

Art Media Studies for At-Risk Students: What Works?

Joanna Black

Abstract: At-risk students are on the verge of dropping out of high school because of social problems which impede their progress. Visual Arts Media Studies is discussed in relation to teaching such at-risk students. Discipline-Based Art Education as a model for at-risk learners is examined and an alternative model, the art appropriate model, is presented for at-risk learners who are taking media study courses.

Résumé : Les étudiants en difficulté sont prêts à abandonner leurs études au secondaire en raison de problèmes sociaux qui les empêchent de progresser. L'article traite des liens entre les études en médias des arts visuels et l'enseignement à des étudiants en difficulté. L'auteur examine l'enseignement de l'art basé sur la discipline en tant que modèle pour les étudiants en difficulté. L'application de ce modèle approprié à l'art est suggérée pour ces étudiants en situation particulière qui suivent des cours d'étude des médias.

At-risk students are becoming increasingly disillusioned with the high school curriculum. We are told that over thirty percent of high school students will drop out of school before graduating (Cities in Schools, 1994). Many Canadian students are at-risk: it is predicted that between 1990 and the year 2000 Canada will produce over one million dropouts (Cities in School, 1990). At-risk students are often bored and frustrated. They feel school is not relevant to their lives. What can art educators do about this phenomenon? In the last ten years the Discipline-Based Art Education [DBAE] model for visual arts education has become increasingly influential. More educators are using this model, extolling its merits, and declaring that it should be applied to dance, drama and music, so that it becomes Discipline-Based 'Arts' Education. DBAE advocates believe this model is applicable not only to every area of visual art, including the teaching of media, but is also relevant and indeed beneficial for all learners, from the gifted to the physically handicapped (Hallatt, 1990). In this paper I will discuss the applicability of the DBAE model for at-risk high school students in the visual arts media class and I will present an alternative model.

Media Education in the Visual Arts

Media Studies termed "Extended Media" in the Ontario Ministry of Education *Curriculum Guidelines* (1986) is based upon electronic technology. This includes computer generated images, graphic text, computer animation, and the following: "...the application of videotex today, and in the future in journalism (electronic newspaper); interactive computers and television; advertising..." (p.98). The ministry guideline is narrow: I would extend this definition to include video and electronic multimedia interconnecting video, television, visual and graphic texts, photography, laser color copiers, and CD ROM disks. Hence, media studies encompass a broad range of art forms from movies and rock videos, to graphic art produced for newspapers and magazines. It is comprised of popular art such as the television show *Roseanne*, and high art displayed in, for example, exhibits of computer artwork at galleries, and alternative art forms like the video, *Production Notes*, by Jason Simon.

Media education in the Visual Arts is very extensive. Educators teach it utilizing multidimensional approaches from the technical, historical, critical, sociological, cultural, aesthetic, design theory, to the studio perspective. How it is taught also differs. For instance, the media course can be project based by focusing on students making a television show or it can be theme based focusing on violence in media imagery. Students can also analyze their own interest in media. Furthermore, educators can teach media by focusing on the different media productions in the high art, low art and alternative art realms in a specific media area or by teaching a combination of approaches. The above are only a few suggestions from an extensive list of possibilities (1).

At-Risk Students

In understanding at-risk students it is important to look more closely at (1) the society in which they live; and (2) such students' needs. For this paper, I am using the term 'at-risk' loosely to refer to students who are potential dropouts. I am not including students who are at-risk because of their behaviour, or 'low' intelligence. Nor am I referring solely to students whose economic status is low. (At-risk students often come from underprivileged homes; however, there are some from other economic backgrounds.) In this paper the focus is on at-risk adolescents whose social problems are causing them to be at risk of dropping out.

Such students have a variety of social difficulties from drug abuse and prostitution to neglect at home, gender issues, and embroilments with the law. It is assumed that most of these adolescents do not have a single problem: in fact, one difficulty often leads to others.

The future is not a very promising one for such students. Slavin, Karweit and Madden (1989) write:

While the problems of low achievement are not new, the consequences of this problem are becoming more serious. The U.S. economy no longer has large numbers of jobs for workers lacking basic skills...Allowing large numbers of disadvantaged students to leave school with minimal skills ensures them a life of poverty and dependence — the consequences of which are disastrous to the social cohesiveness and well-being of our nation. (p.4)

What happens in the U.S. frequently occurs in Canada, and we do indeed face similar problems (2). Presseisen (1988) refers to our shift from an industrial to a technological society. She discusses the Victorian era, and believes some of the concerns of that time are similar to our own. She also states that the gap between the rich and poor, both economically and intellectually, may greatly widen (p.7). This is proving to be true. Ontarions are now beginning to feel the effects of politicians attempting to control the deficit by cutting social programs: of wages decreasing, and cutbacks occurring in numerous areas from health to education. Increasingly, there is a greater need for students to complete high school because if they do not, job prospects are poor and prospective earning power is poor.

There has been much literature concerning teaching at-risk learners. Many researchers have asked, why at-risk students want to drop out of school in the first place? Researchers (Dunham and Alpert, 1987; Titone, 1982) found that it is extremely important for students to like school. In fact, Dunham and Alpert found disliking school to be one of the most powerful predictors of school leaving (p.55). This does not mean students need to be successful, but that they need to enjoy the learning experience. Other researchers, however, claim that lack of academic success does motivate students to leave school (Levine, 1988; Scales, 1990). They drop out because of the lack of connection between the world of school and the students' own world. There is little relation between what is being taught and the students' 'real' lives (Farrell,

1990; Presseisen, 1988; Titone, 1982). Farrell describes his idea of handling four at-risk students who had severe problems. He devised a one year programme in which he was responsible for teaching them all their subjects. The sole project was to build a house from start to finish; everything from logging the trees to creating the interior design. He describes how this project made education "come alive" for these students for there was a direct relation between what was learned to their own lives. He writes "...when the Pythagorean theorem was perceived as necessary to design a house... [students] learned it... education reasserted itself in my life as a meaningful endeavor. (Farrell, 1990, p. 159-161)

At-risk students lack motivation (Farrell, 1990; Mirman, Swartz and Barrell, 1988). Farrell says that at-risk students complain frequently of boredom (1990, p.11) Boredom can be caused both by how the material is taught and by what is being taught. Another cause of dropping out is the lack of apparent connection between school and the work force. In other words, many at-risk students see little practical benefit from working hard and being successful at school. A final reason, and certainly one of the most important ones but one of the least mentioned in the literature, is the overwhelming social difficulties these at-risk students confront. One of my own students recently admitted: "School is one of the last things on my mind". Indeed, with such social problems as facing criminal charges, neglect at home, involvement with street gangs, it is no wonder school can seem insignificant.

Two problems that at-risk students bring to the learning situation have often been discussed in the literature: low self-esteem (Jones, 1986; Scales, 1990; Unsworth, 1990); and the lack of parental or adult involvement in at-risk students' lives.

Students need personal, meaningful relationships. Farrell (1990), Unsworth (1990), Dunham and Alpert (1987) comment: "The stronger the attachment of the youth to conforming members of society, the less likely will deviance occur because the youth will not want to disappoint loved ones. Parents can have a tremendous influence on a child's behaviour through attachment." (1987, p. 55) In fact, in our Cities-in-Schools programme at Downsview Secondary School (a programme for at-risk students) both these factors are recognized: first, we seldom accept any student who does not have strong parental support; and second, we are constantly teaching and addressing self-esteem issues with our students.

There are many recommendations for addressing at-risk students' needs. It is proposed that more emphasis should be placed on developing

students' communication skills. Scales writes:

...some evidence suggests that only 1% of their [students] class time is spent in debate or in expressing or listening to opinions. It is these young people who will create the future for all, and yet some back-to-the basics groups advise young people, literally, not to talk about the future. (1990, p. 430)

Many researchers advocate that teachers should not teach facts, but rather should teach 'learning how to learn'. (Pogrow, 1987; Presseisen, 1988; Scales, 1990). It is recommended that students be taught other higher order thinking skills such as problem-solving, inventive and creative thinking, and the ability to link different types of knowledge together (Kozma and Croninger, 1992; Pogrow, 1987; Presseisen, 1988; Scales, 1990; Unsworth, 1990). Kozma and Croninger (1992) write:

At risk students often fail to develop higher order skills because they are placed in classrooms that de-emphasize the need for them. Classes for at-risk students break lessons into small, sequentially related tasks that emphasize drill and practice, work sheets and extensive desk work. Studies that compare these classrooms to those attended by high and moderate achieving students report more discipline problems, low teacher expectations, slower paced instruction, fewer academically oriented interactions with classmates or adults, and an emphasis on social goals such as learning to be punctual or accept responsibility for assignments. (ps. 445-446)

The head of Downsview's C.I.S. programme believes that the lack of success of some at-risk programs is due to the emphasis on social skills and the disregard for any kind of academic curriculum which develops higher order cognitive skills.

There are numerous recommendations for addressing the needs of at-risk students in the secondary curriculum. Can teachers using the DBAE model address these needs?

Discipline-Based Art Education Issues

What exactly is DBAE? Although the ideas that constitute the DBAE model are not new, it was designed and financially propelled by The Getty Center for Education in the Arts. In 1983 the Getty Institute produced an interim report in which researchers discussed the need for art to be regarded and taught as a discipline. In other words, art should be treated as an academic subject similar to other subject areas. The report urged that visual art should be taught as a discipline, and that four disciplines constitute the subject itself: (1) art making, (2) art criticism, (3) art history, and (4) aesthetics.

DBAE is a product of the discipline-centered educational reform movement (Hallatt, 1990). The early 1980's recession had a great impact on North American society. In current times, at a time when there is less money in education, when the terms one hears are "accountability," "learning outcomes," and 'back to basics,' art is looked upon increasingly as a frill. The development of DBAE is no mere coincidence. What better justification for the arts than to call it a discipline? If art is a discipline, then the public at large will accept its importance in the education of every student. (Hausman, 1987; McFee, 1984). The DBAE model reassures to a questioning public that art educators have developed a no-nonsense approach to art education in which they know what should be taught, how to teach it, and what will be accomplished. In short, education tax monies will be well spent. (McFee, 1984).

Given the background and milieu of DBAE, it makes sense that it should have had a great impact in the field of art education; nevertheless, there has been much criticism. Critics have complained that DBAE is Eurocentric and chauvinistic—especially the art history component, which is strongly focused on what "Dead White European Males" (DWEMS) have produced (McFee, 1984; Hamblen, 1987). Furthermore, there have been complaints that DBAE does not take into account the multicultural student body, and therefore does not respond to students' cultural needs through the inclusion of art from other cultures in the curriculum (Hamblen, 1987). Critics such as Chalmers (1992) for example, recommend that we "...need some good examples of DBAE programs permeated by multicultural perspectives in which the curriculum really does help students to develop an understanding of the commonalities and differences in art within and across cultures" (p.24). Other critics have discussed modifying DBAE content to accept technological and mass media art productions (Hallatt, 1990; Hamblen, 1987; Lanier, 1987; McFee, 1984). Indeed, art educators who have a socio-

logical perspective have attacked DBAE for the assumption that only traditional elitist 'high' art should be taught. Critics comment that little mention is given to other 'fringe' arts such as Folk Art, media, Pop Art, and low art (Duncum, 1987; Hallatt, 1990). By focusing on the high arts, it is believed that DBAE privileges upper middle class values, preparing students to be proper gallery visitors (Chalmers, 1987; Hamblen, 1987; Lanier, 1987). Duncum (1987) says that the elitist DBAE model reflects the values and interests of people with economic wealth and power. Hence to teach Discipline-Based Art Education is to instill these elitist values (Lanier, 1987). In Eisner's essay, in support of DBAE, he writes scathing remarks about 'fringe' arts and the mass media:

There must be more to life than the pleasures of 'Miami Vice' or 'Loveboat.' Children require no ... assistance gaining access to the programs on television that consume about 27 hours each week for children and 22 hours per week for adolescents... These programs make few demands our children cannot meet and offer little they do not already have. Their intellectual substance is thin and their stimulation high. Not to be able to deal with more than what such programs provide is to ensure that our children will continue to attend to them, as they do now. What do they have as an alternative? But there are alternatives, challenging alternatives that provide satisfactions qualitatively, different from those they have secured through the mass media, pop culture, and one-eyed monsters we have in our homes.... The arts provide such alternatives. (1987, p.35)

Eisner is making an assumption that there is little to learn from mass media. This is far from true when one approaches mass media as a teaching tool in order to develop students' skills in studio, critique and analysis. Moreover, he does not account for the fact that children gravitate to and are highly motivated by the popular arts.

In the last few years, art educators have modified and expanded DBAE's curriculum which has resulted in its being more inclusive of the many aspects of art (Chalmers, 1992; MacGregor, 1989). They have responded to the criticisms and consequently have tried to make DBAE more multicultural and inclusive of art forms like mass media. Multicultural issues and curriculum development concerns have been

considered as is apparent at such proceedings as the one for a Getty Center for Education in the Arts National Invitational Seminar (1989) and a National Invitational Conference on Education in Art (1989). Furthermore, this new broadness of DBAE curriculum is reflected in recent writers comments such as Moore (1991) who discusses DBAE as a new postmodern movement encompassing cultural pluralism. Hamblen states that these broader curriculum changes in the 1980's have created a postmodern Neo-DBAE movement in the 1990's.

Does DBAE in the 1990's address at-risk students' needs? The answer is no. Some students require special programmes. Students must have their social problems addressed. Most teachers (not just ones following the DBAE model) lack the training to handle these problems, and consequently, must refer students to the proper social agencies (Slavin and Karweit and Madden, 1989; St. John, 1986). Moreover, teachers need to provide more adult guidance to help their students. This also needs a special programme like Cities-in-Schools which is designed for a greater connection between parents and teachers and a greater involvement of teachers in the personal lives of those they teach. At-risk students' needs are given little priority in the DBAE model. Research on at-risk students indicates the importance of connecting learning to students' lives (Hamblen, 1987). Even though the DBAE advocates say that it is important for teachers to do this, it will be very difficult given the vast amount of academic material teachers are expected to cover. Furthermore, in the literature about at-risk students it is recommended that teachers should develop the learners' self-esteem. There is little discussion of this issue in the DBAE model nor is there discussion of relating the curriculum to training for the work force. In addition, the literature on at-risk students indicates a strong need to develop students' communication skills self-teaching skills and higher level thinking skills. Advocates of the DBAE model propose to do this (Eisner, 1987); however, if students' interest and motivation are not there, student development in these areas will not occur. Last, and most important, researchers on at-risk youth point out that teachers could keep more at-risk students in school by altering the curriculum and their teaching styles so that at-risk students enjoy school. Farrell (1990), a teacher who has taught at-risk students for many years, refers to a discipline type approach to teaching. He writes, "Conservative critics of education would have us believe that more algebra, more foreign languages, more Shakespeare will improve things. It is hard to believe that any of these critics has ever taught a class of students at risk of dropping out" (p.2). To teach using the DBAE model without relating it to the student'

lives is to invite at-risk students to walk out the door. Most will be bored. If educators do not meet students' needs, students simply will not attend school.

Eisner provides an example of the type of model question from the DBAE curriculum: "Can they identify the work of a particular artist in his or her later period by extrapolating from the visual qualities of the artist's earlier works?... Such tasks present the kinds of challenges that capture student interest...." (1987, p.26) I witnessed what happened when this type of question was asked by museum docents to my class of at-risk students. Fortunately, students were polite and sat through that experience without showing their utter boredom. But, afterwards, they said, 'Don't ever take us to that place again!' Later, I took them to the Royal Ontario Museum where I did not have a docented tour. I let them see the museum in a group and left the tour unstructured, but made certain to ask pertinent questions that related to their lives and interests. (For example, I asked them to compare the ancient ideals of feminine beauty, apparent in the statues of ancient Greece, with our present day Canadian ideals.) I was worried beforehand: I thought, 'What will I do with them in the museum?' To my surprise they loved the experience. These fourteen to nineteen year olds seemed to be like little kids — they were so enthusiastic! One said to me, 'Ms., can I take pictures the next time we visit so that I can show them to my future children?' It did not occur to him that he could, himself, take his children to the museum!

The DBAE model falls short in addressing the personal and emotional needs of at-risk students. Motivating learners, creating a style of teaching which is interesting, addressing the interests of students through the type of material taught, relating the curriculum to learner's careers and lives are of utmost importance. It is in these key areas that art educators can make a difference for at-risk students. These issues DBAE does not address. At-risk students will acquire few academic skills if these areas are not dealt with.

An Alternative Model: Visual Arts Media and At-Risk Students

Media studies addresses some of the needs of at-risk learners. If teachers encourage progressive methods such as (1) student-directed learning, (2) activity based, hands-on instruction, (3) developing higher order thinking skills, and (4) interactive learning, then at-risk students will learn better (Kozma and Croninger, 1992, p. 450). Couple this

teaching methodology with a subject such as popular media and one may address many of the at-risk students' needs.

Study of media attracts at-risk learners to education. One factor is that media teachers can easily relate mass media to at-risk students' lives (Duncum 1987). The curriculum connects learning to real world situations. Jones (1986), Kozma and Croninger (1992) discuss the vast potential of media to link learners to the school community and the community at large. A second factor is that popular arts is a motivator: students find it interesting and important. Content is seldom boring. Duncum writes that there is "a strong case for bringing together the subject of art as it actually exists outside classrooms with what is both felt by students to be relevant and what is indeed relevant to students. ... {The} study of popular culture provides one avenue and, perhaps, a particularly valuable one." (p.19) A third key factor is that media can link learning to what students' already know. Begin with a current and popular television show and build new knowledge from an existing knowledge base (Kozma and Croninger, 1992; Powgrow, 1987). Depending on the way it is taught, media has the potential to be an excellent subject for at-risk learners.

Are there any problems with teaching media in high schools? One problem is that schools no longer have the budgets to buy the equipment needed to teach media. In Ontario, as of 1994, major technological grants have been stopped and school budgets have been considerably lessened. Typically many at-risk students come from low income families and so do not have much opportunity to use equipment. It has been found that "higher achieving students have greater access [to technological equipment] than lower achieving students (Kozma and Croninger, 1992, p. 440). Kozma and Croninger do have hesitations about the impact of technology:

...we contemplate the impact of technology on at-risk students with both optimism and dread... To realize the potential benefits of these technologies, we will have to develop policies and practices that make them more available to students and teachers and encourage their effective use, especially in schools that enroll large numbers of low-income and minority group students. We will also have to encourage other school reforms that affect learning and develop safeguards against inequities that would disadvantage students traditionally at-risk of school failure. Without implementing

these changes, along with the technologies that can facilitate learning, exciting possibilities may well become future failures. (1992, p.451- 452)

Teaching about popular media can be beneficial to at-risk students if (1) the aim is to develop higher order thinking skills; (2) the proper equipment is provided and hands-on use is promoted; (3) the curriculum is related to students' lives and careers; and (4) it is taught by educators who can address important issues in the classroom such as teaching about human rights, materialism, cultural indoctrinations, and empowering students against discrimination.

Hallatt (1990) notes a deficiency in the DBAE model and she has coined a term for a more personal approach to teaching art: art relevance. Hallatt describes art relevance as follows:

The students in the intermediate and senior divisions fit directly into the fifth stage of Erikson's theory of psychosocial developments (identity v. role confusion, 12 to 18 years of age). "Whom am I?" and "Why am I?" are two fundamental questions most asked by pupils in this stage of development. Art as an academic subject can help students discover answers to these and other questions by having relevance and meaning for the individual student. Art, as an integral and valuable part of the human social community, can put students in touch with their own history, thereby promoting self-identity, identifying community and societal values and cultivating a sense for aesthetic preferences. (p. 53)

Because art relevance directly connects school to students' lives it is of particular significance for at-risk learners. This should be a focus for a media program. But art programs which emphasize student's identity are not enough. There are two other areas of focus: the effect of society on the student and studio production.

The second focus is how society affects students. In terms of media, teachers empower students by looking at how media affect their lives. Educators should help students analyze their place in the world, and address societal issues such as consumerism, values reflected in dominant power groups, race and gender discrimination, stereotypes, inequities, violence, and sexuality. For example, the television programme *Married with Children* can be dealt with on several levels: (1) looking

at student responses to the show; (2) examining how the television program affects students' values and beliefs; (3) examining how this show serves to promote gender stereotyping. And in case anyone asks, "Where's the art in all this?" keep in mind that these studies can lead to learning about productions by alternative artists like Lisa Steeles (who are often poor, or powerless, and are on the 'fringe'). Such artists deal with the same issues but from different positions. Furthermore, teachers should discuss how other cultures deal with similar issues in their own mass media, and therefore (to relate back to the individual learner) develop students' personal stances (which are now more informed) on these issues. Not only should these issues be a part of the learning experience, but students should also create works which reflect their own thoughts about such issues. Production is important.

The third focus is studio production — the art making process. The Ontario Ministry of Education Guidelines recommend that the art making process make up 55% for Basic-Level, 50% for General-Level and 45% for Advanced-Level art courses; nevertheless, there is leeway, for it is recommended in some cases, that the studio component could constitute up to 75% of class time (Ministry of Education, 1986). In my personal experience it would be detrimental to merely undertake another dry critical analysis of professional media which constitutes the typical media English course approach. Walk into these classes and you will see what I call the "glazed look" — boredom. (For a wonderfully typical dry text refer to Duncan's *Mass Media and Popular Culture* (1989) the standard 'bible' for teaching English media in Ontario). By following such a media text, students have little chance to produce their own work for there is often an overemphasis on the critical approach to studying media at the expense of the practical production. For example, teachers can emphasize the practical hands-on approach by having students create sets, write scripts, role play and film the work. This creative process is most crucial, for the studio emphasis enables at-risk students (in fact most learners) to become hooked to learning.

For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the model I am proposing as the "art appropriate model". It is made up of three factors: (1) art relevance— a focus on students' identity; (2) a concern for how society affects students; and (3) an emphasis on the production process.

An art appropriate model has some weaknesses. The DBAE issues of criticism, aesthetics, and art history will be addressed but they will be subsidiary to the three focal points. At-risk learners who desire to proceed to university may need more of a focus on art history. Hence they should pursue a more extensive art historical course. Moreover, the

art appropriate model may not be appropriate for students who are at-risk because of intelligence handicaps. Such students may not have the capacity to handle a rigorous approach — their specific handicaps need to be addressed by a different model.

An art appropriate model has substance. Challenge through rigor is important for any student including those who are 'at risk'. Teachers should have high expectations. How does one proceed to teach media using an art appropriate model? A teacher for example may teach students about sexual objectification through visual imagery. Media study which is solely comprised of showing a Madonna rock video to a class, for example, is inadequate. First, sociological and cultural perspectives should be taught. Hence students could research Madonna as a sociological phenomenon of American society. They can examine, through watching her videos, how Madonna creates visual images and powerful cultural symbols that are highly effective. Furthermore, students could take an historical approach to media. Studying Madonna, for instance, can lead to studying Madonna's influences such as Marilyn Monroe. Intertextuality, which is learning about a media work through its references to other media works, is important. I have taught students born in the 1970's who did not know Madonna's references to former media sex symbols. Also, analyzing alternative videos which are about the same theme would offer students other viewpoints. Students should read, and become aware of their own and other people's responses to media. Students can, in the case of the Madonna study, read about what others have written about her, delve into their own understandings, examine peer response, and try to understand how they themselves and others are influenced by this controversial performer. Lastly, the studio component provides a rich tool for learning. Through studying Madonna videos, for instance, students can learn how to make their own video based on the theme of sexual objectification. Technical information about the media they are dealing with is important. In making a video, students must learn how a video is planned and how to use the equipment. They can create their own visual images, connecting them through developing a storyboard, and combining graphics with the video text. Furthermore, they can study the specific medium, video, as an artistic expression. Much can be learned in creating a video; everything from studying film techniques such as cuts and wipes, and learning elements of design, to dealing with lighting, color theory and computer imaging. Lastly, students could create a multimedia project using the computer in which they combine the videos they have made, written text and sound as a reference for other students. This could become a

multimedia text about sexual objectification from the students' point of view. The above is an example of an art appropriate approach which integrates sociological, personal and studio content.

In responding to criticism, Eisner (1988) writes, "DBAE is a concept, an approach to art education. It may not be right for everyone. Those who are guided by other lights ought to follow them" (p.13). I think he offers good advice. Art educators need to address the personal, emotional, and spiritual needs of the at-risk student. Teachers dealing with at-risk learners should indeed modify the bearings by which Eisner chooses to steer his ship.

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Notes

1. For a more in-depth examination of the role of media in art education refer to the *Curriculum Guideline, Visual Arts, Intermediate and Senior Divisions*, (1986).
2. I remember, when I was a teenager growing up in the Hamilton area in the early 1970's, many of my peers dropped out of high school to work at the steel plants. Now these very same peers who dropped out are finding themselves either laid-off for months at a time or 'out of work'.

Qualitative Assessment of Secondary Studio Art: Problems, Definitions, and Solutions

Fiona Blaikie

Abstract: In studio assessment teachers are concerned with the problem of making aesthetic judgements; some strategies adopted have been incompatible with the qualitative nature of studio art, and a plurality of values has made defining objectives and related assessment criteria difficult. Solutions are examined in the form of strategies and assessment criteria for the British General Certificate in Secondary Education and the Advanced Placement program: Portfolio reviews of studio work are undertaken by teams of art education professionals making intersubjective judgements, with reference to criteria. Both attest to the feasibility of studio assessment through emphasizing educational judgements, qualitative strategies, and the adaptability of each model.

Résumé : Dans l'évaluation du studio, les problèmes gravitent autour du fait que les professeurs doivent émettre des jugements esthétiques. Parmi les stratégies adoptées, certaines sont incompatibles avec la nature qualitative de l'art du studio et la multiplicité des valeurs rend difficile la définition des objectifs aussi bien que celle des critères d'évaluation. L'auteur examine des solutions sous la forme de stratégies et de critères d'évaluation pour le British General Certificate in Secondary Education et le Advanced Placement Program. Des équipes de professionnels en éducation de l'art ont entrepris l'examen des contenus des cartons à dessins en portant des jugements intersubjectifs tout en tenant compte des critères. Les deux moyens indiquent qu'il est faisable d'émettre une évaluation sur le travail effectué en studio en accentuant les jugements éducatifs, les stratégies qualitatives et la capacité d'adaptation de chaque modèle.

Introduction

This study outlines some of the problems associated with assessment of studio art at the secondary level. In an effort to clarify issues, terminology is discussed and defined. Solutions are examined in the form of visible and current models of studio assessment in practice, namely, Britain's national General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE), and the Advanced Placement (AP) program which operates internationally, including within Canada.