

# Curriculum Development in Art Education

## Towards a general definition of Art Studies

In looking at some of the rationales of the Art Subject, the report 'Art in Schools, Education Survey 11', produced by Tom Keay and others at the DES in 1971, merits our attention today not so much as a work of major theoretical importance in art education, indeed as a collectively produced general survey the recommendations are extremely tentative, but more usefully because of isolated definitions of 'art' and the relationship of these definitions to particular types of educational institutions. The survey also requires scrutiny for its use of specific concepts, many of which are used without reference to their tradition; and the particular use of language. In reading this survey it rapidly becomes clear that it represents the bringing together of many minds, many pieces of knowledge and the lived experiences of individual teachers in particular institutions. This in itself makes the survey a valuable contribution to any ongoing definitions of art in schools. However, the more one examines this survey, the more clearly does one discern its authority to be less than neutral. The excessive 'reasonableness' of the work could easily lead many to make the mistake of supposing that in being described as a survey the work can be read as an impartial judgement of art educational ideas and practice of the 1970s. Whilst, balance and contrast is often maintained in isolated areas of comment, there is an overall attempt to unify and reconcile particular views into an overall rationale.

In a recent paper (produced by the Association of Art Advisors, 1975) Maurice Barratt described the DES survey as belonging to the 'Art and Craft Rationale' which 'existed almost nationwide in art departments in the late 50s and early 60s'. He continues 'a strong justification for this rationale is to be found in "Art in Schools" ... what stronger legitimisation would you want than this?' Out of the 6 rationales which Barratt examines, I would suggest that the 'Art and Craft Rationale' has proved the most important and pervasive influence on art educational thinking and organisation in that it developed in the late 60s directly into the 'Design Education Rationale'. There is much evidence to support this view and during the period in question I myself was teaching at a secondary school at which the Art/Design/Craft rationale was clearly articulated — and which, significantly, is quoted and illustrated in the DES report. The following extract from the early aims of the art and design course at that school will give some indication of the issues involved. 'The aim quite simply is to teach the Fine and Applied Arts as one subject while being aware that at their extreme polarities they may appear a separate thing ... in all Art there is Design and in all Design there must be Art. In our organisation of the course there is no hard distinction between the two dimensional and the three dimensional areas, yet each contributory subject retains its own distinctive quality. Each member of the teaching staff subscribes to a common aim and purpose, the same fundamentals are presented by each through his

own personal and craft approach. From the start Art, Design and Craftsmanship are regarded as indivisible ...'

That design should be approached through the craft disciplines is not theoretically new, though the intention in this school of including the traditionally separatist Fine Arts within the definition is in the 40s and 50s fairly uncommon. Given that in any discussion about the relationship of art, design and society, nuances of theory from pivotal figures such as Ruskin, Morris and more recently H. Read would prevail, we can understand that 50s explanations about the relationship of art and society often took their frames of reference directly from the physical world — from art objects, architecture, the natural world and man made world, etc. Indeed in those few schools where some form of art criticism was taught (as opposed to the equally few who offered academic Art History examination courses) this was often accomplished through the study of Architecture, e.g. decoration and structure. Though to be fair some departments, like the one quoted above and in the DES report under 'Art in the sixth form', had introduced a much broader curriculum of critical studies.

More recently design education theory (which by its own definitions, I would have thought, permitted design to enter into any subject area, e.g. design and geography) has, through increased social and political interest in the environment, widened its scope to include notions of Visual Education, (Footnote 1), and Visual Literacy, with early and mostly crudely developed ideas of 'art as communication'. Yet the first attempts to include film and TV in the art departments' rapidly increasing repertoire were, not surprisingly, somewhat primitive, e.g. 'Some of these (media) will have long and complex tradition, e.g. ceramics. Others, in the field of plastics, or film and TV, are relatively new. All will demand the proper use of skills and techniques which will be implicit in the solution of given problems. The concept of craftsmanship would be developed as an attitude of mind capable of existing within any medium'. (Aims of Visual Education, HMI survey, 1971).

At this point a detailed examination of parts of the DES survey could begin with this passage from the Introduction:

'Three important changes in educational aims and organisation might be instanced to show their influence on the teaching of art. Firstly the growth of much larger secondary schools has led to large art departments, where groups of teachers working as teams, each contributing to his or her own expertise,



such as that of a painter or potter or graphic designer, can provide a balanced course for their pupils. Secondly, the increasing provision in such schools of suites of art studios, designed on an open plan principle, is making possible a more flexible use of space, time and method. Thirdly, the radical changes made in the structure of art courses in schools and colleges of art!

Out of the three determining factors mentioned, the first two of which are organisational problems, the latter qualitative and theoretical, it is the third concerning the art colleges which has had the most dramatic, and perhaps limiting, influence on the character of contemporary art education in the schools.

Before proceeding, I would suggest that there are other factors which have proved of at least equal importance. In the establishment generally of a more liberally conceived curriculum, where knowledge areas can make contact and on occasions combine, groups of 'summarising subjects' such as Environmental Studies, Media Studies, Communication Studies, etc. have developed in their own right, or as attachments to parent disciplines such as English or Social Studies, or as a direct result of the inclusion of art and design in general courses.

(Schools Council Paper 25. General Studies 16-18, 1969)

(Schools Council Paper 53. The Whole Curriculum 13-16, 1975).

In addition, 'Integrated Arts' groupings have occurred between Art, Drama and Music departments when co-operation has operated through shared concepts or occasionally common themes. One major consequence of the coming-together of the traditionally separatist subject of Art with the social form of the subject Drama (a movement which is noted in the DES survey) has been not only a sharing of teaching method, but also the use of drama as a stimulating form of communication for promoting critical studies in art (see *Hopes for Great Happenings, Alternatives in Education and Theatre*, Albert Hunt, Methuen 1976).

If we return to the three factors of influence, given in the DES survey, we can see clearly that the first two factors foretell the increasing size in art departments, and though factually correct, there is very little evidence to suggest that an increase in art resources would immediately bring an increasing awareness of shared concepts or an increased consciousness of the function of art education. Though to be fair, the larger departments did provide a broadening of experience for art teachers who had traditionally, like the music teachers, tended to work as a 'one-man-band'.

Where the DES report is eminently correct is in its recognition of the influence of Higher Education institutions (in this case art colleges) in determining, through their own graduates or state examinations, the character of art education in the schools. Sadly, their recognition of this direct influence is not

examined retrospectively but only looks forward to radical changes in the future. Though one must be grateful for the recognition itself, there is fundamental value in looking back at institutions who given the legitimation to research their aims and purposes often developed extreme individualist theories of art which, when transferred into broader art educational contexts (other than Art Therapy) could be seen to be divisive and disabling.

The interest of the DES survey lies in its particular statements. The following is a good example:

'The natural materials are more important at this stage. They offer experiences which connect children directly with the growing, cyclic and *organic* world of which they are a part' (p.15).

The notions of an 'organic society' extend in range and degree of definition from the 1700s, prior to the Industrial Revolution through to today. This formulation occurs and is a product of the nostalgia for rural origins, for a way of life not unlike that existing in medieval society, and as a complex opposition between grown and made, organic and mechanical. The 'organic' is opposed to what is seen as the horrors of industrial manufacture. Here in the DES report, as in Ruskin's work long before, a particular type of experience identified as belonging to the arts is used in a biological sense to refer to the general health of a nation. On page 45 under a section named 'Art and the raising of the school leaving age' we have:

'The concept of art as therapy is one which many teachers will reject. Yet considered not merely as therapy, in a narrow connotation of the word, but perhaps as regeneration, art has a very significant part to play in the education of the disadvantaged and partly rejected pupil'. (The biological references remain even with the change of words; 'therapy', 'regeneration').

The powerful and enduring definition of the artist perceiving organic as opposed to external (social) forms can be seen to have had an alienating effect on any social theory of art, through to the present day. Indeed in terms of any optimistic strategies for the future development of art education the notion of art as some form of asocial activity has served to unnecessarily polarise two art rationales i.e. Design Education and Integrated Arts, which with an amalgam of the best of both could have proved a most successful promoter of the development of theoretical studies in art.

Returning to the DES report, the organic health of a nation theory is transformed into a qualitative judgement of class types and races.

'Many come from homes which are impoverished linguistically, *culturally*, and financially, and there are many recent immigrants'.

Culture, is used here as some attainable standard of excellence rather than the product of accumulated life experiences. One wonders, whose culture?; whose excellence?; and all the complexities of sub-culture in relation to, if there is such a thing, mass culture. Furthermore, the centre sections of



the DES report contain a rambling collection of descriptions of schools work occasionally punctuated by such unhelpful and unexamined statements as:

'The qualities and skills which the art teacher endeavours to encourage are often emotive and intuitive, intangible and difficult to assess'.

I suppose we should be grateful that the whole of knowledge domain of art was not lost to poetry! (Wordsworth, Keats, Elliott, etc.) Yet in the later part of the survey, missing out the section called 'The art syllabus' which is essentially a list of materials and crafts, there are some encouraging suggestions in the two sections titled 'The development of visual discrimination' (65) and 'Summary and conclusions' (93).

The essence of these sections is reflected in the implications of the recommendations:

1. that there are indications of an increased awareness of the significance of the subject in the increasing use of the term Visual Studies in place of the term Art. (See Footnote 1).
2. Aims of art education
  - a. fostering the imagination
  - b. training in how to look
  - c. developing visual discrimination

Though this is a somewhat drastic summary of a set of proposals whose general terms are also worth noting, I don't think any great injustice is done to our interpretation of these terms as some of the major ingredients of the inherited tradition. I say *some* of the ingredients of the tradition for in other parts of the survey other more limiting definitions abound.

The requoted H. Read definition given in the important section named 'The development of visual discrimination' follows:

'The aim of art teaching in schools should be to discover how forms arise in nature and then to use that knowledge to construct forms that are equally vital or organic' (that word again!).

Though the DES survey does go on to say:

'The third, not explicit here, was the ability of education through art to develop a strong sense of discrimination'.

As a decisive emphasis and crucial instance within the survey this position is to be commended. Sadly, the theoretical issues are not developed and one is almost led to the negative conclusion that the survey sees the issue of the practice and theory of art as a saving clause in a bad treaty between boring academic Art History (appreciation?) lessons and the real exciting world of 'practical' art. Certainly, the more complex relationship of 'the practice of theory and the theory of practice' is rarely distinguished in this report; and there are many instances where various habits of approaching the art subject result in a self-protective sliding of definitions. Thankfully, a more high-powered magnifying glass is turned upon the art subject in the 1976 publication from the Association of Art Advisers, 'The Function of Art Education in Secondary Schools'; though the two documents, the

AAA and the DES survey, when read together illustrate clearly the development of art strategies and rationales over the last four or five years.

Of course, that there is bound to be an inadequacy in any such surveys is obvious, but this needs to be tempered against such shrewd assessments as this, which appears in the DES section named: 'The development of visual discrimination'.

'William Morris's hope in *How we Live and Might Live*, written in 1885 is still unrealised more than 80 years later ... We ought to have some vision of how we might live ideals planted in the minds of children and cherished in the hearts of men enter into the character of their living'.

Morris is a fine political writer, a practical Socialist whose perceptions of art and society far outweigh any of the simple formulations e.g. Morris = handicrafts, often operated by craft teachers.

As the DES report intimates but does not develop, here is one of the first identifications of 'the ideological role of art, its active agency in changing human beings and society as a whole'. (William Morris, *Romantic to Revolutionary*, E.P. Thompson, London 1955).

That these early warnings have gone unheeded can be perhaps partly deduced from the following quotations, one from the USA and one from the UK.

'Homes are decorated with magazines like dentists offices because they feel strangely sterile without them. Instamatic and Polaroid cameras are travellers' tools because people know places as photographs and photograph them so they'll seem real. Home movies are a kind of surrogate sperm which ensure biological continuity on an information level. Taking pictures, regardless of content has become an end in itself'. (Guerilla Television, M. Shamberg, Holt 1971), and from the Secretary of State for Education; Shirley Williams,

'We are now living in a visual rather than in a verbal culture and this aspect has not been looked at'. (N. England Education Conference, January 1977).

She was referring directly to the effects of mass communications, especially television, upon our changing definitions of culture. It is clear that art and art education, which traditionally has exercised a determining though limiting definition upon culture, should not now abdicate its responsibility in the area of communication. (Statistics show that the subject to work most with Art, is English) where new theory is emerging in the areas of art and ideology, art and politics and art and society. (Though if the reactionary conclusions of the art history conference, held at Essex University in April 1973, is any indication — there is still a major battle of enlightenment yet to be won. See their publication 'The Teaching of Art History in the Secondary School').

It is difficult to conclude this short essay with a reconciliation of the need to provide a broad view of art education related to its social context and which will not be too limiting, whilst at the same time wanting to include some concrete determining



instances which will serve to locate an emerging definition of Art Studies, historically and institutionally.

In an attempt to distinguish some of the important areas of potential influence upon a definition of Art Studies, I have made the following connections,

from Design Education:

The Design in General Education Project at the Royal College of Art, Ken Baynes.

\*from Art History:

Ways of Seeing: Books + Films, J. Berger

from Integrated Arts: (including political theatre)

Hopes for Great Happenings, A. Hunt. Art and Environment Course, Open University, Community Video.

from Literary Criticism:

F.R. Leavis, R. Hoggart, and R. Williams, especially Williams' books *Culture and Society*, and *The Long Revolution*.

\*from Mass Communications:

Viewpoint television series for schools. Screen Education Magazine. New Media Studies CSE, and 'O' level examinations.

from Theoretical Studies in Art:

Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham. Royal College of Art seminar on Art Education, December 1976.

from the Sociology of Knowledge:

Knowledge and Control, Michael Young. Social Construction of Reality, Berger and Luckmann.

from Visual Studies:

depending on what is produced, the Art and the Built Environment Project Schools Council.

\*in terms of determining content in Art Studies, Art History and Mass Communications are seen as major contributing 'disciplines'.

#### Notes on Interdisciplinary Studies/Integrated Studies

At the centre of the curriculum planning debate is the nature of curriculum integration, and the types of integration now operating in many schools (see 'Social Change, Educational Theory and Curriculum Planning' by Denis Lawton, Unibooks £1.50).

The nature of curriculum integration operating as it does across subject disciplines, e.g. Art, Music, Drama or some other combination, raises problematic issues not only for the particular methods of integration to be used but also for the nature of each of the subject disciplines. This situation is further compounded when one realises that whilst subjects such as Biology, Science and Mathematics etc. have formulated subject philosophies (which have proved invaluable as a basis for integrated studies), the Arts have yet to formulate a comparable rationale (aesthetics does not provide a subject philosophy) which is able to demonstrate a theory of the subject discipline in its relations with the rest of the curriculum.

However, in the general moves to make knowledge areas more open, the Arts have explored

various forms of curriculum integration. Three models for arts integration are now in operation. (There are others, but in the majority of situations where integrated studies exist, one or other of these three models will be in operation.)

#### A. The Expressive Arts Model

This model most often groups Art, Music, Drama, Dance and PE together and here there has been an emphasis on individual expressive activity, most of which could be generally classified as a 'formalist approach'. The notion of Creativity as an *a priori* category of mind is central to this model; it is therefore formalist in the sense that the individual works within a framework that is at a remove from the determinations of everyday reality thereby allowing him/her to consider abstract notions of rhythm, texture, form, harmony, colour etc. (Sadly this model has been recently supported by the disabling, in my view, 'theories' of Robert Witkin, 'The Intelligence of Feeling' and Ernest Goodman, The Schools Council Art Subject Panel, rather than by the more socially-located theory emerging from, say, political theatre or for that matter, The Sociology of Knowledge.)

#### B. The Design Education (Environmental Studies) Model

This model embraces Woodwork, Metalwork, Housecraft and Art often within a Faculty structure. Though Design Education obviously lays emphasis on industrial production (division of labour!) and the man-made environment, it does share with the Expressive Arts Model one important position: they both see the Arts in Education as primarily practical subjects in which understanding and achievement is only obtained through practice.

#### C. The Media Studies Model

This is a comparatively recent model and still in its very early stages of evolution. Originally, this model was developed from English and Social Studies disciplines with particular emphasis on pure Film Studies, but is now through the growth of Media Studies Departments in their own right, exerting considerable and increasing influence on the Arts subjects. In this model emphasis is placed on comparison and analysis of 'cultural productions' in everyday life e.g. Publicity, Television, Press, Pop Music etc. and 'cultural issues' e.g. Race, Class, Sex etc. (Interestingly, John Berger's work has been used and extensively developed in this model.)

#### Footnote:

I am sceptical of the terms: visual education, visual bias, visual recording, visual ideas, visual communication, etc. (all used in the 'Front Door' article. *SIDEC* Vol. 9, No. 1). No radical art theory could accept the disabling notion that there is substantial distinction between 'visual' and 'non-visual' communication. Both penetrate each other extensively and it is little more than fantasy to believe that because a message is 'visual' its codes of communication are also 'visual'.