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Introducing a recent Routledge publication on curricula models for teaching Critical and Contextual Studies: Rintoul (2017) 'Integrating Critical and Contextual Studies in Art and Design: possibilities for post-compulsory education'

Critical and Contextual Studies, Visual Culture, Visual and Cultural Studies, Art History and Contextual Studies, are some of the many terms in circulation for a kind of formalised 'theory' in art and design education at all levels. Notwithstanding important differences, these terms allude to a common curricula space that has a turbulent relationship history with studio/practice based elements of an art and design course. This aspect of an art and design course will be labelled here as Critical and Contextual Studies (CCS).

CCS is in a state of flux and agitation; it varies in design and delivery from institution to institution, and that comes into sharp relief at the point when students opt to study art and design full time, ie on Further Education courses (for 16-19 year olds) or at Higher Education institutions (for 18+ year olds). At best the unresolved shape of CCS offers flexibility; CCS can be tailored to accommodate available resources and to satisfy student dispositions and staff specialisms at individual institutions. This flux and agitation also provides a healthy metaphorical reminder that 'theory' is not static; re-forming and re-making is as pertinent to materials handling as it is to the handling of critical theory. At worst, however, the lack of a national (or sometimes even institutional) standard for CCS provision creates ambiguity among staff. Consequences of this might include a default to designing CCS provision merely for assessment or replicating the (likely outmoded) delivery and content that teaching staff experienced in their own art and design education.

There have been no formal policy recommendations on CCS since the 1960s when Coldstream reported that 'the history of art should be studied and should be examined for the diploma...About 15 per cent of the total course should be devoted to the history of art and complementary studies' (HMSO: 1960: 8). Lack of formal policy recommendations is no bad thing; it leaves space for discussion. And one aspect of the discussion that recurs without resolve is the relationship between CCS and studio practice; namely, how to integrate CCS with studio practice. This is the focus of my recently published research in this area: 'Integrating Critical and Contextual Studies in art and design education: possibilities for post-compulsory education' (Rintoul, 2017).

The book begins with a broad historical mapping of CCS within the changing character of English art and design education since the nineteenth century, positioned in an international context. Among other themes, there follows discussion on demystifying 'intuition' (including propositions for intuition as a way of synthesising complex ideas, making the case for intuition as integral to the rigour of art and design as a subject), the reification of the term 'theory', identifying where integration resides in a student journey, and assessing the educational benefits of an integrated curriculum. In the concluding chapters I make recommendations for CCS design in order to facilitate the most interesting integrative practices and to support in students the development of a critical creative practice.

The research underpinning the book was a mixed methods study combining a national survey of CCS provision on Extended Diploma in Art and Design courses (a two year art and design course usually taken by students aged 16-18, and increasingly a route to university) with five in-depth qualitative Extended Diploma in Art and Design case studies. The survey allowed a broad mapping of the field and provided a secure basis on which to choose five case studies; the qualitative case study work included observation, interviews with staff and students, and the production of visual representations by students.

One aspect of the analysis involves examining the lecture theatre and the studio as the common sites for CCS and studio practice respectively. While both of these sites support the critical thinking that is key in art and design education, they typically construct and maintain discrete 'learning cultures' or 'communities of practice' in the terms of Lave and Wenger's (1991) 'Situated Learning'. Throughout the course, students learn and rehearse the cultural codes of these spaces. In so doing they progress from being – to use Lave and Wenger's terms - 'legitimate peripheral participators' or 'newcomers' to becoming 'full participants' or 'master practitioners' of these distinct cultures. These concepts are a useful reminder of the socially constructed nature of these two spaces and their uses. Far from being mere names of spaces, the studio and the lecture theatre represent distinct ways of thinking and learning (theoretical, academic, written and codifiable in the lecture theatre; material, visual, live, embodied and tacit in the studio). Given this distinction, does integrating CCS necessitate an eradication of the lecture theatre?

There are two common conjectures that I debunk in the book. The first is the assumption that non-integrated approaches, such as those manifesting in the curriculum as a lecture theatre / studio divide, are outmoded and belong to mid-century ideals of art education and false binaries— whereas an integration that merges CCS with studio practice is perceived as more progressive. The second is the assumption that integration ought to be immediate; students generally value immediacy to achieve a grade that counts towards the qualification, and institutions value immediacy in order to meet assessment and results targets. In response to these conjectures and through data analysis I make an argument for discrete delivery as a support to, rather than a deterrent to, integration and I suggest that immediacy might not be in the interests of student empowerment or the most interesting integrative practice. Immediacy rarely provides a successful and developed integration of CCS. It is more meaningful or valuable to see the process of integration as cumulative and rhizomatic, unpredictably surfacing at various points and always developing and in process.

A pedagogical model where integration is in process and manifests at a future (unspecified) point might not sound like a useful educational approach, but I propose that curricula can be designed to accommodate this, by delivering separate building blocks (including CCS) from which students are empowered to select in their own sense-making. In the book I recommend a model that I term 'Intuitive Integration', where curricula are designed in this way as discrete elements open for synthesis. I suggest that this synthesis is actioned through intuitive skill (building here on discourse on intuition in creative practice, following Jarvis, 2007; Melrose, 2009; Fisher and Fortnum, 2013). Outcomes in the 'Intuitive Integration' model are not predictable, as this model locates integration within the individual student rather than in the curriculum. Through my analysis, I posit that the 'intuitive integration'

model empowers students to form sophisticated connections that manifest in the most interesting critical creative practice.

References:

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Rintoul (2017) *Integrating Critical and Contextual Studies in Art and Design: possibilities in post-compulsory education*. Oxon and New York: Routledge

Illustrations:

Figure 1: Book cover, Rintoul (2017)

Figure 2: Laurentius de Voltolina, *Medieval manuscript of a lecture theatre in Bologna, Italy*, c.1300s

Figure 3: Perry Ogden, *Francis Bacon's Kensington studio*, 1992

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