

## CHAPTER THREE CAPABILITY THROUGH ART AND DESIGN

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### **The Context**

As a creative, practical and problem solving activity Art and Design education is well suited for the development of capability.

Visual images are effective means of communicating information, ideas, concepts and emotions. They have a major part to play in the shared formulation of problems and the exploration of solutions. They can convey innovative ideas and propositions in advance of the development of language relevant to those ideas and propositions. Visual intelligence is therefore a major feature of capability. We live in a society in which visual communication is dominant and its power is understood and exploited by skilled communicators. The whole of the man-made environment has a strong visual dimension and those lacking visual intelligence and understanding are at a disadvantage in that environment.

Modern technology, in the form of low-cost video cameras, cable networks, desk top publishing, word processing and electronic imagery is giving many more people access to potentially effective visual media. Raising people's visual skills is as important as raising the more traditionally emphasised oral and written skills of communications.

Awareness of how visual material can be manipulated to suit the purposes of the communicator helps people understand and analyse the intentions behind the communication. Image interpretation is an important part of the full range of communication capability. Greater visual communication skills increase our ability to explain what we are about and to understand what others are about. There are no language boundaries in visual communication which, depending upon a shared cultural understanding, makes universal communication possible and available to all.

In the urban environment most artefacts are a result of some aspect of design thinking and decision making, whether it is the buildings we live in or the clothes we wear. Such decision making is not only the prerogative of the designer but of the user as well. Not only do we need to improve the production of these artefacts, but the users need to have a similar understanding to benefit from them. Awareness of the creative process involved enables the user to participate in the creation of the man-made environment, thus facilitating choice, collaboration and a shared desire for quality and fitness of purpose.

### ***Capability Features of Art and Design Education***

Art and Design education sets out to develop individual abilities, skills and understanding through practice, set within an historical and cultural context. 'Live' practice encourages a concern for self-identified and project specific problems and a search for solutions, and enhances creativity, invention and practical understanding.

The universal effectiveness of visual images means that Art and Design influences and is influenced by other social and cultural activities. Students extend their experience in a broad and evolving landscape and, as a consequence, their learning activities focus on the evaluation of their own progression not only amongst their immediate student peer group but also within the culture itself.

Learning through making requires critical awareness and self-evaluation to be developed in parallel with understanding. Content and process have to occur simultaneously for ideas to be expressed visually and materially. This duality is so central to the subject that initially much study is taken up in enabling students to develop this facility. This occurs either as a foundation year of study (something that has been formally recognised in Art and Design for some 30 years), as a series of induction courses or as part of an initial period of diagnostic study before specialisation.

The strong emphasis on practice within Art and Design education enables professional artists and designers, together with representatives from those industries employing artists and designers, to participate in the students learning process. This occurs in direct teaching situations, the setting and evaluation of professional projects, placement experience, residences and public exhibitions. Such dialogue and collaboration puts the student

From *Quality in Learning*, edited by John Stephenson and Susan Weil, published by Kogan Page, London in 1992.

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learning experience into a realistic context, establishing a professional and industrial environment for which most students are preparing themselves. The practitioner as teacher not only understands the nature of the learning experience in art and design but also understands and encourages the application of creative ideas to customer and client needs. Such experience is invaluable in providing a platform for professional development and a bridge between learning and practice.

The bridge with professional practice is extended through to assessment where the external examiners include practising professionals able to evaluate the work of the student in a professional context. As each student's work is in itself a piece of research involving self directed enquiry, it is appropriate that both the negotiation and completion of student work is so evaluated. Critical evaluation not only occurs within the assessment process but is central to the learning process too which can best be described as a process of constant critical dialogue between staff and student, student and student, and finally client and ex student.

Art and Design students, therefore, develop a facility for critical awareness as part of their own working methodology. They also employ it amongst their own student peer group both formally in project or group 'crits', and informally when discussing each others work. Team learning also requires a shared critical perception which becomes the framework on which such group work is based. Students therefore learn from other students' mistakes and achievements as much as they do from their own.

Group learning is commonplace in art and design. Some activities such as film and video work require production teams to enable the work to materialise. Even when the work is concerned with an individual idea, that idea cannot take shape without the help of others (lighting, sound, camera, props, continuity etc) and so a range of interactive skills and learning processes are required. By co-operation and interchange of activity, learning becomes a collective experience and is consequently more valuable for that reason.

Business understanding in Art and Design best occurs when it is related to specific projects and is seen as part of the brief. Time scales, production costs, promotional considerations, technical problems are all best understood when they are encountered in reality rather than in theory. For that reason projects that are set by companies, or works that are site specific or are for a specific exhibition or showing, carry with them a discipline that incorporates other learning strategies.

Related studies such as the History of Art and Design have more value when they are fully integrated with the main study. Rather than pursuing theoretical studies as a separate activity, students benefit by understanding how their own creative ideas relate to and are shaped by the culture of which their work is a part. The culmination of this integration can be witnessed in both the practical work and the written dissertation.

### ***Current Issues in Art and Design Education***

The success of Art and Design education in the UK is recognised and emulated worldwide. Many design students in particular are sought after and employed in high profile companies in Europe, America and Japan. Whilst it is often considered to be an expensive education in unit cost terms this is not borne out when compared with other courses with practical elements in technology, science, medicine and architecture. It is cost effective in its ability to retain students - the wastage rate is minimal compared with the average - and it is one of the very few subjects where students are expected to start employment in their specialist study without further training. Although there is no identified employment for the Fine Art student, the flexible and adaptable nature of their education employing a number of capability skills means that they are able, and do, take up employment across a diversity of activities where their particular creative and visual thinking gives them a considerable advantage.

It is probable, however, that much that is good and valuable in Art and Design education - in fact the very nature of the education itself - could well be lost in the changes that are sweeping through Higher Education at the moment. A rapid increase in student numbers without a corresponding increase in financial support is making it almost impossible to continue to provide the learning climate that has supported such a successful education practice.

A move towards lecture-based mass education rather than individual learning through practical skill-based study, together with the apparent attractiveness of modular courses as an expedient, will devastate the very nature of Art and Design education as a specialist study and transform it into a liberal arts education that broadly informs but doesn't develop individual student potential. There has already been a severe cut back in the employment of practising artists and designers as specialist staff. Many specialisms are no longer available because of cost and a

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number of known art and design courses have been dissolved into institutional modular structures which encourage breadth rather than specialism.

These policies may well produce a greater participation in Higher Education but at a cost. Unless the emerging broadly based education is endorsed by more specialist postgraduate education then much that represents a proven success in Art and Design education may be lost and with it our ability to provide artists and designers of capability.

## **Theme One: Reviewing and Building on Experience**

The Art and Design commitment to helping students take responsibility for their own educational and professional development begins at the point of recruitment and admission and continues into the first stages of the course. Three features predominate: the Foundation Course; admission by negotiation and portfolios of students' work; and the early induction of students into taking responsibility.

### ***Foundation courses***

Most entrants to undergraduate courses in Art and Design come via a 1 year full-time or two year part-time Foundation Course run in a variety of institutions, including the polytechnics themselves. Foundation Courses seek to give students experience of what it will be like for them when they join an undergraduate course. They provide a grounding in some essential skills and a range of experience on which students can base effective choices about their own professional development. They provide a bridge between the heavily teacher led environment of most schools to the student led environment of art and design higher education.

The first term of one Polytechnic's Foundation Course {81}, for instance,

*is conceived as a general course that aims at introducing students to the various disciplines and modes of thinking embraced by different areas of study.'*

The explicit aim is to give students direct experience of the skills and qualities required in different specialisms and the means to appraise their abilities, so that they might have:

*(he clearest possible picture, not only of the training involved on a degree course but some idea of the reality of the professional world outside.*

Students are given early experience of working intensively on group projects, portfolio management and exchanging self, peer and tutor assessment. The principle of the shared reviewing of progress and planning the next stages is built into tutorial dialogue and the more formal assessment points. The Foundation Course gives students both the opportunity to choose their own future specialism, and the feedback on performance to help them do it.

Foundation Course students are introduced to the Art and Design tradition of public demonstrations of achievements. Final assessment, even on a Foundation Course, includes the students' ability to select appropriate material and present it to external specialists and the wider community:

*All students are required to mount an individual show of selected work. This is assessed, by both internal and external assessors, and a Polytechnic Certificate awarded accordingly, confirming the satisfactory completion of a foundation year. Great importance is attached to the presentation and hanging of the exhibition... The exhibition itself is widely publicised, especially to all schools over the wide area from which we draw our intake. {81}*

One student's experiences {135} illustrates the value of Foundation Courses in helping students explore their interests and decide the direction of their subsequent polytechnic studies. Andrea had access to a range of specialisms, enabling her to broaden her awareness of what was available and her own interests and abilities.

*we spent time in all areas of design (photography, ceramics, graphics, fashion, textiles etc). Initially I thought I would specialise in ceramics but... I came across weaving completely by accident. It was an area that I discovered for myself. I began by weaving paper, experimenting with different textures, colours and weaves, creating new effects. This I found to be extremely exciting.*

At the end of her Foundation Course, Andrea was clear about what she wanted and was experienced in taking responsibility for her own development:

### ***Admission by negotiation and students' work***

By the time students are ready to apply for their H E course via the Art and Design Admissions Registry Scheme, most have a clear idea of what they want and where they can get it. It is not unusual for students to take the lead in exploring the facilities and ethos of likely programmes - often by day visits and discussions with tutors and students - before submitting a formal application.

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On their part, admission tutors admit students on the basis of their portfolios of their work, their ability to assess their own work and their articulation of their longer term professional intentions. Capability potential is as important as prior academic achievement, as this admissions tutor explained {40}:

***What we are looking for is their potential creative ability, objective criticism and understanding of their own work, and evidence of a clear sense of direction and commitment.***

A typical admissions procedure would involve a whole day. Activities include:- group discussions with staff about the course, facilities and diverse learning/career opportunities, formal tests of basic skills and general knowledge; Individual interviews to give students the opportunity to talk about their portfolio of work, to explain their reasons for applying and to discuss how they intend to use the course to further their longer term aspirations. Final year students (4th) are often included in the discussion of applicants' suitability. All current student year groups are involved in the giving of information to prospective students during Open Day visits prior to application.

### ***Induction into responsibility***

Despite the Foundation Courses and the admissions procedure, Art and Design programmes do not assume that their students have the capacity to act independently at the outset. The exposure of students to a range of activities, concepts and basic skills continues throughout the first year curriculum. Mastery of basic skills is considered to be of prime importance, not only to help students make realistic choices but also to help them perform well in a professional capacity.

Short intensive workshop programmes are provided in most key skill areas, often built around group projects. Once inducted into the basics, students are expected to continue to develop their skills through subsequent activities. Students learn the procedures for accessing studio and workshop facilities, including the benefits of help from studio technicians. The technicians, in fact, are a crucial element in the whole skills support service, providing individual advice and expertise whenever specialist studios and workshops are open for students. Students in their turn learn how to make use of technical support for their creative activities.

In effect, the whole of the first stage of Art and Design courses, including formal assessment points, is devoted to continuing the process of helping students make informed choices about their professional future based on mutual assessments of their skills and interests. In one Polytechnic {80}, for instance, the first assessment point is significantly called the 'Gateway Assessment', clearly signalling its role in the continuing development of the student. Progress is reviewed in the light of tested skills, interests and aspirations and the future direction for the student is agreed with the student. The programme leading to the Gateway Assessment is

***designed to cover the basic experiences which it is felt the student must have in order to be able to make an informed choice of pathway'***

As a consequence, student decisions about the future are negotiated with the benefit of evidence of the students skills and interests in a range of contexts:

***After satisfactory completion of the Gateway Assessment, students individually discuss with the Gateway Assessment Panel their appropriate pathway through the final two years, and arrive at a mutually acceptable choice.***

In summary, the Art and Design experience shows how the early stages of higher education programmes can be geared towards giving students the basis on which they can build their own distinctive programmes of study. The whole course infrastructure, from recruitment priorities and procedures to resource allocations and assessments, supports the development of student capability. They have shown that giving students a grounding in a range of basic skills is not incompatible with students taking responsibility for their own learning. Indeed, the skills make it possible for students to take advantage of that responsibility.

## **Theme Two: Planning, Negotiation and Approval**

Most art and design students are expected and encouraged to participate in all decisions concerning their studies. Student negotiation of programmes is part of the culture; approvals of plans are informal and flexible. In most cases, students and tutors share responsibility for the decisions which emerge. Not many courses, except in the case of final year formally assessed assignments (see Theme Four), provide for the formal approval or validation of learning contracts. Continuous critical dialogue enables staff and students to shape the overall coherence of the students' experience, from admissions to completion. Tutorial exchanges are less about the giving of information or formal instruction than about discussing the development of the student's work, and what might be done next.

The introduction of modular structures makes it more difficult to sustain this continuity and informality. In order to accommodate transient participants, individual modules on Art and Design courses have pre-determined explicit objectives and learning outcomes for all students thus limiting the extent to which the 'all through' Art and Design students' total programme can grow out of the experience of the student. One consequence of the modular approach is to make the process of negotiation and approval more explicit and formal. Students are required to enter one such course {234} by formally 'negotiating briefs' at the outset of their second year. This particular programme recognises 'that each individual will have interests, skills and competences very much their own' and sets out to provide opportunities for the development of these within the overall context of the area of study, but imposes explicit requirements which all student must meet. For instance, in putting together a team for their group project, students must demonstrate they can:

- \* *Clearly identify aims and objectives.*
- \* *Anticipate the skills / competences / knowledge required to attain the aims and objectives.*
- \* *Assess fellow students as to their suitability / willingness / competence / ability to function adequately in their required roles.*
- \* *Assess their own abilities / knowledge / suitability to carry out certain functions and enlist help where necessary.*
- \* *Anticipate and allocate realistic workloads.*
- \* *Schedule the production.*

In this scheme {234}, student plans are approved if, after discussions with staff, they are seen to be appropriate in terms of

*realistic aims and objectives, anticipated duration, budgetary requirements, and learning outcomes.*

The above example illustrates how even within a structured modular programme student responsibility can be assured. The explicit programme requirements - the criteria against which all students must be judged - relate to process issues (objective setting), the development of personal skills (self and peer assessment), and the demonstration of competences relevant to the industry the students hope to join (budget control, deadlines, team-building). The specific objectives of the students' work are a matter for the students themselves. One concern about the less formal sharing of responsibility for the decisions which emerge from critical dialogues is that the general criteria used by the staff in advising students may not be explicit. Decisions emerge because they 'seem right' in the light of the students' experiences and intentions. What constitutes good or desirable practice may be understood by the participants, but is not always spelled out.

Negotiation is not an easy option for students. The obligation to be open about their choices demands rigour. Deciding one's programme is daunting because one's whole professional future is at stake - and it is down to the students to justify their choice on the basis of their proven competence and commitment. Decision-making, even in the less formal learning environments, is taken seriously as Andrea recalls {135}:

*By the second year I had to make a decision and specialise in one area. It was a hard choice between print and weave because I had enjoyed and been successful in both areas. Although I could have specialised in both, I opted to concentrate on weave as it was a specific skill to learn.*

### **Theme Three: Active and Interactive Learning**

With the exception of some History of Art components, the learning environment for most Art and Design students is the studio, the workshop, the community and the work place. The variety of individual interests, the demands of the industry, the nature of the discipline and the emphasis on student responsibility do not easily accommodate delivery modes of teaching. Active and interactive learning is therefore the norm.

Three widely practised activities are explored in this section:

- Team working
- Live projects
- Placements and residences

#### ***Team working***

Team working is a feature of most art and design courses. There are two main reasons why this is so. First, team-working reflects the nature of the business itself, where many different specialists have to collaborate to convert ideas into reality. Second, team working is a way in which students can pursue different specialisms whilst maintaining contact with the wider range of related activities. Students can share expertise and learn from each other. On one Design course {134}, for instance, team work is seen as

***central to the production of media in terms of students taking on particular roles within a production team, working together as a team, and producing a quality product.***

Team-working, in other words, is not a fad of the methodology of teaching; it is a legitimate part of the students' professional development. It is also used explicitly to give the student experience of '***discharging responsibility to him/herself and simultaneously to the group!***' Teams are not confined to students. They frequently include technicians, tutors and external clients working in partnership. They often work within the discipline of externally imposed criteria of success.

Experience of collaborative projects helps students become less dependent upon their tutors and be more self-reliant and supportive of other students. Staff have found that an actual reduction in their contact with their students, confined to key process activities, has the effect of helping students become more responsible and accountable for their own learning, as this tutor reports {133}:

***Self and group-managed learning is implicit in the structure of such collaborative subjects. Curricular and tutorial time is maintained at a minimum throughout the exercise and is concentrated at the nodal points of briefings, interim critiques and presentations. We have found that a reduction of academic staff contact during the project has helped to create greater personal accountability within the peer groups.***

Moreover, experience of working together without constant supervision by their tutors also raises student confidence in their own ability to explain to their colleagues and clients what their work is about:

***the overall project structure helps students in gaining confidence in the presentation and justification of their concepts to a critical audience of peers, tutors and senior management; a communication skill vital to success and effectiveness in their ultimate professional roles in industry. {133}***

Tutors also report that self-directed team-working has a beneficial effect on the students' capacity to judge the performance of themselves and their colleagues. Team projects are strongly product driven, not tutor driven, so students need to develop clear product specifications in order to plan their work. Product specifications enable students to judge a) the capacity of each member to complete the work, b) the actions they need take to fill gaps in their abilities, and c) the extent to which they have been successful:-

***In undertaking group projects students are required to carry out assessments of potential in regard to themselves and other group members. Can I or X carry out adequately the requirements of the set task? If not how can this be overcome? Equally, on completion, how well were each individual's and their own responsibilities carried out? Importantly, were their initial assessments at the beginning of the project accurate and realistic? It is this feedback through which students are required to test their own and others' judgement which is of great value. (234)***

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In summary, team-working is an essential part of Art and Design education because it is the essence of the Design industry, it widens students' experiences of different skills, it develops key personal skills of communication and evaluation, and enables tutors to concentrate the students' overall professional development.

### **Live Projects**

One of the main vehicles for the development of student capability on Art and Design courses, and one of its most distinctive features, is the Live Project. A live project is an assignment negotiated by students and/or their tutors with clients working within the students' intended or potential professional field. They are often three way partnerships, involving the tutors as professional practitioners, as well as the clients and the students.

Live projects can be commissioned by outside organisations or can be initiated by the college itself. The Staff of the Visual and Performing Arts Department at Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic {134}, for instance, saw an opportunity for a live project in an initiative being sponsored by the local police:

***The Northumbria Police, who had collected over 800 weapons during a fire arm amnesty, were looking for ways in which this might be put to some good effect. We decided to put this to the students as a second year project in which they would prepare drawings and maquettes for a sculpture based on the theme 'Swords into Ploughshares'....***

This particular live project illustrates another feature of Art and Design Courses: the use of competitions to emulate the reality of the fierce competition within the business itself. Winning can be prestigious. In the case of the Police project, the presentation was made by the Home Secretary. For the successful student, the design of the sculpture was not the end of the matter. Excellence had to be demonstrated in both the design, manufacture and the delivery of the product:

***At every stage of the process the student was involved in the planning, organising, the written presentation, the submission for the exhibition, the planning application, attended the meetings and made presentations to the Planning Committee, negotiated with the City Council on the installation, negotiated with the foundry, and worked with the Police Authority and the commissioners. She was involved in the organisation of the presentation with the Chinese community in the area where the sculpture was erected, with representatives of the various religious faiths in the city who dedicated the sculpture at the unveiling ceremony, and with the Chief Constable and Sheriff of Tyne and Wear, and the Lord Mayor. {134}***

Live projects enable students to gain an insight into aspects of their business not normally accessible within the confines of the college. They enable students to learn what is involved in dealing with actual or potential clients. In the case of the Newcastle gun sculpture, the successful student gained experience of working with four different groups outside the college: the body commissioning the work, the groups producing the sculpture, the formal bodies whose approvals were needed, and the community within which it was to be placed.

Where ready-made live projects like 'Swords into Ploughshares' do not exist, staff may have to go out and negotiate them for their students. This requires staff to be in close touch with trends in the professional world outside the college and to have the credibility to enter into realistic negotiations with hard-pressed employers. The resultant project {208} can be a genuine collaboration between the college and the client over the students' development and the client's needs:

***The subject matter would be mutually agreed and a typical time scale of five or six weeks would involve a site visit to the manufacturing plant coupled with an initial project briefing by management staff. Course staff would then provide the studio tuition, general management of the project and prepare the students for an interim presentation of design concepts to the 'client' after approximately two weeks.***

The benefits students derive from live projects are not confined to experiencing the commercial reality of their intended specialist field. The quality of the studies itself benefits, as staff on one course report:

***When students are involved with 'live' projects and real deadlines, we have found that the quality of work they produce and their performance improve dramatically... We believe that the student emerges from these 'real work' experiences better equipped to assess and deal with the challenges of professional life in his or her future career, particularly where the project has involved analysing available data, negotiating and describing a design solution and then completion of the task to the client's satisfaction.... {208}***

According to the above experience, the live project work contributes to the quality of students' work through a) the discipline of deadlines, b) the sharing of information and expertise through collaboration with staff and peers, and c) the obligation on students to be explicit about their work to critical external professionals.

An alternative to the negotiated contract with outside companies is the purpose built replica of the commercial world within the college. One Polytechnic {232} provides an in-house design studio in order to

*expand upon the experiences provided within the normal academic environment. It enables the student to use and develop their communication skills with face to face meetings with a real client. The completed design work is presented at the commissioning company. A price is obtained from the printer. The artwork is produced. The student is involved in establishing the criteria for assessment and in the assessment itself. It is an excellent example of how to provide a total academic and commercial experience for advanced design students.*

Staff also benefit from working with students in the Design Studio {233}. The work

*creates the necessity for staff to discuss and assess new teaching and learning methods, develops a more critical attitude to the learning processes and assessment criteria, and provides staff with the opportunity to update their own professional and commercial experience.*

Live projects present college staff with a constant opportunity to monitor the relevance of the course to external circumstances, and to evaluate its effectiveness. They provide opportunity for genuine partnership between the industry and the course, giving each a valuable insight into the other. They enable students to meet practising designers in a commercial environment whilst also providing an insight into the latest commercial practices and equipment. Representatives from the design industry have the opportunity to contribute to the education of young designers and to influence course development.

### **Placements**

Placements give Art and Design students an extended opportunity to absorb the milieu of the design business and to develop the skills which will enable them to survive within it. Art and Design placements are seen as being much more than 'a year in industry'. They are seen by tutors, students and employers as integral parts of the students' programmes. The students do more than 'experience the industry'; they explicitly learn from their experience of the industry. Employers take their educational responsibilities for their placement students very seriously; they see them as young professionals and they are potential employees. They use them on front-line work.

Frequently, the college and the employer collaborate on helping students develop their personal capability as well as their specific competence, as this joint feedback-form illustrates {135}:

*Please comment on the student's:*

*Motivation*

*Communication skills*

*Attitude to work*

*Ability to assimilate and collate information*

*Decision making*

*Ability to work in a team*

*Potential leadership*

The employers' view on what constitutes capability is indicated by comments they choose to make when giving feedback on individual student performance. For motivation, for instance, good student performance prompted the following comments from employers:

*a consistent self-starter;*

*self-motivated... got on with it.. asked for help when needed;*

*self motivated - did not require constant supervision;*

*easily motivated - once briefed was able to complete projects on her own. {135}*

Employers such as Wallis Fashions {228} vouch for the effectiveness of these partnerships in developing the all round capability of students by their willingness to employ the students afterwards:

***Students from the Fashion Marketing course use their wide-ranging skills and abilities on their placement with us. We benefit from the practical and innovating ideas students bring to the company and this balance of qualities also makes them attractive potential employees. {228}***

Because tutors and employers put great emphasis on the educational value of the industrial placement -and are seen to be collaborating in order to make them effective - students also take the experience seriously. Students see the industrial placement as an essential part of their own professional development and seek to get the best out of it. They want a good company specialising in their own field offering relevant learning opportunities. Students choose their placements accordingly, as reported by Julie:

***When choosing my first placement I took into consideration: a) the type of company I would like to work for and b) how my design philosophy would fit into that company. {228}***

Julie was not disappointed with her choice. The company gave her the kinds of experiences she needed and wanted:

***After I had chosen Wallis I was told what the placement entailed. It was exactly what I was looking for: to spend half of my time designing a coat, to produce the pattern, toile and finished garment - in cashmere; therefore to go through each individual department and with constant guidance from (their) outer wear designer; also to spend the other half of my time in various departments - such as the press office, production and quality control; to learn how each department operates and liaises with each other; and finally to help out with general duties in the pattern room.. to do a very wide and thorough placement. {228}***

Not only has Julie learned a great deal, she has also enjoyed the experience and is eager to learn more:

***I have been doing all of this and find it thoroughly enjoyable. So far it has been a valuable learning experience, especially knowing that there is still plenty to do and learn. {228}***

Another student, Andrea {228}, reports how much she appreciated being given serious things to do. She saw the placement as 'part of the course', not an interlude away from college.

***The year spent on industrial placement was a very valuable part of the course... I was designing fabrics that were put into production, made into garments and sold in the museum shop... the year gave me a lot of understanding about the weaving process and its commerciality. {228}***

The Company's officer with responsibility for supervising Julie and Andrea's placements {228} explicitly sets out to ensure that students placed with her company gain experiences which supplement the skills gained in the college. She recognises the importance of students actually wanting to make full use of the placement for themselves:

***These girls are very intelligent but because the colleges they attended did not offer courses with depth to encourage their capability, they made the decision to work in a fashions company to expand their knowledge. {228}***

Students greatly appreciate the educational value of their placements. A group of students on a fashion course {135} readily reported to us what they had learned about the industry from their placements and the skills they had developed. Most developed greater commitment to the industry and confidence in their ability. They particularly liked being taken seriously, being used as professional practitioners, and having access to all aspects of the business. This compilation of student comments summarises their general view of placements:

***My placement gave me a much clearer understanding of the commercial fashion industry. I learned the importance of communication with staff and with buyers, how to work as a team, how to visualize somebody else's ideas and cost effective sample cutting. It gave me the confidence to deal with various clients, from company directors through to customers on the shop floor. The placement was a great confidence booster. I was able to see how a design evolves from inspiration to sales and was allowed to work with all levels of the company. We learned how to be professional. {135}***

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***They gave me experience of incorporating my own design skill with those of the company's and was invited to get involved in a whole multitude of new experiences. Due to the absence of the clothing manager I was often required to make decisions fairly quickly on a highly responsible basis. Overall it was an excellent experience and has been of great influence in my future work***

The close relationship between the industrial placement and the college components of the course - and the Art and Design tradition of helping students plan their own professional development - enable students to follow up their placement experience with further voluntary association with the employer and, more significantly, into the post-placement college programme and the students' final assessments. Placements, in other words, can be used to involve employers more directly in students' final year programmes and final assessments as well as give the students' final year programme and assessment a firm grounding in the professional area.

Fine Art students have less opportunity than fashion and design students to engage in live projects or extended placements with professional organisations. A different tradition, 'Artists in Residence', has emerged. Such schemes bring Art students into contact with the wider community where they often find themselves questioning the relevance of their studies both to themselves and to others.

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On one such scheme {42}

*all second year students undertake a four to six week Artist in Residence project, within a public context beyond the college. Here they spend approximately half their time working as an artist with the host community, and the rest on development of their personal practice... The residency experience is a mandatory component of the second year, linking both with studio concerns and the Contextual Studies component, through which it is currently assessed.*

One criticism students make of the scheme is that they often fail to get the opportunity to carry on with their own work during the placement. They get drawn into helping in other ways. The residency scheme, however, offers a vehicle for the development of capability, giving students experience of negotiation and the management of time and resources.

*This is an experience largely self-managed by the student, who will discuss the project with the coordinator and then jointly with her, negotiate the details with the host concerned. {42}*

Regular college based seminars provide an opportunity for reflection on the residency experiences, the development of presentational skills, and collaboration:

*The weekly seminars, whereby students return to college contact, provide a forum for exchange of experience, discussions of approach, and presentation of work achieved, as well as contextualising the experience through a variety of investigations - historical, theoretical, current case studies etc. This provides a framework fostering the residency, and peer-group support plays a dominant role here. {42}*

The benefits of the Residency scheme are illustrated by the experiences of one student painter who was placed in a local school. The experience improved his understanding of his own work, and of the relevance of art to life in general.

*I have found the residency very beneficial to the way I think about art and consequently my work. I have found that some of the things that (school) students do highlight the problems with my own work... often their mistakes are the same as mine only they are harder to spot in me.... I have thought a lot more about why we make art as a result of thinking about a strategy for teaching. {42}*

#### **Theme Four: Assessment**

The formal assessment of Art and Design students presents particular problems. The expressed aim of most Art and Design courses is to encourage students to develop their distinctive professional identity, and to demonstrate it in live and often external contexts. The more successful courses are in achieving this aim, the more difficult it is to use standardised assessments. The challenge is to find forms of assessment which allow maximum individuality in the specifics of a student's work, whilst placing equal professional and intellectual demands on all students seeking awards of a similar level.

The variety of forms of assessment used is considerable, including exhibitions, designs, working models, cat-walk fashion shows and portfolios of drawings. What they have in common is the use of panels of assessors, direct presentations by students to critical and informed academic and professional audiences and prolonged *viva-voce* examinations. Student exhibitions are often supported by critical reviews of their own work which in turn are scrutinised by external academics and professionals. The rigour of this approach is impressive. As one student reported:

*Other students just take written exams. They don't have to hang their answers on the wall for all to see. {134}*

Two contrasting examples are examined in depth.

*The Newcastle upon Tyne Fine Art Degree* {134} is a typical example of the all through integrated programme. Its formal assessments, conducted at three different stages in the programme, show how some of the above issues are tackled.

First, the regulations explicitly acknowledge the problem they are designed to address:

*Clearly in a course which encourages self-motivated exploration, the emphasis in assessment must take account of highly individual programmes which may indeed re-define subject areas within the totality of Fine Art.' {134}*

Second, the Three Stages of assessment explicitly allow students to progress through the course from foundation skills and knowledge into individual development. Third, the regulations emphasise general criteria against which student performance can be judged, thus allowing space for individual specialist aims and objectives to be pursued.

First Stage assessment, for instance, is concerned with the 'assimilation of basic techniques'. Criteria relate to the student's

*aptitude in the use of methods and materials  
comprehension of the basic elements of artistic expression  
capacity to command fundamental critical concepts in Fine Art  
understanding of the history of the visual arts' {134}*

The Second Stage assessment explicitly allows for student individuality to develop. The regulations are quite categorical in this respect:

*the student's progression is measured in terms of growing personal identification with a particular range of attitudes and media' {134}*

The criteria for the assessment of the student's 'work in progress' relate to the student's

*exploration and enquiry rather than finished product  
critical self-scrutiny  
intellectual apprehension of the creative process  
engagement with historical and critical factors {134}*

The Second Stage assessments are organised by the students themselves, and 'no stipulation is given concerning the work a student should choose to include', except that they will be judged by the above criteria.

By the Third and final Stage, students are expected to

***demonstrate the results of profound personal engagement with the intellectual concerns and techniques associated with their chosen practice' {134}***

Criteria in this final stage relate to the student's 'commitment' and the programme's 'intensity'. Students must show

***that personal research and critical reflection have been directed towards arguing a coherent case in their final project;  
breadth and depth;  
awareness of modes of thought, practices and disciplines other than those of the main study. {134}***

The assessments of student performance extend throughout the final term of the final year. Internal and external panels review student progress at the outset of the assessment cycle; they are able to see the work progress and engage in 'critical dialogue' with the students at pre-determined points. This intensive use of examiner time - in contrast with more traditional methods - is compensated by the extent to which students have access to technician support and, by that stage, are not expected to be dependent upon close tutoring. Significantly, the assessment task is shared with people from industry, which also ensures close scrutiny of the relevance of the students' work to the needs of the industry.

The rigour of the above assessments is clear. In addition to producing their specialist work, students have to articulate the basis for their assessment - including the specific criteria - and account for their achievements to internal and external panels of examiners, potential employers and, in some cases, the wider public. They need to be proficient in oral and written communication, setting their own objectives, self-evaluation, managing their own time and resources and in negotiation skills. They are also required to demonstrate a high level of independence in the context of their professional field.

***The Leeds Polytechnic BA Honours Graphic Design Degree Programme*** {88} is a modular scheme. The Leeds scheme illustrates one way of ensuring that the commitment to the development of individually focused programmes can be preserved within a formal modular structure. The critical factor illustrated in the Leeds approach, visible also in the Newcastle Fine Art Degree, is the clear separation of general programme requirements and criteria from the specialist objectives and criteria negotiated by the student. Students prepare and submit the brief for their proposed project or assignment for approval. The pro-forma for the project brief requires students to spell out the specific aspects of the work, through which they will meet the general criteria for the course. In effect, they are required to negotiate the basis of their own assessment. The headings on the form are:

***Nature and context of work:  
Outline of brief:  
Objectives, specifications of work required and assessment criteria  
Reference material or research required. {88}***

Students are given the criteria against which the proposed work will be marked before they begin the planning of their work. They are able to take into account the general criteria when negotiating their own specific objectives and criteria. The programme's criteria fall into three categories: personal development (eg creativity, generation of ideas); educational development (eg methodology, research, problem analysis); vocational development (eg application of media skills, appropriateness of final product). Other factors which are taken into account, such as commitment and attendance, are also made explicit.

The significance of the separation of general course criteria from the specific student objectives and criteria - whether in the all-through or modular programmes - is that it requires students to show how their own educational development and achievements relate to the level of the qualification they seek. The separation converts assessment into a valuable learning activity in its own right; it is challenging, develops and tests key skills and qualities, leads to a high sense of ownership and motivation and promotes depth of understanding.

### **Issues Arising from the Art and Design Experience**

The Art and Design experience provides strong support for the Education for Capability argument that giving students opportunities to be responsible and accountable for their own learning improves both its relevance and quality. High completion and employment rates, together with an international reputation for the excellence of

many of its graduates, are achieved without the use of tightly controlled pre-determined knowledge based teaching. The design business is very competitive; companies demand a high degree of commitment and professionalism from their recruits in order to flourish within it. Their belief in the quality of the distinctive approach of Art and Design education is shown by their willingness to play a full part in its central activities and to compete for its products.

To some extent the nature of Art and Design itself contributes to capability. Creativity and visual intelligence are important personal qualities. However, by directly involving students in the development of their own programmes and the justification of their achievements, other important attributes and skills are developed: confidence in their abilities, independence, commitment, critical awareness, communication skills, team-working, evaluative skills and decision making. The use of client based live projects as a central feature of undergraduate programmes requires students to address the needs of their own professional development in the context of the needs of the industry.

The most distinctive feature of Art and Design education, from a capability perspective, is the strong emphasis on student accountability at every stage, from initial interview through the 'on-going critical dialogue' style of tutoring to final assessment. The examples quoted show how this key activity stimulates personal development, greater understanding and intellectual and professional rigour.

Art and Design education shows it is possible to ensure that essential skills and knowledge can be covered within a structure dedicated to the independent development of each student. Close links with the external professional environment, at every stage, make students aware that high levels of technical competence are essential ingredients of personal development. It is their own commitment to their personal professional development which motivates students to work on their basic skills; it is their basic skills which make their professional development possible.

Other disciplines have similar features to Art and Design (where the application of skills and knowledge is as important as their acquisition) but have developed different educational cultures. A major factor determining Art and Design's distinctive approach to learning is that it has not grown out of the traditional university approach of the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake. Art and Design education as it is known today developed from the aftermath of the Great Exhibition in 1851 where the dismal standard of British manufacture had aroused considerable disapproval both from Government and royalty. As a result the Department of Science and Art established a number of Art Schools which after a Royal Commission in 1886 became schools of Art and Design with the specific aim of relating Arts, Craft and Design to industry and manufacture, through a process of practical and technical education.

There is no overall professional body controlling entry into employment. Control resides in the direct working links between the industry and the college and the mutual concern for the students' proven professionalism.

There is a tradition of employing staff, either full or part-time, on the strength of their professional experience and links with the industry. Many practise their professionalism, and demonstrate their commitment to becoming better at it, alongside their students, blurring the distinction between consultancy, staff development and teaching. Close working relationships with the industry ensure effective collaboration over student placements.

The availability of technicians to give specialist advice on technical matters means that students can become independent of academic staff, with consequential benefit according to some of the evidence. Tutors can be available for 'critical dialogue' about the idea, the strategy and the outcome of the activity and about each student's progress. In one polytechnic department, there is one technician to every two teaching staff.

The concerns about the modularisation of courses and resource constraints focus on key capability features of the Art and Design tradition - skills support, individual development, tutorial styles and close professional links. The examples illustrate ways in which modules can retain some capability features; the effects of continuing resource constraints on part-time staff, technical support and tutorial styles may not be so easily mitigated.

## **References**

Work Experience in Art and Design, CNA 1990 (Anne Channon) Design in Partnership DES 1989