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Students' Negative Attitudes Towards

Their Own Artistic Ability

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Education

in Candidacy for the

**B.A. Degree in Art and Design Education**

by

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
INTRODUCTION	viii

## CHAPTER

I	THE PROBLEM OF STUDENTS' NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TO THEIR OWN ARTISTIC ABILITY: A PERSONAL VIEW	1
II	STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TO THEIR ARTISTIC ABILITY: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	7
	The Self Concept I What is the Self-Concept? How is the Self-Concept Formed? The Self Concept II How the Home Effects the Self-Concept. How the School Effects the Self-Concept.	
III	THE IRISH EDUCATION SYSTEM'S ATTITUDES TO ART AND TO ART ABILITY: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	17
	Conclusions: How Self-Concept Theory and an Examination of the Irish Educational System's Attitudes to Art in be Applied to the Problem Proposal	







IV	METHODOLOGY SECTION I	26
	Reliability of Questionnaires	
	Introduction to Subject Group One	
	Questionnaire No. 1: Diagnostic Questionnaire	
	Results of Questionnaire No. 1	
	Introduction to Questionnaire No. 2	
	Results of Questionnaire No. 2	
V	METHODOLOGY SECTION II	48
	Introduction to Subject Group II	
	Questionnaire No. 1	
	Questionnaire No. 2	
	Conclusions	
VI	RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	61
	School's Intervention	
	Rationale for Projects and Exercises	
	The Educational Value of this Programme	
	"Avoidance of Drawing" Exercises	
	Drawing Exercises	
	Game 1	
	Game 2	
	Game 3	
	Game 4	
	CONCLUSION	75
	APPENDICES	77
	SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	83







## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 2.1	A Hierarchical Organisation of Self Concept	9
Fig. 4.1	Transition Year Answers to Question One, Questionnaire No. One	33
Fig. 4.2	Transition Year Answers to Question Two Questionnaire No. One	34
Fig. 4.3	Transition Year Answers to Question Three, Questionnaire No. One	35
Fig. 4.4	Transition Year Answers to Question Two, Questionnaire No. Two	40
Fig. 4.5	Transition Year Answers to Question Fourteen, Questionnaire No. Two	44
Fig. 4.6	Transition Year Answers to Question Seventeen, Questionnaire No. Two	46
Fig. 4.7	Transition year Answers to Question Eighteen, Questionnaire No. Two	47
Fig. 5.1	First Year Answers to Question One, Questionnaire No. One	51
Fig. 5.2	First Year Answers to Question Two, Questionnaire No. Two	55





Fig. 5.3	First year Answers to Question Fourteen, Questionnaire No. Two	56
Fig. 5.4	First Year Answers to Question Seventeen, Questionnaire No. Two	58
Fig. 5.5	First Year Answers to Question Eighteen, Questionnaire No. Two.	59







## LIST OF TABLES

1.	Transition Year Results to Questionnaire No. One	32
2.	Transition Year Results to Questionnaire No. Two	39
3.	First Year Results to Questionnaire No. One	50
4.	First Year Results to Questionnaire No. Two.	54



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characteristics of the self-concept by introducing the topic of "Global Self-Esteem"<sup>4</sup> (Dembo calls it General Self-Concept). In doing this they are using research carried out by Marsh and Shavelson (1985) and adapting a diagram by Marsh et al. to illustrate the Hierarchical nature of the Self-Concept.<sup>5</sup> Global Self-Esteem is the individual's general and overall feeling of self worth, it is relatively constant over time and is an umbrella term for all of the specific, situation related types of self-esteem which arise from areas such as academic ability, body type and social skills. The diagram (Fig. 2.1) shows how specific activities effect the General Self-Concept (Global Self-Esteem) failure or feelings of inadequacy in any of these activities should not effect the Global Self-Esteem but will effect the specific self-concept for that activity. To illustrate this, Ludwig and Maehr (1967) found that when individual were either successful or unsuccessful in an athletic activity it was only their self-concept relating to physical ability which changed, their Global Self-Esteem was not changed.<sup>6</sup>

We should remember though that if students cannot avoid an activity which is detrimental to a specific self-concept then, over time, the feeling of low self-esteem may generalise to encompass the Global Self-Concept.

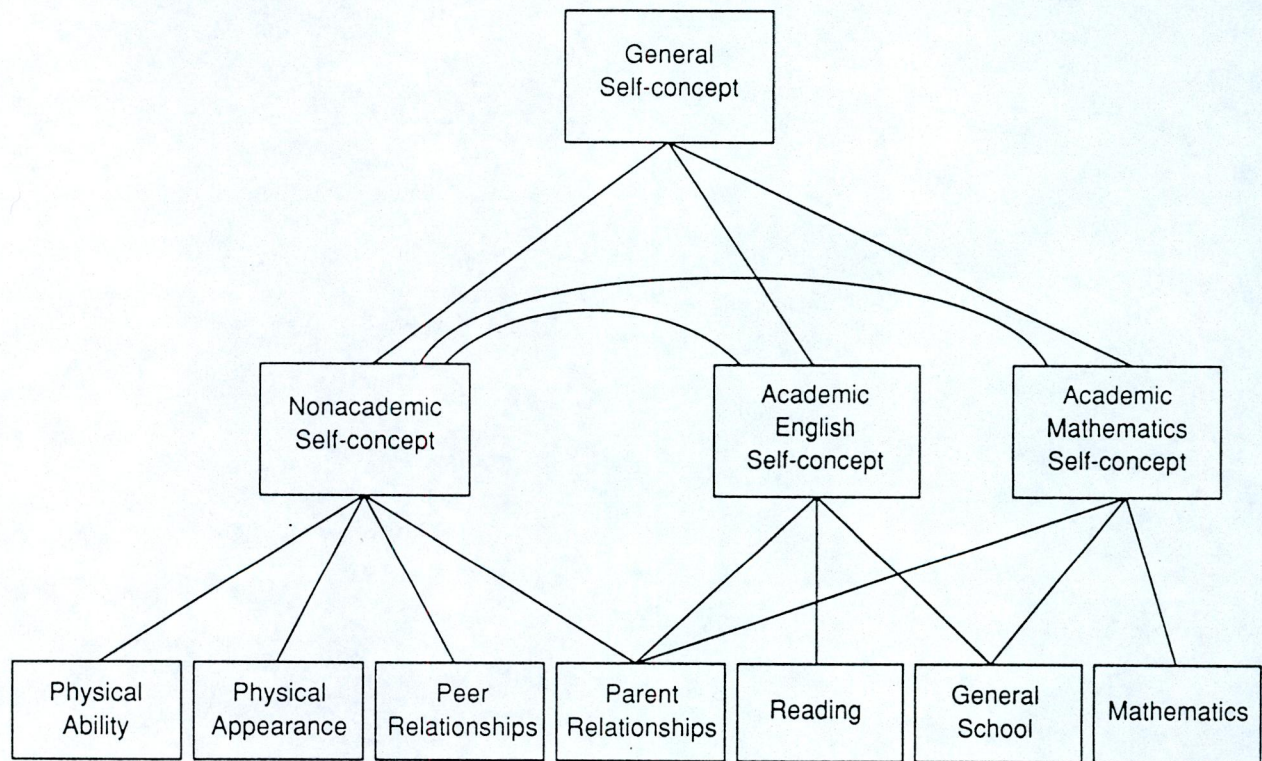
### **How is the Self Concept Formed?**

Having looked at and described the nature of the Self-Concept the next step is to examine how it is formed. What influences the self-concept and what factors determine self-esteem in general and in specific areas are questions which effect how students see themselves in relation to artistic ability and are therefore important to this study. Carl Rogers' theory of how the Self-Concept is formed hinges around the terms "organism", the "self" and "congruence".<sup>7</sup> The organism is the whole person, their needs, feelings and experiences. If all of the needs of the organism are met then the person develops a self which is in congruence with it. If the needs are not met, the self may become incongruous with the organism. The main need of the organism, according to Rogers is Positive Regard.



FIGURE 2.1

A Hierarchical Organisation of the Self Concept.



Source : This model was adapted from Marsh and Shavelson, (1985), quoted in Dembo, Applying Educational Psychology, p. 140.



If the child experiences positive regard from its parents then it will develop a self which is congruence with the organism. This idea is similar to good self-esteem. If the child does not receive positive regard, then it will feel like it doesn't deserve it and since the organism has a basic need for positive regard the self and the organism will become incongruous. This is similar to bad self-esteem. In short Rogers' view on how the self-concept is formed hinges on the idea of the child, either receiving or not receiving positive regard from those around him or her.

George Kelly has developed the idea that individuals make sense of experience, by using what he calls "Personal Constructs".<sup>8</sup> These constructs are units of meaning by which we categorise every aspect of our experience. The construct for art class in any particular student's life will include all aspects of their previous experience of art, including art teachers, products, comments by others about art, etc. This construct is what comes to mind when art is mentioned to the student. I would link the two ideas of personal construct and specific self-concept because they are both to do with a particular aspect of a person's life, and they are both formed by past experience with this aspect. So a student's attitude towards art may be formed, like a personal construct and a specific self-concept, on previous experience with the subject.

Charles Horton Cooley, used the phrase "The looking glass self"<sup>9</sup>, to show how individuals find out about themselves by observing the reactions of others as they would observe a mirror. George Herbert Mead developed this idea and showed that a person's self-concept is formed largely by a person accepting as their own and internalising the ideas about themselves, which they perceive others to have.<sup>10</sup> These 'others' however, must be significant, such as parents, teachers and peers. Therefore, the self-concept is formed by the individual interaction with significant others, as Burns says, "The self-concept is learned and develops out of the mass of "I", "Me" and "Mine" experiences which bombard the individual"<sup>11</sup>



So, as we can see, the self-image begins to develop from birth through the verbal or non-verbal signs by which parents communicate to the child, feelings of being loved or unloved, valued or undervalued. The more experience and interaction with the environment and with significant others that one has, the richer the self-image becomes. Therefore, if the child has a broad and varied experience at school, this will differentiate the self-image even further. The Ideal-self is formed mainly by the acceptance by the child of cultural standards.<sup>12</sup> One of the first ways that these standards becomes apparent is through stereotypes of behaviour associated with Body Type as shown by Staffieri (1957)<sup>13</sup>. The ideal self is not caused by body type, but Staffieri's research shows the effect which cultural standards such as physical beauty and acceptance have on even very young children. These standards can permeate all aspects of life as the child learns accepted norms of behaviours and attitude. With regard to the formation of Self-Esteem, Lawrence says that "It is not failure to achieve which produces low self-esteem, it is the way the significant people in the child's life react to the failure."<sup>14</sup> I would argue that the way in which the parents or significant people react to the failure depends on the culturally imposed standards associated with the activity in which the child failed. If, for instance, a child appears unable to produce a simple weaving it may not be taken as seriously as if a child fails to learn to read adequately. The parent's reactions will be different for each failure and consequently the child's self-esteem regarding the two activities will differ as will his/her attitude to the activity, and to ability in the activity.

## The Self Concept II

### **How the Home Effects the Self Concept**

Hargreaves stresses the idea of the self as a social entity when he says that "in a very fundamental sense the self is a product of a person's interaction with others"<sup>15</sup> The home and home life will obviously influence all aspects of self-concept because parents and possibly other siblings are the child's first experience of social interaction. Rosenberg







(1965) and Coppersmith (1967) found that broad cultural and social context doesn't play a large role in defining self concept but that everyday relationships with significant others does <sup>16</sup>. Fontana analyses Coopersmith's results and says that "Since..... there was no apparent difference between the boys on cognitive, physical or socio-economic variables, we can conclude that their high and low levels of self-esteem were linked significantly to parental behaviour" <sup>17</sup>. Miller and Wook's research from 1970 <sup>18</sup> supports Coopersmith's results. They state that disadvantaged children can score equal to or higher than advantaged children on tests of general self-concept but generally score lower on tests of self-concept related to school achievement. This shows that advantage in the social sphere does not necessarily lead to better general self-concept because it is the parents and not the broad social context which contribute most to self-esteem.

### **How the School Effects the Self Concept**

One of the most pertinent questions for the school regarding self-concept is the chicken and egg scenario of which comes first, positive self-concept or high achievement? Does a child do well in school because of having a good self-concept or does a child develop a good self-concept as a result of doing well in school? Barker Lunn's 1970 survey showed that "academic ability was correlated with self-concept for all pupils" <sup>19</sup> in streamed classes. The pupils in the A streams and at the top of the B and C streams all had good self-esteem whereas pupils in the low ability streams had low self-esteem. This research does not, of course, solve the problem of origin of self-concept in schools but it does show that the problem exists. Dembo says that "it is difficult to resolve this issue because there is evidence to support both positions" <sup>20</sup>. One issue which is relatively certain regardless of the resolution of the chicken / egg problems is the self-fulfilling prophecy <sup>21</sup>. If students, for whatever reason, believe they have low ability in a certain activity then they will avoid failure by avoiding the activity. As a result of this avoidance they will get less practice and will consequently become as bad in actual fact as they initially believed themselves to be. Hargreaves (1972) <sup>22</sup> states three variables which may effect both the self-fulfilling



prophecy and a pupil's general feeling of self worth in the classroom. The variables are; teachers conception of pupil's ability, pupil's conception of their own ability and whether or not the pupil regards the teacher as a significant other. Barker Lunn also rates pupil relationship with the teacher as highly important, <sup>23</sup> and Canfield and Wells (1976) use the term "killer statements" <sup>24</sup>, to described verbal and non-verbal comments by teachers who are significant others which are detrimental to the students self-concept. But pupil / teacher relationships are not the only factor by which the school effects self-concept, Nash lists three salient influences:

- a. Pupil's perception of their ability relative to their classmates,
- b. The regard in which they perceive themselves to be held by the teacher, and,
- c. The extent to which school achievements are supported by parents <sup>25</sup>.

This sum-up of influences raises the issues of the role of peers in the formation of a self-concept related to ability. Nash says that "it is not his actual ability that seems to matter so much as his ability as he compares it with others in his class" <sup>26</sup>. Burns makes the point that the peer group sets up a frame of reference and creates standards such as bad, average and good <sup>27</sup>. He shows that peers are more important than family in the creation of self-concept relating to ability because of the fact that peers are of comparative age and are therefore supposed to be of similar ability but in a family there is a hierarchy of abilities which is natural due to age and so will not really effect the students' specific self-concept <sup>28</sup>. So we can see that school life can effect self-concepts in a variety of ways, and that it especially effects specific self-concepts relating to academic activities.



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## CHAPTER 3

### THE IRISH EDUCATION SYSTEM'S ATTITUDES TO ART AND ART ABILITY

#### A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Curriculum and Examinations Board in their 1985 publication "The Arts in Education" say that "the apprehension, formulation and communication of meaning requires the use of symbols" <sup>1</sup>, and that "the symbol systems which dominate Irish Education are verbal and numerical" <sup>2</sup>. This is a relatively recent description of the neglect of the arts, and in particular of the visual arts, but even a cursory glance at the curricula of the past century in Ireland shows that even when provision for art education did exist it was usually of a narrow definition and carried a restrictive concept of what constituted ability in art. In 1900 a new primary school curriculum replaced the three Rs of the payment-by-results policy. A subject called 'drawing' was introduced, which suggests that assessment of ability was based on representational drawing. The establishment of the Free State in 1922 brought changes in educational policy and drawing was effectively dropped from the much narrowed curriculum. Artistic and aesthetic subjects continued to have extremely bad representation at primary level until 1971 when art and craft became an integral part of the new curriculum <sup>3</sup>. The inclusion of art as a subject should have broadened ideas on what constitutes art ability, and should have promoted the theory that artistic ability in the developing child is about more than representation and naturalistic drawing skills. However, in "The Arts in Education" the CEB still had to stress that "the inadequate visual arts education in many primary schools is a matter of concern" <sup>4</sup>. My own view is that the traditional and continued low value attached to art education in primary schools can contribute to an inaccurate and probably quite narrow definition of artistic ability. This definition is, in some ways, linked to the general 'academic' bias so that successful art is associated mainly with easily assessable representational drawing ability.



Lowenfeld and Brittan point out the “importance of the taste and aesthetic judgement of the teacher” saying that “his / her attitudes will be shown in how they structure the lesson, how they introduce it, in advice and direction given during the lesson and evaluative comments afterwards” <sup>5</sup>. They also quote research by Rump and Southgate (1966) which showed that 77% of children between seven and fifteen agreed with their teachers stated preference for pictures if the teacher was present. While 71% disagreed with the teacher if he / she wasn’t present <sup>6</sup>. These statistics show the extent to which children are influenced by their teachers in matters of aesthetic evaluation. Therefore the attitude of primary school teachers to their own personal artistic ability and to the artistic ability of their pupils will have a large effect on how the pupils view their own ability. Also the attitudes of teachers cannot develop and broaden when, as Ciarán Benson points out “within the Irish system of education, the arts, ..... have traditionally been a neglected area” <sup>7</sup>.

The situation in secondary schools with regard to their traditional emphasis on art is similar to the primary schools. In 1924 when the Intermediate and Leaving Certificates were put in place by the new Department of Education, art occupied a very peripheral position in the Curriculum. In 1962 the curriculum prescribed by the Department was “still on the lines of that adopted in 1924” <sup>8</sup>. Art education has developed considerably with the introduction of the Junior Certificate in 1992 but it can still be seen as a minority subject. This view of art as a subject pursued by the interested few has added to the stereotype of the artist as a member of an elite who are ‘naturally’ talented.

Elliot Eisner says the idea of talent as “a dichotomously distributed ability” <sup>9</sup> has caused problems in the classroom, such as being used as a cover-up for bad educational practices in which a proportion of the pupils weren’t learning properly. Also it can be used as an excuse for avoiding work by the students; if talent is only given to the few then there is not much point in those who see themselves as untalented working hard to improve at the subject. Eisner stresses that artistic production is not a result of talent but of qualitative intelligence (i.e. selection and organisation of qualities). He says that thinking is not



limited to the verbal and the difference between the artist's thought processes and the intellectual's is the nature of the material used and the character and appraisal of the product  
10.

I would argue that Eisner's view of artistic ability being the product of an intelligence which can grow through experience is not one held by most students in secondary schools. As a result of such traditional attitudes to art education and production the art teacher is sometimes forced to contend with student attitudes to their own ability which are based on the idea of talent being given to some and not to others.

## **Conclusions**

### **How Self-Concept Theory and an Examination of the Irish Educational System's Attitude to Art can be Applied to the Problem**

As we have seen from Lawrence's description of the Global Self-Concept <sup>11</sup>, an individual develops specific self-concepts which relate to situations and areas such as physical appearance, social acceptance and individual school subjects. This idea of specific self-concepts is related to George Kelly's concept of Personal Constructs <sup>12</sup>. Each student taking art at second level will have a personal construct and a specific self concept relating to art which will contain aspects of all past experiences with art. Lawrence says that this type of self-concept can also be seen as a motivator. "We all tend to behave in ways which fit in with our perception of ourselves. Indeed, we can feel decidedly insecure when we are expected to behave in a manner which may be regarded as 'not me'" <sup>13</sup>. Ralph Linton, an anthropologist, backs-up Lawrence's point by saying that "the functional importance of value-attitude systems derives primarily from their emotional content. Behaviour which is not in accord with the individual's system elicits responses of fear, anger or, at the very least, disapproval" <sup>14</sup>. So, we can see that past experience of art is very necessary in order to allow the student to incorporate the artistic experience into his / her self-concept. If the







student has not had past experience of art of adequate quality the art class will probably not induce "anger or... disapproval" <sup>15</sup> as Linton says but it will more than likely be an alien experience which can threaten and humiliate. Therefore the student whose previous experience of art has been rich and various will have had adequate opportunity to develop a Personal Construct for Art but the student whose home and primary school did not promote art may find the art class more a source of failure to be avoided than of opportunity to be grasped.

The literature has fairly unanimously shown that self concept depends largely on the acquisition of positive regard from significant others. In order to build up a positive self-concept for art the student must, at some stage of their artistic career, receive positive reinforcement of their efforts from significant others, be they parents, siblings, peers or teachers. But as the examination of the Irish educational system's attitude to art ability shows the cultural standards and values associated with art and with art ability are not quite favourable. Both the CEB report 'The Arts in Education' and Cairán Benson say that the visual arts have been traditionally neglected by the Irish education system. This undervaluing of art will surely effect the opinion of parents and teachers who will consequently influence the students self-concept for art in a negative way. As Irving Kaufman says "many cultural values are introduced into the individuals personality and passed from one generation to the next" <sup>16</sup>.

We also discovered that the Irish education system has traditionally promoted fairly narrow ideas of what good art is and of what art ability is. The ideal art has been put forward as mainly realistic and representational with high value and appreciation of accurate drawing skills. Talent has been viewed mostly as a "dichotomously distributed ability" <sup>17</sup> - you either have it or you don't. These narrow definitions of good art and elitist ideas of 'giftedness' will be transferred to the students personal construct for art through his / her contact with the environment. Kaufman again argues that cultural values such as those regarding art "are learned, the result of experiences within a particular environment" <sup>18</sup>.



The first of these is the fact that the quality of the work will not only be affected by the quality of the materials used, but also by the quality of the work itself. The second is the fact that the quality of the work will not only be affected by the quality of the materials used, but also by the quality of the work itself. The third is the fact that the quality of the work will not only be affected by the quality of the materials used, but also by the quality of the work itself.

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So, it can be shown that through the effect that significant others have on the self-concept for art, negative cultural values about art in the education system can create what Dembo would call a "self-fulfilling prophecy" <sup>19</sup> in students. That is, students are led to have both a largely unattainable ideal of the type of work they should be doing and also to have an image of talent as being something one has or has not, that one has been given or not given. This can lead to the belief that they cannot produce good work which will cause them to avoid work or to prefix art activity with the disclaimer, "I can't draw but...". This belief that their work will inevitably be a failure can turn out to be a prophecy which fulfills itself.

I would argue that cultural standards help create the ideal image of what good art is and then they provide an escape route for the self-esteem by giving the idea of talent as an either / or situation and by the idea of art as a minority subject. William James said in 1890, "with no attempt there can be no failure; with no failure no humiliation" <sup>20</sup>. The adolescent in the art classroom can avoid the humiliation of failure, not only by not attempting the activity but also by appealing to the cultural standard which says that the majority of people have an acceptable lack of artistic talent. A standard which would not be acceptable in an English or Maths class to either teacher, pupil or parent.

In conclusion, I will say that if a student feels less than competent and equal to class mates he / she will feel humiliation. In art class this can be accentuated by cultural standards of realism and also probably reinforced by lack of artistic input from the home environment. If the student has had little opportunity to incorporate art ability into higher self-concept then the activity may be fairly alien and can pose serious threats of failure. To escape this failure a child or adolescent can invoke standards of talent and giftedness which make art ability either naturally present or absent and not something which can be learned and developed.



## PROPOSAL

The central proposal of this dissertation is that students' negative attitudes to their own artistic ability are caused by a combination of three main factors:

- a) The effect that significant others have on forming the child's self concept for art.
- b) The effect of cultural values and attitudes regarding artistic talent on the students' concept of artistic learning and development.
- c) Cultural values and standards regarding the criteria used for judging the value of students artwork.

The first factor can be explained by saying that a child's personal construct for art will contain aspects of past experiences with art or with the notion of art. Parents, siblings, peers and teachers can seriously effect this personal construct by whether or not the child receives positive regard from them as a result of his / her artistic efforts. The child will only get to incorporate artistic experience as a significant part of his/her self-concept if efforts are praised and accepted and if art is valued as a worthwhile activity in both home and school.

The second factor is what appears to be the general view of artistic ability as being a dichotomously distributed ability, you either have it or you don't. This either / or situation means that a student may feel that learning and development are not possible and may regard their assumed lack of ability as permanent. If a student feels that their ability level is predetermined and set fast then they may see little point in either risking failure by taking an art course at school or in trying hard to improve if they are in an art course through some form of compulsion.



The last causal factor as I see it is to do with general cultural standards regarding how people value art. I would see many students subscribing solely to values of realism and technique, i.e. accurate and skillful manipulation of materials in order to give realistic rendering of nature. As a result of these values adolescent students can become frustrated because their efforts don't match up to their standards of high realism. Values of creativity, originality and expression are not usually valued as highly except if they are linked to or backed up by realism and technique. Therefore the emphasis is on final product and not on process, idea or meaning.

These three factors work in combination and reinforce one another's effects to produce students who appear to have very deeply set negative attitudes to their own artistic ability.



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## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY SECTION I

#### Reliability of Questionnaires

The main bulk of the research for this dissertation will be done using questionnaires administered to two subject groups. I am using questionnaires as opposed to other research methods because of a few reasons. They're fast and relatively instant and they are quite a direct way of finding out attitudes. It is also a more basic and simple method to both develop and administer in a classroom situation. With that said, questionnaires can be open to accusations of unreliability and care must be taken in both the writing of the questions and answers and in the conclusions we infer from the subject's answers. The wording of the questions must be plain and easy to understand and tailored to the verbal ability of the subject group. One must be careful not to use ambiguous words which may have more than one possible meaning and be open to misinterpretation due to lack of attention. Also the questions, in both length and number, must be as concise and short as possible.

My questionnaires have multiple choice answers and my wording of these answers will definitely condition and limit results because of the lack of personalised answers but multiple choice has its benefits, i.e. it is easier to correlate and categorise final statistics and it is easier for students who find it difficult to describe their feelings verbally. I also had to take care with giving equal 'gaps' between the answers. For instance, if I give a five point scale of "well below average... average... above average... well above average... excellent", I would then be giving no opportunity to answer "below average" and would be weighting the results in favour of one end of the scale.



## INTRODUCTION

In the course of my teaching experience so far I have found the problem of negative student attitudes to their own ability to be quite significant. Students' development can often be hindered by what appears to be an intransient lack of confidence in their own artistic ability. In this dissertation I will investigate three main areas.

- Initially I will explore the literature related to the topic in order to develop a proposal which will outline possible causes of the problem.
- Secondly I will develop specific questionnaires which will research the problem as it occurs in the art classroom so as to test the veracity of my proposal.
- Finally I will use my findings and results to develop a programme which aims to remedy the problem of negative student attitudes to their own artistic ability.

Chapter One is a statement of the problem as I experience it in the classroom and in general school life. I will assess my experience of those groups who I have found to be most likely to have negative attitudes to their own ability.

Chapter Two is a review of the related literature. In it I will look at the Self Concept in two sections. Firstly, what it is and how it is formed, and secondly how the home and school effect it.



In Chapter Three, I will assess the Irish Education System's traditional and current attitudes to art and artistic ability. In the conclusions to chapter three, I will assess how self concept theory and an examination of the education system's attitudes to art can be applied to the problem. After these conclusions I will put forward my proposal.

Chapter Four contains an introduction to the methodology and the first section of the methodology.

Chapter Five contains the second section and the conclusions of the methodology sections.

Chapter Six has my recommendations and suggestions for a programme which will begin to foster confidence in the students who I have found to have negative attitudes to their own ability.



## CHAPTER 1

### THE PROBLEM OF STUDENTS' NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TO THEIR OWN ARTISTIC ABILITY : A PERSONAL VIEW

The problem of negative student attitudes to their own artistic ability is one which I have encountered regularly in my teaching experience to date. In this short exploration of my own experience of the issue, I will look at students' and teachers' low opinion of their own ability in both secondary schools and primary schools. I will also review how I see the general public in relation to the problem.

In secondary schools I feel there are certain groups who are more likely to have negative attitudes to their own ability than others, i.e. Pupils who have never done art as a subject during their school career, teachers who have little or no artistic experience and pupils who are compelled to join art classes.

I have noticed certain similarities of opinion between both pupils and teachers who haven't had much experience of art. In spite of their lack of experience many people will have formed ideas regarding both their own ability in art and artistic ability in general. For instance, there appears to be a feeling that artistic ability is something that one either has or has not, and that it's occurrence is to do with a natural, innate talent or gift. The result of ideas like these seems to be feelings of resignation at the arbitrary 'fait accompli' of not being gifted and while there may be a sense of seculsion from a small elite, there is generally little embarrassment or shame at the perceived inability. There seems to be a socially acceptable level of inability because artistic and visual theory are not as commonly valued as verbal literacy or numeracy.



## CHAPTER 1

### THE PROBLEM OF STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE COURSE

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the attitudes of students toward the course and to discuss the factors which influence these attitudes. The first section of the chapter is devoted to a description of the attitudes of students toward the course. The second section discusses the factors which influence these attitudes. The third section discusses the factors which influence the attitudes of students toward the course.

In general, students have a positive attitude toward the course. This is due to the fact that the course is interesting and informative. The students also like the instructor and the other students in the class. The students also like the fact that the course is not too difficult and that they can learn a lot from it.

There are several factors which influence the attitudes of students toward the course. The first factor is the quality of the instruction. The second factor is the quality of the materials. The third factor is the quality of the students. The fourth factor is the quality of the environment.

The quality of the instruction is a very important factor. If the instructor is good, the students will have a positive attitude toward the course. If the instructor is bad, the students will have a negative attitude toward the course. The quality of the materials is also a very important factor. If the materials are good, the students will have a positive attitude toward the course. If the materials are bad, the students will have a negative attitude toward the course.

The quality of the students is also a very important factor. If the students are good, they will have a positive attitude toward the course. If the students are bad, they will have a negative attitude toward the course.



Students who take art as a result of timetable clashes or because they were not able for 'academic' subjects, and students in years which have a modular structure (some transition years for instance) may find themselves being faced with artistic tasks for which they feel unprepared and inadequate. They appear to feel out of their depth and are wary of being asked to participate in activities which they don't understand. There can be considerable embarrassment at what they see as sub-standard performance and many will try to assuage this embarrassment by invoking the norm of the majorities' acceptable level of inability. Their frustration with their apparent lack of ability can easily turn to a type of vindication of their already held beliefs regarding both their own inability and the elitism of artistic ability in general.

In primary schools I have noticed quite distinct differences in the degree to which this problem effects children of different ages. Younger children (4-7) will for the most part be extremely eager and willing to participate in artistic activities with an apparently high level of freedom and self confidence. The only inhibition is the occasional statement that they can't draw particular objects and may ask the teacher or other pupils to draw for them. This seems to point to a concentration on the perfection of the product rather than on the enjoyment of making art, but these inhibitions do seem to be only occasional among younger children and don't diminish their overall enjoyment of the subject.

Older primary school children (10-12) can become highly self-conscious and inhibited in their artwork. Statements of inability to draw particular objects can widen into blanket expressions of inhibition and also of apparent resignation to and acceptance of this inability. Lowenfeld and Brittain describe children of this age (The Dawning Realism Stage) as being more self-aware and as categorising themselves more narrowly. They also describe children regularly hiding work from adult scrutiny.<sup>1</sup>



Among the general public I receive conflicting impressions. Art appears to be a fairly widely practiced activity supporting several artist's materials shops and many galleries and yet I get the strong impression that artistic ability is not perceived as widespread or as a democratically distributed ability. Artistic ability can be narrowly associated with an arty or bohemian cultural stereotype, which can be restrictive and can prevent individuals from participating in an activity which they feel is not them. Also, the cult of genius and uncritical veneration of old masters has promoted an elitist vision of artistic ability where it is something to be wondered at and admired as an occurrence of natural talent, as opposed to being practiced and developed as a skill and an understanding which can be learned.

From my experience of my own teaching I have found that there are a few questions which I am often asked and they illustrate some of the issues regarding the problem of the attitude to ability which art educators must face and deal with clearly. The first question is the most common and the most important. Can anyone be taught art? By 'Art' in this case it is assumed that what is meant is not only realistic drawing but all of the activities of art, craft and design, which are valued as skillful and difficult to master.

In response to this question, I would say that from my experience of my own learning I've found that in order to learn effectively there has to be a "suspension of disbelief" on the part of the student. By this, I mean that the student must adopt an open and clear minded attitude to their own ability and prospective ability. They must suspend any disbelief in their own ability which can cripple attempts and experiments, can prevent persistence and can jaundice the judgement of the results of tentative attempts. If the ingrained feeling of inability and the expectation of failure can be removed and replaced by confidence and eagerness to learn, I see no real barrier to successful progression of skills and artistic learning.



The second question follows on from the first. If art can be taught to anyone, to what standard is it possible to teach them? Developing on the answer to the first question, I would say that the standard depends on how much self confidence can be engendered in the student. In order to ensure commitment to the learning process, and to overcome any failure or setback in the student's progress, the student must be made to feel confident and safe enough to make mistakes without viewing these mistakes as indication of overall failure. In addition to confidence and practice the student needs to be exposed to educational structures which will promote analysis and understanding of his/her own artistic production and the production of others in order to develop an aesthetic sensitivity and sensibility.

Thirdly, I am commonly asked how much do I feel 'natural talent' has to do with artistic success and also how can I account for people who show high levels of ability without having any formal art training? If we see natural talent as an apparently innate aesthetic sense, a sensitivity to visual experience and an ability to express this aesthetic sensitivity in skillfully practical ways, then I think it is obvious that these factors can be developed in students through education. In other words, lack of what is perceived as 'natural talent' does not prevent a student from developing artistically. To say that natural talent can be learned may seem a contradiction, but I think it is to a large extent true.

With regard to the second part of this third question, I feel that the training which effective art education affords, can be obtained under different circumstances. For instance, development of technical skill can come from practice, the motivation for which can come from sources such as interest, parental influence, sibling competitiveness and many others. Development of aesthetic sensitivity can come from home environment so much as it can form a classroom. In other words, what is often given the quasi-mystical title of natural talent can be caused by the same factors which cause development in the classroom.



None of these three questions are strictly central to the study at hand, but they are pertinent to it because of their effect on both my understanding of the subject and on student attitudes to their own ability. Student's concepts of ability and how it occurs is of obvious importance to their ideas about their own artistic ability.

To summarise this statement of the problem as I see it, I would say that one of the larger problems I have experienced in my teaching, and one of the problems confronting all art educators, is the fact that many students show quite negative attitudes to their own artistic ability.



**FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 1**

1. Victor Lowenfeld and W. Lambert Brittain, Creative and Mental Growth, Seventh Edition, (New York and London : Macmillan, 1982) p.37.



## CHAPTER 2

### STUDENT'S ATTITUDES TO THEIR ARTISTIC ABILITY

#### A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

##### The Self Concept I

The issue of Self Concept is central to student's attitudes to themselves and as such it is very important for education in general and for this study in particular. In this first section of the chapter I will review the literature pertaining to self concept in order to find out what the self concept actually is and how it is formed. In the second section of the chapter I will look at how the home and school environments effect the self concept.

##### **What is the Self Concept?**

Myron H. Dembo refers to the self-concept as 'organised',<sup>1</sup> by this he means that descriptive models have been developed by psychologists to show the actual make-up of the self-concept. R. B. Burns assesses that the composition of the self-concept can be broken into two main aspects; Self-Image and Self-Esteem. Self-Image is defined as the total of all the ways a person perceives themselves and Self-Esteem is the subjective judgement of each aspect of the Self-Image.<sup>2</sup> Denis Lawrence elaborates on Burns' definition and says that the Self-Concept is made up of three essential elements. To the Self-Image and Self-Esteem he adds the Ideal-Self. Along with awareness of Self-Image the individual develops a sense of what he/she should or shouldn't be. Self-Esteem is then described as "the individual's evaluation of the discrepancy between self-image and ideal-self."<sup>3</sup> The difference between these two theories is fairly superficial, they both propose the same basic model except that Lawrence's concept of the ideal-self is implied rather than explicit in Burn's model. Lawrence and Dembo then continue to describe the



With the students answering the questionnaire there are also pit-falls and possibilities of unreliability. For instance students may give answers which they feel they should give or which they feel are expected of them. They may try to be helpful and tell me what they think I want to hear. The only ways to limit this is to stress the need for honesty and to make the questionnaire anonymous to aid this honesty. Students may also honestly not know how they feel about a certain question or may say what they would like to be the case other than what the reality actually is. There is also a danger of students getting either self-conscious or bored of answering all the same type of answer, for instance a student may put in a "well below average" answer just to vary from all her other answers of "below average". Having taken, or at least tried to take into consideration most of these imitations to the questionnaire method I feel that the benefits of speed and directness and efficiency outweigh any possible drawbacks.

### **Introduction to Subject Group One**

The first subject group are from an all female convent school in the north suburbs of the city. The school has a mostly lay staff and a lay principle. The pupils would come from a mainly middle class background and the school has a relatively high academic standard with a high proportion going on to third level when they leave. In conjunction with the high academic level the school has a very strong art department and art would have a higher profile than it would in most schools.

The particular group to whom I have initially given the questionnaire are transition year girls. They have not done art at all in secondary school so the last official contact they have had with the subject was whatever art was taught in their primary schools. It was my interest in the attitudes of this group to their own ability which prompted this present study.



The class seemed quite unconfident and uncomfortable in the art room itself, as if they felt they were out of place and they were extremely intimidated by being asked to draw from nature.

My own assessment of their general ability was that they were only marginally below average for their age and that this discrepancy was due mainly to lack of experience. But they seemed to feel unusually negative towards their own work and the standard of their own ability. They were intimidated by most activities and this was shown in both their physical body language and in their verbal reactions. Many girls would distance themselves from any connection with the work by predicting the failure or low standard of the work before starting so as to minimise any expectation and therefore any disappointment or humiliation. Some even seemed vindicated when they felt their work had turned out as badly as they had said it would.

In general the group are lively and confident and can express themselves well verbally. For instance they show high standards of creativity and innovative, lateral thinking in verbal brainstorming and class discussions.

I am very interested in why a group of bright sixteen year old girls are apparently uniformly intimidated by art as a subject and have such negative attitudes to their own ability.

### **Questionnaire Number 1 : Diagnostic Questionnaire**

In order to find the causes of this apparent lack of confidence I need to find out exactly how they feel about their own ability. I cannot simply assume that my observations are correct and proceed with trying to find the causes of what may or may not exist. I could be mistaken and be reading motives into the student's behaviour which aren't there. This first questionnaire diagnostic in nature, it's designed to find out exactly what their opinions are regarding their own ability. It must also give me an overall picture of the class' attitudes



1. The first section of the report is a general introduction to the project and its objectives. It outlines the scope of the study and the methods used to collect and analyze the data.

2. The second section provides a detailed description of the study area, including its geographical location, climate, and population. It also discusses the historical and cultural context of the region.

3. The third section presents the results of the fieldwork, including a series of photographs and maps. These visual aids are used to illustrate the various features and landmarks of the study area.

4. The fourth section discusses the findings of the study, highlighting the key observations and conclusions. It also addresses the limitations of the research and suggests areas for further investigation.

5. The fifth section provides a summary of the report, reiterating the main points and findings. It also includes a list of references and a bibliography of the sources used in the study.

6. The sixth section contains a series of appendices, including a glossary of terms, a list of abbreviations, and a detailed index. These sections are designed to facilitate the reader's understanding and navigation of the report.

7. The seventh section is a concluding statement, expressing the author's appreciation for the support and assistance provided by the various individuals and organizations involved in the project.

8. The eighth section is a final note, providing contact information for the author and inviting feedback or inquiries from interested parties.

9. The ninth section is a list of acknowledgments, recognizing the contributions of the individuals and organizations that have supported the project throughout its duration.

10. The tenth section is a list of references, providing a comprehensive list of the sources used in the study, including books, articles, and other relevant materials.

11. The eleventh section is a list of appendices, providing a detailed list of the supplementary materials included in the report, such as maps, photographs, and data tables.

12. The twelfth section is a list of abbreviations, providing a key to the abbreviations used throughout the report to ensure clarity and consistency.

13. The thirteenth section is a list of terms, providing a glossary of the specialized terminology used in the study to facilitate understanding.

14. The fourteenth section is a list of figures, providing a detailed description of the various charts, graphs, and maps included in the report.

15. The fifteenth section is a list of tables, providing a detailed description of the various data tables included in the report, including their structure and content.



and a description of an average, compound student with an amalgamation of the class' characteristics. (See Appendix A for questionnaire No. 1). I am really only asking one basic question and asking it in two general ways. I need to know how they rate their own artistic ability. I am doing this by asking direct questions and by asking the student to compare herself with various other groups. The first three questions are fairly direct, the initial one asks for an 'objective' self rating on a five point scale where one is the lowest point and five the highest. The second question asks them to rate how they feel about the ease or difficulty of the subject on a five point scale. The third asks how confident they feel when they are presented with a new artistic task. The rest of the questions are comparative in nature, asking the subjects to rate (again on a five point scale) the ability of various groups i.e. their art class, another transition year art class who have done art for the junior cert., their parents or guardians and finally the general public. After rating the ability of these groups the subjects are asked to rate their own ability as compared with these groups.

This comparative section is also designed to give me a few general pointers as to what are the causes of this problem. For instance if the class rate themselves much lower than a group who have done the junior cert then they must obviously see the junior cert as an experience which will improve their artistic ability and may easily see their lack of ability as a symptom of lack of experience which can be rectified in time. In the comparison with their parents I am trying to begin to gauge their home environment, to see if it is 'artistic' or not. In the comparison with the general public I am quite interested in finding out how they rate the man and woman in the street and how they see themselves in relation to this standard. Do they assume they are of a lower standard than most or do they assume that most people are of a similar low standard to themselves?

Before giving the questionnaire results I have decided to give my predictions as to what type of result I am going to get. This is meant to show my expectations and to highlight



any surprises or any large anomaly in either prediction or statistics. It will also clarify the results because of the comparison. I feel that the results will show:

- A low rating of their own ability.
- That they find art either 'difficult' or 'very difficult'.
- That most feel 'unconfident' or 'very unconfident' when presented with a new artistic task.
- That they rate their own class quite low and rate themselves as below this level.
- That they rate an ex-Junior Certificate group quite high and rate themselves well below this standard.
- That they rate both their parents and the general public fairly low and themselves either the same or below this standard.

### Results of Questionnaire No. 1

In order to give an overall picture of the class' view of their own ability I will outline generally the main trends and the majority reactions to each question. Table 1 shows the statistical results of the first questionnaire.

In response to the first question, most of the class rated themselves quite low, over half the class gave themselves two on a five point scale and no one rated above three (see Fig. 4.1). Over half the class said they found art 'difficult' which was as predicted but a third said they found art 'manageable' which I would class as a healthy reaction to this question (see Fig. 4.2), with that said though, no one found art 'easy' or 'very easy'. A large majority,



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(twenty three out of twenty eight) felt 'unconfident' when presented with a new artistic task, no one at all felt 'fairly confident', 'confident' or 'very confident' (see Fig. 4.3). Most of the class, (twenty out of twenty eight) rated the class ability at three out of five which is fairly average and slightly higher than I expected. Just under half the class rated themselves as 'average' with standard which is encouraging but the same number thought they were 'below average' compared to the class.

All of the class felt that the average ability of a junior cert group would be four or five out of five. This means that the vast majority think that doing the Junior Certificate will raise you only one point on a five point scale of ability. This statistic says that either the class have a high rating of their own ability or a low rating of the Junior Cert's effectiveness as a teaching agent. It could also mean that a five point scale doesn't show enough subtlety and that a ten or twenty point scale may have been better in this particular case.

Three people in the class felt average with the Junior Cert group standard but the rest of the class felt either 'well below average' (over half of class) or 'below average' (approximately a third of class).

Two thirds of the class rated their parents as either two or three out of five and over half said they were about average to their parents ability.

In response to the last question regarding the public I was mildly disappointed to see most of the class rate the public in the safe middle ground (three out of five). Exactly half said they were below the public's average but nearly half said they were about average with the public.



TABLE 1.

## Transition Year results to Questionnaire No. 1

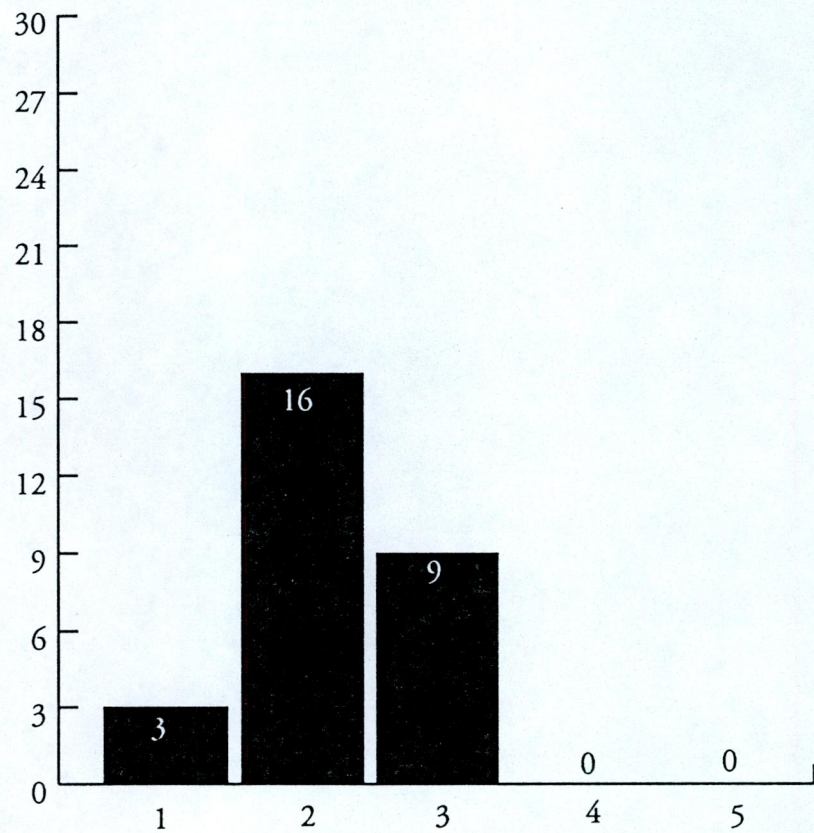
1. On a scale of one to five, how would you rate your own artistic ability?	<table><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>3</td><td>16</td><td>9</td><td>0</td><td>0</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	3	16	9	0	0
1	2	3	4	5							
3	16	9	0	0							
2. How easy / difficult do you find art ?	Very Difficult 1 , Difficult 17, Managable 10, Easy 0, Very Easy 0.										
3. How do you feel when presented with a new artistic task ?	Very Unconfident 5, Unconfident 23, Fairly Confident 0, Confident 0, Very Confident 0.										
4. What would be the average ability level in this class ?	<table><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>0</td><td>6</td><td>20</td><td>2</td><td>0</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	0	6	20	2	0
1	2	3	4	5							
0	6	20	2	0							
5. How do you rate yourself compared to this average class standard ?	Well Below Average 2, Below Average 13, Average 13, Above Average 0, Well Above Average 0.										
6. What, do you think, is the average ability of a fourth year art class who have done art for the Junior Cert. ?	<table><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>22</td><td>6</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	0	0	0	22	6
1	2	3	4	5							
0	0	0	22	6							
7. How do you rate yourself compared to this standard?	Well Below Average 16, Below Average 9, Average 3, Above Average 0, Well Above Average 0.										
8. How do you rate the artistic ability of your parents / guardians ?	<table><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>4</td><td>11</td><td>9</td><td>1</td><td>3</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	4	11	9	1	3
1	2	3	4	5							
4	11	9	1	3							
9. How do you rate yourself compared to this standard?	Well Below Average 2 , Below Average 5, Average 17 Above Average 4, Well Above Average 0.										
10. What, in your opinion, is the average artistic ability of the general public ?	<table><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>0</td><td>1</td><td>22</td><td>5</td><td>0</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	0	1	22	5	0
1	2	3	4	5							
0	1	22	5	0							
11. How do you rate yourself compared to this standard ?	Well Below Average 2, Below Average 14, Average 12 Above Average 0 Well Above Average 0.										



FIGURE 4.1

Transition Year answers to Question One, Questionnaire No. One.

No. of Students in Class.



On a scale of one to five, how would you rate your own artistic ability ?







FIGURE 4.2

Transition Year answers to Question Two , Questionnaire No. One.

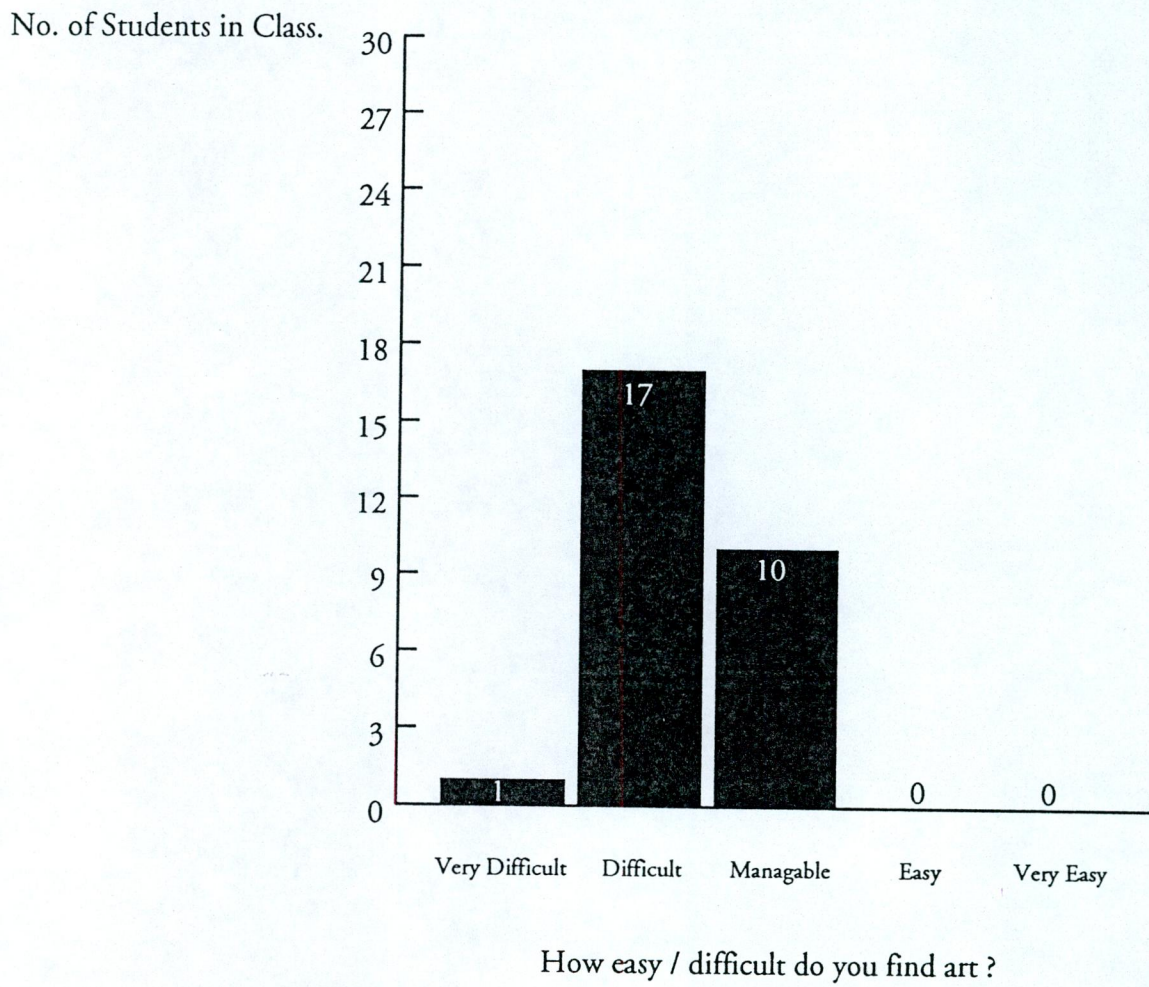


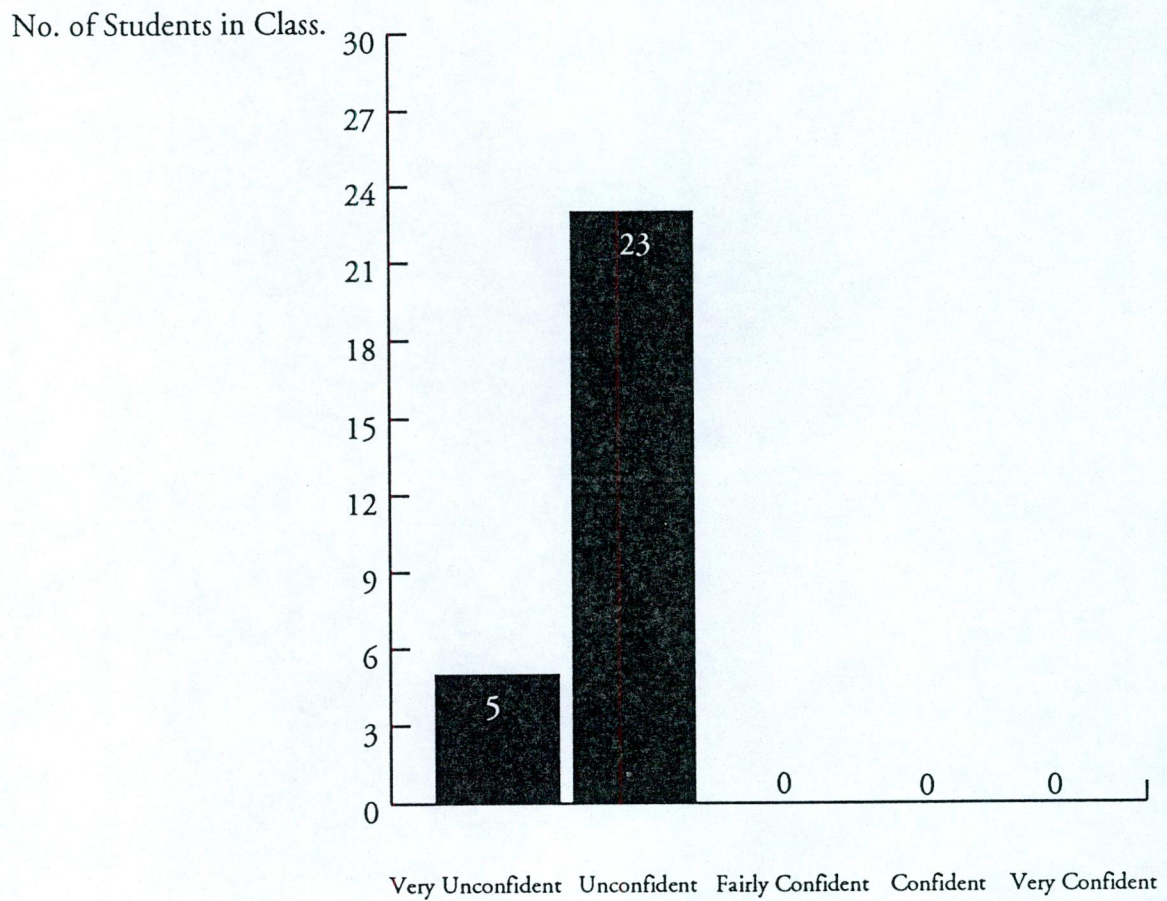






FIGURE 4.3

Transition Year answers to Question Three, Questionnaire No. One



How do you feel when presented with a new artistic task ?







To summarise these results into a more manageable picture I would say that, while it would be a mistake to make blanket remarks about the whole class, it certainly seems as if about half appear to have quite bad attitudes to their own ability. The picture is not quite as bleak as I thought it would be with a third finding art 'manageable' as opposed to difficult or easy and over a third feeling average with their class and with the general public. But I think that one of the most telling results from the questionnaire is that twenty three out of twenty eight feel unconfident when presented with a new artistic task. A portrait of a composite student from the class would say that she doesn't rate her own artistic ability highly, she finds art difficult and is unconfident when presented with a new artistic task. She feels either just average or below average in her class group, feels well below the average standard of a fourth year transition year class who have done the Junior Certificate.

### **Introduction to Questionnaire No. 2**

See Appendix B for Questionnaire Number 2. The aim of this second questionnaire is to test the accuracy of my proposal. I am trying to find the causes of the negative attitudes to ability shown in the first questionnaire but I am restricting the area of research to those areas outlined in the proposal. Therefore, even if my proposals are proved to be correct, this doesn't mean that these results are the definitive causes, there could still be further reasons for low opinions regarding one's own artistic ability.

The questionnaire tries to get a picture, based on the students own subjective interpretation, of how they view the three areas which I think relate directly to the problem. That is, the artistic values and the interest in art shown by significant others. The students' own aesthetic judgement (i.e. what art they think is good and are impressed by), and the students' ideas regarding talent and whether or not they think one can learn artistic skills or are they an inherent natural talent. Appendix B shows the questionnaire given to twenty five transition year girls.



The questions to do with the interest in art and opinions about art shown by parents and primary school teachers are on the first page of the questionnaire. These questions try to get an overall picture of the family background and the primary school ethos. I want to find out if these people, who can be regarded as significant others, thought that art was a valuable subject for the girls to do, did they show interest in the girl's work when they were younger and did they reinforce the girls' efforts with positive regard thus making it more likely that the child will develop a positive self-concept for art? Questions thirteen, fourteen and fifteen are trying to find out if I am correct in my assumption that most of the class would put a higher value on realism and technique than they would on other artistic values such as expression for instance. Questions seventeen to twenty are straightforward questions to find out the students' opinions on talent. Do they feel that artistic ability is something one either has or hasn't or do they think it is an ability which can be developed with experience? Question sixteen relates indirectly to the first twelve questions, it is trying to find out how much the students value art as compared with their other subjects. It is meant to be compared with how the parents viewed the value of art to give a general indication of how much the values were passed from parent to child.

Again, with this questionnaire as with the previous one, I will give predictions as to how I think the class will react to the questions in order to be able to compare them with the actual results to highlight and classify the results.

I think that in general the parents will be very interested in the children's education and very concerned with their progress, because of this I feel that even if the parents don't regard art as an important subject they will still support the child and be interested in their artwork. They would probably also encourage the child if she chose a career in art, but I feel that the parent's interests and values will lie with the more academic subjects and that they will have little feeling for art. I think that the primary school's will show a distinct lack of enthusiasm for the subject and as a result of this, initial interest in the subject by the



children will wane and their enjoyment of art will probably have changed a lot since primary school.

In the choice between pictures I think they will fairly unanimously choose picture B by Peter Claesz because it is the most realistically finished. With regard to the last few questions I think that the majority of the class will think that it is impossible to learn artistic skills and will put it down to natural talent. I think they will feel they are not as good at art as they would like to be and that the reason they give will be lack of natural talent.

### **Results of Questionnaire No. 2**

#### **The Effect of Significant Others**

Table 2 shows the statistical results numerically in conjunction with the questions.

The picture that appears regarding the students' families attitudes to art is that the majority either 'like' art or 'sort of like art' but that they would regard art as either 'unimportant' or 'very unimportant' as a subject for their daughters to do at school (see Fig. 4.4) and most (twenty two out of twenty five) would be 'unhappy' if their daughter proposed a career in art. Most students say their families either 'never' or 'hardly ever' go to an exhibition or watch an art programme on the television. While the families of the students would be either 'fairly interested' or 'interested' in their art work most students feel that their families would have a fairly low opinion of their artistic ability. When they were young they say that their families either 'sort of encouraged' or 'encouraged' their artistic ability.

This picture of the families attitudes to art is mildly contradictory, they like art, they encouraged their childrens' artistic attempts when they were young and they are interested in their child's current artistic products. But they don't recognise it as an important subject to do at school and they would be unhappy if their child proposed a career in art.



TABLE 2.

Transition Year results to Questionnaire No. 2.

1. How much do your family like art?	Don't like it at all ...2. Don't like it very much... 4. Sort of like it... 11. Like it... 7. Like it a lot... 1.										
2. How important do your family regard art as a subject for you to do at school ?	Very unimportant... 6. Unimportant....14. Fairly important...5. Important...0. Very important...0.										
3. How happy would your family be if you pursued a career in art ?	Very unhappy...1. Unhappy...22. They wouldn't mind...2. Happy...0. Very happy...0.										
4. How often would your family go to exhibitions or watch art programmes on the T.V.?	Never...11. Hardly ever...9. Sometimes...5. Regularly...0. Very regularly...0.										
5. On a scale of one to five, how would your family rate your artistic abilities ?	<table><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>6</td><td>12</td><td>7</td><td>0</td><td>0</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	6	12	7	0	0
1	2	3	4	5							
6	12	7	0	0							
6. How interested would your family be in the art you produce, both in school or outside school ?	Very disinterested...0. Disinterested...5. Fairly interested...12. Interested...8. Very interested...0.										
7. When you were young, how much did your family encourage your artistic ability ?	Did not encourage at all...2. Did not encourage very much...4. Sort of encouraged...9. Encouraged...8. Encouraged very much...2.										
8. How much did your primary school teachers like art ?	Disliked it very much...2. Disliked it...2. Were indifferent to it...5. Liked it...9. Liked it very much...7.										
9. How important a subject did your primary school teachers think art was for you to do ?	Very unimportant...2. Unimportant...12. Fairly important...5. Important...6. Very important...0.										
10. How would you rate your own artistic ability when you were in primary school ?	<table><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>8</td><td>8</td><td>7</td><td>1</td><td>1</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	8	8	7	1	1
1	2	3	4	5							
8	8	7	1	1							
11. How much did you like art when you were in primary school ?	Disliked art a lot...2. Dislike art...1. Sort of like art...4. Like art...7. Like art a lot...11.										
12. How much has your enjoyment of art changed since you were a primary school child ?	Not at all changed...1. Not really changed....3. Sort of changed...5. Changed...5. Changed a lot....11.										

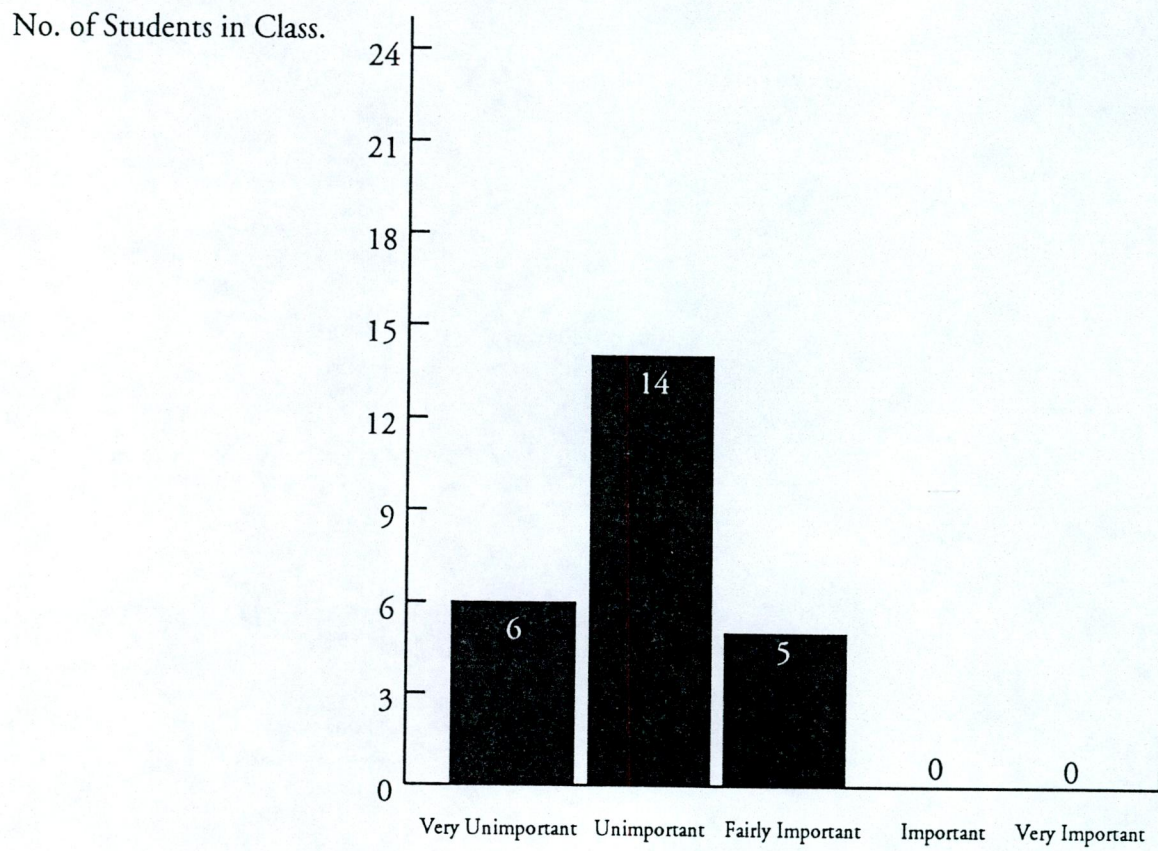






FIGURE 4.4

Transition Year answers to Question Two , Questionnaire No. Two .



How important do your family regard art as a subject for you to do at school ?







This seems to point to an opinion where art is viewed as a hobby or as a child-like activity which is not suitable or significant as an educational subject and it's not acceptable as a practical, commercially viable career option.

When I compare these results with my predictions I get a worse picture than I expected, I thought that the parents would be interested enough in their childrens' education to see art as a significant part of this education and that they would have the practical sense to see it as a possible career option for their child. We can get a measure of how much the parents 'academic' values have been transferred to the pupils by looking at the results of question sixteen. When asked how important is it to them to be good at various subjects seventeen out of twenty five rated maths and science as five out of five, only two rated art at five out of five.

The picture of the attitudes the students perceived in their primary schools is remarkably similar to the attitudes they felt their parents had. The majority felt their teachers either liked art or liked it a lot but that they felt it was an unimportant subject educationally. The students rated their own ability in primary school as very low but the majority said they either 'liked' art or 'liked it a lot' when they were younger. Unfortunately this feeling of enjoyment was rated by most to have either 'changed' or 'changed a lot' since primary school. When I compare these results with my expectations I am surprised at the fact that they say that their teachers liked art quite a lot. This has not been my own experience of primary school teachers. I am not surprised, though, at the depressing change in the students' enjoyment of the subject. It seems their youthful liking for the subject has been replaced by a sense of failure. All of these results, when taken in conjunction with the picture of the students' own attitudes to their own ability, seem to confirm my proposal that the significant others in a child's life will seriously effect the child's personal construct for art. For instance twenty three out of twenty eight students feeling unconfident and sixteen out of twenty eight rating their ability at two out of five is a picture which fits fairly easily with the idea of the parents and primary teachers who stress academic ability and doubt the



commercial or educational significance of art. Art is not something they have been taught to value, it's alien to them and it imposes a value system and criteria for success and failure which they are not used to and that they haven't had a chance to "internalise". These students are used to different skills and different criteria for success and in the art room the goal posts are somewhat shifted and success is not easy. When their parents and their own value system doesn't include art then the students can avoid the possibility of failure by openly claiming what is an acceptable lack of ability and thus waiving most of the expectations and pressures for success.

### **The Effect of General Cultural Values of Aesthetic Judgement**

The aim of these questions is to find out how important realism is to the aesthetic judgement of the students. My main argument in this section is that if realism is the main thing that they value in art work then they will not value their own work or ability very highly because their age and their lack of experience will not contribute to a highly developed sense of skill, technique or realism.

Nearly half the class chose the Cezanne painting and the reason they gave was that it was realistic. Just over a quarter chose the Dutch painting again giving 'realistic' as the reason for their choice (see Fig. 4.5). But a sizeable minority, about a quarter of the class, chose the Picasso still life citing the reason that it was 'imaginative'. In question fifteen nearly half the class said they would most like to be able to draw a realistic portrait but again significant minorities deviated from this to prefer to be able to either select an effective colour scheme or make an expressive picture. The most interesting and worrying result from this question is that no one valued design! No one in the class said they would most like to be able to design a functional and attractive walkman.

These results in one way contradict my prediction that most would go for the Pieter Claesz still life but they back up the reason for the prediction which was that it was highly realistic.



Their choice of Cezanne for his realism points to the fact that they have broader ideas of realism than I thought they would have. I think that the reason for this is that post impressionist work has become so accepted and popularised that it can now be viewed as comfortable and non-challenging and therefore, in a way, realistic. This is quite an interesting anomaly.

I think that in spite of nearly a quarter of the class preferring the imaginativeness of Picasso to the 'realism' of the other two artists, these results do back up to a fairly large degree my theory that the students' aesthetic judgement hinges on values of realism. From these results I can only infer that this value system will have an adverse effect on their attitudes to their own ability.

These results have also produced two quite interesting blemishes or anomalies, i.e. that design is totally under-valued by this class (design being possibly the branch of the arts which affects them most and the branch which their parents would possibly recognise as the most commercially viable) and that Cezanne is now so widely accepted and unchallenging that he is regarded as 'realistic' by a group of sixteen year old girls.

### **The Effect of Values Regarding Artistic Talent on Student's Concept of Artistic Learning**

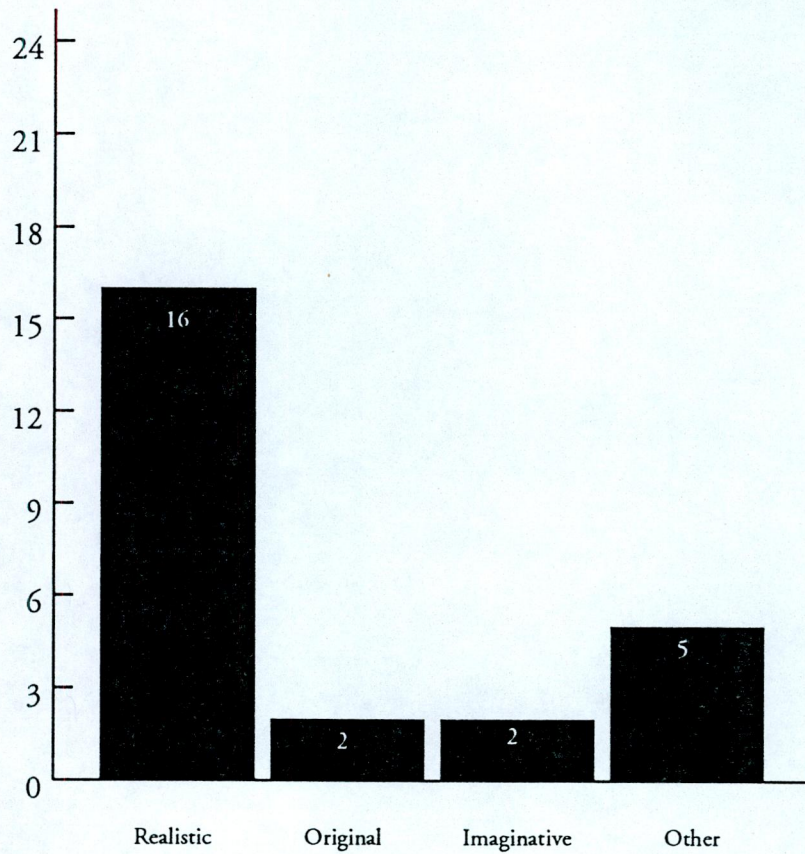
The picture the results give us of the class' ideas about talent is that they are split almost exactly half and half. Just over half say that it is possible to learn how to be good at art, just under half say you can't learn art (see Fig. 4.6). Just under half say artistic ability depends purely on natural talent and just over half says it doesn't (see Fig. 4.7). When I compare these findings with my predictions the picture is much better than I'd expected. Over half feel that art can be learned and this is very encouraging. But this, while being very positive, does not mean that they feel that they themselves can learn to be good at art. Also over half say that art isn't just about natural talent and this is a good sign.



Figure 4.5

Transition Year answers to Question Fourteen, Questionnaire No. Two.

No. of Students in Class.



Why did you choose this painting ?







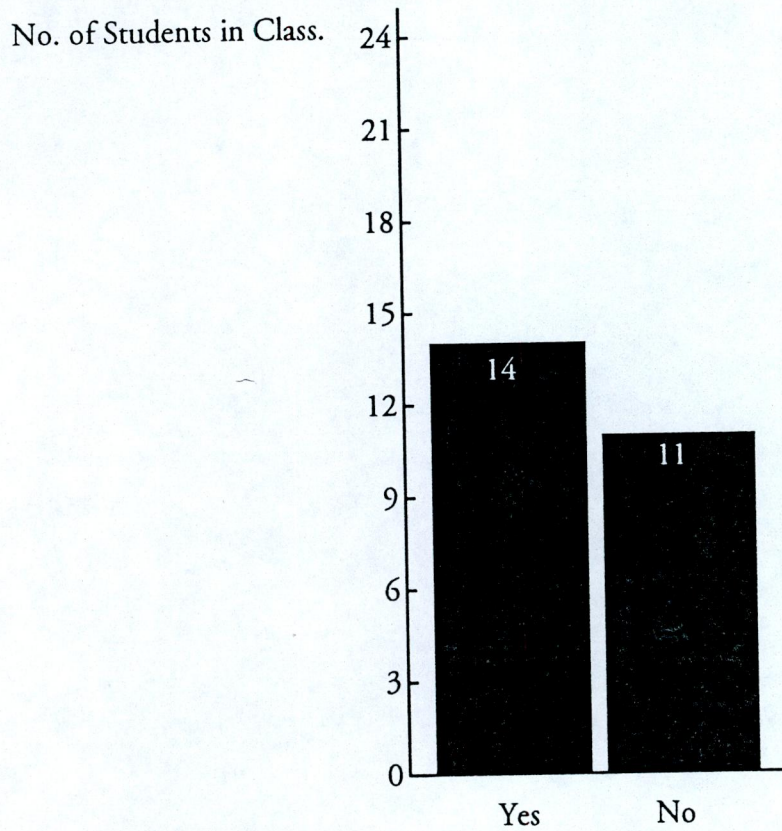
The reasons for these results could be that they have had a few months of experience with art now and they maybe don't see it as such a threat now or it would be that the wording of the question and the black or white, yes or no answers conditioned the results. Maybe if I'd given a rating scale it would have produced more useful and accurate results.

But in the last two questions the class give a slightly contradictory picture of their views on talent to those already expressed. All but one say that they are not as good at art as they would like to be, thus showing an interest in and value of the subject in spite of parental lack of value. Seventeen out of twenty five state that the reason for this is because they aren't naturally talented. These results contradict those earlier expressed because well over half the class feel their lack of ability is due to lack of talent. This leads me to think that while the picture of their opinions regarding talent is not as bad as I had expected their split over whether or not art can be learned and over the importance of natural talent was, to a large extent, a split over theory. The question may have seemed theoretical and therefore easier to answer in the abstract. But when the question was put in a more personal manner the proportion of those who seemed to view talent as a dichotomously distributed ability rose fairly significantly. Nevertheless, these are positive findings and show that the class are not quite as fatalist as I had expected even though over half of them feel that art and art ability are primarily to do with natural talent, it's presence or lack of presence.



FIGURE 4.6

Transition Year answers to Question Seventeen, Questionnaire No. Two.



Do you think it is possible to learn how to be good at art ?

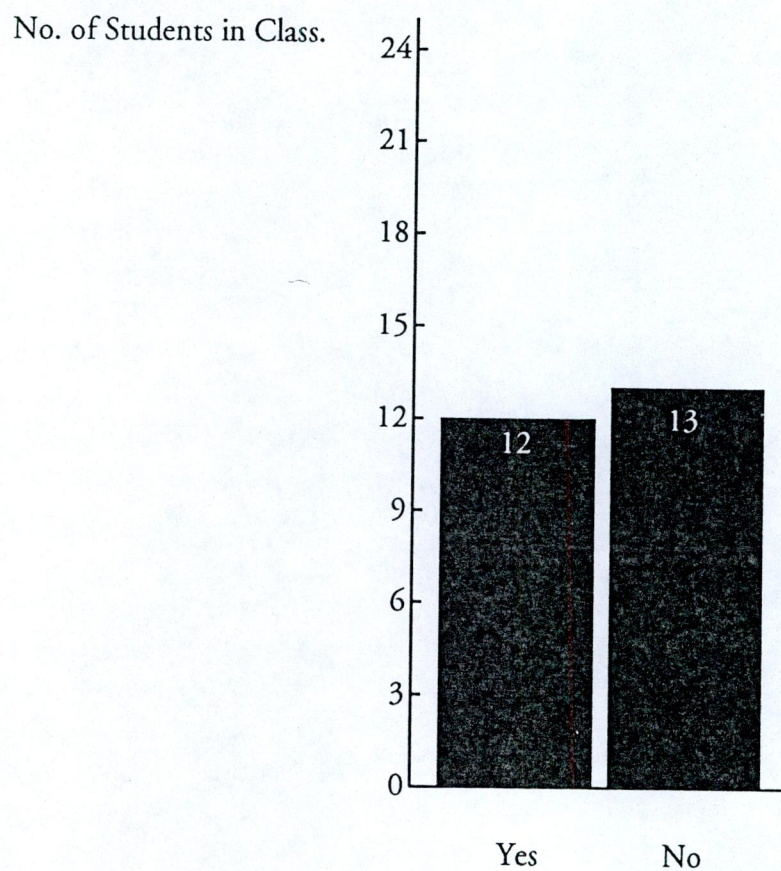






FIGURE 4.7

Transition Year answers to Question Eighteen, Questionnaire No. Two.



Do you think artistic ability depends purely on natural talent ?







## **CHAPTER 5**

### **METHODOLOGY SECTION II**

#### **Introduction to Subject Group II**

The second group to whom I have administered both questionnaires are from the same school as the transition years in subject group one. There are two main differences between the groups; firstly they are different age groups, group two are first years who have just entered the school this year and secondly they have made different subject choices; the first years have chosen art whereas the transition years had avoided it until it was compulsory.

There are two reasons why I gave the questionnaires to the first years. Firstly I want to find out if negative attitudes to the students' own artistic ability is a phenomenon which is relatively widespread even in pupils who have chosen art. Secondly I want to test a separate group who should have more positive attitudes to their own ability to see if the readings can be compared to the transition year readings in order to either reinforce or refute the basic proposal of this dissertation.

#### **Questionnaire No. 1**

##### **Description**

This questionnaire is the same as the first questionnaire (see Appendix A), given to the transition years except that I have removed questions six and seven as they related solely to the transition year situation.



### Predictions

I think that because they have actually chosen art for the junior cert they will have to more positive attitude towards their own artistic ability. I think they will rate themselves as having a fairly high ability level, either three or four out of five, they will find art either 'manageable' or 'easy' and will be 'fairly confident' when presented with a new artistic task, finally I think they will rate themselves as either average with or above average to their class, their parents and the general public.

### Results

Table 3 shows the statistical results.

The majority of the class rated themselves quite favourably as three or four out of five and only two class members rated themselves as two out of five (see Fig. 5.1). Most of the class found art 'manageable', no one said they found it difficult, and most were either 'fairly confident' or 'confident' when presented with a new artistic task. They rated their own class as either three or four out of five and all but one rated themselves as average with their classmates ability. Most rated themselves as average with their parents and the general public.

These results show fairly normal and healthy attitudes to their own ability and quite acceptable levels of self-confidence. They do not hold many surprises and my initial predictions appear to have been fairly accurate.



TABLE 3.

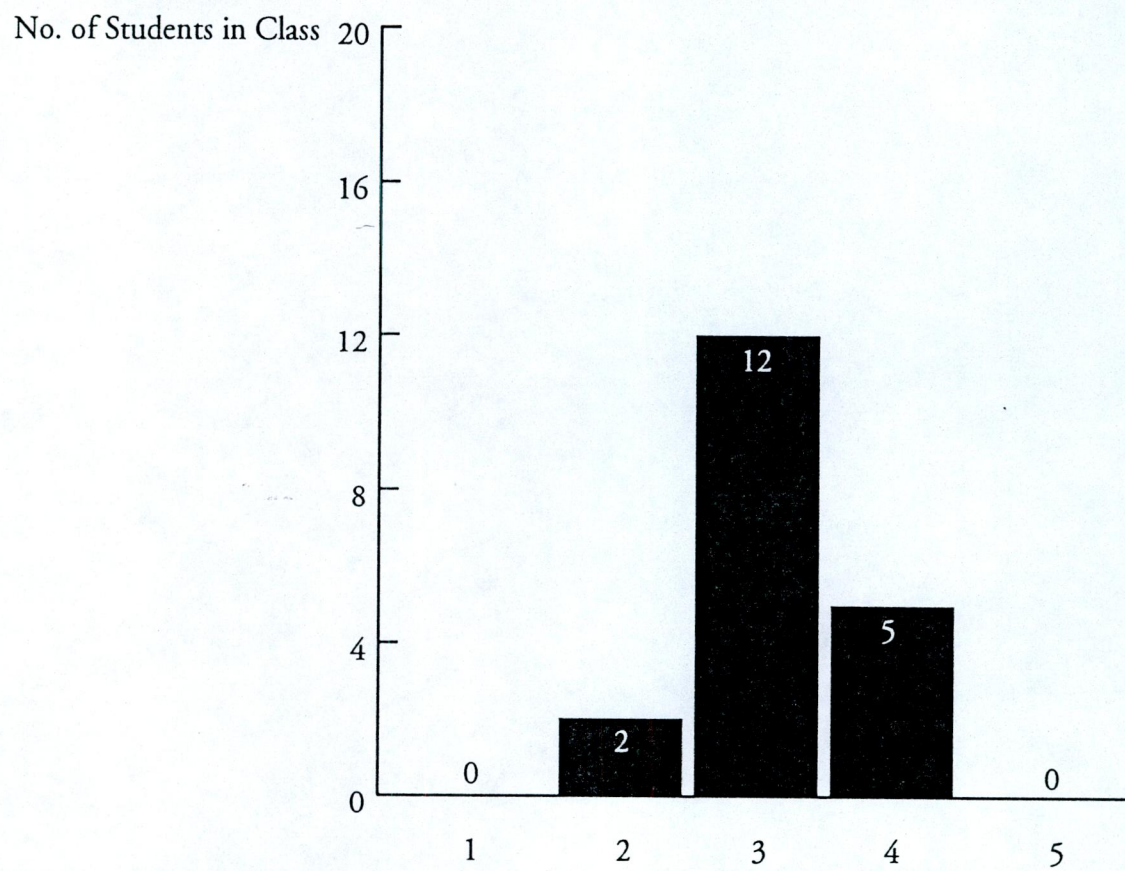
## First Year results to Questionnaire No. 1( Ammended ).

1. On a scale of one to five, how would you rate your own artistic ability?	<table><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>0</td><td>2</td><td>12</td><td>5</td><td>0</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	0	2	12	5	0
1	2	3	4	5							
0	2	12	5	0							
2. How easy / difficult do you find art ?	Very Difficult ...1. Difficult....0. Managable....15. Easy....2. Very Easy....1.										
3. How do you feel when presented with a new artistic task ?	Very Unconfident....0. Unconfident ....1. Fairly Confident....7. Confident...9. Very Confident....2.										
4. What would be the average ability level in this class ?	<table><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>9</td><td>9</td><td>1</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	0	0	9	9	1
1	2	3	4	5							
0	0	9	9	1							
5. How do you rate yourself compared to this average class standard ?	Well Below Average....0. Below Average....1. Average ....18. Above Average....0. Well Above Average...0.										
6. How do you rate the artistic ability of your parents / guardians ?	<table><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>2</td><td>4</td><td>8</td><td>2</td><td>3</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	2	4	8	2	3
1	2	3	4	5							
2	4	8	2	3							
7. How do you rate yourself compared to this standard?	Well Below Average....0. Below Average....1. Average ....12. Above Average....4. Well Above Average....2.										
8. What, in your opinion, is the average artistic ability of the general public ?	<table><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>0</td><td>1</td><td>16</td><td>1</td><td>1</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	0	1	16	1	1
1	2	3	4	5							
0	1	16	1	1							
9. How do you rate yourself compared to this standard ?	Well Below Average....0. Below Average....2. Average ....15. Above Average....2. Well Above Average ....0.										



FIGURE 5.1

First Year answers to Question One, Questionnaire No. One.



On a scale of one to five, how would you rate your own artistic ability ?







## Questionnaire No. 2

### Predictions

The second questionnaire is exactly the same as the one given to the transition years.

Given the fact that this first year group have shown healthy attitudes to their own artistic ability I would predict that their families attitudes to art will be fairly positive, they will probably like art and think its 'fairly important' and more than likely they 'wouldn't mind' if their child pursued a career in art. I think the students probably had a positive experience of art in primary school, that they will show a preference for realistic drawing in their system of aesthetic judgement and that they will be generally positive about learning and developing artistic ability.

### Results

Table 4 shows the statistical results.

The picture of the families attitudes to art is quite positive, most families either 'like art' or 'like art a lot', they think it's 'fairly important' for their child to do art at school and the majority would be either 'happy'; or 'very happy' if their child pursued a career in art (see Fig. 5.2). Most pupils felt their families had a high opinion of their abilities and were interested in the artwork they produced.

Many pupils didn't rate their ability when they were in primary school as highly as they rate it now which means that they must see their ability developing positively. They also felt that their primary teachers liked art and felt that it was 'fairly important' for them to do at school.



Most pupils chose painting 'B' for its realism (see Fig. 5.3) and the majority expressed a preference for the realistic portrait but a significant minority did say they would prefer to be able to make a picture which expressed their thoughts and feelings. One of the most encouraging results from these first years was that a huge majority felt it was possible to learn how to be good at art and the same number felt that ability did not depend on 'natural talent' (see Fig. 5.4 and 5.5). Again there were no real surprises in these results and my predictions were quite accurate. Although I didn't expect the pupils' assessment of their primary teacher's attitudes to art to be so positive.

### **Methodology Section : Conclusions**

The first conclusion we can draw from these results is very basic and simple. Transition years had negative attitudes to their own artistic ability, but the first years didn't, they had healthy positive attitudes. This tells us that negative attitudes are not ubiquitous and it should not be taken for granted that all adolescents will have them. This conclusion only makes it all the more important to find out the causes of negative attitudes so that we will become better able to remedy the situation. The next set of conclusions are more complex. We must compare the results from the two subject groups to see if they reinforce or contradict my proposal regarding the causes of these negative attitudes. To make this comparison I will take each proposal and compare the results of each subject group regarding this proposal.

### **Effects of Significant Others**

In order to see how the child's significant others effect their self concept for art I will assess the parental attitudes and the attitudes of the primary teachers towards art to see if the causes of the child's negative opinions can be linked to the opinions of their significant others. The transition years parents attitudes were not positive, they liked art but thought it



TABLE 4.

First Year results to Questionnaire No. 2.

1. How much do your family like art?	Don't like it at all ...0. Don't like it very much... 1. Sort of like it... 4. Like it... 8. Like it a lot... 6.										
2. How important do your family regard art as a subject for you to do at school ?	Very unimportant... 0. Unimportant...0. Fairly important...13. Important...3. Very important...3.										
3. How happy would your family be if you pursued a career in art ?	Very unhappy...0. Unhappy...0. They wouldn't mind...6. Happy...6. Very happy...7.										
4. How often would your family go to exhibitions or watch art programmes on the T.V.?	Never...0. Hardly ever...7. Sometimes...9. Regularly...2. Very regularly...1.										
5. On a scale of one to five, how would your family rate your artistic abilities ?	<table><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>0</td><td>1</td><td>8</td><td>9</td><td>1</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	0	1	8	9	1
1	2	3	4	5							
0	1	8	9	1							
6. How interested would your family be in the art you produce, both in school or outside school ?	Very disinterested...0. Disinterested...0. Fairly interested...3. Interested...5. Very interested...11.										
7. When you were young, how much did your family encourage your artistic ability ?	Did not encourage at all...1. Did not encourage very much...1. Sort of encouraged...3. Encouraged...7. Encouraged very much...7.										
8. How much did your primary school teachers like art ?	Disliked it very much...1. Disliked it...1. Were indifferent to it...1. Liked it...12. Liked it very much...4.										
9. How important a subject did your primary school teachers think art was for you to do ?	Very unimportant...1. Unimportant...6. Fairly important...4. Important...7. Very important...1.										
10. How would you rate your own artistic ability when you were in primary school ?	<table><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>0</td><td>8</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>0</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	0	8	5	6	0
1	2	3	4	5							
0	8	5	6	0							
11. How much did you like art when you were in primary school ?	Disliked art a lot...0. Dislike art...0. Sort of like art...0. Like art...5. Like art a lot...14.										
12. How much has your enjoyment of art changed since you were a primary school child ?	Not at all changed...2. Not really changed...2. Sort of changed...2. Changed...7. Changed a lot...6.										

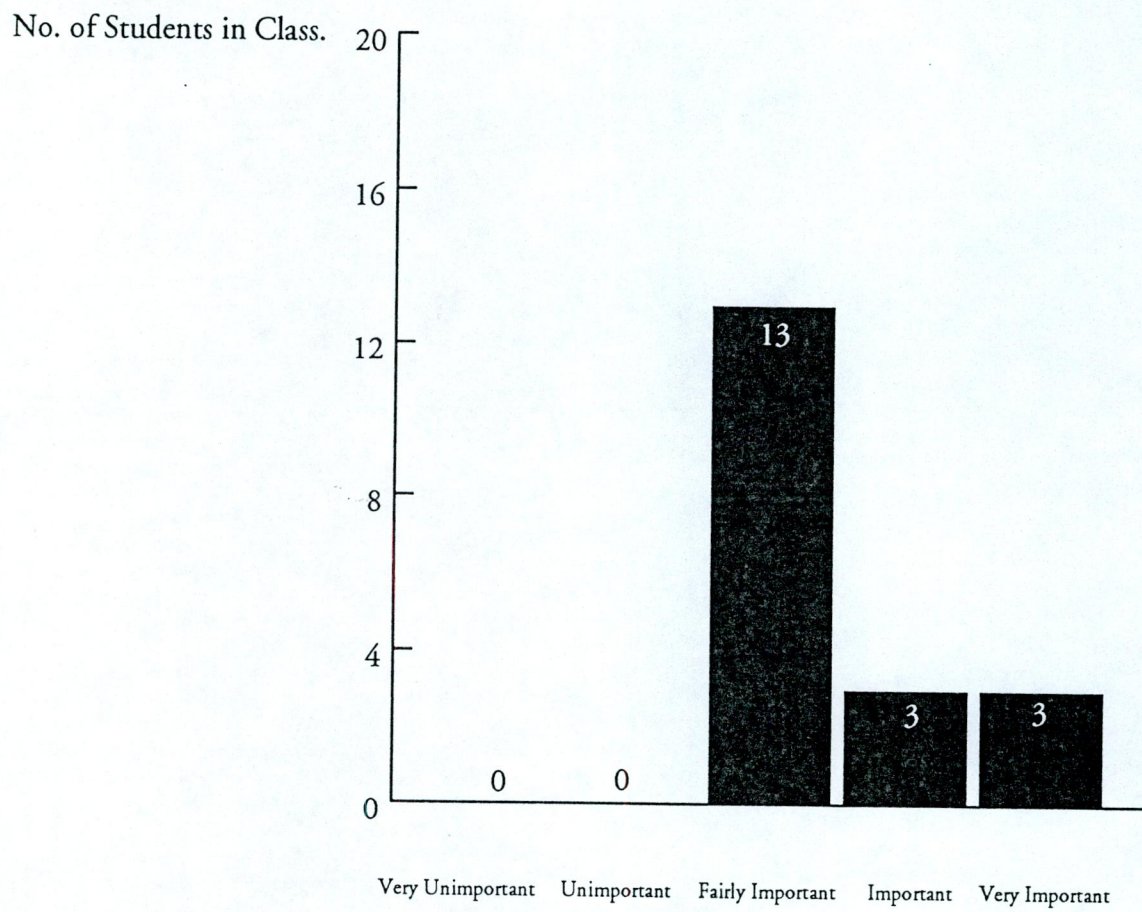






FIGURE 5.2

First Year answers to Question Two, Questionnaire No. Two.

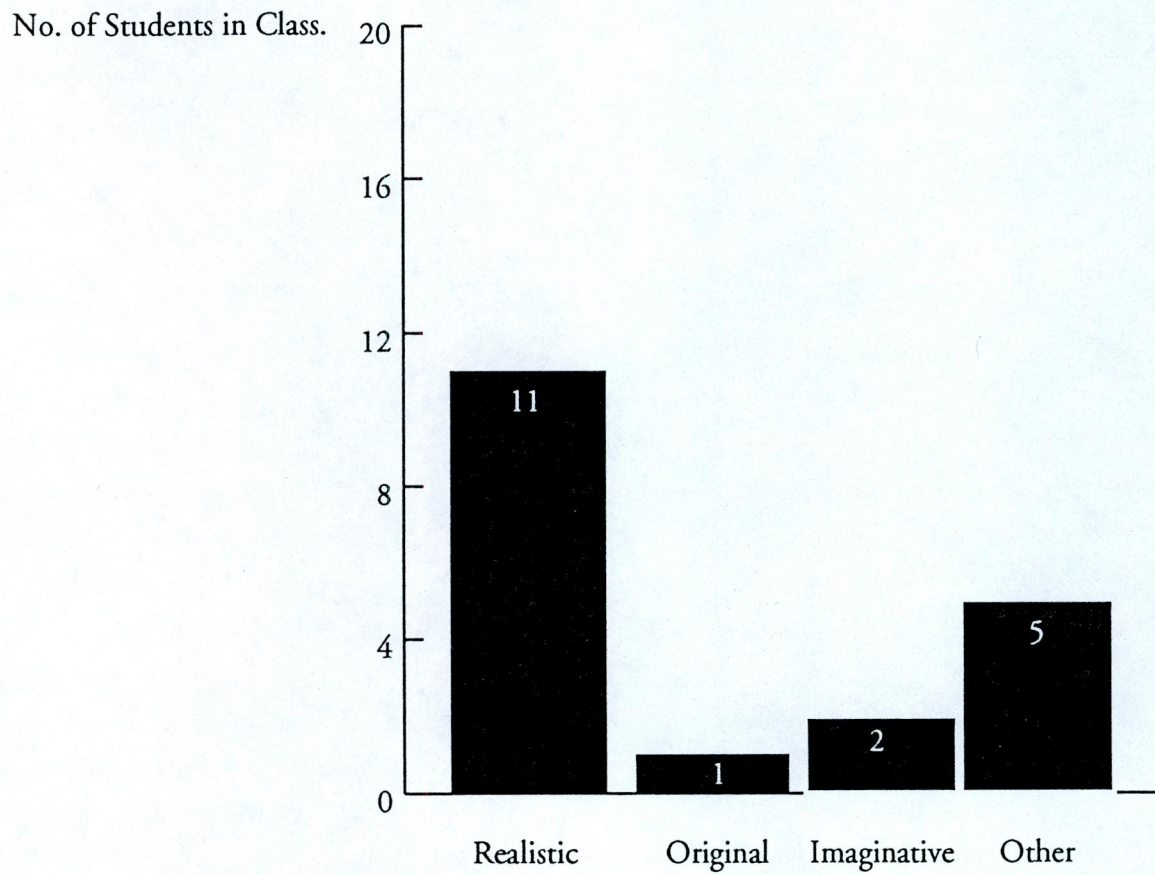


How important do your family regard art as a subject for you to do ?



FIGURE 5.3

First Year answers to Question Fourteen, Questionnaire No. Two.



Why did you choose this painting ?







was unimportant for their child's education and would be unhappy if their child chose a career in art. Their primary teachers had similar opinions.

The first years' parents appeared to have a more positive attitude to art. They liked it and viewed it as significant both educationally and in terms of a future career for their child. Again there was a definite similarity between the parents and primary teachers attitudes. These results show clear parallels between the opinions of the students and of those people who have influenced them the most, thus reinforcing the proposal that students' negative attitudes to their own artistic ability can be caused by the effect that significant others have on forming the child's self concept for art.

### **Effect of Cultural Values Regarding Aesthetic Judgement**

In order to see how cultural values regarding aesthetic judgement effect the students attitudes I will examine the results regarding the value students put on realism. Both subject groups showed that they regard realism as very important but they both have different attitudes to their ability. This result shows that it's possible for adolescents to value realism and still have positive attitudes to their own ability. Therefore the placing of realism at the top of the hierarchy of aesthetic values appears to be only a peripheral factor in causing negative attitudes. But I would argue that it is a factor that becomes more important with age. The older a pupil gets the more he / she expects his / her art to be adult-looking and therefore realistic. The first years have relative youth on their side and may feel that at their age it's acceptable not to have a realistic style whereas the transition years feel that realism is expected of them. This is quite an important conclusion as it has implications for the type of remedial programme one puts into place. Different programmes should probably be developed for different age groups.



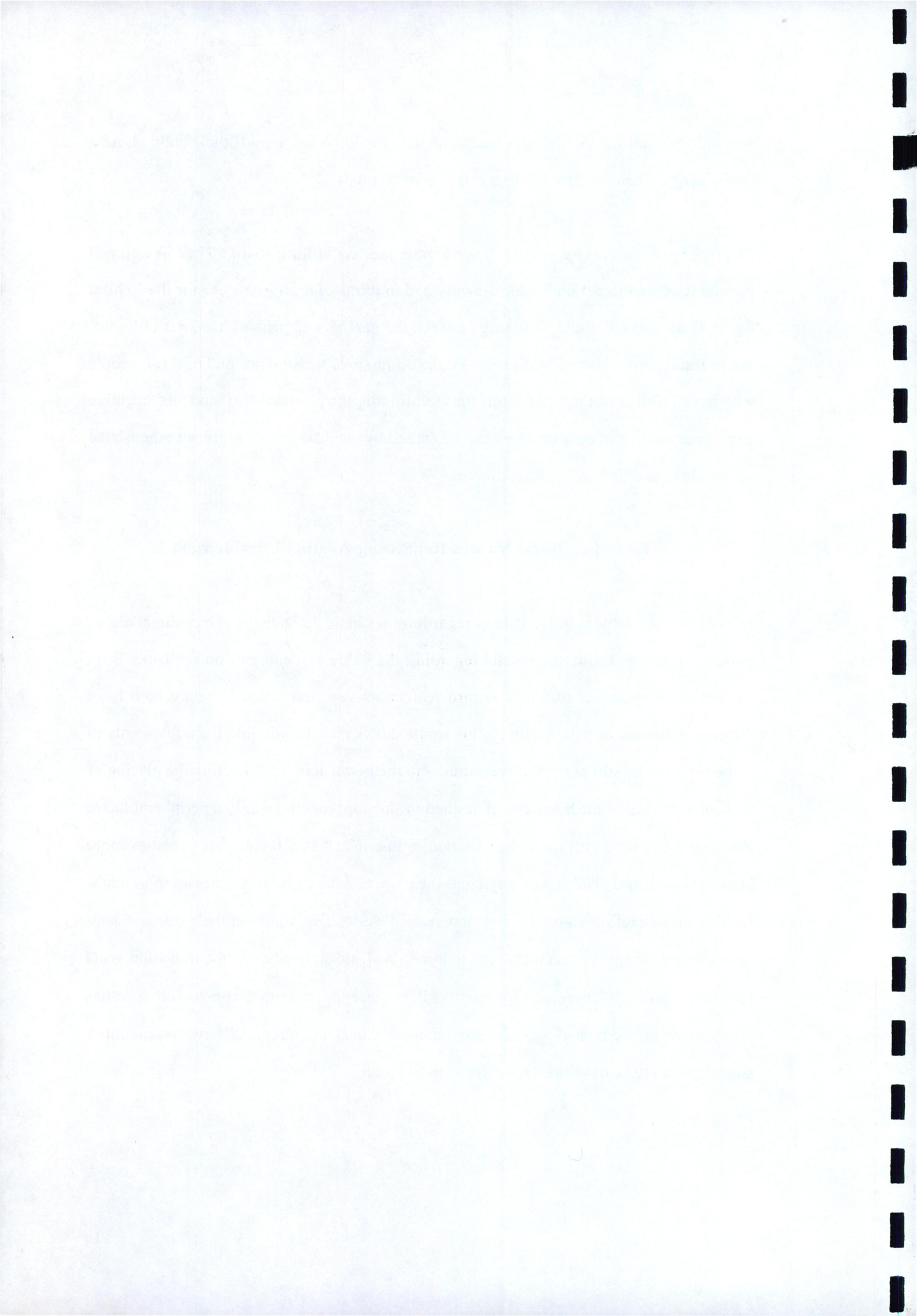
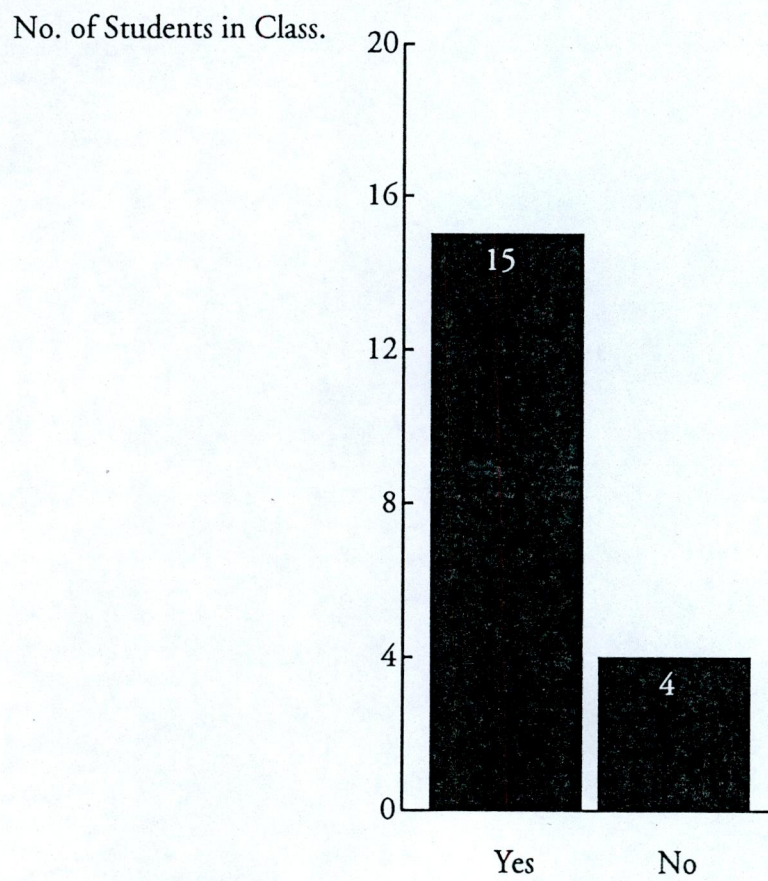




FIGURE 5.4

First Year answers to Question Seventeen, Questionnaire No. Two.



Do you think it is possible to learn how to be good at art ?

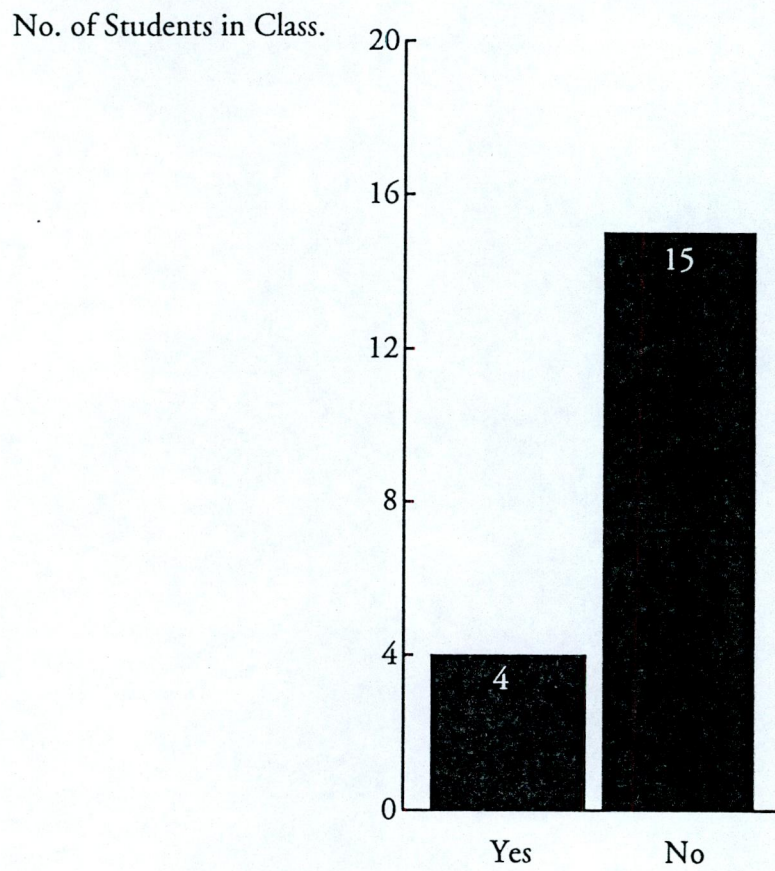






FIGURE 5.5

First Year answers to Question Eighteen, Questionnaire No. Two.



Do you think artistic talent depends purely on natural talent ?







### **The Effect of Cultural Values Regarding Artistic Talent**

The transition years were split half and half in their opinions about whether or not it is possible to learn how to be good at art and whether or not artistic ability was solely to do with natural talent or not.

The first years on the other hand, had much more healthy attitudes towards artistic learning and natural talent, they unanimously felt that it was possible to learn how to be good at art and that artistic ability did depend simply on talent.

According to these results there appears to be clear parallels between a child's concepts of artistic learning and natural talent and their attitude to their own ability.



## CHAPTER 6

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

#### School's Intervention

This chapter deals with various exercises developed to deal with the problem of negative student attitudes to their own ability. By way of introduction I am including a section on what appears from the literature to be a general ineffectiveness in the programmes that schools put into practice to remedy low self-esteem and improve self-concepts. As Dembo says "many special programmes have been developed by schools to improve students' self-concepts but have failed to demonstrate any change"<sup>1</sup>.

Lawrence says that resistance to therapy can be a result of the need to maintain consistency in the self concept.<sup>2</sup> He says that it can be quite threatening to be told that a change in one's abilities will occur. A learning difficulty may have become a part of the person's self concept and therefore any change must be a gradual process in order to maintain self consistency. Lawrence compares the situation to a hearing-impaired person who may, at first, resist an operation which will restore his /her hearing because it will mean a radical altering of their self-concept.<sup>3</sup> So, any intervention programme must recognise the need for gradual rates of change.

Dembo says that the reasons for such bad results from schools' intervention programmes are because the programmes themselves are weak and that there is a poor relationship between the programme's goals and the specific type of self-concept to be changed. In order to improve results Dembo says we must first decide which specific self-concept is to be improved. Then we must develop activities which are related to the dimensions of this specific self concept. Then lastly we must measure the dimensions of the self-concept. It is this model which I intend to use as a general guide in my own programme.



Dembo also quotes research by Marsh and Peart (1988) which has some interesting applications for this study <sup>4</sup>. Marsh and Peart measured the different effects which a cooperative and a competitive physical fitness programme had on the self-concept for physical fitness. In the competitive programme, fitness improved but the self-concept for physical ability decreased. In the cooperative programme, they found that both fitness and self concept were increased. Marsh and Peart concluded that it was not the participants actual ability but his / her perception of their ability which contributed to the quality of self concept and that their frame of reference was crucial to this perception. For instance the subjects saw their ability differently when they were in the competitive and the cooperative groups because they were comparing their ability to others using different criteria.

### **Rationale for Projects and Exercises**

The projects and exercises which I have developed are based on the findings and results of the questionnaire, especially the answers given by the Transition Year group who were beginners and had particularly negative attitudes to their own ability.

I have broken the findings down into four general points which I will use to get a picture of what the aims of the exercises need to be. Firstly there is a lack of confidence in their ability, especially when they are asked to attempt something new. Secondly, there is also a fairly low opinion of their own ability, they rate themselves quite low on a five point scale. Thirdly, there is a high preference for and admiration of realism. By realism I mean skillful manipulation of materials and technique to produce a realistic and naturalistic end product. Lastly I found that there was some division over the issue of talent. Some thought that artistic ability depended purely on natural talent (i.e. something you either have or have not) and others thought that natural talent was not such a large causal factor and that there were other influences on artistic ability.



These four points give me quite a clear picture of what my aims should be for the projects. They should develop the students' confidence in her own ability and raise her opinion of this ability. It is also clear from my own past experience that in order to develop confidence each student must experience success in an area which she values. For instance many students in the transition year class have completed work which I would term successful but the work did not increase their confidence because they themselves were not impressed with their own work, this was probably due to it's semi-abstract nature. The students have shown a strong preference for realism and accuracy of representation and it is precisely this area in which they must experience success. They must see an obvious development of what they view as talent. It must be proved to them that talent and ability are qualities which can be achieved by them and which can be developed through experience.

But success in realism is very hard to achieve because it comes as a result of much close observation of nature and pain-staking development of skill and technique when handling media. Observation skills and experience with materials are two of the main qualities which are lacking in the transition year group. To take these students through a normal educational programme of observation and drawing from life would mean a lot of trial and error and a postponement of success until sufficient experience had been gathered. To go through a process of trial and error means that you need to have the ambition and confidence to persist in spite of failure but these girls don't have the confidence to begin to make art never mind to persist in the face of failure.

So what is needed is a method of by-passing all of what is normally regarded as the learning process in order to cut directly to the feeling of success and confidence which the production of a realistic piece of artwork will induce. The student must be lured into a state of confidence so that she can feel free and able to practice, develop, explore and experience art at deeper levels than basic naturalism. The method used should surprise students with their own ability. The student should feel amazed at their own produce and feel that they



are actually capable of making what they view as significant art work. In this way the student will experience the reinforcement of confidence needed to integrate art into their self concept and to make them feel at home in the art room itself and in the actual making of artistic products.

This, of course, is a fairly tall order and there are many factors militating against the success of a project such as this, not least the time limitations of a secondary school timetable and what Dembo would call the "stable"<sup>5</sup> nature of the self-concept and its resistance change. So what are needed are exercises which fit easily into the timetable structure of an average art class and which will show quite forcefully that each student is capable of achieving extraordinary results in artistic projects.

Before giving detailed descriptions of each exercise I will outline the broad categories into which they fall and the ways in which I have tried to build success into every exercise.

Firstly, there is what can be called the "avoidance of drawing" exercises. These begin with the premise that the students are going to find drawing difficult and intimidating and they probably won't experience any great success with drawing anyway so therefore the best way to ensure success is to avoid drawing in the project and try to achieve realism through other methods. In this category use of diverse materials can be extremely useful to shift the goal posts away from technical expertise with drawing.

The other categories of exercises all make use of the opposite attitude to drawing to that shown by the "avoidance of drawing" projects. They all regard drawing as the major stumbling block to the students' artistic self confidence and so reason that the only real way to remedy this situation is to meet it head on with projects which are based on drawing and which aim to reverse the students opinions about their own drawing. These exercises could be called "confrontations with drawing" because in them I feel the student confronts one of her main fears and insecurities about art and hopefully she will begin, after several



of these drawing exercises to believe that she can confront art and realistic representation without fear of failure and with a confident, enquiring attitude.

The third general category into which the exercises fall are "educational games". These games will run in conjunction with the other exercises and are the main educational area of the whole programme. The games are purely verbal in nature and should not threaten the student because they do not rely on practical artistic skill or on any type of pre-ordained artistic knowledge such as art historical information for instance. The one ingredient the games do require is an innate sense of playful competitiveness and a desire to win. Most students I have encountered have these qualities and I would guess that they would be quite prevalent in highly academic classes and schools where competition is usually a motivating factor in academic attainment. Therefore competitive games can be very useful in the case of an academic class which is doing art against their will. The only problem I can see with competitive games is one which I think only really exists in theory. March and Peart's research from 1988 which I discussed earlier showed that competitive programmes have positive effects on skill but adverse effects on self-concept. It could be argued that these competitive games will have such negative effects. But in practice the games are usually of a light hearted nature and winning or losing is not the issue it's the desire to win which is the motivator and the end result is usually ignored. Also the games are team based so they are cooperative as well as being competitive. In my view they give the best of both systems. The games would be designed to enhance awareness of and critical analysis of artwork, i.e. technique, use of media, preferences and reasons for these preferences etc.

### **Educational Value of this Programme**

In many ways the projects which I will describe are of little or no educational value. They ignore many of the commonplace systems which we regard as educational. For instance there will be very little 'process' no preparatory drawing, no collection of support studies, no obvious individual enquiry for themselves. In many of the exercises the teacher passes



on knowledge and skills to the pupil in a very traditional manner with no real analysis on the part of the individual pupil. In this aspect I seem to be proposing a return to the rather rigid system of the "academys". My defense is that values which I would usually appreciate in the art room such as imagination, originality and individual critical visual enquiry are simply not going to arise unless the student has enough confidence to want to expand and develop individually. I feel quite justified in using methods which I would normally regard as backward and uneducational in order to achieve the confidence the student needs to progress in a more educational manner.

The games are the only aspect of the programme which can be regarded as genuinely educational. They will attempt to develop the individual's critical visual skills as opposed to having the narrower aim of developing artistic confidence.

### **"Avoidance of Drawing" Exercises**

These exercises do not adhere strictly to the brief which I have set myself. That is, they do not try to instill confidence through helping the student to achieve realism but they are helpful in that they may begin to widen the students' ideas about representation and the types of materials and methods you can use to represent nature. The first exercise is a basic collage of found objects. The students must make a scene using a collection of various materials. For instance they could make a tree by using a pair of old brown cords for the trunk, crumpled brown paper bags for branches and real leaves for leaves. Nails could be used as grass and coat hangers could be birds or aeroplanes. This simple example shows that the students would be concentrating on creative selection of materials and on assembling a composition. The exercise would be group based and its benefit for the students confidence lies in its lack of depiction. Representational skills are not required. This is the basis of another Montage project, this time using photos from magazines. Given a theme the students must make a picture using whole images cut from magazines.







While assembling the scene they must take perspective and depth into consideration, it must look like a real scene, not a mere hotch potch.

A third way of avoiding drawing would be to work directly with a three dimensional material. For instance directed clay work is usually successful, the teacher shows the class in gradual stages how to make a clay pig or an elephant from simply sticking two thumb pots together and adding legs and features. Having successfully made a simple animal the students can develop the formula and extend it to make sheep, giraffes, lions etc., all in different poses. The end result could be a miniature zoo.

It is also possible to make quite a complex and realistic three dimensional piece by making it in sections which will eventually jigsaw together to make the finished piece. Each section is made separately so that the student doesn't know what it is until the sections are assembled together. Hopefully the students will be surprised at their final piece and will be impressed at the level of realism they have achieved. Making the piece in sections means that each bit is quite abstract and the student won't be worrying about making it look real she will simply be following the teacher's instructions which will need to be extremely exact.

### **Drawing Exercises**

The first drawing exercise is directed drawing. This is a method which is sometimes used in primary school in which the teacher makes a drawing on a large sheet of paper in front of the whole class and the class copy it while the teacher draws. In a secondary class for this to work the students would need to be initially motivated by showing them the impressively realistic finished drawing before they start and then very slowly building up the drawing on the sheet. The teachers directions while drawing would have to be very clear and would have to describe accurately how to achieve the various pencil techniques required for completion of the drawing.



The first of these is the fact that the present system of land tenure in the country is not based on any legal title, but on a system of customary rights which are not always clearly defined.

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The problems with this kind of exercise are that the student may not feel that it was their achievement, that everyone in the class ended up with the same result and that it was really only the teacher's drawing. But the benefits are that they will learn how to go about building a drawing from simple lines and shapes, they will learn techniques and 'tricks' with the pencil and they can do all this in a safe way. They won't feel threatened or isolated, they are all doing the same work together and there is only minimal danger of failure.

A variation on this type of directed drawing is when the class copy a teacher building a drawing up from very simple shapes. For instance a schematic childlike drawing of a house can be developed into an impressive drawing by adding details, depth and shading techniques. In this way a drawing is taken from the stage where the students are at and is taken gradually to the stage of realism and ability that they would like to be at. Again the teacher's instructions must be very precise and extend to everything from describing the basic proportions and relations between the shapes to how to get various textures with the pencil.

When the students have made a few drawings under the strict direction of the teacher they can move on to another exercise which could probably be described as directed seeing. This time the teacher does not make a drawing to be copied, the students are drawing an object from life. The teacher's role is to break the object down into basic geometrical forms. The students must learn to visually reduce the object down to its most basic shapes so they can build it up for themselves the way they have seen their teacher make a drawing from very basic shapes in the previous exercise. The student will hopefully develop their drawings from simple cubes, cuboids, tubes, pyramids and spheres into more subtle forms which are closer to the irregularities of nature.

The next project which I propose would be helpful in developing confidence and ensuring success is the type of work which is usually quite anathema to art educators, the students'



The following table shows the results of the analysis of the data collected from the 100 subjects who participated in the study. The table shows the mean scores for each of the 10 items, and the standard deviation for each item. The table also shows the mean scores for the total score, and the standard deviation for the total score. The table is presented in the following format:

Table 1. Mean scores and standard deviations for each item and total score.

Item	Mean	SD
1	1.5	0.5
2	1.2	0.4
3	1.8	0.6
4	1.4	0.5
5	1.6	0.5
6	1.3	0.4
7	1.7	0.6
8	1.5	0.5
9	1.4	0.5
10	1.6	0.5
Total	15.0	3.0

The results of the analysis show that the mean scores for each item are relatively low, ranging from 1.2 to 1.8. The standard deviations for each item are also relatively low, ranging from 0.4 to 0.6. The mean scores for the total score are 15.0, and the standard deviation for the total score is 3.0. The results of the analysis suggest that the subjects in the study generally scored low on the items, and that the scores were relatively consistent across the items. The results also suggest that the subjects in the study generally scored low on the total score, and that the scores were relatively consistent across the items.

The following table shows the results of the analysis of the data collected from the 100 subjects who participated in the study. The table shows the mean scores for each of the 10 items, and the standard deviation for each item. The table also shows the mean scores for the total score, and the standard deviation for the total score. The table is presented in the following format:



tend to enjoy it but teachers certainly don't. Cartoons and other formulaic symbols are drawn constantly by some students because they have learned them off and are comfortable with them. The teacher can use this enthusiasm for cartoons to develop a student's technical skill in a safe way. Firstly the students learn how to draw a favourite cartoon character, they can do this through repetitive tracing or through analytical directed drawing i.e. breaking the cartoon into extremely basic shapes. Eventually the student should begin to be able to depict the character in various poses 'free-hand'. In this gradual way the student develops a formulaic method of drawing a particular character and this in itself is of dubious benefit. By this I mean that although learning off a cartoon character will probably bring a certain level of confidence it can also cause a student to get into a safe, non-productive rut where they simply reproduce repeatedly the same character.

The teacher, at this stage, should force the development of new story-lines, new backgrounds and eventually the development of a new character which is drawn in the same style as the previous one but is the student's own creation. Hopefully this encouragement to develop the cartoon further will prevent it from becoming hackneyed and stunted.

This process of 'learning off' a cartoon can be extended to drawings where a student could learn how to reproduce faithfully from memory a favourite drawing by repeatedly reproducing it by various methods.

The last set of exercises which I feel will develop the students confidence in their own ability are linked by the fact that they both use a similar method. They both aim to reproduce another piece of art by breaking it into sections and faithfully copying each section.

The first exercise is the well known project of turning a drawing upside down and copying it's lines, shapes and tones as if they were mere abstract marks. Then when you are



finished translating the marks you turn your drawing around to reveal the copy of the original. In order to add to both the surprise of the end result and the abstract nature of the process I suggest not only turning the original drawing upside down but also covering it with another sheet and only revealing it in sections by gradually pulling back the sheet. If the student does not know what the original drawing was this increases the abstract feeling of each section as it is revealed and the student will be really only drawing lines and shapes in an abstract manner until the final image is revealed and turned the right way up. This method of copying a drawing should make the student surprised at their end result.

The second exercise where a finished piece is developed in sections is slightly more complicated than the previous one and should really only be attempted with students who have at least some experience of working with paint. It involves the students picking a painting that they like from any period or style and reproducing it using the photo realists' technique of sectioning off areas and copying the colour with the aid of a magnifying glass. The obstacle of drawing can be gotten over by tracing the painting or by using a grid. The teacher must limit the students choice of painting only on the grounds of time limits. If the painting takes too long to copy the student may get bored. This is essentially a colour matching exercise and is designed to surprise and impress the student with their own work. When they don't have to worry about the whole composition their attention and skill will be focussed more clearly on each section and this will hopefully improve the quality of the whole.

My last point about practical ability and ways of improving a student's self-confidence is to do with presentation skills. If students work is presented well and if sufficient fuss is made of it by those in authority then the students opinion of their work will probably change favourably. Methods of presenting students work can vary from simple mounting or framing to taking well staged and well lit photos of three dimensional work. Another way to present work can be to colour photo-copy a section of a student's work, cut it to the correct size and use it as an inlay card for a cassette or compact disk. The typography and







the band's name can be taken from music magazines. But perhaps the best way to present work and boost confidence and pride in their own work is to have an exhibition. The exhibition must, of course, be sanctioned by the students because it could be embarrassing for them and have the opposite effect. An exhibition should be opened by the principal or other dignitary with much ceremony so that students see their work is valued and important.

### **Educational Games**

These games are designed to be a source of back up learning to the confidence building exercises. While the practical projects were supposed to build confidence by ensuring a high level of realism in the end result the games try to cater for much wider educational aims. It is through the games that the students learn about the various aspects of aesthetic understanding and it is through the practical exercises that they develop the confidence to put that learning into practice. The games would be run simultaneously with the practical projects so that the learning could influence both critical thinking and practical ability.

#### **Game 1**

The aim of the first game is to develop awareness of materials and techniques. I want the students to begin to analyse art works, by asking themselves what materials the artist used and how he / she used them. The format of the game is like a basic quiz show with two or more teams competing to answer questions. The quiz master will show a reproduction of an art work and the teams get a point for answering what the artists medium was and another for describing how the artist used this medium. This format can be developed to include buzzer rounds, answering by individual team members, conferring and various other well known quiz show methods. The pictures shown can get steadily more complex to include sculpture, mixed media and unusual types of media.



## Game 2

The aim of this game is to develop a critical analysis of aesthetic judgement. I want the students to begin thinking about why they like a certain painting as opposed to making a preference and not analysing it.

The format of this game is basically one of discussion and planning and then of confrontation as in a debate. The class again splits into teams of about four students each and each term picks democratically a painting which they like from a selection of about ten paintings. They then discuss why they like this painting under the heading of subject matter, style (under which I would add the sub-headings of colouring and treatment of form i.e. naturalistic, exaggerated or abstract) and lastly meaning (symbolism or emotional content). Having decided their defense of their choice of painting they discuss the choices which the other teams have made. They pick a painting which they particularly don't like and make up questions asking the team who have picked it why they did so. The questions they make up must try to expose how little the other team have actually analysed their painting and how the other team's choice was based on whim rather than analysis. Then, having prepared both their defense and offence they commence the questioning section of the game. Each team takes turns to put another team on the spot and ask them pointed questions as to why they chose their particular painting, trying to point out inconsistencies in their opponents argument, and flaws in their judgement. The offensive team get a point if they ask a question that the defensive team can't answer satisfactorily and the defensive team get a point if they do answer the question satisfactorily. The judges decision as to what constitutes a satisfactory answer must remain final and the judge must at least try to be objective. This game will be most successful with a loquacious and competitive class who enjoy activities such as debating or acting.



### Game 3

The third game is designed to develop visual awareness in a practical way as an aid to drawing. The format is simply a quiz show where the quiz master shows a contestant an object (a telephone, a bedside lamp, a shoe) and the contestant has to verbally break it down into its simplest geometric forms. A contestant can score points for their team by accurately describing the object.

### Game 4

One of the more alarming findings from the questionnaires was the apparently total lack of awareness of the importance of design and I decided to include a final game whose aim is to promote critical analysis of design. The format of the game is again extremely simple and the only real difference between the game and normal class questioning is the introduction of the elements of cooperative team work and competitiveness. The adjudicator presents the class, who have split into teams, with an object such as a walkman, a toaster or a pair of jeans, something which has been designed to both perform a function and to be aesthetically appealing. The teams discuss it in private and analyse its aesthetic qualities such as, shape, form, colour, texture and typography and its technical qualities such as its function and use of materials. Then they analyse its overall 'look' and try to guess what section of the public the designer was aiming the product at by using the crude criteria, of age, gender and social class. After making a full analysis, the teams elect one member to present their analysis to the class, the most comprehensive in the eyes of the judge win the point. This game can be broadened to include a section where the teams are asked what qualities should a successful walkman / toaster / pair of shoes have.



## FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 6

1. Myron H. Dembo, Applying Educational Psychology in the Classroom, Fourth Ed. (New York and London: Longman, 1991) p. 139.
2. Denis Lawrence, Enhancing Self-Esteem in the Classroom (London: PCP, 1988) p. 8.
3. Ibid.
4. Dembo, Applying Educational Psychology, p. 140.
5. Ibid., p. 139.



## CONCLUSIONS

I think that I can conclude, at the end of this dissertation that my research has proved the majority of my proposals to be correct. It has become very clear that the effect of significant others on the student's self concept for art has the most influence on the child's attitude towards his or her artistic ability. The next most important influence is really a subsidiary of the effect that significant others have. The cultural values regarding talent have a definite effect on the child's concept of artistic learning but the strength of this effect will depend largely on the quality of the child's self concept for art.

The only aspect of my proposal which the research did not reinforce in a very definite way was the idea that cultural standards of realism helped to create students' negative attitudes to their own ability by proposing a standard which their age and experience could not compete with. In everyday practice in the classroom, this factor appears to be quite important, indeed it can seem to be the only reason for negative attitudes. But the research did not unanimously confirm or deny this.

As a conclusion to my recommendations and remedial programmes I would say that they were formulated with a particular class in mind i.e. the transition year class who have particularly negative attitudes. I used my knowledge of the class to design a programme which was tailored to suit their needs. For instance I included the educational games because I knew that word-play and verbal games involving a modicum of competition were particularly successful with this group in the past. My programmes are not, therefore, intended as a panacea to cure all learning difficulties in art, they are not even intended as a general solution to this problem. They are a response to a particular class and I feel that any specific programme intended to remedy negative attitudes to ability in the art classroom must be designed with a particular a group or even individual in mind.



To sum up finally, I think that my research and my general experience has shown that students' negative attitudes to their own artistic ability is was very significant problem for art educators. It is a problem which can be the root of many behavioural and performance related difficulties in the classroom and as such it must be tackled practically in each classroom so that students receive the full benefits which artistic experience has to offer.



APPENDIX A



## ART QUESTIONNAIRE

Questions on how you view your artistic ability.

Read questions carefully. Mark your answer by circling it clearly i.e. Answer.

- |   |  |   |   |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1. On a scale of one to five, how would you rate your own artistic ability?                                       | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. How easy / difficult do you find art ?   | Very Difficult, Difficult, Managable, Easy, Very Easy.                         |   |   |   |   |
| 3. How do you feel when presented with a new artistic task ?  | Very Unconfident, Unconfident, Fairly Confident, Confident, Very Confident .   |   |   |   |   |
| 4. What would be the average ability level in this class ?  | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. How do you rate yourself compared to this average class standard ?   | Well Below Average, Below Average, Average, Above Average, Well Above Average. |   |   |   |   |
| 6. What, do you think, is the average ability of a fourth year art class who have done art for the Junior Cert. ? | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. How do you rate yourself compared to this standard ?   | Well Below Average, Below Average, Average, Above Average, Well Above Average. |   |   |   |   |
| 8. How do you rate the artistic ability of your parents / guardians ?   | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. How do you rate yourself compared to this standard?  | Well Below Average, Below Average, Average, Above Average, Well Above Average. |   |   |   |   |
| 10. What, in your opinion, is the average artistic ability of the general public ?                                | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. How do you rate yourself compared to this standard ?  | Well Below Average, Below Average, Average, Above Average, Well Above Average. |   |   |   |   |







APPENDIX B



## ART QUESTIONNAIRE

Read questions carefully. Mark your answer by circling it clearly i.e. Answer.

1. How much do your family like art? Don't like it at all, Don't like it very much, Sort of like it, Like it, Like it a lot.
2. How important do your family regard art as a subject for you to do at school? Very unimportant, Unimportant, Fairly important, Important, Very important.
3. How happy would your family be if you pursued a career in art? Very unhappy, Unhappy, They wouldn't mind, Happy, Very happy.
4. How often would your family go to exhibitions or watch art programmes on the T.V.? Never, Hardly ever, Sometimes, Regularly, Very regularly.
5. On a scale of one to five, how would your family rate your artistic abilities? 1 2 3 4 5
6. How interested would your family be in the art you produce, both in school or outside school? Very disinterested, Disinterested, Fairly interested, Interested, Very interested.
7. When you were young, how much did your family encourage your artistic ability? Did not encourage at all, Did not encourage very much, Sort of encouraged, Encouraged, Encouraged very much.
8. How much did your primary school teachers like art? Disliked it very much, Disliked it, Were indifferent to it, Liked it, Liked it very much.
9. How important a subject did your primary school teachers think art was for you to do? Very unimportant, Unimportant, Fairly important, Important, Very important.
10. How would you rate your own artistic ability when you were in primary school? 1 2 3 4 5
11. How much did you like art when you were in primary school? Disliked art a lot, Dislike art, Sort of likeart, Like art, Like art a lot.
12. How much has your enjoyment of art changed since you were a primary school child? Not at all changed, Not really changed, Sort of changed, Changed, Changed a lot.

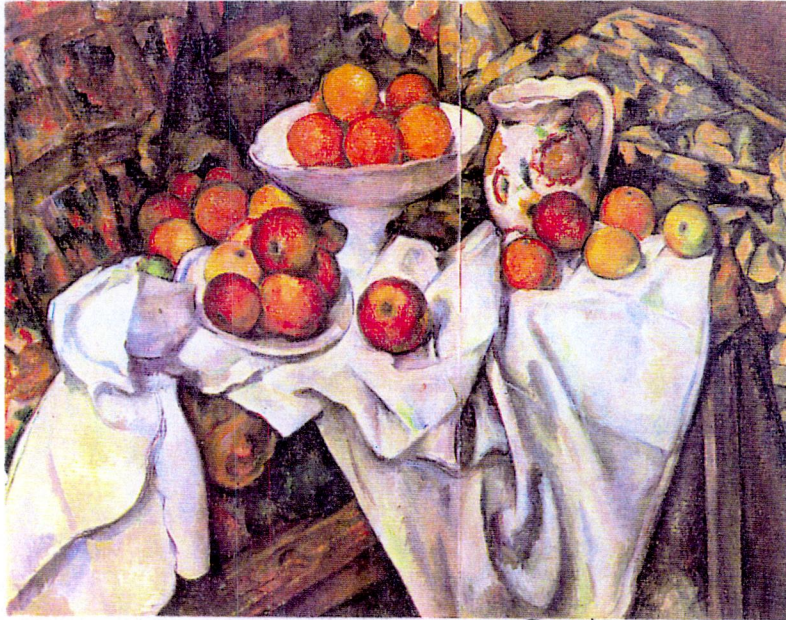






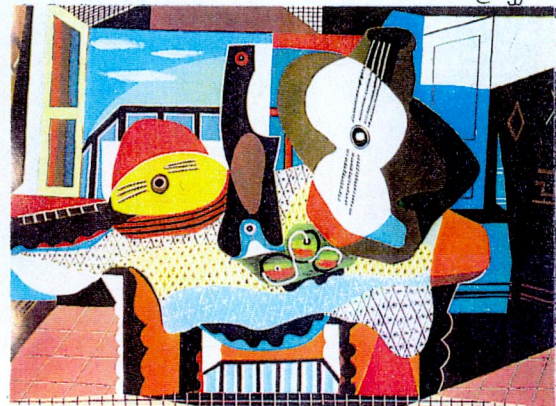
## ART QUESTIONNAIRE

13. Which painting do you think shows the most skill and talent ?



A

B



C

14. Why did you choose this painting ?

- A) Because it is the most REALISTIC.....  
 B) Because it is the most ORIGINAL.....  
 C) Because it is the most IMAGINATIVE.....  
 D) Other. ( state reason ).....



## ART QUESTIONNAIRE

15. Which would you most like to be able to do ?  
( Rate from one to four in order of preference )

Draw a realistic portrait. \_\_\_\_\_  
Design a functional and attractive Walkman. \_\_\_\_\_  
Select a colour scheme for a Restaurant/Cafe. \_\_\_\_\_  
Make a picture which expresses your thoughts/  
feelings/opinions. \_\_\_\_\_

16. How important is it to you to-be good at the following subject ? ( Rate each subject from one to five )

European Languages.....	1	2	3	4	5
English .....					
Irish .....					
Maths.....					
Science.....					
P.E. / Sports.....					
History.....					
Geography.....					
Music.....					
Art .....					

17. Do you think it is possible to learn how to be good at art ?

Yes..... No.....

18. Do you think artistic ability depends purely on natural talent ?

Yes..... No.....

19. Do you feel you are as good at art as you would like to be ?

Yes..... No.....

20. If no, then why do you feel you are not as good as you would like to be ?

- A) Because you have not done art in secondary school.....  
B) Because you are not naturally talented.....  
C) Because you do not come from an artistic household.....  
D) Because art was not taught well in your primary school.....  
E) Other ( state reason ).....  
.....  
.....







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