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COLAISTE NAISIUNTA EALAINÉ IS DEARTHÁ  
NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS ON VISUAL AWARENESS  
AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS IN THE ART ROOM

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PATRICIA WALSH

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# INTRODUCTION

Environmental factors must influence the way we see things. How much we have been exposed to must also be a factor. Experience and culture should also be taken into consideration when trying to assess a persons visual awareness. For the purpose of this dissertation I wish to discuss environmental effect on students visual awareness and how these may effect student performance and understanding in the classroom.

Chapter 1 looks at the family background and its influence on students, and their educational attainment.

Perception, an important part of visual awareness, is discussed in Chapter 2 to help define visual awareness itself.

Chapter 3 discusses the support studies aspect of the Junior Certificate Examination, and its part in the role of promoting visual awareness.

Chapter 4, the methodology chapter, gave me an opportunity to promote visual awareness in the classroom myself. Discussion of questionnaires given to the students along with the results can be found in Chapter 5.

# CHAPTER 1

## EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

### A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### THE FAMILY BACKGROUND

Are there experiences that an individual must have in order to develop perceptual skills? Is the way a student perceives the world at all influenced by the home and cultural settings in which he lives? Victor Lowenfeld and W. Lambert Brittain in their publication "Creative and Mental Growth" state that

Certainly the cognitive behaviour of individuals, their effective behaviour and the interaction between themselves and their environment all play a part. The background of a student, his socio-economic level, the cultural factors of the time, his exposure to mass media, his ability to be flexible in his thinking, and his standing in the classroom all influence the development of aesthetic awareness. (1)

There are numerous factors mentioned here which might influence a student's angle of perception or what that individual may perceive. Which of these, however, is the most influential on a student's development of perceptual skills? Out of the many, school, media and family background seem to me to be the most influential, but which of these, however, is the most powerful?

Since the advance of industrialization, formal educational institutions have taken over from the family, the task of teaching basic skills.



In fact "...the school has become the focal socialising agent but does not completely take over the parents' influence". (2) Even after their children starting school, parents are greatly influencing their children by their behaviour and attitudes. According to Olive Banks in her discussion of the Plowden Report of 1967.

More of the variation in the child's school achievements is specifically accounted for by the variation of parental attitudes than by either the variation in the material circumstances of parents or by the variation in schools. Secondly the importance of the parental attitudes increases as the children grow older. (3)

Education is only partly the result of schooling and mainly the result of other educative agencies (and individuals), such as the family, the community and communications media. School or schooling is only one influence, one "teacher" among several that form the social institution of education. The importance of family background must be stressed. It obviously has a profound effect on the perception of a child. Family background or socio-cultural-factors, can be divided into two parts, cultural, and attitudinal.(4) The cultural factors being parental reading habits, their rearing practices etc. and attitudinal factors being parental attitudes towards educational attainment and achievement. Elizabeth Fraser draws the conclusion that.....

...there is little doubt that if some account were taken of a child's background when trying to forecast his future scholastic success, this would add to the productive efficiency of intelligence and other standardized tests. (5)

This opinion is reinforced further by a recent study carried out for the Steering Committee on the future development of Third Level Education.



It revealed huge variations in educational achievement, this time, however, due to socio-economic status.(6) The study showed that students from professional backgrounds obtained better grades than students from working class homes. Even where children from professional backgrounds achieved modest Leaving Certificate results, they were still more likely to go to college than those students from working class backgrounds.(6)

When we think of the problem of cultural enrichment or cultural deprivation, it is easy to presume that these problems are directly related to socio-economic background and that cultural deprivation is purely a problem affecting the under-privileged. It is important to recognize that factors like poor housing, overcrowding, etc. do effect educational performance. These factors, however, are not confined to this area of social class strata. There are of course differing value systems and value orientations, for different behaviours of different class groups. Where parental encouragement is poor, as previously stated, student performance can be affected, regardless of socio-economic-status. A good home as regards education i.e. encouragement, etc., irrespective of its position in the social order, has been found by many research studies to be the most powerful determinant of scholastic achievement and educational attainment.

### **Background to Questionnaire**

The relevant literature has give me sufficient information to conduct a questionnaire on this topic of family background. This will give me further proof and information which will be linked to perception and visual awareness at a later stage.

Parental background and attitudes are aspects of the literature to be considered. As has been previously stated, the parents of a child exert a huge influence on the attitudes and behaviour of the child and also his / her educational achievement, which we will be linking, obviously to the area of art, craft and design and the students awareness and understanding within its realm.

There are several important aspects to be considered when illustrating what a strong and important area of discussion this is in relation to the teaching of art, craft and design in the classroom. Firstly, we considered the fact that the school is not the only teacher in the student's educational experience. How can we relate this to a questionnaire? Questioning the student on their parent's interest and involvement in their education could be one way. This could be approached in relation to art, craft and design through asking, whether or not the student has been to an art gallery before. If they had, who in fact brought them? This is an important angle to be brought into the question. Even if they had in fact been brought to a gallery before, the chances are it was with the school. This factor has to be taken into consideration.

Parental encouragement and attitudes can be as influential as socio-economic status. As stated in the previous part of this chapter, a good home, i.e. a home with encouraging parents, etc., irrespective of it's position in the social order has been found by many studies to be the most powerful determinant of scholastic success. Many things can be taken into consideration here, such as the question of reading habits. Are the students encouraged to read at home? What kind of literature is available to them? Are there magazines available? If so what kind of magazines or newspapers are purchased by the parents?



This, once again, all leads back to the parental influence. It is the parents who will buy the newspapers, it is also the parents who will allow certain types of magazines to be bought.

The local library is also another factor to be considered. Are the students members of the local library, and, more importantly, are they encouraged to use it. Even if the students have sufficient books at home, are they encouraged to read at all? This particular question will be approached by asking the students how many books they have read within a certain time span, so that the students, whose average age is thirteen, can put this question into context.

While television can be an educative agency, if viewing is not supervised it may have a detrimental effect. This can also be said of computer games. Computers can be valuable tools in education, however, when student's play a computer game for leisure only (e.g. Nintendo, etc.) this is when parents should intervene. If students are not supervised they can play these games for up to four hours. How could this be educational? How can students become aware of anything in their environment if they are not looking at anything but a screen? As Max Frisch in his novel Homo Faber points out, "Technology may be regarded as the knack of arranging the world so that we do not have to experience it". Technology, if unsupervised, at once becomes an educational burden instead of an educational opportunity.

Experience is an important part of perception. Levels of perception can be limited by limited experience. Thus the power of television and computers can be detrimental, if abused, they can become limiting. Television and computers can be valuable educational tools, however, when unsupervised this could affect the level of perception of the student.

The results of the questionnaire will be discussed in Chapter Five.



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## CHAPTER 2

### TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF VISUAL AWARENESS

#### A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

Young people everywhere must learn the  
forgotten art of seeing life with their own eyes -  
[Oscar Kokoschka]

Environmental factors must influence the way we see things. Experience and culture also affect our perception. It is important, however, to include how aware students are of what is in their environment. Are they in fact seeing what is around them? If they are not, would this affect their standard of practical work in the classroom, or even their understanding of work done within the classroom?

It is absolutely necessary for children to be enriched with a visual environment because

children who are rarely affected by perceptual experiences show little ability to observe and little awareness of differences in objects. (1)

What exactly do we mean by perception? Why do individuals only see certain objects until others are pointed out to them? Why might individuals not be aware of certain objects within their immediate environment? How would this affect the students and their understanding of art, craft and design?

Irving Kaufmann defines perception as....



... the particular characteristic means whereby man places himself in his environment, knows it and acts upon the incoming information after he has coded it for himself and given it a meaning. It is a basic and beginning ingredient of the artistic and creative processes ....perception influences learning of all kinds in a profound way, and the quality of art is intimately dependent upon its personal functioning. (2)

Though it may not always appear so, to look at something is an act of choice. No object is merely perceived out of idle curiosity - there is a reason for its being noticed. This is the selective factor at work - taking notice of certain objects of interest and passing over those that do not interest us. This selective device, has, according to Kaufmann, its origins in primeval times, when man existed closely tied to an actively hostile environment so that danger could be readily identified through movement or change in external conditions. (3) June McFee shares this opinion with Kaufmann, as she states that children who come from rural areas and whose visual development occurred in more open areas, may see more details in the city, due to the fact there would be such a change in environmental factors for a rural child, and also so much more 'movement'. (4) This is also true she says in relation to their practical art work, where urban dwellers put less detail in their drawings than rural dwellers because the latter are exposed to less and so, do not have to ignore as much. (5)

Rudolf Arnheim discusses this theory of selectivity in one of his many essays on the psychology of art. He puts forward his theory that children receive too much of the wrong kind of visual stimulation.

How many of our children lack sensory stimulation. One might suspect that most of them receive too much. What is wrong with them may be something quite different, namely that they are incapable of responding to perceptual challenge.

The blunting of their perceptual and cognitive responses may be a defense against incomprehensible, frightening overwhelming sensations. I am suggesting that what is needed is not more shapeless, mysterious unrelating sensations but instead more perceptual challenge. (6)

Our five senses, or sensors, eyes, ears, nose, tongue and touch all gather information from our surroundings. This information is then passed to the brain and each individual has either a passive or active reaction to this. If it is active, the individual has perceived an object or image. This act of perception involves a range of human functions, an act of choice has taken place. "It involves not only the state of awareness but an ordering aspect that gives the awareness a quality of meaning". (7) Kaufmann continues to explain how we are unique as a species in this fact. He states that man alone appears to be able to know and control his environment.

It is probable that most living things have some measure of awareness of their surroundings. However, in man this capacity reaches its fullest development with a sensitivity and refinement that raises man well above his closest living cousin on the evolutionary scale, permitting him to successfully adapt to his environment. This awareness of the environment, feeling the force of its dynamic pressures and the quality of its physical and operating components is made available to humans through his senses, which in turn activates the processes of perception. (8)

Perception is achieved through an active choice, we choose to see and we choose not to see. Children who are deprived of visuals in their environment could not and do not have this choice. They can only perceive what their environment allows them to. (9)



Aesthetic awareness can be taught therefore through an increase in a child's awareness and sensitivity to his environment. (10) Children raised in an environment of visual deprivation may appear to be slow learners. Research shows, however, that if these children are then introduced to a more stimulating environment, they can catch up on those who had a more visually stimulating upbringing. (11) This opinion relates to that of the behaviourist who believes that, "the environment is primarily responsible for the making of the child". (12)

One of the major contributions in the field of art education can therefore be said to be one of helping people learn to see qualities that normally escape their attention.

The degree of sensitivity and intensity of awareness during the process of perception, has a distinct bearing on the art work of students at all levels. (13) The development of visual awareness in students, can only serve to promote creative thinking. Each individual student's art work will differ depending on the environment in which he lives, how he perceives that environment, and what he chooses to see. Therefore, what he draws will differ depending on the environment in which he lives. The more a child learns to perceive, the more he will develop in sensitivity towards colour, form and space. (14) "Perceptual growth is a growing sensitivity to tactile and pressure sensations". (15) This is an important part of the art experience. Every child is able to perceive, it is just a matter of how aware that child is of what he sees. The more a child learns about his environment, the more he will perceive and notice, or become aware of. This, obviously, must affect the practice of art in the classroom. And, is a challenge to all art teachers.

## Visual Awareness Defined

So what in fact is visual awareness? Why do individuals only see certain objects until others are pointed out to them? Does this mean they are not visually aware? What qualities does a visually aware individual have that makes them so?

To be visually aware an individual must do more than just look or see something. It is more than just being aware of objects in the environment. Throughout the review of literature related to this topic, certain words re-appeared on numerous occasions. These words or sentences should help us define visual awareness.

Visual awareness involves observation. It is necessary for an individual to be aware of differences in objects. An act of choice must be present. Information must be coded. This information must be given a meaning. Response to perceptual challenge is important, this response can be active or passive, the individual must be sensitive towards his environment, colour, form and space and see qualities that would normally escape attention.

Visual awareness is obviously highly important in the realm of art education not only as regards understanding, but for students to develop their learning, after all it is "the basic and beginning ingredient of the artistic and creative processes". (16)

### The Importance of Visual Awareness in Art Education

As we mentioned, Kaufmann states that visual awareness is the basic ingredient of the artistic process. (17) Here the art teacher may play an



important part in developing in youngsters the eagerness to see, feel and touch their surroundings. (18) Arnheim gives suggestions on how this may be achieved through materials and also through explanation. He stresses the importance of relevance for the students.

... the materials to be used must permit inherent order, and permit the creation of such order at a level of comprehension accessible to the child. Children cannot get a grip on what they cannot comprehend, they can only shut themselves off. But it is precisely this shutting off that we are trying to undo. What is needed is the experience that among visible things, there are some that can be understood after all. (19)

The role of the art teacher cannot be emphasized enough in this situation. As Eisner sees it...

... if artistic learning was in fact an automotive consequence of maturation, the task of an art teacher would be a relatively simple one. He would merely need to supply art supplies. (20)

### The Perception of Art Works

The recognition of the environmental influences on art is not complete without a parallel evaluation on how this might affect the perception of art works. Our acceptance or rejection of art is strongly influenced by our visual environment and past experiences. Another aspect to be considered is the role of our own culture as regards perception. As Kaufmann states, "It is necessary to recognize the interactions between the individual and his society". (21) He continues, "we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by culture". (22)





The art we have been subjected to can also influence our opinions and how we perceive or expect art to be.

In the visual arts, children develop expectations for visual form, often from the type of art he has been exposed to. This can influence the way the child conceives of art.... What he expects art to be can tend to hamper his perception of objects that for him do not belong to the category art. (23)

In short, what a child learns through his experiences, at home, and in society in general, can create expectancies that admit or reject certain aspects of the environment. This is a problem facing all art teachers, and a barrier to be broken down. John Dewey in his "Art as Experience" notes that any person in looking at a work of art is bringing his whole past life experiences with him when looking at that work. Experience is an integral part of this perception. Culture, is also, as stated previously, highly important. Objects are perceived differently by different individuals, depending on background, etc. Our environment and culture act in two extremes, developing our visual awareness and ability to perceive, but also hampering our vision through preconceptions.

### Culture

It may be said, that as individuals we are products of our time and our comprehension of art, is the result of our experiences with a particular culture that influences our perception beliefs and acts.

The culture impinges upon the individual, and shapes his personality, just as in one of the components of that culture - education - that consciously attempts to affect the development of each student. (24)

Finally we can say that as our culture changes, and our surrounding environment changes, this can be said to affect the way we all see - including a students perception of his surroundings. The new society that is emerging may change our ways of perceiving. We can draw from this that our understanding of art may also change due to this fact. Art education therefore, must also grow along with the very influential environment surrounding it. The importance of the ability to perceive and visual awareness can be summed up in a statement made by Paul Cezanne. "A sort of liberation, the mysterious becoming eternal. Everything falls into place.... I see".

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## CHAPTER 3

### SUPPORT STUDIES AND VISUAL AWARENESS

#### BACKGROUND TO SUPPORT STUDIES

Support studies have been most important for art teachers since their introduction as part of the Junior Certificate Examination. What, though, are support studies? What are their requirements at examination level? Could they be improved? If so - how? Do they promote visual awareness within their requirements? And how could this be developed?

Support studies require that students consider several concepts during practical work for the Junior Certificate Examination. Each student must on completion of the examination have a collection of materials and studies which 'support' the work they have completed. They can take the form of a description of techniques, tools used *etc.* They should include, very importantly, Art Historical References. That is, artists relevant to their work, whether the work is two-dimensional or three-dimensional, painting or graphic design. Once again the artists used, or artistic movements used, should 'support' the work completed and the students should feel confident in talking about their influences, etc.

Support studies are significantly important for the teachers of art also, to gain an insight into how much their students understand. It is a means for the teacher to see where weaknesses lie in students' work and understanding of the subjects.



There are certain requirements for the Junior Certificate in the area of support studies, but how relevant are they in relation to the course objectives of the Junior Certificate Art, Craft and Design Syllabus? Support studies do in fact promote many objectives of the course from "helping the students sustain projects from conception to realization", (1) to helping them "...develop an awareness of historical, social and economic role and value of art, craft and design aspects of contemporary culture and mass media". (2) It is also a vehicle to enable the students express "personal responses to an idea, experience or other stimulus", (3) which is a major part of the requirements.

It is of utmost importance that support studies are an integral part of the learning process. Support studies should be encouraged within the classroom, during practical work, but also as a home activity, thus ensuring that students have more independence and control over what information is present in their work. If this was encouraged, it would also mean less work for the individual teacher and ensure that repetition of imagery would not occur in the support studies, within the class group, in the form of photocopies, etc.

If and when support studies are integrated sufficiently into a scheme of work, the learning process that takes place is of greater value to the student, and the project itself develops further and more coherently, having much more influence and effect on the work in progress than if it was left to the end on completion of the project which is common. Support studies should run alongside the project in hand and reinforce the learning process. They should include and involve research that is carefully selected, suitable and relevant to the work in progress.



Support studies are necessary to create in the student an awareness of other cultures in the world. Contemporary artists must also be included and these should not just be Irish artists. It is of utmost importance for the students to be introduced to work from other countries as well as their own so that their work seems worthwhile and relevant to them. These artists should be both past and present.

The old Intermediate Certificate Examination did not enforce such a formula. Day long examinations only gave students the opportunity to perform within certain limitations. It also, did not require any such art historical influences to be present in any form. It is not only necessary in this situation but also as a stepping stone towards the Leaving Certificate Art History and Appreciation course. At least now students entering the Leaving Certificate course are not completely unaware of artists and artistic movements as they would have been before, on completion of the Intermediate Certificate Examination. Now at least they have a basis to build upon. The art historical and appreciation section of the support studies, is in my opinion, of the utmost importance. It is this I lay an emphasis upon in the classroom and this shows through in the students' notebooks. Students must be aware of and be able to appreciate art works. They should be able to respond to, criticize and evaluate works of art. This is extremely important to the students' practical work and its obvious necessary development.

### Promotion of Visual Awareness

So, how in fact do support studies promote visual awareness - if at all? Visual awareness is and should be an important general aim of art education. The way this should be approached is through discussion of

visual awareness and the aims of support studies in conjunction with each other.

As stated in the previous chapter, visual awareness involves observation. How would support studies promote this? Students must observe a number of things when compiling support studies. Namely their own work in progress, objects relating to their theme or subject, techniques, etc. They must also be aware of differences in objects to be visually aware, and an act of choice must be present. How do support studies promote this? This is promoted through the students choice of content of the support studies. Lay out of support studies could also be included here. Students must be sensitive towards their environment, colour, form, and space and see qualities that would normally escape attention. The fact that students should be constantly on the look-out for objects, relating to their project would promote this. The art teacher should be constantly encouraging this.

All the aforementioned would relate to the students practical work and development of ideas, etc. The next area to be discussed is the area of art historical references and how they could promote visual awareness.

### **Art Historical References**

As stated before in the previous chapter, the art we have been exposed to can influence our opinions of art works.

In the visual arts, children develop expectations for visual form, often from the type of art they have been exposed to. This can influence the way the child conceives of art..... What he expects art to be can tend to hamper his perception of objects that for him do not belong to the category art. (4)



This problem facing art teachers can be broken down through support studies. Students can now be made aware of artists that they might never have made contact with before. Through support studies, students can also be made aware of the relevance of these artists' works in conjunction with their own work. Students must, however, be visually aware to appreciate works of art. As previously stated, observation is an important part of visual awareness. This is important when looking at a work of art. Information must be sought. This must be coded and given a meaning. Response to this information is important as is an active response. All this can be achieved through art historical references. All of this can be achieved through support studies.

### Background to Questionnaire

For this area of study a questionnaire was compiled for students. Throughout the year, for each class art historical references were used. Students were made aware of different artists and movements. For the Junior Certificate students should be able to respond to, criticize and evaluate works of art. If all these were achieved a teacher is helping a student become visually aware. This is what I was aiming for. The way I planned to assess whether or not students were aware of their surroundings or not, was by questioning them on art works in their environment.

Art works in their environment, were, I considered, works of art at home or on the school corridor. Students would have had to notice especially the works of art on the corridor, to be considered visually aware. The students would have to do more than just know that these were copies of paintings on the walls. It is more than just being aware of objects in the environment.



The students must have observed the painting or prints, be aware of differences. In other words the response to the work must have been an active one. There must also have been a choice made. Therefore questions that will be asked of the students will be to describe a painting at home. And also one on the corridor. Not only that but they should also be able to say whether or not they like it and if so - why? If not - why not? The results of this questionnaire will be discussed in Chapter 5.

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## CHAPTER 4

### VISUAL AWARENESS IN THE CLASSROOM

#### METHODOLOGY

#### BACKGROUND TO METHODOLOGY

I am currently completing my teaching practice in Sancta Maria College, Ballyroan. It is an extremely large all-girls school catering for up to 1000 students. Art as a subject has a high standing within the school, due to the strong profile of the art department because of the large number of successful applicants to art colleges over the years. The scheme I have chosen to use for my practical application, to promote visual awareness in the classroom, was a scheme focusing on tactile texture. The scheme ran for eleven weeks. The aim of the scheme was to develop an awareness of tactile texture through a mixed media poster. Students did not compose the layout of the poster themselves but did experience the process of lettering. The theme of this scheme was "In Touch With Nature".

The final piece was a group effort. It was a combination of all the students' individual works. Each student had a section of the poster to complete. At the end of the scheme, the poster would then be combined as a single unit.

#### Practical Application

This was the second scheme to be completed by this First Year class and the students had already been encouraged to constantly be on the 'look out' for objects relating to their work for the support study notebooks, which they



have been compiling over the year. From the very first day of teaching practice, I insisted upon the necessity of keeping a support studies notebook which was promoted as a home activity. At the end of each class, I would give the class an activity which was to be completed for the next class. Evaluation of this work was a main priority at the beginning of the following class, reinforcing the importance of the work. The first activity to be completed for this scheme in relation to the notebooks was the collection of both visual and tactile textures. It was an activity based exercise, to introduce the students to a new concept.

The first class, was a class on paper manipulation. Students observed textured objects, they then tried to recreate the textures using paper. This promoted the observing aspect of the process of visual awareness. As well as the fact that students had to become aware of the differences of textures of objects. It was also promoting a sensitivity to qualities of objects that would normally escape attention. This process was repeated in the next class through observational drawing. The students were also aware of the fact that they went through the process of creating a visual texture by looking at a tactile texture. Support studies for this class included collecting visual textures.

To give the students a chance to render lettering for themselves, the next class was a class on lettering so that the students would understand layout, types of lettering, etc. For support studies for this part of the scheme, students were asked to collect different types of lettering in magazines. (Fig 4.1) This would give them the opportunity to look at magazines for more than just the content. The students were made aware of poster designs in their environment as well as lettering in their immediate environment in other words things that might normally escape their attention.

The next eight lessons, saw a return to the topic of tactile texture. The aim was that students would develop an awareness of tactile textures. I also hoped that students would gain a working vocabulary to be able to discuss appreciate and evaluate work by each other and other artists. Gradually, students through the development of the project began to become more aware of objects in their environment which could be brought into their work. They began to look around them. They began to see possibilities in objects in their immediate environment that would normally escape their attention. Mundane objects in their home environment were now seen in a new light. Objects like pasta, toilet rolls, egg shells, buttons, etc. now all had possibilities as part of their project, (See Fig.4.2 - 4.7) the whole process of what visual awareness is and the path it should take, was being taken by each student. Each individual student became aware of differences in objects. They became sensitive to their environment, colour and form. They began to see qualities in their environment that would normally escape their attention. Each individual had an active response to a perceptual challenge. Choices were made and information was coded, not only was that information coded but it was also given a meaning.

### Art Historical References

At the beginning of this scheme, students had preconceptions of what a work of art should be. The previous scheme completed was a painting and drawing scheme, and obviously paintings were used as art historical references. Even though these works were by twentieth century artists and abstracted, they still fitted into the realm of 'painting', which meant 'art' to the students. As each person looking at a work of art is bringing all his past



life experiences with him, it was inevitable that as the scheme progressed and we began looking at creative embroideries etc. and knowing the class, these pieces would be questioned. Firstly, paintings were used to show texture through painting. Artists such as Van Gogh, Yeats and Jackson Pollock were used as references (Fig.4.10 - 4.12). Reactions to Jackson Pollock were mixed. Reactions like "I could do that", or "that's not art", were not unusual. This however, was to be expected. They did, however, agree that the piece in question did have a visual texture, which was also obvious in the other two.

Over the next couple of weeks, works from the Embroidery Design Group were shown. These were works by artists working at the moment. Irish contemporary artists. Reaction to these works was very positive. Their influence can be seen in some of the pieces of the group poster. We discussed techniques, subject matter and materials used by the artists. Through discussion it became obvious that some students would not have previously considered embroidery, and these pieces shown, as works of art. They could however, by the end of this scheme not have thought this. Their own work and the work of the Embroidery Design Group soon had changed some opinions.

Obviously different students have different opinions as to what a work of art should be. Family background, experience and environment all influence what a student perceives. A student's exposure to mass media, his / her ability to be flexible in his thinking background and culture factors of the time all influence the development of aesthetic awareness. Hopefully, through this scheme and its art historical and contemporary references, these students will be more open and flexible in their thinking and opinions towards art than they were before. I also hope that I achieved my aim of



developing an awareness in students of their environment and surroundings on the completion of this scheme.



4.1

EXAMPLE OF SUPPORT STUDIES





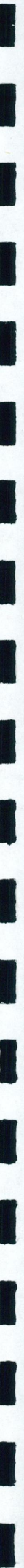




4.2

COMPLETED GROUP POSTER





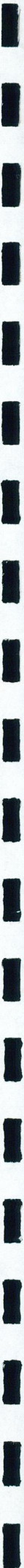




4.3

EXAMPLE OF STUDENT'S WORK SHOWING  
SELECTION OF FABRICS









4.4

STUDENT'S WORK  
USING FOUND MATERIALS





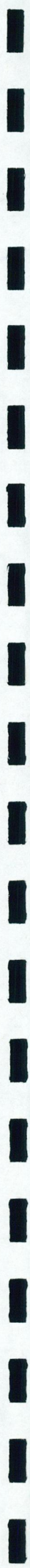




4.5

STUDENT'S WORK USING  
MIXED MEDIA









4.6

EXAMPLE OF STUDENT'S WORK









4.7

EXAMPLE OF STUDENT'S WORK









4.8

STUDENTS EVALUATING  
CLASSMATE'S WORK







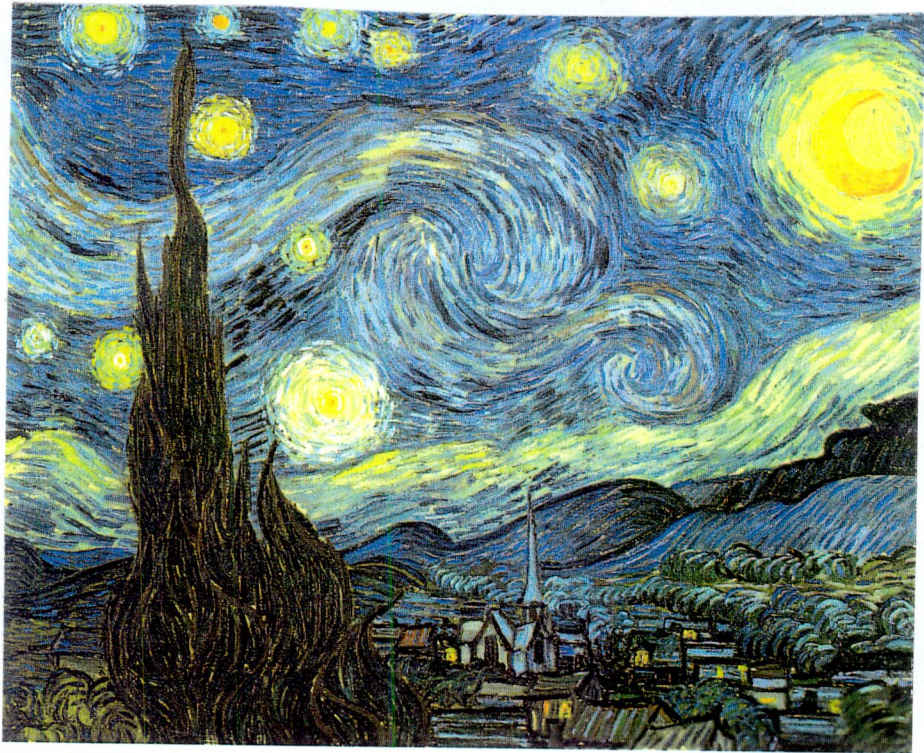


4.9

OTHER STUDENT'S WORK  
USED AS A REFERENCE







*The Starry Night*, Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890). Oil on canvas.

4.10

ART HISTORICAL REFERENCE  
USED





*About to write a letter* Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957).

4.11

ART HISTORICAL REFERENCE  
USED



*Frieze*, Jackson Pollock (1912–1956).

4.12

ART HISTORICAL REFERENCE  
USED



## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

#### THE FAMILY INFLUENCE

Parental background and attitudes ie. socio-cultural factors were the main sources for the first questionnaire. It became obvious that parental attitudes have a profound effect on student performance and also student perception and attitudes. (1) As the home environment plays a huge role in the life of a child, this had to be discussed in relation to visual awareness.

All students received a questionnaire to help me determine what kind of involvement the parents have in the childrens' lives. Students were questioned on

- Whether they had been to a Gallery before.
- If they had, who brought them?
- Were they a member of a library?
- Were they encouraged to use it regularly?
- Did they have magazines / newspapers at home?
- Did their parents supervise how much television they watched?
- Did their parents supervise or monitor what they watched?
- What type of programmes were they allowed to watch?
- Did they have a computer?
- Did their parents supervise the time spent playing on the computer?

All these questions were answered by all students. The total number of students questioned was 28. The results of the questionnaire were both interesting and sometimes shocking.

Three quarters of the students had been brought to a gallery. Quite a large number for a class of first years. However, the majority of these were brought by their school, during their primary school years.

All students answered positively to the question of membership to a library, unfortunately only forty three percent of the class were regular users, although all students claimed to be regular readers. All stated that they were encouraged to read. All students had access to magazines and newspapers in the home environment.

The next part of the questionnaire also considered the home environment. This time in relation to technology, i.e. television and computers. All students watched television for more than two hours a day. In fact, answers ranged from two hours up to four and a half hours a day. The answers relating to parents monitoring this amount of time and also content of the programmes being watched were alarming. Seventy-five percent of students were not monitored by their parents at all, either in relation to the content of the programmes they watched, or the amount of time spent in front of the television.

As regards computers in the home environment only fourteen percent of the class did not own a computer. Another alarming statistic here was the fact that of the eighty-six percent that did own a computer only twenty percent of these students' parents monitored how long was spent playing on them. Each student is on average playing on the computer for up to two hours per day. Combine this fact with the average student watching television for two and a half hours a day and we have a recipe for quite an anti-social society in the future. Not only that, but in relation to this dissertation topic, we can



say that these students are looking, but they are not looking around themselves and at their surrounding environment.

### Art Works in the School Environment

The results of this section of the questionnaire were mixed. All students claimed to have paintings (or copies of paintings) on the walls at home, and yes, they could all describe them. However, as regards the art works in the school only one student could describe a painting on the corridor. Of course they could all say - "The one with the kitten", or "There are holy pictures there". But in only one case was it obvious that the student had looked closely at a painting. She had obviously gone through the process that makes someone visually aware. She obviously observed the painting. She then looked closely and saw that it was an unusual technique (pointillism) that she had never see before. Her response was an active response. She had also decided that this was her favourite because of the variety of colours. A choice had been made, as she could defend the reason for her liking it.

What these results tell me is, that as first years these students were not looking around them. This questionnaire was completed before the practical application promoting visual awareness was completed. Now I know through the students' practical work and support studies and evaluations, that they are in fact now beginning to 'see'.

## Conclusion

Visual awareness is obviously an important factor to be considered by any teacher of art, craft and design. Its importance cannot be stressed. This dissertation has attempted to define and emphasize its role as an aim of art educators. The importance of family background was firstly considered as an environmental effect on visual awareness and its effects were noted. Next a definition of visual awareness was arrived at through a review of the relevant literature. This was then further used to discuss the methodology in the classroom. It was noted that visual awareness can be taught, it should however, not just be an aim of the art educators but a general education aim. There is something extremely positive about being visually aware, about being able to perceive objects in the environment with fresh eyes. To be able to help individuals see with fresh eyes, what they may be taking for granted in their environment, is an exciting endeavour. This is the challenge for all art teachers and one that has to be met.





**APPENDIX A**



Please answer all the questions as honestly as possible

Have you ever been to an art gallery before?.....

Who brought you? Was it your parents, or somebody else?.....

.....  
.....  
.....

Can you remember the name of the gallery?.....

Are you encouraged to read at home? How many books have you read since Christmas?.....

Have you access to magazines or newspapers at home?.....  
.....

What type of magazines would they be?.....  
.....

Are you a member of a library?.....

Are you encouraged to use it?.....

Do you own a computer?  
.....

Do your parents monitor how long you spend playing on it?  
.....

How long would you play on it a day?.....

Do you watch much television?.....

On average, how many hours a day?.....

Do your parents monitor how long you spend watching television in a day?.....

Do your parents monitor what type of programmes you watch?.....

**Thanks for your help**



**APPENDIX B**

Please answer all questions as honestly as possible

Are there art works in your home? This could be copies of paintings or prints,etc.....

Can you name the artist who painted it?.....

Do you know the name of the piece?.....

Can you describe how it might have been done?.....

.....

.....

What is the painting/print about?.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Can you describe any of the paintings on the corridor outside your classroom?.....

.....

.....

.....

Have you seen it anywhere

before?.....

Is it your favourite? Why/Why

not?.....

.....

.....

.....



APPENDIX C

WEEK AND DATE	CLASS GROUP AND TIME	THEME	SOURCE	ART ELEMENT	ACTIVITY SKILL	MATERIAL	ART HISTORY HERITAGE OR OTHER VISUAL REFERENCE	CROSS DISCIPLINARY CONNECTION
24/11 week 1	1A5 8.45 - 10.15	In TOUCH with Nature	natural textured objects	Texture	Paper manipulation	Cartridge paper	Van Gogh Yeats Pollock. Rubens Durer	
1/12 week 2	↓	↓	naturally textured objects	Texture	observational drawing	paper pencils	magazines, poster design	
12/1 week 3	↓	↓	letraset	shape through lettering	lettering	pencils, rulers graph copies	Embroidery Design Group artists	
19/1 week 4	↓	↓	previous work on texture	Texture	Fabric manipulation	fabric fabric stiffener scissors, glue, sellotape, masking tape, needles,pins	Students work	
			as above	Texture	Fabric manipulation through creative embroidery	↓		





WEEK AND DATE	CLASS GROUP AND TIME	THEME	SOURCE	ART ELEMENT	ACTIVITY SKILL	MATERIAL	ART HISTORY HERITAGE OR OTHER VISUAL REFERENCE	CROSS DISCIPLINARY CONNECTION
26/1 week 5	1A5 8.45 - 10.15	In TOUCH with Nature	as above	Texture	Fabric manipulation through creative embroidery	fabric fabric stiffener scissors, glue, sellotape, masking tape, needles,pins	Students work	
2/2 week 6	↓	↓	↓	Texture	↓	↓	↓	
9/2 week 7	↓	↓	↓	Texture	↓	↓	↓	
2/3 week 8	↓	↓	↓	Texture	↓	↓	↓	



**APPENDIX D**

## QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

**Results from questionnaire given to all  
students in class**

**Total no. of students - 28.**

% of students who have been brought to an art gallery	75%
% of students who have <u>not</u> visited an art gallery before	25%
% of those who <u>have</u> visited an art gallery	
- brought by parents	48%
- brought by school	52%
% of students who are a member of a library	100%
- regular users	43%
- do not use library regularly	57%

All students have access to magazines and newspapers.



All students watch television on a regular basis

% of students whose parents monitor the amount of time spent watching television or content of chosen programmes	25%
% of students <u>not</u> monitored	75%
% of students who own a computer	86%
% of students who do not own a computer	14%
% of those who own a computer who <u>are</u> monitored	20%
% of students who <u>are not</u> monitored	80%
% of students who <u>could name</u> or describe a painting or print on the corridor	3.6%
% of students who could not	96.4%

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