



COLAISTE NAISIUNTA EALAINÉ IS DEARTHA  
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CRITICAL STUDIES : AN APPROACH TO  
TEACHING ART & DESIGN AT  
LEAVING CERTIFICATE LEVEL,  
A PRACTICAL AND CREATIVE THEORY

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CIARAN SWEENEY

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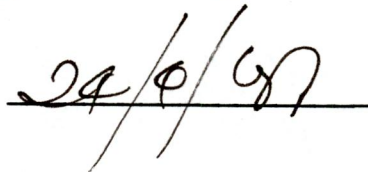
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SIGNED:



DATE:





## INTRODUCTION

David Thistlewood defines Critical Studies as

an accepted abbreviated term for those parts of the art and design curriculum, in all levels of education, that embrace art history, aesthetic theories, and the social, economic, political, religious and numerous other contexts within which the practice of art and design exists. (1)

Critical Studies is undeniably of increasing importance in Art and Design Education especially in Britain and the United States. It contains the traditional subjects of art appreciation (2), art history (3) and the more recently introduced area of complimentary studies (4). In this dissertation I will attempt to apply what is being practised abroad to an Irish context, both theoretically and practically through my work with a Leaving Certificate group. The Leaving Certificate is a state examination which since first introduced in 1926, and although syllabi have been altered over time, the basic structure of the examination remains the same (5). Therefore a pretence exists which puts forward that nothing has changed in almost seventy years. Furthermore art and design at Leaving Certificate level has no given aims so it remains up to the individual teacher to interpret syllabi (6). Despite these obstacles, Critical Studies can be seen to have an increasing importance and relevance to second level education in Ireland. This could be seen as a direct consequence of the introduction of the new Junior

Certificate course which has greatly increased pressures on teachers of all subjects (7). In art, craft and design art teachers are faced with the demands of new project based examinations, each requiring fundamentally different teaching methods. This has resulted in teachers inevitably demanding more resources and increased pupil contact has become a necessity. Critical Studies can be found in the new Junior Certificate under the guise of Support Studies (8) yet the traditional Leaving Certificate course still follows with no alteration or allowance for what the student has already explored, examined and created throughout his/her three year Junior Certificate course.

It is time for us as teachers, parents and students to address the problems and inconsistencies in our educational system and give Irish children the opportunity to develop their skills, abilities and beliefs. What better area to do this than in that of art and design education?

The arts are not only to do with the development of practical skills. They are to do with exploring ideas and feelings, issues and events that concern artists both as individuals and as members of society (9)

In Chapter 1 I will review the concerns and observations of art educationists over the relationship between art gallery/museum and school within the Critical Studies

Curriculum. Following from this in Chapter 2 I will examine two different approaches to the teaching of Critical Studies in Britain.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the methodology of a scheme of work I practised with a group of twenty five seventeen year old girls in Dublin earlier this year. In this study I draw heavily upon the writings previously discussed. Chapter 4 contains an evaluation of the results of this study concluding with a series of recommendations on the teaching of Critical Studies

all children fail... they fail to develop more than a tiny part of the tremendous capacity for learning understanding and creating with which they were born and of which they made full use during the first two or three years of their lives.

Why do they fail?

They fail because they are afraid, bored and confused. They are afraid, above all else, of failing, of disappointing or displeasing the many anxious adults around them, whose limitless hopes and expectations for them hang over their heads like a cloud. They are bored because the things they are given and told to do in school are so trivial, so dull, and make such limited and narrow demands on the wide spectrum of their intelligence capabilities and talents (10)

This dissertation is dedicated to those children who fail - past, present and future. It is my belief that Critical Studies is an area in which no student fails, an area in which I hope to prove, the visual, the written and the verbal hold equal importance.



## FOOTNOTES - INTRODUCTION

1. Thistlewood, David. 1990. Critical Studies in Art and Design Education (viii) Longman in association with the National Society for Education in Art and Design.
2. This stems from the seventeenth century when it was considered essential for all persons to know of Ancient Greek and Roman Civilisations.
3. This is a means of ordering successions of artists, innovations and movements throughout the centuries This has a much shorter pedigree, becoming a prescribed subject in British colleges of art in the 1960's.
4. Introduced as an extender of History and Art in the 1970's examining sociological, environmental and scientific aspects of the subjects.
5. The Curriculum Review Body whilst making many and varied recommendations has never succeeded in initiating change in the examination structure.
6. See "Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools 1992/93". An Roinn Oideachais, published by the Stationery Office.
7. The Junior Certificate courses were introduced in Ireland (replacing the traditional Intermediate Certificate course) in the years 1986-91.
8. Junior Certificate Syllabus: Art, Craft and Design, An Roinn Oideachais, published by the Stationery Office.
9. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation 1983 Report.
10. Holt, J. 1964. How Children Fail. Harmondsworth, Penguin p.9.

## CHAPTER 1

### CRITICAL STUDIES: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### The Art Gallery/Museum and the Classroom - Bridging the Gap

Educationists differ as to where the academic nucleus of Critical Studies lies. Some believe its purpose is to examine works of art which would not normally be brought into the classroom e.g. contemporary art. Some say it is only valuable if it ultimately informs practice, to them its curricular value resides in that it gives students experiences of new techniques and novel forms of subject matter. Others believe that its purpose is to develop a better understanding of society, from the artist's viewpoint. This approach, naturally, brings the student into contact with different societies and beliefs e.g. Oriental Art. Some educationists believe that Critical Studies is a means of tracing history through works of art. This idea relies greatly on the narrative tradition in art e.g. the depiction of a specific event.

Whatever stance one takes as to primary function of Critical Studies, it will remain clear that it is a plural term describing a multi-faceted subject. A subject which involves the interaction between students and the work of mature artists past and present. The art gallery/museum



is perhaps the most obvious location in which such interaction should take place. Just as the function of the subject itself is one of differentiation, so too is the role in which the art gallery/museum is to play within it.

In *Critical Studies in Art and Design Education*, David Thistlewood examines not only the role of the art gallery/museum within Critical Studies but also the art gallery/museum as an institution (1). He states that Critical Studies must be "critical" in that it involves "criticism" and must also involve "study" - the study of works of art as independent in themselves or the processes that produce these artifacts. Thistlewood appeals for positive teaching in this area and warns of the danger of naive analysis. He states that if traditional art elements are over emphasised by the teacher when examining a work then history, politics etc. will be overlooked and vice versa.

Thistlewood makes the point that few art historians/curators are practitioners and this leads to a subjectivity where aesthetics are neglected. He argues that museums and galleries do have both aesthetic and historical knowledge. But, he says, they communicate this information to each other and not to the public, nor to art producers or educators

Our art museums are concerned to be popular, and measure this property by means of attendance totals but they trade principally in the art of witness and appear indifferent as to whether this is informed or uninformed (2)

In the above mentioned climate Thistlewood claims that works of art often appear more real when reproduced well in a book or a lecture sustained by text. He calls for a re-evaluation of the engagement of public and art museum and puts forward two approaches.

- 1) Popularise exhibitions (drawing people in)
- 2) Take exhibitions to the people (3)

The former is quite vague, but the latter, Thistlewood claims, has been done before: for example, during the aftermath of the Second World War in Britain when arts experiences were brought into factories, schools and community halls. What happened then, he claims, was that this approach of taking art to the people was gradually withdrawn and there was no noticeable long-term shift towards museum attendance. This is backed by his belief that "participation in the arts requires continuous educational nurturing" (4). Thistlewood identifies an obstacle in the physical structure of the art gallery/museum itself: "He reviews their educational concerns as "passive" for the most part and criticises the fact that works of ranging values from diverse cultures

are set in an almost constant dominant architecture of Classicism

This is why naturalistic art is preferred in our culture... even 'Revolutionary' art is contained and conservatised by the cultural conventions it once utterly rejected (5)

Thistlewood argues that only one of the purposes of Critical Studies is to educate in Greek and Roman Art and Classical antiquity and that another equally important aim is to do so in the contemporary arts or what lies in between. He calls for critical dialogue between the public and the art museum/gallery and calls for the latter to become an "interactive organism" Thistlewood acknowledges that some images are so widely disseminated that they become cliches e.g. Munch's "The Scream". He calls on those involved in Critical Studies to observe popular images as keenly as the less familiar and emphasises this through the analogy - "Poetry cannot function without an audience" (6). According to Thistlewood not only the artists perceptions but also the cultural processes that give rise to artists themselves should be addressed. He observes that art galleries/museums do not criticise their works and that there lies a standing point for those involved in Critical Studies.

Perhaps Thistlewood's strongest argument and most beneficial point in gaining attention to the subject of



Critical Studies is that it is the public's identification with art's processes as practitioners and investors which would give rise to enhanced environmental respect

This is the case that all involved in Critical Studies should be arguing for nothing is more likely to prompt advancement on political agendas and bring art and our art museums from the periphery to the focus of social relevance (7)

In 1986, Mike Hildred, a Scottish art educationist and teacher, explored the role of the art gallery/museum within Critical Studies in a different manner. In *New Ways of Seeing* (8), Hildred examined the idea that people at all levels of education can bring observations and judgements to bear upon works of art without the direction of the attitudes of adults. Hildred describes how he drew the structure of art appreciation into five clearly defined components drawing from H. Osborne's *The Art of Appreciation* (9).

These five areas were (10)

**1) Production of art and design** Hildred describes this as first - hand experience of art/craft/design processes as an important mode of art appreciation.

**2) Critical Activity**

This area, as do the following three areas, derives directly from Osborne's theories. Osborne describes Critical Activity as involving comparison, evaluation and

judgement. It can be applied to an individual's own products, or it can be directed towards evaluation of the work of others.

### **3) History of Art**

Osborne described this area as the memorising of externally selected facts.

### **4) Connoisseurship**

This was described by Osborne as a product of individual contemplation based primarily upon close contact with individual objects.

### **5) Aesthetic Experience**

This, Osborne states, involves initiative, individual, sensual enjoyment and an attitude of particular attention to current experience - "noticing that you are noticing".

In 1981 Hildred was invited to create a pilot course for 14 year olds that would embody the changes recommended in Scotland in 1977 (The Pack, Munn and Dunning Report) (11). Hildred integrated studies in the classroom, art museum and a local print workshop in an attempt to encourage pupils to analyse accepted master paintings in the original and in reproduction, "while at the same time studying the commercial processes that make such works the icons of our time". He had no difficulty in finding



youngsters who knew nothing about art history

....despite the fact that for Lothian and Edinburgh children a good number of local galleries are National Galleries with collections that attract enthusiasts from all corners of the globe. But there are many other galleries in Scotland and, in more remote places, castles, with rich collections that also remain relatively neglected by schools in their areas (12)

Where Thistlewood blames the art gallery/museum, Hildred blames the education system directly i.e. "neglected by schools". Hildred wanted to provide a structure that would encourage children to look at images in a variety of ways and for a longer period of time, before expressing their opinion. To do this Hildred chose to use postcard reproductions as opposed to the

traditional approaches, whereby chronological art history is presented as a one-way communication of extremely selected facts and judgements. At secondary level, this process has often taken the form of slide lectures... (13)

Hildred used postcard reproductions from local galleries (national and others) he mounted these on assignment sheets giving a little basic information about the image, a range of standardised open-ended questions and suggestions for follow up activities. By means of a measuring exercise students were enabled to recreate the dimensions of the work - "a very useful element of preparation in the classroom for eventual contact with original paintings".

Hildred's and Thistlewood's ideas overlap, again, in regard to the popularity of the image

I regard as fundamental the process whereby pupils are invited to make an open selection from a range of images that include famous, less famous and neglected works of art (14)

Katy MacLeod calls for a collaboration between school and art gallery/museum and echoes Thistlewood's sentiments in relation to the art gallery being, ideally, an "interactive organism" (15)

MacLeod believes that, taking into account the variety in the way in which school visits are organised

some being part of carefully constructed programmes of related study, some being purely off the cuff and casual, educational visits are generally of a slot-in kind. Schools come with their courses sewn up, visit the gallery, take what the gallery has on offer and go. The gallery may be unaware of the overall purpose of the visit and may not be fully informed about follow up sessions (16)

MacLeod claims that the school makes too narrow a claim on the gallery's resources, and that the gallery presents its offerings "in the dark". She presents the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol (17) as a gallery which deals in changing contexts. She claims that each context creates its own expectations and that this, coupled with differences in training and education, adds to the potential barriers of co-operation. MacLeod also points out that whenever museum and school try to work together a difficult problem surfaces. She believes that

gallery/museum educators generally pride themselves on the flexibility, inventiveness and conception of the student as a potentially creative being and that most school people find this a "sloppy promise" for the business of teaching,

priding themselves on there ability to undertake and complete a project in which students realise some of their potential. Most museum educators in turn find this emphasis rigid and narrow.(18)

MacLeod calls for collaboration between local education authorities and Arts associations in an attempt to improve the relationship between art gallery/museum and school. She presents this collaboration not as a representation of a smoothing over of differences between gallery and school but as a fundamental attempt to bring about change, to prove that the gallery can be more than a teaching aid.

It becomes apparent through the writings of MacLeod, Hildred and Thistlewood (although they sometimes stand for fundamentally different attitudes to art education) that a different approach must be taken by both gallery and school within the Critical Studies Curriculum. This change in approach appears essential if progress in this aspect of art education is to be made. It appears that within the school it is the teacher's education which is essential in bridging the gap between art gallery/museum and school.

Educate one teacher and you improve the opportunity for 30 plus pupils to make concrete connections between your museum and their lives (19)



Both the school and the art gallery/museum can be seen as teachers. But is the latter being over-emphasised? Without undermining what MacLeod, Hildred and Thistlewood are arguing, for a better relationship between the school and the gallery, the day-to-day teaching of Critical Studies has yet to be addressed Can Critical Studies be taught within the climate previously discussed? In the next chapter I will review two different approaches to the teaching of Critical Studies by examining the approaches of Andrew Mortimer and Rod Taylor in Britain.

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  2. Ibid., p.4
  3. Ibid.
  4. Ibid.
  5. Ibid., p.5
  6. This derives from an analogy originally belonging to Jean Learing, formerly Director of the New Abbe Museum, Eidenhoven.
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  8. Hildred, Mike, et al 1986. New Ways of Seeing, Edinburgh, Moray House College of Education.
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  10. Ibid., p.9
  11. Dunning, J, 1977. Assessment for All. Edinburgh, Scottish Education Department (Report of the Committee to Review Assessment in the 3rd and 4th years of Secondary Education in Scotland)
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12. Hildred, "New Ways of Seeing", p.45
  13. Ibid.,
  14. Ibid., p.49
  15. Thistlewood, "Critical Studies", p.9
  16. MacLeod, Katy, 1983. Education Supplement Arnolfini Gallery.
  17. Ibid.





18. Newscome, B.Y., and Silver, A.Z. (eds) 1978. The Art Museum as Educator a Collection of Studies as Guides to Practice and Policy. University of California Press, Note 2, p.271
19. Ryne, B. 1978. From Object to Idea., Museum News Vol.56, No.3 pp.45-47.

## CHAPTER 2

### APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF CRITICAL STUDIES

In 1986, Andrew Mortimer, in *Agenda for the Arts* (1), focused on the same phenomenon explored by Hildred (2), discussed in Chapter 1. They are both interested in the successful integration of studies conducted in the classroom, and museum and artists studio. However, the special dimension Mortimer has added has been to involve his pupils in the history of events portrayed in works of art, for example by comparing the "news" embodied in historic paintings with comparable incidents reported in the media to-day. This type of exercise derives from Mortimer's model for the teaching of Critical Studies. Mortimer believes that

there has been enough tangible progress to suggest a model of the principal approaches to teaching Critical Studies and to examine some of these in terms of their benefits and pitfalls. These methods are numerous but they may be discussed under two main headings: The use of primary sources and the use of secondary sources (3)

#### The Use of Primary Sources

Mortimer claims that primary sources are likely to be more stimulating than secondary, however well produced the latter might be. Mortimer is sceptical as to how often, indeed if at all, a pupil could experience what David Hargreaves has called a "conversive traumatic experience" (4), or what Rod Taylor prefers to call "the illuminating



experience (5), from a reproduction or secondary source. Mortimer does, however, agree with the suggestions put forward by Hargreaves and Taylor that awareness of scale, medium and detail, as well as notions of "presence" or "occasion", are all important features of a heightened experience of art.

#### **Mortimer's list of Primary Sources (6)**

1) The use of original artwork seen in museums, galleries and exhibitions.

This is perhaps the most obvious primary source. In recent years there have been feelings among several art historians pressurising museums and galleries to reconsider their function

museums and galleries have tended to estrange the works they bring together from their original functions (7)

Some art historians suggested that at its most basic there were

shortcomings in academic art history. Much of it (had) moved away from what ordinary people see and think (8)

Mortimer suggests that for the art teacher the implications of these notions offered

an alternative to the academic chronologically - based body of knowledge which traditionally governed the approach to art history in schools. It also called into question the divisions between "high" and "low" culture, and attacked the cult of the end product - the framed masterpiece (9)





## **2) The use of original artwork on loan to a school**

Mortimer suggests that this can reduce the need for expensive out-of-school trips and provide teachers with longer and more frequent opportunities to relate relevant objects to their pupil's own practical work. Mortimer is influenced by Pearson (10), in his belief that there is also a case to be made for choosing pictures and art objects for classroom use, with regard to research of educational psychologists into the relationships between pupils personalities (e.g. introvert/extrovert, field dependent/field independent etc.) and their aesthetic preferences (11). Mortimer also echoes Dyson's opinion that teachers need to be aware of pupil responses to both making and looking at art in the light of such findings in order to maximise the chance of selecting work with the broadest appeal.

## **3) The use of visits and residences by practising professional artists and crafts people.**

The purpose of this approach has already been defined by Pat van Pelt, a former Art Education Officer at the British Arts Council:

A school environment, by its very nature, tends to be insular and isolated. All we can do to enrich and enlarge this world is therefore vital. An artist brings to the school a wealth of new experiences from which s/he selects, records, examines, rejects, reassesses, codes and decodes. To be witness, even in part to this process, both stimulates enquiry and heighten perception (12)



#### 4) The use of statements made by artists about their work.

This is closely linked to the use of artists and crafts people in schools it is an approach which

examines the development of ideas and the creative process, through consideration of artists' verbal accounts of their work (13)

#### 5) The use of pupils and teachers own work

Here Mortimer draws from Pye's 'The Nature of Workmanship at risk' which involves the possibility of failure. Mortimer believes that the teacher/artist is

undoubtedly the best person to make children aware of and share, this aspect of the creative process (14)

### The use of Secondary Sources

It would appear that the use of primary sources in Critical Studies methodology would be quite rare. The use of secondary source materials has been standard practice for many years. Mortimer highlights two of these:(15)

#### 1) The use of mass produced images of art work.

Mortimer is cautious of the use of reproductions as sources for pastiches, borrowings or copies. This phenomenon has been explored extensively by both Hildred in 'New Ways of Seeing' and by Clement in 'The Real Thing' (16). Mortimer agrees with Clements idea that working with reproduction



can

enliven the content of the work of younger children - it can encourage older children towards a more demanding use of such qualities of colour, pigment, tone, surface and space that illustrate many of the works studied (17)

Mortimer insists that the teacher must enable the pupil to move on to what Reid calls

something more discriminating, finer, richer, fuller, more complex (18)

Mortimer sees a place for the reproduction in the classroom but his fear is that it would become part of a "sterile art exercise".

## **2) The use of supporting background material to place art work into a context.**

Mortimer shares the belief that all art is produced in a cultural or social context. Therefore he suggests that the critical study of art should help explain the purposes of art and offer potential models for the pupil's own work. If it fails to do this, Mortimer suggests, the child's contact with artists remains ill-informed. Mortimer supports the study of information (for example, written or filmed) that enhances an understanding of the historical or environmental conditions in which the work was made; reconstruction of the artist's life; experimentation with materials or methods associated with the artist; and



visiting the site(s) of production, from specific landscapes to actual studies.

Rod Taylor shares Mortimer's assertion that Critical Studies is "an essential adjunct to the pupil's practical work; sometimes it may lead to it, sometimes stem from it" (19)

In approaching Art and Design, Taylor attempts to deal with students' needs and personal responses in an individual way, but within the framework of three main areas: studio based activities; home - based and location work; and contextual and critical studies (Fig.2.1). Above all those whose writings I have examined in the field of Critical Studies it is Taylor's ideas which have influence me most in my own teaching (this will be discussed under my teaching methodology in Chapter 3).

It is Taylor's interest in the ideas and aspirations of the students themselves which most attracts me to his method of teaching Critical Studies

How can the art educator take account of this flood of stimuli, as its nature and impact is bound to vary from one student to another? It seems that the only constructive way forward is to tap into the ideas of the individual student (20)

Taylor is critical of the traditional teaching approach in the art room, teaching through "a distance learning system, of judging solely according to that teachers criteria"





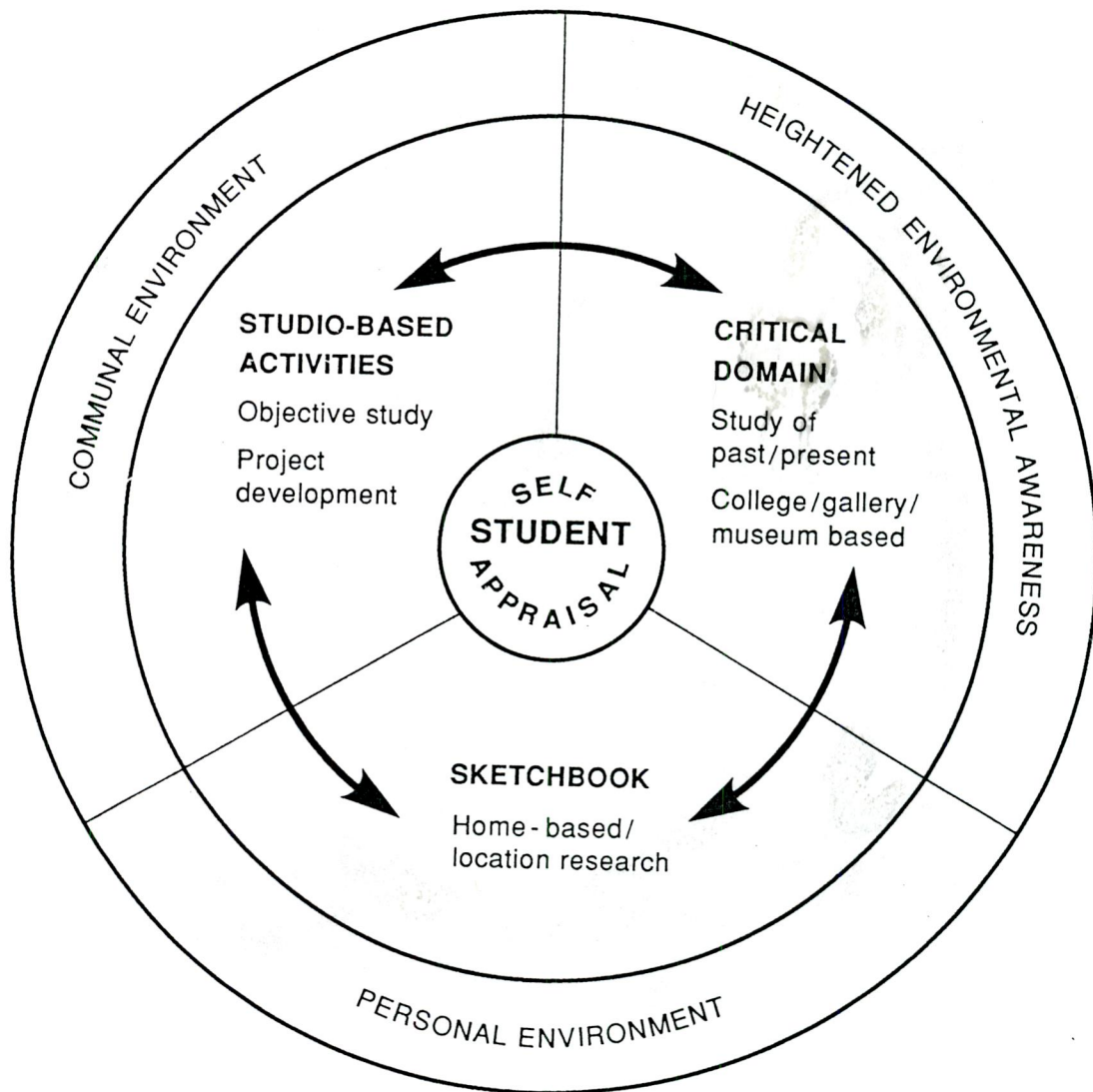


Figure 2.1  
 In The Winstanley College of Art  
 Taylor dealt with his students needs within this framework  
 Source: Taylor, Rod. Approaching Art and Design Education  
 London, Longman.



(21). Taylor is constantly aware of the students intentions and criticises those teachers who "consistently give advice on how to make it look more three dimensional without having an inkling as to what the student is attempting" (22). A student's written testimonies are of equal importance to Taylor as those which are visual or verbal and they occupy equal space in his writings. This reinforces what, for me, is one of the greatest advantages of Critical Studies in Art Education. To pay equal attention to a student's visual, verbal and written testimonies suggests that there is a place for every student within the Critical Studies Curriculum. Taylor suggests that we, as art teachers, pay equal attention to

The attitudes and responses of students, sometimes drawn from their written testimonies, at other times through the spoken word

Taylor's methodology is based on traditional figure drawing, still life and the study of natural forms and he makes no apology for this because

No student has ever complained to us about having acquired genuine drawing skills, rigorous though the process has to be (23)

Taylor also claims that the sketch book is a vital part of Critical Studies. It is his belief that

another special attribute of art and design education is its capacity for involving students in problems which are intensely real to them in a sense which much of education most certainly is not. This is because it can provide so many genuine opportunities for personal and active participation, and consequent internalisation of experiences... there is no finer aid to this process than through the systematic use of the sketchbook (24)







Taylor shares with all of the supporters of a Critical Studies curriculum discussed previously a belief in the importance of studying and responding to the work of mature artists as something of worth in its own right and for its own sake. To do this Taylor suggests the model of Content, Form, Process and Mood which is proposed also as a worthwhile one for use by students with regard to their own work. This model has also been emphasised by Hughes (25) in his call for teachers and in turn their pupils to think in terms of histories of art.

#### Taylor's Content, Form, Process, Mood Model (26)

##### **1) Content**

Taylor describes this as an analysis of the subject matter of the work and its social, religious, moral or political concerns.

##### **2) Form**

Taylor describes this as an investigation into the artist's arrangement of imagery, art elements and the overall entity of the work.

##### **3) Process**

Here Taylor asks us to explain the manner in which the work was made, the artist's use of materials and his sources. The artist's skill is also examined here.



#### 4) Mood

It is here that Taylor calls for investigation into how the work affects the viewer and why. The artists mood or feelings when creating the work are also analysed here.

In this chapter I have examined the approaches put forward by Mortimer and Taylor to the teaching of Critical Studies. I have examined Mortimer's preoccupation with and breakdown of Primary and Secondary sources and Taylor's pupil centred approach to the teaching of Critical Studies through such sources. It is in Chapter 3 that I will introduce my own approach to the teaching of this subject and give an account of the ideas which most influenced me in doing so.

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17. Clement; Ibid. Note 24.
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24. Ibid.
25. See Arthur Hughes, "The Copy, The Parody and the Pastiche" in Critical Studies (ed. D. Thistlewood).
26. Taylor, "Critical Studies in Art and Design Education : Passing Fashion or Missing Element" in Critical Studies. (ed. D. Thistlewood), p.39
- 27.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction to the Study

This study concerns a scheme of work with a group of twenty five seventeen year old girls at Santa Sabina Dominican Convent in Sutton, North County Dublin. Approximately seven hundred pupils attend Santa Sabina, an all girls' school with a full-time staff of forty-five teachers. The school itself brings together students from two varying socio-economic backgrounds; the affluent area of Howth and the working class areas of Bayside/Kilbarrack. The school is very well facilitated in terms of sports equipment, computers, laboratories etc. Art and Design are well catered for and is a choice subject at both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate levels. There are two art rooms in the school, one very large one (Figure 3.8) and one prefab classroom adapted for use as an art room. There are two art teachers working in the school one full-time and one temporary whole-time. A lay principal has recently been appointed to the school.

#### The Schemes of Work

The group of 25 pupils I worked with are in preparation for their Leaving Certificate Examinations in 1994. The scheme can be divided into two sub schemes

- 1) "My World", Tonal Composition Project
- 2) "Seated by Meaning", Cushion Project

My intention when designing the first scheme was to combine and balance historical and practical work as much as possible and to integrate the two in such a way that they relate directly to each other. The school had asked me to cover the Renaissance Period in History of Art in so far as time allowed (I teach this class once a week for a double period, one hour thirty minutes in duration, one period being timetabled as History of Art). I was also asked to develop the pupils' drawing ability. The scheme therefore evolved around drawing and a grounding in problems faced by Renaissance artists.

The opportunity was perfect for investigation into the problems faced by Renaissance artists both practically and theoretically. In doing this I decided to plan a ten week programme from October to December in which the project was to develop. I sought to use Rod Taylor's approach in teaching Critical Studies by using his framework of home-based studio-based and location work as outlined in Chapter 2 (See Figure 2.1 Chapter 2). I also sought to use as many of Mortimer's list of sources as possible, "Variety" being the operative word.



In designing the scheme I was constantly aware of my own second level art education. I myself attended four secondary schools and Art History was consistently presented as a separate "academic" side of the subject of art and design. I wanted this scheme to be different, I thus gave the group a questionnaire (Appendix 3) in an attempt to ascertain the students' feelings and interpretation of the subject of art and design at Leaving Certificate level. The results of the questionnaire were unexpected to me. Students were asked to number their favourite area of art at school from five main areas. The areas were pottery, life-drawing, imaginative composition, print-making and calligraphy.

Life drawing fared badly, calligraphy being the least favoured area. Pottery and print-making shared the most favoured area.

Interest in the History of Art varied greatly from student to student, however, almost all students found that it could sometimes be "boring".

It had been a year since any pupil had visited a gallery or museum, the occasion being a school excursion to the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

## Scheme 1

**The Tonal Composition Project**  
**(Ten double periods of one and a half hours in duration)**

This scheme involved figure drawing for a single period per week and Critical Studies for the other. Home-based work was also involved along with location work in the National Gallery's Anatomy and Art Exhibition (1)

The scheme involved life-drawing initially in tone and colour. Students were also required to record a room in their home. The student's bedroom/kitchen were the most popular subjects for this exercise. Line, tone and perspective were the main art elements explored (some students did use colour in their research work). Investigations were made into problems faced by early Renaissance artists and architects. These investigations were both practical and theoretical e.g. the students examined Giotto and Massacio's achievements in dealing with the figure and tone and Donatello's treatment of the figure. The investigations took place in three main areas

**1) Drawing**

By examining art elements tackled by Renaissance artist first hand. This was done through figure drawing exercises and perspective studies a) in the classroom and b) in the pupil's home.



## 2) Essays and Written Testimonies

All students were required to write short written evaluations of finished pieces. The students also wrote three essays during the course of the scheme.

## 3) Slide Presentations and Location Work

This area involved discussion of works and analysis of their content, form etc.

The overall outcome of the project was a tonal composition using research drawings from section one above as source materials.

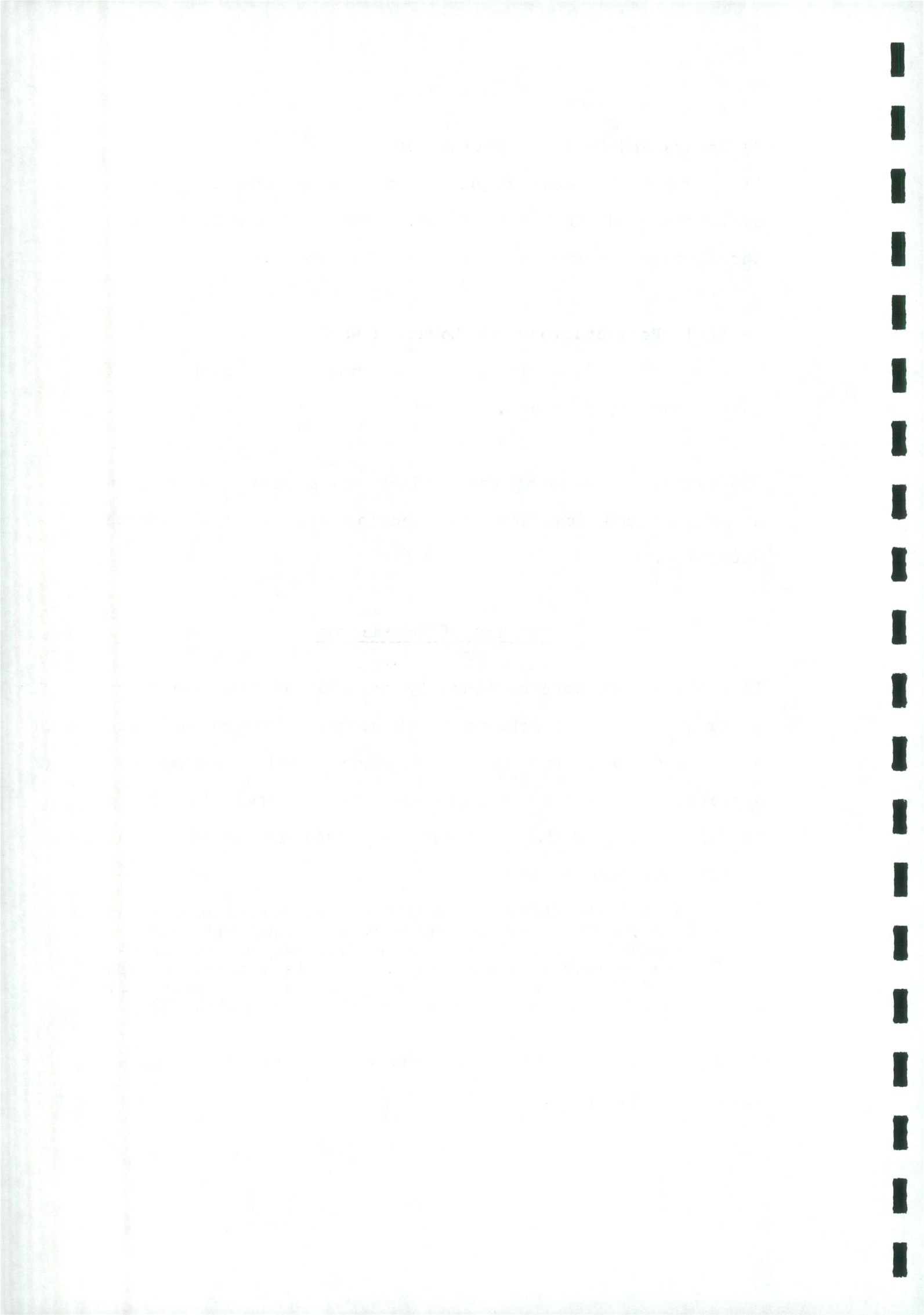
### Results of Scheme One

1) The students were continually reminded of the importance of art, the contextualisation of works. Comparisons were encouraged between the Renaissance and contemporary society. Emilie's description of Donatello's "Mary Magdalen" (Figure 3.1) displays an acute awareness of the artists pre-occupations

Donatello's figure of Mary Magdalen comes as quite a shock. The figure was carved in wood and showed a ravaged face... the surface of her ragged dress.. her bare scrawny arms and legs. This is not just a work to fulfil an order, it shows deep emotion... Donatello shows real features of human bodies (2)

2) Home based and Classroom based Drawings with Pupils' written evaluations.





Neasa's "Kitchen" (Figure 3.2) and Heather's "Bedroom" (Figure 2.3) are examples of home-based activities related to the scheme. This assignment had to be reintroduced to pupils. This was due to an initial lack of application. I believe that the reason for this was that the pupils were not used to practising drawing outside the classroom.

As with all of their work, students were asked to write short evaluations under Content/Form/Mood and Process (as outlined by Rod Taylor in Chapter 2). Here is Neasa's evaluation of her kitchen drawing

I chose the kitchen to draw because its where my family spend most time at home. I also chose it because it has a lot of perspective and lines going in different directions... used a pencil to draw it first then smaller ones like the titles on the wall. I used my finger to make shadows (3)

It is obviously a very involved drawing. Neasa examines perspective in her immediate environment, it is not only Neasa's rendering of perspective but also her reasoning behind choosing this location which makes the work successful.

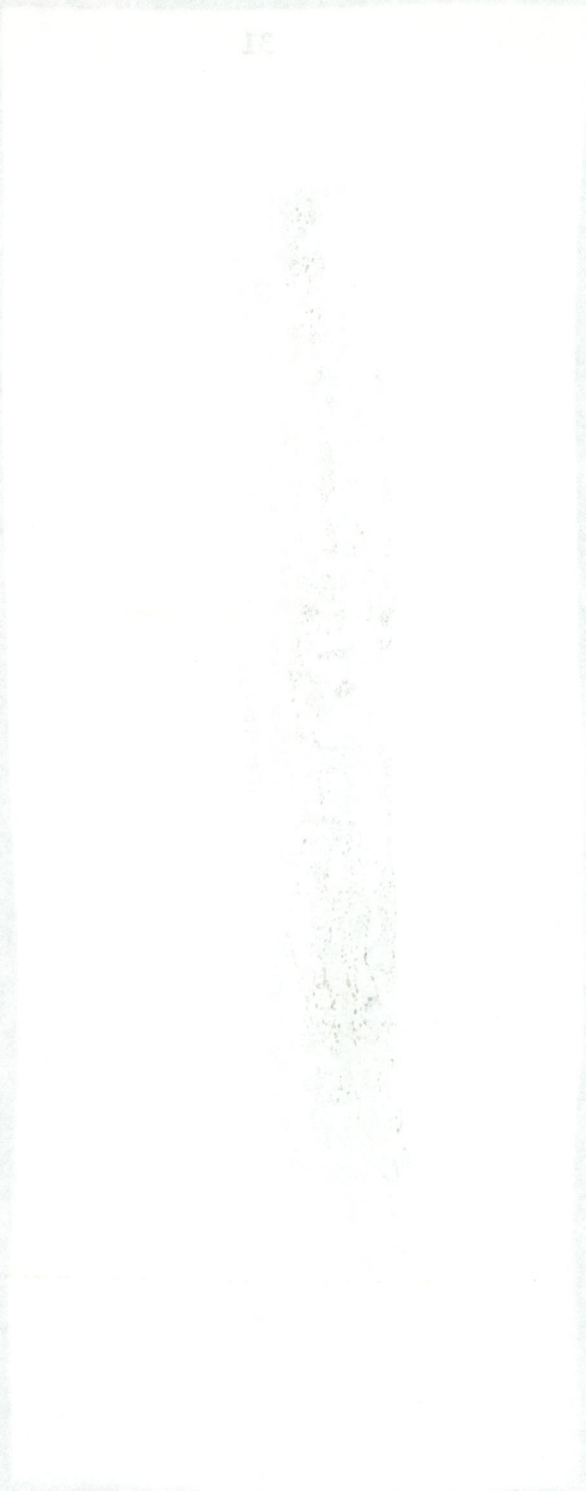
Heather displayed a similar thought process behind her bedroom study

My bedroom is a place where I can do what I want and keep all my things. I drew it in pencil first and then used paint over it. We weren't supposed to use



Figure 3.1  
Donatello's Mary Magdalen





THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



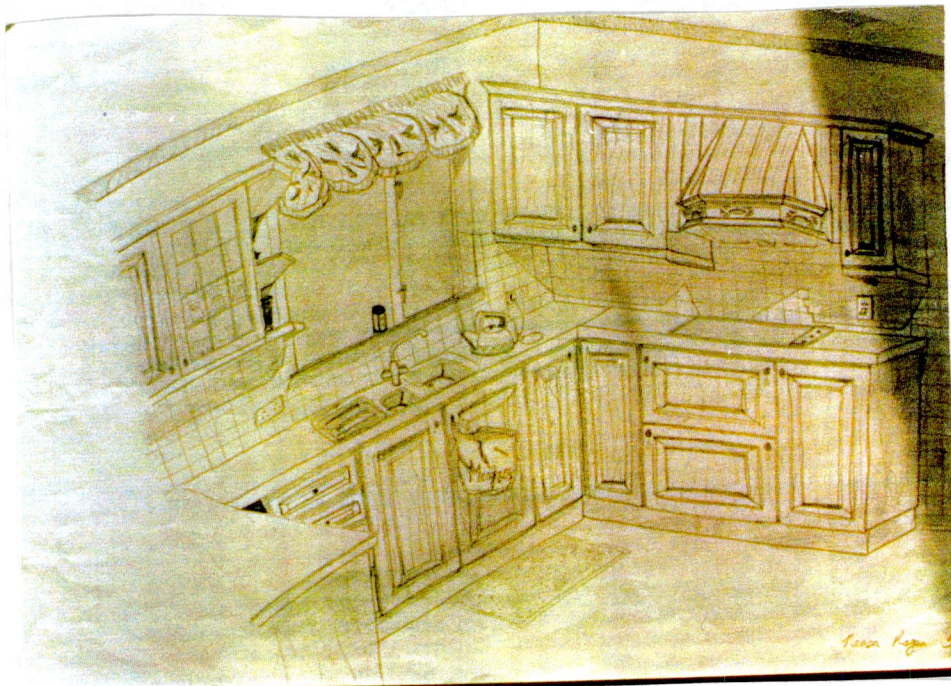


Figure 3.2  
Neasa's Kitchen Study





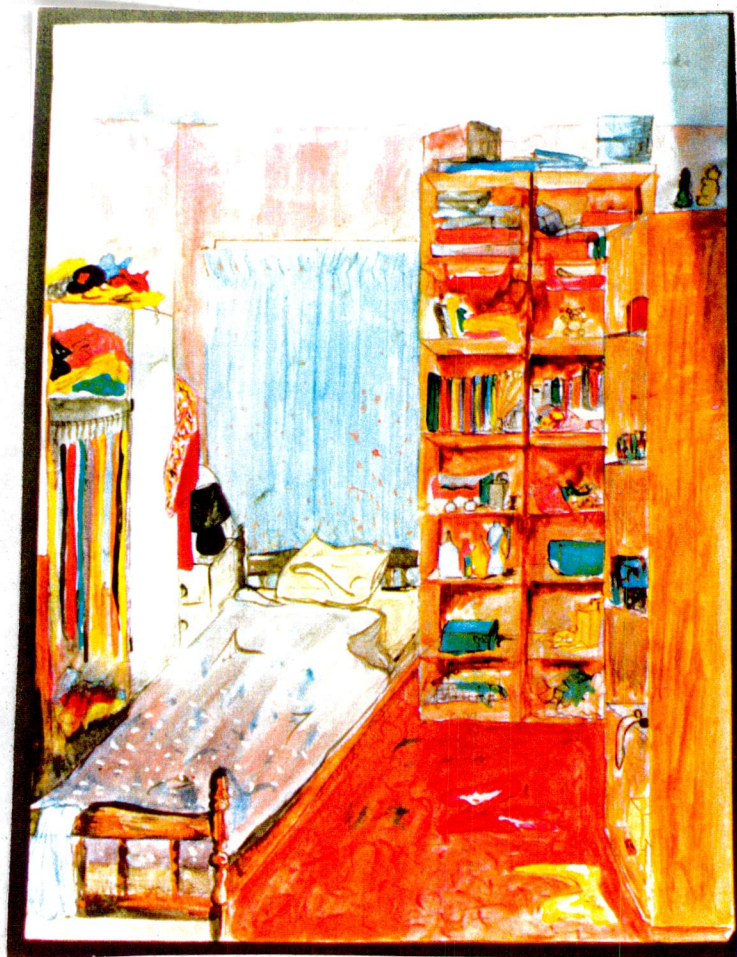
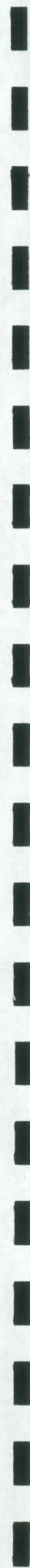


Figure 3.3  
Heather's Bedroom Study





colour but my room is bright and cheery and I wanted to show this (4)

### The Final Composition

The Students went on to arrange a tonal composition using their home-based work and life-drawings which were worked on in the classroom. Nicola, Amanda and Neasa each display varying approaches to their final projects.

Nicola's composition (Figure 3.4) shows an innovative approach to and treatment of the figure

I used my drawing of Heather and of Miss Cassidy as they were my best ones... I wanted the figures to be important so I left the background simple. It's the corner of a room. I spent a long time working out where to put the figures. In the end just moved them around and moved Heather's legs to the corner, as if they belong to a third person (5)

Amanda (Figure 3.5) took a more traditional approach to Nicola. Her drawing is also more narrative

... I wanted my drawing to tell a story... put one figure sitting down and then an other walking away as if they have had a row. I think it makes you want to know what has happened... It took me ages to do the tone and I had to keep remembering which side the light was coming from (6)

Neasa used her home-based kitchen study (Figure 3.2) in her final composition (Figure 3.6). Neasa relates her work directly to that of Massacio

... Massacio put people into a setting that looked real, I wanted to do this too and make the room look like a real space I made Aine smaller in the background... and showed the tiles getting bigger as



Figure 3.4  
Nicola's Final Composition







Figure 3.5  
Amanda's Final Composition







Figure 3.6  
Neasa's Final Composition





they came closer. I also made the tiles darker at the back (7)

This project worked well in that a group of students who at the outset displayed a distaste for life-drawing worked timelessly on these pieces from home-based and classroom research through to their final pieces.

Tonal compositions in pencil are time-consuming for any artist and demand consistency in technique. This "concentration" facet of the project could be seen as quite superficial, it is what learning took place that is of primary importance and relevance. I can only suggest from the work I see in front of me, backed up by the students written evaluations that they have examined and developed their knowledge of the figure and perspective through this tonal composition.

#### Scheme 2

##### **Seated by Meaning : Cushion Project (10 Double Periods)**

This scheme links with the previous scheme by continuing to examine preoccupations of Renaissance artists. I felt, however, that the students required a totally different activity primarily to prevent boredom. I rewarded their efforts in scheme one by introducing a fabric print project resulting in a hand printed cushion.



This project involved an introduction to Northern Renaissance artists' concerns with the depiction of textiles in their work (e.g. Van Gych, Van der Weiden, Durer). The project also involved a visit to a restored Georgian townhouse in Dublin (Figure 3.7) to look at textiles of a different era. The source for each pupil's design was a still-life of man made and organic objects.

This project, again drew from Taylor's writings

Still-life's potential for developing compositional skills, ordering colour and tone, rendering form, making considered decisions, and accumulating information will prove of value in virtually every other area of your art and design studies (8)

Claire-Louise's cushions and Amanda's cushion are examples of how the pupils approached this project in a highly individual manner. They both developed their ideas from their still-life drawing through to the design stage in varying ways. Claire-Louise used Coke cans in her still-life. She manipulated what she observed in a highly creative manner

I used cans, drapery, leaves and old car parts. I liked the shapes of the shadows on the cans so I took a section of them and lightly drew the outline of the shapes... then I coloured in the shapes in red marker after that I worked out my repeat (9)

Figure 3.9 displays the development of Claire-Louise's cushions as she describes it above. Again, it is what the pupil learned from the project which is of primary importance



Figure 3.7  
Drawing Room at "Number 69", Merrion Square in Dublin



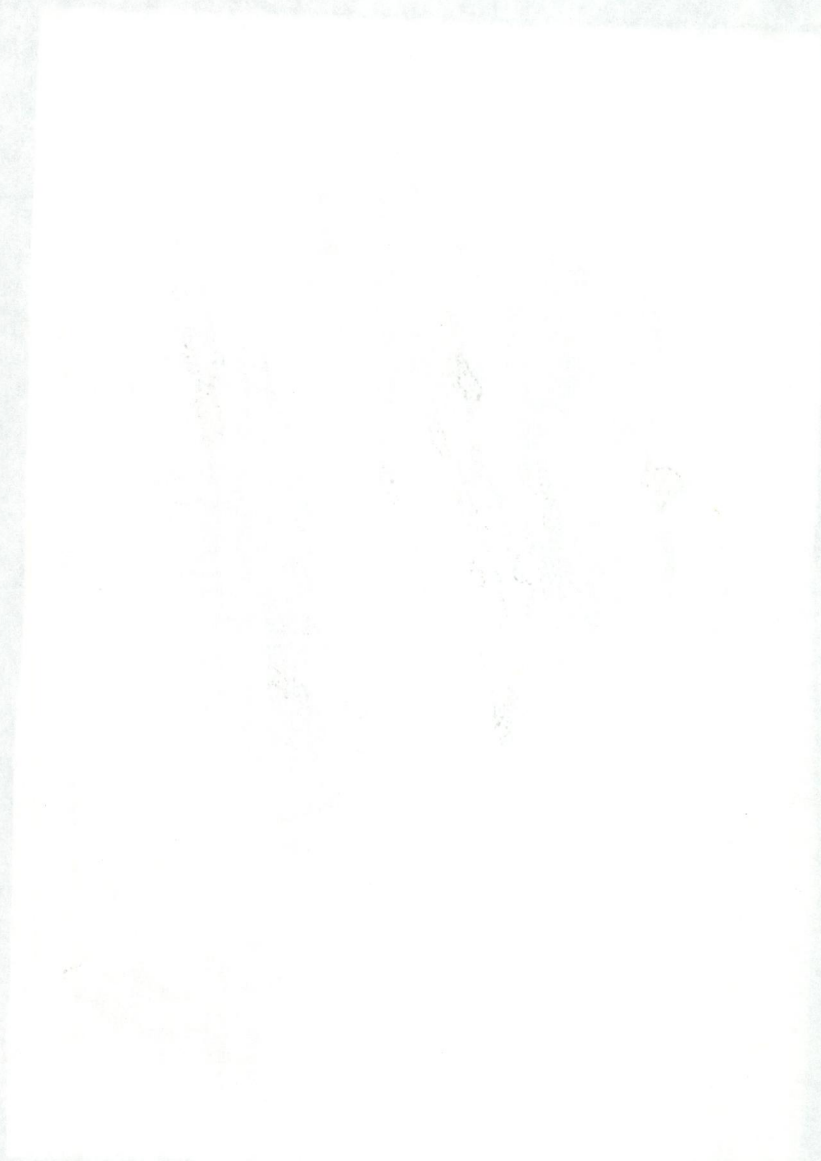






Figure 3.8  
5th Years working on their cushion cover print designs



decoration influenced some of the pupil's custom designs.



I printed two cushions... in the first one I block printed side by side... I felt that this was very still looking... I decided to do a second print, this time I rotated the block... this made the print look as if it was moving.. a bit like Durer's wallpaper  
(10)

Amanda's cushion (Figure 3.11) also displays an interest in movement and rhythm, however, this is for different reasons

... an old drill I found in the store room was my still-life. I took a close up drawing of it and drew all of the knobs and discs... It looked a lot like the inside of a clock... (11)

Amanda's interest in the mechanics of her chosen object is evident both in her initial design (Figure 3.10) and in her final piece. It was Amanda's strong mindedness which most impressed me during this project

We were supposed to make a cushion but I wanted to make a pillow for my bedroom. I chose red and white to go with my unit... I don't want it to be ruined  
(12)

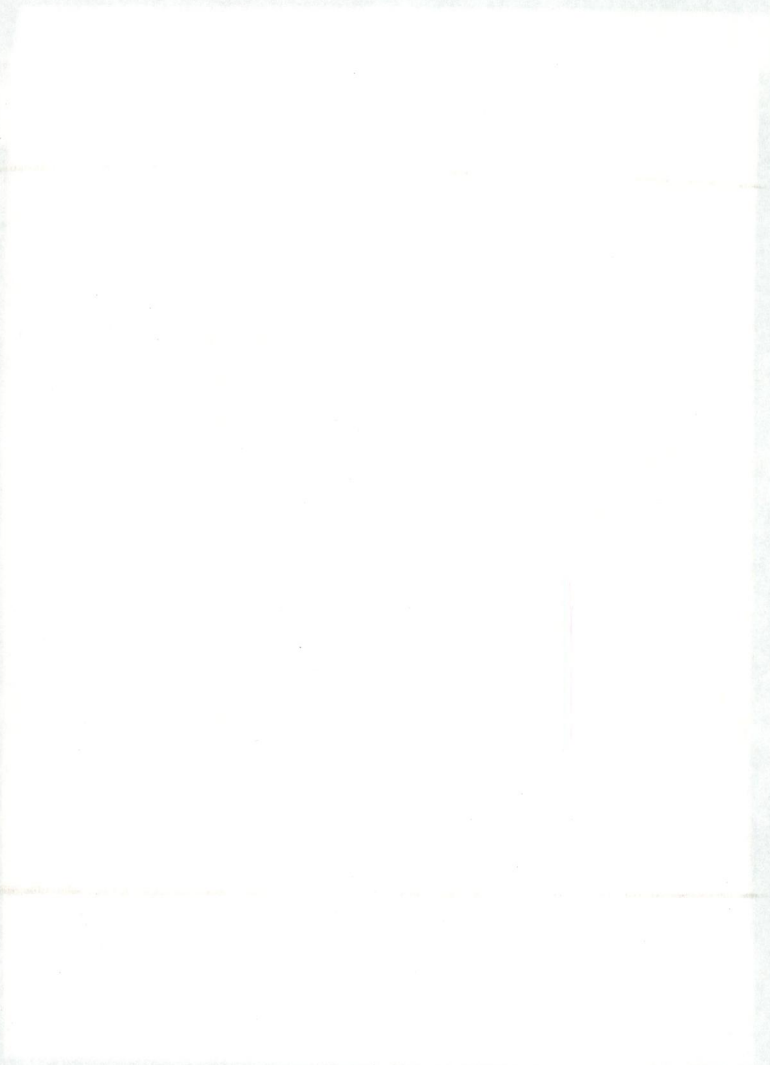
It is firmly my opinion that students should be encouraged to make decisions. There is no problem in a student moving slightly away from a given brief as long as this is backed up by an assertion.

In this chapter I have discussed and examined my work with the fifth year group. In it, I have attempted to present clearly why I explored what I explored and how. In the next chapter I will conclude this dissertation with a series of recommendations to such an approach in teaching art and design.





Figure 3.9  
Claire-Louise's Cushions and Research



1960-1961  
The following are the names of the  
persons who have been elected to the  
Board of Directors of the  
American Association of  
University Professors for the  
year 1960-1961.





Figure 3.10  
Amanda's Research and Development of Repeat Pattern





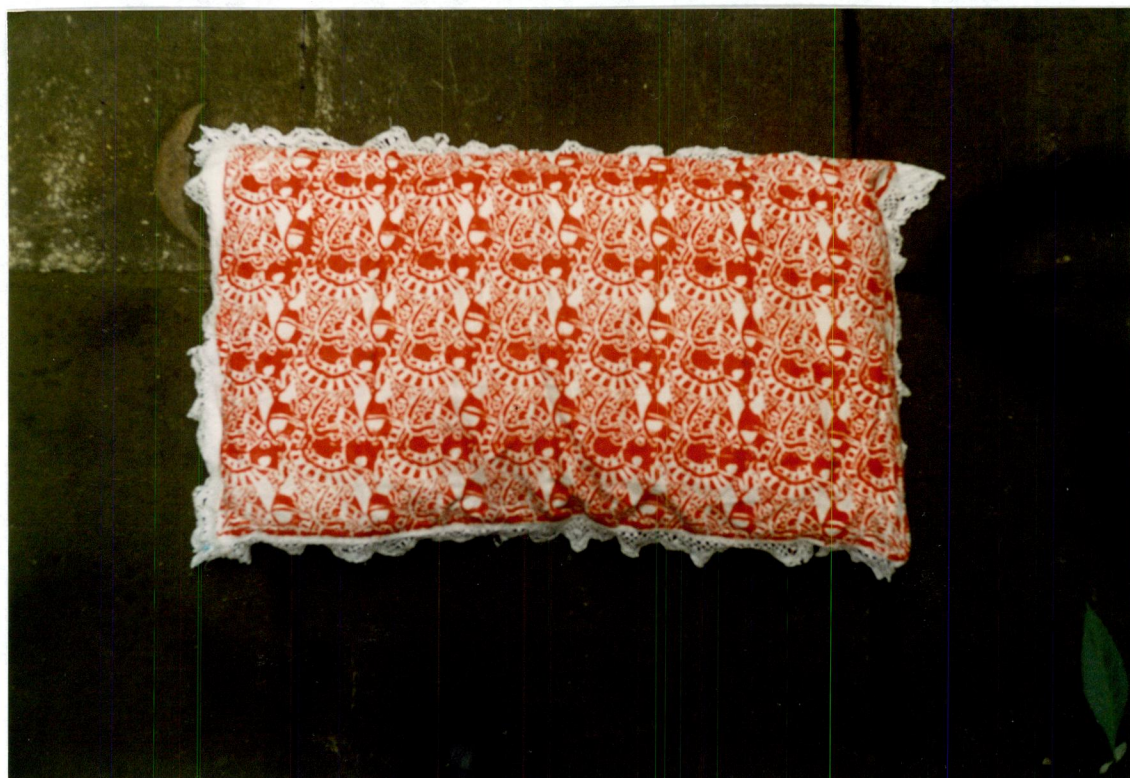


Figure 3.11  
Amanda's Cushion









Figure 3.12  
5th Year Cushions







Figure 3.13  
5th Year Cushions





## FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 3

1. The Anatomy Lesson: Art and Medicine: A unique exhibition on the theme of Art and Medicine was on show at the National Gallery of Ireland from 18th October to 29th November 1992. It explored the history of anatomical illustration, and the relationship between the visual arts and the study of human anatomy.
2. Emilie's essay on Donatello.
3. Neasa, written evaluation of her work.
4. Heather, written evaluation.
5. Nicola, written evaluation.
6. Amanda, written evaluation.
7. Neasa, \_\_\_\_\_
8. Taylor, R. and Taylor, D. Approaching Art and Design Education London : Longman, 1990 p.
9. Claire-Louise, written evaluation
10. Claire-Louise, \_\_\_\_\_
11. Amanda, written evaluation
12. Amanda, \_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

From examining the works of Critical Studies theorists, the work of the pupils I practiced the schemes with and day to day analysis of my own teaching I have reached one immediate result. Critical Studies, in my opinion, is of no value in isolation it must inform practice in art and design. It could almost be said that Critical Studies main value resides in the fact that it adds variety to school-based activities through discussion, field trips, evaluations etc.

The role of the gallery/museum in teaching Critical Studies, discussed in Chapter 1, can be seen as one similar to that of a type of visual aid. It is essential that its importance is not over-exaggerated. Any gallery/museum visit must be viewed as a support to the students' practical work as in the projects I have explored with the pupils. Furthermore, the Critical Studies element can enhance the student's ability to analyse and evaluate the work of mature artists, their own work and the work of their peers.

Critical Studies is not an area for the authoritarian teacher. It must involve honesty and patience both sides



of the teacher's desk. How can a student be expected to genuinely air his/her view if the teacher fails to do so? It, for me, is a beneficial and refreshing approach to art and design education at any level.

Critical Studies must inform and examine practise. It must be considered as an integral part, a vital element and a working component of any Art and Design curriculum.

### APPENDICES 3

#### QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

AGE: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why did you choose Art as a subject for your Leaving Certificate?
2. What do you like most about Art class? Why?
3. What do you like least? Why?
4. What is the History and Appreciation of Art and Design?
5. What do you like about the History and Appreciation of Art and Design? Why?
6. What do you dislike? Why?
7. Who was Leonardo da Vinci?
8. Name one of his works?
9. In Art class do you prefer to work on your own or with friends? Why?
10. Please number your favourite areas of art at school  
e.g. 1 = most favourite    2 = 2nd favourite

Pottery

Calligraphy

Life Drawing

Imaginative Composition

Printing (fabric or line)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. List five occupations which involve art e.g. Graphic Design.

12. Name the last Art Gallery/Museum you visited?

13. When did you visit it?

14. Who with?

Family  
Friends  
School  
On Your Own

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15. Did you enjoy you visit? Why?





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