

WHAT ARE WE TEACHING OUR ART-STUDENTS?

Reflecting on the different experiences with teaching, there seems to be a disconnection between the fundamental questions of why, what and how we are teaching. Fundamentally, this has caused Art students in particular to feel lost in the process of sieving through what is actually required of them when they get their project briefs for assessment (PS02).

Lilliedahl (2021) advocates that “the arts have long been part of the secondary school curriculum. However, a transnational trend of weakening the status of such subjects has emerged”. Consequently, due to this, the significant decrease has been marked by cuts in curriculum time and again, diminished funding, and a decline in the number of students taking Arts courses. This is also echoed across to post-compulsory Arts education too, with teachers across the Arts ultimately not feeling supported and often undermined as they are often not only fighting against policies and stakeholders but also the educational opinion that the Arts is not valued and therefore a burden on the budgets and on the philosophy of education as a whole (Lilliedahl,2021).

On placement, within the Arts faculty, there is an uncertain atmosphere surrounding the current culture of Arts education. It is like we are waiting for a call from OFSTED; waiting on the anticipation to be told that the government and educational governing board members have decided to finally scrap the Arts all together. Looking at this from a different perspective; from both the teacher and the student, it is clear that this, among other factors have caused a fundamental issue when considering the primary issue of this blog entry; What are we actually teaching our Art students? In my opinion taken from both being a student of Art education and now as a teacher of it too, that the issue isn't actually the extrinsic opinions, but how those opinions have intrinsically impacted the overall culture and attitude of Art education. It could be argued that the real issue, is more of an internal one. As a culture of education, teaching and learning, everyone involved should be united by a collective identity and intrinsic set of goals, that is unimpressionable by external pressures and influence though As Lui et al. (2019) in their study identifies as a consequence of teachers' narrow goals and institutional biases towards teaching success and excellence, it has made teachers experience low levels of efficiency as it doesn't allow teachers to inspire and motivate outside of extrinsic confinements (Lui et al.2019). Therefore, I would argue that educational success and excellence is achievable but not through the consequence of undermining teachers' freedom to inspire and motivate through the example of their teaching ability. It rather comes from a balance between extrinsic and intrinsic motivations; a unity formed by understanding its importance and transferrable influence. The student's interaction with this process “is like a sponge, absorbing the information from their surrounding environment” (Montessori,2007).

As a teacher fairly new to the current educational structures surrounding teaching Art at FE level, I was shocked to find how restrictive the teachers as well as myself are in allowing more freedom to teach in a way that suits our styles, approaches and pedagogies and consequently, will benefit the students more; if the teachers are inspired and motivated so will be the students; the students model behaviour from the teachers “like babies from their parents” (Montessori,2007).

Foley (2014) makes the case that, “the Art's critical value is to develop learners that think like Artists which means learners who are creative, curious, that seek questions, develop ideas, and play. For that to happen society will need to stop the pervasive, problematic and cliché messaging that implies that creativity is somehow defined as an artistic skill”

(TEDxColumbus,2014). Qualifying Foley's points further Art education is not clearly abiding by this model, Art education has become misunderstood and unappealing due to its branding as a STEM subject. The constant moulding by the government to make Arts (which isn't built the same way as STEM subjects) the same. As Einstein explains "everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid" (quote-investigator,n.d) and in defence of the Arts, if you continue to judge the Arts by its ability to perform in the same way as a STEM subject, it fundamentally won't work.

I feel that due to this the Arts will continue to lose its value not only from its external perceptions but I fear also from its internal perceptions too. Art education had always meant something, but I fear that that sense of authenticity has been bullied out of them. Art education is a mess, as it has no individual identity and as a consequence, this has meant that students coming in and studying Art at post-compulsory level in particular are confused.

Art education should be an echo of life; we are teaching them Art and so we should be teaching them how to be artists, creators, thinkers and inventors. This is what I understood Art education to be, but now as a teacher it feels that it is far from that. We are teaching a kind of hybrid version of Art through the guise of STEM. There seems to be a disconnection that has stemmed from trying to make sense of what is required from the government and governing bodies, which is presented in assignment briefs, though the issue with these assignment briefs is that it is often prescribed and not clear enough. As Einstein identifies, "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough" (brainyquote,n.d). The reason for this is that when writing these briefs, we forget who the target audience is. We are not writing for other academics; we are writing for students of variety of comprehension and ability. Due to this, I feel as a student and a teacher that a major reason for the students to feel lost and quite often confused is that we are simply forgetting who we are addressing and talking to. They don't know what we know, but we are not being taught here, we are teaching our students and they are very different from me and you. For future CPD, I would like to collaborate with both the other members of the Arts faculties and the students with trying to develop strategies to make the assignment briefs more inclusive, by differentiating between what is essential and further information and ensuring the students are a part of this process (PS01,02,04,05,10,12,14,19,20).

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