

ART EDUCATION IN THE FORMAL SECTOR

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There is a crisis in art education in the formal sector. In a survey on C2005 in Grade 7 [Department of National Education, 1999], Arts and Culture was identified as one of the three new learning areas that had serious problems regarding effective implementation. In 2001, with ongoing support for Grade 7 and the introduction of Grade 8 in all high schools, the situation has not changed very much. I will try to outline some of the main issues that give me great cause for concern:

- The lack of capacity in the majority of educators to deliver in the learning area of Arts and Culture will have serious consequences in terms of preparing learners for the proposed GETC qualification at the end of Grade 9 which terminates formal schooling in the GET band.
- It is proving to be very difficult for generalists to teach visual art without some degree of specialisation and understanding of the philosophical underpinnings and practice because much of this is implicit and not easily articulated in the short space of time allowed for formal INSET. If you do not know what to do, how to do it, with what to do it, and what to look for, it is exceedingly difficult to teach and assess learners' work in visual art appropriately and developmentally.
- Inadequate time allocation: In the Senior Phase of the GET band [Grades 7, 8 and 9] the learning area comprises the discrete disciplines of Dance, Drama, Music, Visual Art, Culture and Heritage Studies. The other phases have even less time and the learning area does not stand alone. In the Foundation Phase it is submerged in Life Skills, Literacy and Numeracy while in the Intermediate Phase, it is clustered with Life Orientation. The proposed time allocation for the learning area in the Senior Phase is 10% of the timetable which works out at +/- 2 hours per cycle for all of the above plus an integrated approach. The 10% is not a given certainty and it is possible that this allocation will be reduced.
- Historically, art education was restricted to and inherited by the privileged few that were able to attend well-resourced schools. The majority of South African teachers have never experienced the benefits of art education during their own schooling or teacher training. This **legacy of ignorance** is reflected in most teachers' inability to implement successfully the new Learning Area of Arts and Culture throughout all phases of the GET band. The FET band presents even more problematic issues relating to art specialisation
- In addition there are associated factors which serve to prevent Visual Art from taking its constitutionally guaranteed place in the curriculum.

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- In the first place, many schools see Visual Art as elitist and a luxury that they can ill afford. In rare instances, art is only offered to a few interested learners, extra-murally, usually by a volunteer. [Alternatively, Music, in the form of choirs and choral festivals, and Drama in the form of Eistedfords, have strong traditions to build upon in the majority of schools - and they cost less].
- Secondly, there is an overriding suspicion of the usefulness and place of Visual Art in education. It is often narrowly interpreted as making a product – nice, often formula derived paintings to hang on foyer walls which are used to “showcase” a school, a departmental institution, or, more sadly, entered for child art competitions.
- Thirdly, the education rationalisation policy has marginalised the arts. As a so-called “soft option “ many visual art [and music] educators, especially in the primary schools, were the first to be identified “in excess” as management committees struggled with the implications of right sizing.
- Fourthly, there has been the gradual loss of permanent education department posts for art educators. As they left their schools, for whatever reason, their vacant permanent posts were, and still are, often used to attract Maths and Science teachers while new art educators have no choice but the option of management committee contract posts - if the school could afford them.
- The majority of generalist teachers who are required to teach Arts and Culture have little or no prior knowledge of arts education. They have no pedagogic or methodological arts skills, appropriate materials, facilities or regular support to assist them in the successful implementation of the new learning area within the context of their own schools. In addition, many of these teachers are reluctant to be associated with arts and culture for fear of being the first in line to go, should further rationalisation of posts take place.

The skilling of generalist educators in Visual Art has therefore to be understood in the broader context of management and rationalisation, and in the recognition by schools and their communities of the value of art education.

- Teachers need to develop an understanding of Visual Art and be able to transform their classroom practice by INSET methodology based on praxis - acquiring “minds on” theoretical knowledge in combination with “hands on” specific practical skills, and reflexivity.
- It is short sighted and unrealistic to expect the majority of generalists to acquire their understanding and practice of art education from a book or

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from a brief 30 minute OBE workshop session. Unfortunately, the concept of teacher at best as a "facilitator" or at worst, a mere technician rather than a skilled, knowledgeable and reflective practitioner drives such workshops and completely ignores the realities of changing one's practice, and developing specialist skills. Most teachers have to rely upon provincial workshops such as those referred to, which are isolated from the school context, and held after hours or over weekends.

- Our field experience has been that generalist teachers are most effectively skilled when they work alongside art specialists, doing what their learners do and dealing with questions of practice as they arise in the context of the classroom. There is no official sanction or provision for this method of INSET within the normal teaching day.
- One innovative INSET programme is the **Ibhabathane Project** which was piloted at the WCED's Frank Joubert Art Centre. This on-going programme is a Visual Art and Design skills development initiative run in conjunction with specialist art educators, an NCEO and the WCED Safer Schools project and aimed at generalist educators from a cross section of disadvantaged schools who want art training [ref: Ibhabathane presentation].
- This is a needs-driven project funded by the private sector and various non-governmental sources. It is a viable training model that should be taken seriously by the formal education sector in this province, and nationally, in order to address the lack of capacity in educators to implement and deliver C2005 education in the arts.
- At present, this model cannot be taken up by art NCEO's because there is little support or funding from the formal or public sector.

VISUAL ART AND DESIGN EDUCATION IS A COMMUNITY AFFAIR

- The possibility of initiating the Ibhabathane INSET model for educators and learners in community centres that are easily accessible to schools in disadvantaged communities needs to be taken up at national and provincial governmental level. The support of tertiary institutions would be of prime importance.
- This training model should also involve the assistance of arts NCEO's as well as specialists in the formal education sector, It could enable many school going learners, and unemployed youth and adults, to continue with further education and training in the arts [through ABET and FET]. This could ultimately contribute to the economy through their creativity and design skills being used in an assorted variety of jobs, careers and entrepreneurial activities. An example of this approach is the success of the **Zolani Ceramics project**
- More long term, is the support of formal education in Arts and Culture in the community so that all our learners can start to develop, at an early age, an active understanding of the value of visual art, the development of fundamental art skills and their relation to culture and heritage. It is also

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imperative that teachers are able to identify art talent in young learners in order to open up various career paths and entrepreneurial possibilities.

- Working with the community is one significant way of dispelling the myths that colour the popular attitude towards the role of arts education in the formal sector.
- Community centres in low income areas such as Langa, e.g. the Gugus'thebe Centre, have a dedicated space for the performing arts, music, the visual arts, design and craft. This centre has an open-air theatre, indoor performance venues, ballet studios, ceramics studios and art rooms. It has smaller rooms from which individual artists could work and from which craftspeople could set up small business ventures, selling their ware.
- This type of centre offers the possibility of sustainable job creation for hitherto unemployed artists, designers and craftspeople sharing the combined resources of a centre in Langa dedicated to the development of skills, knowledge, pride and value in its community arts, culture and heritage practices.
- Linked with arts education and job creation is the role that such centres could play in supporting the craft industry and tourism – similar to the tourist craft route initiative based at Sivuyile Technical College in Gugulethu.

VISUAL ART CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: LEARNING THROUGH DESIGN

- The Design approach is, to my way of thinking, a possible solution for the future of visual art education in South Africa, given the present economic and social needs of a post apartheid society.
- The major responsibility for teacher training, which was formerly provided by colleges of education, is being taken over by the technikons.
- This is the moment which innovative curriculum planners in technikons should seize in order to create design education courses which will provide the country with educators who can implement an art, design and technology curriculum in the formal and non formal sectors to boost job creation, and, inter alia, build a national cultural identity through a unique South African aesthetic and well designed products.
- There are many examples of innovative curriculum development in other countries which would suit the emerging nation status of South Africa. The socio-economic importance of planning a curriculum in the GET and FET phases of education which integrates key aspects of fine art and graphic arts skills with technology is an area that needs to be given serious attention. For example, in the UK, at Turves Green Girls' School and Technology College, the school's Art and Design programmes cater for the GNQV and GCSE through innovative curricula taught in the Design and Technology department. The UK Department of Education's Ofsted report [1999], noting with appreciation the school's response to the urgent need to link technology with design and graphic art, comments that " ... the

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graphic and presentation skills transferral to other subjects areas across the curriculum are exceptionally beneficial.”¹

- The teacher at the school who was responsible for promoting the concept of **learning through design** emphasised that “ ... creative ideas, good use of visuals, and the learning of a full range of graphic techniques are still paramount ... along with basic realisations. My business background helped me to convey the importance of issues such as deadlines, meeting clients' needs, budgeting and producing final artwork under pressure.”²

CONCLUSION

It is the stated primary objective of our new education system to empower our learners, through the acquisition of relevant skills, knowledge, values and attitudes, to become competent contributors and critical consumers in the national economy [C2005 Critical Outcomes]

An integrated Visual Art, Design and Technology education is a key building block towards fulfilling this objective. No post industrial or emerging nation can afford to ignore investing in the cultivation of design skills to develop career pathways, entrepreneurial attitudes and a manufacturing culture to stimulate the economy.

Education is needed to build a stable society and central to transformation in post apartheid South Africa is the understanding of and the reflection of a national identity. And yet, the high levels of poverty, unemployment and violent crime are stifling any form of sustainable economic growth. In the present circumstances, the chances of attaining social transformation through an education policy such as C2005 are remote.

However, “ ... throughout South Africa in urban and rural areas, there is a wealth of unharnessed artistic talent. Talent which reflects a culture and a nation. ”³

Talent, that at the moment, for the majority of our learners remains untapped because of the lack of capacity in education to deliver this aspect of the curriculum.

It is of major concern that the C21 committee, reviewing an education system dedicated to transformation, have reduced the importance of visual art and the arts in general and have completely misplaced and misunderstood the role of design in the curriculum, when it should be doing exactly the opposite. There is a carry over of the perception mentioned earlier, that the arts are still a luxury, lowest on the list of priorities, and one that this struggling economy can ill afford. And Design, in the opinion of the C21 committee, is something to be vaguely tacked on, inexplicably, to the Learning Areas of Life Orientation and Natural Sciences. While Technology and EMS are to be abandoned because of the lack of capacity of educators to deliver.

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If the national education department were prepared to place more value on encouraging the development of innovative art, design, technology curricula in the GET and FET bands of education [as in the UK], fundamental skills could be taught to all learners, levels of visual and design literacy could be raised, along with cultural awareness and heritage education, and creative talent could be identified and nurtured. In combination with the Learning Area of EMS, the entrepreneurial and management skills that many school leavers would acquire, would make them better equipped to generate a sustainable income through the opportunities offered by the multifaceted design industry.

To cite lack of capacity in educators as the reason for marginalising or abandoning the learning areas I have referred to, highlights the absence of creative thinking and depth of vision, and inability to solve the crisis that this paper has attempted to outline. Neither has an obvious intervention been taken up - to call for a national task team to be set up to design some solutions.

REFERENCES:

¹ **A Graphic Account:** Openshaw, Lesley, in DESIGNING: Summer 1999, p.10 [Ofsted report, 1995, Turves Green Girls' School and Technology College, Birmingham, UK]

² **A Graphic Account:** Openshaw, Lesley, in DESIGNING: Summer 1999, p.10

³ **Motivation for the importance of Art, Technology, and Commercial Learning Areas as part of National Education,** Smuts, C. Submission to C21 Review Committee

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