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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
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THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING
APPRECIATION THROUGH CRITICAL STUDIES IN
ART AND DESIGN EDUCATION

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BY

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation discusses the importance of developing students art appreciation through a structured critical analysis program. Essentially it addresses the need for a greater balance in art syllabus between art appreciation and practical work. It questions if students today are receiving a full art education. As Vincent Lancier states that “the most important benefit we can provide for young people is to make them knowledgeable enjoyers of art”. Students should experience art by both creating it and responding to it. This art experience can only be optimised if students are taught how to respond fully to art. Critical analysis of art is the skill of responding to art, the learning potential of which seems to have been overlooked. Even on the Junior Certificate with its emphasis of the integration of appreciation with practical work, the lack of importance given to critical skills is evident in the unstructured way in which it is implemented in the curriculum and lack of guidelines.

In Chapter 1, the nature of art appreciation and critical studies is discussed. Chapter 2 considers why critical studies should be taught and possible benefits of such instruction. The place of art appreciation and judgement on both the Junior and Leaving Certificate is discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 deals with methodology and the approach that should be taken in teaching critical skills.

The final Chapter describes how the above theory was applied to the classroom. It includes a taped class discussion on Picasso’s Guernica, to demonstrate students skills of critical analysis.

CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO ART APPRECIATION AND CRITICAL STUDIES

There are certain educational issues, arising as they do from time to time which provoke much thought and discussion. Recently it has been in the area of critical and historical studies in Art and Design education. Teachers already under considerable pressure, question whether there is a place for the theoretical aspects of art and design in the syllabus. There is confusion as to whether this is simply another name for Art History and much annoyance with the prospect of adding yet another subject to an already over crowded timetable.

Much of the teaching which takes place in the school art room at present has a strong bias in favour of the practical. Emphasis is placed on observation, analysis and interpretation. But is this true visual education?

In a typical secondary school the school administrators bracket art as a “practical” subject for the purposes of the option system. The teaching style is as informal as the dress of the art teacher. A typical scene would be of pupils drawing, painting, modelling in clay and building in card. This picture is common in most schools today. The accepted role of art as a practical subject is reflected in the amount of books published on ways of introducing pupils to new media and techniques.

Art education is not simply about the acquisition of manual skills. It should be geared not only for the potential practitioner but for students who simply wish to have an informed appreciation of the environment, the different media of visual communication, their own past culture and that of others.

We must question whether students are receiving a truly balanced art education and what exactly would define a balanced art program. According to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment it is a “program of art instruction that integrates the study of art criticism, aesthetics, art history and production.” This means that students will be engaged in making art, learning about contexts in which artworks were created and pondering fundamental questions about art. This is a more broad view of art than when almost exclusive emphasis was placed on children’s art making and its benefits on personality development. This shift in today’s art program is towards the development of art appreciation through critical studies.

In order to enrich the lives of our students, to enable them to see what it is they create in relation to that which has been created in the past, that which is being produced at present; and to assist in the appreciation and intelligent critical understanding of what is and has been important to societies other than our own.

THE NATURE OF APPRECIATION

The word “appreciate” means “valuing” or having a sense of an object’s worth through the familiarity one gains by sustained, guided study. It also involves the acquisition of knowledge related to the object, the artist, the materials used, the historical and stylistic setting, and the development of a critical sense.

THE NATURE OF CRITICAL STUDIES

The term critical studies calls to mind words such as evaluation, discussion, judgements, good and bad. Critical studies is all those things, it is the teaching of how to look at and evaluate a piece of art, form one's own opinion on it and be able to justify it sufficiently. It covers also the teaching of students how to relate to an art work in terms of their own work and on a higher level their own life experience.

To be able to evaluate a piece of art thoroughly requires a substantial knowledge about the nature of art, its make up and background. Therefore the essential knowledge, learning and understanding that must come before such analysis also comes under the realm of critical studies. In essence the learning associated with critical studies could be considered true art education.

CRITICAL STUDIES : A DEFINITION

Critical studies is the sphere of education that brings works of art into informed rather than casual perception by analysing their aesthetic presence, their formative processes, their spiritual, social, economic and political causes and their cultural effects. It would also involve the development of the students vocabulary to enable them to adequately express their ideas and insights which reflect a developing awareness of their own work and that of other artists. It refers to the development of an individual's ability to aesthetically encounter and appreciate visual form, to be able to recognise the primary and secondary surfaces of a work of art or design and understand the various organisation of elements and the experience and symbolic characteristics of those qualities approximately.

Before this new shift in art education towards appreciation and analysis there was, in the 1900's the picture study approach. The teacher would show reproductions of master paintings and would explain the biographical and factual details relating to the works, but there was little individual perception by the student of the elements that made up the visual quality of the work. This is what we aim to achieve with critical studies and it is essential that students are formally taught this in school. It cannot be assumed they will pick it up from their practical work. The critical facilities needed for appreciating art cannot be developed in students from infrequent and non-directed encounters with works of art in museums and galleries either. Art appreciation and judgement are important skills to develop in students and a more structured approach must be taken in developing them. R.C. Niece says that "the typical art appreciation class of showing colour slides is just not good enough for true understanding".

If works of art are merely subject to naive analysis they may become little more than a combination of form, colour, texture and mass. Little will be known or understood about the religious, historical, social, political, economic and other motives which may have given rise to them.

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF A MORE BALANCED ART PROGRAM

One of the main aims of art education should be to develop students, who may not become professional artists or critics but who will be able to make visual forms for aesthetic experience and be able to evaluate them with a degree of taste 4.

By teaching art appreciation and judgement we are instilling in the students some feeling for taste, a form of education that once acquired will never be lost and is more beneficial perhaps than the textbook based learning of subjects that rely on memory banking.

Also by teaching aesthetics and discussing the complexities of works of art and design; we aim to challenge students attitudes towards art as being a “play” or a “doss” subject. but a process which demands careful thinking, a deal of commitment and the calling into play of all the power and skill possessed by the practitioner. Therefore developing a much greater respect for students own work and that of others in their group.

The following are a list of aims of a critical studies program:

There is a definite process of critical analysis which can be divided into four key stages of discussion:

1. Descriptive where a work is discussed in terms of its subject and art elements.
2. Formal Analysis at this stage, the way in which the elements in stage one are organised to achieve a composition is discussed i.e. the principles of design.
3. Interpretative the possible motives why an artist may have created a particular work. What is being said through the work.

4. Judgement and this is the culminating and most demanding stage where Informed Preference judgements must be made and argued on the information collected from the previous three stages.

This process of analysis will be dealt with more fully in Chapter 4.

THE AIMS OF CRITICAL STUDIES

- To build a rich vocabulary for describing colour, line, shape, and other sensory qualities which can help us interpret the expressive meanings of art works.
- To develop students understanding of all the art elements and principles of design and how they are manipulated by artists to achieve affects and meaning.
- To encourage students to defer judgement and to develop a deeper level of response beyond the initial innate response of preference.
- To learn the phased approach to art criticism such as description, analysis, interpretation and informed preference.
- To develop students ability to identify and describe, using the appropriate vocabulary, various visual art forms from different historical periods.
- To expand students frame of reference, their store of art images.
- To develop students ability to make a reasoned assessment of artistic quality.
- To develop students ability to evaluate their own and other students work, with a degree of taste.
- To instil appreciation, and a curiosity for further self directed study and research of art.

The objective therefore of a critical studies program would be to help students acquire such sensibilities that will enable them to experience “visual form on the plane of aesthetic meaning,” 5 to be able to suspend preference until a visual analysis has been made. For teachers it means not necessarily saying a work is good or bad, but helping others see it more completely by breaking it down into layers of perception. First the aesthetic, next the formative process and beyond that contextual, spiritual and symbolic meaning.

The culminating stage of critical analysis is that of judgement and informed preference, where students must make a reasoned assessment of artistic quality. It is important to distinguish here as does David Esler in his book ‘Readings in Art Education’ between statements of preference “I like it” and actual judgements “This is a good painting”. The latter being the desired response. 6. Elliot Eisner states that often “premature judgements of good or bad are made about visual forms without adequately attending to the qualities of the work” 12. In addition to this David Esler states that judgement requires reasons or grounds for statements about a work of art. Therefore to judge the work or be critically informed with respect to it requires an ability to provide reasons for the claims one makes about a work of art or design piece. This is the crux of what a critical studies program is aiming to teach students.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 1

1. Jacob Bronowski, The Visionary Eye, Cambridge University Press, England, 1978, Pg. 13.
2. The National Art Education Association in Al Hurwitz and Michael Day's "Children and their Art", Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, San Diego, 1991, Pg. 40.
3. R.C. Niece, "Art is Fun", Collier MacMillan Publications, London, 1972, Pg. 22.
4. Dr. Kenneth No. Lansy, in Gordon S. Plummer's Children's Art Judgement", Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, Iowa, U.S.A. 1974, Pg. 27.
5. Victor Lowenfeld & N. Lamber, "Creative and Mental Growth", MacMillan Co., Brittain, 1970, Pg. 317-20.
6. David Esker, Readings in Art Education, Blaisdell Publishing Co., U.S.A., 1986, Pg. 40.

CHAPTER 2

WHY TEACH ART APPRECIATION & CRITICAL SKILLS

It is my intention during this chapter to discuss the reasons why more attention should be paid to the development of students critical skills. To do this I will discuss the possible benefits, that being the hoped for outcome of a more balanced art program.

Ideally , a student who has participated in a balanced art program, which attends equally to historical knowledge, analysis and evaluation of artworks, art concepts, vocabulary as well as the accomplishment in the production of art in several media, will have the following experience:

REASONS

1. The student will be introduced to many art works they may not experience at home. Such art works will include fine, folk and the applied arts, thus the child's frame of reference is expanded. They have a greater store of art imagery and subject matter to refer to.
2. The student will have a basic understanding of the range of visual arts of many different cultures throughout history and will be able to various art terms and be able to understand the developments in the story of art, accompanied by a store of relevant examples of the same.

3. Students will develop a greater understanding of how art is influenced by psychological factors within an artists life, or even by political events, social values or changes in technology. Also how cultures are expressed through art and how art in turn influences society.
4. The students will have discussed, read and written about many different art works. He/She will have learnt how to analyse and speculate about the work according to a formal process which can be applied to the discussion of previously unencountered or avant-garde art works and be unfazed by any lack of information or historical knowledge.
5. Students will discuss issues such as the nature of art or even more contemporary issues which surround the making of art, appreciation, displaying, buying, selling and interpreting such artworks. Students will for example learn that there are many different answers to the question "what is art?" and that each can be supported by sound arguments.
6. Students will be able to respond more fully to art experience, be able to form an opinion on this experience, and be able to defend it with reasoned argument. Students confidence in the validity of their own opinion will be improved and they should as a result feel less inhibited to speak up and partake in class discussions.

7. Art learning activities derived from art criticism will take students beyond the descriptive use of language to formal analysis and interpretation of meaning in art. Language instruction can be readily integrated with and enhanced by an art curriculum where students learn systematic ways to talk and write about the visual arts. Visual art images are interesting and can provide issues and topics that students can relate to and therefore are more motivated to speak up and articulate their views.

To build on these points even with all the information a teacher feeds his or her students much of appreciation and criticism will still be based on subjective reactions or experiences e.g. influence of concepts of art developed in the home environment or locality. Eisner points out that “these forms of art influence the way the child conceives art. Thus they become his frame of reference for art” 2. For example, if a student has never experienced abstract or non-objective art or his conception of art is limited to forms that imitate nature it will be difficult for him to encounter abstract or non-objective art appreciatively i.e. it won't fall into his view of “art”.

The art teacher therefore must help expand the students frame of reference so that his concept of art extends well beyond the limited conception that is unfortunately quite common in many homes. Therefore it is especially important that students from underprivileged homes are encouraged to see the best art and read good books on art, as they rarely have the opportunity to add to their knowledge of art. It is the teachers duty to supply the inspiration and sources of knowledge that their home environment has denied them. The development of students art judgement makes their vision of the world more expansive and their perception more objective.

THE BENEFITS OF GROUP DISCUSSION

Critical studies in the classroom take the form of group discussions. These discussions can be very beneficial on many levels and as such should be promoted in the art room. Students should be encouraged to express their ideas and insights gained in reflection upon their own and others work, which heightens their understanding and encourages self evaluation of their own work and that of other students, the problems they may encounter and their possible resolution. Such evaluative group discussion should be encouraged. It promotes self expression and interaction but not only this, it can actually benefit the holistic development of the student.

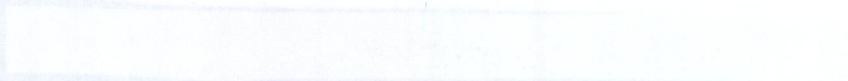
The critical discussion of art within a group situation “stimulates language development, promotes conversation that eventually leads to a greater willingness and ability to express oneself verbally” 3 and thus their confidence to speak up and their belief in the validity of their own opinion is strengthened.

A current concern in general education has to do with levels of thinking that are fostered within all subjects in the curriculum. Evidently too much of students time is spent at lower levels of thinking, involving rote learning, identification and recall and too few higher level thinking skills are developed.

The art curriculum is one of the easiest and most direct means to engage children in higher levels of thinking. Art criticism involves forming hypothesis for interpretation of meaning in visual works and discussion, debate, and defence of different interpretations based on visual evidence of the work.



1. Photograph of students involved in group discussion.



THE BENEFIT OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS ON ART, TO SLOW LEARNERS AND NON-GIFTED STUDENTS

The visual and verbal aspect of art criticism can be of great benefit to slow learners. By teaching students to name objects depicted in paintings, naming colours, types of line, texture, shape and then introducing visual concepts such as contrast and balance, you can do much to stimulate language development.

For example, postcard images can be given to students to sort out according to simple categories such as subject matter, art modes (landscapes, interiors, cityscapes etc.), mood (happy, sad) and many others. short stories about the artists can be read, even photographs or self-portraits of the artists could be shown to make them more real for the students.

A balanced art program, that which values art appreciation and critical studies can provide rich learning opportunities for mentally retarded as well as normal or gifted children. The full educational resources - including art reproductions, games, films, videos, slides, books and magazines should be used for the education of all students.

CRITICAL STUDIES IN ART: - A GATEWAY TO GREATER LEARNING

Elliot Eisner describes art analysis as “one of man’s major avenues for the formulation and expression of his ideas, his images and his feelings”. 4. With critical studies the process of analysis and group discussion of such works that these ideas, images and feelings are not only formulated but clarified and shared.

As discussed it provides us with the means to examine and experiment with different realities in ways that are helpful for the students development. It serves therefore as a source for a unique kind of knowledge - the realities of existence which is not merely known but experienced. This is a form of knowledge which unfortunately the exam focused curriculum hasn't and cannot in its present state cater for proficiently.

When a new art work is introduced to children in the classroom issues are introduced which demand the employment of a higher level of thinking. For example when I showed my students a slide of one of the French artist Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades "The Fountain" the question "is this art" of course arose. Accompanying this were questions such as "If this is art, are all mass produced products art"? "Why is this in the museum and others not"? Such discussions on the nature of art which arise through critical analysis cannot be separated from the philosophical discipline of aesthetics. This type of discourse uses higher levels of thinking so valued by those concerned with general education.

Crucial episodes in history, nations, critical episodes such as birth, marriage, wars, dynasties and revolutions all of which have left their traces embedded in works of art are also discussed in the art room. Society relies upon the images of art to define social roles of the family, government, religion and the status of individuals within these institutions.

Through group discussions moral issues can be analysed and assimilated, controversial issues discussed, opinions formed.

Alistair Smith of the National Gallery, London states his belief that a painting should work “as a historical, cultural and social document” and be used as a means to “examine and elucidate a complex past” 5. This statement was used in reference to a painting by Albrecht Altdorfer ‘Christ taking Leave of His Mother’.

Smith advocates total honesty with students about background circumstances that may accompany a work of art for the learning experience they provide. This particular painting could be read at the level of subject matter but if we search deeper into the iconographical meaning more serious issues are revealed, in this particular case Smith was referring to anti-Semitism.

Rather than detract from a work of art, such revelations can help to establish a fuller understanding, not only of the object itself but of the sometimes complex motives and beliefs that gave rise to it, and of the changing attitudes to it in a perspective time. Rather than the banal approbation of all works of art both students and teacher benefit from the discussion of works in which values are questioned in the light of how we regard issues today.

Not only is our own society analysed but the visual arts of the great ages cultures of the world, Egypt, Greece, Africa and China inform us on other societies, religions, technologies and respective cultures. By studying works of art students can gain understanding of the roles and lifestyles of various cultures.

THE 'REAL WORLD OF ART' EXPOSED

Art education has traditionally been portrayed as a means to foster creativity, provide leisure activities and develop self concept. It may indeed do all these things, but there is also an opportunity, within the realm of critical studies to learn about the 'real world of art' i.e. what it means to be an artist, what an artist contributes to the world and to what extent their lives are influenced by arts both fine and applied.

Students could also learn about the function of art criticism thus giving relevance to their study. An interested area of study would be the form art criticism takes today. Students could also be introduced to art journals, the working of art museums, art fairs, auctions and societies of artists. The 'real world of art' is as valid a form of art knowledge as that presented in the textbook.

The world of art should be demystified for the students. It is important that students are aware of the many different forms it takes and the different art related occupations in addition to the "fine artist", graphic designer, illustrator, animator, and fashion designers and the many different areas that students may be interested to go into.

The development of critical capacities in pupils and the whole area of knowledge learnt through critical studies would seem to be an essential educational function. Educators need to address themselves in exploring ways of developing such skills and give consideration to the implications of accepting responsibility for this area of development.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER TWO

1. Al Hurwitz and Michael Day, Children and Their Art, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, San Diego, 1991, Pgs. 44 - 45.
2. Elliot Eisner, "Educating Artistic Vision", Collier MacMillan Publications, London, Pg. 49.
3. Elliot Eisner, "Reading in Art Education", Blaisdell Publishing Co., U.S.A. 1986, Pg. 207.
4. Ibid, Pg. 32.
5. Allistair Smith, "Description of the Course, History and criticism in Schools," National Association of Art Advisors, 1987.

CHAPTER 3

THE PLACE OF ART APPRECIATION AND CRITICAL STUDIES ON THE PRESENT LEAVING CERTIFICATE SYLLABUS

The leaving certificate course requires a huge body of work to be covered in a considerably short period of time. As a history course it is quite impossible to cover everything with just one 40 minute class a week devoted to it.

The course is divided into three sections covering Irish and European history and a general appreciation section.

The following is a brief outline of the course content.

THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE ART HISTORY AND APPRECIATION COURSE, CONTENT

Section 1

Irish History -

Pre-Christian Ireland.

Early Christian Ireland.

Eighteenth Century Georgian Ireland.

Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Irish Artists.

Section 2

- European History
- Greek and Roman
 - Medieval Europe
 - the Renaissance
 - Impressionism and Early Twentieth Century Art Movements

Section 3

This is a general appreciation section covering

- Product Design
- Film
- Culture
- Environment
- Advertising
- Exhibitions Visited

True learning and understanding of the development of art cannot be taught with a course so large, playing within such time constraints. Ultimately class content will be determined by the exam. Perhaps instead of trying to superficially cover the entire vault of art historical fact, could we not instead concentrate on teaching the skills of historical enquiry and analysis, with the emphasis shifted to critical skills, the study of ideas and values in art. The history of art could simply be a framework for considering these.

Also if we scaled down the length of the history course, to sufficiently demonstrate to the students the variety of styles and movements and at the same time familiarise them with traditionally well known names such as Giotto, Michelangelo, Monet and Picasso, we would have the luxury of added time to develop students critical skills.

As will be discussed in greater depth later, the ability to analyse and base judgement on such analysis is an important skill and the basis of all art learning. The skill of critical analysis should be introduced at a much earlier stage than the Senior Cycle. Such a need has been recognised and is evident in the aims of the junior certificate where the importance of support studies is stressed, and integrated as part of the curriculum.

Senior cycle students studying art history should be freed from the blind reliance on textbook analysis and description of works. Their confidence in the validity of their own analysis needs to be strengthened. As previously discussed too often students are forced to rely on memory banking without assimilating the facts, developing their own opinion and practising their critical skills. They would get greater satisfaction from an exercise which allows them to make a personal enquiry as opposed to being “fed” information constantly.

“it is critical understanding rather than the accumulation of unrelated fact that should be the aim of any art course”.⁸

Once such skills are mastered students should be able to approach previously unencountered visual experience with confidence in their powers of analysis, understanding and the communication of such information.

The present art history and appreciation syllabus is coming under much attack as the importance of critical skills is being realised. If we examine the structure of the leaving certificate, art history and appreciation are being dealt with in separate sections.

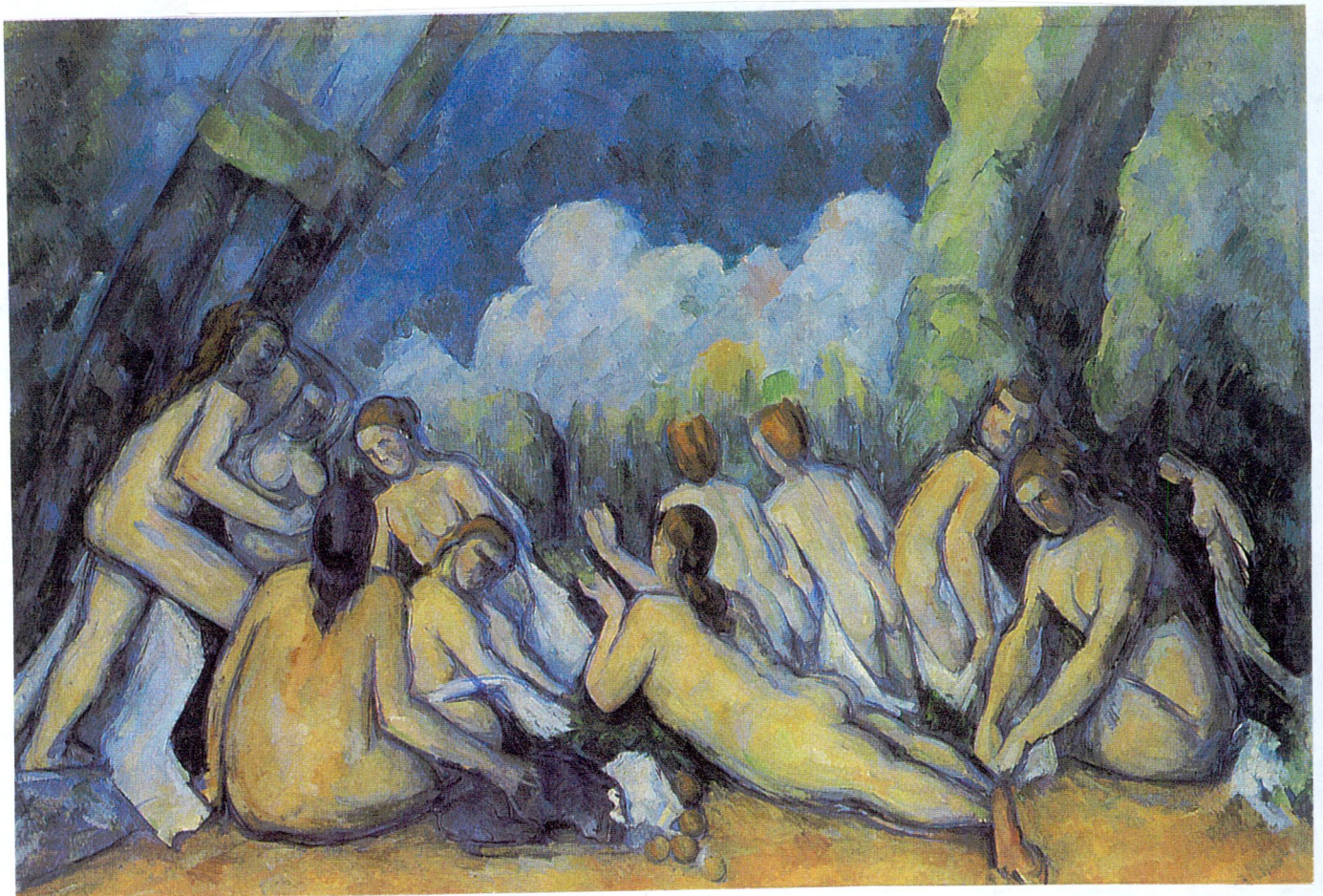
Students are asked questions on Irish and European art which do not test students skills of analysis and critical prodding or their ability to form an opinion on a work, and back up their claims with a relevant argument.

For example, a question on the European section of the 1996, higher level paper, read as follows:

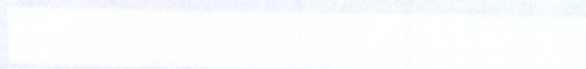
Paul Cezanne's (1839 - 1906) painting influenced the development of modern art. Discuss his work, with reference to paintings which you are familiar with and to those illustrated below.



2. 'An Old Woman with a Rosary' - Paul Cezanne



3. 'Bathers' - Paul Cezanne



This question tests students' understanding of the artist and the movement to which he belonged, the explanation of which has been sufficiently covered in the students own text books, and can be quite easily learnt off and regurgitated for the exam but I would argue whether this shows true art education and understanding. If a student was questioned on a unknown artist of the same movement, would he/she be capable of discussing the work in a structured manner and giving a reasoned assessment of artistic quality.

The addition last year of colour illustrations to the Leaving Certificate paper was a positive and much needed move, one which would lend itself quite easily to the discussion on the exam, of previously unencountered artists and their works. If such a change to the exam structure was to occur the whole area of art appreciation and critical analysis would take on a whole new importance. Teachers would be forced to have a more committed attitude to the use of relevant support studies, group discussion and the teaching of the process of critical analysis, as a lack of attention to these areas on their part, would show up in exam results.

Some may argue that attention to students analytical skills have been dealt with sufficiently in the appreciation section. However our aim should be to develop students' powers of critical analysis so they can form their own judgements about art works rather than accept what the textbooks say. But is a separate section of the course an appropriate way to do this? I have already discussed the importance of critical analysis being built into the history section and even suggested its taking precedence over it. It should become an important part of each topic discussed i.e. knowledge and critical analysis should be aimed at simultaneously. Once these skills are mastered students should be able to apply them to all sorts of previously unencountered material.

In any case, the appreciation section of the syllabus is often neglected because of the huge amount of work that must be covered on the history of art within such a short time, 18 months exactly.

THE PLACE OF ART APPRECIATION AND CRITICAL SKILLS ON THE JUNIOR CERTIFICATE

The Junior Certificate has a much healthier approach to the teaching of art history through support studies. The relatively recent change in the Junior cycle reflects the heightened awareness of the importance of critical studies - art appreciation and judgement. Indeed some of the aims of the junior cert. could be adopted as part of the basis for an improved senior cycle syllabus.

The New Junior Certificate art, craft and design syllabus was introduced in Autumn 1989. The aims of this syllabus as set out by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment are as follows:

AIMS OF ART, CRAFT AND DESIGN AT JUNIOR CYCLE

1. To promote in the student an informed, inquiring and discriminating attitude to his or her environment and to help the student relate to the world in visual, tactile and spatial terms.
2. To develop a sense of personal identity and self-esteem through practical achievement in the expressive, communicative and functional modes of art, craft and design.

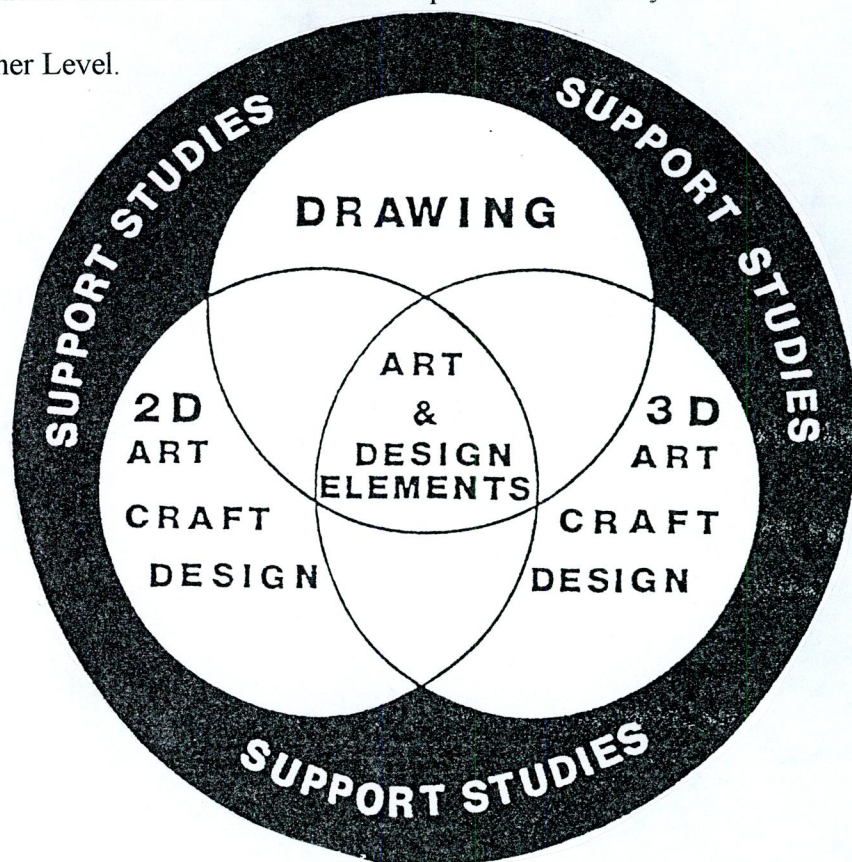
3. To develop in the student an understanding of art, craft and design in a variety of contexts - historical, cultural, economic, social and personal.
4. To develop in the student the ability to apply evaluative criteria to his/her own work and to the work of others and in his/her daily encounters with the natural, social and man-made environments and with the mass media.
5. To promote in the student a practical understanding of and competence in the principles and skills underlying visual and constructional design and problem-solving.
6. To develop through structured practical work the student's aesthetic sensibilities and powers of critical appraisal, appreciation and evaluation and to enhance the student's qualities of imagination, creativity, originality and ingenuity.

Aims numbered 3 to 6 are particularly relevant to the development of art appreciation through critical studies.

SYLLABUS STRUCTURE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT STUDIES WITHIN THAT STRUCTURE

The syllabus is structured to ensure a balance between experiencing, making and understanding. 3. From the diagram below we can see that art, craft and design as experienced through drawing, 2D and 3D are considered as three interdependent disciplines. We can also see the importance of support studies on this syllabus. They

form a vital and integral part of the learning experience. The core area of study is common to all and is further expanded by a wide range of options, such as animation, photography, batik etc. The teacher selects a minimum of one option for Ordinary Level and a minimum of two for Higher Level.



Support studies are an important part of the syllabus and must be introduced in every area of learning experience. On the subject of support studies the N.C.C.A. state that:

SUPPORT STUDIES: Critical, evaluative and appreciative skills.

Support studies involving critical appraisal, history and appreciation of art, craft and design, and related studies should be organised to form an integral part of the learning experience. The N.C.C.A. also suggests that such studies could be a starting block or stimulus for studio based work, therefore students will personally experience those formal elements introduced and discussed.

They also state that the analysis of works of art can define for both students and teacher certain criteria for evaluation. They outline areas, which, through the critical process attention is directed to:

- Specific treatment and organisation of a variety of visual elements and form in specific works.
- General concept of form.
- Significance of symbolic meaning being expressed.

and that all these qualities must be considered in relation to the cultural and historical context in which the artist, craftsperson, designer lives or has lived. 5. Through such studies the student can recognise, understand and relate to the artists motives, feelings, philosophy for himself as a human being and for life.

The N.C.C.A. states that “Integration of support studies in this way should lead to a greater understanding, balance and effectiveness of the learning as a whole” 6.

The aims set out in the Junior Certificate are quite expansive. No aims however have been laid out for the Leaving Certificate art history and appreciation course, therefore, teachers must examine the structure of the exam when deciding what to teach, rather than concentrating on the learning content of the class.

Ideally, the senior cycle should build on the knowledge and skills already acquired at junior level therefore maintaining continuity and a deeper understanding and relevance. As is the case of the Junior Certificate the history of art, craft and design at senior level

should be introduced in relation to the practical work undertaken. "Learning situations should be carefully selected keeping in mind their continuity - that is, the extent to which they will allow the student to practice the understanding and skills previously acquired"

7. We must question the relevance of teaching an art history course so abstracted from its practical partner. There is little meaningful learning in mere "literary application of standards for appreciating art" ⁸. A balance must be reached in the curriculum between the two examinations. This leads to the subject of the integration of practical work with critical studies on the Leaving Certificate syllabus.

THE NEED FOR GREATER INTEGRATION BETWEEN ART APPRECIATION AND CRITICAL STUDIES WITH PRACTICAL WORK AT SENIOR LEVEL

"Children should experience art by both creating it and responding to it" these modes of encounter are interdependent. 9. The junior certificate states that the "history of art... should be introduced in relation to" the practical work to be undertaken. At present, senior level art history and critical studies are not integrated with practical work.

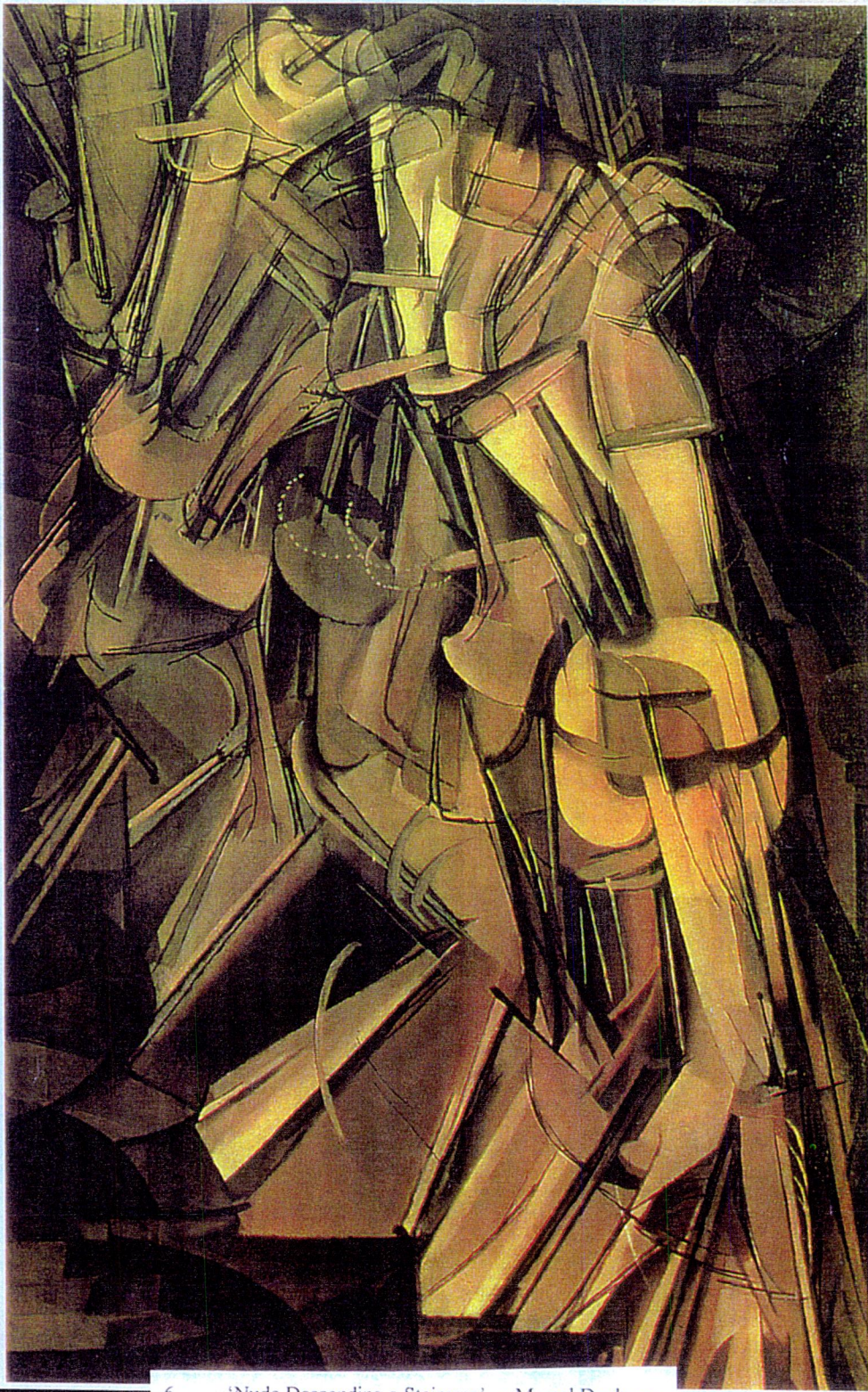
The very reason that leaving cert. students have art history and appreciation as a compulsory part of their course is because of the recognition that practical art cannot be studied in isolation. If both theoretical and historical elements of the course are linked to the practical part of the course a richer and vast art experience would be the result. This is one of the main principles of the junior certificate syllabus for art. There is a need for carefully selected support studies, visuals, articles of interest and suitable materials which have relevance to the practical work in hand. It only makes sense that such integration

of theory and practice be continued at Leaving Certificate level. Very often even the study of art history is neglected in favour of studio work therefore resulting in students leaving school with little or no knowledge of art history or the powers of critical analysis, and discrimination other than their own practical work, which is not the aim of art education.

The imbalance in favour of practical studies in a joint course like the leaving cert. is also reflected in the neglect of critical studies when compared to the treatment given to art historical fact. Obviously we should aim to link the practical element of the leaving cert. more closely to the art history and appreciation of the course. But how could we go about it?

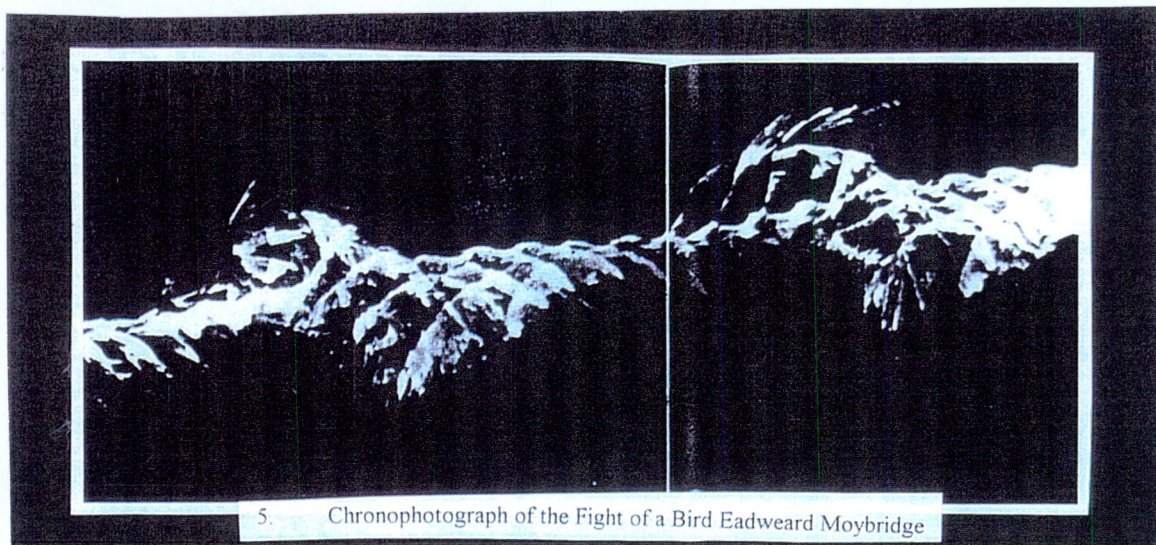
POSSIBLE SUGGESTION

Again we find ourselves looking towards the junior cert. model for answers. A thematic or project based approach could be taken, where, like the junior certificate, students would chose a theme of interest and do their own in-depth research of relevant artists and movements. Therefore research skills and analytical thinking would be put to work. Hence making more real, the historical framework in which the student and his/her work belongs. Such research and analysis makes for interesting project work and provides a rich source for the students own practical work. Thus allowing one area of the course to influence another.



6. 'Nude Descending a Staircase' - Marcel Duchamp

It is my experience that students are much more interested in art history topics when they are integrated with related studio activities. When teaching my fifth years about figure drawing and action poses we looked at the work of chronophotographers Eadweard Muybridge and Jules Marey and how their work influenced the futurist movement and artists such as Balla and Duchamp. Students found it very interesting to see the context in which futurism began and what these artists accomplished with the concept of forms in motion. Students were very enthusiastic in their gathering of examples of figures in action for their resource pack. Such motivation was reflected in their work and their commitment to completing the finished product.



The combined use of art historical analysis and studio based work, is an ideal situation, but despite the fact that in most schools both subjects are taught by the same teacher there is little or no integration of practical work and theory after Junior Certificate level. This defeats the whole purpose of having a theory element in the course, they may as well be two completely different subjects.



FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 3

1. Michael J. McCarthy, Introducing Art History: A Guide for Teachers, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1978, Pg. 7.
2. N.C.C.A., The Junior Certificate Art, Craft and Design Hardbook, The Department of Education, Publishers, Ireland, Pg. 2.
3. N.C.C.A., Art Craft and Design Guidelines for Teachers, The Department of Education Publishers, Ireland, Pg. 2.
4. Ibid, Pg. 5.
5. Ibid, Pg. 55
6. Ibid, Pg. 15.
7. Ibid, Pg. 7.
8. Michael J. McCarthy, Introducing Art History: A Guide for Teachers, Pg. 7.
9. Laura H. Chapman, Approaches to Art and Education, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, U.S.A., 1978, Pg. 72.

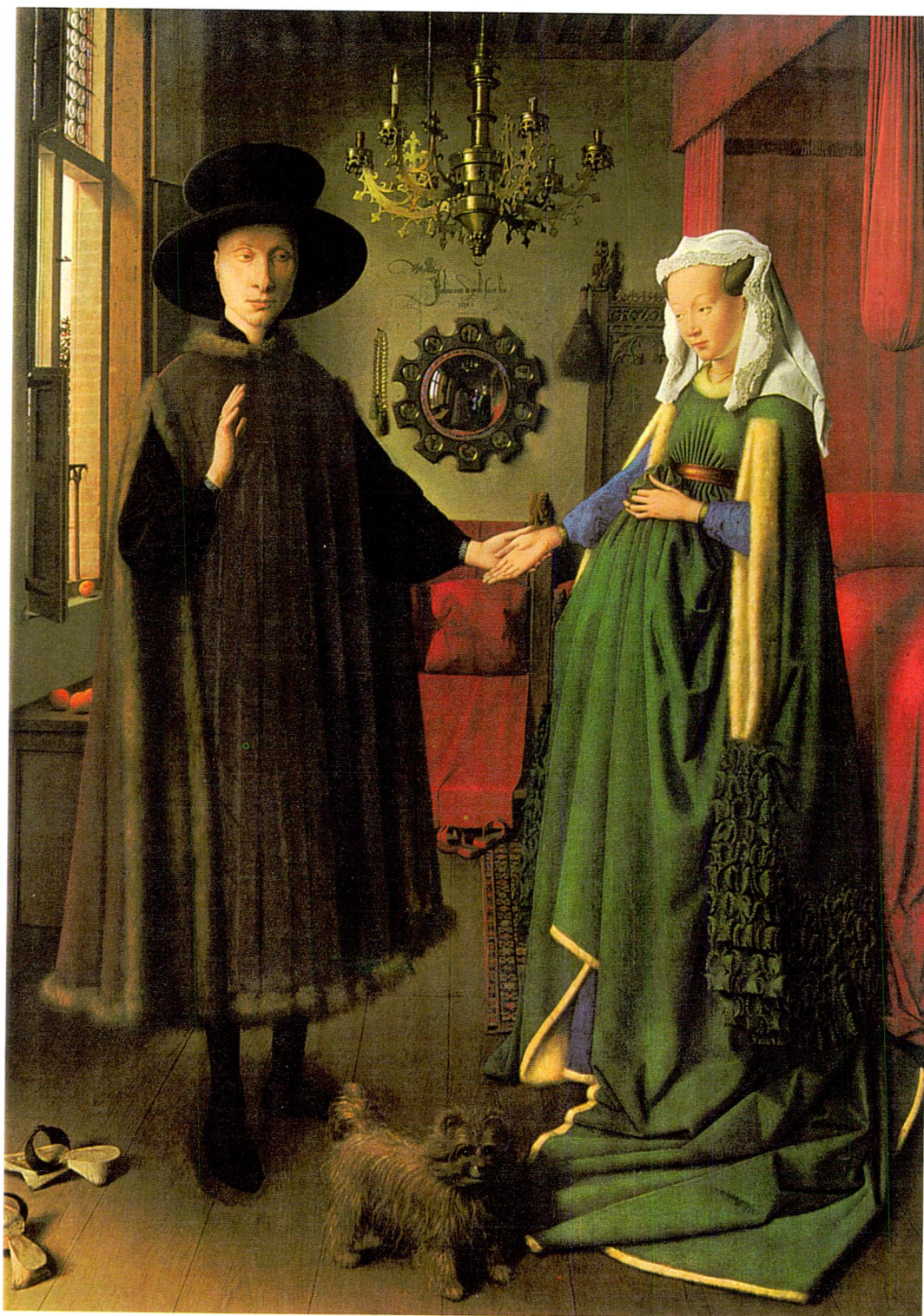
CHAPTER 4

HOW CAN WE APPROACH THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL SKILLS

In the area of teaching criticism and appreciation there are a number of conflicting viewpoints as to how it should be implemented. Some feel that a formal teaching approach would in some way take away from the students natural spontaneity and free response, that it would in fact inhibit students, make them self conscious and unsure of what is being asked of them. Others believe that critical analysis should only be employed in relation to studio based activities when thought expedient. I believe, however, that students should be made aware of the critical processes, therefore bringing order to their perceptions and equipping them with such tools that will enable them to encounter artworks of any culture and period in history.

The more structured approach to teaching critical analysis and appreciation, as discussed in Chapter 2, develops students verbal skills and confidence through group discussion and can even promote self expression and interaction among students. More academic students who may not be as competent in the practical area can excel in this other side of art learning.

There is a need for both teachers and students to be more focused during art appreciation class when discussing an artwork. For example if we were studying the painting "The Arnolfini Wedding" (1434) by Jan Van Eyck, questions such as "Why is the woman placed where she is?", "What colours has the artist used to make us look at her?", seem to be lacking in educational value. But questions such as "do you think she is happy?", or "why isn't she wearing any shoes?" are distracting us from the essence and inner life of the work completely, critical learning cannot occur. A more structured approach is necessary.



7. 'The Arnolfini Wedding' - Jan Van Eyck



To be able to conduct any kind of analysis, students must first be acquainted with the components of artworks i.e., art element and principles of design and how they are manipulated by an artist to produce a work of art. One of the main aims of critical studies is the expansion and use of an art vocabulary and the understanding of art concepts.

As with all subjects art information must be taught in a sequential manner. It is important not to see learning activities as a mere collection of independent events. A curriculum in art, one with a balance of activity and appreciation needs sufficient “continuity so that skills can be developed, refined and internalised and hence become a part of an expressive repertoire”. Students will “appreciate those things which to them have already an element of familiarity” ². They will also quickly develop within a systematic sequence. Eisner states that “succumbing to the lure of novelty is no substitute for an analysis of the demands that a task makes upon students and using the results of such analysis in the selection of subsequent tasks” ³. It does not take on the same logical understanding.

Sequence refers to the organisation of curriculum activities which become increasingly complex as students proceed. The Junior Certificate handbook states that the “learning situation should be carefully selected keeping in mind their continuity - that is - the extent to which they will allow the student to practice the understanding and skills previously acquired”. This strengthens the argument for greater continuity between the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate syllabus.

Gordon S. Plummer suggests in his book "Children's Art Judgement", that students should be taught the grammar of art i.e. the art elements and the principles of design and that each should be taught as a separate topic in a sequential manner from line to shape and so on. Consistent use of art examples should be selected for those art terms students are expected to learn. He makes very specific suggestions for each grade, for the study of these topics and for actual studies based practical work related to these topics. Once students have fully understood the art elements and principles of design, steps can be taken towards learning about the art areas i.e. drawing, painting, carving even photography and film again along a logical sequence. Following this, background information should be taught on different eras in art, their styles and the working traditions for a deeper appreciation and more accurate judgement forming.

Edith Henry proposes a sequential structure for looking at works of art once the information above is assimilated by the students.

1. In an analysis of the basic elements found within them. (Work of Art).
2. The discussion of ideas best suited for similar work. (Practical).
3. The evaluation of works when completed both art history reference and practical work should be at this stage be firmly linked. 6.

In Chapter 1 when discussing the nature of critical studies I mentioned briefly the structured process of critical analysis that we have been discussing in this Chapter, and outlined four stages of discussion:

THE FOUR STAGES OF CRITICAL ANALYSIS

1. Description
2. Formal Analysis
3. Interpretation
4. Judgement and Informed Preference

Essentially the four stages can be related to the following four basic questions:

“What do you see?”	-	Description
“How is the work organised”	-	Formal Analysis
“What is the artist saying to us?”	-	Interpretation
“What do you think of the work, and why do you think this?”	-	Informed Preference

Stage 1: Description

This is self explanatory, it requires simply that students be able to describe what they see before them in the artwork. Students should be sensitive to qualities of colour, line, shape, texture etc. They must also be able to recognise the media used by the artist, be able to distinguish between symmetry and asymmetry and be able basically to describe the subject.

Quite interest discussion can result even at this basic stage for example one student may see green another may see blue. A very interesting discussion took place with my own first year group when looking at Jack B. Yeats colour treatment in “Men of Destiny”.

In fact what started out as a simple descriptive exercise turned into a heated debate on whether Jack B. Yeats palette was solely primary colours or whether it was more varied.

Stage 2:

Here the descriptive stage is taken a step further as students describe how the elements discussed in Stage 1 are organised according to a particular structure to form a composition. It is the stage in which the teacher can evaluate whether the students understand and can use the vocabulary and language of design and combine it with that used in the descriptive stage.

Both Stages 1 and 2 focus students attention and prepare students for the more difficult phases of interpretation and judgement.

Stage 3: Interpretation

This stage requires that students make the connection between the artists use of structure or composition of elements and his reasons for doing so. It probes at an artists motives behind the work and the decisions he took in creating it. Again there are many answers disagreements and discussion at this stage but as in Stage 1 and 2 no right or wrong answer.

When discussing Picasso's black and white colour scheme in "Guernica" one student's explanation for this was that Picasso was trying to show how "...after the bombing all the lights would have gone out and everything would have been burnt up and sad and black". Another student suggested he was trying to make his painting look "like a picture in his newspaper."

Both these answers show much imagination and also how understanding of the context in which the work was created can effect the way students perceive an artwork. This particular teaching session will be dealt with in greater depth in Chapter 5.

Stage 4: Judgement and Informed Preference

This is the culminating and most demanding stage of critical analysis. All other stages lead up to this and it is on the knowledge gathered from these stages that one must be able to form an opinion on and support this with a reasoned argument. It is the most telling stage for teachers to be able to access just how well students can use critical and art and design vocabulary to articulate their views.

We distinguished earlier in Chapter 2 between statements of preference and judgement. To recap, a preference refers to one's personal liking or disliking for a work of art, e.g. "I like this painting", no reason is given why, it discourages discussion. Judgement is however subject to further discussion, for example a statement such as, "This is a fine painting", invites a question such as "Why do you think so?" One of the aims of the formal process of analysis is that students defer instantaneous preference until they have given the matter more thought i.e. subjected it to the three stages of, description, formal analysis and interpretation, after which they are qualified to make a more informed judgement.

Synthesising is the drawing together of the discoveries we have made while examining a visual form. John Dewey said that "our impressions should be integrated in a way that leaves us with a feeling of completeness about our response" ⁷. i.e. a fusion of impressions.

To try and encourage such a fusion questions such as the following should be asked:

- What are your thoughts and feelings after experiencing the work?
- Can you link this experience to any other you've had?

By synthesising all your impressions you get an overall understanding of the pervasive qualities and mood of the piece. It will give the students more clarity and coherence to their experience of the work.

Having discussed in detail the formal process of critical analysis, it is important that teachers are aware of some of the many obstacles that one may face, in getting their students to respond fully to visual form and thus stand in the way of informed judgement.

THE OBSTACLES TO FULL RESPONSE ARE:

1. Perceptual Constancies.
2. Stereotypes.
3. Lack of background information.
4. Poor conditions to responding to art.
5. Poor vocabulary.

PERCEPTUAL CONSTANCIES:

“The tendency to perceive the general features of an object rather than its specific qualities”.

This refers to an insufficient or lax examination of an art work i.e. trying to take in all elements of the art work at once, “averaging the size, shapes and details, only taking in a fraction of the detail.

Perceptual constancies are formed at infancy, merely to accommodate our need for points of reference as we moved about in space, avoiding obstacles, for example all cars are seen as one, they are not distinguishable by sizes, shapes or colours.

It is necessary to overcome such perceptual constancies, if not, we may examine a landscape painting and notice nothing else but green fields and trees. However if the work is examined more closely one becomes aware of colour variations, values and even brushstrokes. It is therefore very important that at the descriptive stage of critical analysis students are questioned thoroughly to access the depth of their perception.

STEREOTYPES

These are a form of prejudice in that our thoughts and feelings are effected in the same way that perceptual constancies effect our responses. Stereotypes are an almost mechanical repetition of an idea, an image, a form of speech or an attitude that causes us to prejudge things. These stereotypes are usually challenged by new experiences but can be particularly damaging to the perception a student makes at the interpretation stage of critical analysis. For example, colours such as yellow, red and orange which we quite often associate with warmth and happiness can be equally powerful in conveying death, darkness and damnation.

We are all loaded with such preconceptions but it is not necessary to shatter them in order to get students to experience art more fully, they are still valid in their own right. Instead students should be made aware that even the most traditionally founded symbols are open to alternative interpretation.

Speculating is of course an important aspect of interpreting art. David E. Templeton in his article on critical thinking and the teaching of art, suggests that “in the study of the history of art there is a need for contradiction, instability and even slight fear of the unknown which will cause the student to think critically”.⁸

We cannot tell exactly what the artist is getting at by simply adding up all the evidence, however, we can use the clue that we perceive to arrive at some estimation of the artist's motives. Speculation is the process of adding up such clues in order to formulate good guesses about the significance of visual form.

Students speculations could be challenged by considering the possible significance of the work for example considering the effect if the dominant features were changed into their opposite, changing the scale from small to significantly larger, colours made stronger or more subtle, or if the same work was executed in a different medium. Therefore by challenging such speculations we can highlight students awareness of the meaning held in specific qualities also the origins of the work, time, place, culture and functions.

LACK OF BACKGROUND INFORMATION

When discussing stereotypes we say how prior knowledge about art can interfere and even become a substitute for direct perception. There is however a definite need when embarking on a critical discussion of any work that a knowledge base is created, that is knowledge surrounding a work, (names, dates, places), the context of its creation are explained to the students as well as facts to do with physical or technical details taken from the work. Such information as shown in the example given for the interpretation stage earlier in this Chapter, demonstrates how it can deepen a students perception of a work. Knowledge of media and process helps in the perception and therefore awareness of aesthetic or artistic quality in relating to an artwork.

POOR CONDITIONS FOR RESPONDING TO WORKS OF ART

Poor conditions are a definite obstacle to a full response to an art experience. The hindrance can take on two forms of physical and psychological.

A poor physical setting has an obvious disadvantage, e.g. poor quality slides or poster reproductions, an over reliance on textbook reproductions, viewing a work from a bad angle or under bad lighting conditions or from too far or near a distance, all take away from the quality of the experience. The colour or scale of slides and reproductions differ greatly from the originals. If possible students should experience the works in reality, however the psychological setting in which we view works in the museum etc. can also be a hindrance.

Students may feel inhibited in museums and galleries under the watchful eye of guards and the presence of actual works of art. They may feel embarrassed about asking questions or even maybe afraid to take a closer look at artworks for fear of being told off.

Teachers could overcome such inhibitions by discussing with the students beforehand the role of the museum in society, how it is run, and by visiting them as often as possible.

“In order to respond to work openly and honestly we must be psychologically prepared to do so”⁸. Going to the museum should be an exciting experience for the students not an intimidating prospect. They should feel comfortable and be familiar with their surroundings.

It is important that art teachers are aware of all obstacles that can stand in the way of a full art experience. Many of these can be dispelled through a committed art appreciation and critical studies program, others like poor conditions, can be taken care of by the teacher themselves.

POOR VOCABULARY

The job of building an adequate vocabulary to describe one's perception is of the utmost importance. It loosens the tongues of students, gives them a better understanding of their art experience and also the confidence to talk up and contribute in class.

Language derives from our perceptions and use of language reflects the meaning of such perceptions. A rich vocabulary for describing colour, line and other sensory qualities can help discover clues to the expressive meanings of things we see.

The building of students vocabulary store should be tackled at an earlier stage of instruction, when teaching the basic art elements through practical activities and support studies rich enough to evoke the desired vocabulary from the students. A well developed vocabulary of specific nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs is essential to meaningful understanding of art and teaching it.

The development of students art judgement and appreciation through critical studies makes their vision of the world more expansive and their perception more objective. By teaching this we are instilling in students some degree of taste. This highlights an issue which at this stage must be discussed, that of indoctrination.

THE VALIDITY OF INDOCTRINATION IN AN ART JUDGEMENT AND APPRECIATION PROGRAMME

Indoctrination is a controversial subject especially when discussed in relation to art teaching. Patricia Sloan on the subject considers this “a pernicious activity... beneath contempt for any art teacher”⁹. However it is an important issue and one which must be discussed in relation to my area of study.

As already mentioned most children would not have received much knowledge at home on which to form opinions of “good art”. You often hear children say that they don't like a piece of modernist art. They themselves cannot conclude why or understand how they reached that decision as does anybody else.

As Vincent Lanier points out “no one can force another person to like or dislike something, but one can argue reasons for liking or disliking work of art or anything else” ¹⁰. Gordon S. Plummer states that “appreciation like taste cannot be taught in a formal sense” ¹¹. But what we as teachers must do is show such examples that will encourage one to appreciate their beauty. an outcome of which should be a students acquisition of a feeling for beauty. An example of this would be showing work by Michelangelo for his sensitive handling of the figure, his statue of “David” an example of beauty and grace.

Some might be disturbed at the thought of indoctrination being used, in a subject such as art, on young and impressionable minds. However, education itself can be looked upon as being the process of presenting material that has itself been selected by specialists for the student. Is this not a form of indoctrination and, can it be at all avoided in any subject?

The teacher presents facts to the students who will in turn make value judgements. The same is true of objects the teacher may present to the class even if he or she says absolutely nothing about them, the students will automatically assume it has some quality value therefore it is necessary that education in the classroom must include what is not good art and why.

HOW SHOULD THE TEACHER APPROACH THIS IN THE CLASSROOM?

As already mentioned students own taste will have formed to some extent already, either positively or negatively, and it is necessary to guide and encourage its development. The

important skill in conducting critiques is in guiding discussion without dominating it. Kathy McLead argues that pupils imagination and stimulation will be diminished if the flow of teaching information is controlled exclusively by the teacher. ¹²

It is possible for the teacher to influence the students value judgements in quite an informal manner for example teasing and asking questions on the work and allowing students form their own opinions providing they can support their conclusions.

Plummer, Lanier and Eisner suggest ways of questioning students, helping them to see the work more completely and getting students to formulate reasons for their response, for example:

- Why did the artist make this work?
- What were his intentions behind it?
- Was he successful?

Students may even suggest alternative ways of making a better visual statement.

This kind of process of evaluation can be extended into the total surroundings and opinion forming can be applied to almost anything - furnishings, equipment, buildings etc.

Elliot Eisner and Gordon S. Plummer both prominent art educators see the benefits of indoctrination. I see it more as a form of evaluation and a process of opinion forming. I do not believe that if carefully and skilfully handled how indoctrination could be harmful to students imagination and creativity.

Our personal involvement is expressed in the feeling of confidence we obtain from mastering this process and thus being free of the compulsion to accept any ready made judgement.

Perception cannot be limited to the more sensory recognition alone. Full perception is the organisation of our impressions so that we can fully understand what they mean to be able to interpret things we see or even touch as sources of our feeling. Laura H. Chapman says “unless we can interpret the meaning of our perceptual experience, it has but momentary significance”.

An adequate vocabulary, a balance between objectivity and subjectivity, a willingness to speculate on alternative meanings, good conditions for response and an attempt to synthesis all our impressions is needed for the act of critical analysis.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 4

1. Gordon S. Plummer, Children's Art Judgement, Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, Iowa, U.S.A. 1974, Pg. 12.
2. Vincent Lanier, The Arts We See: - A Simplified Introduction to the Visual Arts, Teachers College Press, New York, 1982, Pg. 20.
3. Elliot Eisner, "Readings in Art Education", Blaisdel Publishing Co., U.S.A., 1986, Pg. 111.
4. N.C.C.A., The Junior Certificate: Art, Craft, Design, Department of Education Publication, Pg. 1.
5. Gordon S. Plummer, "Children's Art Judgement", Pg. 21.
6. Edith Henry, in Gordon S. Plummer's "Children's Art Judgement", Pg. 17.
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9. Laura H. Chapman, "Approaches to Art and Education", Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, Publications, U.S.A. 1978, Pg. 78.

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11. Patricia Sloan, "Teaching Art History in Community College in "New Ideas in Art Education"", E.P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1973, Pg. 280.
12. Vincent Lanier, "The Arts We See", Pg. 280.
13. Gordon S. Plummer, "Children's Art Judgement", Pg. 16.
14. Katy McLeod, Introduction of "Critical Studies in Art and Design Education", Longman Publications, England, 1989, Pg. 2.

CHAPTER 5

CLASSROOM APPLICATION

SCHOOL PROFILE

The school I did my teaching experience in was an all boys school run by the Christian Brothers. It is located on the Northside of Dublin. It's catchment area includes Coolock, Clontarf, Artane, Raheny, Malahide and Portmarnock, therefore the students come from many different backgrounds mainly middle to working class.

The school itself is well run, there are some discipline problems but student teachers find there is quite a good support system for them. The art room I found to be poorly equipped for practical activity, there was no kiln, a poor supply of paints, brushes and other tools were either missing or in bad condition. On the other hand for art history I found it to be more than satisfactorily equipped with a video recorder, a wide variety of art tapes, large selection of reproductions on the walls, a selection of contemporary art magazines, periodicals, a slide projector and one of the largest selection of slides I've seen in any art room. It was difficult to ascertain however if they were used to their fullest capacity.

The class on which I have based my research were a group of first years which I had over a course of 16 weeks. During this period we completed 2 schemes of work. The first was on lino printing, students learnt about all the main art elements except for colour and form. They also learnt about the design principles, balance, composition, rhythm, variety and symmetry. This knowledge was taught through the use of relevant support studies implemented in students own work and displayed in their final piece.

10/10/10

Scheme 2 was a painting scheme, where students produced quite an abstract painting, the design of which students got from information they collected on objects from the gold and bronze age in the National Museum of Ireland. Students learnt about optical and tactile textures, how to create different textures with paint and an understanding of the design process was developed. Support studies during this scheme were brought beyond the stage of mere recognition of art elements and principles of design to interpretation and opinion forming. What follows is a brief description of each scheme.

Description of Scheme 1

Theme: “Special Occasions”

Students worked on a design for a particular occasion.

1. Halloween
2. Christmas.

Duration of Scheme: 8 Weeks

Objectives

- To explore line and texture, by experimenting with mark making media.
- To explore line, texture, shape and pattern through the making and printing of additive relief blocks.
- To learn about positive/negative shape and the design principles composition, balance variety.
- To use art elements and design principles learned to create a balanced lino composition.
- To learn the technique of lino cutting and obey the safety precautions.

- To further develop students understanding of pattern through the printing of the lino block.
- To develop students ability to recognise art elements and principles of design in the work of supporting artists.

Sources: Still lines, magazines, books relating to celebration

Support Studies: A selection of work by Paul Klee, Ludwig Kirchner, Aubrey Beardsley, Rembrandt, Albrecht Dürer, M.C. Escher, Bridget Reilly, "Cataracts", Vincent Van Gogh, "Starry Night", Jan Vermeer "The Kitchen Maid" Edvard Munch (Woodcuts) "The Kiss". Examples to line, shape, pattern, and texture in the environment.

Students worked individually on their own work. A good quality print was produced by each student. Evaluation sessions of 5-10 minutes were held at the end of each class, on the students own work and that of a relevant support study. At the end of the scheme when we displayed the prints we held one extensive discussion of 30 minutes. During this discussion the final work was examined on 3 levels.

- Formal elements:- the art elements and principles of design and how they were used in the finished piece.
- Technique:- the use of materials during the course of the scheme.
- Comparison with relevant support:- Students had to choose an artist referred to during the course of the scheme and relate his own use of the art properties to that of his chosen artist.

A rich variety of relevant support studies were used during this scheme to discuss the art elements. Not all phases of the critical process were achieved during scheme 1. the main concern was that students learnt about the art properties and how to recognise them in a work and understand how an artist uses them to create their composition. Therefore the descriptive and formal analysis stages were employed from the very beginning, however the interpretative and informed judgement stages weren't formally introduced until scheme 2, however there were many incidents where students quite willing put forward their own personal interpretation or works.

For example: When discussing Ludvig Kirchner's use of line and texture in one of his woodcuts one of the students said that they didn't think the example was very good because... "the way he cuts his line Miss it looks like it keeps slippin' and cutting bits he's not supposed to". This student was clearly giving a reasoned assessment of the quality of Kirchner's technique. He didn't believe it was of a high standard because as he saw it Kirchner's technique according to what they had learnt in class, wasn't good. Of course it was explained to the students that this was Kirchner's individual style, he wasn't making mistakes, and this was how he intended it to look.

Therefore support studies were used during this scheme to enforce the learning of art elements, aid students own practical work and develop descriptive and formal analysis skills.

Description of Scheme 2

Theme: “Special Occasions”

Students worked on a design for their painting on a particular occasion.

1. Valentine’s Day
2. St. Patrick’s Day

Duration of Scheme: 8 Weeks

Aim: To develop an awareness of colour, impaste paint texture, linear pattern through a painting scheme.

Objectives

- To explore tactile and optical texture through experimenting with mixing paint with other substances and referring to the work of Jean Dubuffet and Jan Vermeer.
- To explore line, shape, pattern, texture, structure form and design through the completion of a worksheet at the National Museum of Ireland.
- To explore positive/negative shape in the work of Patricia A. Renich and the designing of painting.
- To explore colour and the impaste technique through painting and the work of J.B. Yeats, Jackson Pollock and Vincent Van Gogh.
- To further develop students skills of description, formal analysis by analysing the work of J.B. Yeats, Vincent Van Gogh and Patricia A. Renick.
- To develop students skills of interpretation and speculation through the analysis of work by J.B. Yeats, Van Gogh and Picasso.
- To develop students skills of informed judgement on own work and the above artists.

Support Studies: Jean Dubuffet, Jackson Pollack, Vincent Van Gogh (Gauguin's Chair & Cafe at Arles), Picasso (Guernica) Patricia A. Renich (Conversation Piece).

The class was divided up into 6 groups of 4, according to their colour family i.e. primary, secondary or complementary students would work solely in the colours they were given. Again evaluating sessions of 5 - 10 minutes were held at the end of each class and was evaluated under the same three categories of formal elements, technique and comparison with a relevant support.

During scheme 1, as discussed, emphasis was placed on developing students descriptive skills. During scheme 2, from week 3 on, stages 2 and 4 of critical analysis i.e. interpretation and informed judgement were formally introduced. Support studies became more abstract and a smaller amount were used because of obvious time constraints. During week 3, Jack B. Yeats "Men of Destiny" was discussed as a brief introduction to colour theory. Students were to describe the work in terms of colour, texture, technique and subject matter. They were also asked to speculate as to the meaning behind the work. This discussion was continued in week 4, students were to speculate on the possible effects of changing the medium used or even the colour, what the significance of the colours could be and why the figures were so abstracted. Students were asked to write down their thoughts on the painting after our discussion. One student's thoughts on the ambiguity of the figures was as follows.

- (a) "the men are no one you can make out, they have no faces and you can only make out their body because of the strong yellow brush stroke along their side. I think they have no face... cause Yeats wants them to be anonymous, so they

could be anybody.... I don't think this is a bad picture because its abstract, this is his style. I like it because of the way the paint is very thick and the colours he uses are primary colours, red, blue and yellow and are very bright."

- (b) "...he makes the men look like there're walking out of the picture... the men in the background are smaller than those in the foreground.

for a first year, this student shows a good use of art grammar. He is clearly speculating as to the reasons why the artist may have painted the figures so mysteriously. I am satisfied with his art terminology and shows an ability to form an opinion on a work and back it up with sufficient evidence. This excerpt demonstrates both the interpretative and educated judgement stages of critical analysis. Part B, was include to demonstrate his grasp of the descriptive phase.

When analysing a painting it would take 2 class periods of 10-15 minutes each. Analysis was in the form of a class discussion. This I found to be the most interesting in terms of class interaction and the most successful when trying to stir the imagination of students. At each stage students suggestions were written on the board in the style of a spider chart or a brainstorming session. Students imaginations would be sparked by the previous suggestion of fellow classmates.

Each student had to write up a brief paragraph on their opinion on a work and their reasons for such an opinion. This enabled me to assess their progress for example their use of art grammar and vocabulary, did they understand art concepts, could they give a reasoned judgement, thus enabling me to keep an eye on those students who seemed to

be falling back. In addition students were asked to write up a brief essay on Vincent Van Gogh's "Cafe at Arles" in which they had to use the phases of critical analysis that had been practised. They were also given a short slide test on the works we looked at in class and were asked to identify the artist, style, materials and technique used.

In order to access the degree and nature of change in attitude and preference for an artwork that takes place as a result of deferring judgement until a proper critical analysis of the work has taken place, a simple slide test was given to students at the beginning of scheme 2, based on all the works that would be used as supports throughout the scheme, including work by Jean Dubuffet, Jackson Pollack, Vincent Van Gogh, Patricia A. Renick and Picasso. To accompany this students were given a simple questionnaire. Students had to tick off the phrase that best described their response to each of the artworks shown.

For example:

1. I like this painting and would hang it on my bedroom wall.
2. I don't particularly like this painting
3. I think it's rubbish.
4. I don't feel anything for this painting.

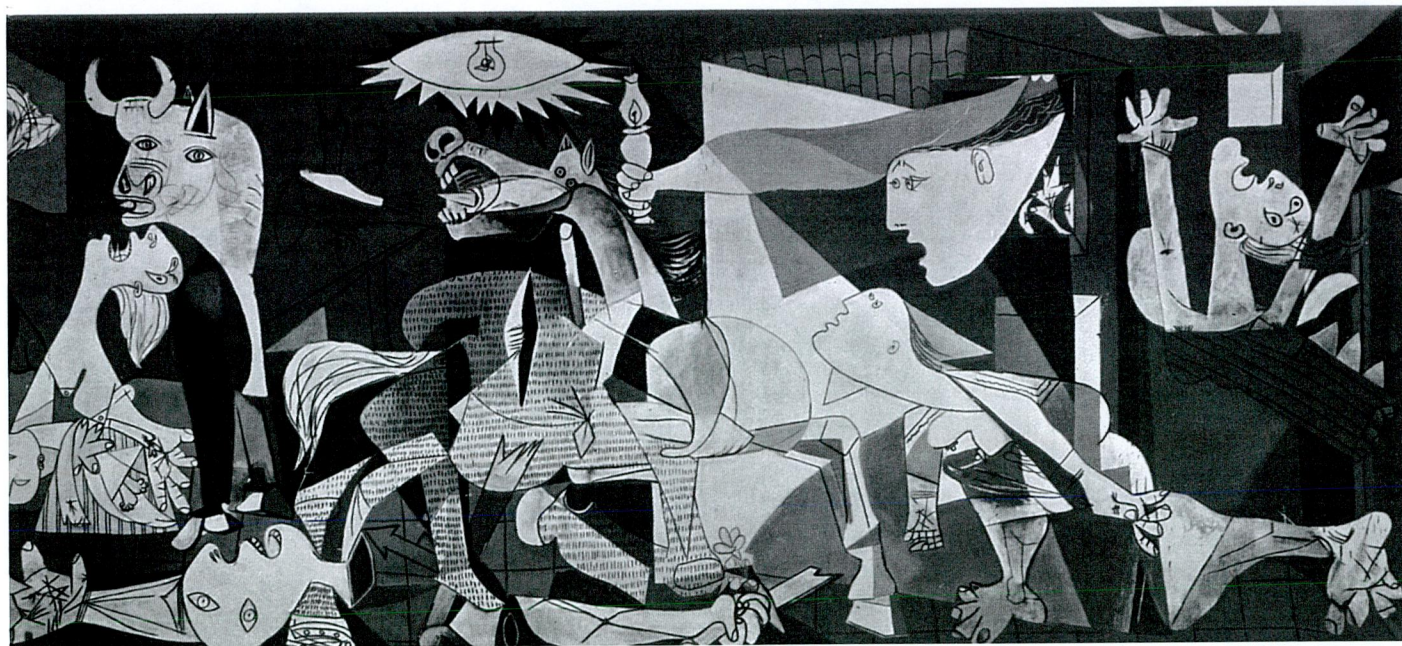
A brief explanation why also had to accompany their choice. Students generally preferred those works that were more realistic, Vincent Van Gogh was the favourite, for his use of colour and his style being the most realistic. These initial preferences could then be compared to the informed judgements students came to once each artwork was discussed in detail to the critical process.

There were only four such lengthy group discussions, each was tape recorded. The final session was on Picasso's Guernica. When first shown at the beginning of scheme 2 no background information of any kind was given about the work, or, any kind of analysis deeper than the questionnaire. The initial response was that they didn't like it for reasons such as "You can't make it out", "I don't like modern art", "It's rubbish", "He can't draw", "I could do better than that". There was no further development of these statements.

The following is a exert from a half hour long taped discussion of the Guernica, which took place at the end of scheme 2. The discussion has been divided up according to the four phases of critical analysis.

To aid our discussion and focus students observations the following four phrases were listed on the board:

1. Description, subject and art elements.
2. How are they organised?
3. Meaning.
4. Feeling.



8. 'Guernica' - Pablo Picasso

ANALYSIS OF TAPED CRITICAL ANALYSIS SESSION 4

EXTRACT FROM THE DISCUSSION

Descriptive Stage: Art Elements in the work

Liza: Can anybody tell me what they see in this painting?

Pupil 1: Loads of heads and people Miss and their all screaming.

Pupil: There're all crying and there're in bits.

Pupil: I see a bull and a horse with nobody on it only a head.

Pupil 2: He does have a body but it's all over the gaff.

Liza: You mean it's distorted?

Pupil 2: Yea, that Picasso's weird.

Liza: In what way do you think he's weird?

Pupil 2: The way he draws, he puts ears where eyes should be and eyes on cheeks, like your man on the ground there, (referring to fallen soldier).

Pupil: He hasn't any ears (giggles)

Pupil 5: Its not because he can't draw though he wants it that way. He does it on purpose.

Teacher: That's right, the way he chooses to paint or draw is called his style. We discussed this before, what is his style do you think?

Pupil: Modern?

Pupil: Abstract.

Pupil: Cubist

Teacher: That's right. How can you tell from Guernica that Picasso's style is cubist?

Pupil: Because all the people are chopped up.

Pupil: There're made up of different shapes

Pupil: They don't look realistic

Teacher: Very good, now who can tell me what is happening in the picture?

Pupil: Guernica is being bombed all over the place.... people are screaming and running to hide.

Pupil: A woman is going mad over there.

Teacher: Why do you think so?

Pupil: Her head's knocked back and she's screaming her head off.

Teacher: How can you tell she's screaming and not laughing?

Pupil: Her eyes are turned down and she's holding a dead baby in her arms.

Teacher: What else is happening in this picture?

Pupil: There is a man that is blown up on the ground...his head and his arm have been taken off.

Teacher: He's supposed to be a soldier what would tell you this?

Pupil: He's got a sword in his cut off arms.

Teacher: What else can you see?

Pupil: There's a lamp.

Pupil: And a door... and a bull.

Pupil: There's a woman who looks as if she's been eaten up by a crocodile (referring to the right hand side of picture, roars of laughter).

Pupil: It's really hard to make out all the bits.

Teacher: Why is that do you think?

Pupil: Because it's more abstract and confusing than the other pictures.

Pupil: And it's black and white and all scribbly.

Teacher: Can anyone remember the word we used during linoprinting for a picture painted in one colour only?

Pupil: Mono tonal?

Pupil: Monochromatic?

Teacher: Yes, very good. Is it mainly black or white?

Pupil: White.

Pupil: Black

Pupil: Well, there's kinda, blacks and whites and greys as well.

Pupil: It's mainly white in the centre and dark around all the edges.

Teacher: Why is this do you think?

Pupil: Because the light bulbs shining on them.

Pupil: All the people are white and grey and the building is black.

Pupil: The people are white to make them stand out.

Teacher: Why do they have to stand out?

Pupil: If it was all grey and black you wouldn't be able to see what was goin' on.

Pupil: The people are the main thing...cause their gettin' killed.

Teacher: If the artist used loads of different colours instead of black and white what would be the effect do you think?

Pupil: That would be better.

Teacher: Why?

Pupil: Cause it would look nice, the black and whites borin'.

Pupil: It wouldn't look as sad, though.

Pupil: It's not all black and white anyway, he uses loads of grey and white with dots and pattern on it.. you can see it on the horse.

COLAISTE NAISIUNTA EALAINÉ IS DEARTHA

NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

B.A DEGREE IN ART AND DESIGN EDUCATION

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

LIZA COGGINS

THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING APPRECIATION
THROUGH CRITICAL STUDIES IN ART AND DESIGN
EDUCATION

This dissertation discusses the importance of developing students art appreciation skills through a structured critical analysis program. Essentially it addresses the need for a greater balance on the art syllabus between art appreciation and practical work. It questions if students today are receiving a full art education. Vincent Lancier states that "the most important benefit we can provide for young people, is to make them knowledgeable enjoyers of art". Students should experience art by both creating it and responding to it.

The structure of my dissertation takes the form of five chapters and a conclusion.

Teacher: Can anyone tell me how many animals there are?

Pupil: Two.

Teacher: Name them?

Pupil: A horse and a bull.

Pupil: There's a bird under the light as well I think.

Pupil: Yea, there's a bird as well, 3 animals.

Teacher: How many people?

Pupil: Five.

Pupil: Did you count the baby?

Pupil: Six.

Teacher: How many of these are men do you think?

Pupil: The one on the ground.

Teacher: How can you tell it's a man?

Pupil: He has no hair.

Teacher: Can anyone show me an example of linear pattern in the picture?

Pupil: There's some on that girl's shirt (referring to the mother and child).

Teacher: Anywhere else?

Pupil: On the horse and on that person there. (Referring to the column like figure).

Teacher: How many different kinds of line has Picasso used?

Pupil: Long straight ones for the girl's shirt.

Pupil: Wavy, curly ones for the horses tail.

Pupil: And the bulls.

Pupil: Long curvy lines.

Pupil: He uses lines little ones for the horse's body see.

Pupil: There all kinda mad.

Teacher: What are?

Pupil: His lines.

Teacher: Why is that?

Pupil: I don't know.... there're harsh or something.

Teacher: Why does he use so many different lines, do you think?

Pupil: To make it more interesting.

Pupil: To make the horse's body look like it has hair on it.

Pupil: To give it texture.

Pupil: Some lines make patterns.

Teacher: Can anyone think of another artist we've looked at that used hard lines like Picasso? Remember when we were doing line cutting.

Pupil: That mad German guy.

Teacher: Think of the captain of the old Star Trek.

Pupil: Captain Kirk.

Pupil: I know Miss, Kirtner.

Teacher: Kirchner, very good, can anyone describe his lines?

Pupil: Strong, thick ones.

Pupil: Spike and jagged.

Teacher: Is there any special reasons for his lines being like this?

Pupil: Because he was cutting into wood... without a traced on design.

Teacher: What kind of shapes has Picasso used?

Pupil: You can't describe them there're all over the place.

Pupil: It's like a line for a walk, you can't name them.

Pupil: Organic and geometric Miss.

Teacher: Out of the following 5 words which would you choose to describe, them, rounded, angular, square, strong, delicate?

Pupil: Angular and big.

Pupil: Some are round like your man's head (refers to fallen soldier).

Pupil: The rays from the light thing are like spikes or triangles.

Teacher: Do you not think that some of the shapes aren't suited to some of the objects they describe?

Pupil: There're not real looking or anything but that's all right cause that's how Picasso wanted them to be, kinda distorted.

FORMAL ANALYSIS: STAGE 2

Teacher: How has Picasso organised his painting? What's the shape of his canvas?

Pupil: It's rectangle.

Pupil: It's very wide.

Pupil: It's huge Miss, the size of our class wall.

Teacher: What can you say about the composition?

Pupil: It's jammed packed Miss.

Pupil: Clustered.

Pupil: There's no black spaces, there's shapes and patterns everywhere.

Teacher: How has the foreground and background been organised i.e. positive and negative space? Can anyone remember what is meant by positive and negative shapes?

Pupil: The foreground and background of a picture.

Pupil: The foreground is the bit that stands out.

Teacher: In your own painting what area was the positive shapes and how did you paint them.

Pupil: The foreground.

Pupil: The two main shapes that stood out.

Pupil: We painted them with tactile texture.

Teacher: Look at the room all the figures are in, does it look like a large room, why?

Pupil: Yea cause it can fit all those people in it.

Pupil: No there looks like there's hardly any room.

Teacher: How has Picasso made the foreground stand out from the background.

Pupil: All the people are in the foreground.

Pupil: Except for the bull... he looks like he's in the background.

Pupil: All the people are white and the background is black so they stand out.

Pupil: There's doors in the background.

Teacher: How can you make out the doors?

Pupil: Because Picasso has used different lines and stuff.

Teacher: What kinds of lines, remember we did this before?

Pupil: The angle of the lines go downways to make the door look open.

Pupil: He uses perspective Miss

Teacher: Very good.

Pupil: They also make the room look bigger.

Teacher: Is there a lot of movement in the picture?

Pupil: Yea.

Teacher: Where exactly do you see it?

Pupil: The way people are screaming their heads off and stuff.

Pupil: The horse is goin' mad.

Pupil: That woman looks like she's waving her arms like mad.

Pupil: That woman's running, she looks like she's just about to fall (right hand side)

Teacher: Which woman is that?

Pupil: the one on the right hand side draggin' her leg.

Teacher: Why do you think Picasso wanted so much movement in his picture?

Pupil: Cause there're all scared.

Pupil: There're runnin' away from the bombs.

Teacher: What effect is Picasso trying to get by overlapping so many lines and shapes, do you think?

Pupil: People are all cut into pieces.

Pupil: Like their blown up.

Pupil: All the lines are just slashing through the thing.

Pupil: The canvas.

Pupil: He means that their not organised.

Pupil: Random.

Pupil: It looks more exciting

Pupil: You can just see Picasso getting mad into it, so you can.

Teacher: What if we took away all these lines, patterns, different shapes and tones, what would be the effect?

Pupil: And left it black?

Pupil: It would be too borin'.

Pupil: It would look really quiet. It would be easier to make out.

Pupil: Yea, but it's more interesting if you can't make it out. You want to know what's going on.

Teacher: What's the first area, or object you see when you look at the picture, what catches your eye?

Pupil: The horse.

Pupil: No, the woman with her head in the window.

Pupil: The light.

Teacher: Why are you drawn to these first?

Pupil: Because they stand out.

Pupil: There're in the centre of the composition.

Pupil: Because their white.

Teacher: How does the white make objects stand out in this picture?

Pupil: Because it's the brightest colour

Teacher: Colour?

Pupil: Tone, and all around it are darker tones of grey and black.

Teacher: Where is the main action happening?

Pupil: It's everywhere.

Pupil: In the middle.

Pupil: That's got the most people in it.

Pupil: It's got the most white, it stands out.

Pupil: It's got the most shapes.

INTERPRETATION STAGE 3

Teacher: Why do you think Picasso has crammed so many people into the composition and that there's so little unused space?

Pupil: He wanted it to look like a stampede.

Pupil: Because it was a town that was bombed and these were all the people in it.

Pupil: Cause it just looks better.

Teacher: How do you mean it looks better?

Pupil: It looks as if everyone is mad panicked... like they don't know what's goin' on.

Pupil: Yea, there're all runnin' and screaming their all runnin' away from the bombs.

Teacher: Why do you think Picasso has organised the composition the way he has, what's he trying to describe to people?

Pupil: What it looks like in the middle of a bomb raid.

Pupil: I think it looks really scary Miss.

Pupil: Yea like a black and white horror film.. when people have been chopped to bits an' all.

Pupil: We need to call in Mulder and Scully (reference to the T.V. series the X-Files, roars of laughter).

Teacher: Why has he made it look so scary then, what do you think he's trying to show us?

Pupil: How scary war is Miss.

Pupil: Yea, everybody's just runnin around scared out of it.

Teacher: Is there anybody not running?

Pupil: Yea, the dead guy.

Pupil: Yer one with the baby.... she's just standing crying.

Teacher: Why does she stand out so much?

Pupil: Cause everyone else is running and she's just standin' there crying cause....

Pupil: Her baby's dead.

Teacher: By placing a dead baby in the picture, what do you think Picasso is trying to tell us through this image alone?

Pupil: Cause he's just a little baby...he's nothing to do with the war.

Pupil: He probably doesn't even know there's a war on.

Pupil: Yea! he probably thought it was fire works (roars of laughter).

Pupil: He's innocent Miss.

Pupil: Yea! He didn't do anything.

Pupil: His Ma didn't do anything also

Pupil: Or anyone else.

Pupil: The soldier did.

Teacher: How do you feel when you look at the image of the mother and her dead baby? Imagine 5 minutes before the bombing they could have been sitting down having dinner?

Pupil: It's sad.

Pupil: It's not fair.

Teacher: Why?

Pupil: Cause, they don't care about the war.

Pupil: Yea, and the mum's probably going to die now cause she's not running like the others.

Teacher: If you didn't know about the story of Guernica getting bombed, would you be able to tell what was happening in this picture?

Pupil: You'd know something bad had happened, because everyone is screaming.

Pupil: You'd have to know what it was about to know a bomb was goin' off.

Pupil: You'd definitely know it was about war.

Teacher: Look at the height and shapes of the rays coming from it, what does it remind you of?

Pupil: A bomb.

Pupil: An explosion.

Teacher: Remember when we talked about how Guernica was bombed by the Germans.

Pupil: Yea, in their planes.

Pupil: The blitzing plan.

Teacher: Can you pick out any image in the painting that Picasso might be using as a clue, to represent this?

Pupil: The bird Miss.

Teacher: Very good, why do you think Picasso painted this picture?

Pupil: Cause he was angry and sad about the people who were killed.

Pupil: He was sad....cause he was from Spain as well.

Teacher: Why was he so angry?

Pupil: Because the people in the town were bombed and no-one helped them.

Pupil: They weren't soldiers.

Pupil: He was angry cause they shouldn't have been killed.

Pupil: They were innocent and no-one seemed to care.

Pupil: It wasn't in the papers much or anything.

Teacher: So why did he paint a picture about it if it made him so sad and angry?

Pupil: So when people looked at it, and weren't able to tell what it was about, they would have to ask.

Pupil: Yea, so they would have to find out about what happened in Guernica.

Teacher: Why then do you think he decided to paint it only in shades of black and white, there must have been a reason?

Pupil: Because it was a sad story and he wanted it to look sad.

Pupil: He wanted it to look scary.

Pupil: Because after the bombing everything would have been burnt and black and sad.

Pupil: I know why Miss....cause he wanted it to look like one of the pictures in the newspaper where he read about it.

Pupil: Yea, look the horse's body looks like newspaper writing.

Teacher: Is it just about Guernica do you think, or could it be about our own bombings here in Northern Ireland.

Pupil: Yea, it could be about the North

Pupil: Or anywhere.

Pupil: If you didn't know the title or the story to go with it you'd think it was just about war.

Teacher: Imagine if you like Picasso at that time were away from home and you read about Dublin City Centre being bombed and no-one around you seemed to care as you did about the pictures you were crying over in the

newspaper. How would you feel?

Pupil: Angry.

Pupil: Afraid and depressed.

Pupil: Very sad.

Pupil: I'd be very afraid....that my ma or da or anybody I knew was dead.

Teacher: No looking at the picture how does it make you feel?

Pupil: If you knew the story behind it Miss?

Teacher: Yes.

Pupil: Sad.

Pupil: Angry.

Teacher: What if you didn't know the reasons why the artist painted it, how would you feel then?

Pupil: Well you wouldn't feel as much cause you wouldn't understand it.

Pupil: You'd just think it was rubbish.

STAGE 3 INFORMED JUDGEMENT

Teacher: What are your opinions on this painting, do you think it's a good or bad painting?

Pupil: Good (majority of the class).

Pupil: I think it's good.

Teacher: Remember you must always back up any statements you make with a reason why?

Pupil: Because there's loads in it.

Pupil: Once you know what it's about you like it better.

Teacher: Yes but what I'm looking for is a reason, taken from the painting itself why you think it's a good or bad painting, there has to be a reason?

Pupil: I think it's interesting to find out about it because of the story behind it.

Teacher: What do you think about it Jamie?

Pupil: I think it's a very sad painting because it's about war and the people are all crying and screaming.... and what happened in Guernica was terrible.

Pupil: I think it's good because it's so scary....he can really make everyone look like there're in pain...and it makes you care about what happened.

Teacher: Seamus what do you think about it?

Pupil: I don't think it's a good painting but I like the fact it's about Guernica...I liked hearing about what happened and you can understand why he was so mad.

Teacher: But why don't you think it's good, can you give us a reason?

Pupil: I don't like the way it's not realistic and the way it's only in black and white. It's depressing. I wouldn't put it up on me wall or anything... but I still like the story behind it.

Teacher: You mean the meaning behind it, what's the artist saying to us?

Pupil: He's telling us about how the Germans bombed Spain in their aeroplanes.

Pupil: He's warning us about the Germans new war plan.

Teacher: What else is he telling us do you think?

Pupil: War's wrong.

Teacher: And why?

Pupil: Because people get killed...that shouldn't be.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN ON TAPED DISCUSSION OF PICASSO'S

GUERNICA

Pupil Participation

The level of participation in the classroom discussion was quite uneven. This is important to note and will be dealt with in depth later. Out of a class of 22 students the following figures were recorded:

Freely participated	50%
Only when asked	25%
A limited participation when asked	17%
Didn't participate in any way	8%

Quality of Class Discussion

Stage 1 and 2 - Description and Formal Analysis

Pupils show an adequate knowledge and use of art grammar and were able to identify them in the artists work. They did show a slight difficulty in expressing how these elements functioned to create a composition. They have the vocabulary and understanding but need more practice to improve their confidence in using it. They seemed to enjoy this part of the discussion.

Stage 3 - Interpretation

This part of the discussion was quite successful and very enjoyable also. Students speculated as to the possible meaning and emotion behind the work. It was a more difficult stage than the previous two but students seemed more relaxed and were more

willing to contribute to the discussion. Their responses had quite a rich imaginative quality and showed that the background information was fully assimilated and influenced the way they perceived the work entirely. Students showed good perception skills in recognising certain symbolic images and emotions, how they were used and for what purpose. This stage further clarified for the students the relevance of the previous two stages and prepared them for the final stage of informed preference.

Stage 4 - Informed Preference

This was the most difficult stage of the discussion, this was obvious from the participation level, it necessitated random questioning of the students. Also not all students freely volunteered reasons for forming a particular opinion, and this also had to be teased out of them. This of course may not be because of any inability on the students part to draw together the discoveries made while examining the work, as some students showed that their impressions had been synthesised and could communicate this to the class. It could be that I need to re-examine my own formula of questions.

Students response to the work had changed as predicted. A greater majority of them much preferred the work after it had been analysed and the history and context that surrounded the work discussed.

I am quite satisfied with the students progress and level of response for the standard of the class (good/weak). Considering they were only first year standard, and as such their command of the English language was quite under-developed, they showed an adequate understanding of how artists control and manipulate the art elements and principles of design to achieve effects and meanings that had been analysed and interpreted. I am

satisfied also that students are capable of giving valid reasons to inform their art preference. I found these discussions very enjoyable and highly rewarding, the students themselves seemed also to enjoy these activities, they were attentive, interested and highly motivated throughout each session. Continued practice of the critical process will further develop students skills of interpretation and analysis thus leading to a richer and deeper encounter with art and a broader and deeper understanding of the purposes and functions of art in the lives of human beings.

FINDINGS

One of the main problems I came across when trying to teach the critical phases of appreciation was total group involvement. The importance of dialogue in critical studies and to the personal development of students has already been discussed, it was my observation that class discussions were often dominated by the more articulate students. Also I found we were very limited time wise, and it was impossible for each student to put forward their own observation or opinion. Therefore it is important that critical studies is not solely a verbal practice, as such it would be impossible to access each students progress. Non verbal methods must also be practised. This is an area which unfortunately because I was so limited time wise, I only had these students for 40 minutes a week, I couldn't develop group discussion for my work because of time constraints, but for a committed program of critical studies it doesn't sufficiently ensure that all students are benefiting from such a program.

SUGGESTION

One suggestion I would make to aid instruction in the area of art appreciation and judgement would be to address a problem I faced in trying to implement my program of critical studies, that of time constraints. It is important that critical skills are practised during each art period. On the standard time table art is given only 4 periods in comparison to the 5/6 period time slot allocated to more academic subjects. Art appreciation and judgement are important skills to develop in students and a more structured approach must be taken to its implementation on the curriculum. By teaching aesthetics and discussing the complexities of works of art and design we are challenging attitudes towards art as being a “doss” subject, but a process which demands careful thinking, a deal of commitment and the calling into play of all the power and skill posed by the practitioner, and as such demands greater percentage of the curriculum time table. One aim as art educators is to provide students with a balanced art education, this cannot be achieved within the time allocation that exists at present.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the development of critical capacities in students and the whole area of knowledge acquired through critical studies would seem an essential function. Our concept of art education is changing, it is no longer about the acquisition of manual skills. It should cater not only for the potential practitioner but for students who simply wish to have an informed appreciation of the environment, the different media of visual communication, their own past and that of other cultures. This is not simply a matter of decoding symbols and of noting observable characterisation of things but “is a

predisposition, cultivated by instruction to search for expressive meaning in visual forms". It is a creative process in its own right and the developing of perceptual abilities i.e. critical skills is worth of the same attention and educational time that, in the past, has been reserved for creating art.

Educators need to address our present curriculum to explore ways of developing such skills and give consideration to the implications of accepting responsibility for this area of development.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 5

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