



such as painting, graphics and sculpture if a project in which he was involved demanded it.

Projects, or courses of study or assignments should form the main part of the course and may be directed to the interests of the student and his or her future intentions. For example, a potential Diploma in Art and Design student may be interested in graphics and painting and time could be spent exploring the possibilities of these subjects or another student intent on entering a college of education may be interested in experimenting with a very wide range of media.

The reconstruction of 'A' level courses then could begin to be a suitable alternative to a Foundation Course in an art school and the numbers proceeding to Diploma in Art Design Courses (or in the future, as they will be known B.A. awarded by the C.N.A.A.)

A recently published book "Art Students Observed" by Charles Madge and Barbara Weinberger surveyed the attitudes and expectations of various groups of art students one group consisted of Pre-Diploma students (the survey took place in 1967-69) whose reaction to the art world from secondary education was

"Very few students arriving for the Pre-Diploma course from school were at all prepared for the type of work and attitude demanded from them at College. The great majority went through at least a few weeks of confusion and bewilderment. For many it was a traumatic experience.

Three quarters of the students in our study found the course a big break from the art that they had been taught in school; two thirds thought that school art was not an adequate preparation for college. In nearly every case their ideas on art in general, and about their own future in it were drastically modified."

This extract poses two questions – the nature of the then Pre-Diploma Course, new Foundation Course and the standards of

Secondary school art. It is also a reflection upon both sections of education. It is highly desirable that they should be reconciled.

#### Sources.

1. Memorandum on Courses leading to the award of Diplomas in Art and Design. National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design. 1973.
2. Readings in Art and Design Education
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  2. After Coldstream
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Davis-Poynter.
3. Art Students Observed: Society Today and Tomorrow Charles Madge and Barbara Weinberger. London 1973. Faber.
4. Change in Art Education Students, Library of Education Dick Field London 1970 Routledge and Kegan Paul