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CHAPTER ONE

As a relative newcomer to the complex field of art education in secondary schools, I chose this topic primarily as an investigative tool to illuminate the situation for myself, and perhaps for those about to enter or considering entering the field of art teaching.

First of all, as almost everyone is aware, great changes have taken place in Irish education in general, with the first candidates last year for the new Junior Certificate examination in terms of its aims, its objectives, aspirations and implications which have been laid down in all subjects for which new syllabi have been devised. This is a culmination of over twenty years of dialogue, symposia, and pioneering curriculum development.

I can remember my own transition from primary to secondary education and was very conscious of two palpably different processes of learning. This I have come to realise as child centred in one case and examination centred in the other. Although the demands of post primary and primary education are different, my post primary education was at the tender hands of the Christian Brothers and therefore not wholly typical of everyone's experience at second level. Ironically it was the vociferous diatribes from more liberal members of staff, about "painting pretty pictures in primary schools" which left me in no doubt that this new forbidding institution, where I would spend the next six years, was to be a very different experience in learning altogether. The new school also let it be known that it held the previous schooling we had had in such dismissive terms as can only be deemed contempt.

I can remember noticing but not being able to fathom the reasoning behind these mutually opposing approaches. The treatment of us as potential miscreants and villains became a self-fulfilling prophecy in some cases. In hindsight perhaps the hostile atmosphere and the numerous beatings were "out of concern", a desire to mould us into "men", or a pallid illusion of what "men" constitute.

In such an atmosphere, suspicion and naked contempt for visual art is not difficult to envisage. In this, my second level education followed the national trend of the time with depressing regularity. Boys were, and indeed, in some cases still are actively discouraged from pursuing art or music in senior cycle (despite this country's wealth of musical heritage) if perchance the choice even existed. However the good news was and is that more enlightened people clamoured for a more relevant and wider curricular choice in children's second level education.

The then Minister for Education , Gemma Hussey, established the Curriculum and Examinations Board in 1983 with a view towards examining the whole curriculum and to revising it by means of the introduction of more relevant and challenging curricula. Incredible though it may seem, until then no coherent philosophy of second level education had been articulated by a government appointed group of educationalists. The C.E.B. formulated this general aim;

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

With this laudable and far reaching goal in mind the C.E.B. went on to identify the needs for :

- (A) A broader and more balanced core curriculum with an increasing emphasis on skills and processes.
- (B) A curriculum structure sufficiently flexible to recognise and accommodate curriculum initiatives at school and regional levels.
- (C) Assessment procedures that were determined by the aims and objectives of the curriculum.(1)

The C.E.B. identified core areas in education of children and set up working parties to investigate each core area. They then defined a rationale for each core area in question, and a set of recommendations for immediate implementation. The Arts Working Party produced an eloquent, irrefutable document. Visual art contains within it the richness of and diversity of human response. This has always been justification enough for me, but then I am biased. I openly and freely acknowledge my love of artistic endeavours and aesthetic beauty. Yet even a dyed-in-the-wool reactionary would be hard pressed to dispute the clarity and unyielding logic to the C.E.B.'s Arts Working Party's discussion paper. However the C.E.B. noted realistically in their conclusion that:

"The lack of understanding of the value of the arts in our society is the greatest impediment to change and to better provision for arts education. Until and unless the arts are taken seriously and their unique educational contribution recognised, the present low status of the arts in Ireland will be perpetuated and the indefensible neglect of arts education allowed to continue".(2)

Given the sparse reference to art in the Green Paper, it seems this lack of understanding persists.

When I see the hungry young faces in the classroom on a Monday morning, some wait eagerly anticipating today's lesson; others are already convinced of their own self-perceived inadequacy, some faces are distracted lost in thought, all of them needing to experience themselves as capable, unique and important people in their own right. Art education engages the whole person, intellectually, physically and emotionally. Its potential as a positive catalyst in their educational and subsequent lives can only be guessed at, and yet no less valid for that.

In November 1987 the National Council for curriculum and assessment took over the work of the C.E.B. Revised syllabi and the new subject "technology" were introduced in 1989. The students coming into first year in September 1989 would now follow the Junior Certificate rather than choose between two separate curricula; the Group Certificate and the Intermediate Certificate. The essential thrust of this new programme is that the role of the teacher is changing from that of the traditional dispenser of a held body of knowledge to passive students which the children regurgitated at examination time (often forgetting it soon if not immediately afterwards). The teacher must now facilitate learning which allows the pupils the opportunity to develop learning skills for themselves. This in itself is not altogether dissimilar from the "new curriculum" for primary schools introduced in 1971, which stipulated a role change for the teacher. He or she would create a learning environment and not merely impart education.

However, all the goodwill in the world can evaporate at the source if what is almost universally accepted as a huge step forward (the Junior Certificate) suffers from the deaf ears of government. The Confederation of the Teachers Union was considering advising its members against teaching the new curriculum. Their objections were threefold:

- (A) Inadequate funding to implement the goals of the new syllabi in nearly all areas, (for example inadequate provision of tape recorders for languages).
- (B) Poor staff/pupil ratios - a problem the government pledged itself to address under the P.E.S.P.
- (C) The role of teacher assessment as part of the overall grade, which moves the teacher from being advocate to judge of pupils.(3)

To quote the General Secretary of the A.S.T.I. Mr. Charles Lennon;

"The introduction of this worthwhile educational development was marred by inadequate funding and bad planning. This was best shown in the haphazard way in which the in-service courses for teachers were organised. However teachers have gotten on with the job".(4)

These "teething pangs" have spilled over into art education which the new learning ethos of the Junior Certificate seems to favour. The Art Teachers Association conducted its own survey of 43 schools taking the art examination in the 1992 Junior Certificate with 86 classes participating.

- (A) 36 of 86 classes had the recommended time of 32 hours (less than half of the schools).
- (B) 27 of 86 classes had more than the recommended 24 students (almost a third).
- (C) 30 classes had less than 24 hours (less than a quarter).
- (E) Further time was lost with parent teacher meetings, mock exams, outings and practical exams.
- (F) Classes that were over the recommended number of students gave the least time to the project.
- (G) Generally weaker classes got more time but the stream classes doing the higher paper with more to do got less time.(5)

In the final meeting of the Art Teacher's Association for the 1991-92 school year, on the 25th June, in Newman House, the following problems were identified;

- (A) An unacceptable level of emphasis on quantity rather than quality.
- (B) Owing to inefficient time tabling, overloading of work coupled with pressure from parents and principals, lunchtime, after hours, and Saturday classes were necessary.
- (C) Under no circumstances must art teachers permit their whole hearted embrace of the new structure be exploited because of point (B).(6)

Once these problems were addressed the conference felt a tremendous step forward had been made, and truly worthwhile learning experiences for the students had been the result. It is an exciting if a little bewildering time to enter education. The system is changing, let us hope attitudes towards art education turn rightly in our favour. We can only wait and see.

FOOTNOTES

1. John Walshe, Preparing for a New Way of Learning
(Dublin, Irish Times, 02/10/1991)
2. Curriculum and Examinations Board, The Arts in Education
(Dublin, Curriculum and Examinations Board, 1985) p.20.
3. John Walshe, An Ideal Constrained by Reality
(Dublin, Irish Times, 03/10/1991)
4. Ibid
5. Art Teacher's Association, Art Craft and Design
(Dublin, Art Teacher's Association, October 1992) p.2.
6. Ibid, p.6.

CHAPTER TWO

In this chapter, I shall examine the political and social context in which secondary school teachers find themselves. As secondary school teachers, issues affecting the profession as a whole will obviously affect art teachers.

At the time of writing, the Labour Party have secured the Education portfolio with the appointment of Niamh Breathnach. Fianna Fail and Labour did not agree over the Fianna Fail/Progressive Democrat Government's Green Paper, "EDUCATION FOR A CHANGING WORLD". The presence of Niamh Breathnach could be deemed an indication of a shift in thinking or a furtherance of the debate before the White Paper stage. In his article, "Not Much of a Honeymoon for a Minister "(1), John Walshe charts the immediate problems facing her. Specifically at post primary level, he states

"Secondary schools are up in arms over being largely ignored in the Programme for a Partnership Government".

Perhaps given the dire economic state of the country in general, some issues can be seen to loom larger than others. However, if a shift in thinking on education is heralded by the new appointment, the immediate future should yield interesting results. In the same article it is interesting to note that the present Minister for Arts Culture and Gaeltacht, Michael D. Higgins, was widely expected to become the new Minister for Education.

In an invitation lecture entitled "Education for freedom....not so much a homecoming as a heroic journey" for "THE OPEN MIND" radio programme broadcast on November 5th last, he articulates an ideological divide:

"Children in the future were to be made the pawns of a new version of education, such as is outlined in the recent Green Paper, that denied creativity as strongly as it demanded from even the earlier levels of education the dehumanizing values of Von Hayek, borrowed by Friedmann, and used as tools of oppression by the administrations of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, and brought home to Ireland from the British Jumble sale of ideas by the insecure followers of acquisitive greed rather than proponents of creativity and joy".(2)

Throughout his far reaching lecture he decries what he deems to be a "neo utilitarianistic" response to the education debate:

"Most recently, education has been constituted a commodity. A teacher is to become an executive. A university president is to envisage himself, or, in the unlikely event, herself, as the 'chief-executive' of a multi-million company".(3)

Michael D. Higgins laments the lack of width and breath in the debate on the Green Paper, suggesting that the few opportunities to discuss curriculum expose the true nature of the relationship between society, economy and education;

"Not one significant theme from ecology, feminism, egalitarianism, cultural pluralism...could I find in the framework of the Great Debate in Education. Yet the values of anti-social aggressive, individualistic greed-core values of Thatcher-Reaganism were there beneath a thin veneer of corporate speak".(4)

Though many people would point out that fresh initiatives and innovative proposals can evaporate in the protracted bargainings of coalition governments, the strident commentary of a popular, well respected high profile member of the Labour Party's ministerial team would seem to indicate a persisting gulf in the educational trains of thought of both government parties.

Early last year the Fianna Fail government decided (citing the deteriorating economic situation) that it could not honour the Programme for Economic and Social Progress with regard to education. 1992 was the year the first Junior Cycle completed a programme which clearly demands adequate funding and resources, yet the year kicked off with the spectacle of all three teaching unions threatening industrial action. Teachers from all three unions met the Minister for Finance Bertie Ahern at the end of January last to seek an end to the deadlock and avert looming confrontation. All three unions waged a strong campaign on non-pay elements of the P.E.S.P. The secondary school teachers were looking for a pupil/teacher ratio of nineteen to one to be phased in for recruitment purposes in 1992. Another key element was the provision of extra teachers in disadvantaged areas, more career guidance teachers, in-service training relating to the new Junior Certificate and a recognition on ex quota basis of vice principal teachers in post primary schools of five hundred students and over. The whole P.E.S.P education package had also promised an additional six million to be injected directly into disadvantaged areas at all levels.

The threat of industrial action over the fourteen million pounds package for 1992 was removed when the unions agreed to a compromise set of proposals, which deferred the full implementation of the P.E.S.P. until December 1993(5). Two hundred and seventy secondary schools were to get an additional teacher which brought the pupil/teacher ratio to 19.25 to 1. Caretakers and secretaries were to be appointed to secondary schools and an extra half million pounds was allocated for in-service training while the disadvantaged programme was to see 1.25 million pounds.

The unions were depressed about the piecemeal implementation of the heralded P.E.S.P. proposals but welcomed the compromise as a major advance(6). It is unfortunate that the year which saw the culmination of twenty odd years of debate, research and development in secondary school education was marred by threats of industrial action and a reneged agreement. Let us all hope it is not an indicator of future partnership arrangements between educators and government.

A small country like Ireland on the perimeter of Europe is vulnerable to the all pervasive free market economic situation, as the recent currency crisis more than amply demonstrates. Hitching a lift on the European juggernaut has not proven to be the safe ride the government declared it would be during the Maastricht referendum. It was however, with the economy and Europe in mind, that the Green Paper was produced according to Brother Mark Hederman, the former principal of Glenstal Abbey.(7)

DeValera once spoke of his intuitive understanding of the Irish people; if he wished to know what they felt he merely had to look into his own heart. On page thirty five of the Green Paper an underlying educational aim is identified as:

"To assist or enable each individual to promote his or her development and personality and to achieve a sense of self worth. The values that we share with other democracies stress the individuality and freedom of the person and impart a respect for the rights of others in society. The aim must be to promote in students an appropriate sense of balance between the rights and duties of the individual and those of society at large."(8)

This underlying aim is preceded by the assertion that:

"In a relatively homogeneous society such as Ireland's, a reasonable consensus might be anticipated on the broad educational aims that would inspire such a partnership related to preparing each person for personal and family life, for working life and for living in the community".(9)

Perhaps the spirit of DeValera was inspiring Seamas Brennan the outgoing Minister for Education who writes the foreword in the Green Paper. Ireland is sufficiently non-homogeneous to render the island partitioned and fractious suggesting any assumption of consensus may be self defeating.

In the introduction in the Green Paper six key aims are identified the first of which reads:

"To establish greater equity in education-particularly for those who are disadvantaged socially,economically,physically or mentally".(10)

Under this aim the government identifies the problems as being the social and economic background of some children where there is no history of participation, the curriculum's unsuitability for meeting children's educational needs (as more children are staying on until Leaving Certificate due mainly to poor employment prospects), the curriculum needs widening, the needs of children with disabilities, and the under representation of lower socio-economic groupings at third level. The proposals to combat the situation of poor access are;

- * Higher than proportionate allocation of resources.
- * Early and effective remedial intervention [Niamh Breathnach expressed

herself on 'The Late Late Show about levelling the playing field and was a remedial teacher herself].

- * Improving and adding new programmes to junior cycle.
- * Curriculum flexibility.
- * Twinning arrangements between third level institutions and schools from disadvantaged areas.
- * An expanded visiting teacher scheme for the traveller children is envisaged.
- * The children with disabilities would be catered for as much as possible in ordinary schools with special school back-up, and mobility where appropriate between the two.(11)

Gender equality would be tackled when the following problems were addressed; namely, unequal distribution of the sexes at management level in education (the education department of the N.C.A.D. is an exception). Persisting restrictive choice options in particular subjects and sexist teaching materials highlighted at the I.N.T.O. conference last year and the report published the joint committee on women's right, remain.

These problems would be combated by all institutions instigating an active gender equality programme, minimum representations of each sex on boards of management, the priority adaptation of all younger age group teaching materials to gender equitable standards, full availability of all course options, the active encouragement of co-educational schooling as the norm, and a departmental increase of women's participation at all levels.

The Green Paper urges a tackling of the hidden curriculum :

"In this regard, schools are encouraged to examine the structures of what is often called the 'hidden curriculum' of the school. Gender stereotypes may be either reinforced or challenged by the way in which teachers interact with students within the classroom; by the way different tasks and equipment are allocated to girls and boys in the classroom and around the school and playground; by the content and illustrations of textbooks and other teaching materials; by the organisation of the timetable and the choices it permits; by the nature of extra-curricular provision for girls and boys; by the relationship of the staff to each other, and by the extent of visibility of women in positions of decision-making within the school."(12)

There can be no doubt that gender biases have stunted the growth of art education in boys schools; one of the recommendations of the C.E.B. for immediate implementation is:

"Sexist attitudes towards the arts in education must be removed"(13)

The second aim seeks:

"To broaden Irish education so as to equip students more effectively for life, for work in an enterprise culture, and for citizenship of Europe."(14)

Aim two proceeds with the observation that young people are technically inadequate. Problems to be addressed are the lack of communication and interpersonal skills, critical thinking and problem solving abilities, initiative and language skill. The Paper concedes that there has been an undue emphasis on fact acquisition rather than critical thinking. In order to relate effectively, the student must become the manager of his or her own resources. The traditional second level programme was a springboard for third level selection and clearly does not tap

the strengths and aptitudes of many students. Students must be made aware of their European heritage and European citizenship. Critical thinking must be developed along either health programmes. Technology and enterprise, it seems, cannot be emphasized enough. Major initiatives are called for to increase the capability of students in this area including the mandatory programmes for all students regardless of the career aspirations of the children. The vocational dimension would be strengthened. Cooperation between schools approaching opposite poles of the vocational/academic divide would be encouraged. The languages capability would have to be improved with E.C. funding. The standards must be raised, with emphasis on practical usage. The aim describes the benefits of an extra year at Senior Cycle in terms of work experience and stronger links between school and industry.

The aim stressed a need to further the use of Irish in practical life, with emphasis on oral capability and summer camps for Irish instruction. Political and social awareness needs to be addressed through the framework of an European context and representative councils for students. Post Leaving Certificate courses need a common form of recognised certification, again the emphasis is on technology and enterprise and the acquisition of European languages. The third aim purports:

"To make the best use of education resources - by radically devolving administration, introducing the best management practice and strengthening policy-making".(15)

This set of proposals aims to devolve power to the Boards of Management. Again the link with business ventures is reinforced by the paragraph entitled "representation" in which the Boards would consist of owners, trustees parents, teachers, school principals and the local business community.

In Francis T. Villermains paper "Democracy, Education, and Art" he talks at one stage of the pupils being asked to select a local dignitary as a speaker for their school graduation:

"Invariably the President of the Chamber of Commerce, the Director of the local Industry, the President of the Bank, or a political figure will be specified".(16)

He goes on to interpret this response;

"Here are the leaders of the community, the outstanding men, or if you will, those who tend to have approximated the ideal. But what is being honoured by these choices? It is the ability to manage property, humans and monies profitability. It is the amassment of either political or economic power, and the acquisition of wealth. Sure these are not the defining characteristics of the good life".(17)

Values such as these seem to permeate this aim. The school is to publish a plan for the community stating its objectives and the projected management of the year. A detailed report would then be published analysing progress in terms of meeting stated objectives for inspection purposes. The Board would also administer all monies allotted on a standard cost system.

The Board of Management will be tasked with appointing all staff and responsibility rests with them. Quality, it would seem, would be defined in terms of objectives the school met under its proposed plan which in turn would seem to indicate grades. Teachers would now be expected to evaluate themselves and ultimately the Board of Management. The criteria for "quality education" and "teacher assessment" would seem to be similar. If this is the case exam centering at post primary will become an unshakable reality as the Green Paper finds its way however modified into law.

As the "Chief Executive", evaluating the capacity of teachers would be an "important leadership task" as well as liaising with parents obligatory management training for all new principals would be implemented as well as seven year renewable terms of office. This "quality management" would extend to all areas of the running of the school. Reference is made to establishing links with industry at third level further increasing market input, the streamlining of the Vocational Education Council.

The fourth aim addresses the teaching profession:

"To train and develop teachers so as to equip them for a constantly changing environment".(18)

This aim seeks to revamp the training of teachers by having a common form of initial training for all teachers, before specialization in any chosen area. Increasing attention is levelled at in-service training to meet the challenges of a changing profession.

Aim 5 encourages ongoing assessment of student performance with a view to targeting problematical areas and the publication of progress reports.

Aim 6 deals with accountability of the devolved system again stressing the importance of the annual report of the schools plan and the increased participation of parents at national level to influence policy-making.

These six aims will set the tone for all teaching should they pass into law. The emphasis is clearly on enterprise and technology and languages (presumably so students can be technologically enterprising in German and French as well as English and Irish) with strict quality control structures . One problem with the categorisation of the productivity of schools in terms of grades (in the proposed annual reports) could be the adoption of market force ethos:

"self advertisement is more important than getting on with the pursuit of educational ends. Exaggeration and omission are the tools of image building".(19)

A cold eye cast over grades can seriously distort significant advances in student development, when other mitigating factors are ignored. Senator Tom Rafferty, Vice President of University College Cork refers to this seemingly excessive exam centering as ;

"a climax of horror in the scramble for third-level places; we are classifying young people as failures if they don't make it by 17".(20)

As a statement of governmental policy, art teachers can only despair at the extreme marginalisation of the arts. The entire comprehensive two hundred and fifty page

document mentions art twice for post primary schools, one to deplore the fact that girls chose art, music and home economics, and to be true to the oft repeated gender equity, girls must be encouraged to take higher level maths and the ubiquitous technological subjects. The other sentence concedes that art and music would be "desirable" for the development of expressive capacities of the children, and that about wraps it up. Brother Mark Heferman could well have put his finger of the pulse of the situation in his statement;

"I am not against enterprise technology or the training of youth for remunerative and skilled work. I am looking for a balance for an education that is complete, that addresses the whole spectrum of the individuals needs and aspirations and the purpose of which is subordinate to the goal of human fulfilment at every level. So let me voice a protest over an almost entirely neglected aspect of education in this Green Paper".(21)

Brother Hederman goes on to quote Dr. Ciaran Benson of UCD's 1979 Art's Council Working Party report entitled;

'The Place of the Arts in Irish Education':

"The Arts are conceived as a pleasant way of passing the time..... a set of subjects regarded and treated as unimportant will become peripheral in the curriculum. Educationalists and policy-makers must be urgently persuaded that the arts have a serious and unique contribution to make to education".(22)

Michael D. Higgins echoes Brother Mark Hederman and Dr. Ciaran Benson 's sentiments:

"Isn't it interesting that creativity and the arts were the single greatest omission in the recent Green Paper".(23)

The sad and unavoidable reality is that the policy-makers remain unmoved, unconvinced, and at best disinterested. The Green Paper not only peripheralises the arts, it also champions technology. This trend was predicted by Alfred North Whitehead who said;

"If in the troubled times which may be before us, you wish appreciably to increase the chance of some savage upheaval, introduce widespread technical education and ignore the Benedictine ideal, then society will get what it deserves".(24)

The Green Paper establishes an hierarchy of knowledge leaving us in no illusion as to which knowledge lags behind that, which is, the "cornerstone of economic development". Dr Ciaran Benson spoke at the National Parents Council; he addressed the serious misconceptions and prejudices about the arts and about ourselves which seriously hamper our educational policies and practices. The situation appears not to have improved since 1979. The perception that the arts occupy the leisure part of life and therefore should be subordinate to the technical instruction upon which economic competitiveness in the European Community rests, unless Niamh Breathnach's appointment does herald a genuine change.

FOOTNOTES

1. John Walshe, Not much of a honeymoon for a Minister,
(Dublin, Irish Times, 01/01/1992)
2. Michael D. Higgins, Educating for Freedom, not so much a Homecoming as a Heroic Journey,
(Dublin, Radio Telefis Eireann, November 1992) p.4.
3. Ibid p.11.
4. Ibid p.10.
5. Pat Holmes, (Dublin, Sunday Press, 14/02/1992)
6. Fergus Black, (Dublin, Irish Independent, 25/01/1992)
7. Brother Mark Hederman, The Arts must have a central role in Education Policy, (Dublin, Irish Times, 17/10/1992)
8. Rialtas na hEireann, EDUCATION FOR A CHANGING WORLD,
(Dublin, Government Publications, 1992) p.35.
9. Ibid p.33.
10. Ibid p.5.
11. Ibid
12. Ibid p.69.
13. The Curriculum and Examinations Board, The Arts in Education,
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14. Rialtas na hEireann, EDUCATION FOR A CHANGING WORLD,
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(Massachusetts, Blaisdell Publishing Company, 1966) p.412.
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19. Liam Collins, Our Education System is a Murder Machine,
(Dublin, Sunday Independent, 30/08/1992)
20. Ibid
21. Brother Mark Hederman, The Arts must have a central role in Education
Policy,
(Dublin, Irish Times, 17/10/1992)
22. Ibid
23. Ibid
24. Robert R. Rusk, James Scotland, Doctrines of the Great Educators,
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CHAPTER THREE

The current economic and social reality in which Ireland finds itself is a challenge to the validity of art teaching which the art teachers must tackle head on. Rather than continually protesting the undervalued position of arts in the curriculum we must assert constantly and cohesively what an arts programme at second level stands for. Vague and woolly ideals have no currency (to use business parlance) in the debate. We need to take the offensive. We need to use urgent, coherent and robust language in citing what exactly will be lost (or will remain missing) from the education of our children, if the precarious position of the arts, proposed in the Green Paper, declines any further.

We must start communicating, as Dr. Ciaran Benson did to the Parents Council, what art education can contribute to society. As some art teachers like myself have completed an area of major study and become involved in art teaching through the diploma for art and design teacher post graduate year course, a dilemma exists for us in so far as we are excited and motivated by our own work yet the demands of teaching art (anyone who has run the gauntlet of the classroom knows what I am talking about) requires sufficient effort, that the ambition to achieve excellence in both fields would seem to be unrealistic. There is perhaps the veiled George Bernard Shaw axiom, "these who can't, teach", hanging over our heads and failure to meet personal goals in either area can lead to loss of self esteem. The fact that the policy-makers further marginalise the efforts of art teachers by attaching little merit to hard and painstaking work, further erodes morale in the task before us.

Teaching by nature is founded in faith in the future. Literally the very future of the country is sitting in your classroom. How society will develop in the future depends to a large extent of the success or failure in the classroom. The power to open minds, to foster awareness and expand horizons is not only a moving experience to witness but also a profound responsibility. In short the lifes work of the teacher is a caring, nurturing professional commitment to the betterment of our children. This function can be entirely at odds with the vocation of the artist. Whereas decorative /commercial artists and all manner of designers can tailor their work to the fluctuating tastes of the market place, the fine arts on the other hand seek to explore the territories of human experience. The purpose of their work is to continually push to the frontiers of existence and document their results. These results in turn can be both highly controversial and totally unsuitable for classroom consumption. It is highly doubtful that Robert Mapplethorpe or Jeff Koons (given the turn his work has taken of late) would ever have been allowed in the vicinity of a school room.

And yet the rest of us who have perhaps slightly less controversial agendas require time and space in which to work as artists in our specialist areas. It is here the difficulties lie. The tendency to be self absorbed and concerned with the resolution of this professional dilemma could go some way to explaining our low profile. In Frederick M. Logan's essay "Artist in the Schoolroom; a modern dilemma" he states;

"But just as the artist takes the primary responsibility for the creation of art, so the teacher takes primary responsibility for education in art".(1)

If we take this to be the case then we must pursue courses of action with our primary responsibility very much the cornerstone. Frederick M. Logan goes on to say;

"Teaching art is enough of a challenge to absorb the talent and energy of many of the best young people who want to work in the arts. It is a responsibility which is in old fashioned Victorian sense a privilege".(2)

We may add to this laudable quote that it is not only a privilege but may well indeed become a fight.

The formulation of the hierarchy of knowledge, as it would appear in the Green Paper, into law could lend further credence to the attitude that academically brighter students should pursue other areas of study. There are a myriad of reasons why children may not achieve academically, and the scope for self actualization in the art room may indeed be the spring board of confident achievement they need to boost their overall self esteem and performance. Yet the worrying trend of less access to art education amongst academically brighter students has been documented by the Art Teacher's Association in the survey in chapter one, where it was found in last years Junior Certificate that the higher streamed classes with more to do got less time.

The unacceptable perception among students that art is the "dross subject" must be altered. This reality was brought home to me on my first day in teaching practise when I overheard a group of fifth year girls hoping to change subject choice from

biology to art and the phrase "sure you can always do art" expressed quite graphically the esteem in which these particular girls held the subject. Needless to say I groaned inwardly and found new meaning to Jesus Christ's dying words "forgive them father, they know not what they do".

Brother Hederman outlines an apocalyptic vision of a generation of children put through the rigours of Green Paper envisaged schooling minus art;

"Without it we would produce a generation of aggressive, boring,controlling predators".(3)

In "Doctrines of the Great Educators", Robert R. Rusk names John Dewey as the last of the great educators. Dewey viewed the disintegration of man and his artistic nature in strident terms;

"As long as art is the beauty parlour of civilisation, neither art nor civilization is secure".(4)

Indeed the world-wide furore engendered by Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of Hitler's exhibition of "degenerate" art would seem to indicate that the arts have a moral role of considerable substance but that artists are not co-operating. We as art teachers have to lend our voices to the debate on art in general and specifically on art education. The gap between the general public and art experience must be bridged. We are after all visual people could we not conduct our own campaign for our own subject to redress the balance. Nearly a hundred years ago Herbert Spencer anticipated our Green Paper he said:

"Accomplishments, the fine arts, belles-lettres, and all those things which, as we say, constitute the efforescence of civilization, should be wholly subordinate to that knowledge and discipline in which civilization rests. As they occupy the leisure part of life, so should they occupy the leisure part of education".(5)

Undoubtedly his view finds favour with the policy-makers. One would be forgiven for expecting a modicum of progress since 1896. Yet Dewey's view could not contradict this ethos more. In Francis T. Villemains paper "Democracy, Education and Art", he writes of Dewey's claim that the ideal human community is dependent on its aesthetic component.

The Green Paper represents an opportunity to flex some muscle. If we can write as a body, and speak with the one voice, we have a considerable wealth of educationalist doctrine and the visual know-how. Why not engage in a little piece of marketing of our own. The Green Paper speaks of the need to develop critical faculties across the board in students and conversely ignores the very subject which champions creative, critical and aesthetic factors. Fear and terror of the ever looming economic catastrophe hanging over our heads cannot hold arts education to ransom.

As art teachers we have a lot to do. There can be no sitting back hoping the tide will turn in our favour. It is not enough to be right we have to communicate effectively. We have to be crystal clear about what is on offer and what is at stake. We must be prepared to adapt and borrow from one another's abilities. Above all we must raise the profile of what we are trying to achieve in the classroom otherwise will we witness further deterioration!

It seems we continually have the extra burden of having to justify ourselves and what we do. It comes with the territory, and we are here to encourage critical, visual, aesthetic awareness. As a body of teachers we need to rise to the occasion together, to quote Michael D. Higgins;

"One day children will come to school and the day will begin with music and they will learn in relaxation. Fear abandoned, love will define the pedagogic process. We must make that day."(6)

FOOTNOTES

1. Elliot W. Eisner, David W. Ecker, Readings in Art Education,
(Massachusetts, Blaisdell Publishing Company, 1966) p.439.
2. Ibid p.443.
3. Brother Mark Hederman, The Arts must have a central role in Educational
Policy,
(Dublin, Irish Times, 17/10/1992)
4. Elliot W. Eisner, David W. Ecker, Readings in Art Education,
(Massachusetts, Blaisdell Publishing Company, 1966) p.409.
5. Ibid
6. Michael D. Higgins, Educating for Freedom.... Not so much a homecoming as
a heroic journey,
(Dublin, Radio Telefis Eireann, 1992) p.16.

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