

CURRICULUM ISSUES IN ARTS EDUCATION **VOLUME 5**

THE AESTHETIC IN EDUCATION



EDITED BY

MALCOLM ROSS

PERGAMON PRESS

CURRICULUM ISSUES IN ARTS EDUCATION

VOLUME 5

The Aesthetic in Education

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Series Editor: Malcolm Ross, University of Exeter

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Introduction to the Series

MALCOLM ROSS

This series of books springs from a particular impulse: a feeling that those of us active in the field of arts education must redouble our efforts to ensure the greater effectiveness of our work.

The impulse is strong, the felt need a matter of urgency, even emergency. It arose against a background of economic cut-backs and ideological re-activism: the troubles besetting our society were being identified not merely by the politicians and economists but by the populace in general with the alleged failure of the schools to produce suitably trained personnel for the country's industrial and technological needs. With the judgement that we'd all been having it too good (and on the cheap). And with the call to apply the strictest, most utilitarian and cost effective criteria to an over-all assessment of our society, the way it works, the services it relies upon and the output it generates. In such a climate we should expect the arts, arts education, the life of feeling, intuitive knowing and the things of the spirit all to be severely tested - and, as I write, the evidence offers all too plain an endorsement.

But I should like to think that we might have launched this project even in less searching times - for the impulse is not merely a reflex act in self defence as it were. Behind the decision regularly to publish a collection of papers treating the arts in education not as separate subjects but as a *single discipline* lies the conviction that it is only through the recognition of their common educational function (as distinct from their separate several identities and processes) that the arts will ever come to play the significant part in the education of everyone, young or old, artistically gifted or otherwise, that we confidently proclaim they should. It is because we feel that arts teachers, artists and everyone involved in arts education wherever and at whatever level they work must find common cause, discover their common interest and express themselves as far as possible in a common language, that this series has been conceived. Our hope is that these books - and the conferences from which, in large measure, they will derive - will make a useful contribution to the establishment of this sense of identity and towards the strengthening of the hands of individual teachers in their efforts to create the appropriate grounds for their encounters with those whose feeling lives they seek to enliven and enhance.

MALCOLM ROSS

Preface

This series was launched five years ago. At the time the Great Debate was in full swing and, as the Introduction to the series makes clear, there was a widespread feeling among arts educators that the claims of the arts were being largely ignored and that we would need to assert ourselves urgently or risk being pushed to the wall. The sentiments expressed in that Introduction seem no less relevant today than they did then - which is why I have chosen not to rewrite it. It would not be difficult to argue that the signs remain distinctly inauspicious though, as I shall want to suggest, we would be wrong to take too jaundiced a view. Sir Keith Joseph's New Deal - the "Sheffield" speech in which he signalled his plans for raising standards and establishing a more fully co-operative relationship with the teaching profession - whatever one might think of its likely impact (it was greeted enthusiastically in most quarters), made only passing mention of the arts. His address in June 1984 to the Confederation of Art and Design Associations, whilst endorsing the importance of the arts for all children, was heavily weighted towards design and largely preoccupied with the issues of profit and

business efficiency. The cry seems to be for more examinations to improve pupil motivation, and for a greater emphasis upon science learning and pre-vocational training as a long-term solution to the nation's social and economic ills. Meanwhile the Manpower Services Commission and the Department of Trade and Industry seem determined to extend their stake in formal education. In other words, there is little evidence to suggest that the top people have tempered their functionalist and benighted perception of the kind of education the country needs. And that despite the urgent and eloquent arguments carried by the Gulbenkian Foundation's report, *The Arts in Schools*, addressed directly to the Secretaries of State. In terms of the arts as a whole - i.e. of the larger community to which arts educators belong - the scene is equally grim. There is wide condemnation of the Government's proposals to abolish the metropolitan councils and the GLC. The Arts Council budget is palpably inadequate and its redistribution of available funds, whilst welcomed in the regions, brings hardship and threatens worse to many established and experimental concerns. All of which would seem to suggest that we are being drawn steadily deeper into the wood.

In this context it is interesting to look at the response of the arts. I have already mentioned the Gulbenkian Report, certainly the most prestigious counterblast to be directed at the walls of Elizabeth House. It is difficult to gauge its actual impact, despite a recent glowing and optimistic account carried by the *Guardian* newspaper. Undoubtedly it has been widely read (it is, apparently, the Foundation's own best-seller): one senses, however, that all that cogent and carefully

articulated argument works best with those who need no persuasion, and has actually done little for the plight of the teacher in the classroom. Open criticism of the document by arts educators themselves has been understandably muted since everyone must recognize the importance of closing ranks in times like these.

This past year, however, has seen a whole crop of important developments, many in more or less direct response to Gulbenkian. In November 1983 the National Association for Education in the Arts was established after a series of exploratory meetings at the London University Institute of Education. The aim of the Association is to improve links between the different arts interests in education and, as occasion demands, to lobby for arts education on particular issues. It is still too early to judge the likely value of this initiative: everything will depend upon its perceived credibility within the profession. (Its first full conference was very strongly supported.) Much the same has to be said of the National Lobby for the Arts, established early in 1984. The concern of this group (and another calling itself the British Arts Voice) is to represent the interests of the professional arts in the national debate about the development and distribution of resources. Perhaps the bravest and potentially most effective initiative has come from Ken Robinson and Jonathan Croall whose new monthly arts journal, *Arts Express*, made its first appearance in February 1984. If the idea catches on - and everything will again depend upon the paper's appeal to the arts shop-floor - then we have a potentially powerful instrument for marshalling an informed body of opinion. Behind its inception is

the belief that much of the failure of the arts to influence educational decision-making is attributable to a degree of pernicious insularity whereby each art discipline has, in the past, jealously (even complacently) guarded its own territory and its own identity. Such a view, this paper rightly implies, is now no longer tenable - and, as its initial success seems to imply, no longer represents the way arts teachers are thinking and feeling.

In many respects the signs and portents are more encouraging than they have been for years. The Arts Council has doubled its educational budget, which has to be seen as a resounding endorsement of the work of Sue Robertson and her colleagues. The DES has finally published the Assessment of Performance Unit's "Aesthetic Development" Report, which, despite its patchy quality and the Department's adamant decision to withhold research and development funds, is likely to reawaken interest in the assessment issue amongst arts educators. The somewhat prolific outpourings of the Further Education Unit include a trenchant document on the Core Curriculum which strongly endorses the rôle of aesthetics and of the creative arts. Channel 4 tv's excellent series of programmes, Questions of Education, ended with an interesting and vigorously argued account of the rôle of the arts by ILEA's new Chief Inspector, David Hargreaves. Dr. Hargreaves' own report on Improving Secondary Schools is similarly supportive of the Arts. The Society of Secondary Heads insists, in its paper "View from the Bridge", that room must be found for the arts in a radically realigned curriculum. The National Book League is about to launch its first travelling exhibition on The Arts in Education. The educational journal *Educational*

Analysis published a volume entirely devoted to the arts in November 1983. And there is rumour of a new national arts project to be sponsored by the Schools Curriculum Development Committee.

I think it is fair to say that nothing on this scale was evident when this series began, and, whatever one might feel about some of these manifestations of collective fight-back individually, we can and should take courage from the energy, care and enthusiasm shown by all those responsible for what, spelt out in this way, represents a not inconsiderable achievement. Certainly no one could accuse us of simply taking our punishment lying down. I naturally hope the present volume will prove a useful additional resource. Once again it features papers presented at Exeter University's Annual Creative Arts Summer School (Dillington House College, July 1983) together with additional material especially solicited. Contributors were asked to apply themselves to the idea of the aesthetic as a special dimension of education, and the volume embraces what I think is an exhilarating range of perspectives: philosophical accounts of art, aesthetics and creativity; multi-cultural education; the sociology of art; the arts in further education.

Time alone, of course, will tell whether all this activity will have any long-term effect. It is difficult, looking back over, say, the past 10 years, to find a book, a report or a speech that has had the same *practical* impact upon arts education as, for example, the Bullock Report has had upon English teaching. Clearly something as comprehensive and as thorough-going is urgently required. Without vigorous and stiff debate and

discussion among arts educators themselves, there is little prospect of vigorous and relevant action in schools and colleges. Still less is our work to be understood and appreciated outside the arts community. We are, however, seeing the emergence of a critical discourse - and in so far as each of us needs to be his or her own PR person, we have a responsibility to engage with it. And whatever else might be said about the initiatives I have been reviewing, they do for the main part represent a concerted commitment to mutuality. If our leaders seem to manage their aloofness and intractability with somewhat daunting acumen, at least we can point to a growing body of colleagues actively committed to resisting the encroachment of the threatened new Dark Age and determined to put their own house in order as the only responsible basis of a claim to full participation in what Professor Tom Stonier has predicted will be the nation's next boom industry: education.

Note: Details of publications and initiatives mentioned in this Preface.

1. *The Arts in Schools* (£4 + 60p postage).
The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation,
98 Portland Place, London W1M 4ET.
2. The National Association for Education in the Arts - NAEA (Subscription £5, £2.50 not employed). Membership Secretary:
David Elliott, Briar Wood, 28 Oakroyd Close,
Potters Bar, Herts, EN6 2EN.
3. The National Lobby for the Arts,
Chairman: Peter Brinson, 39 Lord Road,
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