

## **ABSTRACT**

**TITLE**      The Visually Impaired Child In The Art Class  
**COURSE**    BA Degree in Art and Design Education  
**NAME**      Sandra Dempsey  
**DATE**      June 1996

### **OUTLINE OF DISSERTATION**

In this Dissertation I have explored visual impairment and how the art teacher in an ordinary school can successfully integrate the child into his/her class. Chapter one discusses the educational issues relating to pupils with visual impairment and the discrepancies in the integration provision for both boys and girls in Ireland is noted. Chapter two explores how integration has proved successful in the United States and the need for continual planning to ensure a balanced curriculum. In chapter three a study was carried out using the method of Action Research. Through the use of Action Research continued change could be established in the classroom. The fourth chapter reflects upon the work of Padraig Naughton, who is a visually impaired ceramic artist and teacher. Padraig is a past pupil of Pobalscoil Rosmini and in 1993 graduated from the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. Finally chapter five examines the future of education for visually impaired children and reviews a teacher training course in New Zealand

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

THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED CHILD IN THE ART CLASS

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Education

in

Candidacy for the

B.A. DEGREE IN ART AND DESIGN EDUCATION

by

SANDRA DEMPSEY

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WILLIAM T. BROWN

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My special thanks to Ms. Eileen Doyle for her guidance and support. To Alex for his inspiration through the years.

Finally to my Family, Special Friends, and Diarmait for the continuous encouragement throughout.



Small things



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Second year student, Pobalscoil Rosmini, manipulating materials to create a three dimensional figure.....19
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GRANT BROS

## INTRODUCTION

I was first introduced to the art of the visually impaired child by 'Touch', an Exhibition of Ceramic Sculpture presented by the pupils of St. Joseph's School for Visually Impaired Boys, and was filled with excitement. The many positive and enlightening lessons to be learnt from a child who is visually impaired is what attracted me to the opportunity of working with these differently gifted young people. On embarking on my teaching practice experience I did have some preconceived ideas about impairment. I hope through this dissertation that prejudice or condescension can be avoided and the true character of each individual can emerge in the art class.

Small Room



CHAPTER 1  
INTEGRATION IN ACTION:  
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

**Educational Issues Relating to Pupils with Visual Impairments**

All children, including those with special educational needs have a right to an appropriate education,

each child deserves to be provided with the kind and variety of opportunities... which will enable him to develop his natural powers at his own rate to his fullest capacity. (1)

Teachers will find that this aim set out by the Department of Education for sighted students applies also to visually impaired students. In the art class it is the unique character of each individual that is being explored and developed. The problem of visual impairment should not diminish the development of character within each person. It should neither be blamed as a reason for low achievement. The art class can provide the perfect environment to stimulate a great sense of appreciation for one's self and one's work. It is first proposed to consider the different achievement levels of children that are sighted and those that are visually impaired in the art class.

**Integration in Special Education**

Integration is the most positive way to enhance the visually impaired student's

SWIFT TAILORS



self esteem. It is, Booth says,

most commonly applied to the bringing of handicapped children from segregated special schools into ordinary schools.(2)

Attending an ordinary school can help the visually impaired child to grow and learn in an environment that is shared by every-one and not in a self enclosed 'blind world'. This growth and development should occur in the most practical way possible, by living in it.(3) Colin Low believes integration can also foster in the sighted students an appreciation that the visually impaired child also has a place in the community.

This view is also shared by Michael McGuirk who is currently promoting "Breakthrough - Education of awareness and change"(4) which is a programme aimed at promoting appreciation of the handicapped child by ordinary children. The programme recognises that children of similar age share needs, whether they are disabled or not. It is aimed at second level schools particularly senior cycle students

The focus is on the person rather than on the disability realising in short-term a build-up of positive attitudes. This hopefully will in turn generate opportunities for everyone, with and without a disability.(5)

CHARTER BROOK



### **Procedures Leading To Placements**

The recommendations of the Special Education Review Committee (1993) are significant in the educational placement of visually impaired pupils. Traditionally recommendations were being made based on medical criteria. As part of today's assessment the personal, emotional, and social needs of both the pupil and their families are considered.

Assessment services in Ireland are provided mainly by the Health Boards even though a particular assessment may be for educational use. The Review Committee (1995), however have recommended that School Psychological Services be expanded. A group of assessors including the school medical officer, a school psychologist and a social worker would assist the primary and post primary schools in identifying children with special needs and disabilities. At all times the child's family would be consulted, so that they can make an informed decision.

### **Special Schools For Visually Impaired Pupils**

Department of Education statistics for 1990 / 1991 indicate that there are 532 visually impaired pupils availing of special education services. Of these, 115 pupils are attending the two special schools for visually impaired pupils in Dublin. Of these 532 students in need of special education, only forty are enrolled in Pobalscoil Rosmini, Drumcondra, Dublin, where an integrated system of education is provided.

St. Mary's Special School for Visually Impaired Pupils, Merrion, Dublin, has a

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total enrolment of 72. The school enrolls 49 pupils in primary and 29 in post-primary classes. The school is co-educational from ages four to eight years. After this only girls are provided for, until the age of eighteen. Each student takes the certificate examinations of the Department of Education. The school participated in the integration into ordinary school at post-primary level. The integration was of no benefit and was abandoned after a short period in the seventies.

St. Joseph's School for Visually Impaired Boys, Drumcondra enrolls 43 boys at primary level. The pupils then transfer to Pobalscoil Rosmini, a nearby community school.

### **Visually Impaired Students In Ordinary Schools**

There are 251 pupils enrolled in ordinary primary and post-primary schools. Partially sighted number 211 and 77 attend post-primary school.

Integration has proved successful at Pobalscoil Rosmini. Here there are 40 students enjoying the benefits of working alongside their peers in an ordinary school environment. Their successful social and academic integration is attributed to the flexibility of all the staff and parents and the provision of appropriate resources to meet the students needs. Special Programmes are devised by the four support teachers at the school to cater for the individual needs of the visually impaired students. It should be noted that this is the only post-primary school in the country to provide an integrated second level education. The school caters for boys. The review committee has noted this discrimination and

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recommends that "girls as well as boys with visual impairments have access to mainstream post-primary education." (6)

Disruption of family life is often a result of this lack of mainstream provision and many of the students at St. Joseph's and Pobalscoil Rosmini are boarding on the campus or transported from various parts of Dublin. Rosmini is a Community school and therefore draws a large majority of its students from the local area. All are accepted, an assessment test is given and students are placed in one of three groupings. One of the groups is 'mixed ability', another is the 'adapted programme' where students may need help in a particular subject, i.e. English. The 'special units' are groups of four or five per class. Here students can be provided with individual instruction in specific areas. The resource teachers who work with the classes are responsible for integrating the handicapped students. Integration at Pobalscoil Rosmini is extremely successful providing three different categories of integration, full, partial, and minimal.

It is imperative that funds be made available in other parts of Ireland to enable the ordinary school to enrol those with visual impairment. Correct provision for visually-impaired children whether in ordinary or special schools is important in order to ensure that the child may benefit and develop into a strong-minded and confident individual. This individuality can be positively achieved by providing a balanced art education for all students whether sighted or visually impaired.

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## FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 1

1. Primary School Curriculum, Teachers handbook Part 1, p.13.
2. Tony Booth Lecturer in Education, Open University, Integrating Special Education p.1.
3. Colin Low, Lecturer in Law and Sociology at Leeds University, active in a variety of organisations of blind and disabled people, Integrating the Visually Handicapped.
4. Michael McGuirk Fundraising and P.R. Manager, St. Michael's House, Dublin, Education and Living, The Irish Times, 1995 "Eradicating disabling stereotypes", p.3.
5. McGuirk Education and Living, "Eradicating disabled stereotypes".
6. Report of the Special Education Review Committee, 1993 Recommendations, p. 117.



Example 1. 1950-51

1. 1950-51

## CHAPTER 2

### WHAT IS MEANT BY INTEGRATION

Historically students with visual impairment and other physical and learning disabilities have attended special schools. The national move towards integration is now beginning to provide students, irrespective of differences with individualised education in ordinary classroom environments alongside peers who have no obvious or recognised disabilities.

Integration is concerned with educating all children, including those with disabilities in ordinary schools. Proponents of integration advise that all schools should adapt their curriculum to facilitate pupils with special education needs. Douglas Biklen suggested while addressing educators in Melbourne in June 1989:

How schools see integration is crucial: is integration understood as an outsider coming in or as creating a school culture so that it accepts all comers?(1)

The benefits of an integrated education must also be examined. Questions such as programme design, support services and how students can be included into "typical class activities" must be considered.

Integration is not an attempt to normalise children with disabilities, nor is it the recreation of segregated practices within the mainstream school with the attendant emphasis on labelling for ascertainment purposes.(2)

CHIEF BOOKS



### **Characteristics of Integrated Education**

There are many characteristics which determine the successful integration of children with a visual impairment. Attending a local school can be very beneficial to a child who previously may have felt isolated by his or her disability.

Integration in education can have a tremendous effect on the behaviour and socialisation of each child, therefore a welcoming environment in a local area can be very effective.

The proportion of visually impaired students in the integrated system is approximately ten per cent. This ensures that children are not totally isolated, they are surrounded by children with similar impairments. In the system of integrated education, visually impaired students can experience all forms of learning while still taking part in many of the other educational experiences that occur in a normal day at school.

With the help of technology and other educational resources, the pressure for a child or young person who is labelled 'handicapped' is reduced. Over a period of time children can learn to use specialised equipment such as a micro-writer or an optacon - a machine that converts print into tactile symbols.

A visiting teacher service was established in Ireland in 1976 by the Department of Education. It provides a nation-wide service to visually impaired children. The visiting teachers service concentrates on direct teaching, such as Braille, reading, numeric skills and handwriting/typing/micro-writing. This interaction can

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establish a good rapport with the student so as to encourage good attitudes to work, promoting a positive self concept, and the confidence to interact socially.

is ? The school support service provided by these visiting teachers and assistants who would bear the major responsibility for the success or failure of the programme. The visiting teacher would help to collate as much information about the child as possible. They can also easily recognise that a child may need specialist equipment and check to see that it is being supplied and used correctly. The participation in curriculum development can help raise the full-time teachers' expectations in order to develop positive levels of achievement comparable with the child's sighted peers. The visually impaired student is surrounded by people without a disability working in an ordinary classroom. This can also help to prepare the young person for effective integration into the work place.

Educational programmes are designed to enhance individuality. An American study carried out by Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman and Schaltman (1993) chronicled the experiences and perspectives of nineteen teachers each of whom had a student with deaf / blindness in class. All teachers became familiar with visual impairment as the experience progressed. The child with deaf/blindness was included because of a belief that all children have similar needs and abilities. Class plans were adapted to suit the whole class, not just the child with the disability. The teachers noted areas of the support services that were of most benefit to their student, but also those that were disruptive to the class and teacher. In the study students learned to communicate and work alongside their



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sighted peers, in an environment that has long been available to people without a disability. Teachers are now beginning to "see the person not the disability". (3)

### **A Need For A Planned Approach - The American Solution**

The planning and design of an educational programme is imperative if integration into mainstream schooling is to increase. As Colin Low believes,

It is not enough simply to impose, as the 1987 education act does, a general obligation to integrate, subject to considerations of educational suitability and efficiency.(4)

An educational team needs to be established to consider whether the curriculum is enabling or disabling. Educational teams ( comprising of special and general teachers, parents, and service providers) in America are currently using a programme, Choosing Options and Accommodations for Children (COACH) (Giangreco, Cloninger and Iverson, 1993) to plan an "Individualised Education Programme" (IEP). The programme includes social and health education. A national expert validation study established that COACH is an educational planning tool that is congruent with many exemplary practices for all children .(5)

COACH consists of three parts:

1. Family prioritization interview
2. Defining the educational programme components
3. Addressing the educational programme components in inclusive settings

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The programme determines the learning outcomes of the individual student and addresses the issues necessary for the successful participation of the child in general classes with students who are not disabled.

In a recent study (Giangreco, Edelman, Dennis and Cloninger, in press) the "use and impact" of COACH was assessed. The study revealed that COACH was successful in more than just planning a rewarding education programme for integration into ordinary schools. It provided multiple opportunities for educational and social development. The programme also helped to develop relationships between parents and professionals. Ireland has need of a programme to plan for the integration of visually impaired students to ensure inclusion and avoid exclusion from the curriculum.

### **Integration - Not for Everyone**

Increasingly children with the single disability of visual impairment are attending mainstream second level schools. Integration may not appeal to everyone and is often categorised as specialisation. As Lewis (1989) asserts

Integration has resulted in the growth of new categories of people, integration teachers and integration aides, who specialise in dealing with the group of clients labelled as integration children, a new class of disability.(6)

Integrated education may not be suited to parents either. The attitude that the 'professional knows more' is common throughout this country, and a lack of parent / supporter liaison is evident. Another lack of support for integration amongst some is due to the allocation of funds. A school may receive funds for

GOOD LUCK



a student who is labelled visually impaired without paying any attention to the remaining children in the school, who, among them may be a student who needs help but may not fit into the 'severe' category.

A recent report on special education provision in Britain found that most parents with children in special education would prefer them to be integrated. The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) survey showed that this was not true. Parents of visually impaired children in special schools favoured special education, while those in the integrated system favoured this option.(7)

The integration of visually impaired children into mainstream schools is increasing. The adaptation of procedures relating to education programme planning and allocation of funds and support services are helping to lessen the stigma. The vision of the future is one where 'real' integration should become 'invisible'.



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## FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 2

1. Roger Slee, "Inclusion or Exclusion: Changing Educational Cultures," in Is There A Desk With My Name On It? : The Policies of Integration (Falmer Press, 1993) p.3.
2. Slee, Is There A Desk With My name on It?: The Policies of Integration, p.253.
3. David Ruebain, "The Development of an Integration Scheme: A Governors view," in Including Pupils with Disabilities (Philadelphia: University Press, 1987) p.197.
4. Colin Low, "The Need for a Planned Approach," in Integrating Special Education, ed. T. Booth and P. Potts ( Philadelphia: Open University, 1987) p.42.
5. Cloniger and Giangreco, "Including Students with Deaf-Blindness," in Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness: 89, 3 may-june 95 p. 263.
6. J. Lewis, "A Reflection on Five Years of Victorian Integration Policy," in Each An Individual: Integration of Children into Regular Schools (Geelong, Deakin University) pp. 31-38.
7. Paul Ennals, "Visions in the '90s," in Special Children: 60, Oct 1992, pp. 27.

CHARLES BROOK



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction To The Present Study**

All children are naturally creative but all the many diversions of modern life can cause many to grow up without using this ability, thus submerging a natural part of their development. The art class is a way of fostering creative activity, imperative for the visually impaired child. Children learn that art is not something divorced from everyday life. The notion that all art is 'kept' in galleries and museums is often held by young people. I have attempted in my classes to demonstrate that art is for all. As educators and learners we each decide and choose a media that suits our individual taste and need. Engaging in art activities is about bringing something 'out'. This can only happen through engagement with the subject, and such a process of engagement must involve teacher and child and family.

The continuous study that was carried out was based on the brief period of time working with students who are visually impaired in Pobalscoil Rosmini. The chosen project focused on the child's local environment and on the daily experience of "Waiting For The Bus". The aim of the project is , to develop each students appreciation of the local environment through the manipulation and three dimensional composition of a bus stop scene. In the project topics such as the bus stop environment and the characters observed or encountered were extensively discussed. In this particular class there are twenty boys of fourteen/fifteen years old. Two of the boys are visually impaired. In the following study I have traced the developments throughout the project. Criteria

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such as , manipulation of materials, human interaction, self-esteem in the art class amongst others are followed and examined through the use of Action Research.

### **What Is Action Research**

Action Research is a way of working which many educators already use. It is a method of research whereby practices can be remedied in the ' light of new insights ' gleaned through research and reflection.

It is not merely about reflecting on what one does in the class but why one does it." Action Research is an intervention in practice to bring about improvement  
 "(1) I chose this method of Action Research because of the many complexities of a child with a visual impairment. To concentrate wholly on this particular child would mean segregation and could only lead to negative responses to integration /  
 Colin Low states that,

" Unnecessary segregation from the community (classroom) represents a derogation from full humanity and citizenship. Secondly, integration also has an instrumental function. Separate socialisation breeds attitudes of prejudice, intolerance and self-denigration; and integration, particularly at the formative stage of development can do so much to sweep away the barriers of ignorance and misunderstanding that keep the handicapped and un-handicapped apart, and ultimately lead to discrimination, dependency and an inability to cope"(2)

This type of study has not been carried out before. It offered opportunities for me as a young educator and for the student to engage in an art education programme suitable both for the visually impaired child and his sighted peers.



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Action Research is a cyclical process rather than a single intervention. Each intervention is carefully reflected upon, evaluated and influences considerations about future planning ( i.e. the following class). The research was carried out on a small scale and focused on improvements that could be made to the lessons and materials used.

Pamela Lomax states that Action Research is a form of educational research and it should be viewed as an educational practice for all those involved. It should also be noted that educational research differs from research on education. Lomax offers two comparisons. Halsey, Heath and Ridge (1980) use a statistical method to expose the relationship between the origins and destinations of working class children. The work of the research was to establish facts. A different approach was used by Atkinson, Shone and Rees (1981), whose research sought to establish meanings. Action research is a form of educational research and is committed to bringing about improved changes(3). Whitehead (1993) recognises that

action enquiry is educational because it enables practitioners to see their practice as part of a living educational theory that is generated from their critical enquiries (4)

My own Action Research has been concerned with a visually impaired boy in second year. As the project progressed criteria was reviewed and changes made so that the educational experience was improved for everyone in the class. The following criteria was established to explore how art can help in the educational and social development of a visually impaired child and also to assist me in how

SMITH BLOOD



to implement the necessary changes.

1. Attitudes towards art as a subject.
2. Manipulation of materials.
3. Interaction with peers.
4. Self esteem.

A journal was kept consistently for the duration of the project, beginning in September 1995. Each week an account was kept of the student's (David)(5) performance in class and recommendations recorded for the next week.

#### Attitudes Towards Art As A Subject

Positive attitudes towards art are very evident in David's work and this was so from the beginning. Through the use of language he continuously describes work carried out in his classes with Liam Belton.(6) He works consistently throughout the class, but always at a slower pace than other students. The child with a visual impairment is forced to take things slower. Each stage of the project must be explored and every aspect absorbed. At the beginning I gave him complete freedom to express himself creatively. His early enthusiasm however began to fade a little and I would find him sitting and staring. It became apparent that some direction was needed. A change of material and the introduction of a character into the project rekindled his initial eagerness to complete set tasks.

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### Manipulation Of Materials

It is important that any visually impaired child should be given the opportunity to explore and appreciate a variety of media. Some children with low vision can have poor fine-motor co-ordination, this can be improved through the manipulation of tools. Constant supervision and careful teaching both of use and safety of tools is needed. David experienced a wide range of media and manipulative tools. In Figure 1, pencil, paper, chicken wire, wire cutters, wax crayons, papier mache, and modroc (plaster of paris bandage) were all used in the project. It is only through experience that David can discover the materials that he can work with and enjoy.

Problems such as twisting the ends of wire to create form occurred in the initial stages. A solution which proved successful was stuffing newspaper into the chicken wire so that the wire only needed to be pushed and modelled over the newspaper. David was however highly motivated and soon mastered the skill. Decisions about form proved to be the most difficult part of the project. On some areas of the figure there was an excess of modroc applied and in other areas very little. David was always tidy, taking care with equipment and cleaning up after class.

### Interaction With Peers

There is a special contentment I felt looking at David as he interacted with his peers. David seemed to be a 'leader of the gang' and is clearly very much accepted by his peers. His personality makes him very approachable and other



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Figure 1. Visually Impaired student manipulating materials, Pobalscoil Rosmini.





students tended to come to him rather than David having to move out of his seat.

### Self Esteem

It is evident from the research carried out that David has few or no problems with self-esteem. A visually impaired child's perceptions of himself or herself is largely governed by their social climate. The class is very lively but support from peers is very clear both inside and outside the classroom. He is very proud of his work and eager to achieve results. The work is important because it is important to David and his future integration.

### **"A Way Forward"**

#### **Action Research Is About Seeking Improvement By Intervention**

Professional decisions are made by teachers as part of their everyday job. These professional decisions involve choosing the most efficient means to a specified end, examining discrepancies between values and practice. As the programme developed I began questioning the effectiveness of the lesson to promote change as part of the learning process.

The teacher of the visually impaired should verbalise everything written on the board. I found that it was of little significance saying to the students, "Look at the drawing I have here" and continuing with questions. It is important to give an account of what exactly I wanted observed. For example, "look at the drawing, the figure is bending over picking up a football. The knees are bent and the back curved, facing to the side."

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A knowledge and understanding of each child's level of impairment is important. Pre-conceived ideas must be abolished. Blagden and Everett put forward the myth that "people who are colour blind see only in shades of grey". In fact there is no such thing as 'colour blindness'. People with a deficiency in colour vision see colours less vividly but their real world is never completely black and white or grey.(7) The painting in Figure 2 completed by a second year student at Pobalscoil Rosmini shows clearly the child's level of colour acuteness and awareness. A view of the work area in the art room has been painted using mainly primary colours. Very little mixing of colour has occurred. The only mixed colour is that of the dark green, in the star shaped paintings on the wall. The visually impaired child finished the piece by looking at the colours written on the paint pots, then deciding on what colour suited each section.

The need for appropriate lighting and seating arrangements is imperative. Providing good lighting will enable the students to make use of any residual vision. David sat towards the back of the class where there are two large windows. His seating arrangement was well suited as I usually worked from the middle of the class. The use of a white board is very effective and I often used white paper with a thick black marker when moving around the room.

Pacing myself in the class was important and proved a necessity for the class as a whole. Using a clear voice helps the child to link words to activities. It is necessary to allocate more time to certain tasks, i.e. observational drawing or cleaning the room.



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Figure 2. 'View of the Art Room', Second Year, Pobalscoil Rosmini. Note use of primary colour and the only colour mixed is the star shaped green on the wall.





The layout of the homework assignments must be carefully thought through.

Clear illustrations,

size of print , colour of paper and print all merit consideration. Photocopied material was always prepared using the computer, ensured a clear print. These considerations and changes were made as the project continued, but

Against the general background of the school and class, it is important to remember each pupil's individual needs and to consider the blend of qualities which should be possessed by children with special needs.(8)

Through Action Research I was constantly facilitating change. It helped me to question my effectiveness in the classroom by focusing on my own performance and that of all the students. The success of the research led to an enhanced and clearer knowledge of how the visually impaired child works in the art class.

Good Things

## FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 3

1. Pamela Lomax " Action Research For Professional Practice ", Invited paper presented at the Practitioners Research Workshop at the Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association, Oxford, September 1994.
- 2.. Colin Low, " Integrating The Visually Handicapped "in Integrating Special Education, ed. T. Booth and P.Potts ( Philadelphia: Open University, 1987) p. 33.
3. Lomax " Action Research For Professional Practice ",p.2.
4. Whitehead, J. (1993) The Growth Of Educational Knowledge, Hyde Publications.
5. The students real name has been changed to David in this study to protect him.
6. Liam Belton RHA, Art Teacher at St. Joseph's School for Visual Impairment.
7. Sue Blagden and John Everett, What Colour is the Wind ( The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1992 ) p.25.
8. Trevor, Millar, 'Factors Involved in Supporting Visually Impaired Children in Mainstream Schools'. in Support For Learning: 1, 4, November 1986, pp. 16-21



WILLIAM BROWN

## CHAPTER 4

### ART EDUCATION FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED CHILD

#### **The Role of Art Education for the Visually Impaired Child**

Today's world is a society where non-verbal communication is becoming increasingly powerful. Visual education can help people to understand and appreciate this part of our culture, but for the visually impaired child it is vital. Art activities provide a valuable avenue of communication for visually impaired children as a means of expressing ideas and enable the individual to build or retain feelings of self worth and esteem.

Offering any sensory stimulation fills the mind with ideas concerning the relationship between a person and that person's world. Art materials have qualities that excite senses rather than sight. Clay and paint both have a feel, a texture; and movement can be sensed when materials are manipulated. A partially sighted or even non-sighted individual can still map an internal 'image' because of the quality of these materials. (Dubowski, 1986) (1)

There are many reasons to justify the inclusion of Art, Craft and Design into the curriculum especially for the visually impaired child. The intellectual identity which is cultured in the art room can help others to see the person behind the blindness. Chapman and Stone (1988) believe that art is a sensual as well as an intellectual activity, its values are considerable.

The stress-free and relaxed atmosphere often associated with the art room can stimulate intense curiosity. Often sighted children approach the art class with the belief that their visually impaired peers are unable to be creative and produce

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work of an artistic merit. Materials and choice of media can encourage a child to experiment and make decisions. Lowenfeld(1974) believes 'process' rather than product is imperative. In such a climate, how the visually impaired child's self awareness is enhanced and the creation process is more significant than that of the prescribed characteristics of the product.

The art class can also offer the visually impaired child a competitive-free environment where creative language can be explored. Through the careful choice of a theme children can often discuss feelings about themselves or relationships with friends and family. A perceptive teacher will know when to stop and listen. In the right environment the visually impaired child can become highly motivated. Students are now beginning to pass on through second and third level.

### **'An Introduction To Touch'**

The child who has never seen learns to make sense of the world using a combination of touch, smell, taste and hearing.(2)

One such artist and teacher who uses this 'sensory montage' is Padraig Naughton. Padraig who is visually impaired has learned through art education to use touch and sound in combination with seeing in order to understand his environment.(3) Padraig is registered blind and was introduced to art at St. Joseph's School for Visually Impaired Boys in Dublin by Liam Belton who provided a stimulating environment in his art class. This 'initiation' was further explored at Pobalscoil

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Rosmini. Here Padraig with the help and encouragement of his art teacher, set his sights on art college and was admitted to the Craft Design course at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. During the years at college he explored methods of drawing with charcoal. The charcoal is used to cover the whole page and using a putty rubber areas are erased to form shapes. He uses a method similar to massage to create loose images on clay, where 'emotion can be transmitted through the fingertips'(4) Finally he had found a language of his own, 'In Touch'. Touch art can be appreciated only by feeling the surface of the clay piece and experiencing the different textures.

Padraig is now teaching at Leicester's, Richard Attenborough Centre for Disability and the Arts. He speaks enthusiastically about his work there, encouraging young people to explore through art. The core activities of the Attenborough Centre include teaching, research, training and assisting the integration of people with disabilities into mainstream art programmes. Padraig suggests that touch art can appeal to a much wider audience and has conducted a workshop with foundation students at the Loughborough College of art and Design. Through a two day workshop students explored ways of working in clay using drawing, sound and touch. The students listened to various sounds such as water, or a piece of music and expressed their moods in clay. Each of them were blindfolded during the process. The next stage was to introduce the students to objects and using their 'tactile perception' to create in clay without the aid of visual imagery.

Most of the students were surprised with what they had created,



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especially the work they had done using a blindfold, as this rarely matched their visual expectations.(5)

This work conducted by Padraig could be adapted to visually impaired pupils in second level school. It is vital that the visual impaired student is given the opportunity to develop all senses and not just that of touch, through first hand knowledge of the world around them. Padraig strongly believes,

that my experience will be a help to other people, both in terms of the art they produced and in helping them to recognise potential problems at an earlier stage, and to cope with them more effectively (Naughton)(6)

Exhibit 1 Brown



## FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 4

1. Elizabeth K. Chapman and Juliet M. Stone, Special Needs In Ordinary Schools, The Visually Handicapped Child in Your Classroom (London: Biddles Ltd, 1988) p.124.
2. Sue Blagden and John Everett, What Colour is the Wind (The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1992) p.1.
3. Aidan Dunne, The Sunday Tribune " Diversity Makes The Difference ", Sept 12 1993.
4. Julia Cassim discusses the difficulties faced by the young artist and teacher Padraig Naughton who like 'Pisarro, Monet, Degas, Piero della Frances, Wynd Lam Lewis even Michelangelo all battled their failing vision', The Japan Times " Lending a Touch of Insight for the Sighted", July 10, 1994.
5. Discussion with Padraig Naughton concerning his work as an artist and teacher at the Richard Attenborough Centre for Disability and the Arts, Dublin: Oct 1995.
6. Joan Stephen's, Mercury On Monday " The Art of Feeling ", Nov 28 1994.

Handwritten text, possibly a signature or date, appearing as "1909" and "1910" in a cursive script.



## CHAPTER 5

### THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION FOR BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED CHILDREN

For every blind and visually impaired child, there is an appropriate educational programme at a certain time in her/his life. Needs of each change and the best system is the one which can alter or change educational settings to meet individual needs.(1)

Primarily this should be the main focus in the future of education of the Blind and the Visually Impaired. There is no doubt that the great debate between ' full inclusion ' or ' specialist ' schools for the blind and visually impaired continues. Many special schools for the blind and the visually impaired are more experienced in the education of these differently gifted children. They also have more resources available, such as braille, abacus, care travel, keyboarding and other skills unique to the visually impaired child. The term 'warehousing ' however has been used by some educationalists to describe this system where students are segregated - forgotten by educators and peers, where teaching is non academic and poor attitudes about one self seem to prevail. Those educators who are committed to special education for visually impaired children are convinced that full inclusion would be the eradication of residential schools and special education programmes for the blind and visually impaired. This might result in a huge loss in the area of practical skills training. Phil Halten states, "I am frightened by the full inclusion movement" (2) Residential schools appear to have a strong academic programme unlike the integrated system where high academic achievement is not so prevalent. Unfortunately in England financial resourcing is forcing programmes for the visually impaired into ordinary schools.



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Individual needs and technical needs are more likely to be abandoned in this situation. It is a government illusion that integration into ordinary schools is cheaper than equipping a special classroom. If teachers are not properly trained social interaction can often outweigh academic achievement. Yes, it is worthwhile if the visually impaired child is educated alongside the sighted but only if social interaction and academic achievement is evident. However Fred Shroeder states that the experience of the last two decades appears to suggest that the goal of mainstreaming is at best illusive. The literacy rate among blind and visually impaired people is low. He believes that this is a result of societal misunderstanding about blindness.

What we need is a system that believes in blind children-a system that promotes fundamental literacy, academic excellence, and social integration premised on the blind child's ability to give as well as to receive.(3)

The future must start with a co-operative effort, between the 'organised blind and the schools'. Both the local and special schools need to provide quality programmes within a balanced curriculum, based upon the academic needs, orientation and mobility needs, social skills, independent living skills and career education of each individual.

### **Teacher Training**

Children need teachers who demand quality work and have high expectations. The teachers of the blind and visually impaired help students acquire skills that are unique to visual impairment. Students can then begin to function independently both socially and academically. The art teacher of the visually

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impaired child plays an enormous role in this acquisition of skills. Communication skills, listening skills, problem solving and social/emotional development can all be encouraged in the art class.

The Department of Education will provide support services for children with visually impairments and who attend ordinary schools. To date there are three peripatetic teachers compared with the twenty-three employed for the hearing impaired. The peripatetic teacher assists the Department of Education in adapting examination papers. They are not trained in mobility and do not offer instruction in this area. Recommendations made by the Special Education Review Committee, (1993) regarding teacher training state:

Provision should be made for the pre-service and in-service training of more teachers in ordinary primary and post primary and special schools, in the administration and interpretation of a wide variety of non-restricted tests. All pre-service teacher education courses should include a module of such training and inservice courses on the topic should be organised on a phased basis. Teachers should be provided with the necessary training and qualifications which would enable them to use tests to which they do not have access at present. (4)

At present in Ireland there is no specific course available for the teacher of visually impaired children. However such a course has proved successful in New Zealand, where education for the visually impaired is accelerating. The course was established by the Special Education Department, of the Auckland College of Education in 1984. Previously teachers trained on the job, as is the situation in Ireland. The course has many components, skills of counselling,

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consultation and interpersonal communication are given particular emphasis. Competencies that are specific to the education of students with a visual impairment, such as the ability to assess low vision performance, proficiency in braille, adaption of curricula to the visually impaired child, basic orientation and use of equipment are all explored. Some participants come from school and others have teaching experience, which has a 'positive and enriching effect on the development of the course'.<sup>(5)</sup> A course such as this could make a valuable contribution to the education of visually impaired people in Ireland.

There are unfortunately many gaps in the educational provision for blind and visually impaired in Ireland. The Department of Education has failed to make adequate provision for trained teachers in ordinary schools. ' More than a policy of integration is needed, but, the resources to enable it happen '. The Union of Voluntary Organisations for the Handicapped, (UVOH) states

The lack in the Department of Education of any clear policy to implement integrated schooling suggests to us that some disabled children and their families may be paying a high price to stay and keep children in normal schools (6)

Teachers of the visually impaired should be able to adapt the curriculum to facilitate the special learning needs of individual students. Skills involved in planning and teaching need to be carefully addressed. The following are elements that need attention and special training when used in a class with visual impairments,



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### Influences on the curriculum

- The social, community and environmental influences on the curriculum planning
- The legislative and policy framework

### Student assessment

- Collection and analysis of relevant information on student's educational needs
- Assessment of individual needs and aspirations and the implications of these for the curriculum
- Assessment, diagnostic testing and profiling techniques and their application

### Aims

- Establish a common perception of course aims
- Strategies for deciding on curriculum content
- Planning for progression
- Ensuring a balanced programme
- Testing course content for realism and relevance

### Teaching and learning strategies

- Identifying teaching strategies to promote access to mainstream curricula and integration
- Use of aids, equipment and microtechnology
- Guidance and counselling
- Strategies for encouraging student self-advocacy

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Planning

- The use of time in relation to specific student needs

Evaluation

- The meaning and purpose of evaluation
- Strategies for conducting course evaluation
- Course review and modification

General

- Leadership and organisational skills(7)

Insufficient and untrained teachers in ordinary schools could have a damaging effect on integration. Parents may feel at risk by sending their children to an integrated school. The knowledge and skills needed to effectively encourage academic and social well-being, do need initial training but it is imperative that these skills are maintained through experience and continuous in-service training.

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## FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 5

1. Phil Halten, Ed.D. "Where do we go from here? A critical look at the future of schools for the blind" in Braille Monitor : November, 1992, p. 564.
2. Halten. "Mainstreaming, Schools for the blind, and full inclusion: What shall the future of education for blind children be?" in Braille Monitor: November 1993, p. 1006.
3. Schroeder. " Mainstreaming, Schools for the blind, and full inclusion: What shall the future of education for blind children be?" in Braille Monitor: November 1993, p. 1002.
4. Report of the Special Education Review Committee, 1993, p. 36.
5. New Zealand has had a course for teachers of visually impaired students since 1984. The course contains generic and specialist components and requires students to do independent study on various areas of visual impairment. The papers produced are used as resources for other students.  
J. Thorburn. "Course for Teachers of Visually Impaired Students in New Zealand" in Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness: 83, 1, January 1989, pp. 82.
6. Senator Brendan Ryan. " Services For The Blind In Ireland, A research Report", Dublin 1988.
7. Department of Education and Science UK A 'Special' Professionalism, Report of The FE Special Needs Teacher Training Working Group, London 1987, pp.20-21.



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## CONCLUSION

As children we learn so much by visual means. As art providers, in the right environment, this impact of knowledge experienced by sighted children and visually impaired children can be tackled and understood. The visually impaired child should not be deprived of his/her rightful access to a balanced art education programme.

A major step towards better practice in the education of visually handicapped pupils rests in the strengthening of educational provision for pupils, which offers a real choice of educational placement suited to the individual needs. Throughout the Dissertation reference to educational provisions for visually impaired people in other parts of the world have been made. Keeping in touch with professionals in other countries can foster a vital link in beginning an international communication system in the field of visual impairment and blindness. By closing the gap students who were before clustered into a handful of specialised schools are now joining the mainstream.

There is still much more to know and learn about the art of the visually impaired child. Through a greater understanding of the reality of blindness, it is possible to consider the art of visually impaired people in a positive way.

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