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**COLAISTE NAISIUNTA EALAINÉ IS DEARTHÁ
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**THE ARTS IN EDUCATION
AN ASSESSMENT OF THEIR CURRENT STATUS IN OUR SCHOOLS**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

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DIPLOMA FOR ART AND DESIGN TEACHERS**

BY

JULIA CLARKE

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Statement of Authenticity

**I hereby declare that this dissertation is
entirely my own work and that it has not been submitted as
an excersise for a diploma or degree in any other
college or university.**

Signed_____

Abstract

It is the intention of this dissertation to assess the feasibility of the arts in education given the current provisions provided by both schools and arts organisations. It will argue for a wider involvement of the arts in our schools and address the reasons for the current state of the arts in education in Ireland. It will examine attitudes of pupils, parents, and teachers involved in this area as well as arts organisations that strive to include a policy for schools involvement in their programmes.

To strengthen the justification for an elevated status for the arts in education, the benefits of the arts will be examined and conclusions reached regarding their relevance in today's society. The recent Government publication "Succeeding Better" is a concise document which provides an insight into the current levels of participation of the arts within our schools and provide a useful insight into the direction the arts in education are proposed to take. This will be looked at closely and the practicalities of it given the conclusions reached in the research of the dissertation.

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Introduction

The Arts in Education have always been treated as a peripheral subject rather than a necessary factor in a child's education. The arts in education refers to a programme of professional arts activity of a high standard. The programme should enhance and complement the existing curriculum rather than be treated as a separate area. In the National Endowment for the arts publication it states,

" A basic arts education includes the disciplines of literature (from the arts of writing) architecture, landscape and interior design, product and graphic design; performing arts (from the arts of dance, opera, musical theatre and theatre); and media art (from the arts of film, television and radio)" (1)

This dissertation welcomes the proposal for an increased inclusion of the arts in education but is of the belief that they should not be confined, to the institution of the school. They should be explored and experienced in their appropriate surroundings and contexts be it artists studios, theatres, galleries etc. to ensure the full benefits and understanding of them. Through research carried out for this dissertation the case for a greater role for the arts in education will be put forward. It will argue that in neglecting the role of the arts as part of the curriculum a vital aspect of the educational experience is lost. To investigate the current levels of the arts, chapter 1 examines the factors which have influenced the arts and which will continue to influence them. Given this information it may then be made clearer the direction they are likely to take. In order to establish the perception of the arts amongst its educators and the educated a number of surveys and interviews have been carried out with the help of schools, parents and arts organisations. These give an insight into the current levels of arts / schools participation and focus on problems that arise as well as success'. The publication of the Governments Arts Plan (2) is examined and will assess the feasibility of its recommendations given the findings from the research carried out in the dissertation.

Chapter 1

Influences upon the arts.

The misconception regarding the arts is widespread, and although there are signs that the arts in education are starting to be taken more seriously, the benefits of an education which includes the arts are still not fully appreciated.

The following chapter will examine in what way the arts are influenced, in order to put them into a social context. In doing this it may become clearer the direction the arts are destined to take, and consequently the effect this will have upon their inclusion in the schools system.

Every society has, in some form has contributed to the arts to which contemporary society can look in order to learn how they lived. Whether it is pictorial, theatrical or literal the art allows us to communicate ideas and opinions about our lives and the times in which we live.

Ireland's contribution to the arts has been impressive. Renowned for its scholars and craftsmanship, it has led the way in laying the economic, social, and artistic foundations of Northern European civilisation. They were skilled and excelled in the transcribing of manuscripts and wealth of stories leaving a legacy, which far excels that of any other Celtic group.

Throughout Ireland's history the people have been dedicated to ensuring that an education was accessible to all. It is inherent in its societies makeup and can be traced back to the times when hedge schools were the common form of educational system. Commentators of that time such as Wakefield was recorded as saying, "I do not know any part of Ireland so wild, that it's inhabitants are not anxious, nay eagerly anxious for the education of their children." (3) The standard of education was remarkable considering the conditions that were endured. It was noted by a number of travellers their surprise at finding Latin and Greek being spoken by the poor in remote parts of Kerry and Cork. Sir Thomas Wyse at that time remarked, "The lower classes (in Ireland)

proportionally to this position are better educated than the middle or upper.” (4) The curriculum was far more extensive encompassing reading writing and arithmetic as well as other subjects that related to their immediate needs and lifestyles. This was to be replaced briefly by a more holistic approach, which embraced art in its simplest of forms. However, once again due to political circumstances, there became a desire to encourage aspects of Irish identity and more emphasis was placed on language and literature being taught through the native tongue. The arts therefore, with exception of literature were to take a second place and became obsolete in many schools.

The Catholic Church continued to have a huge influence over the running of the schools and saw its role in education as hugely important in the survival of Catholicism. The biggest changes came in the 1960's and 70's with the implementation of a new primary curriculum. But in the following twenty years there was little change in the programme of schools and there was growing concern that inter and leaving certificates were not enough. Parallel to this was the economic decline that the state was experiencing in the 1980's which led to alienation in schools. Out of this there gave rise to a reassessment of the role of secondary schools and the report “A time for change Industrial policy for the 1990's” was published. This report suggested that education be changed so that industrial policy and economic growth could be taken on board. It has been suggested that this report was the motivator for the ‘Celtic Tiger’ which the country is now experiencing. The Culleton report states,

“Despite its enviable academic standards, the Irish education and training system has serious gaps when it comes to technical and vocational education.” (5).

In Martin Drury's article, ‘The arts and education’, he states that,

“The position of the arts within a countries formal education system is a instructive litmus test for the balance between the acidity of schooling and more alkaline qualities of education.”(6)

He is referring here to what is deemed the extrinsic qualities which are so inherent in Irish Education and which have a direct effect on the inclusion and value placed upon the arts. The whole schooling system is geared towards the points system of the leaving certificate exam, without which a future in further education is virtually impossible and a job far from guaranteed. The tremendous pressure placed upon students to pass and to do well in this exam reverberates right down to the primary cycle where, competition for secondary school places is intense. Joseph Dunne describes the points system as an, "education system to select people for progression towards the various job opportunities that it makes available." (7). He further suggests that the points system is purely designed to serve the employer who can pick from the crop of students who have the necessary amount of points awarded to a particular career. The notion that other qualities may be required, that is qualities that can not be assessed, are not considered and thus, those students who may be natural to and excel in a particular career, but lack the points, fail then to qualify.

This chapter has outlined the circumstances that have affected the inclusion of the arts in Irish education. It is inevitable in any education system that the social and political factors will have a direct or indirect effect what is being taught and will consequently help to fashion the content and approach of that being taught. The essentials of reading, writing and arithmetic still remain all important because they are the basic requirements needed in order to gain employment of a secure nature. For that reason, therefore, there is little value placed on the arts when it comes to employment prospects. This attitude to the arts and employment is commonly felt today by both parents and employers consequently the arts are not taken seriously as an academic subject and are often discouraged. The extrinsic qualities that the leaving certificate are so much a part of, leave little room for the arts. The job of elevating the status of the arts becomes even more difficult, given the way in which they are perceived, if not given the full support of the parents.

Parental and social attitudes to the arts

From before a school age the parents are the educators of the child, and during this period play a crucial part in influencing and developing the child's ideas and the way in which he interprets the world around him. If attitudes to the arts are to change in our schools then this must also include that of the parent.

In Donal O'Donohue's study of 'Parental attitudes to Arts Education at Post Primary level', he finds that the arts are still perceived as being,

"More suitable for difficult and slow learners', 'are therapeutic in nature as opposed to educational', 'involves only painting and drawing', 'are less important than the other academic areas', offer little or no career opportunities to those who study it beyond post primary level."(8)

Parental influence upon their children has a huge part to play in the choice of art as a Leaving Certificate subject. The belief that art will not equip the child with the necessary skills needed for a secure and successful career is a belief of parents who deter their children from opting for art. In Ciaron Bensons study of the arts in education he states that, "a young person with an artistic talent or interest in a particular art form can be severely discouraged by unsympathetic parents."(9) The benefits of the arts to a child's education and development are often ignored and not fully understood. This may be due to imagination and creative thought not being easy elements to assess in the same way that a child's factual knowledge of a subject such as physics or chemistry can be measured. This calls into question the whole approach to the way art is structured and examined in our schools system.

The following is a questionnaire carried out for the purpose of examining the attitudes of parents regarding the arts and their place in their child's education. It also was designed to establish the parent's participation to the arts and to determine a link between the results. A random selection of parents whose children were at different levels in the school system was asked to respond to the following questions;

- **Q. Which of the following events have you attended in the last six months; cinema, theatre, ballet, live music event, art exhibition, book reading?**
- **Q. Which of the above would you like to attend more frequently?**
- **Q. Has your child attended any of the above in the last six months?**
- **Q. If yes, then please state which, and whether this was a school excursion?**
- **Q. Do you find information about the above accessible to you?**
- **Q. Would you like to see your child attending these events more regularly?**
- **Q. Do you feel it is important for your child to participate in these events as part of his/her education?**
- **Q. Would you value an Arts education as being more or less important to your child's education than;**
- **English, History, Chemistry, Maths, Physical Education?**
- **Q. Do you believe the arts can help your child in their chosen career?**
- **Q. Do you have an idea of the career your child would like to pursue when they leave school?**

On examining these results it was found that cinema was by far the most popular, frequented by over 80% .At the opposite end of the scale opera and book readings were least frequented.

It was found that the most information was available in connection with cinema, and with a local eight-screen cinema available in the area, cinema was also considered the most accessible. The most common reason stated for the lack of information regarding other art forms was due to lack of interest. It was found that films were well advertised by the media and by word of mouth. 60% of parents would have liked their children to have more access to the given art forms but expressed a concern that the expense of such excursions might fall upon them.

The overall view of the parents regarding the arts and their children's education was that it was not crucial but that they would, nevertheless, like to see their child participating more fully especially in theatre and art exhibitions. There was a mixed reaction to the status of the arts compared to that of the other given subjects. The majority considered all other subjects to be more important and only Physical Education in two cases was considered less important. Only two surveys indicated a belief that the arts would help in their child's chosen career and it was indicated that these careers were acting and interior design

This information regarding the attitude towards the arts does not look encouraging. There appears to be little interest in the arts among parents in question, but especially unpopular were those, which are traditionally, considered high art, opera, ballet etc. It might be the case that these art forms if not commonly frequented by the parents, fail to interest the children. It is still the belief that education is to equip the child with skills, which are considered necessary in pursuing a career. Les Tickles observation that

"Cognitive and unapplied skills and knowledge are afforded greater prestige than affective and expressive ability" (10) This extrinsic attitude to education may be understandable given the competitive nature of the job market and places in higher education. However it seriously calls into question the value placed on the arts in education in a system that is points based. It raises the questions about what the arts have to offer such a society. In order to answer this the

following chapter will examine the qualities the arts have to offer and whether these qualities can fit in to an ever-increasing extrinsic society.

Footnotes for Chapter 1 and Introduction

- (1). National Endowment for the arts. (1985.)
- (2). The stationery office, "Succeeding Better, report on the strategic reviewing of the arts plan1995-1998". (Dublin; 1998)
- (3). P.J. Dowling, The Hedge schools of Ireland, (Cork; Mercier Press,) p.38
- (4). The stationery Office, "The Culleton Report"
- (5). Martin Drury, "The arts in education – Back to basics", (Dublin; Compass. Vol. 20 1999) p.465.
- (6). Joseph Dunne, "What's the good of Education" Partnerships and benefits of learning, (1995) p.463
- (7). Donal O'Donohue " Parental attitudes to the", Solas, (Dublin; Faculty of Art and Design, N.C.A.D, 1996) p.74.
- (8), Ciaron Benson, The place of the arts in education, (Dublin; The Art's Council, 1979) p.127.
- (9). Les Tickle, The arts in Education (Some research studies); (London, Croom Helm Ltd, 1987) p.71.

Chapter 2

The contribution of the arts to education

The aesthetic experience and the type of learning that the arts can offer are among the more sophisticated and less understood forms of human experience. However there has been extensive research into the benefits of an arts education, the results of which can help us argue a case for their more active inclusion in the curriculum.

In his article, 'The arts and education, Back to Basics', Martin Drury states that,

"The processes involved in making or receiving art are such fundamental human processes involving reason, feeling and imagination, that an education system which does not have them at its centre is seriously impoverished." (1)

This view is supported by that of Rick Rogers, who in his publication states that,

'The arts are vital for a child's education by developing the full variety of human intelligence, the ability for creative thought and action, the education of feeling and sensibility, the exploration of values, understanding of cultural changes and differences physical and peripheral'. As well as practical skills and techniques the child's development of the self is an important factor in the use of art as an educator. 'Learning through the experience art is essential for the child to formulate ideas and feelings about the world they live in. Also helps them respond to the social and cultural environment and contribute uniquely to the interplay of ideas and values which help shape it.' (2)

This statement refers to the unique attributes of an arts education and has been described by Elliot Eisner as 'essentialist justification' (3). The process of creativity, which is inherent in any artistic pursuit, is the process of creating something, which is both original and worthwhile. Creativity is not exclusive to an elite few but can be found in all individuals. However those who have been encouraged in the use of their creativity display qualities which have been proved to be connected to arts activities. An experiment by Wild in 1965 found that art students were able to shift from responding in the manner of a regular cautious person to responding in the manner that expressed fluency and flexibility. This meant that they were able to express meaning through a

multitude of ideas and concepts and possessed the ability to search for alternative solutions to a problem. Further tests suggested that the ability to come up with a unique or new solution, for example, a number of different uses for a paper clip, was more apparent in these students.

Research has been carried out by a number of psychologists into creativity and the qualities that were inherent in individuals who were active in the arts. Amongst them, Fuikie conducted studies, which showed that the individual possessed the ability to diverge from a particular form or structure to explore what kinds of uses may be found for it. His work has been used to understand various creative endeavours such as architectural design, (4).

Other traits of personality found in creative individuals included a personal style, new ways of seeing, intuition, willingness to take risks, ability to problem solve, openness to other cultures and beliefs. Martin Drury has written,

“as a social instrument it is the task of education to introduce the young to the general culture of their society and to prepare them for a place in it” (5).

Without an arts education, the sense of identity of a nation and that of the individual is obscured.

The arts have an important role to play in educating the child in the ways of their culture and national identity. In their present state the arts in education are approached in a very two-dimensional way. A play is not designed to be read simply from a book but must be viewed as a live event. It is not enough to view a painting on the page of a book or in slide form but must be observed at first hand. If approached in any other way the full experience of reason, feeling and imagination that Martin Drury talks of cannot be experienced.

“In a culture, the values of which are increasingly disseminated and homologated by visual means, through the media, advertising and communication design, the importance of visual education for all people is a pressing social priority”(6)

This observation by Joseph Dunne strengthens the case for the arts to take on a more active role.

In developing divergent thinking as opposed to the convergent manner most schooling is directed, the individual is encouraged to think for himself and with a different approach. This

surely would be beneficial to employers who require original thinking in the advancement of technology and communication. This form of communication provided by an involvement with the arts helps to break down barriers of language, religion and politics.

The arts can provide an insight into the historical, geographical and social factors through the study of paintings, sculpture, and architecture etc. The education this provides is essential in understanding the world, in which we live and have progressed. In the same way the arts can and should provide us with a social comment that is relevant to contemporary society in order to understand about our environment and ourselves. The method of communication through the arts often enables us to reflect and interpret ideas in completely new ways and breaks away from the familiar and staid methods of assessment.

Ciaron Benson provides another reason for the promotion of the arts to a more elevated status. He suggests that the future will see a society that will be less dominated by work and therefore more time can be designated to the arts. He warns, however that this time must not be seen as 'leisure time' which has associations with something that is less important than work. He suggests that 'leisure time' must be seen as being, "capable of employing a persons full range of talents and energies in a manner that is as productive in its own way as work"(7).

He also observes that the ability of the arts to fund themselves depends on the audiences that attend them. He comments that, "the interaction of an appreciative public with the arts provides the vital basis for high standards as well as for the economic development of the arts"(8).

This is not possible if the audiences do not know how to appreciate the arts because they have never been educated in them. This view is summed up in the following observation

"If we don't have some sort of decent arts education we wont identify the creators of the next generation, we wont identify the consumer's, we wont find the people who'll go and buy the books, who'll buy pictures, who'll go to concerts and the whole cycle is being impeded by this. So I think education is something we seriously have to look at."
(9).

In short the arts can provide unique opportunities and experiences and forms of expression, which allow the individual to communicate in a non-verbal way. To neglect to develop this part of person's skills deprives them of an essential part of their education. It is also a failure on the part of society to produce the next generation of artists and art lovers. Creativity is present in any pursuit of the arts and should be encouraged and treated at an equal level to other subjects. The qualities that are developed through participating in creative subjects can not be adequately assessed by the present system of examination however, this is no reason to dismiss them but rather they should be treated as a serious concern for our educational future.

Footnotes to Chapter 2

- (1). Martin Drury, "The Arts in Education- Back to basics", (Dublin, Compass, Vol.20.1991) p.465.
- (2). Rick Rogers, "Guaranteeing an entitlement to the arts in schools", (London, R.S.A. 1995), p.67
- (3). Elliot Eisner, Educating artistic vision, (Stanford, Macmillan, 1997) p.2
- (4). Guy Lefrancois, Psychology for teaching (California, Wadsworth, 1991) p.149.
- (5). Martin Drury, "The arts in Education- Back to Basics", (Dublin, Compass, Vol.20, 1991) P.465.
- (6). Joseph Dunne, "What's the good of Education, Partnerships and benefits of learning", (Dublin, 1995) p.463.
- (7). Ciaron Benson, The place of the arts in education, (Dublin, Arts Council, 1979) p.25
- (8). Ibid.p.25
- (9). Input at the Arts Council Consultative meeting, "Succeeding better". P. 238.

Chapter 3

The position of the arts in education

A recent report on the state of the arts in schools in Kerry set out to examine current levels and qualities of provisions for the arts in Secondary schools. From this information it proposed a policy which it hoped would support the strategic development of the arts. It identified professional development needs and opportunities for the arts in education and the resource implications and organisational needs.

It identified the main problems as being, lack of resources, lack of training for teachers, inadequate timetabling for arts, lack of support in some cases from the school, poor facilities, poor communications concerning the project. (1).

In the same county, the arts festival Samhlaiocht Chiarrai has provisions for the inclusion of schools in its arts programme. The main focus of this festival is a four-day arts programme over Easter weekend. However it's programme of events take place all year around and liase and facilitate schools in an ever-increasing programme.

Two of the projects undertaken by local schools and the festival are outlined here and following this is a reflection of the project by the teachers involved.

Life-size links

This is an on-going project that was originally undertaken and facilitated in England by the British Council and a Secondary school in Warrington, Cheshire. The aims of the project were to establish cross-cultural links with a school situated in another country. In this case the school was in India. It was assisted by the teacher's centre in Tralee who provided a culture officer who facilitated the cultural side of the project. A schools liaison officer from Samhlaiocht made regular visits to the school in question and facilitated the practical art side of project. This

included making Life-size cut-outs of the children by pairing them up and drawing around their bodies, then cutting these out. During the period of the project the children were exchanging letters, drawings, and presents with the school that were undertaking the project in India. They also put together a 'culture kit', which comprised of objects, pictures e.t.c that gave a sense of the lifestyle the children led and the place where they lived. The life-size cut-outs were painted and were made to suit the individual child's personality.

The figures the Indian children had made were sent over to Ireland and a display of all the work was held in the local library. The work was then sent back over to India where an exhibition was held also.

The teachers involved in the project (2) found that the work helped them forge links with the outside world and encouraged them to feel less isolated. It made them realise that the school did not have to be an isolated institution, and that they were part of a community that they could have a more active role. It also helped them form appreciative views and gave them a sense of pride and worth at seeing their classes work admired by others.

The success of the projects was repeated again in the 1999 festival programme with more schools coming on board and the project expanding to include Africa. To make projects such as these grow from strength to strength the problems mentioned concerning their implementation need to be addressed. Further to this, there must be in place a comprehensive range of learning programmes, which include community, and art based initiatives. With an arts festival taking place now in nearly every town in Ireland there exists a resource for the development and integration of an arts plan with our schools. This cannot be achieved by the schools alone but need developmental opportunities resources and organisational requirements to be put in place.

Footnotes to chapter 3

- (1). Art Education Initiative, Tralee V.E.C.
- (2). Interview with teachers involved in the Life-size Links Project.

Chapter 4

New proposals for the arts in education

Fortunately there are signs to show that the attitude towards Art and to the arts in general may be changing. A recent article reporting on the state of the Arts in Education states that it,

"is now thankfully being recognised as encompassing not only young people and children, but spanning a wide canvas which includes adult education / lifelong learning, audience development and arts appreciation"(1).

This observation is evident in the publication, 'Succeeding better' (2), an Indecon report the purpose of which is to highlight the state of the arts in Education and to award it a higher priority.

The report was commissioned by the Minister for the Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht, and the Islands and will be used to assist the Arts Council in compiling their proposed Arts Plan.

The article further suggests that the recommendation of improving arts education policies will be given careful consideration. This is supported by the establishment of a liaison committee comprising of principle people from the Department of the Arts, Arts Council and the Department of Education

The outcome of this will be to award the arts a more central role in both Primary and Secondary education. Already attitudes have been changing to the arts with the implementation of a pilot project in County Wexford. The aim of this was to establish, 'long term changes to the arts in schools and in the process to discover the issues and needs of both teachers and artists in developing the arts within the primary school (3)

The project confronted the relationships between schools and artists and involved interaction of students in an artistic environment such as a gallery or studio as well as bringing the artists into the classroom.

Through the co-operation of members of the Arts Council, Wexford County Council and the Department of Education, misconceptions surrounding the arts have been addressed. Emeile Fitzgibbon, a theatre worker involved on the project, observed that, ' the arts is now establishing

itself as permitted curriculum activity at primary level and we have to continue striving for both artistic excellence and educational validity'. (4)

Further to this, the report concentrated on a select few areas across Ireland, which observed the relationship between the arts and education. These were recorded at public consortium meetings. The information gathered was summarised and the following are a selection of those comments.

- **Should place education emphasis on primary level - too much emphasis on points system at secondary level.**
- **Need to develop arts through school curriculum, there is a real need for Dept of Education to integrate the arts into school syllabi, this is the only way that the arts will be taken more seriously.**
- **Should use transition year to foster arts development**
- **Until the arts play a credible role in education they will not be taken seriously**
- **Young people in schools are badly served when it comes to the arts, not given sufficient support or emphasis**
- **The Green Paper on Education should embrace education in the arts as well as the overall technical and training facilities in the arts. (5).**

It is the view of this report that arts organisations, Arts Council and the Educational system need to collectively address the issues of arts appreciation. It also recommends that a programme be developed that will ensure the elevated status of the arts. In order to implement this, it further suggests a Sub Committee, made up from Cabinet members and recognises that this is the only way to ensure change.

To further promote arts appreciation it proposes the setting up of a national competition, similar to that of the Telecom Eireann Information towns.

The plan proposes to increase funding to the arts festivals that run a comprehensive programme of events for children and schools. It was suggested that festivals of this sort are often the first introduction children have to the arts and that the fostering of interests and familiarity should be encouraged.

Footnotes to Chapter 4.

- (1). Eimer McNamara "Bringing down the barriers", The Irish Times, (Feb 24, 1999), p.12.
- (2). The Stationery Office, "Succeeding better, report on the strategic review of the arts plan1995-1998)" (Dublin; 1998).
- (3). Eimer McNamara, "Bringing down the barriers", The Irish Times, (Feb 24,1999), p.12.
- (4). Ibid.p.12.
- (5). The Stationery Office, "Succeeding better, Report on the stratategic review of the arts plan1995-1998", (Dublin; 1998).

Chapter

Co-operative learning

The nature of the Transition Year project, which follows in this chapter, lends itself to the co-operative learning method, which will be looked at briefly.

The usual structure of any lesson be it practical nature or otherwise, usually takes place through individual learning, i.e. in any classroom situation the pupil will be seated at his own desk focusing on the teacher and having little or no interaction with fellow pupils concerning exchange of ideas, brainstorming, and general communication which may improve skills such as problem solving, creative ability and formulation of ideas.

The focus is on the individual to act as a single unit throughout his schooling and that at the end of the process that unit is assessed on how well he has functioned.

There is little or no assessment on their ability to function in ways that are essential and innate to their successful interaction with their peers or social group. That is not to dismiss individual learning which has its role to play in developing an individual personal feelings and ideas.

However this case study will approach the project through a co-operative learning situation in which 'individuals work together to achieve one outcome' (1)

Co-operative learning cultivates in the students, 'personal and social development through encouraging the making of art individually in pairs and in collaborative group projects.' (2)

The method of working has been recognised to, 'support learning and increase student motivation to achieve and help one another'. This is achieved through the members of the groups communicating and sharing ideas in order to address the task and to achieve a solution, which is arrived at and supported, by the group as a whole. Adopting this method of working results in the pooling of ideas and resources, which requires co-operation from all members.

Within co-operative learning the factors which can influence the experience include size, individual ability and gender. In large groups the learning of the individual is lessened due to the limited opportunity for them to input their personal ideas. Wlodkowski and Jaynes research into co-operative learning suggest that a numbers should be kept to the minimum requirement for completing the task. They also recommend that uneven numbers will be more effective. (3).

In a group study by Good and Brophy which looked at varying abilities within groups, they found that a group made up of similar abilities will work at a pace that is suitable to all members and is the most effective grouping system. When a person of lower ability is brought into the group they can feel isolated and their confidence and self-esteem can be effected. They are reluctant to share ideas for fear of ridicule. Groups of individuals who would be considered high ability were found not to interact as well and instead worked at a pace which suited the individual and assumed that no help was needed within the group. However, a group made up of low ability individuals were found to have poor communication skills and consequently this affected their ability to complete the task satisfactorily. (4).

Barnes and Todd found that mixed gender groups can enhance the learning experience of participants and this should be encouraged as a more realistic situation. However groups who are in their early teens tend to stick with their gender group and in doing this, feel less threatened. These groups were also found to, 'seek agreement and reduce tension rather than probing and challenging each other and so do not always develop their ideas as much as in a mixed gender group (5).

Transition Year Project

The aim of the Transition year scheme was to involve the class in a project which although would be undertaken in their classroom for the most part, would at the same time be very much a project that had close connections with the community and a community event. This was to be the St. Patrick's Day festival parade through the streets of Dublin. Since this had to take place on a set date a scheme was drawn up around the time allowed up to the 17th of March.

This critical time factor was to prove a hindrance from the start and, coupled with the hectic transition year programme, caused innumerable problems. Another factor, which was to seriously affect the project, was the poor motivation of the students themselves and the poor attendance for various reasons. Out of a class of fourteen only one student had pursued art and had an interest in it, and it became clear at an early stage that this motivation problem, which had not been catered for in the scheme, would prove a major obstacle in the smooth running of the scheme. The first lesson to be learned therefore was that a scheme that may work well on paper would not necessarily be the case in the classroom. As a consequence, the project tasks ran over into weeks when they should have been advancing towards the deadline. In such a poorly motivated class it was near to impossible to keep to the running of the scheme according to its timetable. Interference of the Transition year trips away and involvement in sports activities did not help this.

Although the scheme could not be called successful, there are lessons to be learned from the problems that arose which resulted in a number of things. Also from attempting a scheme of this sort and addressing the problems it is possible to assess whether it is feasible to undertake a project similar to this one in the future. Finally an evaluation of the scheme and recommendations relating to it have been made with particular reference to the new Government proposals outlined in the "Succeeding Better" report, discussed in chapter 4.

Theme of project- “ Saints and Scholars”.

Aim-

Lesson 1-Objectives-

A video of Samhlaiocht Chiarrai, Kerry Arts Festival was shown as a motivation tool. The content of the parade included a very high standard of costume, props and display. Amongst those participating in the parade were local schools and community groups, professional musicians, and theatre groups. The props for the parade were eye catching and in some cases were functional. The video also showed clips of the events organised by Samhlaiocht which included, poetry readings, live music, workshops and performances.

There intended to be a discussion after viewing the video concerning the arts and the student's perception of them and level of participation that the students had in various art forms. This was to establish the student's perception of the arts and to what degree they took part in them. Their thoughts on community arts was also addressed order to gain a clear picture of they considered should be classified as the arts. Their response to questioning and an attempt to involve them in a discussion proved difficult. The most information they were prepared to offer was that they occasionally frequented the cinema but were not interested in any other of the art forms mentioned. They made it known that they would not voluntarily attend an opera or ballet and did not know anyone who did. This led to the question who are these art forms aimed at and it was suggested that, “those with the money on the southside” would be more likely to attend. It was concluded by further questioning that they held similar views on the arts to the parents questioned. From here the discussion was directed at community arts and references made to the community groups seen in the video. The scheme was introduced as a group project and four groups established. The theme, ‘Saints and Scholars’ was discussed and the aim of the project explained. In their groups they then brainstormed their chosen Saint or Scholar.

Lesson 2

The organisers of the festival parade were contacted since the previous lesson and were enthusiastic about the school being involved. Consequently a video and promotion pack were sent as a way of introduction to the whole event. As well as this there was made available a series of slides of 3D assemblages that would be relevant to the project.

However it turned out that only three students were in school that day, due to a trip away.

As well as this none of the students present were in the same group together. To overcome this they were asked to swap into the same group so that they could continue with the project.

Methods of construction which were evident from the slides were discussed and a demonstration of techniques. With this in mind and equipped with secondary source material the task of designing a 3D assemblage for the parade was given. This was approached with little enthusiasm and it was found that the students needed constant encouragement and supervision to get any kind of result. The thumbnails they produced were of a poor standard. It was clear, however that there would be little point in pushing the drawing element of the scheme as it was quite likely that they felt they were not good at art and therefore would not try. It was decided that what little designs they had would be used and that they could improvise along the way.

Lesson 3

Again it was a poorly attended class with only one of the students from last week who was present. This meant that a repeat of last week's lesson was necessary. Again little work was accomplished and the project was starting to fall behind the schedule laid out.

Lesson 4

It was decided that the project would have to advance into the assemblage element of the scheme if there was to be any chance of it being finished. The visit by members of the festival had to

cancelled since it would not have been productive with very little to show them. The class started constructing from materials a 3D assemblage based on their designs but were not applying any of the methods shown to them and did not progress very far. By this time the project was in serious jeopardy and was looking unlikely that anything would be achieved.

Lessons 5& 6

The class were absent for both of these lessons due to other school events and it was decided that the project would have to be abandoned.

Evaluation

The main problems encountered during this project are listed as follows;

The timetable of the Transition Year must be known beforehand

The students were very poorly motivated and felt they were no good at art and shouldn't have to do it.

The project required a design element that was pursued through drawing; the lack of interest in drawing led the students to produce little work.

The project required a strict deadline for the various stages, which could not be achieved within this Transition Year programme.

It is recommended that a block be taken out of school time for a project such as this. This would enable the students to leave the school to attend a workshop that could be facilitated by arts workers. It was found that a forty-minute class per week is not sufficient to engage in this type of project. In a class such as this with poor drawing skills it is also felt that less emphasis be placed on perfecting art elements and that a sense of making and achieving be the goal. It is felt that this

project could have been successful if some of these recommendations were taken on board. It was the intention that co-operative learning be implemented in this project which worked to a certain degree. However the main concern would be that the project could be a group effort including arts workers, arts organisations and outside bodies, which in the present school system is not possible.

Conclusion

The arts in education have proved to be a major concern over the years. Attitudes to the arts must change before their inclusion into our Education system can be taken seriously. But this can only happen when the competition and extrinsic priorities of the leaving certificate and points system allows us to approach Education from a more intrinsic angle. The arts do have a great deal to offer and can work effectively in a school system, equipping parents, teachers and pupils with the ability to formulate and communicate their own ideas and feelings as well as appreciating works of art in all forms. Schools attempting to do this alone encounter many obstacles such as, lack of resources and information and heavily timetabled classes. In order for programmes for arts in education to be successful there must be prescribed an appropriate relationship between the arts and education which requires clear thinking about what the arts are for and how they can be accommodated in our schools system.

Footnotes to Chapter 5

- (1). Fiona Daly, "Co-operative learning in art", Solas, (Dublin; 1996.) p.17.
- (2). Ibid. p. 16.
- (3). Raymond Wlodkowski and Judith Jaynes "Eager to learn", (California; Jossey. Bass, 1991), p.94.
- (5). Good and Brophy, "Looking in classrooms", p.270.
- (6). Barnes and Todd, "Communication and learning in small groups", p.87.

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Julia Clarke.

Abstract

It is the intention of this dissertation to assess the feasibility of the arts in education given the current provisions provided by both schools and arts organisations. It will argue for a wider involvement of the arts in our schools and address the reasons for the current state of the arts in education in Ireland. It will examine attitudes of pupils, parents, and teachers involved in this area as well as arts organisations that strive to include a policy for schools involvement in their programmes.

To strengthen the justification for an elevated status for the arts in education, the benefits of the arts will be examined and conclusions reached regarding their relevance in today's society. The recent Government publication "Succeeding Better" is a concise document which provides an insight into the current levels of participation of the arts within our schools and provide a useful insight into the direction the arts in education are proposed to take. This will be looked at closely and the practicalities of it given the conclusions reached in the research of the dissertation.