

# Linking Colleges of Education and Colleges of Art

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Colleges of Education and Colleges of Art, are they friends or relations? The only answer to the question must be that they are relations, but relations who seldom see each other and hardly ever write. To further underline the seeming lack of interest by art colleges in education I can quote from personal experience. In my last post I was on the staff of a college of art with its own large department of education. This teacher training department was isolated several miles from the other departments of the college. There was virtually no contact between this department and the Dip AD departments of the parent college and I doubt if most Dip AD students or staff even knew of its existence.

On the face of it Art Colleges and Art Departments of Colleges of Education seem to have a number of things in common. Why is it then that there is so little contact between them? Looking at it purely from the art college point of view there are two basic reasons. First, most art colleges do not regard themselves as having anything to do with training teachers and they often regard students who are interested in teaching as failures. Second, art colleges have been so preoccupied with their own problems in the last ten years that they have become cut off from developments in related educational establishments. In fact art colleges themselves have become divided into Diploma and non Diploma Colleges and more recently Polytechnic and non Polytechnic Diploma Colleges. Any contacts between these various divisions is generally slight.

These two reasons contain many implications which reveal much of the attitudes of the Art College sector of Higher Education (including the Art sections of Polytechnics). The attitude towards training

teachers implies that art colleges have a role which is clearly defined and which excludes any connection with teaching. In fact, however, the role of art colleges is difficult if not impossible to define clearly and this often leads to unjustifiable expectations on the part of students and vague attitudes on the part of staff. Art Colleges do not see themselves as involving students in the assimilation of facts but rather providing an environment in which students can be creative. The student is made to feel that his individuality is all that counts and in trying to compare art education with other branches of education some have described it as essentially a postgraduate activity carried on at undergraduate level. This attitude of cultivating individuality varies from one area of study to another. It is seen in its most extreme form in fine art departments and to a lesser degree in design areas. The anti teaching attitude, which I have already mentioned, is generally, however, just as evident in design departments as in Fine Art. It has justification in design departments because they can produce graduates who are immediately employable as professional designers. The attitude of fine art departments is not so readily explainable. Often fine art is chosen by students less for conventional reasons of wanting to produce paintings or sculpture, and more because it offers an open ended area of study. The fine art area in many colleges includes, for example, film, television or theatre opportunities and so eventual employment for fine art graduates is possible in more places than might at first be thought. Even so, it is unmistakable that the majority of fine art students enter teaching and still colleges operate in the belief that every fine art student will become a professional artist and the student is led to believe that he is a genius with expectations that can hardly ever be realised.

Very recently there has been a slight movement towards an interest in teaching by

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some students. Students are becoming more and more socially aware and this has led to some questioning of design activities and the realisation that education is an area of great social significance. The fact also that an educational qualification is now necessary for graduates entering teaching has made some students really question whether they would wish (or need) to teach at some time in the future.

Art colleges I have said have been pre-occupied with their own problems and these have mainly centered on insecurity. The Government White Paper *Education, a Framework for Expansion* mentions art colleges only once (and that in passing) and those involved in art education are believing more and more than no expansion in this field is intended. Some colleges expanded significantly in the fifties and sixties but at the same time some smaller colleges closed. Art education has not enjoyed anything like the expansion there has been in the rest of higher education for a variety of reasons ranging from DES restrictions (eg, Administrative Memorandum 16/67) to the University equivalent academic entry requirements which seem to be inevitably coming into force despite a large volume of protest. The list of causes of insecurity is endless. The formation of the Polytechnics, (again the Art College protest was ignored) the merger of CNA and NCDAD, and the Pooling Committee Report on student staff ratios (more unfavourable to art than any other subject) are just three random examples.

In spite of all the problems, however, art education in the last decade has been a success story. Despite the fact that the popular view is that art students are unemployable the 1972 survey, *The Employment of Art School Leavers* published by HMSO, shows that the majority of students are employed in the areas in which they have studied and although to my knowledge there are no comparable figures available for other subjects to prove this point, the suspicion is

that the figures for art students are better than those for other degree courses except for ones which are strictly vocational. The art colleges success has taken many forms. There is the world success of fashion design with much of the influence coming from art colleges. There have been several instances of British design being represented by work from art colleges and the colleges have attracted to their staff internationally famous artists and designers. It is not an exaggeration to say that our art colleges are envied the world over.

From all this one might deduce that art education might at least meet with qualified approval but to quote from a letter from Jo Grimond, the former Liberal leader, sent inviting attendance at a conference at the University of Kent last year, "British Art taken overall has been one of the success stories of the last 30 to 40 years ..... (but) as you know the future of art colleges is rather in the melting pot."

It is difficult to see why there is so much apparent opposition to art education. Since the Dip AD came into being, standards generally have been raised immeasurably. The production of professionally oriented designers acceptable to industry has helped the economy, and even the art college drop-outs have become pop stars. It is true that some colleges have been given new buildings and that expensive equipment has been provided but many Dip AD courses are conducted in accommodation which would be considered totally inadequate by other disciplines and facilities taken for granted in other branches of education (eg, student hostels) are almost totally absent in art education. Worst of all, far reaching decisions are seemingly arbitrarily taken (one is never sure where) and art colleges are left in the position of trying to argue as to why these decisions should not be implemented. Needless to say the arguments are seldom heeded.

I have already said that Art Colleges and



Colleges of Education are relatives who know little of each other and I have indicated how the problems of art schools have so preoccupied them that they have virtually ignored teacher training completely. Inevitably then it will be assumed that my concluding points are made from the position of isolation I have described and are in total ignorance of the situation in Colleges of Education. I have however seen something of the work of Art college teacher training departments and colleges of education and I was instrumental in organising a conference for the London District of the National Society for Art Education in 1972 on the alternative ways of training the art teacher.

Let me say in conclusion then that there is no comparison between the ambition and the standards achieved in actual art practice in colleges of art and colleges of education. It is, I suppose, arguable that the best artists do not make the best teachers and certainly in achieving their higher standards art colleges ill prepare some students who will go on to teach. The art college attitude to teaching is often unhelpful, and the emphasis on personal development can be hard at a later time to reconcile with the aims of teaching.

It is difficult to see though how colleges of education can give students a real idea of what is currently possible in art education. The quality of student (at least in art practice terms) and the general atmosphere and ambition generated in art colleges is not possible in colleges of education and it would seem to make sense for "art" to be studied largely in the art college atmosphere and "education" in the college of education. Of course those two ingredients can't be separated as precisely as this and ideally they should be planned as elements which can at some point combine. The time would seem to be ripe for taking a look at the training of art teachers and an attempt should be made

to use the qualities which Art Colleges and Colleges of Education both possess to achieve the best possible teachers of art.

Is it possible that the introduction of the Diploma of Higher Education on the one hand and the suspected reduction in Foundation courses on the other might be the two factors that could bring about the kind of co-operation that is needed. The cut back in teacher training will presumably lead to art and design based Dip H.E. courses in colleges of education. The probable reduction in Foundation courses will leave art colleges with many excellent staff who are experienced at teaching on a broad diagnostic art course which is especially geared to committed students coming straight from secondary education. It is difficult to see how colleges of education will be able to offer their own degrees in art so that it will be necessary for some of their Dip H.E. students to be able to join Dip A.D. courses to obtain a degree in art and design. (The point at which they might join the Dip A.D. course poses an interesting problem.)

It may be necessary for a close friendship to develop between colleges of art and colleges of education so that the ready transfer of students in both directions can be easily achieved. Dip H.E. courses can be offered jointly by colleges of art and colleges of education with each college making its special contribution and on completion of the course direct transfer would be possible to an appropriate point on either of the colleges graduate courses.