

Values in Art and Design Education.

Introduction

This essay investigates the values held by art and design educators in secondary schools. Firstly, I undertake a literature review focusing on three main texts; "The Arts and the Creation of Mind" by Elliot Eisner, "Learning to Teach Art and Design in the Secondary School" by Nicholas Addison and Lesley Burgess and "Why We Make Art and Why it is Taught" by Richard Hickman. Other sources are referenced in the literature review, including government documents and articles. These references helped me understand the main theories, values and principles of experienced art educators, artists and academics. They also discussed ways these values could be turned into practices in art rooms and inform art pedagogy. I then concentrate on three main values in more detail. Secondly, I consider my own values as a learner, designer and beginning art educator. I analyse how my own emerging values are developing and reflect on my values as a design practitioner. Analysis of the relationships between my own values and those of studied authors also informs my writing in this section.

Literature Review

The literature studied discusses values held by art and design educators and there are many linked ideas. Hickman suggests that values fall into one of three categories; social utility, personal growth and visual literacy, (Hickman, 2010) whereas Eisner's main principles are described as artistic intelligence, creating satisfying visual images, uniqueness and aesthetic experience. (Eisner, 2002) Addison and Burgess consider therapy, visual literacy, cultural heritage, new ways of looking and individual expression. (Addison & Burgess, 2015) The arts are identified by the authors as having the value of teaching skills such as reflective ability, openness to new ideas, creative thinking and problem solving, which are vital in subjects outside the arts. However, the authors are careful to say that just because the arts can teach skills useful elsewhere, this should not diminish appreciation of their intrinsic value. (Eisner, 2002, Hickman, 2010, Addison & Burgess, 2015) Three particularly compelling values are identified and discussed in detail, these being: Seeing the World Differently, Expressing Individuality and Beyond the Art Room.

Art educators teach that although the world is routinely looked at in a superficial way it can be seen or perceived with more visual awareness. (Payne, 2012) Hickman refers to this as drawing attention to subtleties of the visual world (Hickman, 2010), whilst Eisner thinks art should encourage pupils to appreciate the aesthetics of everyday experience. (Eisner, 2002) We can passively interact with our environment with much remaining unseen or we can use curiosity as a tool to shape our perception. (Payne, 2012, Gompertz, 2015) Grayson Perry describes an artist as someone who notices things others do not (Perry, 2013) or as the Teaching Standards say, a teacher must "promote children's intellectual curiosity." (Department for Education, 2014) Eisner describes this beautifully, "The arts give us permission to slow down perception, to look harder and to savour the qualities we usually try to process efficiently." (Eisner, 2002:5) He suggests efficiency should not displace the skill of seeing. The designer Helen Storey describes the "need for an education system that...harnesses the skill of the eyes; not just as a means to copy or take in information but as a gateway to encourage an individual's imagination." (Addison & Burgess, 2015:123)

Eisner illustrates how this value may be applied by describing how a teacher asks pupils to see a practical activity as an aesthetic one, "to re-see." (Eisner, 2002:68) The teacher pours cream into coffee, an everyday activity normally ignored. As he does so he shows his interest in the way the liquids dance together. He explains that this is not only a practical activity but an aesthetic one. In doing this he takes the normal and transforms it, showing there is more than one way to see. He is hoping for poetic pupil responses to a seemingly ordinary activity, (Eisner, 2002) and so perception creates expression.

When Modigliani said “You look out at the world with one eye, and into yourself with the other” he succinctly connected the value of ‘seeing differently’ to that of ‘expressing individuality’. There is more to art education than teaching students to discover new ways of seeing, once pupils have realised the value of noticing, finding their own unique way of processing information can follow. (Eisner,2002)

Art educators examine the value of expressing individuality and agree on its importance. Most school subjects are formulaic, making the importance of personal view and giving it space to develop in art imperative. (Hickman 2010, Eisner 2002) Art is unique in school as pupils can explore feelings, imagination, instincts and examine their inner world. (Hickman, 2010, Addison & Burgess, 2015) As pupils learn to respond to their individuality, their creativity will emerge and as Vygotsky says “Any human act that gives rise to something new is referred to as a creative act, regardless of whether what is created is a physical object or some mental or emotional construct.” (Vygotsky, 2004, cited in Addison & Burgess, 2015:4)

To create visual responses, pupils must find ways to express their individuality by producing satisfying objects with value. It was interesting to explore the links between expression and individuality, Hickman describes this as seeing the impact of thinking on product, whilst Eisner says our imagination can be kept to ourselves, but in order to share it we must represent it in some way. (Eisner, 2002) The National Curriculum puts forward the belief that pupils should progress their creativity and develop skills in portraying their ideas. (Department of Education, 2013) Many art educators talk about this but Vygotsky puts it best, “A construct of fantasy may represent something substantially new, however, once it has been externally embodied, that is, has been given material form, this crystallised imagination that has become an object begins to actually exist in the real world.”(Vygotsky, 2004, cited in Addison & Burgess, 2015:20) Expressing individuality becomes entwined with making.

Some art educators believe that children possess an innate creative power and blossom naturally, that we should not interfere in this process. (Viola,1936, cited in Hickman, 2010) However, many disagree with this and say that without guidance a child’s potential cannot be realised, that learning by osmosis is not enough. (Hickman, 2010 Addison & Burgess 2015) A teacher initiated and child led approach, where diversity of outcome is sought, is championed by some, as Eisner says “We are interested in the ways vision and meaning are personalized”. (Eisner, 2002:44) Many art educators believe lessons with structure but space for individuality, where children make decisions are of value, (Watts, 2020, Eisner, 2002), where a balance of didactic and heuristic approaches is used and pupils learn to manage risk and accept failure as part of the creative process. (Addison & Burgess, 2015) Children need to be taught skills and how to use materials to express their individuality. (Eisner, 2002)

The third focus is the value of art education beyond the classroom, on the ways in which the classroom connects with the outside world. It can be difficult for children to see the purpose of art lessons and they can question knowledge gained in school. (Watts, 2020, Addison & Burgess, 2015) Art educators must ensure pupils understand the purpose of lessons and that art and design can be about more than self-expression. Pupils must be aware that their learning has a point and it is important their practice is put into context and pupils think about audiences, sustainability and end uses. (Addison & Burgess, 2015) Art education can be given purpose and value when pupils take artwork home for parents to write responses to or for children to put on exhibitions and invite visitors. (Eisner, 2002) Teaching’s most important results show up outside the classroom, yet focus remains on children’s test performance rather than on how knowledge is transferred to the world outside. (Eisner, 2002)

We can look beyond the classroom by connecting the art room with creative industries. This can be done by locating art and design learning in places like museums, galleries, in industry and through connections with creative professionals. (Hickman, 2010) Additionally, more designers and craftspeople can be involved in school work so authentic art experiences take place in school. (Hickman, 2010, Addison & Burgess, 2015) The National Curriculum states that pupils should develop an understanding of different jobs and ways of working and producing art and design in the creative industries. (Department of Education, 2014) The Crafts Council's survey 'Pupils as Makers' reinforces the need for teachers to involve industry in school and discusses its concerns about the inward-looking nature of school practice. (Crafts Council 1995/1998, cited in Addison & Burgess, 2015)

Setting problem solving or question answering projects in school can prepare pupils for careers like architecture or product design. (Addison & Burgess, 2015, Eisner 2002) In the famous Bauhaus school, students gave equal importance to both form and function. Site specific projects, like designing a community sculpture, can give pupils an idea of how aesthetics and practicalities work together and show art's importance in life beyond school. (Addison & Burgess, 2015) It is easy for pupils to forget that everything human made is designed by someone and that design is central to all of our lives. As designer Thomas Heatherwick says, everything is designed, either by humans or nature. The study of designed artefacts can become ignored and it is key to show pupils that objects can take on different meanings depending on location, for example, a chair in their home, in a museum or a shop. (Addison & Burgess, 2015)

There is no more worthwhile reason to consider what we create than its impact on the ecological environment, therefore teaching about sustainable design is of utmost importance and transports the pupil from classroom to real world thinking. (Addison & Burgess, 2015) As Papernek says, "By creating a whole species of permanent garbage to clutter the landscape... designers have become a dangerous breed." (Papernek, 1971, cited in Addison & Burgess, 2015:131) The world is over populated with human made objects and there is an argument that pupils should be encouraged to ask questions like 'does the world need this?'

The values discussed above are imperative and inextricable from the teaching of art and design and the following section of my essay will discuss how these theoretical values link in practice to my development as an artist and designer and first experiences as a teacher.

Reflections on my Own Values for Art and Design Education

Reading extensively on the subject of values in art and design education has led me to reflect on and analyse my own experiences as a secondary school learner, an art foundation, Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degree student, a professional fashion and textile designer and as a beginning teacher. I can see academic theories have influenced the progress of my art and design journey and are beginning to impact on my choices as a developing and curious art and design educator. I have had many experiences which link to the values identified in the literature review, of seeing the world differently, the world beyond the art room and expressing individuality. I aim to describe, reflect on and analyse these experiences in this part of the essay.

The value of noticing the subtleties of the visual world has been consistently important to me and it was interesting to read the authors' views on this value, particularly Eisner's (2002) observations. I am a collector of objects and this has been driven by a desire to study and notice the everyday visual world. As a small child, I would come back from country walks, pockets full of leaves and twigs to draw. For my final A level art piece, I went back to nature and collected pieces of bark which I painted, collaged and photographed.

As a teenager I became interested in life drawing and would no longer see the body but re-see it, as Eisner (2002) says, as a landscape to be studied. Whilst studying fashion and

textiles at the University of Brighton, I became a devoted visitor to the Brighton Sunday market, which sold everything from time-worn bottles, old taxidermied animals to wrecked antique furniture. Everything was second hand and battered and I loved noticing the imperfections and imagining their previous lives. I bought old photo albums to use as sketch books and used objects as inspirational primary research for design projects. For example, I was inspired by a box of fishing hooks and baits, an old eiderdown sparked another project idea. I would 'notice' as Perry would say (2013), items that had been discarded or ignored. Some of my professional design projects have started with finding the beauty and interest in ordinary objects like an umbrella, an envelope or a suitcase.

I have found as a beginning art and design teacher that it is important to me, as the National Curriculum says, (2014) to encourage pupils to be curious about the visual world around them. I taught a lesson where pupils were continuing with their observational drawing from a previous lesson. I was surprised to see that many pupils were drawing from what they remembered, without the observed object in front of them. I asked them to get the objects they had observed and explained the importance of drawing what is there, rather than what they think is there. One student was reluctant to get the shell he had observed "But I can remember what it looks like Miss!" I got the shell and we discussed how drawing is actually eighty per cent looking. We talked about the lines and grooves and the way they cross and repeat. Hickman's (2010) reflections on drawing attention to our visual world helped me with this. The student's curiosity was ignited and he began to draw with more visual awareness. It was the best drawing I had seen him do.

The second value I reflect on is that of expressing individuality. I feel compelled to impact my visual environment and express myself, be it through fashion, interiors or expressive artwork. As a child, I would untidy my bedroom to be able to put it back together again and re-group objects to create new aesthetic effects.

For me, teaching and learning the skills needed for expression are as important as allowing space for individuality. It has been fascinating to see how this balance is struck in my placement school and to consider how this value has affected my own creative development. My secondary school art education was disappointing, my art teacher believed that children needed little guidance. Eisner (2002) believes that children who do not receive skills education are at a disadvantage. I worked hard exploring materials and techniques on my own, but had the class received skills knowledge in secondary school as Hickman (2010) and Addison and Burgess (2015) see as important, in my opinion the pupils would have learnt to express individuality more quickly and effectively. At foundation level the teaching I received was different and I was taught skills as well as given time to experiment. That said, the techniques I taught myself during A levels have been adapted and used throughout my professional life. With more teaching and less time to experiment would I have found my personal style so quickly?

Again, as a degree level fashion student, the educational emphasis was on expressing individuality and not on being taught techniques. This led to frustration at not being able to crystalize my imagination, as Vygotsky (2004) would put it. My fellow students and I, untutored as we were, would work on the mannequin or try pattern cutting and joke, "Do I look like I know what I'm doing?" It was not until technical skills workshops at the Royal College of Art years later, did I really learn how to pattern cut and therefore truly express my ideas.

In my school placement I am enthused that skills are being taught but I am also conscious that children can lose interest in the subject if not allowed freedom and task choices and the importance of giving students time to understand themselves as Eisner (2002) and Addison & Burgess (2015) reflect. During a year seven lesson on drawing 3D forms a pupil said

“When are we going to do some real art Miss?” He did not see learning to draw 3D objects as real art, he wanted more freedom and chance for expression. I agree with Hickman (2010) and other authors that it is important to give pupils time to experiment and learn to express their feelings, but also to equip them with the skills they need to be able to show the impact of their thinking on the art or design they produce. I taught a year nine lesson which began with a short task learning to mix hues of colours, then pupils were asked to mix more hues and draw shapes to express their emotions in an abstract painting. I hope to achieve this fine balance between teaching skills and giving time for experimentation and expression in future lessons.

Thirdly, the value of connecting the classroom with the outside world is becoming increasingly interesting to me, through my experiences in my placement school, during the research for this essay and in provoking realisations about past experiences.

My secondary school did not connect my art and design education with the outside world. However, my parents provided the outward looking ethos championed by the crafts council. (1995/1998) They encouraging me to attend drawing classes, visit exhibitions and visits to Camden Market in London and Affleck’s Palace in Manchester opened my eyes to fashion and textile design. My secondary school careers advice also felt surprisingly unconnected to industry. I was advised to become an interior designer but when I asked what that was, the careers advisor was unsure nor knew of any other sorts of designers. Had the curriculum been partially located in places beyond school I believe, as Hickman (2010) says, that this would have given purpose to art in school. At university, projects set by industry experts forced me to think like a professional designer and our tutors were working fashion designers which connected us directly to the industry. If similar approaches were taken at school, as the National Curriculum (2014) now sees as important, an understanding of careers linked to the subject could have been gained.

So far, in my placement school, there is an emphasis in lessons on the work of artists, over the work of designers. In my opinion it is at least as likely that there are future designers in the classroom as future artists. For pupils to understand the variety of jobs in the creative industries they must be exposed to them in school. In textile classes, discussing my career and showing garments I have designed has brought the subject to life for pupils. I have found contextual discussions about artists helpful in taking pupils on metaphorical journeys out of the classroom gaining cultural knowledge and insight into the life of the artist. In one lesson, pupils watched a film about the inspiration behind Picasso’s Guernica. I then led a class discussion on the symbolism of the figures in the painting and the pupils surprised me with their thought-provoking contributions. When discussing John Piper’s work, I mentioned that he went to the local art college, this excited the class and made the artist into a real person for them. As I begin to plan my own lessons I will take care to include designers’ work, highlight current exhibitions and events, discuss my own career and introduce creative professionals. Even when trips cannot be made, useful discussions can be had.

As Addison & Burgess (2015) and Eisner (2002) relate, problem solving projects linked to the outside world can initiate positive pupil responses and I have found this in my placement school. For example, the art department held a Christmas card competition and pupils were excited by the prospect of having their design used to represent their school. My daughters’ primary school set a project to design a mural for a local pedestrian bridge and they were enthused by the idea of having their design chosen. The project became real to them as they visited, measured and photographed the bridge. One year nine class I teach is focusing on expressive painting. There are a couple of disengaged boys in this class who say things like “I’m not going to be an artist so what’s the point in me doing this lesson Miss?” Focusing on a pragmatic vision of art which prepares pupils for the world of work can help pupils see the point to art lessons, as related by Eisner (2002). I am planning a scheme of work to introduce the class to furniture design and I will be interested to see if these boys are more

enthusiastic about a project driven by design, where end use and real audience have to be considered.

Conclusion

In this essay I have investigated three important values in art and design education; seeing the world differently, expressing individuality and beyond the art room. I have considered these values from the point of view of influential authors, through my own experiences and by early practice as a beginning teacher.

I have become more in tune with how these values have already affected me and can affect my future teaching. My values have not so much changed during my time in school, as been identified and recognised and I look forward to reflecting on how I will implement these values in lessons.

During the next part of my placement I aim to develop strategies which allow these values to inform and develop my teaching style. I aim to teach children to notice their visual worlds. I hope to develop a style which balances teaching of skills and leaves space for expression. I am intent on developing ways to plan and teach lessons which are both relevant to the world beyond school and teach skills useful to pupils whatever their future careers.

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