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Susan Ogier

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Introduction

Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep.

(Scott Adams)

Art and design in schools: the current context

Subject knowledge is at the forefront of debate and discussion in Initial Teacher Education in response to the government White Paper, *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (2016), and as the 2014 Primary Curriculum for England has become embedded in non-academy primary schools. OFSTED also has a renewed focus for observing and commenting on the teaching of foundation subjects during its primary inspections, and as a new teacher it can be difficult to know exactly what excellent practice looks like in subjects that you might be unfamiliar or unconfident with in relation to your own personal experiences, or from having only very short courses during your training.

Reports such as *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture* (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016) highlight the place and pertinence of the arts as a vehicle to facilitate deeper learning experiences. Specifically, this is through providing enabling avenues by which to develop enhanced cognitive abilities, motivation, communication skills, problem-finding and solving, as well as building self-esteem and confidence: in simple terms, it is about making children's learning experiences meaningful, accessible and palatable. It is therefore essential for you as a trainee, or as someone new to teaching art and design in primary schools, to have a thorough understanding of the discrete subject knowledge that is associated with art, craft and design education. It is imperative that you do this, for you to be able to offer appropriate provision and positive learning opportunities in art for the children in your class.

The 2009 OFSTED report, *Improving Primary Teachers' Subject Knowledge across the Curriculum*, stresses the importance of teachers having a wide knowledge base in *all* areas of the curriculum. It states that developing this kind of wider understanding is essential for raising standards in the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools generally. The report shows that findings from OFSTED inspections during 2007 to 2008 revealed that arts subject knowledge was undermined by teachers' lack of confidence, often stemming from misconceptions about how children might develop creative abilities: evidence showed that teachers often opted for sticking rigidly to closed and directed tasks, or published plans and schemes of work with fixed outcomes, therefore limiting children's creativity by placing a cap on what they could produce. A more recent OFSTED report (2012) shows that although there are indeed examples of very good practice to be found around the country, concerns remain whilst only one third of primary schools inspected during the period 2009–12 were seen to offer at least good art education to their children. The activities and case studies in the following chapters will specifically address concerns outlined by these reports. This should encourage you to experiment with teaching strategies that will develop your confidence to plan imaginative projects, as well as give you a sense of what is good practice in art and design teaching.

You might have already found that, when on placements, you are often under pressure to limit your teaching to 'core' subjects, such as English and mathematics. Sometimes, art, craft and design is taught by specialist teachers, who take the class whilst you are otherwise engaged in activities such as marking or planning. The result of this type of school organisation can be beneficial where the specialist teacher has good pedagogical knowledge, as well as artistic skills to share. There is a downside, however, which is that you might be excluded from ever

seeing an art lesson in progress. Further impact of this situation is that you will not be able to gain the skills and confidence to teach the subject yourself, nor will you have the knowledge and understanding of how to plan and teach good quality art and design lessons should the school organisation change, or should you move to a new school where you are expected to teach the subject. Alternatively, if you are passionate and confident about teaching art, and are not given the opportunity to include the subject in your practice, then there is a chance you will feel disincentivised to teach art and design, and ultimately this could lead to you feeling or becoming deskilled. The intention of this book is to support you to teach art and design with enthusiasm and vigour, regardless of your own experience in art education – or lack of it. The following chapters will address your training needs no matter how long you have been teaching, or which route you are taking into primary education: for example, undergraduate or postgraduate university courses, or perhaps school-based routes. This book will be invaluable to you if you have only received superficial training in this subject area. It will provide you with support when you are a newly qualified teacher, and equally it will offer good practice models to experienced teachers who would like to refresh their skills.

Getting to know the National Curriculum

The 2014 English Primary National Curriculum for Art and Design seems noticeably scant in terms of statutory requirements, and only gives very little guidance on a few selected aspects of areas that are deemed important enough to be covered or achieved. Whilst this might at first appear less prescriptive, which is a good thing, problems can soon arise as to how this can be interpreted in relation to excellent practice in art and design education, without the deep knowledge and understanding that lies behind this basic guidance. For the novice trainee or teacher who is not art trained, the lack of detail is extremely unhelpful and could eventually lead to a lowering of standards. For example, where the curriculum states that ‘mastery’ in drawing should be achieved, a non-specialist teacher might read this as children having to practise and practise formal drawing skills, until they have learnt to draw like Leonardo da Vinci, which of course is nonsense. Teachers and trainees might find the lack of guidance off-putting if they do not have the pedagogical understanding or sound subject knowledge that is required to teach well in art and design. In Chapter 1, the National Curriculum will be analysed and re-interpreted, along with a more detailed explanation of current requirements, so that it is made wholly accessible for the generalist class teacher. It is also important to say here that the National Curriculum is not a compulsory document for all primary settings, therefore the interpretation in this book will essentially be about what constitutes high standards in art and design education, as basic good practice is rarely subject to change – unlike the National Curriculum.

Why is art, craft and design on the primary curriculum?

It could be argued that it is easier to question what would be missing if art and design education were not part of a broad and balanced curriculum. Try to imagine a world without art and design: no images to get us thinking or questioning; no visual link to history or culture; no way of communicating thoughts and ideas without using words; no graphic novels or comics; no film;

no photography; no visually exciting TV graphics; no creative advertising; no illustrations in children's (or adults') books; no exciting new fashions to wear; no video games; no new architecture or attractive interiors; no flower arrangements or garden design; no birthday cards; no new transport designs or furniture design. Only functionality would exist.

Reflection point

- What would that world look like? Colourless? Uniform? Uninteresting? Rather unpleasant? I'm afraid so!
- Have you created a visual image of that world in your mind? Because if you have, you are certainly using art-related skills to do that, namely *imagination* and *visualisation*.
- Take a moment to consider where an artist, craftsperson or designer has made a difference to your life.

A world without art certainly does not sound like a very pleasant or exciting place to live, and the Reflection point helps us to remember that. In fact, aspects of art, craft and design infiltrate every area of our lives, whether we are conscious of this fact or not. Everything that is manmade around us started life as a figment of someone's imagination, which was likely to be sketched on a page, before being transformed into an object in the world that we know and love: from the clothes that you are wearing to the mobile phone in your pocket; from the chair that you are sitting on, to the mug from which you are drinking your tea. We use our aesthetic senses all the time, and we engage in an increasingly visually orientated world. For example, perhaps you are momentarily distracted from reading this book and look away to appreciate a beautiful view in nature; or maybe you have felt disgust and dismay at seeing a litter-strewn street: in observing these views you are making informed, critically aesthetic judgements which affect your sense of self-worth and your emotions. Without the ability to view our world with an appreciative or a critical eye we would surely just have to accept whatever we see before us without question, or without having any sense of value. Chapter 1 will discuss this further, and enable you to base your teaching on firm values and principles, which in turn will keep children at the heart of your art and design teaching.

Tackling barriers to good practice

The value and practicalities of offering an inclusive subject base that places art and design securely within a primary school curriculum have been slowly but surely eroded over the past few years, in some cases almost to extinction. This is largely due to the increased importance placed upon the performative culture to which we now belong, in both English and international societies. This has forced arts education and activity to be viewed as less important than gaining knowledge in literacy and numeracy. Of course, literacy and numeracy are very important, *but so are all the other subjects*. The relentless pressure to stack subjects in a hierarchy, with literacy and numeracy at the pinnacle, has now become a huge problem for all of us. If knowledge of this type is deemed to be the end game in an educational race to the top, then what happens to other aspects of learning, such as

enquiry and experimentation? Are these not important for future generations to be able to live their lives in a progressive way? These key skills for life and living in the twenty-first century, and beyond, are realised through working creatively with children, and what better way to nurture that creativity than by using art and design to underpin their learning. Creative thinking, and the implementation of creative ideas, is now crucial for the success of a future economy, as well as for developing cultural understanding through celebrating diversity, and for promoting and implementing social justice. Creative solutions will be a prerequisite to deal with the huge challenges and changes that the world faces now and in the future, and it will be the next generation who pick up the tab for that. Chapter 2 will explore these concepts further.

Reflection point

In his TED Talk of 2006, the creativity and education guru, Sir Ken Robinson, stated: *Creativity now is as important in education as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status.*

- Do you agree with this statement?
- Do you think it is possible to 'teach' creativity?
- Where have you seen 'creativity' happening in your classroom experiences?
- Do you consider yourself to be a creative person? In what way are you able to express your creativity?

Watch the whole talk here: www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity?language=en

Unlike Robinson's vision, creativity in primary schools is currently relegated to a low priority in the teaching day. External pressures that create an environment where class time is mainly spent on core areas that subjects such as art and design are often overlooked as an unnecessary luxury. The chance that the arts might help children in the real world by relieving stress, boosting self-esteem and confidence, and expressing themselves creatively is lost in favour of short-term goals, which might (or might not) push children successfully through tough testing regimes. But successfully for whom? Not necessarily for individual children. This success is more likely to be for the schools themselves, as they show their achievements in widely published league tables. Sadly, the measurements are very narrow and restrictive, unlike the personalities, talents and potential of the child population, whose futures are potentially at the mercy of these tests. The National Test results in 2016 showed that almost half of the country's population of 11-year-olds are already deemed as failures of this system, and faced re-testing as soon as they started their secondary education, just at the time they should have been encouraged to feel happy and welcome in their new school environments. If these children are offered a well-rounded curriculum, which helps them become resilient and resistant to personal challenge, they will survive these experiences and continue to progress. Right now, there is a renewed urgency for arts to be focused upon in schools to ensure that we provide the broad and balanced curriculum that we know is essential. It is imperative to prevent a future generation of people who are unable to fulfil their potential as creative individuals due to the lack of that broad education,

and it is our responsibility, as their teachers, to ensure that they are offered a curriculum in which they can grow to discover and develop their individual talents and skills.

Subject-specific knowledge

I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.

(Albert Einstein)

Another potential barrier to good teaching and learning in the subject of art and design is that many teachers have misconceptions of what the subject involves. Many primary school teachers and trainees might not have picked up a pencil or paintbrush since the age of 14 themselves, and even then their memories of engaging in art activities at secondary school are often not positive. They tend to remember just not being good enough for the GCSE class, or perhaps were counselled out of doing the subject they enjoyed because they would 'never get a job doing it'. There is sometimes a feeling that art cannot be taught or assessed, and that children can either do it or they can't, but no one would dare to say that about maths or English, nor about many of the other foundation subjects, so why should that apply to something as inclusive and enjoyable as art and design? Ironically, it is also unlikely that children will grow up to have a job 'doing' maths or English! But they will employ the skills they have learnt in all subjects, no matter what they end up doing in the workplace. Throughout this book, essential subject knowledge will be explained, along with examples and activities for you to try and case studies that will exemplify how this is put into practice in the classroom. Einstein stated that knowledge is limited, and that it is *imagination* that is needed to extend knowledge further, by pushing boundaries that are set by what we already know. It is, however, important for us to have the starting point of a secure understanding from which knowledge can grow, develop and change, and we need to bring this right back to the children we are teaching: no two groups of children are the same, therefore the knowledge they will gather during their work in art and design should also be different. As their teachers, it is important for us to keep a flexible view of where they are headed in their learning, and be open to their ideas, thoughts and new possibilities.

Case study

A five-year-old child was sitting on the floor of the classroom playing with some randomly torn shapes of paper. As she pushed the tiny pieces around they were formed into patterns, which she suddenly recognised as such. She changed the formations, and the patterns developed into more complex arrangements, and eventually these transformed into images representative of familiar objects and creatures with recognisable features. 'I've made a 'picture-mover'!' was her excited response when the class teacher, Abbie, went to see what she was doing. The other children were inspired by this free flow 'play' activity and wanted to make their own 'picture-mover' so Abbie set up an area in the classroom where the children could create their own images and patterns using a variety of ephemeral materials that could be easily moved around, such as cardboard shapes, buttons, stones, shells, coloured paper scraps, flowers, leaves, and even pieces of construction kit.

Reflection point

- What learning do you think was taking place during this activity?
- What do you think that Abbie had learnt about this child from her observations?
- What subject knowledge in art and design would Abbie need to be able to progress this child's learning a step further?

Analysis

Abbie had observed this child and engaged her in a dialogue about her activity. The child was using her imagination and sense of play to change and edit the shapes to create new compositions: she was learning to think flexibly and to visualise; to make decisions and to know that sometimes decisions can be reversed; she was observing shapes, lines, sizes and lengths, finding out how shapes fit together, and how to create balance through symmetry – all with just scraps of paper! This free flow activity was successful in promoting the child's open-ended, creative and flexible thinking.

How to use this book

The case study gives you a flavour of the pedagogical basis of this book: that it is not about how good you are (or not!) at art but about how you can promote a creative environment where children can thrive and express themselves visually. Your support can make or break it for some children.

Each chapter has theoretical and research foci so that you will have strong justification for teaching the subject, especially if you find you are in a school where art and design is not fully valued. You will find practical help in the form of advice, useful tables and diagrams that clearly explain different aspects to you. There are suggestions for planning formats linked to theory, and illustrations of key points, in the form of case studies.

Chapter 1 (Principles and values) will set the scene and lay down key features of good practice that are built upon throughout the rest of this book. This chapter will help you to situate your own position and to form your own philosophy for teaching art and design.

Chapter 2 (Creative learning: imagination and expression) and **Chapter 3** (Curriculum and concepts) will give you powerful arguments and tools for ensuring that you have very sound theory for your work with children in learning art and design.

Chapter 4 (Processes and practice) is the practical section. It contains all you need to know about individual processes, made easy to read and easy to find, so that you can identify how to do the processes quickly. You will find references to websites with information and demonstrations, which are most helpful – especially if you are not sure how a process might work.

Chapter 5 (Planning, assessment and progression) will support you in planning and assessing children in this subject. We shall look at the debates and difficulties surrounding this crucial

aspect and seek solutions to help you plan to the best possible standard, pinning this to the theory explored in earlier chapters. It will help you to put theory into practice.

In **Chapter 6** we look 'Beyond the classroom and into the future', to help you to plan inspiring experiences involving art and artists, with contributions from Ed Dickenson, educator at the Ben Uri Gallery, as well as artist, Alistair Lambert, and our own artist-in-residence, Al Johnson, whose 'Artist's Stories' you will find throughout this book. For those with an art background, or a love and enthusiasm for art and design, this chapter also provides advice on how to progress the subject further and prepare for subject leadership.

Chapter 7 (The broad and balanced curriculum) is an array of contributions from experts in other curriculum areas, who advocate links with art and design in their individual subjects. This chapter will enable you to see the value of everything you have read in this book in terms of how it translates seamlessly to support and enhance learning across the whole curriculum. My deep thanks go to the contributors for their enthusiasm and commitment to promoting art and design in this way. Hopefully together we shall all start a quiet revolution to get art back on the menu for the joy and motivation it can bring to children in primary education.