

Art Activity Using a Theme in Curriculum Planning

Introduction

This paper is seen principally as a discussion document for students who are training to be specialist art teachers and for young teachers in their first year or two of teaching. The writer's intention is to raise some basic issues related to the planning of creative art activities within the art curriculum and he uses pragmatically-orientated charts as a means of generating thought processes which are not stifled by philosophical discourse. His experience of working with Postgraduate Certificate in Education students as well as with experienced teachers on advanced level courses, has led him to conclude that in considering the use of themes and the sequential development of ideas which will make theme-work both meaningful and educationally valid, it is imperative to spell-out basic aims, objectives and procedures clearly and simply so that confusion and unstructured teaching are avoided.

The Basic Thesis

The writer's basic thesis is: that art activities which are related to a theme approach will generate deeper personal involvement in the making of meaningful art than one-off or what might even be single lesson activities, and will demand more sustained involvement, rational thinking and a wider range of developing expertise. Such theme or project work will also call for co-operative effort between groups of pupils within the art studio, with the sharing of learning experiences, group discussion and planning leading to greater and more sustained achievements.

In a previous paper Professor Ron Magregor introduced the idea of a *kit* for the building of an art curriculum, and argued that this was an attempt to give teachers the means to develop objectives for art programmes. He explained that two stages were of fundamental importance: (i) the assembly of aims and goals and (ii) the selection of appropriate objectives geared to the achievement of these aims. He set out seven aims of art teaching, namely:

1. *Students should be involved in building competency in a number of studio areas* (i.e. They should learn a range of practical skills and expertise in using materials and equipment).
2. *Students should be involved in projects which relate art concepts with concepts in other disciplines.* (This could apply in the theme work under consideration here but, in general, the writer has limited his concern to themes and projects within the field of art).
3. *Students should be concerned with acquiring knowledge through study of the history of art.* (Some themes would not expect this to happen).
4. *Students should be involved in developing skills associated with the critical examination of art works and movements.* (This aspect has been excluded by the writer in order to keep the curriculum planning simple, although, of course, it would depend on the nature of specific themes.)

5. *Students should be involved in social action projects, focussing on the improvement of the visual environment.*

6. *Students should be involved in learning the language of, and applying the principles of visual perception and visual communication.* (This is fundamental to all theme work in art).

7. *Students should undertake experiences geared to facilitating emotional expression and exploring feelings.* (In a number of instances this would be so, but there would be times when aspects of theme-work would be purely pragmatic in nature.)

These aims are fairly concise and certainly accepted without argument by the writer so that the reader will find it easier to relate the two papers. It is also important to go along with Magregor's planning ideas, for they are basically sound and, in the writer's experience, are welcomed by teachers and student-teachers alike as a simple and logical procedure.

Eight Stages in Planning Art Activities on a Theme
In the Spring Term of 1979 Professor Magregor held seminars with groups of the writer's students who related their developing ideas and plans with experiences of art in local schools. They had to conceptualise a great deal and it became increasingly apparent that they needed to think much more at a basic level, when considering their course of action in developing curriculum plans slowly and methodically. With this in mind the writer decided to plan a number of basic steps which, in discussion, would make the curriculum art kit more meaningful. The result of a number of seminar sessions was that he produced a series of charts, in the form of cards which could be added to the art kit, and a modified version of each one is given here with a sentence-or-two of comment or instruction.

Stage 1

Imagine that you intend to use a theme as a starting point for creative art activities which will involve sustained effort and sequential development over a period of time. Using *chart number 1* state the title of the theme you intend to use, giving a brief explanatory statement but, at this stage, no aims. List in the left-hand column what the theme might

include in a general sense or as it applies to the general curriculum, and in the right-hand column write down some aspects which are applicable specifically to 'making' and 'doing' in creative art work. See *Chart 1*

Stage 2

Now choose three of the activities that you have placed under *Creative Activities* (right-hand column) and list, in *Chart 2*, a number of materials which will be useful for developing practical work in these three activities. See *Chart 2*

Stage 3

Go on to select *one* of the Art Activities from the three in the left-hand column in *Chart 2*, and in *Chart 3* make a list of suggestions as to *what* the children might do in each one (i.e. 2D and/or 3D work). Write these in the left-hand column and in the right-hand column list what you feel the children will learn if they pursue these activities. See *Chart 3*

Stage 4

Linked with this will be a consideration of your specific aims and objectives. Write in *Chart 4*, therefore, the art activity used in *Chart 3*, in the left-hand box. Fill-in two or three long-term objectives or goals in the boxes on the right. See *Chart 4*

Stage 5

Now we come to your short-term objectives. This is where you can be specific about individual lessons or even single learning experiences and what you would expect the children to learn from them. Go on to *Chart 5* and write down the art activity or lesson (possibly the one in *Chart 4*), placing *four* of your short-term objectives or aims in the boxes on the right-hand side. See *Chart 5*

Stage 6

It is important at this stage to link your thinking with *Chart 2* (Art Activities and Materials) as well as to consider what you actually propose to do in order to control your single activity or lesson aim. Move on to *Chart 6* where you will write only one short-term objective or aim. Note your art activity (or lesson) under (a), *one* short-term objective under (b), what action will be taken under (c), the materials they will use (d), and the skills which they will require or will need to be shown to complete the art experience in a meaningful fashion under (e).

Stage 7

It is now important for the teacher to reflect seriously about the *modus operandi* which has proceeded at this stage, and whether the stages he has planned will stimulate meaningful creative activity. And, as a consequence of the art activity outlined in *Chart 6*, he must consider what the pupils will have learned from it or how it will have benefited them in an educative sense. With this in mind complete *Chart 7*.

Stage 8

It now only remains to find out what the 'real' outcome of the art activity experience has been. This can be done by evaluating it at its termination, although assessments can be made as activities are pursued and especially if these are collated carefully. The writer suggests that (i) the opinions of pupils and other teachers be gathered together, (ii) discussion comments be taped and analysed, (iii) work resulting from the activities be assessed – perhaps by staff and pupils together, with evaluation criteria clearly stated beforehand. Then the final chart can be completed: See *Chart 8*

Concluding Remarks

Such a methodical and yet simple and easy process would be an aid to curriculum planning in art, especially if it is used in conjunction with Professor Magregor's kit. The art teacher must remember, however, that he is responsible for planning and controlling art activity. He cannot abdicate this responsibility by permitting a free-for-all situation in which pupils do what they like but must select experiences which are crucial to the young person's development. As Martin Buber has said:

'What we term education, conscious and willed, means a selection by man of the effective world: it means to give decisive power to a selection of the world which is concentrated and manifested in the educator'. (Buber 1861, Chapter 3).

In using the theme approach the teacher must use a wise and educatively demanding topic which, in the writer's view, should foster and sustain the individual's originator instinct. Personal interest in 'making' and 'doing' will then give him a broad basis for developing his communication skills – talking, reading, listening, painting, writing, etc; mathematical and scientific concepts and experiences; and environmental understanding in terms of making sense of and interpreting the environment.

References

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Chart 1

THEME (title)

Brief statement of intent

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Time scale (number of days/weeks)

General aspects	Possible creative activities
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6

Chart 2

Art Activities	Materials
1	1 2 3 4
2	1 2 3 4
3	1 2 3 4

Chart 3

Art Activity Number (from Chart 2)	
What the children might do	What the children will learn
1	1 2 3 4
2	1 2 3 4
3	1 2 3 4
4	1 2 3 4

Chart 4

Art Activity	Long-term objectives (i.e. for one half-term, one whole term or even one academic year).
	1
	2
	3

Chart 5

Art/Activity/Lesson	Short term objectives/aims
	1
	2
	3
	4

Chart 6

(a) Art activity or lesson	
(b) One short-term objective	
(c) Action to be taken i.e. what the pupils will actually do in the art experience or lesson	1 2 3 4 5
(d) Materials	1 2 3 4 5
(e) Skills	1 2 3 4

Chart 7

Predicted outcome: i.e. involvement in this activity will have taught the pupils the following;

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

Actual outcome and evaluation.

The art activity – scheme – was successful for the following reasons:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

Similar schemes would be planned, however, bearing the following notes in mind:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6



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