

# Mapping and Forecasting the Change Agenda in Scottish Art and Design Education

## Cartografía y Pronostico en el Cambio de Agenda de la Educación Artística en Escocia.

Diarmuid McAuliffe  
School of Education,  
University of the West of Scotland  
*Diarmuid.McAuliffe@uws.ac.uk*

Recibido 01/09/2014  
Aceptado 09/10/2014

Revisado 05/09/2014

### ABSTRACT

In part one of this paper I draw on Marshall McLuhan's now infamous idiom 'the medium is the message' in order to help capture current art and design educational discourses and practices in Scottish secondary education. I then move in part two to capture the many initiatives that are beginning to point so positively towards a new era for Scottish secondary art and design education- the growth in uptake in Higher\* photography as illustrated in Table 1.0 is an example of one such initiative. Central to this observation is the realisation that if you change the medium you somehow change the message thus allowing new discourses and new art and design practices to emerge.

### RESUMEN

En la primera parte de este artículo me baso en la expresión de Marshall McLuhan "el medio es el mensaje" con el fin de entender las prácticas y discursos actuales de la educación artística en la enseñanza secundaria en Escocia. Así, en la segunda parte me dirijo a recoger, las muchas iniciativas que están empezando a señalar de manera positiva hacia una nueva era para la educación artística en la enseñanza secundaria en Escocia – se percibe un superior crecimiento en la selección de materias como Fotografía, tal como se muestra en la Tabla 1.0, que es un ejemplo de una de las iniciativas que se están llevando a cabo. El centro de esta observación es la comprensión de que si se cambia el medio cambia de alguna manera el mensaje, lo que permite nuevos discursos y nuevas prácticas artísticas y de educación.

### KEYWORDS / PALABRAS CLAVE

Change Agenda, Art and Design Education, Scottish secondary education / Cambio de agenda, educación artística, educación secundaria escocesa.

### Para citar este artículo:

McAuliffe, D. (2014). Mapping and Forecasting the Change Agenda in Scottish Art and Design Education. Tercio Creciente nº6, págs. 49 - 54,  
<http://www.terciocreciente.com>



Table 1.0 Course Entries and Awards 2008-12

Photography**					
	2008	2009	2010	***2011	2012
Higher	537	768	947	1,153	1,495

(Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)\*\*\*\*, 2012)

\* A 'Higher' is an exit award at the end of Scottish secondary education, although you can progress further and exit with an 'Advanced Higher'.

\*\* Photography is generally taught within the Art and Design department, although in some schools it is taught in other departments such as Computing and Design and Technology.

\*\*\*Prior to 2011 known as Photography for the Media

\*\*\*\*The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is the sole public body of the Scottish Government responsible for accreditation and educational awards. In England for example, there is at least four such bodies leading to greater competition.

The Medium is the Message: secondary school art and design education today

Whilst there is a degree of turmoil south of the border<sup>1</sup>, with political imperatives once more denigrating the subject of art and design and its infrastructure, in Scotland, art education is in a relatively 'good place' as it begins to draw in oxygen from the various subject specific reforms currently under way as part of the 'roll-out' of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)<sup>2</sup>. How and why we teach, learn, and assess in art and design is currently under review and whilst there are still some with deeply felt reservations about the CfE programme, most it must be argued, at least within art and design, regard the process as a genuine opportunity for reflection and renewal.

For the highly motivated art and design teacher, the CfE reforms represent nothing more than a 'rubberstamping' of what they themselves have always done well and that is to teach the subject of art and design within the broad context of culture and society. For this sizable group of art teachers, a certain 'keep calm and carry on' attitude prevails towards their current pedagogical practice. However, there is still also a 'sizable other', whose practices remain outmoded and inflexible

and do not serve our population well in preparing young people for life and work in the 21st century.

Learning must be at the centre of what we do in art and design and it is widely acknowledged now that for our subject to remain relevant in a 21st century school environment it must shift away from the teacher-led pedagogies of the past [the sizable other] that are overly didactic and product-led to a new pupil- centered, concept-based and process-led pedagogy that privileges the pupil voice and the world of ideas.

Today, deep and meaningful conversations concerning learning and the value of learning in and through art are occurring across the sector with words such as 'relevance', and 'context' finding their way into the lexicon of Scottish school art and design education – a lexicon which hitherto was largely dominated by such words as 'accuracy', the latter being at the core of Scotland's entrenched classroom practices of drawing and painting. The challenge as Jerome Bruner sees it is 'always to situate our knowledge in the living context' and within 'broader culture' (Bruner, 1995, p. 44) and suggests that "...simply demonstrating 'how to' and providing practice at doing so is not enough [p. 54] and has led, as I would argue, to many art teachers in Scotland becoming mere technicians rather than leaders of learning. Studies



of expertise, as Bruner argues, ‘...demonstrate that just learning how to perform skillfully [and accurately] does not get one to the same level of flexible skill as when one learns by a combination of practice and conceptual explanation...’ (p. 54).

This time of ‘renewal and opportunity’ for art and design teachers in Scotland, is also a time of immanent challenges. The question of subject leadership is beginning to emerge at a critical juncture in the subject’s development as many experienced principal teachers<sup>3</sup> of art, now find themselves taking on wider faculty management roles and responsibilities as the traditional identity of ‘principal teacher’ is eroded or in some cases dropped altogether. The impending reduction in time spent studying the subject from the current two years of compulsory study to one coupled with fewer periods of art per week as we lose out to other areas of the curriculum such as Health and Wellbeing<sup>4</sup> may result not only in a reduction of departmental staff, but in art departments becoming no longer able to provide the ‘quality’ that they have traditionally provided at National Qualifications (NQ) level.

Art Departments that have done well in the past and have worked hard to build up their reputations are hugely concerned about the relinquishing of some of the assessment controls from a centralized SQA<sup>5</sup> in favour of a greater blend of assessment methods, including internal assessment and regional moderation in the case of National 4<sup>6</sup>. Teachers fear most that decentralization will result in a lowering of grades for departments that have traditionally done well through the centralized assessment process.

There are fears also that too great an emphasis is being placed on the intellectual side of the subject at the expense of ‘practical art skills’. What teachers should therefore be aspiring towards is what Atkinson and Dash (2005, xii) have called ‘a critical based arts practice’ which consists of a ‘fusion of the practical with the critical whereby art practice is critical practice’ where critical ideas are given visual form. External assessors’ reports repeatedly refer to some of these tensions and outmoded practices still occurring in our art rooms. In a recent externals’ report for the expressive unit<sup>7</sup> within Standard Grade, it was reported that pupils encountered ‘difficulties when faced with very poor and uninspiring groups of objects from which to work (SQA, 2011)’. Similarly, encountering whole classes expressing the same or similar opinions in written work and in art work too is not that unusual as standardization, though not prescribed, has nevertheless been inadvertently embedded in art education in Scotland to the extent that external examiners have called for

urgent change in the way art and design is summatively assessed (Hepburn, 2011. p14).

Some art teachers it must be argued have for too long slavishly adhered to a set of practices promoted by the SQA in its annual exhibition and publication of exemplars. Similarly, the Times Educational Supplement Scotland in its weekly publication of an artwork from a Scottish school confirms these normative and largely mimetic practices that have come to represent Scottish school art. The pervading message that emerges from much of the work at NQ level with the exception of design work and Advanced Higher work is one of compliance to a set of ‘past practices’ and ‘orthodoxies’ (Atkinson, 2005) that privileges technical skills and teacher-led pedagogies at the expense of creativity and more pupil-led pedagogy which champions free expressive modes of thinking and making whereby the pupil voice is made visible. Similar issues are evident in the teaching of art history where often what pupils receive is a ‘caricature’ relating to a standardized art history (Hughes, 2005, p. 35).

It is now well recognized that Scotland has had an unhealthy obsession with summative assessment in art and design – a subject with a natural impulse for self and continuous assessment. This obsession or ‘groupthink’ culture has slowly emerged over the decades and has simply discouraged creativity and risk taking, these being the very ‘oxygen’ that is now required to develop and sustain progressive practices as promoted by Curriculum for Excellence.

Encouragingly, formative assessment is now well on its way to becoming the dominant form of assessment in schools. However, the art produced in the middle years of schooling in particular continues to be ‘end product’ driven with little concern for the ‘deep search’ that Curriculum for Excellence is seeking. For the vast majority of schools in Scotland the SQA manage, in a straightforward and relatively trouble-free way, the public examinations for art and design. Some schools though, mostly private, choose the English A-Level route as it is considered less constraining and far less onerous in terms of assessment when compared with the SQA. The old adage ‘if it’s not assessed it will not happen’ has been a definite feature of Scottish art education, particularly in the middle years of schooling S3/4. Tied to this is teacher-led art pedagogies which must now be revised in favour of a more personalized and pupil-led pedagogy.

If as McLuhan argues ‘the medium is the message’ we then need to change the medium and adopt new ways of meaning-making that reflect the age we live in. This



does not mean dispensing with paint and charcoal but rather calls for the end of 'procedural orthodoxies' that have determined school art in Scotland for the best part of a century.

### **Changing the Medium changes the Message: school art moves forward**

Looking ahead as we await the introduction of National 4/5<sup>8</sup> in 2013-14, which will replace all current existing courses in art and design, we are slowly seeing the emergence of a different learning environment. No longer can school art be just about the privileging of observational drawing over free expressive modes – a practice that served well in the training of engineers and craftsmen for Scotland's flourishing industries of the past. An art education today needs to equip young people to meet the challenges of the 21st century and be inquiry-led. And while we acknowledge that much has changed over time in art rooms up and down the country, change has not come nearly quick enough. School art remains largely disconnected from contemporary art practice and as such is retrospective in its outlook – one could date many of its practices to the 19th century. Why is this and surely the 'medium' of the 21st century is different to that of the 19th? And what if the medium was to change, the message too would surely change and what would that message mean to our young people attending their art class today?

Nevertheless, the most pressing concern for art and design teachers today is assessment. Assessment, it is proposed, will be more decentralized and with that, personalized enquiry based learning, a central tenet of CfE, will hopefully be assessed in a more meaningful way. 'Fit for purpose' assessment procedures currently being developed include a mix of formative and summative, the latter involving internal and local assessment along with regional moderation. The decentralization of assessment, whilst a worry for some as earlier mentioned, will enable new and more diverse practices to emerge, leaving behind the often overly restrictive and standardized three A2 sized submissions which have been a distinguishing and limiting feature of Scottish art and design education for many a decade. Meaningful assessment methods are called for, and it is likely that assessment through learners' sketchbooks will be one feature of the process (Education Scotland, 2012a).

New media-based submissions including film and animation along with the huge growth in the uptake in photography [see table 1.0] at all levels, will begin to push boundaries in terms of subject matter and personal response and will inevitably change 'the message' of school art in Scottish education.

The Assessment is for Learning strategy, or formative assessment as it is otherwise known, has been the most noticeable advancement in teaching and learning in art and design in recent years. It has been well received by teachers of art and design and has resulted in getting pupils to participate actively in the assessment of their own work. Learners are now encouraged to review their own learning and are involved in setting their own personal learning goals (The Scottish Government, 2010). This represents a clear focus on the individual learner and their development and progress. It has also resulted in the teacher making explicit the learning intentions and success criteria at the start of a lesson, and this is now a commonplace feature of art and design teaching in Scotland. Much innovation is currently taking place in relation to the monitoring and reporting aspects of assessment with teachers working with increasing confidence with the experiences and outcomes of CfE. Teachers recognise the need for a coherent approach to learning, teaching and assessment as we move away from the grade-based assessment narrative towards that of developing, consolidating or secure. The ability of children and young people to apply learning in 'new and unfamiliar contexts' is a refreshingly apt measure of learning.

Questions foremost on the minds of all Scotland's art and design teachers are what does 'secure' look like, what evidence would be needed to show that a young person was 'secure in their learning'? Departments have been innovative in the ways in which they gather evidence of achievement and lots of dialogue about a shared understanding of standards is currently taking place. Note-taking by teachers of an individual's achievement is becoming commonplace, with many using digital cameras to record achievement as they assess a pupil's progression from developing, consolidating, to secure. Evidence-gathering should accommodate the wide range of creative responses to tasks, which pupils might have and should be based on what the pupils can 'say, write make and do' (Education Scotland, 2012 b).

The lack of exemplification in art and design has been contentious as the profession is left to their own professional judgment. Over-exemplification has been discouraged by central government and art teachers within local authorities are increasingly 'coming together' to discuss these matters. In the past this lack of exemplification was perceived as a 'vacuum' which would most certainly have been filled by willing 'consultants' but so far this so called 'vacuum' is not seen necessarily as a negative thing but rather is providing us with an opportunity to reflect deeply on and about the nature of what we teach. There are also signs that the value of not always knowing 'the outcome' has found favour and whilst



we can determine what the learning objective might be and this is crucial, to determine the final outcome is often to cut short an individual's learning journey.

The aspect of 'group learning', which is given much attention in CfE, raises many questions for teachers of art and design where the culture has traditionally been very much focused on individual learning. Art and design also will no longer be hermetically sealed, as cross-curricular and interdisciplinary learning take root.

Alternative models of practice to mainstream art education provision do quietly exist in such forms as Room 13 (Gibb, 2011, p.113), a social enterprise model of art education embedded in a number of primary's and one or two secondary schools in Scotland. Where this model exists, socially engaged and enquiry based pedagogical practices flourish. Learners manage their own learning and have 'creative autonomy in determining the subject, media and direction of their work' [Adams et al, 2008, p.11].

There is a growing desire within the Scottish government and 'good art teachers' to foreground 'creativity' in all teaching and learning and increasingly this is happening as Standard Grades and Intermediates are replaced by National 4/5. However, at the time of writing 'teaching to the so called test' does still remain a feature of Scottish art education and creativity as an attribute has yet to be taken seriously.

## Conclusion

Art and design remains one of the most popular and successful subjects in the curriculum with consistently healthy uptake across all levels and arguably, whilst teachers are facing real challenges there has never been a better time to be an art teacher in Scotland (see table 1.0). Art teachers are having to think for themselves as the old certainties of the past with the SQA firmly in control and a principal teacher leading the subject can no longer be relied upon. However, there is still much to do in order to reach a point where learning is privileged over procedure and learning objectives are shared with pupils and displayed prominently within the art-room along side reference to departments' commitments to literacy and numeracy and to the wider school curriculum. There is no doubt that pupils are becoming more articulate about their learning, and learning is being organised in a variety of ways through whole-class teaching or in small groups. Ideas are being 'problematized' through 'rich tasks' and through enquiry based approaches to learning and art lessons may occasionally be occurring in another

faculty or department away from the art department or even beyond the school altogether as schools seek greater learning opportunities through working across and beyond the curriculum where partnerships and entrepreneurship is encouraged.

Note: The terms 'Art' and "Art and Design" are used interchangeably throughout this chapter.

Note: The terms 'Art' and "Art and Design" are used interchangeably throughout this chapter.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, J., K. Worwood, D. Atkinson, P. Dash, S. Herne and T. Page (2008) *Teaching Through Contemporary Art: a report on innovative practices in the classroom*. London: TATE Publishing.
- Atkinson, D. (2005) *Approaching the future in school art education: learning how to swim*. In D. Atkinson, and P. Dash, (eds.) *Social and Cultural Practices in Art Education*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books, pp. 21-30.
- Bruner, J. (1995) *The Culture of Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Education Scotland (2012 a) *Learning through Sketchbooks in Art and Design*. Online at [www.ltscotland.org.uk/sharingpractice/1/learningthroughsketchbooksinartanddesign/intro.asp](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/sharingpractice/1/learningthroughsketchbooksinartanddesign/intro.asp)
- Education Scotland (2012 b) *Marks on the Landscapes: Inspiring Creativity across the Curriculum*. Online at [www.ltscotland.org.uk/marksonthelandscape/curriculum/artanddesign/assessment/index.asp](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/marksonthelandscape/curriculum/artanddesign/assessment/index.asp)
- Education Scotland (2013) *What is Curriculum for Excellence*. Online at [www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/index.asp](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/index.asp)
- Gibb, C. (2011) 'Room 13 Art Studio', in F. Allen (ed) *Education: Documents of Contemporary Art*. London: Whitechapel Gallery.
- Hepburn, H. (2011) *On your marks: How the SQA exam system works and what the assessors thought of this year's papers*. Times Educational Supplement Scotland (4 November), 14.





Hughes, A (2005) Don't judge pianists by their hair. In Hickman, R. (Ed.) (2005) *Critical Studies in Art & Design Education*, Bristol: Intellect

McLuhan, M. (2002) *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. London: Routledge.

Scottish Government (2010) *Building the Curriculum 5, A Framework for Assessment: Recognizing Achievement, Profiling*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Scottish Qualifications Authority (2011) *External Assessment Report, 2010*. Online [www.sqa.org.uk/files\\_ccc/EA\\_Report\\_ArtDesign\\_SG.pdf](http://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/EA_Report_ArtDesign_SG.pdf)

Scottish Qualifications Authority (2012) *Statistics 2011*. Online at [www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/57517.html](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/57517.html)

## NOTES

- 1.- The term 'south of the border' refers to England.
- 2.- Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is the new national curriculum for Scottish Schools.implemented

in 2010 for learners age 3-18 years (Education Scotland, 2013).

- 3.- A 'principal teacher' is a promoted position within Scottish schools and comes with subject leadership responsibilities.
- 4.-The curricular area of Health and Wellbeing includes religious and moral education and physical education and it is intended to ensure that children and young people develop the knowledge and understanding, skills, capabilities and attributes, which they need for mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing. The latter being a particular problem for Scotland, with above average levels of childhood obesity.
- 5.- For National Qualifications the SQA have traditionally examined art and design work in one centralized location.
- 6.- National 4 is the new exit award and replaces Standard Grade and Intermediates, awarded following a period of around 4 years of study.
- 7.-The 'expressive unit' consists of three A2 sheets, which includes the students practical investigation and up to two A2 sheets on development of ideas and a final solution or outcome.
- 8.-National 4 and National 5 are the new state examinations for the Scottish secondary phase.