

The Need for a Balanced Curriculum

There are three matters to which I would like to address myself in this paper:

1. Some brief comments on the GCE A-level examinations in Design.
2. Some questions regarding the relevance of examinations and, in particular, those in Design.
3. Some suggestions regarding curricula, curriculum directions and curriculum concerns in the contexts of courses.

The curriculum concerns I shall implicitly refer to are

- a) Who is the curriculum being designed for; otherwise described as the *population*.
- b) What should be the outcomes of curricula; otherwise described as *aims*.
- c) What should the implementation of the curricula consist of; otherwise described as *content*.
- d) How shall we know the learning or whatever is intended has occurred; otherwise described as *assessment or evaluation*.

1. Comments on the GCE A-level examination in Design

Art, craft and design are generally considered to be low status subjects in schools. This low status, to which I have referred elsewhere,¹ is projected by head teachers, other teachers, parents, pupils, higher education and the professions and industry.

Although art, craft and design and the multiplicity of sub-categories which are applied to them in schools are most frequently classed as separate subjects it is indeed, as the Carter Report noted, difficult to separate them conceptually. The separation in schools is more related to the skill predispositions of the teachers than to their actual nature. I shall refer to the curriculum implications of this matter later. However, within this separation, the 'heavy' crafts, that is, woodwork and metal work, are considered to be of the lowest status and certainly lacking in intellectual demands. As wood and metal work is related to the use of the hands, any thinking is presumed to go on below the wrist! Even though this view may be considered to be a little wrong-headed and more related to what goes on in many schools than to any sensitive understanding of the real nature of craft, 'Design education' and, particularly, the A-level Design examinations, appear to go to considerable lengths to devise a new image by denigrating Craft, as may be seen from the following quotations from the summary paper by the Chief Examiners of three Examination Boards.²

This major project is as demanding an element as will be found in any Advanced-level examination. No project on any of the three courses will be acceptable if it is craft-based alone.

The examiners feel it is important to give due weight to the candidate's thinking and reasoning ability since too great an emphasis on pure dexterity weakens the award in the eyes of higher education.

A candidate whose cognitive ability falls short of

a standard acceptable to university or polytechnic

departments or industry will not succeed on the basis of good quality 'craft' alone.

The one thing it is not is to give academic credibility to the 'old' craft subjects or the means by which the less-able may achieve A-level status.

It is clear that a number of important issues arise from this particular projection. In the first place, the 'crafts' are denied any real integrity although, as noted earlier, this may be due to current or earlier ridiculous external examination definitions of 'crafts' which see them as being mere 'wrist-action'. However, to perpetuate the notion of craft-skill being mindless is not doing any aspects of the visual arts field a service. The pure dexterity of, for instance, Grinling Gibbons, Hepplewhite, Bernard Leach and Alvar Aalto is as much a visual manifestation of cognitive ability as well as aesthetic sensitivity as may be found in the work of Mischa Black, Mies van der Rohe, Patrick Abercrombie or a few contemporary environmental designers. Actually, the Grinling Gibbons and Hepplewhite group have, on the whole, been manifestly more successful in human and aesthetic terms than the so-called designers group. There is, of course, a real need to recognise that the crafts have a particular and valued role in contemporary and past cultures.

The A-level examinations in Design, whatever else may be said of them, do primarily set out to assess designing ability, and I shall suggest later this is an unfortunate misconception. Yet quality of thought manifests itself in many ways; designers work in many different ways; some designers, for instance, never put pencil to paper and research has shown that designing through making three-dimensional models may be more effective than having students draw on paper;³ and very rarely would a designer be asked to produce in three hours under examination conditions a 'design' for something of which he was previously unaware. On the whole, the A-level Design examinations are based on how designers are *thought to behave* rather than considering the kind of base from which designers could emerge.

With some slight variations between the three Boards, the A-level Design examinations consist in the main of written papers to be undertaken in examination conditions and a major project which is carried out during the last year of the course. The written papers are designed to indicate the candidate's breadth of knowledge and, although it must be recognised that such papers are notoriously difficult to set, the focus on the notion of the 'pupil as a designer' has led to questions which cannot be

described as other than trivial. For example:

You are the General Manager of a chain of supermarkets. Prepare notes for a brief to the architect of a proposed new branch, outlining the problems of designing a checkout area. (Oxford Local Examinations, 1975. Advanced Level, Design, Paper I, Question 10).

Group III. Ceramics

Describe how ceramic products can be 'cast'.

Explain how the process differs from *either* (a) casting metal *or* (b) casting concrete.

(Oxford Local Examinations, 1976. Advanced Level, Design, Paper II, Question 12)

Group IV Graphics

You have been asked to set up a small printing shop in a large comprehensive school. It is to have a dual function. It will be used for the graphics element of the A83 Design course and for a limited number of pupils taking an Ordinary Level course: it will also provide the full range of printing facilities required for the day to day running of the school. Make a check list of the major equipment you would like to see installed giving in each case the reasons for your proposals.

(Oxford Local Examinations, 1977, Advanced Level, Design, Paper II, Question 19).

The major project which requires the pupil to behave 'as a designer' over a protracted period of time may be subjected to many questions regarding its value as a vehicle for learning. It is not identified, for example, as to what may be the expected outcomes for such a large proportion of course-work time nor what prior learnings or skills would need to be brought to the course and what consideration would be given to them in the final assessments. Time precludes discussion of the rating scale used to arrive at a 'profile' of the pupil's performance except to note that it contains some inconsistencies and it is difficult to ascertain how such a profile would be used in determining a single index grade.

2. The Relevance of the Examination

On the matter of relevance, and bearing in mind the 'behaving as a designer' notion which underlies the course, the question may be asked as to whether or not the A-level Design courses do, in fact, produce designers or even if they are intended to? Statistics here are helpful as it is known that over 1000 candidates are entered annually for the examinations and this figure can be related to national statistics for the 17-19 age range. In 1976, 27 per cent of the age range of a total of 730,000 were continuing general education; of which 153,000 were in schools and 7,000 were in F.E. colleges. Of the 4,607 accepted for BA Art and Design degree courses only 191 of the 350 who applied for direct entry from schools were accepted. Of the total of 927 accepted for BA 3D Design courses, the course presumably mainly related to the A-level Design courses, only 55 were direct entry. The very large majority of entrants to BA courses were from the Foundation courses which also claim to have a diagnostic function. No statistics are available of the number

of pupils with passes in A-level Design who entered degree level engineering courses, but it may be of interest to note that a pilot survey carried out as part of a Schools Council project⁴ showed that in two-thirds of the schools surveyed 'none or fewer than five per cent went on to courses or professions which either directly or indirectly related to the A-levels in art and design'.

However, as virtually all art and design teachers claim that they are *not* training artists or designers, the point must be made, as I have elsewhere,⁵ that most of their activities would appear to be directed specifically to that end. The Welsh Board, for instance, appeared to pride itself on its A-level Design course looking like a CNA Design degree course submission! But even if it was the case that the A-level courses were for training designers it is suggested that the examples of the examinations clearly show that they would be going about it the wrong way. Further, it is self-evident that the degree colleges would regard it as their function to train artists and designers, not the schools, as may be inferred from the statistics referred to earlier. Even the very few pupils who go directly into degree courses would not be accepted primarily for their designing abilities but for some qualities and kinds of understanding which would provide *prevocational* ground upon which the colleges can build and so develop them *into* artists and designers. As has been shown, the vast majority of A-level Design pupils, however, do not proceed beyond that level into related vocational activity and it is appropriate to question as to the ways in which the courses, as presently conceived, can serve a useful and justifiable purpose. Continuing with the 'behaving as a designer' notion, the realities are surely that designers are specialists, as any visit to a design studio would show, and it simply would not be possible or desirable for general education to assume a vocational role on that basis. However, as the present structure requires that some kind of specialisms are sought or fostered, it can be suggested that the courses at best could only be considered as quasi-vocational with, in many cases, the teachers teaching what they want to teach rather than, perhaps, what their pupils may need to learn. I have posited elsewhere that for a variety of reasons art and design courses in secondary education are fundamentally teacher-centred rather than learner-centred.⁶

General education in art, craft and design, which I noted earlier as not being conceptually distinct, might properly be regarded as being continuous and a sequential process from first school to the end of formal education.⁷ No one stage or examination, such as primary, secondary, VIth form, GCE 'O' or 'A' level or CSE, should be seen in isolation but as part of a continuous educational endeavour in that it will always be the same pupils who are following through the stages. Because of this it is inevitable that the examination systems directly influence the curriculum rather than, as is often fondly but erroneously thought, reflect it.

It is worth reiterating that there may be an infinitesimally small number of pupils who show particular interests and aptitudes which may indicate some potentiality to be artists or designers, but the overwhelming majority will not. Looking at the whole field of art, craft and design education, it is, therefore, of more than passing interest that the *model* for deciding what the learners in general education should be doing in *art* has been that of the *artist* – with certain presumptions as to how artists behave and what may be learned by having children behave in the ways artists are thought to behave. This, as I have suggested elsewhere,⁸ is both logically and demonstrably an erroneous conception.

I have more than a strong suspicion that it has been felt that the notion of the learner 'behaving as a designer' is an updating of the notion of the learner 'behaving as an artist' and which I elsewhere, somewhat unkindly, described as 'an old and inappropriate wine being put into a new and apparently trendy bottle'.⁹

The 'behaving as an artist or designer' notion is clearly manifest in the proliferation of 'O' and 'A' level subjects offered in art, craft and design. As I suggested earlier, the teaching of these subjects is *not* for the most part *learner-centred*, (in that it explicitly sets out to prepare the learner to participate in, contribute to, enjoy and find enrichment from their visual encounters within the society in which they will become fellow citizens) but is *teacher-centred* and that the teachers, to use Richard Jones' rather cruel criticism, 'find children handy objects on which to practise self-deception'.¹⁰

3. Some suggestions regarding Curricula

It could be considered that the specialisation arising from the presently widening fragmentation (to which the Design Education syllabuses strongly contribute) by attempting, albeit unsuccessfully, to be vocational, deny the opportunities and possible rights of access to a wide range of potentially valuable experiences within the field of art, craft and design. Furniture design, environmental and textile design *is* important but so are the paintings of Rembrandt and Lichtenstein, the graphics of Steadman and Goya, the films of Russell and Eisenstein, the buildings of Corbusier and Gibberd, the ceramics of Cardew and the Dubai, the mosaics of twentieth century Mexico and tenth century Italy, the non-functional engineering feat of Saarinen as well as the wholly functional engineering marvel of Concord – in fact all those manifestations of vision, feeling and idea which not only form a heritage of this and other cultures but actually constitute our contemporary culture, form the basis of our humanity and human values, and look forward to the unrealised aspirations of the future including the Pandora's Box of microprocessing and the galactic explosion of the communications systems.

The kinds of understandings, aesthetic sensitivities and autonomic discriminating sensibilities which will enhance and give meanings to both the future

lives and decision-making responsibilities of our future fellow citizens, (a small handful of whom will become artists or designers whilst the majority will, of necessity or desire develop other often narrow life-styles) will not occur by tinkering with quasi-specialisms during general education. Some much broader concepts about art, craft and design will be essential as underpinnings for such educated sensibilities.

It is clearly no longer a case of art *or* design *or* craft but a need for a realistic curriculum framework which will provide a more meaningful base for understanding and feeling. Rather than pursue further the present fragmentation of concerns, which negates the formation of meaningful concepts, I would suggest we look for more essential understandings which will allow individuals to encounter the diversity of present and future experiences of visual forms, ranging from the embodied or inferrable meanings in painting and sculpture; the projected attitudes in film and TV; the values in manufactured products and other technological developments and their relationships to life-styles; and the community effects of the built and natural environment so that our future fellow citizens can be enriched by their experiences, discriminating in their judgements and *contribute* from a base of real understanding and sensitivity.

Such a view of art and design education, which accords with that of the Carter Report, does, of course, demand a whole rethink not only of the curriculum but also of the examinations which should be considered to be an integral part of the curriculum. It may be of value in identifying curriculum concerns to look directly at what might be the expected outcomes or, in other words, what kind of description could be given to someone who had been 'educated in art and design'. Some time ago I offered such a definition as being:

To be 'educated in art (and design)' means considerably more than being able to manipulate some art materials, however skilful and expressive that manipulation might be. It also means to be perceptually developed and visually discriminative, to be able to realise the relationships of materials to the form and function of art (and design) expression and communication, to be able to critically analyse and appraise art (and design) forms and phenomena, to be able to realise the historical context of what is encountered and to be able to appreciate the contributions to, and functions within, differing cultures and societies that art (and design) makes.¹¹

Such a definition, given that it is acceptable, is wide ranging. It can only become a basis for developing curricula if it is broken down and expressed as a series of clear aims or, in other words, as a number of statements about what it is expected that the pupils or learners will be able to do or know as a demonstration of being 'educated in art and design'. As part of the Schools' Council deliberations on the N & F level proposals for examinations at 18+, the commissioned group which I led identified a number of aims for art, craft

and design education which will serve as a useful example in this regard.¹² It is as well to point out, however, that, although the brief for the commissioned group specifically referred to craft, for reasons noted earlier it was felt to be necessary and appropriate not to make a distinction between art, craft and design. It should also be pointed out that because of the invalidity of conceiving of any stage of educational development as being in isolation, the aims which were identified for the 16-19 age range are also appropriate for the whole of art, craft and design education from first school through to end of formal education. Any assessment, evaluation or other form of examination must necessarily relate to the particular stage of development in the realisation of those aims. The aims identified were:

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.

If indeed the context of art, craft and design programmes in schools at all levels of general education was related to the achievement of these aims and it was recognised that such achievement would require participation and contribution by teachers at all levels then perhaps, as I suggested elsewhere,¹³ art, craft and design might well move from generally being a peripheral activity in schools to a core activity. The sense of purpose underlying these aims can be publicly understood, examined and justified. Not only would such an 'education in art, craft and design' have relevance for any future fellow citizens in ways I have described earlier but would also provide a really substantial base for the very few pupils who demonstrate the ability and interest to pursue their studies vocationally and at degree level; a view which has been confirmed by the chairmen of the CNAA Art and Design and Industrial Design Committees.

Of course, there is a considerable distance between identifying aims which, in a sense, give broad guidance and purposes to the educational endeavour, and what might happen in any one classroom or studio at any one time. As I have argued elsewhere,¹⁴ the kind of educated sensibilities referred to will not be achieved by the prevalent over-emphasis on expecting pupils 'to behave as artists or designers' and indeed the point cannot be overstressed that such an emphasis will not make them into artists or designers either. The conceptual understandings implicit in the aims may only be arrived at by the realisation of the interaction and interdependence of certain kinds of experiences, knowledges and skills which underly and are unique or intrinsic to art, craft and design. In order to clarify these contributing elements, I have categorised them broadly into four domains. These four domains were defined in the N and F proposal as:

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.

It will be self-evident that 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. In other words, educational programmes would need to attend to all the domains for the kinds of understandings referred to earlier to be developed. Clearly, equal emphasis cannot be given at all times to all concerns and it will be obvious that what may be happening in any one classroom or studio at any one time may very well be giving emphasis to one or other of the domains. Nevertheless, the conceptual framework of the domains clearly demonstrates that continuing

emphasis wholly on one domain to the exclusion of the others would be invalid and indicates that proper emphasis and attention should be given to each of the domains within any one programme.

As the achievement of aims such as delineated earlier through the attendance to the four domains can only occur as consequence of continuous and sequential educational experience it is necessary to recognise that what may actually be done in any one classroom or studio at any one time can only be a *means to an end* and not an end in itself although it is certain that what is done may be used as an indicator of the extent to which those ends or aims are being achieved.

It is now appropriate to return to the question of examinations as presumably the sole purpose of examinations is to assess the extent to which educational intentions are being realised. The prime purpose of examinations, particularly those referred to as the external examinations, has been generally if not singularly considered to be that of providing evidence to a future interested group, regarding competence in the purview of interest of that group. Whilst this purpose is to a large degree a valid one, it is, nevertheless, subsumed within the more essential one of indicating the extent to which identified aims have been or are being realised. In this sense, appropriate evaluation measures are a fundamental part of any educational endeavour and cannot realistically be conceived of as separate to curriculum development. Examination syllabuses are, in fact, either explicit or implicit expressions of educational aims; which is the reason for making the point earlier that examinations inevitably direct curricula rather than reflect them. If the aims for art and design education are expressed in terms such as those referred to earlier in relation to N and F, then it becomes necessary to define the content of the curriculum in conceptual terms. The concepts must be those that underly the nature of art, craft and design; an example of which might be 'that different societies vary in the ways they embody and communicate their beliefs in the visual symbols they produce'.¹⁵ The skills which it would be necessary to acquire as part of the curriculum content would include perceptual, analytical, critical and judgemental skills as well as some manipulate skills.

Whilst schools and colleges may devise a variety of art education programmes to contribute to the formation of concepts and the acquisition of skills, the examinations would need to assess the extent to which the defined and agreed aims had been achieved. In this sense, as the aims for art and design education would be common, there would be no need for the presently existing plethora of examinations syllabuses which merely set out to examine bits and pieces of art and design and which neither by their nature nor intention can determine the extent to which some fundamental understanding of art, craft and design has been achieved.

By recognising that curricula and examinations are inseparable and essential parts of the same endeavour it might be possible to develop both

more meaningfully than they are at present. These are issues to which I would suggest we address ourselves as a matter of some urgency.

Summary

In this paper it has been argued that GCE A-level examinations in Design are less than adequate and appropriate on a number of grounds. Particular reference was made to the unfortunate denigration of 'craft' in the Design examinations and it was suggested that this was symptomatic of some of the ways in which school art, craft and design showed a lack of understanding of the real nature and value of art, craft and design. Particular criticism was made of the prevailing notion of the learner being almost exclusively required to 'behave as an artist or designer' at the expense of other possible relationships with art, craft and design.

It was suggested that the examinations under discussion continue to add to the existing plethora of narrowly conceived 'product-oriented' syllabuses in art, craft and design and it was strongly urged that the time was opportune for a rethink of the whole art, craft and design curriculum. It was argued that such a curriculum should be a continuous and sequential whole and directed towards the development of the aesthetically educated sensibilities and sensitivities of our future fellow citizens.

Attention was drawn to the lack and undesirability of a clear distinction being able to be made between art, craft and design and a number of aims for art, craft and design education were identified which were relevant not only to general education but also as vocational preparation. A particular strategy based on four inter-related and interdependent domains was put forward as an example of a way in which such aims might be conceptualised in curriculum terms.

The role of evaluation and particularly examinations was discussed and it was argued that any form of evaluation should be a reflection of defined aims and as such needed to be considered as an integral and essential part of curriculum conception.

This paper was originally given at the Design Council's symposium at the RSA, 1979.

References

1. Allison, B. (1978), From the Periphery to the Core: *Times Ed. Supp.* 19/5/78.
2. I was privileged to have a copy of a summary of the points to be put to the conference by the Chief Examiners of the three Examination Boards which offer A-level Design.
3. See Stewart, R. (1973), Modelling versus Drawing as Design Technique. *British Journal Educational Psychology*, 43, 1, 50-52.
4. Schools Council (1977), *Examinations at 18+ N and F Proposals. Report of the Crafts Commissioned Group based on the NSAE*, London: Schools Council.
5. Allison, B. (1974), Professional Art Education, *Journal of the NSAE*, 1, 1, 3-9.
6. Ibid.
7. Allison, B. (1972), Sequential Learning in Art, *Journal of the NSAE*, 1978, October 6-14.
8. Ibid.
9. See 5 above.
10. Richard Jones was using this aphorism in relation to would-be teacher psychiatrists but it equally applies to many art and design teachers. Jones, R. (1972), *Fantasy and Feeling in Education*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p.11.
11. Allison, B. (1972), *Art Education and the teaching about the art of Africa, Asia and Latin America ...* London: VCOAD, p.7.
12. See 4 above.
13. See 1 above.
14. See 5 above.
15. This concept is one of a number relating to the Cultural domain. See 11 above, p.7.

ANNUAL CHAMPIONSHIP 1979

National Schools' Karting Association

The Hertfordshire Schools' Karting Association will organise the National Schools' Karting Championships at Rye House Stadium, Hoddesdon, on Saturday, 7 July, 1979 and Sunday, 8 July, 1979. The event this year is being sponsored by Esso Petroleum.

The meeting will be governed by the current National S.K.A. Regulations and Additional Supplementary Regulations. Details of circuit and appropriate gearings will be forwarded with the acceptance of entry forms.

The event is open to all members of the National S.K.A. who have reached the required competition standard.

Accommodation will be available at two local schools and basic camping facilities can be arranged in the area. Those requiring accommodation should return the Pro-Forma as soon as possible, to give us an idea of numbers. Final bookings and money will be requested nearer the event. Entries close on 15 June 1979.

The secretary of the meeting, to whom all entries and enquiries must be addressed is: Mr. Keith R. Breach, The John Warner School, Stanstead Road, Hoddesdon, Herts, EN11 0QF (telephone Hoddesdon 62889 or home Hoddesdon 45334).