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ART EDUCATION AND THE DISADVANTAGED CHILD

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
I ART EDUCATION: ITS BENEFIT TO THE DISADVANTAGED CHILD	4
II THE FAILURE AND SUCCESS OF EDUCATION TO RESPOND TO THE DISADVANTAGED CHILD	15
CONCLUSION	25
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	30

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is intended as an examination of education in Ireland, and in particular, its reference to the area of the disadvantaged child. It is primarily concerned with analysis of second level education although reference shall also be made to education in Irish National Schools at the present time. What this dissertation would hope to put forward in particular [and this is its primary motivation and purpose] is an examination of the disadvantaged child within the educational system. I would also like to highlight the value of the arts in improving what is at heart the failure of the Irish Educational system [and one supposes educational systems worldwide] to respond to the disadvantaged child's needs.

For the sake of convenience and clarity the dissertation is structured in two chapters. The first is an examination of the value of the arts in education and how helpful, and indeed necessary the arts are, can and should be to the disadvantaged child and his or her subsequent development. It also examines what constitutes arts education, what are its aims and what precisely can it achieve compared with other areas of the curriculum.

In my second chapter I hope to examine the present educational system, the ideas and theories which formed this system and what I see as its subsequent failure in responding to the disadvantaged child's needs. This will involve an examination and analysis of what exactly the current curriculum caters for and tends towards. Moreover I will

further examine its attitudes and responses towards arts education and its place on the curriculum. The recent successes and changes in arts education shall however be taken into account in order to give a more balanced and fairer view.

We must recognise the benefit of the arts in education and argue for its complete integration into the curriculum, the reasons for which shall be cited in my first chapter. My conclusion shall draw on my own experience as a student teacher. I have a first hand knowledge of the disadvantaged child in education, indeed, this was the motivating factor for writing on the subject. The arts have a great deal to contribute to the development of the disadvantaged child.

According to John Lancaster,

Art provides children with opportunities to experience 'making' and 'designing', practical experiences in which both inventiveness and direct observational copying are encouraged. It gives many less academically inclined pupils the chance to experience some success. Teachers recognise, of course, that success is very important if learning is to flourish and progress, and if children with learning difficulties in the so-called core subjects can be stimulated by their abilities in doing art work, then this area of curriculum studies can be an invaluable key to the unlocking of other interests and the promoting of learning potential which might otherwise remain stifled or unrealised. (1)

FOOTNOTES INTRODUCTION

1. John Lancaster, Art in the Primary School, [London : Routledge, 1990], pp. 9-10.

CHAPTER 1

ART EDUCATION : ITS BENEFIT TO THE DISADVANTAGED CHILD

The term 'Disadvantaged Child' conjures up an image of a child from a poor background, not just in an occupational sense but also in an educational one. Many such disadvantaged areas exist in the inner cities and their various suburbs countrywide. These areas often reflect high unemployment rates, a phenomenon of modern Ireland, which is unfortunately on the increase. In many cases the reality is one where households are disrupted not just by the parents' being unemployed but also other family members. However unemployment itself is not the sole cause of disadvantage, as much a factor are low paid, non skilled occupations.

Poverty offers no easy solutions. It is destruction of the idea of freedom and has far reaching and awful consequences - low morale becomes one of its major by-products and the communities affected by unemployment and the subsequent poverty it causes may well ask what is the value of education at all. What purpose does it have exactly? The attitudes at large can well be reflected by the children from these communities, after all children are perceptive beings, and as a result lack of interest in the possibilities of education by adults will be imitated by the child.

It would be a mistake to suggest that in these affected areas of the community there is a consequent lack of intelligence in comparison to children from more advantaged homes. It is however unfortunate that

this intelligence may seem to be more visibly lacking or dormant in the disadvantaged child as it has so much adversity to contend with - badly planned estates, cramped housing conditions, and a lack of even the most basic amenities. In a comparative study of children from advantaged and disadvantaged homes quoted in Theory and Practice of Education, Joan Tough found that:

.... children from both kinds of background used language to a similar degree, but that disadvantaged children were far less likely to use it for analysing and reflecting on past and present experiences or to the possible or hypothetical. (1)

The child from a disadvantaged background, finding himself or herself amidst these conditions will most likely suffer as a result, often relinquishing the benefits which education can offer. These children will often fail at school.

This chapter sets out to examine and discuss where arts education, as distinct from other areas of the curriculum can combat those factors which can lead to inferior social conditions.

I shall explore those areas of the imagination, symbolic language, and the role of the senses in the cognitive development, in order to show how the arts, in their very distinctive way, can help disadvantaged children make sense of their experiences. Certain other points shall also be made to support this. The arts are a unique and fundamental area of education succeeding where all else fails.

Before we proceed it is necessary to point out exactly what the arts are. The term is well defined in The Arts In Education: A Curriculum and Examinations Board Discussion Paper:

The Arts is a generic term for the human activities of dance, drama, film, literature, music, and the visual arts, each of which is itself a generic term for a range of significant human experiences created and understood symbolically. (2)

One is immediately aware of how broad ranging the arts are, how much variety is involved and how much scope it offers to any child's development, in particular to those that are disadvantaged.

The system however remains to a great extent in pursuit of the academic. It will only be necessary here to point out that in such an academic based system - examination orientated, the disadvantaged child is decidedly losing, and consequently cannot work well within this framework.

And so to the arts, an area which not only can be compensatory to the educational process but which can be as vital and as relevant to learning as with any other subject taught in school. The arts offer an alternative means of communication. David Holbrook makes the point clear in stressing that all children have the same needs for, "imaginative nourishment, insight and understanding". (3) He further emphasises that the filling of these needs is the main purpose of education.

So education, ideally at least, is about tapping childrens potential, and the disadvantaged child has the need, as with any other child, to have his or her gifts explored and developed through inspiring teaching strategies and a curriculum which explores the aesthetic and artistic domains. According to Dressel the goal of education is, "To enlarge and refine childrens understanding of unheard forms which are by nature aesthetic". (4)

So much of our knowledge about the world, and thus in turn our ability to use that knowledge has a visual source and it is imperative to be able to understand and use visual language. Our ability to use this knowledge engenders human meaning and human interaction, a point made clear in The Arts In Education: A Curriculum and Examinations Board Discussion Paper:

Most human interaction takes place in and through symbol systems. Human meaning is created and embodied in symbols, and it is the agreed social use of symbol systems that leads to shared meaning The apprehension, formulation and communication of meaning requires the use of symbols. The creation and sharing of meaning is a necessary condition for personal and social development. (5)

Symbol systems are developed as a result of cultivation through the educational process. They help individuals to form concepts of reality and also to express what becomes known to others. While I do not wish at this point to discuss the dominance of verbal and numerical systems in Irish education [this is to be raised in my second chapter] it is necessary here to put forward the point that the learning of symbols cultivated through arts education compensates for the learning difficulties encountered by disadvantaged children in the

more academic parts of the curriculum, which are difficult for these children because they are seen as abstract and without meaning.

Art, because it is activity based, works in the opposite direction to academically inclined subjects, inviting the child to freely experience and experiment and be creative in a much more spontaneous manner, thereby strengthening their knowledge of reality. It is this notion of reality, one which to the disadvantaged child may appear incredibly complex and confusing which the arts helps become manageable and understandable. For to return to Tough's point as quoted earlier, while disadvantaged children used language to a similar degree to children from advantaged homes they were less likely to use it in analysing and reflecting on past and present experience and also were lacking to imaginative possibilities. Art can create experiences for the disadvantaged child that challenges him or her to use language for reflecting on events and behaviour and for imaginative play.

Because our learning is of necessity so visually based, it becomes imperative that the senses must be developed and disciplined. There can be no thought-making without image making. To be able to perceive critically and correctly, children need to create order through learning disciplines. It has been pointed out that this cannot, indeed must not, be just an academic concern. Art plays a vital role in helping the disadvantaged child particularly, by making sense of what he or she perceives and has perceived in their past experiences. Eisner talked of the senses being responsible, ".... for bringing to awareness the qualitative world we inhabit". (6)

If children cannot use their senses to increased standards of quality in perception and criticism, this will cause limited knowledge of themselves and their environment. Not being able to make sense through more academic processes, e.g. mathematics, the sciences, will only cause further failure with scattered and unfocused senses. Filtering information will as a result become more difficult. Senses are crucial to conceive information. Without sensory information and the ability to be able to order and classify it, it becomes impossible to form concepts, and concepts are the backbone of all mankind's experiences. Eisner suggests that the concepts are externalised by adopting a form which is visual. The empirical form represents the concept brought about through the processing of the sensory information. What this type of knowing fulfils is the disadvantaged child's need to comprehend reality. As seen previously symbol systems also help in this process. Art offers the ability to develop through experimenting, experiencing, and discriminating sounds, shapes, colours, forms etc. from each other and, using the senses to do so, children gain aesthetic experience and learn through the many and various art forms.

Tough's points about children from disadvantaged homes lacking in imaginative ability is another crucial area which art can cope with to the exclusion of other subjects that are academically based, and in which these children will often encounter learning difficulties. As she describes it, these children were far less likely to use language, ".... for projecting beyond the present to the future or to the possible or hypothetical". (7) While the ability to form concepts and ideas through the use and developing of the senses is crucial to

mankind the imagination and its cultivation is another crucial aspect.

The imagination deepens and makes more meaningful our world vision, going beyond the world of the senses and of the here and now. To fully understand the mystery and beauty of the world is the realm of the imagination involving a process where by experiences are selected, remoulded and combined. Ultimately it becomes the avenue leading to the perception of the meaning of truth. It is not one merely of fantasy, illusion or escapism. According to David Best:

It often requires imagination to see the truth and it can involve a creative struggle to achieve the precise medium necessary for expressing and recognising true insight. (8)

Ruth Mock makes a similar point:

.... far from being divorced from reality imagination heightens it as an essential factor in education. (9)

Art facilitates the imagination process, one in which the disadvantaged child is severely lacking. And it is the disadvantaged child in particular who needs the limbering experience available through the exercise of the imagination experiences which help the child see beyond actualities, to discover new possibilities there by escaping his or her poverty. Imagination is freedom as it allows the individual to change the present. In Maxine Greene's words, imagination becomes:

.... the source of a future vantage point from which to consider what's lacking in the present or the now. (10)

The individual is free to plan and, even should those plans become frustrated, nevertheless he or she can continue to conceive of a world which is different from the present.

The physical conditions of these children's backgrounds causes emotional damage. Educational success to my mind gives any child a source of pleasure that can be advantageous when finished school.

Once again it is art and the imagination which can facilitate this emotional pleasure. The arts by their very nature stimulate imaginative thinking and knowing, compensating for these children's disadvantages. Imagination frees the mind and allows the conception of alternative possibilities. It is a source of control and pleasure and can imbue the world with new meaning. The disadvantaged child benefits in this way and art education helps them to expand on their imaginative insight, through developing symbolic relationships.

The disadvantaged child should find compensation in art. In 'English for the Rejected', Holbrook argues that it is most important to give the child the experience of the arts, in order to master the language or symbolism. The mastery is the object of the language of education and not one of self expression alone. While every human being has the capacity for the aesthetic, he or she can find expression in response to the symbol or image. For the disadvantaged child such exposure to the imagination and the symbolic through the language of the arts can

serve to stimulate the symbolic modes of representation and receptivity. Image making is the foundation of other basic skills, i.e. numeracy and literacy and these skills should be advocated because they are basic to the complete growth of every child. For instance reading skills, it has been shown, can be improved by certain art programmes. Children's motivation, sense of accomplishment, perceptive powers and analytical thinking are all enhanced by the arts. A report from the Gollta School Union District in 1976 suggested that:

In the classroom where the arts approach has been carried throughout the curriculum, so that aesthetic expression pervades everything the children did, the standards of work in all areas were significantly higher than in other classrooms where a more traditional approach was used. (11)

Learning should always attempt at being positive especially with regards to children with learning difficulties. Their disadvantage brings with it all kinds of emotional damage. They lack in self-esteem and are unable to recognise their own self-worth. These children cannot be positive about learning. Research has shown this to be true. People from a deprived background are apt to be more negative, than those who were not deprived. Thus the education system is faced with the challenging task of enhancing the disadvantaged child's personal sense of worth through learning activities which will allow for the amelioration of the child's perception of self.

The arts are essential to the full development of the individual. Art should not replace numeracy or literacy but be included into a broader conception of literacy. To learn in the arts offers the disadvantaged

child a direct creative and recreative experience. To learn about the arts is to learn about the world of sensation emotion, perception and expression. To learn through the arts is to further enhance children's motivation and to develop a disciplined approach to learning and a respect for it. The arts offer alternative communication skills to children experiencing difficulties in language communication.

That there remain disadvantaged children reflects failure in political, social and educational thinking. It is the failure of these thoughts not forgetting some of the more recent successes, which I wish to deal with in my next chapter.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 1

1. Meriel Downey and A.V. Kelly, Theory and Practice of Education, An Introduction, [London : Harper and Row, 3rd Edition, 1986], p. 89.
2. Curriculum and Examinations Board, The Arts in Education: A Curriculum and Examinations Board Discussion Paper, [Dublin: The Curriculum and Examination Board, 1985], p.6.
3. David Holbrook, English for the Rejected, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964], p. 11.
4. Janice Hartwick Dressel, Critical Thinking and Perception of Aesthetic Form, [London, 1988], p. 20.
5. Curriculum and Examinations Board, The Arts in Education, p. 6.
6. Elliot W. Eisner, The Arts as a Way of Knowing, Principal Vol. 60, No. 1,, 1980 : pp. 11-14.
7. Downey and Kelly, Theory and Practice of Education, p. 89.
8. David Best, Feeling and Reason in the Arts, [London: Allen and Unwin, 1985], p. 84.
9. Ruth Mock, Education and the Image, [London: Chatto and Windus, 1970], p. 18.
10. Maxine Greene, "What Happened to the Imagination?" in Imagination and Education, edited by K. Egan and D. Nadaner, [Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988], p. 49.
11. Denise R. Adelhart and Dale O'Merill, Back to Basics: Lets do It Better with Art, Gollta School Union District Report, 1976], p. 21.

CHAPTER 2

THE FAILURE AND SUCCESS OF EDUCATION TO RESPOND
TO THE DISADVANTAGED CHILD

We have already recognised through the arguments put forward in the first chapter the benefit of art education to the disadvantaged child and the many and various approaches in methodology that can be applied in arts teaching. We have seen how the reasons for children with learning difficulties [and who will remain having learning difficulties right through their time in school] can be compensated for by the arts and indeed, to a great extent can prevent these children from failing at all. Furthermore as Douglas Sloan says:

No one would deny the need for survival level competence, but if that is the highest education can aim for, it is a training in despair. Even which such training succeeds[that it can by itself, is doubtful] the results would more accurately be described as minimum competency and functional illiteracy. For these students it is society which has failed its minimum competency examination in education. --- To say that people need only utilitarian two basic skills --- that they have no need for beauty, for ideas, for personal and social vision, that these are bourgeois delusions, is both condescending and political reductio ad absurdum of instrumentalism. (1)

Let us remind ourselves of the real purpose of education:

To achieve a genuine education it is imperative that we return to the person before us. The child, the adolescent, the adult, the individual who is now ready, however dimly and in need of however much support to adventure both further out into his experience and further into it, who's ready in some part of himself, to risk himself in order to become more than he is now. (2)

This point is reinforced by Peter Abbs:

.... always to keep childrens welfare and humanity
always at the heart of the educational
process. (3)

What this chapter intends is an examination of Irish education, in particular its failure to respond to the needs of these children with learning difficulties, through its neglect of arts education. There have been of course recent successes and I intend taking due note of these, charting the developments in the philosophy behind arts education of the lack of it in this country in the recent past.

In the course of my research a number of factors have emerged as to the reasons for the neglect of art education in this country. My first point shall be to examine our cultural history and traditions in line with the political and social trends that helped shape modern Ireland. This country, in particular during those years following the emergence of independent government lied in its representation of social and political order, an order at variance with the ideals of the revolution it came out of. In D.S. Connery's view, "Ireland's revolution is surely among the most unrevolutionary self-government once achieved led to no radical or violent uprooting of established institutions" (4)

This was also true in terms of its culture, perpetuating a dubious and extremely shallow Gaelicism or Irishness. The visual arts suffered with neither progress nor aid to real artistic development and innovation. Instead the newly established and retrogressive political order perpetuated in turn cultural retrogression and stagnation.

Our society after independence became even more traditional, more backward and more narrowminded.

The dissipation of revolutionary disillusionment is by now a commonplace of modern political history. That however a revolution fought on behalf of exhilarating ideals, ideals which had been crystallised in the heroic crucible of the Easter Rising, should have led to the establishment of an Irish state notable for a lack of social, cultural and economic ambition is a matter which requires explanation. (5)

While the combined narrowminded attitudes of church and state [and also those on behalf of the public] heralded an era of cultural stagnation I believe that this was also reflected in arts education. Drawing for example became non-compulsory in second-level education.

Ireland missed out on cultural development and produced a narrow perspective on what was artistically acceptable. Art was particularly retrogressive in Ireland. (6)

One can already see how little value was placed on the arts, it was only natural that arts education was to follow suit in this neglect.

This brings me to my second point. The system perpetuated in schools was an academic one. This was so right across the education spectrum. It has continued to remain so up to the present except for certain changes in recent years, which I shall discuss later. The examination system flourishes, non-academic subjects coming under and being restricted by this system when they are in reality contradictory to one another.

Many human experiences are too precise to be captured in words and so the need for the use of other modes of representation, such as the symbolic are paramount. As we have seen in the first chapter most human interaction and consequently human meaning is embodied in symbolism, a usage which leads to shared meaning. Art facilitates this, to quote from The Arts in Education: A Curriculum and Examinations Board Discussion Paper:

Education needs the arts, not alone because the arts are intrinsically important symbol systems, but because the languages of art operate differently to verbal or numerical languages. In particular, attention is drawn to the quality of immediacy of aesthetic experience and to the presence of the art object. A good work of art cannot be paraphrased. It means what it is and not what it refers to as with other symbol systems, meaning in art serves fundamental human desires and needs including the desire to know. The making and receiving of art in an educational context calls for human processes which, of their nature are not required in other curricular areas such as the sciences, languages or business studies. (7)

We have already explained the benefits of art education in reference to the disadvantaged child. Our point here concerns itself not in reiterating these but in contrasting the various kinds of intelligence in order to argue for an equal sharing of the use of all.

What are these types of intelligence? These are linguistic, musical, logical or mathematical, spacial, bodily or kinaesthetic and personal. In Irish education the concentration is mainly on two of these - the linguistic and the logical.

The symbol systems which dominate Irish education are verbal and numerical. However, these are far from the only symbol systems necessary to becoming a fully productive and understanding member of our culture. Many other systems exist, central among which are the arts, and the neglect of such forms of meaning in the school experience of most young people is educationally indefensible. (8)

I am not saying that in Irish schools those four other forms of intelligence are not catered for. What I am saying is that they are inadequately catered for, some to a greater extent than others. Statistics prove this to be true. In 1991 at Leaving Certificate level there was out of a total of 49,037 regular examination candidates only 9,237 or 19 per cent took Art. In Music, both A and B there was a total of 1,120 students or just 2 per cent. In all the failure to educate the articulation and refinement of the symbolic forms of the mind has had and continues to have devastating effects on children. Moreover for disadvantaged children, their growth is affectively strangled by the limited cognitive opportunities presented in the curriculum.

Eisner spoke of educational deprivation being engendered by academic biases:

Real deprivation occurs to students who are denied opportunities in the curriculum to learn these systems of thought [i.e. symbol systems], which would allow them to create other forms of meaning in their lives. (9)

The disadvantaged child is denied access to a fuller comprehension of reality as the curriculum discriminates against the use of the symbol systems located in the arts. The same writer goes on to say about an academically orientated curriculum:

.... diminishes the child's chances to employ the modes of imagination that poetry and drama can engender. It withholds from the child the opportunity to cultivate the capacity to learn what is subtle. These forms of educational deprivation exact a price not only skills function directly but also in those other spheres in which sensitivity to the visual world, to the auditory and to the imaginative are crucial. (10)

While as David Holbrook argues, the mastery of the symbol is imperative. It being necessary therefore to give any child, let alone those with learning difficulties the experience of art, the mastery of the symbol is the object of the language of education and not one of self-expression alone. The view that separates intelligence and talent; the verbal and the logical forms being deniers as intelligence, the artistic as talent catches disadvantaged children between these two forms of perception. Of course this misunderstanding has encouraged the bias in favour of the academic. Everywhere in our schools this particular curriculum type flourishes, and ultimately influences children [and one supposes parents], into perceiving what society values and what it does not. The status of art at school level conveys a message to children [our future generations], about the position and function of art in society.

An education which concentrates on the 3R's to the exclusion of non-verbal communication and creativity, seriously handicaps future citizens who have to contend with a rapidly, growing world. (11)

A curriculum which fails to include the Arts automatically puts the child at a disadvantage. This is especially true for those whose way of knowing cannot fit within the narrow confines of a rigid 3R's programme and if no compensatory stimulation is provided outside of

the formal school, he or she will most likely fail or be an underachiever at school and later on perhaps as an adult.

The first fifty years since Independence have seen some improvement. Art is taught in most schools and this is a great step. Educational reform to some extent embraced the arts. John Walsh in an article for The Irish Times explains the reasons behind this:

There has been much talk about the need for curriculum reform over the past two years many teachers had complained about the rigidities of what they were obliged to teach their students while the students themselves often felt that what they were learning had little relevance to the real world about them.

The existing examination system was felt to measure too narrow a range of abilities, skills and achievements. (12)

The Curriculum and Examinations Board and later the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has carried out pioneering work in recent years with its introduction of the new Junior Certificate. This is to be warmly welcomed with considerable emphasis now being placed on assessment at that level and a fuller and broader education of the individual. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment sees the general aim of education thus:

The general aim of education is to contribute towards the development of the individual, including aesthetic, creative, critical, cultural, emotional, intellectual, moral, physical, political, social and spiritual development, for personal and family life, for working life, for living in the community and for leisure. (13)

Likewise the Green Paper seeks to promote such aspects as self-esteem and self-worth, self-reliance and innovation, all necessary to the child from a disadvantaged background. In this scheme of things the disadvantaged child has a chance. Aspects of intelligence have been broadened so considerably as to affect a complete change in those children's position in school and later on in life, but one remains sceptical. Indeed though it was published over seven years ago now one has only to look at the list of recommendations cited in the Arts In Education: A Curriculum and Examinations Board Discussion Paper to see what a formidable list this makes and how much work remains to be done.

Art is still inadequately funded, the leaving Certificate remains examination based for the most part, classes are all too often too large and not enough emphasis is given to art at the Primary School level.

Literacy and numeracy is most important to an individual's development but concentration on those to the exclusion of all else is blatantly wrong. Education in this country has fostered as its priority this type of learning which is of little help to children with learning difficulties. However, those children from disadvantaged homes who have to be motivated and stimulated to take an active interest in learning will fail in the narrow educational confined adopted. Dependency on these forms confirms their failure sharply and distinctly. Those very subjects, subjects not directly affected by the child's learning ability or lack of it as the case may be, have been and will continue to be sacrificed. The arts have been a prime

example of this. The development of the individual's intellect becomes imbalanced if all forms of action, thought, communication are not explored, where the learner is deprived of an opportunity to develop creative thought and the ability to develop creatively in practice. It remains that a curriculum which does not promote expression, creativity and appreciation through arts learning becomes a sterile one and this is the situation we are still facing and in which these children have unrealistically to contend.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 2

1. Douglas Sloan, Insight - Imagination, [London: Greenwood Press], pp. 199-200.
2. David Holbrook, English for the Rejected, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press], p. 11.
3. Peter Abbs, Living Powers, [London: Falmer, 1987], p. 2.
4. D.S. Connery, The Irish, [London: Eyre and Spottiswode, 1968], p. 90.
5. Terence Brown, Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-85, [London: Fontana 1987], p. 14.
6. Ann Lockhart, "The Uniqueness of Irish Art", [Thesis], [Dublin: College of Marketing and Design, 1987], p. 37.
7. The Curriculum and Examinations Board, The Arts in Education, p. 7.
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CONCLUSION

Before stating my conclusions, I would like to put forward some of my own observations and comments concerning those points I have raised so far in this dissertation.

The school to which I was allocated for my teaching practice is situated in the suburbs of north County Dublin. It is a depressing area surrounded by a large Corporation housing estate, built up during the last twenty years. While the school building may be regarded as modern it would seem far from it. One could easily mistake the exterior for a factory - graffiti is everywhere, most of the windows are protected by steel grids [to prevent them from being smashed by local youths], and the whole building is badly in bad need of repair, both inside and out.

The two art rooms are located at the very back of the building - in an unfortunate and hopelessly planned position, as it has little natural light. Indeed most of the rooms are badly lit as are the corridors which are quite dark. While there is an allocated amount of money spent each year on materials there is only one store room between both art rooms leaving too few materials available at one time due to lack of space.

The school caters for about one thousand students with a staff of sixty-five teachers. While the number of students studying art is quite high, the majority of these are first to third years. Most of the classes are well below average in terms of ability. There are two

reasons for this. Firstly the two art teachers are strong disciplinarians and have good class control, resulting in their being left with low stream difficult students. Secondly, there is the general attitude of the school which is that art is therapeutic for these children, much to the exclusion of the many other benefits to be derived from arts education. This is of prime importance and is tantamount to relegating art to an unassuming and unimportant place in the curriculum. Where these children would benefit is not just in doing therapy art but in being taught the many and various skills the subject can offer in order to enhance their intellectual development.

Someone once defined education as those bits and pieces of learning that are left after everything else has been forgotten - a bleak and perhaps unfair view of education. Nevertheless it holds an essential truth and there are many who would agree. John Lancaster for instance has expressed a similar sentiment:

Basic subjects such as English and mathematics tend to have prime time-table time. I sometimes wonder why. Indeed I remember studying these and science subjects at school, with art and music thrown in as space-filling activities to which my academically-orientated teachers attached little if any value. Yet I cannot honestly think that the mathematics which I was taught has helped me, since I am hopeless at organising the household accounts and fail to understand investment procedures and banking-aspects that have real significance to every-day living. (1)

There will be those who disagree with the writer. After all one supposes that mathematically inclined adults were mathematically inclined at school and see the benefits of having had mathematics teaching. I am not arguing the point nor am I arguing that the arts

should displace these and other academically inclined subjects. What I am arguing for is a greater equality, a wider and more comprehensive view of education. While I admit that advances have been made the situation remains unsuitable to say the least.

How much more argument is necessary to support the beneficial nature of the arts? How positive has the response been to the fact that the arts can have major responsibility towards a person's intellectual and spiritual development and do not act as a merely pleasurable activity? What has to be done to make people believe that the arts are vital?

The Disadvantaged child remains on the periphery of education and will either fail or underachieve or both, a situation which does not necessarily end when school life finishes and adult life begins. We have left and continue to leave the disadvantaged child to struggle unrealistically within the educational system. He or she will not get on, and will not improve, the same old situations shall constantly repeat themselves.

The benefits of arts education are numerous. One is amazed in fact that until recently they have neither been highlighted nor adequately considered. Not only do they provide children with learning difficulties with the motivation to learn, they provide within this framework the many and various skills involved, a growth of the intellect and most importantly a further desire to know and to learn. The arts also have a liberating quality. The artist Rene Magritte spoke of the liberating revelations which are disclosed through an art process. (2)

What is true of modern Ireland however is the fact that there is a bias towards arts education. Any attempt to pursue a genuine education must not, as we have seen, reflect such a bias. It is incomprehensible that such a bias exists, nevertheless it does exist and has had a devastating effect on education as a whole and consequently on children. I have quoted such statements as "educational deprivation" and "educationally indefensible", strong words that admit the failure of education policy to respond to the needs of the disadvantaged child through the neglect of the arts within the system. The disadvantaged child will learn through the arts. If it is merely compensatory it is better than no learning at all. If we are to recognise a genuine education let us consider the rights and the needs of the disadvantaged child and let us bother to set in motion a more balanced educational system with the arts given due consideration to reflect these childrens pressing and urgent requirements.

FOOTNOTES CONCLUSION

1. John Lancaster, Art in the Primary School, [London: Routledge, 1990], p. 8.
2. Andre Blavier [editor], Rene Magritte, [Munich: Samtliche Schriften, 1981], p. 20.

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