

## Art and Lifelong Learning

**Source: Tim Jones (1999) in Directions, 18 (1), Edited by John Swift and Nick Stanley**

### **Abstract**

*It is argued, through the example of art education seen from a broad cultural perspective, that the concept of lifelong learning implies common terms of reference for learning in all contexts in which learning takes place, especially in schools, colleges and universities. This implies a common approach to standards at all levels of formal educational provision. The disparity of school art and art in other learning contexts is discussed, and concepts of standards currently in use are examined and found to be highly problematic. The idea of practitioner referenced standards is introduced in relation to standards derived from educational theory and practice. In the case of art these are considered in terms of 'what it is that artists do; what it means to engage with a work of art at first hand; what people have to say about artists and works of art; and what it means to engage in learning'. Ways of relating these standards to each other and to lifelong learning in the context of a research rationale for an art curriculum are put forward. In conclusion, it is suggested that co-ordination of the current review of the National Curriculum and the developmental work on standards currently being undertaken by the QAA would represent a basis for the establishment of appropriate standards for lifelong learning, although this would require a new level of co-operation between the relevant educational sectors. Such standards would assist in reducing the possibility that lifelong learning could develop as a further isolated and self-justifying educational sector in a divided national educational system. They would also provide an opportunity for post-modern thinking to make a worthwhile contribution to educational debate.*

### **Introduction**

The concept of lifelong learning [1] that has become a key element of recent debates in and about education in Britain may be seen to have a number of far reaching implications for subject teaching in primary, secondary, further and higher education. If the term lifelong learning is taken to mean a consistency in learning throughout a person's life both within and beyond formal educational settings then it would follow that lifelong learning implies a high level of commonality in the ways in which a subject is conceptualised at all levels at which learning takes place [2]. This article deals with this issue in relation to art education where, it will be argued, this commonality does not currently exist although there is evidence that it is much needed. Lifelong learning also offers a way of relating post-modernist thinking to art education.

### **The post-modern context**

Post-modernism is a social and cultural phenomenon and its relevance to art education (which is also socially and culturally framed) may, therefore, be usefully clarified in a broader cultural context than that often used to discuss art education.

Robert Graves' well known poem *In Broken Images* [3] seems to offer an accessible starting point to consider a relevant post-modern sensibility:

*He is quick, thinking in clear images;*

*I am slow, thinking in broken images.*

*He becomes dull, trusting to his clear images; I become sharp, mistrusting my broken images.*

*Trusting his images, he assumes their relevance; Mistrusting my images, I question their relevance.*

*Assuming their relevance, he assumes that fact; Questioning their relevance, I question the fact.*

*When the fact fails him, he questions his senses; When the fact fails me, I approve my senses.*

*He continues quick and dull in his clear images;*

*I continue slow and sharp in my broken images.*

*He in a new confusion of his understanding;*

*I in a new understanding of my confusion.*

However, it is worth considering for a moment this example in its temporal and cultural context. At about the time Graves wrote this David Jones [4] was writing *The Anathemata*, a cultural landmark which he described as a bringing together of fragments. Other earlier examples of this artistic structure can also be found in André Breton's account of surrealist collage [5] and in the writings of Alfred Jarry even earlier in this century. Jarry's *Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician* [6] was seen as a stimulating precedent for surrealism yet its inspirational source can be found in Laurence Sterne's *Adventures of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* [7] which raised the idea of fragmentation and digression to the level of principle. These literary and artistic works, which provide precedents for our contemporary conceptualisation of post-modernism, can be seen to represent a long-standing tradition of questioning simplistic versions of reality which predates modernism let alone post-modernism – unless one was to argue that post-modernism is essentially an eighteenth century phenomenon!

Graves' poem seems curiously relevant to the clear images to be found within official publications relating to educational standards, especially but not only in the National Curriculum for England. The Office for Standards in Education's (Ofsted) *Subjects and Standards* [8] presents subject inspection findings for each subject within the National Curriculum expressed in just these clear images. The first of the 'main findings' for art is given as follows:

*Standards of achievement are satisfactory or better in more than eight out of ten lessons in both Key Stages 3 and 4, and good or very good in almost three out of ten. Post 16, standards are satisfactory or better in over nine out of ten lessons and very good in almost four out of ten.*

The judgements underpinning this statement 'are based on the criteria in the *Handbook for Inspection*' [9]. The Handbook [10] however, proves to be less than an authoritative source of statements about standards, stating in its criteria that pupils' achievement should be evaluated by inspectors with reference '... to attainment in the school overall, in relation to national standards or expectations ...'. In using the criteria inspectors are required to judge whether the attainment of pupils ... meet(s) or exceed(s) national standards ...' and whether they '... progress as well or better than expected.' There is nothing in the Handbook clarifying what is meant by such standards generically although there is the tacit view that they are external to a school, and there is no indication of what is meant by standards within subjects.

Specifications for subjects can, however, be found in the National Curriculum itself expressed in terms of what 'pupils should be taught'. *Art in the National Curriculum* [11] specifies 'Attainment Targets' in terms of the activities in which pupils are required to engage, such as the following examples taken from Key Stage 3: 'Pupils use technical and expressive skills ... They show a developing ability ... They are increasingly able to research, organise and represent ...' Here is specification of activities which teachers are expected to organise in lessons but not standards against which performance in those activities should be assessed, nor any basis for external reference.

Whilst these documents contain much about processes by which pupils are expected to learn and their learning be inspected, there is nothing specific about the standards of pupils' attainment, nor standards for curriculum content, its teaching and assessment. The only clarity concerning standards within the Handbook is in its 'code of conduct for inspectors' [12]. Thus we are provided with some succinctly defined standards for the standard of inspections but not for what is to be inspected. Nevertheless, the Handbook requires 'clear and comprehensible' statements about 'standards achieved in the school' [13]. Standards seem to be like the chimera, there is much said about them – and Ofsted even takes its name from this mythical beast [14] – but no-one has actually seen one. It is a picture of broken images presented as if they were clear images.

If one persists in a search for what is meant by standards the one firm point that one can find is the Handbook's statement of the statutory basis for inspections 'under Section 9 of the Education (Schools) Act 1992' [15]. Perhaps it is not Ofsted's fault that inspectors are sent on a poorly defined mission yet still required to report with clarity. If the real basis for standards is the untheoretical framework of political expectations then it is so much easier to recognise the relativistic character of any standards that may be arrived at. Whilst the example of the National Curriculum has been taken here, the situation in higher education is no better resolved in the former Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) Graduate Standards Programme which comes clean in stating that:

*The recent growth and diversification of higher education in the UK has brought about a situation in which there are no longer universally accepted means for making a comparison between the standards of degrees from one institution to another, between subjects, or over time. In consequence, the notion of comparability of standards no longer commands general support, [16]*

whilst seeking an alternative view of standards in terms of general attributes of graduates or 'graduateness'. However, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) seeks to get deeper into how subjects may be more clearly specified and related through 'developing benchmark information on subject threshold standards' [17]. Useful though this latter work may be in making sense of broken images, it is unlikely to result in the clear image preferred in the political arena. One is left to conclude that standards exist only within the assertion that they do. Perhaps it all comes down to how convincingly the assertions of Subjects and Standards are made. A little like a Wittgensteinian language game, or maybe a game of 'Mornington Crescent' [18].

It is a reasonable conclusion that a concern with standards in education is inextricable from its cultural context of social selectivity and division. Perhaps we believe standards exist because the mental apparatus we bring to bear on the subject all but prevents us from believing otherwise. We talk about standards this way because these ideas are embedded in our language. Even the structure of the education system is tiered in this manner with funding levels reflecting the underlying values. However, the concept of lifelong learning seems to represent other social paradigms in its principle that everyone can and should continue to learn throughout their lives and thereby change their lives, and should be formally encouraged to do so.

## **Lifelong learning**

If the idea of lifelong learning does embody the principle that people learn constantly and in many contexts then institutional educational thinking needs to be consistent with contexts outside institutional provision. In the case of art, it is possible to identify a number of contexts in which learning takes place and the following is a provisional and somewhat generalised list of such learning contexts.

*The Bedroom; The Living Room; The Street; The School Room; The Art School; The Art Gallery; The Museum; The Library; The Cultural Institution including Church; The Public Place; The Media; and The Internet.*

Lifelong learning requires an approach to art and learning which is valid for all these contexts. However, Hughes [19] has argued that much school art 'is predicated largely upon procedures and practices which reach back to the nineteenth century' and that it has developed 'in almost total isolation from thinking on art and design in other parts of our educational system let alone current professional practice'. It would seem that commonality of approach across the various levels of the educational system does not currently exist, and that any common approach to standards remains highly problematic.

Hughes cites Efland's [20] 'impish' account of school art room orthodoxies which questions the relevance of 'objects such as kettles, shoes, bottles and bicycle or car engine parts' to learning in and through art. Hughes' account seems to carry a particular resonance of familiarity and the question arises whether such an orthodoxy is restricted to art in schools. Are such familiar subjects merely clichés or can they be seen as a canon, a loose canon maybe, which has its equivalence in further and higher education? Indeed, could one see art in other learning contexts in a similar way.

### ***A loose canon of art or some school art clichés?***

*Kettles; Shoes; Bottles; Bicycle or Car Engine Parts; Crushed Coke Can; Cut Cabbage; Mask Making; Textures Lines And Tones; Sheep Skull; Pebbles; Swiss Cheese Plant*

### ***A loose canon of art or some foundation course clichés?***

*Negative Space; Sight Size Figure; The Colour Wheel; Perspective; Problem Solving; Doing Your Own Work*

### ***A loose canon of art or some art school clichés?***

*Meaningful Marks; Mythologising The Self; Image And Text; The Charcoal Nude; Addressing The Issues; Intervening And Appropriating; The Installation; The Projected Video*

### ***A loose canon of art or some art gallery clichés?***

*The Portrait; The Self Portrait; The Landscape; The Still Life; The Interior; The Caricature; The Object As Object; The Image As Image; Encounter With Seeing; The Time Based Event; The Shock; The Dream; The System; The Puzzle; The Concept; The Issues; The Power Of Emotion; The Illusion; The Joke*

Perhaps it is not these familiar figures of learning that should be the figures of fun so much as those who adopt them uncritically. As Hughes [21] says, these are not 'necessarily wrong' in themselves and it could be argued that their relevance should depend on the meaning made of them in their relevant contexts. Perhaps any of these lists has the potential to carry a weight of significance if they are articulated in

ways that are not restricted by the customs and practices of any one learning context. Such a breakthrough would require an explicit sense of common purpose in formal education and would benefit from the broader, pluralistic perspective of self reflection and learning how to learn associated with lifelong learning.

### **The social construction of standards**

Part of the problem of locating standards is intrinsically linguistic with the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* [22] giving eight definitions of which four can readily be related to education. Generically, standards in education may be considered as a rallying principle or statement of what is stood for, a measure or benchmark against which performance can be measured, a degree of excellence required for a purpose, or a norm used as a measure of quality. In their own ways each of these meanings are current in education and it is difficult to be sure whether protagonists in debates on standards use the term in the same way. For example, the National Curriculum seems to use the term in the latter three senses in different contexts while the QAA variously uses the second and fourth meaning.

There can only be agreement about standards if it is negotiated, and for the concept of lifelong learning to be relevant to the whole of a person's learning career such a negotiated meaning is essential. The one aspect that the several meanings outlined in the previous paragraph have in common is a concern with some point or frame of reference that is external to the educational institution, and this article is based on this aspect of commonality, whilst recognising that further issues beyond the scope of this article do arise from them.

Two readily identifiable external points of reference for subjects in schools and higher education can be seen in the world of the subject practitioner and the world of educational theory. Practitioner referenced standards imply that pupils and students should engage with art as it exists outside the classroom and the studio while educational theory referenced standards imply that the student's personal engagement with learning should remain at the centre of educational activities. Just as history should be taught with reference to what historians do and chemistry with chemists, so art education needs an engagement with artists and works of art if the self-contained and self-perpetuating character of school art criticised by Hughes [23] and Efland [24] is to be remedied.

Such an engagement would not only provide common terms of reference for school art and art school art but also provide a basis for a fuller engagement with lifelong learning. The balance of practitioner and theory orientations differs in schools and higher education with schools often tending towards a reliance on educational psychology and with art schools often tending towards the world of the professional artist (often in a narrow top-of-the-market commercial sense). However, a dual engagement with both approaches to standards is capable of improving learning in both environments. Recent developments in Teaching Quality Assessment and subsequently Subject Review [25] in higher education, and the forthcoming review of the National Curriculum [26], mean that both environments are under a new scrutiny at the same time, and the opportunity of enhancing quality in both together seems too attractive to miss.

### **Standards for lifelong learning in art**

If the current approaches to standards have been generated separately within the isolated pockets of schools, further and higher education, then a fresh focus on socially constructed art and socially constructed education as bases for the construction of standards would provide means to cross the boundaries of the separate sectors and make sense of the relevance of standards to lifelong learning.

Such an approach creates a new focus on four key questions: What it is that artists do?; What does it mean to engage with a work of art at first hand?; What do people have to say about artists and works of art?; and What does it mean to engage in learning?

If one takes a broad, socially constructivist and pluralistic approach to the terms 'artists', 'work of art', 'discourse' and 'learning' then a curriculum would be amenable to the diversity of personal and cultural experience that is to be found in a multi-cultural society. These terms would all be applicable to all the contexts of art listed above. By 'artist' would be understood a full range that would include professional and amateur artists, designers and craftspeople in the many ways that they are understood within western cultures as well as the makers of images and artefacts in other cultures that have not readily used these terms. By 'work of art' would be understood a generic category of images and artefacts irrespective of culturally located value judgements. By 'what people have to say' would be understood a wide range of discourses relating to art ranging from scholarly publications through television coverage to the treatment given to art in the press, including students' and pupils' own thinking. Lastly, by 'learning' would be understood a variety of skills, competencies and procedures deriving from a number of theoretical positions in the world of education.

These four elements together, in explicit and structured relationships to each other, would provide both a consensual framework for standards for all contexts of learning in art and a facilitating framework providing teachers with opportunities to maximise the opportunities that exist locally to engage students with learning in and through art.

### **Rationales for learning in art**

In presenting the above framework the argument has focused on making sense of the broken images of standards. However, a key issue that follows is how the framework may facilitate the organisation of teaching and learning by teachers – what it means in practice. The problem in assuring a facilitating character to any such explicit conceptual structure is succinctly identified when Steers [27] argues that, 'demands for greater accountability from the teaching profession are leading inexorably to ever tighter control of the curriculum and its assessment and, through these mechanisms, to control of teachers.' Almost certainly, those responsible for the governance of education will not back off from teachers, and greater flexibility can be obtained only within an explicit framework.

Perhaps an answer can partly be found in Read's concept of 'education through art' [28] which can be seen as a prototype model for relating learning methods to explicit standards in ways that enable teachers to define their own curricula in the context of external referents. What would then remain to be found is a rationale for linking the practitioner referenced standards to the education theory referenced standards. Many will be familiar with Barratt's rationales for learning in art [29] but these predate much thinking about student centred learning. To these may usefully be added the research rationale that has gained much ground in higher education in recent years [30]. Here there is a direct engagement with the concept of learning how to learn, and one in which doing and making carry as much weight as research methods as scholarly study. If the artist-teacher and the lifelong learner (in all learning contexts) engage in a joint process of enquiry into the issue of relating the two dimensions of the framework outlined above in the spirit of 'education through art' then the framework can be seen as much as a skeleton for a new lifelong learning curriculum in art as a way of relating learning to external standards. In this way, the blank cells of the above matrix are open opportunities for the creative collaboration of teachers and learners. While much remains to be done in the theorisation of research methodologies in art practice, there is nothing to suggest that this task is

insurmountable, indeed recent developments in practice based research degrees in art have begun to bring a new impetus to the idea of a research curriculum – as the impact of practice based research degrees on studio based taught degrees has already been highlighted in higher education. Resolution of these issues will benefit the whole spectrum of learning contexts in lifelong learning.

## Conclusions

It has been argued, through the example of art education seen from a broad cultural perspective, that the concept of lifelong learning implies common terms of reference for learning in all contexts in which learning takes place, especially in schools, colleges and universities. This implies a common approach to standards at all levels of formal educational provision. The current review of the National Curriculum and the developmental work on standards and quality currently being undertaken by the QAA would both benefit by relating practitioner standards to standards derived from educational theory and practice. There is an opportunity here for the production and publication of long overdue explicit statements of standards although a new level of co-ordination and co-operation between educational sectors is required. Combined with an engagement with issues of how research can underpin teaching and learning, an engagement with these two dimensions of standards in dynamic relation to each other not only represents a sound basis for accountability in education and explicit standards statements, but also facilitates the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning across all educational sectors. It also supports the development of lifelong learning across the full spectrum of education and thereby assists in reducing the possibility that lifelong learning could develop as yet another self contained, isolated and self-justifying sector of education. Additionally, these proposals assist in relating a post-modern perspective to the realities of an as yet unreconstructed and divided education system.

*Tim Jones*

'In Broken Images' by Robert Graves, @ Carcanet Press is reprinted by kind permission of Carcanet Press

## References

- 1 Department for Education [1998] *The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain*. HMSO Cm 3790. In this and related papers the ideas of initial and continuing education are created in an holistic view of learning that tacitly brings into question some of the previously accepted norms of institutional teaching
- 2 Indeed, the concept of lifelong learning can be seen to bring into question the concept of levels of learning in the sense in which it currently applies to separate sectors of formal education
- 3 Graves, R [1926] 'In Broken Images', in *Collected Poems*. Cassell. Graves does not provide dates for poems in this collection
- 4 Jones, D. [1952] *The Anathemata: Fragments of an attempted writing*. Faber
- 5 Breton, A. [1934] 'What is Surrealism?', in Chipp, H. B. [1970] *Theories of Modern Art*. University of California Press
- 6 Jarry, A. [1911] 'Exploits and Opinions of Dr Faustroll, Pataphysician', (Trans.) Taylor, S. W. in Shattuck, R. and Taylor, S. W. (Eds) [1965] *Selected Works of Alfred Jarry*. Methuen
- 7 Sterne, L. [1759-67] *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Florida edition, [1997] Penguin Classics

- 8 Ofsted [1996] *Subjects & Standards, issues for school development arising from OFSTED inspection findings 1994-5, Key Stages 3 & 4 and Post-16*. A report from the Office of her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, HMSO
- 9 *Ibid*
- 10 Ofsted [1995] *The Ofsted Handbook*, HMSO. This document is published in three volumes relating to different sectors of school education. References here are taken from the volume entitled 'Guidance on the Inspection of Nursery and Primary Schools' and the sections cited are consistent with the equivalent sections of the other volumes
- 11 Department for Education [1995] *Art in the National Curriculum*. HMSO
- 12 Handbook, *op cit*
- 13 *Ibid*
- 14 Ofsted and OFSTED are both abbreviated forms of the Office for Standards in Education
- 15 Handbook, *op. cit*
- 16 HEQC Update, news from the Higher Education Quality Council, No 11, March 1997 introducing, Higher Education Quality Council [1997] *Graduate Standards Programme, The Report*. HEQC
- 17 QAA [1998] Developing benchmark information on subject threshold standards, in *QAA higher quality, the bulletin of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education*, Vol. 1. No 3
- 18 'Mornington Crescent' is a panel game on the BBC radio programme, *I'm Sorry, I Haven't a Clue* first broadcast in 1972. The rules of the game (if there are any) are never made explicit although it appears that all participants are fully conversant with them, despite their obscure complexity (the rules, not the participants). Winning seems to depend on an ability to talk self-evident nonsense in a comprehensively persuasive manner. The apparent spontaneity is scripted.
- 19 Hughes, A. [1998] 'Reconceptualising the Art Curriculum', in *Journal of Art & Design Education*, Vol. 17, no 1
- 20 Efland, A [1976] *School Art Style: A Functional Analysis*, *Art Education*, National Art Education Association, cited in Hughes, [1988] *Ibid*
- 21 Hughes, A. *op. cit*
- 22 *Concise Oxford Dictionary*
- 23 Hughes, A. *op cit*
- 24 Efland, A. *op cit*
- 25 Teaching Quality Assessment became Subject Review when responsibility for this process passed from the higher education funding councils to the QAA. See QAA, [1997] *Subject Review Handbook 1998-2000*, reference no. QAA 1/97, QAA
- 26 A review of the National Curriculum is being undertaken by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), see QCA [1998] ONQ no 03, also [www.open.gov.uk/qca](http://www.open.gov.uk/qca)
- 27 Steers, J. [1997] *Some Questions about the Future of Art and Design Education*, an unpublished article, 4th revised draft, 17.12.1997
- 28 Read, H. [1943] *Education Through Art*. Faber

- 29 Barratt, M. [1979) *Art Education*. Heinemann. Barratt describes the following 'rationales' for art education in schools: Conceptual; Design Education; Visual Education; Fine Art; Graphicacy; Art and Craft
- 30 The introduction of the Research Assessment Exercise to the 'new universities' and colleges sector in 1992 has had a significant impact on how creative art practice is viewed as research practice in art schools, and how this has impacted on taught courses in the contexts of research underpinning teaching, and on research degrees in which there is a requirement for explicit research methods. For an account of the current state of the Research Assessment Exercise at the time of writing, see HEFCE/SHEFC/CCAUC/DENI [1998] *Research Assessment Exercise 2001. Key decisions and issues for further consultation*, RAE 1/98. <http://www.niss.ac.uk/education/hefc/rae2001>