

Tuesday 15 June - The French Institute

SESSION 1: Visual Arts and Cross Curricular Approaches to Education – Chair: Clive Gray (De Montfort University)

Transcription of John Steers' presentation

John Steers, The National Society for Education in Art and Design - a leading body in the field of arts education.

I want to talk about cross-curricular planning within the new secondary curriculum. We are not really sure at this stage if it will survive the new government- I sincerely hope it does. The new curriculum is very much concerned with how subjects inter-relate and can complement each other.

The curriculum is organised around three main questions:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- How can we best organise things?
- How we will know if we've done it and done it well enough?

The aims - successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens are just headlines and behind that are a lot of other more significant aims. It's not all statutory; much of it is guidance only. There is a list of subjects and one great achievement here is these subjects. For the last twenty years subjects have been ranked in order of importance: English, science and maths at the top and art, physical education and music at the end. Now it's in alphabetical order with art and design at the front. We don't know whether this is in jeopardy or not at the moment. With regards to whole curriculum dimensions they are cultural identity and diversity, healthy life science, community participation, enterprise, global dimensions and sustainable development, technology and the media, creativity and critical thinking. There is nothing compulsory about working in a cross-curriculum way. Actually when you stop to think about it poor old Michelangelo did have a lot to contend in terms of technology and religion. I think the Sistine Chapel was a cross-curricula project.

Miss Walters who is the architect of the new secondary curriculum explains the purpose of the cross-curriculum agenda in that way. The important thing is it is a way of enriching the curriculum, a way of making it more coherent and it's a way of avoiding the repetition that existed in the curriculum. After all, knowledge in the world is not confined to 14 subjects in their separate little boxes.

What did the new curriculum provide for young people? The statutory aims are really important, some key expectations, it is always about raising standards. The important one is a more coherent curriculum, a cross-curricular dimension that promotes coherence between subjects to help learners make effective links in their learning, it is much more flexible than the one they had before, it provides opportunities for schools to localise the curriculum, in one sense it is no longer a national curriculum but a much more a local one. It is a lot less prescriptive. Behind these three headlines, there are about 28 other aims. The interesting thing about that is although they are aims for the

whole curriculum, virtually all if not all can be addressed through art and design with a little imagination. They can provide a stimulus to curriculum planning, by thinking consciously about how can we address one or two or more of these aims through art and design in the light of any particular project. It is also interesting that when you analyze the key concepts and processes, of all the statutory subjects in the curriculum, there is a great deal of overlap. Creativity for example crops up in 7 out of 14 statutory subjects. In fact the key concepts for English language and for art and design are identical in terms of their creativity, competence, cultural understanding and critical understanding.

The QCDA, the organisation responsible for the new curriculum and which the new government said they were going to axe says this is how you can go about organising compelling/ motivating learning experiences. Thinking about the cross-curriculum dimensions- clearly there are a lot of things that have to be thought about if this is going to be done in a sensible way.

We spent three years talking to art and design teachers, mainly to heads of department across the country. It is very clear that many of them felt very enthusiastic about the notion of developing more in the way of cross-curricula teaching. There were no instructions to do it but it was simply suggested that there are times when projects will be better if you work with colleagues both inside school and outside school to enrich that particular project. Or indeed to be available to work with colleagues from other subjects where art and design can enrich learning in another subject area. One of the things we were asked to do was to produce a number of videos in schools demonstrating the kind of things that might be done. We also asked people to send in case studies with work that they'd done that they thought were successful in relation to the new secondary curriculum. What was surprising was that 90 % of those projects that teachers voluntarily sent in to us to post on the web as examples were cross-curricula. Clearly there was a message coming through there to art and design teachers that this is a jolly good thing and well worth following up as it does produce interesting work. On the NFCA.org there is a whole section devoted to the new secondary curriculum. There are videos, which demonstrate cross-curricular activities. Take a look at it.

In addition to that there are a whole series of case studies on the website organised under those key questions: what were you trying to achieve etc. I am very sure that this has been a good development, but the thing I would stress is what makes it worthwhile is when teachers come together because there is a genuine need or a genuine realisation that if they work together on a particular project, like the pin-hole camera, bringing in the science element, bringing in the art element, bringing in ICT, using ICT to turn them into three dimensional images. There was a lot of science, ICT and art and design. It worked because all the teachers felt keen about it. In the past there have been times when we have talked about teaching using themes but these have been externally imposed eg. Everyone has to do something on the theme of green or the red squirrel, which is daft, it doesn't work.

I feel very good about the developments that have been taking place. If I can do anything to stop our Secretary of State destroying the good work that's been going on, I will do so.