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THE ART ROOM :
A STUDY OF ITS UNIQUE PEDAGOGIC EFFECT
WITHIN THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL SYSTEM

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Education
in
Candidacy for the

DIPLOMA FOR ART AND DESIGN TEACHERS

by

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JUNE 1996

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of the following in the production of this dissertation. Ms. Eileen Doyle, Dr. Deirdre Raftery and Prof. Iseult McCarthy.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Classroom : Room within school building where a number of children are taught together as a group.

Atmosphere : An emotional impression conveyed by ones environment.

From personal observation, it would appear that the art classroom within a school has an atmosphere unlike any other room, particularly within the community school system. The room is specifically designed and arranged for the subject of art, craft and design. Therefore it has a unique appearance in comparison to classrooms for other subjects. It allows for a relative freedom of movement, it combines individual and group activity, it allows students to express themselves verbally as well as visually. Enabling them to gain an holistic experience and therefore allowing them to grow both educationally and personally through experience of the subject. The unique characteristics of the art room engender a climate that may be beneficial to the learning process. The purpose of this dissertation is to examine this theory and establish if it is indeed the case. It will be necessary to discover if this atmosphere does in fact exist as a recognisable phenomenon. If so, how did this situation develop? And if this atmosphere exists, is it of benefit to the learning process.

This dissertation is a record of that process, documenting the procedure undertaken in four stages. The first chapter, introduces the theory to be developed. The second chapter is a study of the literature appropriate to the research. The third chapter is a record of the classroom research project and its findings. The fourth chapter is an overall

conclusion from the study, culminating in a series of reflections and recommendations that may be of practical use to prospective art teachers.

The initial thoughts regarding the issue of atmosphere in the classroom were raised during an observational period in a convent school in Dublin. In which the low status that art has as a subject within the academically focused school was obvious, in comparison with previous experiences of schools, within the community school system. It would appear that the community school in question greatly values art and this is evident by the unique classroom atmosphere, which was missing in the convent school.

In the community school the art room has attained a certain status and aura. Purpose built, in order to comply with the community based ideals of their conception. The architectural design for the majority of community school buildings, was such that it highlighted the importance of the artroom. It projects an important image of the school. The location of the room is specifically chosen in order to create this effect. This information dictated that the research ought to be concerned with the community school system, with particular reference to the first year students of Colaiste Chiarain Community School in Leixlip, Co. Kildare as a case study.

In order to establish set criteria to define the terms of study, it was necessary to conduct preliminary research. It was important at this point to specify the understanding of atmosphere within the classroom, as a basis for study. This was examined through qualitative and quantitative research. By interviewing art teachers of varying levels of experience in the community school system, it was possible to establish certain foundation points to enable the research to proceed.

In discussing these issues with the teachers it became evident they did indeed agree that a unique atmosphere existed. An inner city teacher

believed it was "less formal and the kids have more control, it doesn't necessarily follow a straight line academically". (1) A teacher from a rural school felt it was important to engender a "creative, enthusiastic atmosphere, reacting to my motivation". (2) A student teacher agreed hoping to create a "relaxed, pleasant atmosphere, switched off from other subjects, allowing more creativity". (3) She felt the introduction of a radio allowed them to "work to themselves, not being distracted by each other". Others suggested using the radio as a system of reward to maintain discipline. The inner city teacher was very concerned that the students provide their own motivation, "timing at their own pace, reducing tension allowing an atmosphere of discussion and less pressure". He found that "kids are conditioned to dislike school, but in fact they enjoy it, it is often a viable alternative to a rough home life". His beliefs concerning child-centred experience were to prove influential as the research developed.

Having established that art teachers working within the community school system, (1) agree that the unique atmosphere of the art room exists as a phenomenon, and (2) see value in it, it was necessary to ascertain the opinions of students.

The children who took part in all the experiments and research involved in this study, were 48 first year students from Colaiste Chiarain, who had chosen art as an option subject, therefore being relatively new to the art class environment. To discover their opinions regarding the atmosphere of the art room, a short experiment was conducted. After a discussion as to whether they found any differences between classes within the school, they were asked to write down on prepared voting slips in private, three words that best describe their feelings while in art class (See Table 1). A wide variety of responses were submitted. Relaxed, being the most commonly held emotion experienced during the class, appearing

on more than half of all the papers received. These findings demonstrated that the students recognised and reacted in a positive manner to the unique atmosphere of the classroom, as expressed by Roisin "it is very different, to any other class".

The preliminary research provided evidence that teachers and students were aware of a unique classroom atmosphere. This enabled further research into the theory to take place.

TABLE 1
RECORD OF STUDENTS DEFINITIONS OF CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE
Percentage of Students Using Specific Word.

WORD CHOSEN	%	WORD CHOSEN	%
Relaxed	32	Stress free	1
Creative	17	Joyful	1
Free	9	Practical	1
Excited	6	Nice Pictures	1
Enjoyable	4	Energetic	1
Comfortable	4	With Friends	1
Bored	3	Concentrating	1
Option	3	Sleepy	1
Fun	3	Sad	1
Interesting	3	Thoughtful	1
Content	2	Alive	1
Awake	2	Calm	1

Source : Classroom atmosphere experiment, 20 November 1995.

It was also necessary to compile a preliminary record of factors, that were considered important in the creation of this classroom atmosphere, at the outset of the research. To act as a control figure, to compare with later findings and conclusions, one list of criteria related to the classroom itself : comfort, enthusiasm and creative atmosphere were considered to be the most important requirements. Confidence, creativity and positive attitude were to be the primary attributes that students could develop from such a class. This control figure, illustrated important points raised as the research progressed, demonstrating highly relevant issues to the study's conclusions.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 1

1. Interview : Phelim Connolly. Ringsend Technical Institute. 17 November 1995.

2. Interview : Una Nelson. Colaiste Chiarain Community School. 4 December 1995.

3. Interview : Sandra Madden. NCAD. 7 December 1995.

CHAPTER 2
CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE

A Review of the Literature

This chapter is a review of the literature appropriate to the research, to discover a theoretical basis, as a foundation for the study.

The theme of the atmosphere of a classroom has not been widely documented, and this has presented initial difficulties in collating background information. It would appear that the prevailing climate of the art class, is related to the wider topics of classroom management and of the effects of the classroom environment on students. Therefore, it is with regard to these two sub-headings, that initial enquiry is an assessment of the writings of the great educational theorists, in relation to the subject, while later research examines the findings of contemporary contributors.

The great educators were principally concerned with broader issues than the specific atmosphere within an individual classroom. Their philosophical theories identified more general points than matters of classroom management; but they are important statements which underline teaching techniques today.

The earliest writings considered were those of Plato, c.427-347 BC. His theory that education is not a utility, but a means of achieving personal unity and harmony, is summarised in his statement, that education begins by "educating mind and character". (1) This comment is highly relevant to underpinning why an art class may have a unique atmosphere. Art is a unique subject in which students can express themselves, without regard to standardised concepts of correct or incorrect answers. His theory underlines the teaching philosophy that a teacher has responsibility to create a climate in which students can achieve those

personal ends, and the less academically focused atmosphere of the art class may engender this.

Using Plato's statement as a point of departure, later educationalists also argued for the creation of an appropriate environment. The goal was to achieve more rewarding personal success, as opposed to achieving conventional academic standard.

Friedrich Froebel, 1782-1852, developed this point, insisting that all-round development is the aim of education, particularly stressing the importance of art as an integral part of the curriculum. His statement that there are "many teaching environments and so few schools" is explained by his further comment, that it is "the spirit alone, which makes the school a school, and *the room a schoolroom*". (2) This phrase is highly relevant, stressing the importance of the environment in classroom education.

Maria Montessori, 1870-1952, develops this point when she states that "it is well known how our pedagogy considers the environment so important, as to make it the central point of the whole system". (3) Her own system (operating within the area of the pupils sense of mastery being their highest reward) took account of the importance of surroundings. She states that "when the child is placed in certain conditions that favour him. He manifests an extra-ordinary activity". (4) Her reform plans for schools are still relevant in our educational system. Many classrooms today are, as she remarked "neither adapted to the needs of adolescence, nor to the times in which we live". (5) Her recommendations suggested the system should be run on "modern lines with artistic simplicity, gaiety and free from artificial constraint, this should provide an interesting and pleasant form of occupation". (6)

Although recognising external stimuli is powerless, without an internal answering force within the child, Montessori believed that this

force could be ignited by development of their imagination, if the environment is correct. She condemned the school of her time as "a bare naked place, where the grey colour of the walls and the white muslin curtains over the windows, preclude any alleviation of the senses". (7) She saw this as being oppressive to the development of the creative process, which should be encouraged, as it cannot be forced. Her proprosals to improve the environmental settings to facilitate their imaginative abilities, ranged from social reform to proposals concerning the fabrication of desks. Her theories are summarised in her statement that the "school is the child's society". (8)

The ultimate expression of creating an entirely non-oppressive atmosphere must be the Summerhill experiment of A.S. Neill, 1883-1973. His arguments must be included in any reading of this subject. His belief that the "school should fit the child .... instead of making the child fit the school"(9), is highly relevant in creating a child centred learning environment for the art room. An interview with an inner city teacher confirmed this. Mr. Phelim Connolly of Ringsend Technical Institute, believes that it is important that the teacher should set in place the environment in which a child can set their own goals. He states that "nationally set academic standards are often not within their reach, achievable personal goals have more value in their situation". A.S. Neill's philosophy of allowing the classroom to fit the child, would appear to be operating in this situation. His theories have often been in conflict with traditional attitudes, regarding informal classrooms. B.F. Skinner, the behaviourist psychologist stated that "the free school is no school at all". (10) Neill disagreed with these attitudes. He saw tidiness as stifling creativity and inspiring visual imagery as irrelevant (preferring the children to decorate their space according to their own taste). Neill

challenges the traditional viewpoints, under his general philosophy of the paramount importance of the happiness of the child.

Having established that the great educationalists recognised the need for an environment that creates an atmosphere conducive to allowing a student to develop towards personal goals, it is appropriate to consider the thinking of psychological theorists.

The work conducted by Jean Piaget, 1896-1980, into children's development has had a profound effect on the educational process. Application of his theories to the classroom illustrate certain points that should be considered; classroom groups, time and materials should be arranged to enable such thought processes to develop. The Nuffield Project, 1968, found it to be beneficial to allow children within the same room to function at different levels, with various opportunities and stimuli. This could have highly appropriate benefits for the art room. Piaget accepts without question that one learns through "mobilisation of the senses"(11), and a variety of materials to stimulate these learning processes is important. This conforms the importance that the environment be created specifically towards certain ends. But he also states that it is the relationship of the materials, that should attract our attention, in order for the child to arrange them according to the relevant schemata. His theory that the schema, or mental map, is developed by means of assimilation and accommodation, would appear to emphasise the necessity of a wide variety of material with a related theme. The importance of visual and tangible material in the classroom, to establish an atmosphere conducive to learning, seems to be justified by this example.

Psychologists, therefore, also recognise the importance of how an environment influences the child's learning process. To discover if it is

considered relevant in today's educational system, it is necessary to assess the thinking of teachers who have addressed this issue.

Early teaching manuals stress the importance of a settled environmental framework "that controls them vigorously, but does not enslave them" (12), and allows them to live confidently in safety. They also illustrate the effect of aesthetic taste. Primarily, stressing tidiness in relation to function they also critically examine the standard of individual elements within the classroom, signage, lettering on books, arrangement of decorative elements, pictures, plants etc. playing great respect to the display of selected work. "Taste" was considered to develop from the non-visual atmosphere of the room also, unnecessary noise, bad manners etc. They make a forceful statement "children can never produce beauty, in a classroom ruled by a martinet" (13), fully recognising the individuality of the art room in stating that "all aesthetic learning must be accompanied by joy". (14)

Art teachers today reflect these ideas, when discussing their classrooms in Patricia J. Sikes essay. (15) They comment on the importance of creating a certain atmosphere, using words such as informal, different, relaxed and comfortable. Frequently, Sikes found that art teachers place more emphasis on the environment of their room, than teachers of other subjects, this comments on the significance of climate, ethos and atmosphere, and its effect on the learning process. The concept that it is the teacher who creates the climate is introduced. She states that this could be due to the fact that art teachers have a closer link with their subject than other teachers, and perceive success in terms of art culture, rather than traditional academic performance, leading to different teacher/pupil relationships within the class.

Art teachers appear to view themselves as educators in the widest sense, aiming for achievement in fields of self-confidence, individuality

and creativity, and facilitate this development by fostering an informal relaxed climate. Her conclusions are in accordance with Aspy and Roebucks studies (16), into the correlation between facilitative conditions and academic achievement. By stating that the art teacher is on the "right track in aiming to create the optimum conditions for their realisation".

These attitudes, held by art teachers, can create tensions within a school. The status of art can be affected by an attitude that art is not a "real subject", which has occured in less enlightened schools. It is also often indirectly condemned in terms of classroom management.

Michael Marland's comments (17) are those of a long established teacher/headmaster, and his opinions concerning classroom layout (pre-determined seating arrangements, traditional teachers table at top of the class etc.) suggest that other arrangements are inferior by implication, affecting the status of art as a subject within a school, and therefore on the attitude and climate within the art classroom. The attitude of the principal towards art is of great importance, in setting the tone. If the impression that art is not a "proper subject" is gained by students, the art teacher will have great difficulties in adjusting these beliefs.

Certain internal school attitudes concerning the status of art and external parental, social and vocational pressures can create tensions within the art class. Art teachers appear to protect against this by means of creating a personal ideal environment, an armoured barrier against external conflicting pressures. Students absorb this attitude and come to view it as a respite from outside pressure. A fifth year student Peter states "it's like a kind of oasis". (18)

Therefore it would seem that the range of writing considered, educationalists, psychologists, teachers, and students all recognise the uniqueness of the art room. But, as to the question whether the learning process is in fact affected, by the surrounding atmosphere, it is necessary to

consider the research work of McFee and Degges. Their study, art culture and the environment (19), introduces the idea that behaviour is modified by surroundings, stating that the layout of a particular classroom emits a signal on expected behaviour. Also commenting on the architectural design of student-centred schools and classrooms, and finding that they are "usually built differently from schools that stress discipline and formal education". The comparative research concerning the convent and community schools art room illustrates this point. The research conducted by the authors raise many questions of importance to the teacher regarding what they term the psycho-cultural climate of the classroom. This reflects the immense influence of the teachers dominant personality within the classroom, and how it defines the atmosphere. The study addresses the question as to how a teacher can make use of this position to determine a specific desired climate, leading to a conclusion that it is the teachers themselves, who are responsible for the atmosphere within a classroom.

The research of McFee and Degges confirms the importance of the teacher's role, but also raises the point as to whether the nature of the environment affects the learning process, with particular regard to art and design.

An important study in relation to this question, was conducted in 1963 by Wallach and Thomas (20), using two groups of 40 college students, as subjects in an art and design experiment regarding expansive or constrictive use of space in composition. The two groups worked on drawing projects based on music and creative writing, both groups were stopped, one being isolated in a bare room for an hour before being allowed to continue. The other being permitted to spend the time in small group discussion before continuing. The second groups work was, as to be expected, twice as expansive in the use of compositional space than the

first group. The research, however, also studied the groups in terms of high and low anxiety subjects, and their findings in those terms, showed that the low anxiety, extroverted students were more than twice as expansive after being in a social group during the break, than those in the isolated group. The introverted students were only marginally affected by the the break, regardless of the group they were in.

This raises some very important questions regarding assumptions of art educators. In relation to the belief, that an art room in which pupils have the freedom to talk and move about , is more conducive to creativity, than a strictly controlled room, in which everyone works alone without talking.

Using the compositional experiment as an indication of creativity, the findings of the experiment show that if all students were extroverts, the free atmosphere would be appropriate. But it leads to the question as to whether a free atmosphere is beneficial for the others, could it in fact be intimidating?

Using this question as a basis for further study, an experiment was devised to discover if classroom atmosphere is, in fact beneficial to the learning process, with regard to art for all students within the class.

The process of this research is conducted in chapter three.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 2

1. Plato, "*The Republic*" (Penguin Classics, 1987) p. 71.

2. Lilley, I.M., "*Friedrich Froebel. A Selection from his Writings*" (Cambridge University Press, 1967) p. 139.

3. Montessori, M., "*The Secret of Childhood*" (Longmans Green and Co., 1956) p. 137.

4. Montessori, M., "*From Childhood to Adolescence*" (Schocken Books, 1973) p. 108.

5. Montessori, M., "*Spontaneous Activity in Education*" (Robert Bentley Inc., 1917) p. 311.

6. Montessori, M., "*Childhood to Adolescence*", p. 108.

7. Montessori, M., "*Spontaneous Activity in Education*". p. 269.

8. Ibid, p. 310.

9. Neill, A.S., "*Summerhill. A Radical Approach to Education*" (Victor Gollancz, 1973) p. 4.

10. Becker. Application of behaviour principles in typical classrooms, in Clarizia "*Contemporary Issues in Educational Psychology*" (McGraw Hill, 1988) pp. 152-157.

11. Schwebel, M.; Raph, J., "*Piaget in the Classroom*" (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974) p. 247.

12. Hughes, A.G.; Hughes, E.H., "*Learning and Teaching*" (Longmans, 1937) p. 183.

13. Ibid, p. 240.

14. Ibid, p. 241.

15. Sikes, P.J., A Kind of Oasis in "*The Arts in Educations*" Tickle, L. (ed) (Croom Helm, 1987) p. 141-165.

16. A study of 550 teachers, suggesting a clear correlation between facilitative conditions provided by the teachers and academic achievement. Identifying three significant characteristics of teachers who created facilitative conditions.
    1. The ability, to understand the meaning that the classroom experience has for students, and the ability to express that understanding.
    2. Respect for students as separate persons.
    3. Genuineness of the teacher in relationship to the student.

    Aspy, D.; Roebuck, F., "*A Lever Long Enough*" (Washington DC, National Consortion for Humanizing Education).

17. Marland, M., "*The Craft of the Classroom*" (Heinemann, 1975) pp. 24-34.

18. Sikes, D.J., "*A Kind of Oasis*". p. 153.

19. McFee and Degges, "*Art, Culture and Environment*" (Kendal Hunt, 1980) p. 316.

20. Ibid, p. 348.

CHAPTER 3
CLASSROOM RESEARCH

Sociometric Test

To investigate the question whether all students benefit from an informal classroom atmosphere or not, it was necessary to design a psychometric classroom experiment, which could test this theory in concrete terms.

It was important to base the test on criteria that were relevant toi the process of arts education. Therefore, it was approached in accordance with Guildford's work, into the importance of creativity. His theories concerning convergent and divergent thinking (1) are appropriate methods to assess creativity within an art class. The principle of divergent thinking, the ability to generate a range of possible solutions to a given problem, was a sound basis on which to structure and assess the research. Therefore, it was necessary to design an experiment, that allowed each student to explore a range of possible ways to answer the question, in an imaginative and original way. This, more expansive approach to conducting the experiment, led to a consideration of measuring the students' creativity in the light of Wallas' four stages of creativity (2) : -

i Preparation

ii Incubation

iii Illumination

iv Verification

This allowed a wider assessment of the creative intelligence, than a single finished piece of work.

The third consideration to address was to adapt the experiment to the students' own experience. The work of Margaret Donaldson (3) in

highlighting the importance of a child-centred situation, to analyse their response, was very important in this context. She found that a question that was directly related to their own experiences and concerns, stimulated their naturally highly advanced imaginative abilities. Therefore, producing more creative, individual and original work, than a bland question, set merely to satisfy an adult academic enquiry. By using this principle, it would also measure their personality, as to how they would react individually to a given situation.

Using these three theoretical principles as a basis for structuring the experiment, it was possible to devise a four stage test, appropriate to their situation and environment. Which also allowed a variety of response and could be conducted with regard to varying environmental factors.

It was approached in terms of telling a story, which could involve them and capture their imagination. It involved them being in science class, conducting an experiment, under the supervision of the science teacher, Mr. Donnelly. Due to a combination of factors, not being their fault, the experiment went wrong, resulting in an explosion that rendered them momentarily unconscious. Upon recovery they find they have shrunk to only 2 cm in height, and Mr. Donnelly is chasing after them, extremely angry with the ruined classroom. Escaping to the art room, they find that they are trapped as he comes in behind them, blocking their escape.

At this point they were required to continue the story by means of an illustrative piece of work demonstrating their next move, addressing the divergent thinking issue.

"Only being 2 cm in height, the once familiar art room, now looks very different, how can you escape? Can you distract him? Can you create a diversion? Would you fight or hide? Use your own skills and use the

available resources in the room to help you escape using your imagination!"

Their response was to be carried out with accordance to Wallas' four stages of creativity, using four individual stages of the creative process. In involving them directly in the story, it took account of the child centred requirement. Also allowing a demonstration of their personality in how they dealt with the situation of escaping or hiding. The use of the art room environment as inspiration, also addresses the issue of classroom as a stimulating environment.

The environment of the room, being the means of comparing the results, had to be planned in order to create a specific atmosphere. One test was to be conducted under traditional schoolroom conditions, while the other was undertaken , introducing elements considered conducive to generating a creative atmosphere.

The students who took part in the experiment, were forty-eight first year children from Colaiste Chiarain Community School, Leixlip. They had previously been divided into two groups for art classes and having taught them since the beginning of term, a certain understanding of their individual personalities had been gained. Two equal groups of mixed ability students, provided ideal control groups for a comparative study. As both groups contained a wide range of students in terms of ability, attitude and behaviour.

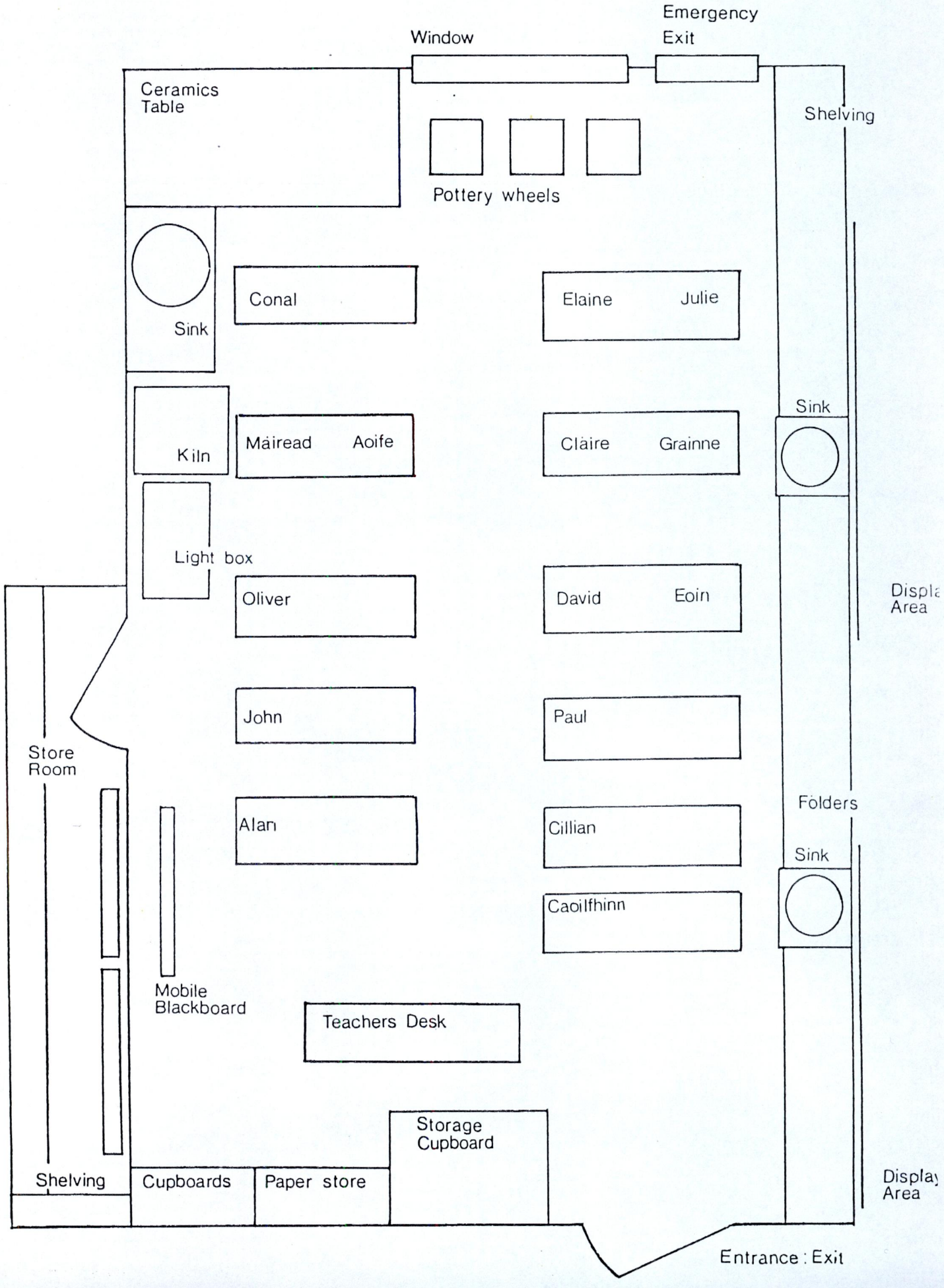
The experiment was conducted in the art classroom of the school. The first test recreated a traditional schoolroom layout (Diagram 1). The teacher's desk was positioned at the front of the class. The students desks were arranged in two columns facing the front, seated one behind another. The students were assigned set positions according to their personalities, in order to discover how they dealt with the new situation. Those who shared desks were allowed to talk with their neighbour only. The others

were not, without permission. Although answering questions related to the test. I did not engage in any personal interaction with either individual students or the class in general. The introduction was direct, without any visual aids as a form of stimulus. There were no opportunities given for expressing or developing their opinions. Although they were aware that the experiment was connected with the further study involved with at NCAD. The test, or the comparative criteria on which they were being examined, was not discussed. To reduce the visual stimulation as much as possible, work displayed on the wall was removed, and secondary source material was not permitted. All artificial lights were switched off and the only window was opened, giving a noticeable, yet not uncomfortable, breeze. This limitation of basic light and warmth factors contributed to the creation of a dull, uninspiring traditional classroom.

This greatly contrasted with the conditions for the second group test. In this case many of the environmental factors were reversed. The room was arranged in a format which allowed greater interaction (Diagram 2). The desks were positioned in such a way to allow this interaction to be heightened. Conversation and movement was permitted and encouraged. The teacher's desk was positioned amongst the students, although the class was conducted from various positions within the room. The test was introduced in an upbeat good humoured manner. The use of visual aids, illustrating events from Gullivers Travels and imagery from the television series 'Land of the Giants', stimulated ideas and discussion. Comments were allowed to develop and diversify.

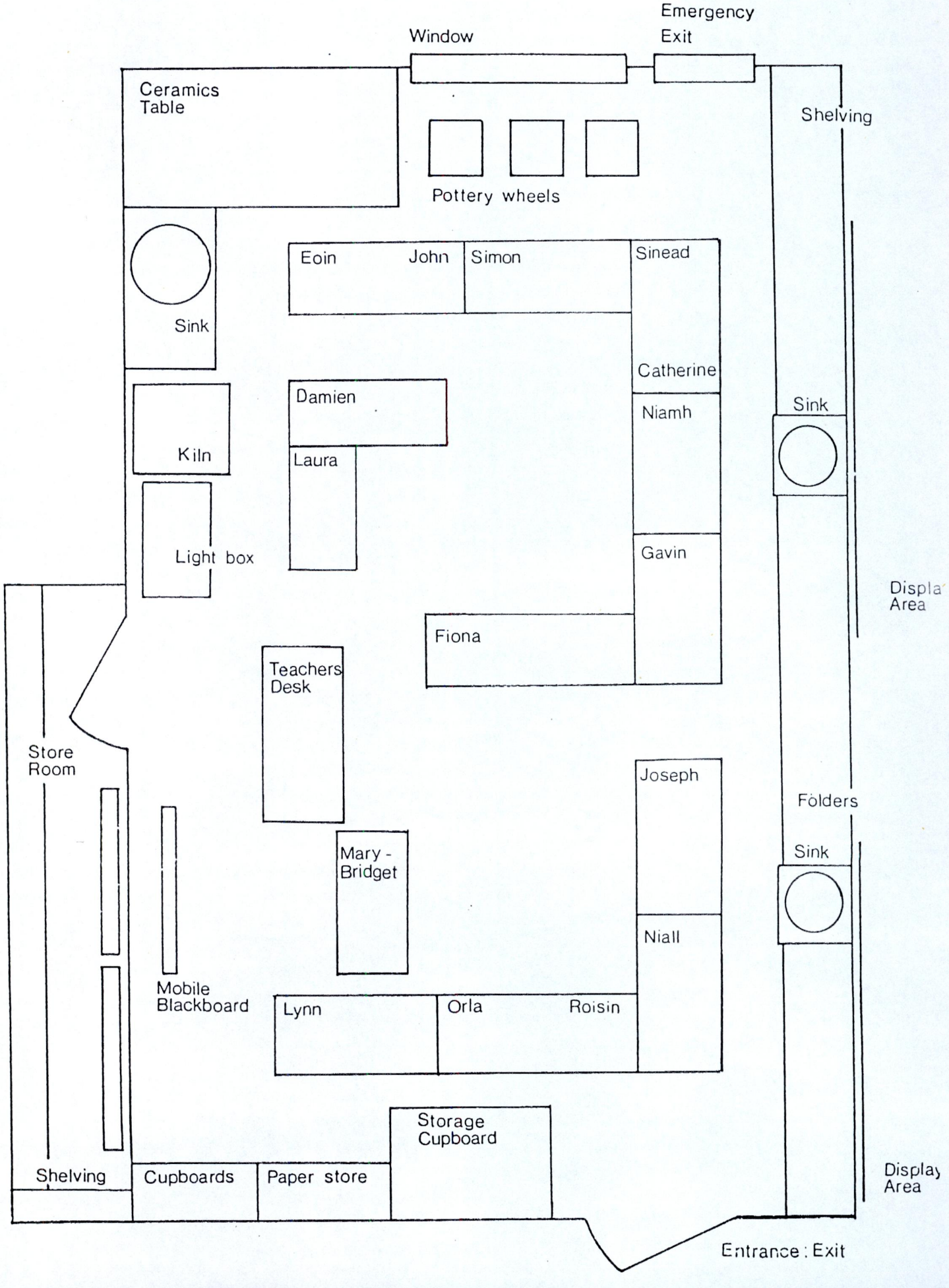
CLASSROOM LAYOUT : 1

FORMAL



CLASSROOM LAYOUT : 2

INFORMAL



I integrated with the class at a much greater level, giving assistance, advice and encouragement. Also responding to personal discussion, allowing more leeway in terms of discipline than is usually the case. The room was bright, well lit, warm and visually stimulating. Their own work was presented and relevant visual stimuli were displayed. The use of a radio, tuned to a channel of their own choice, greatly affected the climate within the classroom, contributing to the overall pleasant and relaxing atmosphere.

Experiment Observations.

The experiments took place on Monday 18th and Tuesday 19th December 1995. The tests are not making claims of psychological accuracy. Longer term research would be required to fully examine this issue. But many valuable points were raised in this experiment. The development of certain professional judgements in relation to the two groups was helped by the test. Allowing a conglomerate picture to emerge, through an analysis of the work of individual students. These findings were then further developed using comparative research to establish if this behaviour would persist.

The results of the tests were recorded in quantitative terms (Table 2 and 3). Marks were awarded for the various elements that structured the test. But it must be emphasised that the results should be analysed in qualitative terms, on a knowledge of students ability, personality and background. They were recorded using the double loop observation technique of Chris Argyris method of recording an individual action and establishing its cause.

TABLE 2

CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE : EXPERIMENT 1. FORMAL ATMOSPHERE

A record of the individual grades of students,

who took part in the formal atmosphere classroom experiment on Monday 18th December 1995.

FORMAL CLASS	DESIGN PROCESS 0-30	CREATIVITY 0-10	ACCURACY 0-10	ART ELEMENTS 0-10	DIVERGENT THINKING 0-10	ORIGINALITY 0-10	EXECUTION 0-10	CONTENT 0-10	TOTAL %	GRADES
E. Brooks	24	7	8	8	7	7	8	7	76	B
J. Coughlan	20	7	6	6	6	7	6	7	65	C+
L. Dungan	17	6	6	6	6	6	7	6	60	C
C. Delaney	19	6	7	6	6	6	7	6	63	C
A. Fleming	19	8	9	9	7	9	9	8	78	B
A. Conconnon	21	7	7	6	6	5	6	6	63	C+
C. Hegarty	18	6	7	6	6	7	7	7	64	B-
G. Healy	18	7	8	8	7	7	7	8	70	C+
J. Hughes	19	6	6	6	7	6	6	7	63	C+
P. Kelly	14	6	7	6	6	6	7	6	58	C
C. Murphy	18	7	6	6	7	7	6	7	64	B-
O. Leacy	12	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	41	D-
M. McKay	18	6	5	5	5	6	5	6	62	C
G. McCarthy	16	6	7	6	6	6	6	6	59	C
C. McMahon	17	6	7	6	6	6	7	7	69	C+
E. McNamara	19	7	8	8	7	7	8	7	71	B-
D. Prendergast	15	7	7	7	7	6	7	7	73	B-
C. Quigley	16	6	6	6	6	6	6	6		
TOTALS	328	115	121	122	105	115	119	117	1143	Av. 63.5

TABLE 3

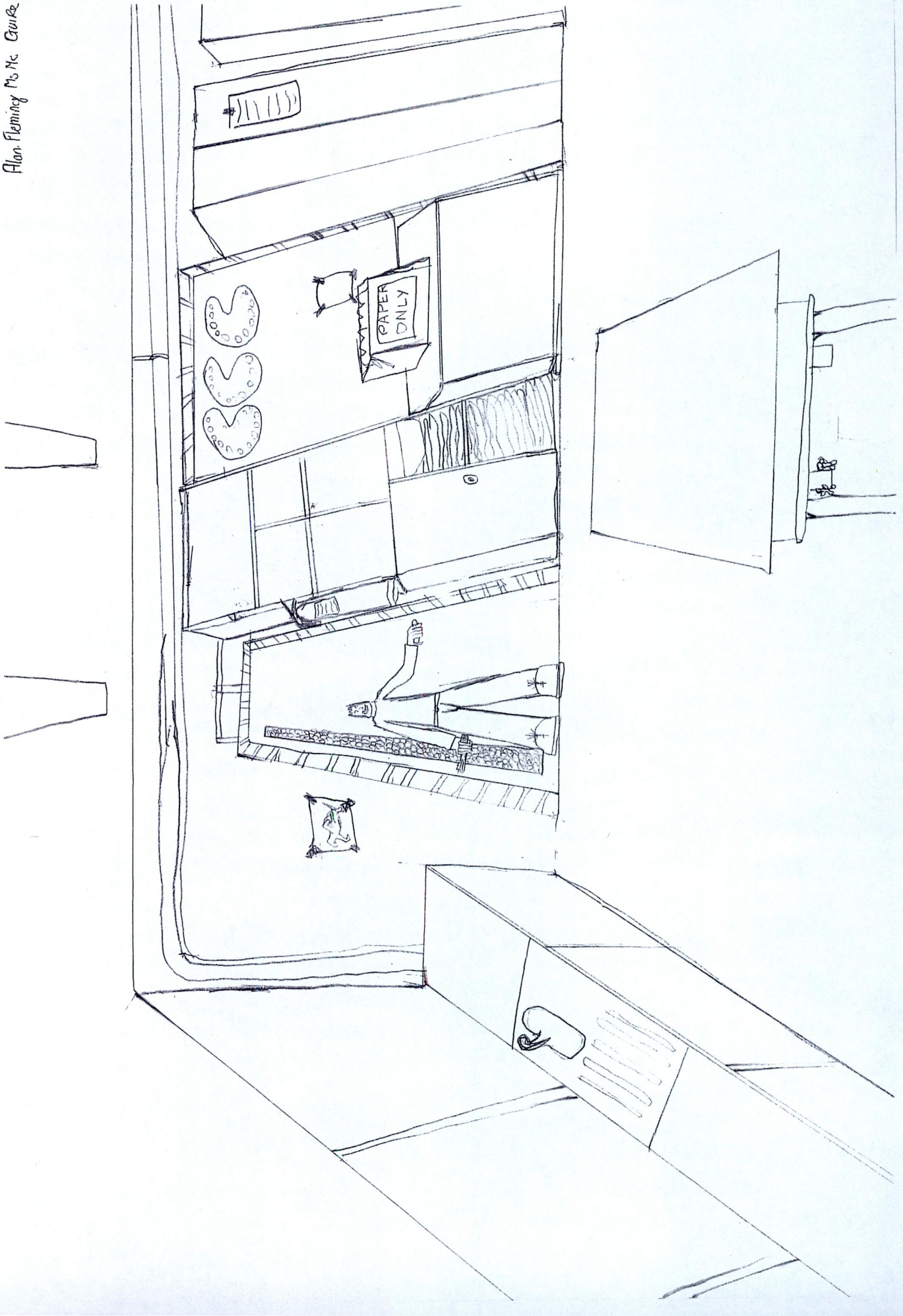
CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE : EXPERIMENT 2. INFORMAL ATMOSPHERE

A record of the individual grades of students,

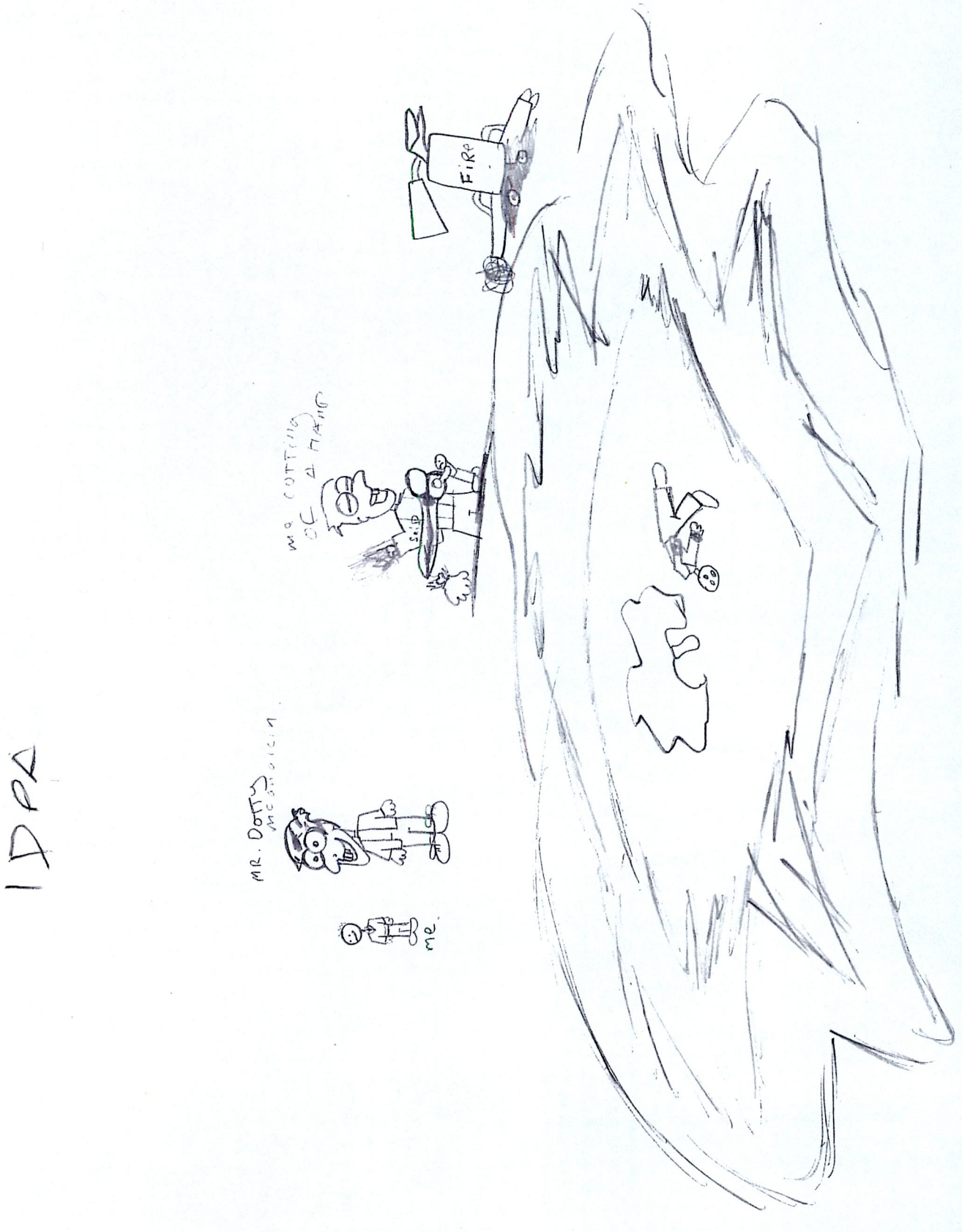
who took part in the informal atmosphere classroom experiment on Tuesday 19th December 1995.

INFORMAL CLASS	DESIGN PROCESS 0-30	CREATIVITY 0-10	ACCURACY 0-10	ART ELEMENTS 0-10	DIVERGENT THINKING 0-10	ORIGINALITY 0-10	EXECUTION 0-10	CONTENT 0-10	TOTAL %	GRADES
L. Brennan	20	8	6	6	9	8	7	7	71	B-
N. Charles	16	6	5	5	6	6	5	5	54	D+
J. Claffey	17	7	6	6	6	7	6	6	61	C
L. Kearney	20	7	6	6	7	7	6	6	65	C+
C. Cremin	16	7	6	6	6	6	7	6	60	C
D. Farrelly	15	8	7	6	8	8	7	7	66	C+
J. Doyle	13	7	5	5	5	5	7	5	52	D+
J. O'Connor	19	6	5	7	5	5	5	5	53	D+
J. Kelly	18	7	6	6	7	7	6	6	63	C
M.B. Donelly	26	8	8	7	9	8	8	8	82	B+
N. Lorrigan	22	8	7	8	8	7	7	7	74	B
F. McGowan	15	6	6	5	5	5	5	6	53	D+
E. Sheridan	18	5	7	5	7	6	7	6	61	C
R. Fitzmaurice	19	6	5	5	6	6	5	6	54	C-
G. Nolan	18	7	7	8	6	7	7	7	67	C+
S. Oman	17	7	6	6	6	7	6	6	61	C
O. Claffey	16	6	6	6	7	7	6	6	60	C
TOTALS	297	116	104	103	113	112	107	105	1057	Av. 62.17

Formal classroom, experiment drawing by Alan Fleming.



Formal classroom, experiment drawing by Oliver Leacy.



For example, it was found that Oliver (a talkative, though not disruptive student) had difficulties controlling his own behaviour during the test. In the formal group, he could not settle down to work for any reasonable period of time. As the class continued, he found it more difficult, resorting to affected behaviour to gain attention. This behaviour adversely affected his work. Although his work is not particularly strong in terms of observation or drawing skills, in this case it was very weak and below his usual standard. Recording this as a negative double loop observation, it appears that the restricted atmosphere of the test was the cause of his difficulties. But a student, who usually sits with him, Alan, sat alone. He managed to produce some very sophisticated work, exploring the principles of perspective in regard to the 2cm point of view. Excellent work that flourished under the same conditions.

This observation system was also used in analysing the work produced in order to discover if a pattern would emerge. Using comparative marking schemes relating to previous work completed with students, first impressions were that the work produced by the group in the creative atmosphere was strong in terms of the process, but surprisingly weaker in terms of content and execution than work previously produced. On examination of the formal groups work, a better attention to detail was found, and in certain cases the design process had clearly benefitted from the atmosphere. This initial finding was unexpected, being of the belief that an informal atmosphere is beneficial. But in trying to form a pattern, it was continually found that each student reacted to the atmosphere on individual terms. Although in a group situation, by relating the work produced to the students personality, it was heartening to find that the creative atmosphere was not detrimental overall, but not in fact appropriate in every case. This was very much in

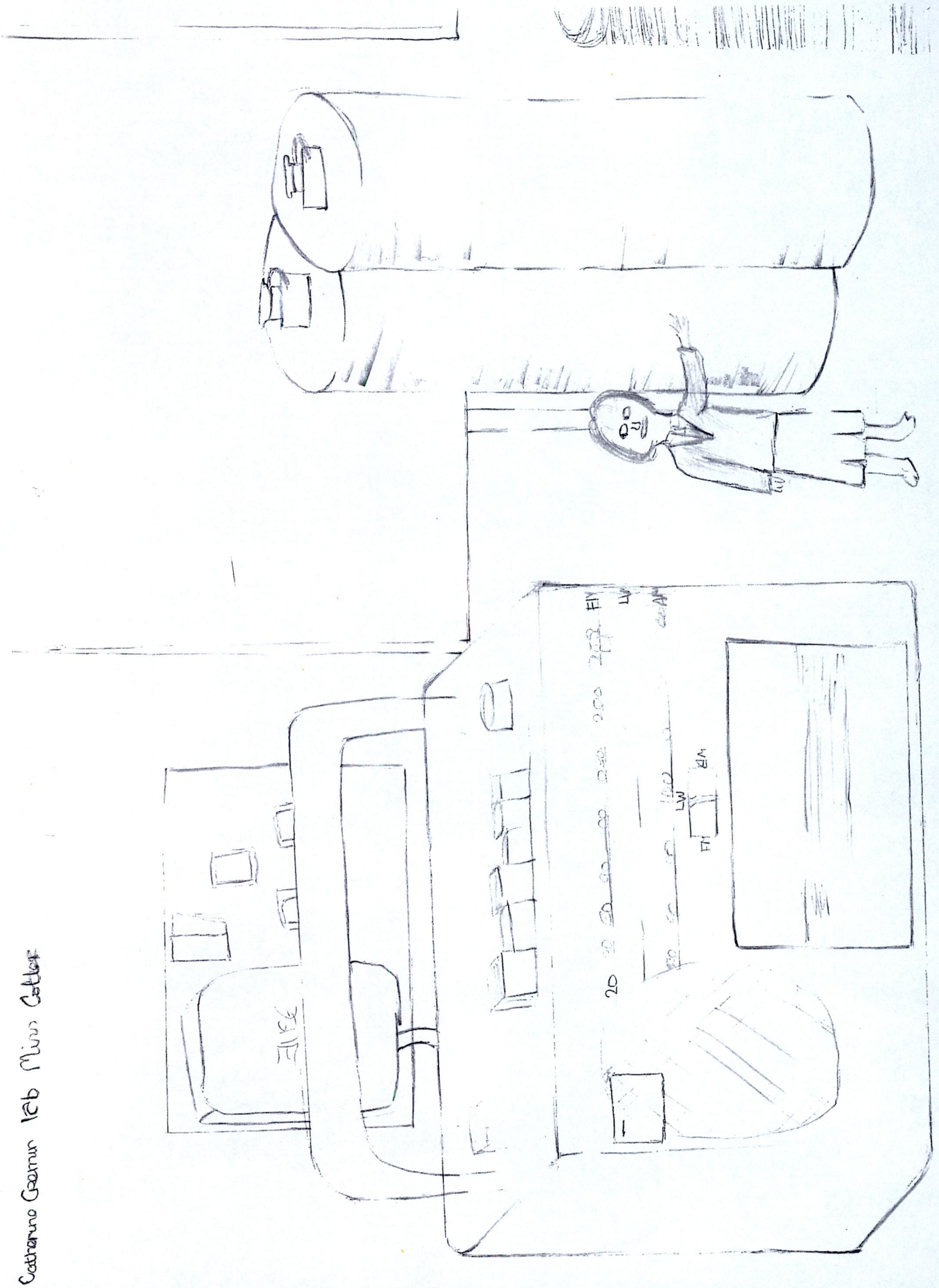
line with Wallach and Thomas' study concerning extroverts and introverts.

For example, Conal, a student in the formal group, does not place a high value on art as a subject, (he was the only student to make negative comments concerning art class, during the definition of atmosphere experiment previously). His dislike of art apparently stems from home, but his work developed imaginatively through the stages, to produce an entirely unexpected illustrative solution, which pleased him. A positive outcome for him in the same group as Oliver who found the climate difficult.

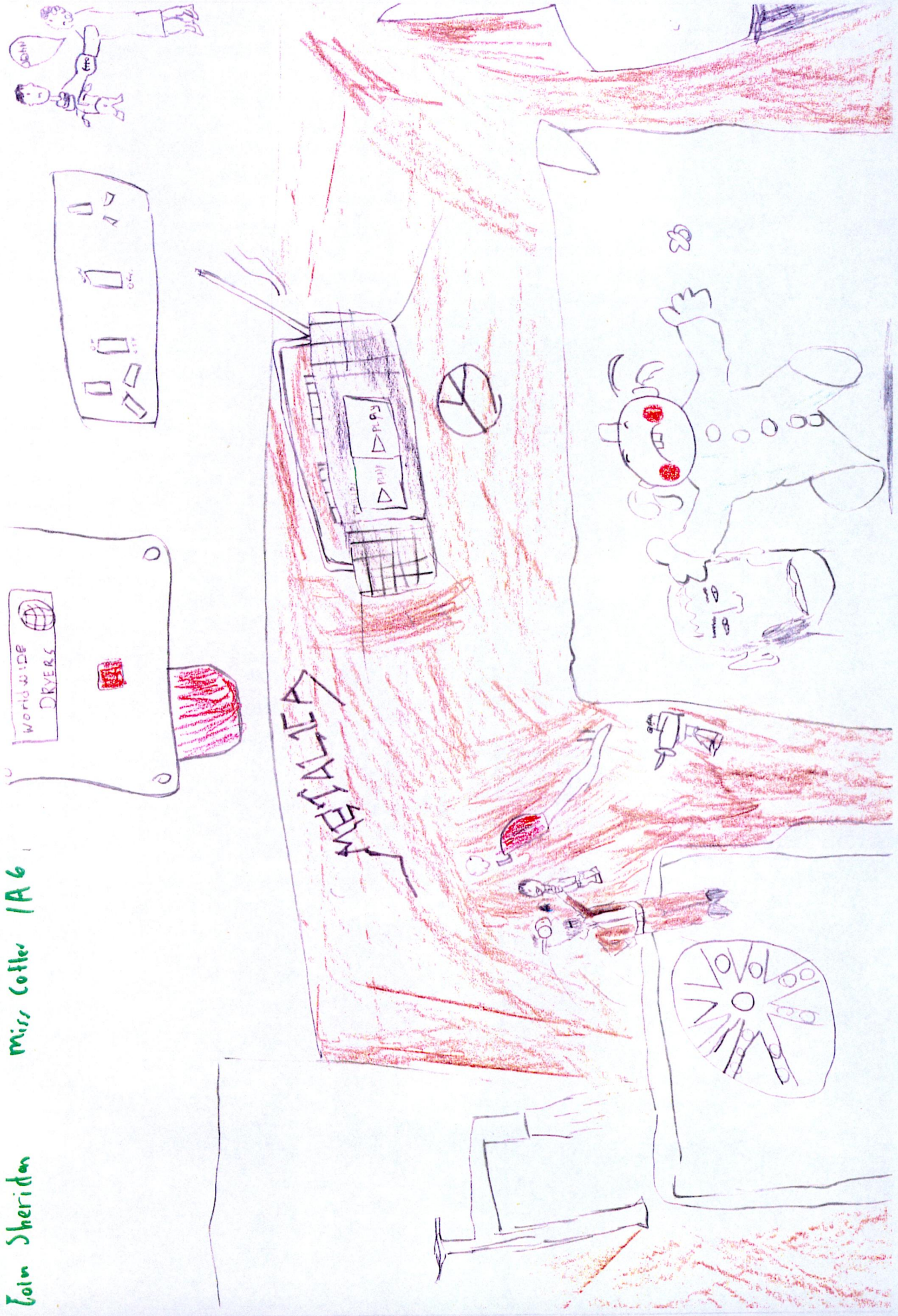
The informal group also produced varying responses to the atmosphere. While much of the student's work was more observant and imaginative, they did not often relate directly to the new stimulus in the room. The radio featured frequently in the students' work. In Catherine's piece, it dominated her work, being an observational drawing with very little imaginative input. This was disappointing, she is a capable student and it would have been expected that a "creative" atmosphere would have encouraged her to be more imaginative. Whereas, undoubtedly affected by the atmosphere, she appears to have relaxed and lost concentration, rather than being inspired by it.

The exact opposite was the case concerning Eoin, a very weak student. His work, despite his drawing difficulties, illustrates a heightened appreciation of his environment. Although derivative and tenuously linked to the purpose of the question. It is closely observed in relation to work he has previously produced, and has been taken to a high level of completion. The less formal climate, clearly helping him in maintaining his concentration.

Informal classroom, experiment drawing by Catherine Cremin.



Informal classroom, experiment drawing by Eoin Sheridan.



Once the work produced was analysed in relation to the student, it became clear that very few students were entirely unaffected by the different climates in the classroom. It is appreciated that many variable considerations affect the individual behaviour of a student, on a particular day. Beyond the control of this experiment and of the individual teacher. It is for this reason that observations were continued with certain students during following classes to ascertain if the behavioural pattern would persist.

These ongoing reflections were conducted with regard to the work of Donald A. Schön. (5) He states that an artful or reflective teacher sees a child's difficulty in learning not as a defect in the child, but a defect in the teacher's own instruction. Therefore, the teacher must find ways of discovering what is concerning the child and address the problem. The child's difficulty is unique and must be addressed using new methods not relying on the repertoire of explanations gathered through experience. This is a positive statement concerning the importance for teachers to continually reflect on their practice, in order to learn and develop their careers, inventing new methods for new situations, and to "endeavour to develop in themselves the ability of discovering them".

With these principles in mind, following classes were more informal, in order to establish a longer term pattern, in relation to certain students. In following less structured classes, involving aerial perspective, Oliver's work dramatically improved. Engaged in painting a clay tile, he used aspects of applying paint to create textural effects, creating illusion of depth through colour to a good standard, the classroom climate being an aid and not a restriction to his concentration. This positive behaviour was continued to produce highly satisfactory results. During a class investigation into three dimensional construction techniques, Oliver discovered a previously hidden ability in the use of clay. His modelling of

human figures was of a very high standard and far superior to any other student's work in the first year.

In the same group however, Cillian, (a talkative student who benefitted from the quiet atmosphere of the test, in terms of concentration levels), reverted to his normal talkative pattern of behaviour in following classes finding difficulties concentrating in an informal atmosphere. These students both in the same group, reacted differently to the climate of the room. This would suggest the atmosphere is of importance and affects students in individual ways. Not in generalised terms, of formal atmosphere equals greater concentration or creativity develops from an informal climate, but at a personal level according to a student's individual personality.

These findings raise issues of importance for the teacher of art and design, and they are discussed as conclusions and recommendations in the following chapter.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 3

1. Guilford, J.P., *Creativity*. American Psychologist. Vol. 5, pp. 444-54, 1950.

2. Wallas, G., *The Art of Thought*. Jonathan Cape, 1926, pp. 79-86.

3. Donaldson, M., *New Directions in Educational Psychology*. 1 : Learning and Teaching. Falmer Press, 1985, pp. 61-70.
Stated that how an experiment is presented to a child determines its response. Stressed the importance of having a human link in experiment to appeal to child. Example : Policeman chasing child in maze, allows subject to identify with situations.

4. Argyris, C., *Interpersonal competence and organisational effectiveness*. Tavistock Publications, London, 1962, pp. 99-106.

CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The theory that an informal classroom atmosphere is of benefit to an entire class is now open to question. It is understood that the research has limitations and touches on wider implications that cannot be discussed at this stage. But it does address the issue regarding the specific atmosphere within a certain sample group.

The results are at variance with initial assumptions held prior to the research. These assumptions were in line with educational thinking, that children would perform better in a positive, informal climate. This opinion appears to have developed without scientific background. The research work of Haddon and Lytton (1), using divergent thinking tests, did confirm this to some extent. But later studies have investigated the issue using other criteria. Bennett's work, using more creative methods to evaluate students abilities, such as creative writing, found insignificant differences between the two groups. (2) Possibly, this discrepancy could be due to the variable criteria, but it is probably the role of the teacher, that has the greatest influence on the formal or informal atmosphere. Bennett's use of creative criteria, as with Donaldson's child orientated questions, would appear to confirm this, thereby underlining the teachers position in directing the climate of the classroom.

Although strongly in favour of the unique atmosphere within the art room, it is of great value and ought to be carefully cultivated to take account of the abilities and potential of all students within the class. A laissez-faire approach is inappropriate, and may be damaging. Therefore, it is important for the new art teacher to recognise the primacy of their position, and develop techniques, which can assist and provide such a climate in an inclusive manner for the entire class. This also underlines

the importance of becoming familiar with the personalities and needs of each student.

As shown in the Nuffield experiment, it can be beneficial for children to function at different levels within the same room, according to various opportunities and stimuli. And, in developing Piaget's belief of the benefits of a wide ranging variety of stimulating resource material, with a related theme, for a class. It becomes clear that it is vitally important the prospective art teacher should consider this.

The teacher's role is, as discussed, that of a facilitator to assist the learning process. It is important that in developing techniques to heighten an appropriate classroom atmosphere, the teacher should be aware of this. It is also important that the teacher allows the climate of the class to develop from a child based direction, utilising and responding to the needs of all the students within the class. If the entire class is involved in creating the overall environmental atmosphere of the room, its encompassing and inclusive climate will benefit all.

It ought to be possible for the teacher to develop a scheme of work related to the classroom environment to encourage this. Beginning with heightening awareness of their surroundings, it may be possible to explore the room on an "awareness" trip by illustrating textures, patterns, forms etc. A record of elements may be documented as research material for a project involving classroom design. Three-dimensional models could be produced, illustrating their ideal perception of the physical attributes, functions, and requirements of the room. The room belongs to all the students and their needs are of ultimate value. The teacher's role as facilitator is often overlooked in the matter of displaying work. The room ought to be a statement that it is a working area for children. It should display what they are producing at a level and location that best suits them.

These practical suggestions, can be approached by encouraging creative techniques, to solve problems. The process of divergent thinking in tackling a problem, can have great benefits, as could a scheme of work that utilises the stages of creativity, particularly if approached from a child centred direction. The teachers stimulus should be in a form that allows for re-arrangement and juxtaposition by the students. It should be directed in an open-ended manner, facilitating the development of an inclusive classroom atmosphere.

Before commencing the research for this study, the initial considerations, as to how a successful climate could be developed, were concerned with the students *absorbing* the atmosphere. It is now clear that the students should be *determining* the climate of the classroom.

This ought to be the aim of the art teacher, who wishes to promote a comfortable unique climate within their classroom. It ought to be an atmosphere that stimulates and responds to each student within the class. Therefore allowing a feeling of personal well being to develop. Promoting their own sense of security and confidence in their environment. In turn, directing these positive attributes to the benefit of the class as a whole.

In summary, the form of climate to aspire to in the classroom is neither a formal, strict atmosphere nor a free casual one, but one which is related to the needs and concerns of each student within the class. To enable each to progress and develop to the fullest extent in relation to their ability, in essence, a child-centred atmosphere.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 4

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