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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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TITLE: INEQUALITY IN IRISH SCHOOLING: A COEDUCATIONAL OR
 PARENTAL PROBLEM.

The major emphasis for this dissertation is the issue of gender inequality in Irish Schooling. The first chapter deals with the emergence of Coeducation in Ireland and its impact on Post-primary education. Also the effects of the hidden curriculum are examined.

The second chapter deals with 'Art' as a gendered subject. In an attempt to understand the gender bias that exists within 'Art', society and parental attitudes to the Visual arts and education in general, are explored further.

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Title:

**Gender Imbalance within Irish Schooling
: A Co Educational or Parental Problem?**

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education

in

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DIPLOMA FOR ART AND DESIGN TEACHERS

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	(iii)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	(iv)
INTRODUCTION	(v)
Chapter	
I. IRISH SCHOOLING AND CO-EDUCATION.....	1
Second level schools in Ireland	
Co-education and Gender equality	
Curricular Provision and Take up	
Recommendations	
II. SOCIETY AND ART EDUCATION.....	14
The Arts in Irish Society	
The Arts in Irish Education	
Parents role in Education	
Parents attitude to Art Education	
Parents influence on Art as a gendered subject	
III. METHODOLOGY.....	29
IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	30-31
VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	36-37
APPENDICES	38-39
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	40

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1	32
TABLE 2	33
TABLE 3	34
TABLE 4	35

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INTRODUCTION

Coeducation is a relatively new phenomenon to the Irish educational system. Previous to the 1970's single sex schools were standard. However, the declining influence of the Catholic church in educational affairs, state intervention and declining birth rates contributed to the emergence of coeducation.

Coeducation has had a major impact on modern schooling methods and highlighted important issues. Central to this are gender inequality and imbalance in the school curriculum. Has coeducation fulfilled its perceived role in creating a unified rather than a bipartite postprimary system or has it in fact only served to compound the problem even further.

Can coeducation be held wholly responsible for creating the "male"/"female" subjects scenario or is it, itself only a mirror image of society, and parental attitudes.

Art remains on the periphery of the educational system, not quite regarded as a core subject. Art is often categorised as a 'female' subject. Has this gender imbalance stemmed from the 'hidden' curriculum of the school, from the home or can fault be equally attributed to both.

In an attempt to explore this question further, parents of children from a working class community school in Dublin were surveyed to ascertain their attitudes to Art as a subject and its suitability to boys and girls.

CHAPTER 1

IRISH SCHOOLING AND CO-EDUCATION:

Second-Level Schools in Ireland

The Irish Education system provides three types of second-level schools. These are secondary, vocational and community/comprehensive schools. The secondary schools are owned mainly by religious orders while the vocational and community/comprehensive schools are all in the public sector. All three are publicly aided. From an educational viewpoint secondary schools are traditionally more academic. The vocational schools tend to have a more practical and technical focus with the community and comprehensive schools providing a balance between the academic and practical subjects.

Secondary Schools

A Department of Education Statistical report 94/95 recorded that of the 777 second level schools in Ireland, 452 were secondary schools. These schools were originally established in the 19th and early 20th century. They tend to be owned and managed by religious bodies (catholic). Management consists of parents, teachers and representatives of trustees. Teachers are employed by school trustees and owners. As with other schools, pupils are prepared to sit the major public exams - the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate. Traditionally, secondary schools concentrate on the academic subjects with a strong emphasis on preparing pupils for 3rd. level education. Most secondary schools do not offer the leaving certificate

applied programme. Only recently introduced to the curriculum, it caters for the student of lesser academic ability and is of a more practical nature. Similarly, the vocational preparation and training (VPT) programme would not be taken by many secondary schools. This programme has been described as a leaving certificate with a strong vocational dimension, preparing students for the real world whilst focusing on personal development, the world of work, enterprise, business and technology.

Another relatively new phenomena is the availability of a Transition year programme to secondary school students. The aim of the transition year is to promote the personal, social, educational and vocational development of pupils and to prepare them for their role as autonomous, participative and responsible members of society.

There is a higher transfer rate to third-level education, especially University, among secondary school pupils than among pupils in other school types (Clancy, 1988), though this is related to the slightly higher socio-economic status of their intake compared with other schools.

Vocational Schools

Of the 777 second level schools in Ireland 247 of them are vocational schools (statistical report 1994/95). Vocational schools were established in 1930 under the Vocational Education Act. They are non-denominational schools and management consists of vocational education committees. Committee members are nominated by the local authority after each local election. Committees are comprised of 14 members, the make up of which usually consists of individuals from political parties, representatives from industry, trade unions and people with experience in

educational matters. The committees are responsible not to the local authorities but to the minister of education. Within the school itself a board of management ensures each schools needs are tailored for. The board of management consists of two parents, a VEC representative and at least one staff representative. In certain cases there may also be a pupils representative. Vocational teachers are employed by the VEC.

While the academic subjects are offered at vocational schools, they have a strong practical and technical background. A high proportion of vocational pupils take on the vocational preparation and training programme and are likely to take on the leaving certificate applied programme.

The Vocational Sector is more likely than others to offer VPT courses. Some 19 per cent (16,383) of Vocational pupils are on 'vocational training and other' courses, compared with 1.3 per cent (2,751) of secondary and 6 per cent (1,197) of community and comprehensive school pupils. (Department of Education, 1992a, 36)

Figures for 1990/91 find only 26% (22,487) of vocational schools total pupils were on the leaving certificate programme with "The transfer rate to third-level education being lower from the Vocational Sector than from other schools" (Clancy, 1988)

(3)

Community/Comprehensive

Community and comprehensive schools account for only 76 of the 777 post primary schools in Ireland. Of these, 60 are community schools. The community schools is relatively new and first opened in 1972, in an attempt by the Department of Education to "create a unified rather than a bipartite postprimary system"(4). Their

board of management consists of VEC representatives, religious trustees, two elected parent representatives and two teaching staff representatives. The principal is a non voting member. There is also provision for the religious order to nominate members to the teaching staff. Teachers are employed by the Board of Management and are paid by the Department of Education. The community school, on average is larger than the other secondary or vocational schools.

70.6 per cent of community schools have over 500 pupils, compared with 40.1 per cent of secondary and 22.2 per cent of vocational schools (Department of Education, 1992a, 38) (5).

The curriculum offered by the community/comprehensive schools is an attempt to achieve a balance between the academic and practical subjects.

Co-education and Gender Equality

The 1970s saw the emergence of co-educational schools in an Irish Educational system, previously dominated by single sex schools. Now almost 3 decades later the face of Irish education has radically changed. Department of education statistics find that there are 130 male only post primary schools, 164 female only and 481 mixed post primary schools.

What were the main contributing factors in the emergence of co-education? A number of reasons can be cited in explanation for this shift away from single sex schools. Perhaps the most significant is a reflection of modern-Irish society itself and the diminishing power of the catholic church within. Prior to the 70s the catholic religion played a vital role in maintaining a gender-segregated education.

The churches view of coeducation were stated succinctly in Pope Pius XI's Encyclical *Christian Education of Youth* (1929)

False and harmful to Christian education is the so-called method of "co-education". This ... is founded upon naturalism and the denial of original sin, ... a deplorable confusion of ideas that mistakes a levelling promiscuity and equality for the legitimate association of the sexes. (6)

The Irish hierarchy were anxious that the Popes Encyclical be followed to the latter, hence the dominance of single sex schools.

Demographic factors also contributed, as the decreasing birth rate resulted in falling pupil numbers which precipitated a necessity to co-education.

The declining birth rates and falling pupil numbers that are bringing about rationalisation, amalgamations and new educational structures in the Irish school system are also increasing the proportion of co-educational schools each year (7).

Recent years have seen a dramatic growth in co-educational schooling in Ireland and this trend is expected to continue as smaller single sex schools become amalgamated into larger co educational schools.

Many commentators argued that co-education could provide for all groups within society and as such was viewed as a progression in education. Catering for boys and girls, pupils of varying abilities and from different social backgrounds co-education also offered the potential for gender equality bridging the division between the traditionally 'male' and 'female' subjects.

To date little research into co-education and its implications has been undertaken in Ireland. However, since the early 80s the topic has been widely debated, especially in Britain (Spender and Spender 1980, Steedman '83, Kelly '86 and Mahony '85).

(8). Opinion remains divided on this issue, with the research findings failing to

provide conclusive answers as to the merits or otherwise of co-education.

It has however, highlighted important questions which must be addressed by the teaching profession. The findings suggest concomitant with co-education is an overall negative effect on girls academic achievement. Co-education schools have a slight negative effect on the academic ability performing particularly poorly in such an environment. More significantly co-education schools appear to have a strong negative effect on girls take up of, and performance in the "male" subjects such as mathematics, the physical sciences and technical subjects. In a broader context, such negative effects on girls academic achievements can also equal negative effects on personal and social development, serving to stifle self-esteem. Girls are given less chance to value themselves and build self-confidence that leads to success in later life.

Curricular Provision and Take-up

As previously stated, co-education appears to have a significant negative effect on girls' take-up, and performance in the "male" subjects. Students enter second level schools knowing little about certain subjects, yet still manage to develop gendered attitudes to the suitability of a subject. What influences these attitudes? Regarding Subject Provision and Take-up, D.F. Hannan et al (13) conclude that the following factors are of influence:

- The number of pupils enrolled in a school, i.e. if there are more pupils, more teachers are needed and so the school can cater for a wide range of choice.
- The Administrative decisions taken by the schools:
 - should certain subjects be made compulsory or optional?
 - should these regulations apply equally to all classes?
 - should some classes be prevented from taking certain subjects.

- Timetabling and advice from teachers and guidance counsellors.
- The primary influence on subject take-up would be the attitudes and expectations of individual pupils which are influenced by:
 - parents
 - teachers
 - peers

Although schools are in the position to make administrative decisions on subject provision, few schools actually use gender as a criterion for eligibility to take particular subjects. A national survey on co-education (1996) revealed that only 7% of co-educational schools limited certain subjects by gender to first and second year students. In most cases, boys were prevented from taking Home Economics and girls prevented from taking traditional 'male' subjects. However, a study carried out by the Department of Education in 1993/94 revealed that the take-up of many subjects at Junior Certificate were heavily gender-biased. Gender imbalance occurs mainly within the technical subjects, with metalwork, woodwork, and mechanical drawing dominated by boys while home economics and music the preserve of the girls. To a lesser extent gender imbalance also occurs in art and science. More girls tend to take art with more boys taking science.

If all students regardless of gender are provided with the same subject choice, why are there clear biases to certain subjects?. Regarding the question of whether or not schools contribute directly or indirectly to gender inequality, Drudy and Lynch suggest that the "hidden curriculum" of schools should be examined more closely (14).

When we talk of the hidden curriculum we are referring to the social norms and values that are implicitly communicated to pupils in schools by the way in which school and classroom life is organised. (15)

Although not fully responsible for this problem, schools are a microcosm of society and as such reflect societies attitudes. Drudy et al point out that "Schools reflect the ethos and culture of a wider society". (17).

D.F. Hannan et al agree that hidden within the school and the classroom specifically of the co-educational school, inequality has manifested itself. They point out three reasons that may explain why this occurs. Firstly, they agree that,

Coed schools, in their policies and practices, behave in much the same way as their enviroing social groups, they will reflect the conventional presumptions about female and male aptitudes, interests and role expectations.. (18)

Senior positions in the schools are predominately held by male members of staff and the existence of gendered teacher roles may compound the problem.

Hannan et al point out that "high female representation on staff does not automatically translate into equivalent representation at managerial levels"(20). In fact women account for only a third of principals and vice principals. Within community/comprehensive and vocational schools, women account for 12 per cent and 15 per cent of principals. From society's point of view and a student's, men appear to be more suitable for positions of power. This must indirectly effect a student's attitude to gender.

In turn, teacher expectations appear to shape pupils' attitudes in education and influence the take-up of, and performance in, particular subjects.

Ormerod (1975) (21) argued that the attitudes of, and towards teachers, play an important mediating role in subject preferences. In further agreement Hannan et.al

(1983) (22) found that pupils perceptions of teacher expectations for them were more important for girls choosing higher level maths.

The classroom according to Hannan et.al (1996) is another likely place for inequality between boys and girls to occur.

The dynamics of mixed-sex small-group interaction processes in co-education classrooms (between boys, girls and teachers), unless proactively managed by teachers, are more likely to lead to male dominance and female passivity in interaction processes.. (23)

Fontana, in reference to a study carried out by Doyle and Good (1982) concludes that in the classroom, teachers are more likely to praise boys for producing good work and praise girls for good behaviour. This, Fontana believes, emphasises academic achievement in the former and social conformity in the latter. Fontana continues to say that:

Teachers often hold stereotyped beliefs about the relative abilities of boys and girls, ascribing the success of girls to such things as hard work and rule-following, and that of boys to creativity and flair... Boys may also (for various reasons, including disruptive behaviour) obtain more attention than girls in mixed classes. (24)

Recommendations

Although teachers and schools cannot be held directly responsible for gender inequality, they must realise and challenge these inequalities while making every effort not to reinforce them. The Irish state believes that one of the primary aims of education is to help in the "breaking down of stereotypes, the opening of opportunities, and the growth of self esteem of all, irrespective of sex" (Green paper, 1992).

This has also been emphasised in the White Paper (1995). Hannan et al, criticise the likelihood of this policy obtaining it's objective, they believe that,

..this policy objective is unlikely to lead to effective action " on the ground" unless the underlying reasons for policy failure to reduce inequalities in educational achievement are corrected. (25)

Both Hannan et al (1996) and Fontana (1995) have proposed certain recommendations that may improve gender inequality in the school and classrooms.

Hannan et. al recommends the following:

- The issuing of guidelines by the Department of Education to coed schools to ensure equality of access to, and treatment within, subjects and levels for girls and boys of all ability levels.
- The provision of specific in-service courses for the principals and management of coed schools, in order to enhance gender fairness in school organisation and curricular arrangements.
- Further research be conducted on girls' achievement in other "male" subjects, particularly the sciences, in order to assess whether this pattern is common to related subjects.
- Positive action should be underpinned by positive teacher attitudes. All teacher training and in-career development programmes should incorporate a strong emphasis on gender equality issues as is emphasised in the White Paper. In addition, teachers in coed schools should be given specific in-service training in how to handle classes with both girls and boys effectively, to ensure gender equity. (26).

Regarding girls personal and social development Hannan et. al, recommends that:

Programmes, such as assertiveness training, should be developed to enhance self-image and locus of control among girls, with separate provision of such courses for girls within coed schools (27)

Fontana suggests that of equal importance within the school, the teacher should:

Avoid all unnecessary polarisation like the ones implied by such instructions as 'girls on one side of the room, boys on the other', or 'girls lead now'...(28).

Fontana realises that the teacher can not single handedly reform the ideologies that exist within the school but believes that "everything possible should be done to see that girls aim as high as boys, and go for the same range of vocational opportunities" (29).

Unfortunately this problem cannot only be solved from within the school walls.

Drastic reformations are needed within society and the family.

The notion that for girls a career is only something to fill in time until marriage is still too prevalent both within the family and within Education (30).

To what extent does the family influence their children's attitudes? Can we point the finger elsewhere and place responsibility with the parents. As previously pointed out by Drudy et al, "schools reflect the ethos and culture of a wider society" (31). It is in the second chapter that this wider society will be examined further, with particular interest in society's/parents attitudes to Art and Art Education.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 1

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12. Ibid., p.43, 44.
13. Ibid., p.99-101.
14. Drudy & Lynch, Schools and Society in Ireland, p.184.
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16. Ibid., p.190.
17. Ibid., p.185.
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25. Hannan, Smyth, McCullagh, O'Leary, McMahon. Co-education and Gender Equality. p. 201.
26. Ibid., p.201-202.
27. Ibid., p.206.
28. Fontana, Psychology for Teachers (1995) p.14.
29. Ibid., p.14.
30. Ibid.
31. Drudy et al p.185.

CHAPTER 2

SOCIETY AND ART EDUCATION

The Arts in Irish Society

Ciaran Benson in his report on the 'Place of the Arts in Irish Education' discusses the role of Art in Irish Society. Benson declares that Ireland's contribution to the artistic heritage of the Western world has been outstanding, but argues that "a greater understanding and development of Ireland's artistic heritage" is needed. He believes that "whole generations have lost the opportunity both of learning about their own artistic history and of acquiring the skills necessary to build upon it" (1).

The place of art in society is very much dependent on society itself. "Societies differ greatly in how they foster or hinder artistic activity" (2).

The economic status of a society is the major limiting factor in the development/underdevelopment of artistic achievement. Undoubtedly, Ireland has a history rich in artistic endeavour and achievement but this indigenous work has been largely lost in Ireland's turbulent past. The wealthier Anglo-Irish population created a deep division between the traditional forms of music and dance and the more exclusive 'classical' Arts, which excluded for the most part the native Irish people.

The early Irish state was to a large extent isolated, on the peripheries of Europe. European cultural developments were of no real significance to a state attempting to find its feet in the economic world. Furthermore, the austere views of a dominant catholic church helped keep a narrow aperture on what was artistically acceptable in Ireland.

In such an environment, art cannot flourish, but present day Ireland presents a much different picture, cultural development has proceeded apace and the onus is now on society to place 'art' in its proper context and appreciate its value in education.

The Arts in Irish Education

...The Irish school child is visually and artistically among the most undereducated in Europe... (3)

A report carried out in 1961 by a Scandinavian group on 'Design in Ireland', highlighted serious problems that existed in Irish art education. The visual arts have never occupied a central position in Irish school curricula, and as already stated by Benson, this neglect of the arts in Irish education has resulted in generations of Irish people deprived of Artistic knowledge and skills.

Looking back through history, one can see how art was of less priority. The development of literacy in the English language and the need to attain a certain level of numeracy preceded all other educational needs during the nineteenth century.

The provision of a basic minimum education for everybody was the aim, and quantity (rather than quality) was uppermost in the minds of the policymakers. (4)

1900, saw the introduction of singing, drawing and physical education to the curriculum, only to be dropped (excluding singing) with the establishment of the Irish Free State. Following Ireland's independence, the restoration of the Irish language became education's greatest priority. The focus of the Irish curriculum continued to be narrow with Irish, English and arithmetic pushing artistic/aesthetic subjects further away. It wasn't really until 1971, that the new curriculum brought about the much needed change in national schools.

Post primary schools suffered equal neglect in regards to an art education. The small minority of people who did receive a post primary education in the early intermediate schools..."largely followed the humanist curriculum of the Renaissance tradition, with its emphasis on the classics and literary studies" (5).

The payment-by-results system (6) insured that art education would continue to be neglected. This results system was demolished in 1924 to be replaced by the intermediate and leaving certificate examinations. This opened the curriculum up considerably, but the "curricular imbalance continued with art and music on the periphery of secondary schooling". A report made by Professor Bodkin in 1949 'Report on the Arts in Ireland' reflects this perspective.

In Irish schools, the subject of art, in either the historical or the practical aspect, is neglected few of the principal schools and colleges, for either boys or girls, employ trained teachers to deal with it, or possess the requisite accommodation and equipment for the purpose. (8)

Of major influence during this time of educational development in Ireland, were the harsh economic conditions that existed. This Benson believes, was of major influence regarding the underdevelopment of art education in Ireland.

Educational systems are closely interlocked with wider political, economic, social and moral elements of the society at large, and at certain stages of development school systems can only achieve limited goals, and the place occupied by artistic subjects in the scale of priorities may not be high. (9)

As economic conditions in Ireland improved so did the educational situation. 1972 brought with it the community/comprehensive school, which in turn brought a wide and varied curriculum. In an attempt to achieve a balance between the academic and practical subjects, community/comprehensive schools have set a standard in which other schools have been influenced by. Pupil enrolment expanded which in effect increased the teaching force and as a result a much more diverse curriculum. Art education could finally enter Ireland's educational system and flourish, or could it?

Parents Role in Education

This present neglect of the visual arts at second level is a reflection of parental attitudes to art in education. (10)

In a research study carried out in 1993, Donal O'Donoghue concluded that parental attitudes are partly responsible for the present status of the visual arts in Irish education.

Whilst the position of art in the school curriculum has improved radically since the beginning of this century, sadly there is still evidence that art is on the periphery of Irish schooling.

Statistics from the Department of Education show that only 15% of all students took the leaving certificate art examination in 1995. O'Donoghue acknowledges that schools are also responsible for this disturbing lack of take-up, he refers to a discussion paper carried out in 1985 by the Curriculum and Examinations Board.

Results show that:

In schools where visual art is offered, not all students are given an equal opportunity to study it. It has also been found that high achievers in academic subject areas are often discouraged from following a visual arts course at leaving certificate level (11).

Whilst schools may be held responsible for the provision of art in the curriculum, they cannot control the attitudes and expectations of individual pupils. Hannan et al, whilst considering all the factors that influence subject provision and take-up, concluded that the primary influence on subject take-up:

...would be the attitudes and expectations of individual pupils. These in turn would be affected by parental, teacher and peer expectations (12).

Parental influences begin long before post primary school, and a child's personality is developed in the early, formative years. Banks believes that, ...even in the most advanced industrial economy the school cannot and does not take over completely from the family. The first five or six years of life are crucial foundation years, and even after starting at school the child normally continues to live with his parents and to be deeply influenced by their behaviour and attitudes (13).

The family is the child's first social group, and for the majority it remains the most important group throughout childhood.

It is widely believed that if parents are involved and interested in their child's development and educational progress, that child's achievement will be greatly enhanced. (14)

Numerous studies have been carried out that examine the role of social class in determining parents attitudes. It has been concluded that the socio-economic status of a parent does not determine the achievement level or attitude of a child.

It has however, been concluded that:

Parental **attitudes** are of utmost importance and that a child's progress or lack of progress in school can be related back to them. (15)

The Plowden Report (1967) whilst examining the socio-economic effect on educational achievement concluded that parental attitudes rather than the material circumstances of parents were of most influence.

A report from the Central Advisory Council for education (England) (1960s) states that:

Educational deprivation is not mainly the effect of poverty; parental attitude and maternal care are more important than the level of material needs (16)

Banks refers to a study carried out by a group of Wisconsin high school seniors, results confirm this conclusion.

Where parental encouragement was low, relatively few students, regardless of their intelligence or socio-economic status levels planned to go to college...Where parental encouragement was high the proportion of students planning on college was also high, even when socio-economic status and intelligence levels were relatively low. (17)

Parents Attitude to Art Education

...A young person with artistic talent or with a delight in a particular art form can be severely discouraged by unsympathetic parents. Like most areas of knowledge, the most fruitful beginning for an education in the arts is the home. (18)

In a study carried out by Donal O'Donoghue in 1993, parents' attitudes to art education were examined even further. More specifically, O'Donoghue studied the differences in attitudes between working class and middle/upper class parents.

As already confirmed, O'Donoghue agrees that socio-economic factors are not of major influence in a child's development. However, O'Donoghue reports that differences in **attitudes** (to an art education) do exist between the classes.

Whilst finding that "There is a considerable lack of awareness of and unfamiliarity with the visual arts among parents.." (19). O'Donoghue concludes that this applies more so to working class parents. It has been proven that social classes differ in that they adopt different values, attitudes and aspirations. (20)

Banks, however believes that there is "...a close relationship between material deprivation and the whole way of life of the family". This in turn, may exert an influence on attitudes, values and aspirations.

Poverty can make a parent less willing to keep a child at school; can make it difficult for him to afford books and toys, or expeditions which help a child to learn; can enforce housing conditions which make the whole family strained and unhappy or make it almost impossible for parents and child to talk or play together.(22)

Findings from O'Donoghue's study prove that Banks conclusions are correct.

Parents from a working class are (area A) believed that "Art is expensive and it is only middle and upper class parents that would be able to finance their child through his studies in Art". (23)

Lack of finance certainly contributed in one interviewees home. He states that his son,

'Constantly sketches at home but he is financially restricted to four pencils at the moment' and if he could afford paint he would buy it. (24)

Middle/upper class parents, in contrast had no problems providing a wide variety of art materials. This variety of stimulation and provision of materials are bound to improve the development of a child's artistic ability and as Max Weber claims such children receive better life chances than children of poorer parents.

O'Donoghue also notes that where parents had a good knowledge of the visual arts, they were much more likely to encourage and involve their children in some form of art work. (25)

Parents from the middle/upper class areas had a greater knowledge of what post-primary art entailed, O'Donoghue states that "such knowledge had been acquired through their own education and from a greater involvement in their child's development".(26)

To the contrary, working class parents attitudes tended to be based on what they 'assume rather than what they know'. This is perhaps where the circle has done its full turn and returned to the basics of education and schools responsibility to the neglect of art education in this country through the decades. Assumptions can only be made where knowledge is lacking.

This lack of education amongst 'working class' parents is illustrated through their attitudes towards the career opportunities available in Art.

Working class parents are unfamiliar with the range of career opportunities in the visual arts. Many parents expressed the opinion that there are no career opportunities in the art and design field. (27)

Of those that believed there were career opportunities, they were only conscious of limited possibilities, such as an architect; art teacher; graphic designer; painter; sculptor.

O'Donoghue, concluded that a young person pursuing a career in the visual arts, would not be encouraged by working class parents.

One father interviewed stated:

I would discourage him and talk him into something different altogether. I would think that he is wasting his time. I would place more value on a steady job. (28)

Middle class parents on the other hand were much more conscious and familiar with career possibilities in the visual arts, in support of a career in the visual arts, one father stated:

I would support, encourage and help him in every way, both financially and emotionally. I would provide him with whatever materials he wanted. (29)

Parental attitudes, O'Donoghue concludes, remain 'diverse and prejudicial', to art education and the visual arts. Attitudes amongst the social classes show clear signs of differing. Whilst many of the parents interviewed, recognised that art contributed to the development of a child's self, many had negative attitudes.

O'Donoghue sums up parents' views to art as follows:

- is more suitable for girls than boys
- is more suitable for difficult pupils and slow learners
- is more suitable for the middle and upper classes in society
- is therapeutic in nature as opposed to educational
- involves only painting and drawing
- is less important than the other academic subject areas

- requires little or no real effort or commitment
- offers little or no career opportunities to those who study it beyond post-primary level. (30).

Parents influence on Art as a gendered subject

Regrettably, there is a particular stereotype of the Arts in many Irish schools. The Arts are seen as more suitable for girls than for boys, and for the less intelligent rather than for the more intelligent pupils (31).

Statistics from the Department of Education in 1976/77 showed that Art was taken by more girls than boys. 16% more girls studies it in the Junior cycle than boys. At Senior cycle almost twice the proportion of girls took Art than boys. (32).

In 1994/95 statistics show that this imbalance remains. At Junior cert. level, 15% more girls take Art, whilst at leaving cert. girls account for 60% of students taking art. (33)

It can be concluded from their statistics that art appears to be a subject more suitable for girls than boys.

What part do parents attitudes play in influencing this imbalance?

Do they contribute to this process of learning what a 'male'/'female' subject is?

...Parents play a crucial role in moulding their children's gender identification

...with almost a direct link between the beliefs, attitudes and values of parents (particularly mothers) and the attitudes and behaviour of children;...fathers tend to discourage evidence of "feminine behaviour" in boys. (34)

This process of learning which are 'male' subjects and which are 'female' begins very early in a child's life.

Images of masculinity and femininity surround us constantly, forming and consolidating notions of gender.

Teachers, parents and other children, in turn, reinforce these notions of what is 'manly', 'girly' in the child's psyche.

Arnot, believes that it is through this process, that 'male' and 'female' subjects are established

...models of masculinity used in the family, home and in mass media are transformed into the more school-based forms of masculinity, such as 'doing science' and learning how to play football (35).

In a study carried out by Alison Kelly (1981) results showed that working class and middle class parents were far more concerned that their sons took science and craft subjects rather than the less vocational subjects such as languages, arts and domestic subjects. (36)

Although middle/upper class parents tend to be more encouraging about taking art, many have mixed feelings as to the importance of art in relation to other subjects.(37) O'Donoghue reports that many of the parents he interviewed viewed art as more of a pastime, on similar terms to sport! On the other hand, many viewed art as a subject 'which was interesting, rewarding, and educational as opposed to solely therapeutic', one parent interviewed said:

I think that it is a misconception that art is seen as an easy subject and taken as a soft option. Art is extremely difficult and extremely interesting. It is as important as any other subject. (38)

Working class parents, as previously stated generally discourage a career in the visual arts.

I would not encourage him as the chances of getting a job out of art are quite poor. I would prefer him to have a secure job and secure future with a good standard of living. (39)

This is a clear example of how the family perpetuates stereotyped roles. This role being that 'men are expected to become the breadwinner and to have a dependant wife and dependant children'. (40)

In order for boys to fulfil this 'masculine' role, "it is a major priority for boys to find themselves an occupation and earn a living..." (41)

This in turn, forms the assumption that women will not be the breadwinners, but financial dependants on men. O'Donoghue's study of working class parents found that sons tended to be prepared for a steady line of work with 'a good trade behind him, for example a welder'. Girls on the other hand were not discouraged from pursuing a career in the visual arts.

If a daughter of one of these parents were to show an interest in a career of the visual arts, this would not be a problem. (42)

In what measure can parents attitudes be held responsible for ascribing a "female" tag to the subject of art? Undoubtedly, parents' attitudes are of paramount importance in forming the attitudes of their children but one cannot discount the power of outside influences, peers, teachers, media.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 2

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The Arts in Education: Curriculum and Examinations Board Discussion Paper. (Dublin: CEB, 1985), p.19, section 6.3.10.
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16. Banks, The Sociology of Education, p. 67-68.
17. Ibid., p.70.
18. Benson, The Place of the Arts in Irish Education, p.127, section 8.5.
19. O'Donoghue, "What Parents Say: Parental Attitudes to Art Education at Post Primary level". Solas
20. Peter William Musgrave, Sociology of Education, Third Edition (London and New York: Methven, 1979), p.72.
21. Banks, The Sociology of Education, p.69.
22. Ibid.
23. O'Donoghue, "What Parents Say: Parental Attitudes to Art Education at Post-Primary level", Solas, pg.72.
24. Ibid., p.72
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., p.73
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., p.74
30. Ibid.
31. Benson, The Place of the Arts in Irish Education, p.20.
32. Ibid., p.43.
33. 1994/95 Statistical Report (Dublin, Government of Ireland, 1996).
34. Hannan et al, Co Education and Gender Equality, p.24.
35. Madeleine Arnot, Co Education Reconsidered, Ed. Rosemary Deem (Open University Press, 1984) p.42.
36. Arnot, Co Education Reconsidered, p.43.

37. O'Donoghue, 'What Parents Say: Parental Attitudes to Art Education at Post Primary level' p.71.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Arnot, Co Education Reconsidered, p.44.
41. Ibid.
42. O'Donoghue, 'What Parents Say: Parental attitudes to Art Education' at Post-Primary level, p.73.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In the introduction, I outlined questions to be addressed in this dissertation. The aim of this study was to determine parental attitudes to Art education, and their influence, if any, on their children.

In order to acquire this information I prepared a questionnaire containing a series of eight questions designed to obtain the attitudes of parents.

Parents questioned were from a working class area of Dublin, the majority of which had no background in an art education.

Total population of the school consists of 996 pupils. Of this 62% are male and 38% are female. Original sample number of the study was 34 pupils, of which 70% of parents replied. Of the 24 respondents, 13 were parents of male pupils and 11 were parents of female pupils. Of those parents questioned, 75% of respondents were mothers.

38% of the population of the school take art as a subject. Male pupils number 621, and of these 38% take art, female pupils number 375, and of these 37% take art.

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CHAPTER 4

Results and Discussion

The objective of the questionnaire was to gain an insight into parental attitudes to art education at post primary level. The response rate to the questionnaire by the parents was reasonable, with a 70% response rate. This can be interpreted as a positive marker of parents interest in their sons/daughters educational matters.

Of the respondents 75% were mothers. One may interpret this figure as an indication that mothers tend to play a more interactive role in their child's educational development. However, one must be cautious of such a claim as the time of day (lunchtime) that the questionnaires were completed may have meant that some fathers were simply unavailable.

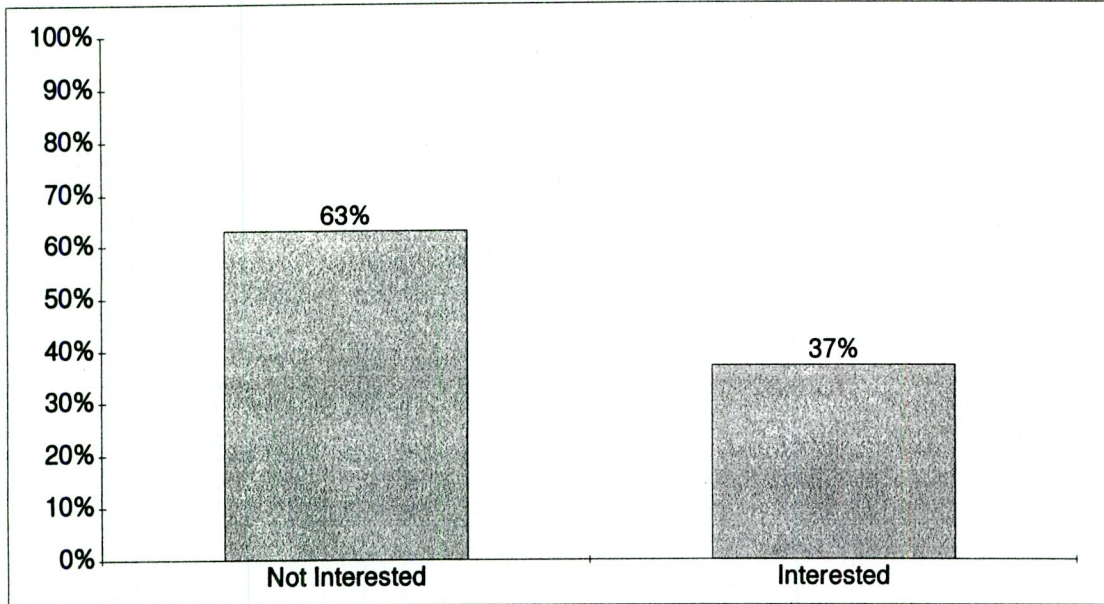
The majority of parents had no form of art education and had no aspirations in pursuing one (Table 1). A significant proportion of parents believed they had no influence on their sons/daughters choice of art as an exam subject (table 2). Numerous studies have previously concluded that parents from working class backgrounds, as in this study, place little value on art education and fail to understand the career opportunities offered through the visual arts. This lack of parental input in the child's subject choice may stem from a belief that this is an area for which the school are responsible. It is the school's duty to guide their children along the correct path.

A strong majority of parents believed art is as necessary as the traditional subjects (mathematics, English, science) (Table 3). Initially this can be taken as a positive attitude towards art, however further analysis of the questionnaire may reveal that parents felt that a 'yes' response was the most appropriate answer. The actual knowledge of parents on the benefits and opportunities offered by an art education were revealed as limited and uninformed. For example, majority of parents cited creativity as the sole purpose of an art education. They failed to recognise arts importance in developing the child's life skills and problem solving abilities. Parents were also unfamiliar with career opportunities offered in visual arts. From a list of 14 possible career routes within the visual arts field only the more traditional lines of work (Graphic designer, Fashion designer) were viewed as possible career choices.

For many years art has been perceived as a subject more suitable for girls than boys. However, in this study parents were in 100% concordance that art was equally suitable for girls and boys. (Table 4).

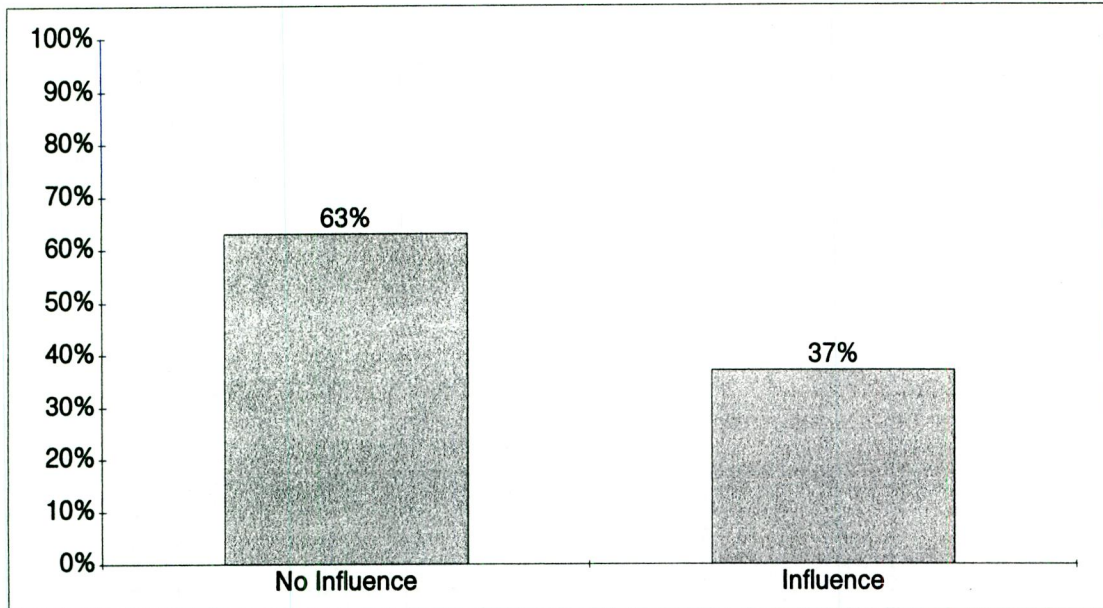
This response suggests that gender inequality does not begin in the home and parents are equally supportive of their sons and daughters pursuing art. In drawing such a conclusion, one must be cautious. Perhaps the "politically correct" climate of today influenced parents opinions.

TABLE 1



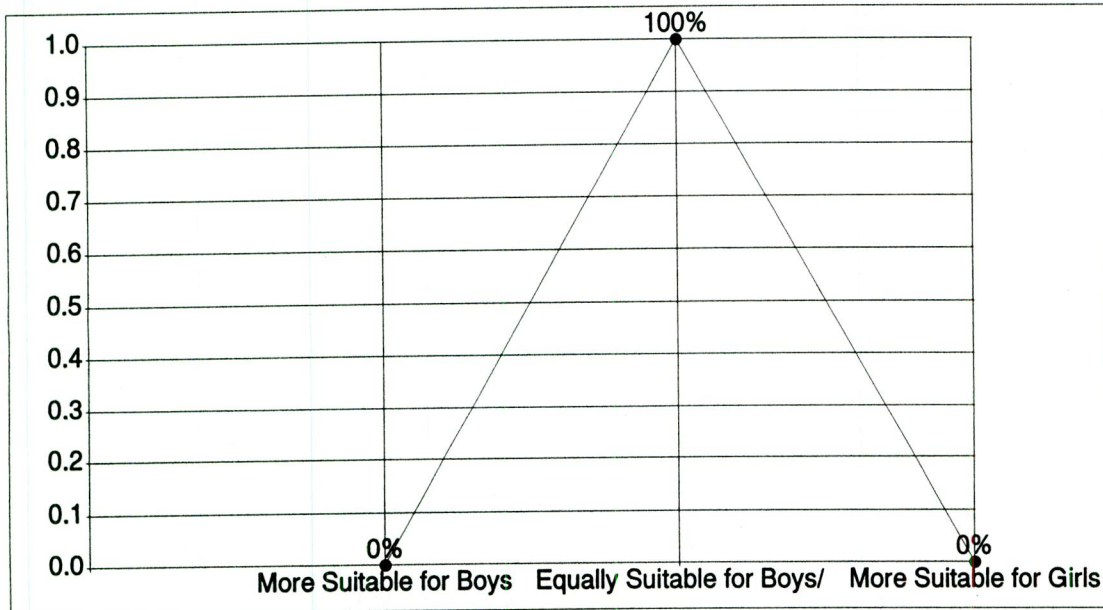
**PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS INTERESTED IN PURSUING
AN ART EDUCATION**

TABLE 2



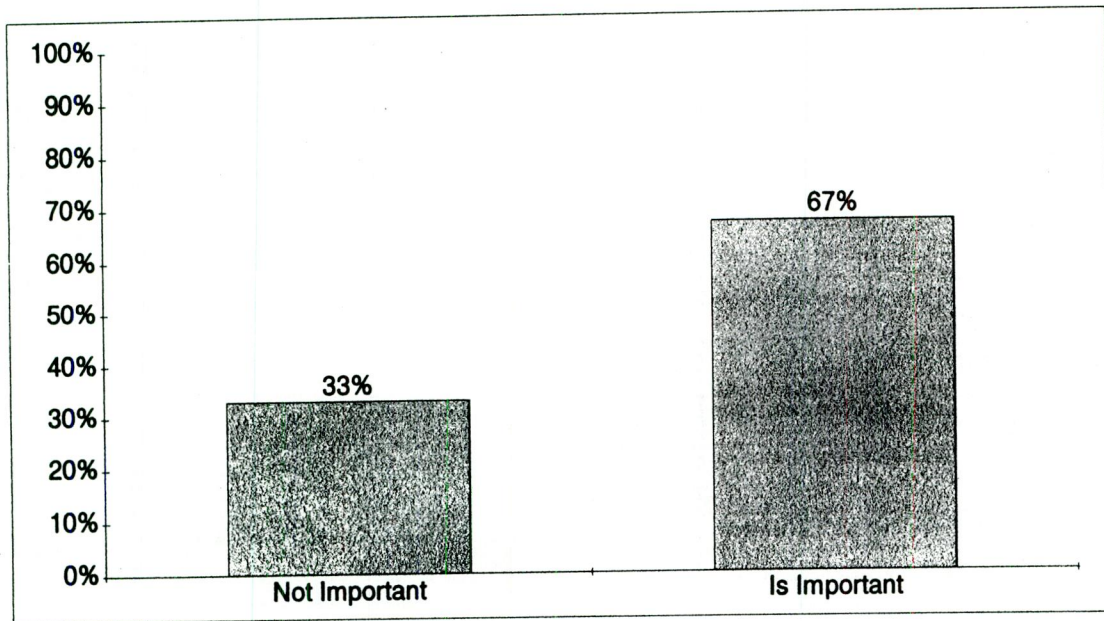
**PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHO BELIEVE THEY
INFLUENCED CHILD'S CHOICE IN TAKING ART AT
SCHOOL**

TABLE 3



**PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS THAT BELIEVE
ART IS SUITABLE FOR BOYS/GIRLS**

TABLE 4



**PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS THAT BELIEVE AN ART
EDUCATION IS AS NECESSARY AS THE TRADITIONAL
SUBJECTS**

CONCLUSION

Recent years have seen a dramatic growth in coeducational schooling in Ireland. Coeducation was seen as a positive step forward particularly in the area of gender equality. It was viewed as an opportunity to bridge the gap between the traditional "male" and "female" subjects.

However, rather than resolve male/female subject segregation, coeducation merely emphasised the issue. The gender fairness of coeducation was questioned and the existence of a 'hidden' curriculum which implicitly conveyed the expected norms and values for the sexes, was uncovered.

Coeducation has not achieved its objective, to help break down stereotypes and open opportunities for all regardless of sex. Hannan et al. Believe that if coeducation is to be successful the underlying reasons for failure must be tackled. Hannan et al. have proposed certain recommendations attempting to improve gender inequality in the school and classrooms. They suggest that school management must be made more aware of the need for gender fairness in school curricular arrangements and organisation. On ground level, teachers should receive in - service training to ensure gender equality within the classroom.

However, to lay the onus of responsibility solely at the schools doorstep would be to discount the effects and biases of the wider society. Within this society, parents must be held accountable for forming childrens gender definitions. Art has been perceived as a female subject. Parental attitudes, and social class are over riding factors regarding the low participation rate of Art at Post Primary level amongst male pupils. To apportion responsibility to one or other of the schooling methods or parental attitudes will fail to address the problem of equality as a whole. The question is of a broader spectrum, a symptom of

society and requires fundamental shifts in attitudes away from the stereotypical image of what is quintessentially male/female in education and a more egalitarian approach must be adopted.

APPENDIX

5th Years

PLEASE ANSWER EACH QUESTION BY TICKING APPROPRIATE BOX

1. PLEASE INDICATE RESPONDENT

Father ☐ Other (male) ☐

Mother ☐ Other (female) ☐

2. HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN ANY FORM OF ART EDUCATION? (School or adult classes)

Yes ☐

No ☐

3. IF NOT, WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN DOING SO?

Yes ☐

No ☐

4. AS YOUR SON/DAUGHTER CHOSE ART AS A LEAVING CERT SUBJECT, HAVE YOU INFLUENCED THIS CHOICE?

Yes ☐

No ☐

5. IN YOUR OPINION, IS ART EDUCATION AS NECESSARY AS THE TRADITIONAL SUBJECTS (MATHS, ENGLISH, SCIENCE)?

Yes ☐

No ☐

6. IN YOUR OPINION, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ARE GAINED FROM AN ART EDUCATION?

Life Skills ☐

Drawing/Painting ☐

Problem solving ☐

Creativity ☐

History of Art ☐

7. IS ART A SUBJECT, WHICH IS

More suitable for boys than girls ☐

More suitable for girls than boys ☐

Equally suitable for girls and boys ☐

8. IN YOUR OPINION, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ART-RELATED JOBS MIGHT SUIT YOUR CHILD?
(Tick as many as you wish)

- ☐ Graphics (poster design)
- ☐ Fashion Designer
- ☐ Art Teacher
- ☐ Animator (cartoons)
- ☐ Textile Industry (fabric making)
- ☐ Industrial design
- ☐ Theatre design
- ☐ Painter
- ☐ Sculptor
- ☐ Interior Design
- ☐ Pottery
- ☐ Photographer
- ☐ Art Historian
- ☐ Art Critic

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