

# Building your own Art Curriculum: A Kit for Teachers

No matter how committed a teacher may be to spur-of-the-moment, self-evolving activity, sooner or later the need arises to offer some justification for what is happening, and to set down objectives and purposes in a formal manner. For the novice teacher, the need comes sooner than later. Newly appointed to a position, with term due to begin in a frighteningly short time, the teacher is forced to grapple with questions like What should I teach first? What do I teach to different age groups? How can I defend what I intend to teach? The answers to these questions, which had seemed comfortably on the tip of the tongue throughout teacher training, all at once demand specific phrasing.

The mature teacher's questions are of a different order, reflecting a degree of previous experience and a philosophy which is consequently more integrated: Will I continue to do what I did last year? To what extent should I modify things to suit Class X? Should the programme be expanded to include an entirely new focus?

Novice or veteran, each has to adjust to unforeseen factors which are bound to affect the programme: an increase or a drop in the supplies budget; an overall reduction in staff, with a resulting call upon the art personnel to give more teaching time to other subject areas; the allocation of additional space to the art department. Often, the amount of notice received is alarmingly brief, yet the proper decision requires that the decision-maker be quite clear about the capability of the programme to accommodate these sudden changes.

To set down a detailed statement of needs and purposes which can, like a last will and testament, bear the addition of any number of codicils to take care of problems as these arise, is not a common practice among teachers. In any event, a 'paper testament' spelling out the activities to be followed by each class, year after year, soon becomes a tedious business. The kit described in this article represents an attempt to give the teacher the means to develop objectives in which she believes, for programmes that reflect the practicalities of the working situation. It is small enough to fit in a pocket; it is inexpensive to put together; it is capable of being added to, or subtracted from indefinitely. Furthermore, it has curricular validity, for the aims governing its format summarise aspects of art education which have continuing and extensive theoretical support.

The process of kit building occupies two stages, the first dealing with the assembly of aims or goals and the second with the selection of objectives geared to the achievement of these aims. An aim, as defined here, is a general statement embodying support for an area of art learning. Seven aims, derived from the general literature of art education, are presented here.

1. Students should be involved in building competency in a number of studio areas.
2. Students should be involved in projects which

relate art concepts with concepts in other disciplines.

3. Students should be concerned with acquiring knowledge through study of the history of art.

4. Students should be involved in developing skills associated with the critical examination of art works and movements.

5. Students should be involved in social action projects, focusing 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.

7. Students should undertake experiences geared to facilitating emotional expression and exploring feelings.

As an initial step in kit building, each of these aims is transferred to 5" x 3" index cards, one aim per card. The aims listed above are a representative but modifiable selection. If a teacher can think of others that seem valid or appropriate, these might be added at this point, for it should be noted that the kit is not prescriptive but is rather to be constructed in a form reflecting the beliefs of the user.

Next, the teacher is invited to identify a number of objectives that might govern groups of lessons or units geared to achieving each of the aims previously mentioned. These are middle-range objectives: they are more specific than the aims which they subsume, but not so specific as to prohibit their use in justifying any one of several lessons. As defined here they are statements of intention, which describe what it is hoped the student will learn in the course of several related art lessons.

Like the proverbial piece of string, objectives vary infinitely. In the following examples, simply as a matter of convenience, three are listed for each of two randomly selected aims. For the aim: students should be involved in building competency in a number of studio areas, middle-range objectives might be a) students will undertake step-by-step exercises in using tools and materials associated

with particular art activities, b) students will explore one art activity, or a limited number of related art activities, in depth, c) students will show evidence of being able to make informed choices among tools and materials as they undertake one self-assigned topic.

For the aim: students should be involved in developing skills associated with the critical examination of art works and movements, middle-range objectives might be a) students will examine the differences between description, formal analysis, interpretation and judgement, b) students will apply the language of criticism to a variety of art products, including their own work, c) students will apply their critical skills in the examination of popular visual material such as television presentations, films, packaging and advertising.

These objectives, together with those developed for each of the other five aims, are transferred on to index cards so that one objective appears on each card. The pile of cards has now grown to include 7 aim cards and 21 objectives cards, assuming that the arbitrary rule about three objectives per aim has been followed throughout. For easier identification, each aim and its objectives can now be colour coded.

The teacher can carry the whole process of kit building one stage further, by developing one more subset in which objectives for each lesson are related to each of the middle-range objectives. But this is a matter of personal preference. Some teachers feel comfortable knowing in advance how the total programme will look. Others, preferring some room to manoeuvre, are content to identify middle-range objectives and let day-to-day activities sort themselves out as circumstances permit. Certainly a statement of middle-range objectives is sufficient to show the general framework from which the programme is derived.

We have now arrived at the point where we can introduce the element of selection. Suppose that we are drawing up a programme for a secondary school. Comprising Forms 1 to 5. First, all the cards are spread out so that each aim and its objectives form a column. For Form 1, some aims (for example, establishing competency in a number of studio areas) will be appropriate, while others (let's say, involvement in social action projects) may be less so. All the inappropriate aim cards, and their objectives cards, can be removed at this point.

Next, we can look at the middle-range objectives that remain. Some will be appropriate (step-by-step instruction, say—, others (for instance, developing a self-assigned area) not so. The inappropriate objectives are removed, and what remains constitutes the framework of art activity for that Form for that particular year.

If lesson objectives have been included in the kit, selections among those which seem most appropriate for the group should be made at this point. When the contents of all the cards that remain have been noted, the kit is re-assembled and re-dealt, so that

similar selections can be made for each of the other Forms in turn.

Overlap among aims and among objectives is bound to occur: it is in fact desirable, if lessons learned in one situation are to be reinforced in another. The concern of the planner is with where the main emphasis or focus lies. A lesson in the history of art may deal with colour, but in a manner significantly different from that governing a studio unit in colour mixing.

Complete individualization of the art programme is possible if students in senior classes are permitted to use the kit to develop their own units of study. In such cases, though, the teacher must exercise special care in drawing up the kit, to ensure that objectives and procedures are not confused, a particular hazard at the individual lesson level. 'To make a silkscreen print' gives us no clear notion of the focus of the activity. Is it to be on process, or on the image produced, or on the relationship of the activity to an underlying concept? With a little amplification, the ambiguities disappear. 'To gain knowledge of the paper stencil method of silkscreen printing, by going through the process, step by step', puts the focus squarely on acquiring information, rather than on using that information as means to another end.

Curriculum planning is not an activity practised solely by theoreticians. Every teacher makes curriculum decisions every day. The process described above is one way of ensuring that these decisions are consistent with what the teacher conceives to be the aims of the art programme.