

**A SOCIAL MODEL OF LEARNING  
CONSTRUCTED FROM THE  
PERCEPTIONS OF MARGINALISED ART  
AND DESIGN STUDENTS**

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## ABSTRACT

A social model of learning is proposed on the basis of findings from an investigation conducted in order to understand the learning experiences of some institutionally marginalised students within the art and design sector of post-16 British education. The research thus contributes to the growing body of generic knowledge about student experience and forms a significant addition to the limited number of studies of learning experience specific to art and design. The focus of research and the researcher's professional interest in art and design combine to determine an eclectic and researcher inclusive approach to the methodology.

Juxtaposing institutional practice in post-16 art and design with theoretical precepts drawn from the wider field of education for adults shows that marginalisation is a social rather than academic phenomenon. It also reveals a paucity of studies about student learning experience in the sector, thereby providing a rationale for conducting a systematic investigation.

Phenomenological analysis of accounts provided by marginalised students shows that they explicitly construct learning as a holistic experience of continuously coping with diverse practical circumstances and conflicting ideas in a dynamic of changing self-perceptions. On these grounds, the findings from this investigation are hypothesised as a social approach to learning. Following substantiation by juxtaposition with established theoretical positions and

comparable studies of practice, the hypothesis is proposed as a social model of learning.

It is argued that under current circumstances the approach of students hitherto marginalised in art and design is likely to become typical of most future students in the sector. Deploying the social model of learning in conjunction with the liberal apprenticeship model typical of art and design institutions would therefore enable the sector to respond more effectively and positively to challenges posed by the prevailing socio-economic circumstances and government imperatives to widen participation.

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## INTRODUCTION

This research is rooted in our daily experience that seeking to understand the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of other people is a complex undertaking. Though they are accordingly various, the reasons for embarking on the research collectively determine an organic relationship between its guiding ethos, conduct and outcomes. In the widest frame, the intention is that it should contribute to the emergent body of knowledge about student experience. Part of the motivation is also to debate issues around the current identity and function of art and design as a sector of post-16 British education. Other motives are more immediate, and localised in my practical experience as a teacher and manager in the sector. This network of professional and personal motivation generates a particular approach to the methodology of the research.

### MOTIVES FOR THE RESEARCH

In recent years, the need to understand the views held by students about their own educational experience has gathered momentum in response to successive government policies to increase the range of people engaged in post-16 education (Tight, 1996; Silver and Silver, 1997; Williams, 1997; Bourgeois and others, 1999). Sections of the population, who on account of economic, social, personal, logistic or cultural circumstances, would not previously have considered the possibility, have been encouraged to undertake access courses and introductory programmes in order to enter higher education. However educationally laudable and beneficial such opportunities and recognition may be in personal terms for individual students, it has to be acknowledged that widening participation is also an economic issue for institutions. The policy, which is rooted in government imperatives to increase the employability of the

population in the light of changing economic circumstances (Dearing, 1997), is being implemented through a variety of devices, including a national system for re-directing the expenditure of further education funds. The recently established Learning and Skills Council and its forty seven regional branches have been given the specific mission, amongst others, of raising employment prospects and levels of participation in post-16 education, particularly amongst social groups under-represented in colleges and universities (LSC, 2001). In purposefully linking distribution of funds to developmental policy, the Learning and Skills Council is reinforcing a general trend towards a market place ethos in post-16 education and the concept of the student as customer is now ubiquitous (Pring, 1995). This in turn has generated a two-fold approach to research in post-16 education. Concurrent with research generated by what might broadly be termed institutional perspectives (Raggatt and Unwin, 1991; Pring, 1995; Longworth, 1999; Harvey, 2002) there is a complementary research interest in what students experience as institutionally-based learning (University of South Carolina and Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic, 1986; Tight, 1991; Haselgrove, 1994 ed.; Stuart and Thomson, 1995; West, 1996; Bourgeois and others, 1999). *In the widest frame, this thesis is intended to contribute to current research into the identity and character of institutionally based student learning experience.*

Pressures associated with a more economic focus in post-16 education tend, in my experience, to favour immediate action at the expense of lengthier critical reflection. For academic, administrative and managerial staff in the art and design sector, this situation is exacerbated by limited means. Critical reflection on changing circumstances, though vital, is problematic since there is little in the way of authoritative sector-specific research upon which to draw. I have found a dearth of studies on how art and design students perceive their own learning

experiences, in contrast with substantial evidence from institutional perspectives. Data about how students respond to institutional provision has been systematically assembled by universities (Green and others, 1994; Wisdom, 1995). The point has now been reached where sophisticated surveys designed to gauge levels of student satisfaction as measures for monitoring institutional performance (Harvey, 2002) are embedded in nationally required systems of quality assessment. In addition, widening participation has seen a concomitant increase in the number of studies directed towards identifying (Silver and Silver, 1997), discussing (Thorpe, Edwards and Hanson, 1993), reviewing (Haselgrove, 1994 ed.) or conceptualising (Williams, 1997) what it means to be a student. Nevertheless, a number of problems remain.

Perspectives are either overwhelmingly generic or focus on courses of study that are academic rather than practical or vocational, and consequently art and design rarely, if ever, features in such research. Nor is the position any more helpful as a result of publications emanating from the sector itself.

Notwithstanding critical reviews, descriptions, accounts and polemics providing material about universities and colleges concerned with art and design (Hetherington, 1994; Buss, 1995; Swift, Jacquie, 1999; Furlong, Gould and Hetherington, 2000) there remains a significant knowledge gap about what students as individual people experience as learning. *Another reason for undertaking this research is to show that the learning experience of students in post-16 art and design education is a field that merits in-depth study.*

Other incentives link more directly with my responsibilities as a manager.

During the last fifteen years, a significant proportion of my work at The University of Central England, Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, has revolved round devising and introducing new courses and forms of study which in practice have proved to be effective vehicles for widening participation. As relatively new learning opportunities, these are considered successful because

they not only attract people who would not otherwise have considered post-16 education, but also enable them to progress to undergraduate and post-graduate levels of study. However, knowing empirically that these structures are successful is not enough, and this research offers an opportunity for critical reflection on why they are successful. *Investigating students' perceptions of their learning experience may lead to a deeper understanding of my own day-to-day practice in art and design education.*

This focus on student perceptions introduces one of the central motives for this research. Throughout my career, I have been continually aware that people who come into post-16 art and design education through pathways that are now grouped under the rubric of access courses tend to be regarded as somehow different, not only by other people in colleges and universities but by themselves as well. Though itself localised, this observation finds strong support in a wider, national context. Access courses in general have been formally recognised as acceptable entry routes to higher education since the late 1980s, but there is convincing evidence that admissions tutors and staff teaching on undergraduate programmes are taking a long time to understand and accept them (Stuart and Thomson, 1995). Older students, for example, are very aware that in various ways they are marginalised not only in relation to the predominantly youth orientated culture of universities (Bourgeois and others, 1999) but also by other students (Bunting, 2002). It is important to establish at the outset that this research is concerned with the ways in which the experiential phenomena of perceptions and attitudes are understood, recognised and made manifest by the people concerned. *Central motives for undertaking this research are to identify what is meant by the perception of difference in post-16 art and design education, and to understand how and why it leads to students feeling marginalised.*

A similar rationale of introspective enquiry underpins why critical reflection on my professional activities permeates the methods through which the research is undertaken. In daily life, few of us are easy with the thought of being regarded merely as objects of analysis or as anonymous items in a data base. I believe that by nature and inclination, we want to dynamically inter-act with people around us and with the circumstances in which we find ourselves. This includes those situations where we find that our thoughts and feelings are of research interest to others. Turning to the reactions of researchers, the activity of seeking to understand how another human being experiences the world raises a crucial issue. Since by definition the experience of someone else belongs to them alone, it is they who can best articulate it and only they who can communicate it to the researcher. Correspondingly, the experience of being engaged in research and reporting the findings is something that only the researcher can communicate. Even if it does not include face-to-face contact, such research inevitably becomes an inter-personal engagement between two living human beings, each with their own thoughts and feelings. For the researcher, it is not a question of disinterestedly studying 'them' but one of understanding 'us in this situation'. What is being studied is simultaneously outside and inside the mind-set of the inquirer and part of his or her role is to be aware of and take account of the resulting interactions in identifying research findings (West, 1996). It follows that any research which acknowledges this position can never be disinterested, and must at least in part form an interpretative undertaking mediated by the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the researcher.

This radical position concurs with Scott and Usher (1996) in taking it as axiomatic that in researching any educational situation account must be taken of the perceptions of the people concerned, including those of the person who carries out the research. The profound implications of this reflexive concept of

research for more traditionally scientific, and thus conventionally objective, approaches are well-known. During the last decade, reflexive modes of research into post-16 education have been developed (McNiff, 1993; Stuart and Thomson, 1995; Usher, 1996-b; West, 1996) to the point where they form an acceptable, if debated, tradition of practice (Cohen and Manion, 1989). In being simultaneously located in art and design and directly drawing on my own practical involvement in that sector, the present research extends the debate about reflexivity in research into particular issues surrounding practice-based knowledge. The crucial implications of this position for the methodology employed in this research are explored in greater depth in the next chapter. For the present, it is sufficient to bear in mind that this research is reflexive in that it recognises that any authentically systematic methodology ineluctably includes the presence of the researcher. *It is further intended that this research should form a subject-specific contribution to the emergent body of practice and theory in educational research that acknowledges the active and positive role played by the researcher.*

A final incentive relates to the present position and future prospects of art and design as a sector of post-16 education in Britain. As the research progressed, questions arose about the relationship between the way art and design functions and the purposes it serves. The sector is revealed as historically and currently ambivalent in its function. It is continuously instrumental in serving socio-economic and political purposes and is simultaneously emancipatory in providing the means of personal development for individuals (Macdonald, 1970). The current government imperative to widen participation is arguably the latest - though also one of the most far reaching - in a long sequence of challenges that have continuously re-shaped this peculiar balancing act. *In part, this research provides the means and opportunity to not only explore challenges posed for art and design by current socio-economic circumstances*

*but also to review some of its characteristic features in the light of a probable future.*

## INDICATORS OF STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Any investigation into student experience needs to acknowledge that it has already been recognised as a complex and diverse phenomenon (Haselgrove, ed. 1994). In addition to being framed within educational establishments that vary markedly in form and character, student experience is also conditional on the individuality of each person and is directly bound up with the wider circumstances that shape and surround him or her. It is also a matter of multi-valent human perceptions since what can be identified as student experience changes according to whether or not it includes the viewpoints of the student's family, his or her tutors, university or college administrators, government ministers, a plethora of agencies or non-governmental organisations, or employers. Consequently, learning experience needs to be seen as a complex sum of reciprocal and diverse perceptions: how students see themselves in the context of how others see them. Student experience in itself is manifestly too expansive as an area of this research, and in the pragmatic interest of arriving at useful conclusions, a sharper focus has to be taken. It is therefore proposed to investigate a specific feature, but in order to contribute to the wider frame of knowledge it needs to be one that has a bearing on generic issues about student experience. *Fulfilling both these criteria, the primary focus of this research is on how individual people, marginalised as art and design students, perceive their own learning.*

Conventional wisdom, expressed in such clichés as 'the happiest days of your life' and implied by the existence of alumni associations, might be taken as indications that this is largely a relationship in which the student feels close

kinship with her or his college or university. With regard to the art and design sector of post-16 education, such kinship can be discerned in what people recall about their student days (Allthorpe-Guyton and Stevens, 1982) though the loyalty they express can be coloured by nostalgia (Hassell, 1995). This echoes the notion of an alma mater, originating with nineteenth century public school traditions and residual in significant sections of British education until the 1960s (Haselgrove, 1994). More critical reflection (Frayling, 2000) suggests that at the time of being a student the relationship can feel decidedly otherwise. From personal experience, I believe that very few students conclude their courses of study with unalloyed praise for the college or university concerned. Though published accounts are certainly useful in understanding what learning can mean for individual students, it is more conducive at this point to indicate the focus of this research with some specific instances. The following vignettes are drawn from my experience of some forty years in art and design as a student, tutor or latterly as a manager.

Amongst the hundred or so students undertaking the same introductory art and design course as myself in 1961-2 was a man who was probably in his early forties. He was friendly enough, but we did not regard him as 'one of us'. Virtually all in our late teens, we had difficulty in understanding why someone of his advanced age would want to undertake the course at all, and he was a stranger as far as we were concerned.

My first teaching post included responsibility for a part-time adult education class concerned with clay modelling from the human figure. One woman had made a head with a particularly intense expression and I automatically began to talk with her in the way in which I would have discussed the work of a more

advanced student attending full-time. After a while, she said that she could go no further because our dialogue might lead her to question why she was about to go home and cook her husband's dinner, and she did not want that.

Several years later, during a conversation about how few of our degree students were other than white and middle class, an Afro-Caribbean member of staff said that her younger sister would never 'sign herself away' to a full-time course of study because she could not trust educational institutions, either socially or culturally.

As a Head of Department, I walked past a student notice board on which teaching groups for the year had been displayed. While the groups included students attending part-time, since they were time-tabled to study alongside those attending full-time, their names had been separated in the lists by a horizontal line. Some students attending part-time were gathered round the notice board and one of them said, intentionally within my hearing, that she noticed 'part-time students are below the line - again'.

Whilst observing a critical discussion conducted between tutors and foundation students attending for one evening per week, I was disappointed to see that the walls of the studio were still covered with impressive drawings produced by another foundation group attending full-time that had occupied the studio during the day. I was going to suggest that the evening students ought to display their own work as a background to the discussion, but - fortunately for me - the opportunity did not arise and it gradually became clear as the session

proceeded that my initial assumption, based on quality of work, was mistaken and the surrounding drawings were indeed theirs.

The most recent episode occurred in May 2002. In discussing with older undergraduate students about how the university could compensate them for attendance days lost through necessary building work on the premises, I suggested that additional days could be added to the end of the second semester in the summer. They immediately pointed out that additional attendance days at that point might suit younger students with few, if any, personal responsibilities but school vacation dates and previously booked family holidays precluded this solution to the problem for them.

While acknowledging the truism that every human being possesses individual characteristics that render him or her different from everyone else, these instances indicate that some students in art and design are recurrently and commonly regarded as more different than others. It might be thought that the reason for this sense of being apart is obvious. The very fact that the students in these instances are either older than others or more particularly conscious of their ethnicity, have other roles in life that are more important than being a student, or are at a different stage of personal development or engaged in another mode of study might be thought sufficient explanations in themselves. It would appear to be obvious that some students are perceived as different from others because they are indeed different. Suspending the rush to judgment for a moment reveals that this is a simplistic assumption. In some of the instances noted above, the awareness of difference is shared between

tutor(s) and student(s). Some instances testify to the way perceptions can change according to events and circumstances. Furthermore, the people are evidently different and similar in various co-existing ways, and perhaps for less obvious reasons than such visible characteristics as ethnicity, age or gender. Nor is it necessarily a personalised matter, since in several instances the sense of marginalisation results from institutional situations making it clear that some students are regarded by themselves and others as anomalies in the prevailing system. Finally, there is the more worrying implication that a minority of people are perceived as different because they do not conform with the majority, and difference is therefore constructed as almost their fault. Common to all these nuances and shifts of meaning is that difference is an intrinsically relative phenomenon: it cannot exist of itself. It is perceived in relation to that which is customary, preferable or desirable and hence something or someone else, not necessarily sympathetic, acts as its definitive measure. Whilst these instances suggest that the perception of difference might be a function of the dynamics of human interaction, it would be unwise to make prior assumptions and it is sufficient at this stage in the research to simply acknowledge two facts. First, that some students in the art and design sector are perceived not merely as other students with their own characteristics but as collectively and significantly different in kind. Second, human perceptions are not independent phenomena and can only be fully understood by taking context into account.

## DIVERSITY IN ART AND DESIGN

This sector of British post-16 education is arguably more diverse than its formally recognised identity (UCAS, 2002) would suggest, the name itself indicating at least part of the cause. Though in Britain, art *and* design is a desirable and customary combination, it is not a necessary one, as evidenced by long-established institutions, such as The Royal Academy Schools or the Ruskin School of Art at Oxford University. Notwithstanding such exceptions, it is revealing to put the standard British pattern next to the way in which other countries organise this sector of post-16 education.

The system of education operating at the Bauhaus in Germany between the wars and highly influential in Britain during the 1960s and 70s subsumed fine art, design and craft in an all-embracing concept of architecture as a type of ur-art (Gropius, 1935). However in British education, architecture had traditionally been regarded as an equal partner. For example, 'The Instrument of Foundation' drawn up in 1768 for the Royal Academy in London lists painters, sculptors and architects alike as its beneficiaries (Royce, 1986). Though the Royal Academy continues to include architects amongst its members, architecture has become divorced from fine art in most British universities. Post-compulsory education in India, which in many other ways has inherited the British model of higher education, includes courses of study in 'interior architecture'. Like British interior design courses, these are included in the curricula of institutions concerned with design education but in India these are largely funded by private industry and therefore exclude art. This is offered

separately by government art schools or university departments and customarily in conjunction with various crafts. The American system devised by John Dewey for shelving library books, and by extension categorising forms of knowledge, places textiles amongst applied arts and fashion amongst the social sciences. In British colleges and university faculties, there are strong industrial and professional reasons for textiles being closely linked with fashion to form a sub-set of design. French culture recognises decorative art as a distinct category with almost nationalistic fervour, whereas textiles, ceramics, jewellery, furniture and interiors are more than likely to be categorised in Britain as sub-sets of design. Evidently, partnering art with design to form a single educational concept is on the whole peculiar to Britain.

It would however be a mistake to assume that art and design is a fixed concept in British post-16 education, since categories of study within the sector are in a state of continuous flux. Until the formation of polytechnics in the early 1970s, most colleges concerned with art and design were known as ‘art schools’, despite being proportionally more concerned with design and craft than fine art (Hilton, 1991). Though the term ‘art and design’ is now in standard use to designate a sector of British higher education and categorise courses of study (UCAS, 2002), it is nevertheless mutable. By common consent, it embraces fine art, graphic design, fashion and textiles, and three dimensional design, but these clusters have never been tightly defined in practice. They were introduced by legislation in the early 1960s (Ashwin, 1975 ) but even then ‘three dimensional design’ had the distinct look of comprising all those established activities that did not fit into any other category. Inconsistencies abound:

fashion is no less 'three dimensional' than, say, interior design; the expressive ethos typical of theatre designers would seem to have more in common with that of fine artists than of industrial designers; and there is a seemingly endless debate (Johnson, 1998) about the location and identity of crafts. In recent years, various economic circumstances have combined to both compound inconsistency and hugely expand the range and number of art and design courses available. A comparison of course listings in connection with national admissions schemes for higher education (ADAR, 1995; UCAS, 2002) reveals how subject-based boundaries have blurred in recent years. In 1995, there were 391 courses offering forms of practice in art and design (ADAR, 1995) but this number is now at least trebled (UCAS, 2002). The comparative lack of precision in the current number draws attention to the difficulty of knowing from its title whether or not a particular course is encompassed by art and design. Looking at one sub-category demonstrates how the new technologies exacerbate this problem. By comparison with the earlier list (ADAR, 1995) in which 'multimedia' does not appear in any course title, the later one (UCAS, 2002) lists 130 which include the term. While some of these, such as Multimedia Art, clearly fall within traditional art and design boundaries, others simply classified as Multimedia may or may not, depending on the precise nature of the course involved. The titles of UCAS courses in 2002 illustrate the further point that the boundaries of courses identifiably within art and design are often less distinct than they were in 1995. A minority continue to be identified according to a recognised profession, Theatre Art, Theatre Design or Theatre Studies for example. However, UCAS now employs generic headings such as Design Studies or Creative Art to cover large numbers of courses which

combine art, design, media and other activities in myriad ways. When these course classifications are additionally considered in relation to the mercurial nature of professional and vocational practice (Schön, 1987; Eraut, 1994; Pring, 1995) the concept of art and design has to be accepted as loosely defined. Overlapping categories, institutional variations, inconsistency and constant change are common enough to justify taking a pragmatic view of this matter. For the purposes of this research, the art and design sector includes all post-16 teaching and learning in those schools, colleges, institutes, academies and university faculties which claim to be concerned with some form of practice in art and design.

In offering a working identity for the location of this research, the preceding statement also draws attention to the ostensible function of art and design. Though its name indicates that it is dedicated to preparing students to become artists or designers, the sector in fact has a wider vocational role. A recent study (Daniel, 2002) shows that a high proportion of undergraduate students in fine art and jewellery design anticipate that their acquired skills will enable them to eventually find generic or mixed forms of employment, albeit more or less related to their studies. Placing other findings of the study alongside those of an earlier and more comprehensive survey (Harvey and Blackwell, 1999) confirms that while the majority of students do eventually gain employment more or less related to the professional field of practice for which they were specifically prepared, 20% are employed as makers, business people or communicators in other facets of 'the creative industries'. Though still amorphous and open to

interpretation in relation to education (LSC, 2001), this term is potentially useful. The art and design sector is unlike others in post-16 education where there is a direct and structured link between what is studied and consequent employment, not least because both are often under the control of a well-established and authoritative professional body. Nursing and the law present good examples of where the field of study is synonymous with the subsequent field of professional practice. Though art and design lacks this tidy relationship, the behaviour of the practitioners it produces closely corresponds with that which has been identified as typical of the professions (Eraut, 1994). While art and design includes a large number of highly specific career routes, each with its own job-related title, the creative industries offers a serviceable name for the total field of professional employment for which the sector acts as preparation..

*For the purposes of this research, art and design is that vocational sector of British post-16 education which effectively equips people with the necessary practical, intellectual and personal skills and capabilities to become professional practitioners in the myriad commercial, manufacturing and communication facets of the creative industries.*

Further evidence of diversity in art and design emerges in considering its more tangential function. The public and instrumental role of the sector as a provider of training and education in preparation for professional employment in the creative industries is peculiarly intertwined with a private and social role. Teaching methods in art and design encourage students to develop self-reliant ways of working as an appropriate part of preparation for creative professional employment (Schön, 1987). This naturally involves acquiring the capacity to

question whatever presents itself as the status quo, which in terms of the creative industries means the current state of the market. However, art and design students are at the stage immediately prior to entering the commercial world and for them the status quo which is open to question naturally includes the stance of their tutors and the ethos of their course of study (Furlong, Gould and Hetherington, 2000). Explicitly accepted and openly advocated in the sector, this has a particular effect on the character and conduct of the institutions concerned.

For the purposes of this research, the term 'institution' means all those colleges, institutes, university faculties, mono-technics, departments of sixth form colleges, specialist schools and private foundations which historically and currently claim to provide any form of post-16 art and design education or training. Dedicated institutions, for the most part originally established at the behest of local or central government (Macdonald, 1970), have traditionally accepted their long standing responsibilities as training providers for industry and the relevant professions, and to this day rely substantially on government funding. Despite this dependency, they have paradoxically developed an anti-establishment role as socially and governmentally sanctioned centres of romantic individualism, cultural rebellion and, occasionally, near-anarchy (Ashwin, 1982; Hilton, 1991). This is apparent in the way that historical and personal accounts of art college life tend to focus on charismatic personalities, unorthodox behaviour and episodes of student dissent (Allthorpe-Guyton and Stevens, 1982; Ashwin, 1982; Hassell, 1995). It is also a matter of popular image. During the last forty years, a remarkably large number of highly successful

popular musicians started their careers in art schools for no other discernible reason than that they saw them as localised focus points for youthful non-conformity and cultural dissent (Melly, 1972). As no doubt did their parents, since from my experience of attending schools careers evenings, some parents still think of art schools as places of raffish irresponsibility that inevitably lead to their sons or daughters starving in a garret. Within the general social framework, the role of art and design institutions is essentially ambivalent: they are valued as a means of developing individual freedom to create new ideas but mistrusted for the very same reason.

The propensity to dissent and emphasise individual liberty in art and design institutions takes on a different slant when seen from the point of view of artists-as-tutors (Hetherington, 1994; Swift, Jacquie, 1999; Furlong, Gould and Hetherington, 2000). Professional practitioners functioning as tutors value art and design institutions as places of work in a number of ways. They regard them as reasonably dependable sources of income (Thompson, 1994) but, more importantly for many, as facilitating self-development and opportunities for inter-action with like-minded individuals (Sacks, 1999). Artist-as-tutors see themselves as professionals in charge of their own identity and jealously guard their own freedom of choice and action while functioning within institutions. They derive personal benefit from institutions but tend not to see this as a reason for supporting institutional structures or conditions, either at the time of attending or subsequently (Kent, Chapman and Chapman, 2000). Designers-as-tutors display a less personalised stance in taking more account of external needs and circumstances but in so far as they are also concerned with creative

solutions, they share the self-sufficiency and single minded professionalism displayed by artists (Lawson, 1983). In this respect, the perspectives of artists and designers functioning as tutors directly reflect wider theoretical positions on the distinguishing characteristics of organisations. A university faculty or college exemplifies what has metaphorically been termed a Dionysian organisation since, whatever the ostensible reason for existence, it depends on individuals who are there to achieve their own purposes (Handy, 1985). It thus reverses the accepted pattern of commercial or manufacturing management structures where the individual exists in order to help achieve the purposes of the organisation. Handy also makes the further observation that where a Dionysian organisation involves artists it rejects rigid classification and step-by-step linear deduction. Such organisations aim to create larger pictures, which they concurrently test for validity using the real world as a constant reference point. Taking Handy's concept in the light of institutional accounts and my own experience, it can be concluded that *art and design institutions are organisational structures in which the tension between conformity, appropriate to professional preparation, and non-conformity, inherent in personal development, forms a salient and creative feature of day-to-day practice.*

## THE FOCUS FOR RESEARCH

Placing this type of institutional ethos next to those personal realities of students recounted earlier raises some pertinent questions. Why do some forms of individuality appear to be problematic in a sector of education that, at least in part, actively encourages non-conformity? How does a combination of age,

gender, social values, ethnicity or multiple demands on individual time - all ubiquitous features of human experience - come to have the effect of marginalising some students in art and design institutions? Does the fact that these questions can be asked, suggest ironically that there is a socio-cultural orthodoxy in the sector? Such questions resonate well beyond art and design. The possibility that educational systems can operate, albeit unintentionally, to the disadvantage of the very individuals for whom they ostensibly provide accords with established sociological definitions of institutional cultures which

... by the very fact of their existence, control human conduct by setting up predefined patterns of conduct, which channel it in one direction as against the many other directions that would theoretically be possible.

(Berger and Luckman, 1991, p.72)

More pointedly with regard to this research, an anthropological metaphor identifies academics as tribes who

... define their own identities and defend their own patches of intellectual ground by employing a variety of devices geared to the exclusion of illegal immigrants: ... traditions, customs and practices, transmitted knowledge, beliefs, morals and rules of conduct, as well as their linguistic and symbolic forms of communication and the meanings they share.

(Becher and Trowler, 2001 p.47)

This observation arises from studies of university departments in Britain and the USA which, though designed to cover a wide range of academic subjects, includes neither creative arts activities, nor any practice-based disciplines. Nevertheless, the traits cited above are equally typical of art and design institutions where coded language and inbuilt assumptions permeate daily activities. As evidence of this, course handbooks in my department now include a lexicon of frequently used terms, enabling students to assimilate verbal implications and behavioural codes as quickly as possible. Adjusting to life

within post-16 institutional culture can be difficult for students, and particularly for those who have previously experienced an extended break from formal education. In the light of findings from the detailed surveys conducted by Becher and Trowler (pp.25-27, and pp.208-212), those students whose experience forms the focus of this research would seem to qualify as 'illegal immigrants' in the territory of art and design.

Tension between individuals and institutions underlies the view (Haselgrove (1994) that the complex experience of being a student has to be understood in both a public and a private sense. In maintaining that only the former tends to be reflected in research concerned with student experience, Haselgrove says that:

Mature students have 'difficulties' with higher education because of the rest of their lives - financial, emotional and personal - impinging on the only role in which HEI are prepared to recognise them - as learners. The unacknowledged reality is, of course, that these roles have always impinged on students' experiences of higher education but the prevailing culture did not permit its articulation.  
(Haselgrove, 1994, p.6)

More worryingly, the non-institutional roles of learners can be unacknowledged to the extent that

Professionals' perceptions of student abilities, especially those of 'different' students who in one form or another are labelled by the education system, can limit student potential.  
(Stuart and Thomson, 1995, p.96)

Placing the student-orientated view held by Stuart and Thomson next to that of Haselgrove, alongside the institutional analysis of Becher and Trowler and the sociological perspective of Berger and Luckman shows that since perceived difference amongst students is widely prevalent and arguably typical of

institutional cultures, its currency in art and design is far from a parochial issue. The range of sources from which these views are drawn also highlights the point that the term 'difference' is currently used to refer to a variety of situations and ideas. Conversationally, it is used to identify someone or something negatively as 'out of place' but just as readily serves as a positive expression to mean 'pleasantly surprising'. Turning to more considered and purposeful usages, difference can be taken in a philosophical sense as a socio-political and cultural phenomenon (Hetherington and Munro, 1997). Following similar lines but more sharply expressed, the concept of difference is central to positively asserting feminist perspectives when critiquing male-orientated educational positions (Weiler, 1996). The meaning of difference adopted in this research lies closer to other perspectives on post-16 education which use 'different' almost as a collective noun to mean those people who have traditionally been excluded from educational opportunities (Stuart and Thomson, 1995). This usage is rooted in late twentieth century socio-cultural theories predicated on dualism in public and private identity (Layder, 1994). It is also evident that the concept of difference is an issue for educational research methodology. For example, attempts to refute the classification of Asian children's drawings as different within British schools are frustrated because the very concept of difference is embedded in the cultural preconceptions that inevitably dominate any framework for discussion (Atkinson, 1999).

Acknowledging these various strands of critical interest in the idea of difference, the term is employed for the time being in this research as a portmanteau of connotations until a more precise meaning can be constructed. Bearing this in

mind, the notion of subject in relation to this research is out of place, since one of the aims is to identify what ‘difference’ means in art and design, and therefore in a sense the subject does not yet exist. It is more accurate and useful to consider the research as being focused on *the recurrent experience of some students that they are perceived by themselves and others as different from the student norm and consequently marginalised in day-to-day practice within the institutional culture of art and design.* This focus on a multivalent phenomenon together with the intention to identify its meaning and significance carries profound implications for the methodology of this research, and these are discussed in depth throughout the next chapter.

# CHAPTER 1

## DESIGNING AN APPROPRIATE METHODOLOGY

The term 'methodology' is taken in a broad sense to mean both the ethos that underpins any research and the accountable system through which it is conducted. Since this particular piece of research encompasses not only standard methods, modified as necessary in the light of motives and focus, but also processes and techniques that are specific to it, this chapter is concerned with showing how the methodology is designed. The reason for including this discussion about methodology as part of the main text, rather than as an appendix, is that this research is characterised by a reciprocal cause-and-effect relationship between underlying ethos, knowledge creation processes, information handling techniques and eventual findings. Since it is taken as axiomatic that this relationship is not only indissoluble but integral, any discussion on methodology is inherent to the whole research. Though the resulting approach is necessarily complex, two dominant clusters of considerations can be identified and these form a convenient introduction to discussing the underlying ethos.

The uppermost cluster of considerations surrounds the question of what constitutes a suitable methodology. Pragmatically, it needs to be one that can usefully and productively be applied to art and design. Cognitively, it should potentially ensure that the findings are supportable as extensions of current

knowledge. Discussing how these two requirements come together needs to be set within a broader frame of educational research. Practice in education has been constructed as theoretically grounded in forms of enquiry, discussion or exposition ultimately derived from a variety of established bodies of academic knowledge, such as psychology, philosophy, sociology or history (Walsh, 1993). While research in education therefore tends to be hybrid in its methodology and variously disciplined, it is nevertheless held to be essentially impartial in the way it is conducted (Cohen and Manion, 1989). With regard to the present research, the philosophical position of Walsh on the practice of education is taken as acceptable, but the position expounded by Cohen and Manion on educational research is questionable. Acknowledging hybridity in methodology predicates diversity of choice, automatically moving the focus away from the authority invested in any single discipline. Without any necessarily procedural reason to choose one discipline rather than another, the door is open to constructing methodologies by applying processes and techniques of enquiry derived from whatever disciplines can be shown as useful or relevant. Furthermore, in being concerned with interpreting various types and levels of shared understanding, educational research by its nature challenges the conventional ideal of the impartial researcher. In so far as research is interpretative in purpose, human nature determines that its outcomes will reflect the background, interests and situation of everyone concerned - including those of the researcher. This in turn raises far-reaching questions about the polarisation of subject and object customarily embedded in scientific concepts of methodology. The implications of such questions for the present inquiry are detailed at a later point. For the moment, the general argument positions my

research alongside those approaches that explicitly reject the assumption of researcher impartiality concomitant with the quasi-scientific methodologies in favour of process-based disciplines which acknowledge the interactive nature of educational research (Scott and Usher, 1996).

Educational research specifically concerned with interpreting how people understand themselves and the world in which they live demands an approach to authenticity that eschews subjective/objective polarisation. Ends and means can be systematically related in order to construct meanings which achieve authenticity and relevance through the significance they carry - for the researcher, for others directly involved and for the wider research community (West, 1996). Seen in the context of this consensual approach to validity in educational research, designing the methodology for this research is less a matter of combining logical systems associated with academic disciplines and more one of following the key principle of fitness for purpose. Effectively this turns the spotlight back to art and design, which as the location for the research has to be taken into account in designing an appropriate methodology.

This second cluster of considerations centres on my concurrent personal and professional involvement in the practice of art and design. Written language customarily forms the medium through which research knowledge is communicated, but is itself a carrier of values. In accepting that language tends to shape how we think (Walsh, 1993), one has also to accept the corresponding position that written language is shaped by our own experience: it carries the imprint of how it evolved. This is so even in ostensibly 'objective' research

where the language used to report procedures and findings, far from being neutral, reflects the experience and training of the researcher, conforms to a preferred style of communication and is conditioned by an ethos ultimately derived from laboratory-based experiments. Turning to this particular research, it needs to be recognised that the language in which it is written has been to a large extent evolved in the context of art and design and therefore reflects the modes of knowledge construction associated with the practice of solving problems - visually and creatively. Extending this personal dimension from the means of communication to the ends it serves, part of the motivation for this research is to understand more about my own practice as a manager in art and design, and this further strengthens the case for a dedicated methodology. As a researcher, I am to some extent engaged in investigating an aspect of my own experience using language that reflects the matrix in which that aspect has been shaped. Though anathema to those disciplines in which the researcher is customarily constrained to adopt a resolutely detached position, reflexivity forms a second key principal in the present methodology. It serves to re-emphasise that this research is aligned with some of the more radical current thinking in the field of educational research (West, 1996; Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997). With its methodology based on a combination of the principles of fitness for purpose and reflexivity, attention is automatically directed towards the values which underpin this research.

## AN ECLECTIC ETHOS

The relationship between values implicit in this research and the ways in which it is conducted corresponds with the view that:

... methods are embedded in commitments to particular versions of the world (an ontology) and ways of knowing that world (an epistemology). These commitments are always held by the researcher, mostly tacitly. This means that no method is self-validating, separable from an epistemology and an ontology. Furthermore, every ontology and epistemology is itself culturally specific, historically located and value-laden.

(Usher, 1996-b, pp.13-14)

However, since my research includes significant variations on standard methodologies, the values embedded in it require more than tacit acknowledgment. Furthermore, the view that no research method is self-validating outside the particular cultural perspectives of its origins imposes a responsibility on the researcher to be explicit about how his or her enquiries are conducted and disciplined. This research is ineluctably value laden in that it brings an educational phenomenon into focus within a field that is ambivalent, employing measures drawn from one that is contested, through a methodology designed on the criterion of fitness for purpose and reflecting the researcher's perspectives. An approach is therefore required that can cope with the plurality of values involved and, on the principle of fitness for purpose, this is highly unlikely to be achieved through adherence to one or other academic orthodoxy.

The position is taken that in order to actively recognise any aspect of the complexity presented by human experience an essentially eclectic methodology is required. Theorists in various fields tend towards encouraging us to identify

with one behavioural camp or another according to how they categorise our thoughts, acts and feelings. In particular, there is a widespread predilection for polarisation which, notwithstanding customary assurances about intermediate positions, in practice tends to lapse into manicheanism by dividing human beings into two opposing groups. Organisational or educational systems based on psychology lead us to consider ourselves as either introverts or extroverts. Politically, we are expected to lean towards the left or the right. There is a pervasive tradition of philosophical thought that classifies what we do or say as either subjective or objective. Though no doubt pragmatically useful in making everyday decisions, polarising values in this way when trying to understand ourselves is counterproductive in that it reduces inherent complexity down to crudely oppositional caricatures. It is fundamental to this research that methodologies based on polarisation should be rejected on the grounds that they are effectively simplistic, and thereby preclude any understanding of the multi-layered diversity of human experience.

Taking an eclectic position on research recognises that our ways of knowing about the world are already varied, disparate and often contradictory. On these grounds, I would hold that building connections, rather than making further divisions, is likely to form the most productive approach in seeking to understand any aspect of human experience. This belief is at variance with that which holds that knowledge is best gained by dividing what is to be understood on the assumption that understanding each fragment aggregates to form an overarching comprehension of the whole. Deeply embedded in day-to-day activities as well as in more analytical thought, this essentially Cartesian view

concomitantly tends to impose a nexus of hierarchical relationships onto the fragments. The mind (intellect and spirit), for example, is not only distinguished from the body (material and physical world), but also and often in subtle ways regarded as superior to it. While the resulting 'culture of dissection' has achieved domination, at least in Western European thought, its victory takes on a Pyrrhic quality since it achieves knowledge by destroying the very interconnectedness of equal value experience which in a post-modern era attracts philosophical attention (Dale, 1997).

My research is directed towards understanding the relationship between students and their context of learning in art and design without having recourse to hierarchical fragmentation of their experience through either polarisation or dissection. Indeed, the reverse position is taken by designing a methodology in which differing forms of knowledge complement and interact with each other and thereby open up the possibility of synthesising new forms of knowledge. The methodological ramifications of this belief are discussed in greater depth later in this chapter, but here it may be noted that a very similar idea has been identified as a constructivist view of adult learning (Sutherland, 1998) and explored through related practice in education for adults (West, 1996). In summary, this is the idea that the learner takes responsibility in the act of learning for pro-actively building strategies which transform his or her experience into knowledge. Employing the reflexive principle for a moment, this thesis itself forms a case in point: I am systematically constructing new knowledge through building strategies for re-interpreting my own experience. Since this includes understanding how other adult learners construct their

learning experiences, the constructive position on adult learning is inherent in both the method and the focus of this research.

Since any fuller exploration of this overarching ethos would lead to a philosophical thesis about research methodology and one very different from that intended here, it is asked that this eclectic position be accepted. One point about its methodological impact however needs to be re-iterated. The eclectic position generates a synoptic approach through which new meanings are constructed as much from networks of connections as from linear sequences of reasoning. In view of the reflexive nature of this research, it is appropriate to draw on art and design to demonstrate what is meant by a synoptic approach and how it is appropriate for present purposes. We construct our understanding of colour from a network of knowledge forms, none of which constitutes an undisputed authority in its own right. How colour is manifest, what it consists of and what it means to us result from continuously synthesising the various forms of knowledge constructed by artists, scientists, psychologists, philosophers, musicians, ecclesiastics, poets and even alchemists (Gage, 1993). This also illustrates how the methodological ethos of this research parallels that of practice in art and design which prepares students to become professionals concerned with practical ways of building new knowledge. Artists and designers extend our knowledge of the world by reshaping its diverse aspects in beautiful (Read, 1951), allegorical (Banham, 1977), practical (Lawson, 1983) or provocative (Parker, 2000) combinations. Similarly, this research reconfigures marginalisation amongst art and design students in pluralist and constructive

ways with the purpose of extending knowledge about this particular fragment of human experience.

A final element in the ethos of this research methodology takes the form of a personal commitment to bridging professional knowledge and academic research in art and design. This research can be seen as offering a particular instance of a generic issue, identified by Eraut (1994), about the relationship between types of knowledge. In focusing on student learning experience in a sector of vocational education, the research encompasses two such types: academic, associated with educational institutions, and occupational, associated with professional practice. Though Eraut contends that research conjoins these types of knowledge, he recognises the bridge as problematic due to the dominance of an academic research system, which ensures that knowledge is framed 'according to the criteria of the research community alone - as codified, published and public' (Eraut, 1994, p.54). The panoramic problem presented by Eraut is reflected in the detailed position of art and design. Charts showing the government funding allocations resulting from the 2001 National Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) provide evidence for research achievements in art and design, a sector that includes both academic and professional knowledge creation (THES, 2002). However, research recognised through the RAE is 'codified, published and public' in approved ways. From my own institutional experience, valuable occupational knowledge is created in ways, such as design consultancy, which the RAE has difficulty in recognising. In order to see how my research relates academic and occupational knowledge, it is useful to draw

further on the views of Eraut (1994). He sees two ways in which academic approaches create professional knowledge through research. First,

... we should not underestimate the degree to which *unsystematised* personal experience affects the knowledge-creation process. In talking to educational researchers, for example, I have often noticed how the influences of their own or their family's education, or their friends in the teaching profession, or the anecdotes of their students have *subtly affected* their work.

(Eraut, 1994, p.55 - my italics)

Italics denote that my educational research is at a more advanced stage since it systematically incorporates personal experience and centres on evidence from students. While he draws attention to informal connections in research between academic and professional knowledge, Eraut also recognises a second and more purposefully interactive form of research. Though he considers it a rarity, he suggests that

... knowledge creation, knowledge use and continuing education are highly interdependent. Such continuing education could be for the academics as well as the practitioners, feeding both into their research and into their contributions to initial professional education (ibid., 1994, p.57).

On the grounds of being both a professional practitioner and an academic researcher in post-16 art and design education, I want to maintain that this resulting piece of research, as a knowledge dialogue between academic understanding and occupational know-how, forms an example of just such a professionally reflexive approach - though perhaps not in the way that Eraut has in mind. Establishing this epistemological position acts as a conclusion to discussing the overall ethos which can now be summarised. As a result of surveying the factors, beliefs, and the types of knowledge involved, *the ethos of this research is essentially eclectic in being characterised as pluralist, contextualised, constructive and reflexive.* The rest of this chapter shows how

this ethos determines and directs the general processes of knowledge construction and the specific techniques of information handling employed throughout the research..

## MULTIDIMENSIONAL PROCESSES

Since the focus for this research involves human perceptions, the knowledge creation processes through which the research is conducted inevitably reflect ideas about how we relate to the world around us. I start by connecting these processes with the methodological exposition provided by Cohen and Manion (1989). They categorise the means whereby people come to terms with their environment as experience, reasoning and research. Experience they see as the standard reference point that we all use in dealing with a new situation. Where our own experience fails, we turn to that of recognised authorities, but this is also problematic in that not only may the experience of one authority conflict with that of another, but also the experience of everyone is by definition partial, mercurial and mutable. Reasoning, as a more rigorous way of understanding the world, is regarded as a self-conscious process of investigation. Cohen and Manion consider research is an enhanced synthesis of both experience and reasoning in being at once more rigorous than experience through employing systematic processes, and more empirical than reasoning in that results are tested against reality. Research also has the valuable attribute of being self-correcting in the form of in-built checks and balances and by being conducted in such a way that is open to scrutiny by informed others.

Each of the categories identified by Cohen and Manion, here equated with processes of knowledge creation, is used in this research according to the principle of fitness for purpose. Indications of how this operates can be found in earlier discussions. In the Introduction, instances drawn from experience were employed to provide cumulative evidence for the existence of marginalisation. As a process of knowledge creation, this also highlighted that reference to recognised authorities is necessary in order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. On a larger scale, the methodology of this research presents an example of reasoning, since it posits the existence of marginalisation, investigates its manifestations, identifies it, accounts for it and considers its implications. Checks and balances are incorporated to achieve a synthesis between systematic investigation and empirical knowledge, and this present chapter in particular renders the methodology open to scrutiny by others. To summarise, the methodology in use here broadly operates within what Cohen and Manion expound as a synthetic definition of research.

The reservation implied by 'broadly' in the last sentence is significant in view of the ethos of this research. Continuing for the moment to follow Cohen and Manion (1989), the extent of the issue can be gauged from the way they account for diversity in educational research by reference to its roots in the ancient debate about the manner in which we understand the world around us. They distill the various viewpoints into fundamental opposites: either human beings are seen as responding passively to an environment that obeys its own laws and is independent of them, or they see themselves as active participants in their environment and initiators of their own actions. Cohen and Manion

identify the educational research methods used to support and develop these philosophical and moral positions as correspondingly in opposition. They say that:

Where one subscribes to the view which treats the social world like the natural world - as if it were a hard, external and objective reality - then scientific investigation will be directed at analysing the relationships and regularities between selected factors in that world. It will be predominantly *quantitative* ... However, if one favours the alternative view of social reality which stresses the importance of the subjective experience of individuals in the creation of the social world, then ... The principle concern is with an understanding of the way in which the individual creates, modifies and interprets the world in which he or she finds himself or herself. The approach now takes on a *qualitative* as well as a *quantitative* aspect.  
(Cohen and Manion, 1989, p.8, their italics)

While accepting epistemological diversity, I find that the way in which it is constructed by Cohen and Manion is unacceptable. They polarise clusters of ideas, concepts and methods as either 'subjective' or 'objective', and their general style of presentation and language favours scientific research, and they imply that qualitative methodologies diverge, more or less satisfactorily, from the fundamentals of quantitative methodologies. Though they acknowledge the value of hybrid positions, their summary lists showing contrasting features of the two concepts of social reality (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p.11) reveals an essentially manichean view of educational research.

The methodology of my research is designed to actively recognise that the world in which we live forms a nexus of social realities in a constant state of flux and that we construct our understanding of them as we experience them. Such recognition is manifest in the way processes of knowledge construction accord with particular purposes or contexts. For example, ethnomethodological

processes of enquiry are employed as best suited to collecting first-hand knowledge about student experience, whereas processes typical of historical research in education are used in considering knowledge expounded and reported by others. How such methodological diversity forms a coherent research approach can be visualised by analogy with the ordering of numerals on a clock face. Since we are ineluctably the agents of our own understanding, our knowledge is the sum of previous experience and future expectations as well as current perceptions, all of which can be combined in a variety of ways and are themselves subject to change over time. Far more versatile than digital displays, the circle of numerals on a clock-face offers a geometrical analogue of our knowledge at any one point in time. It enables us to visualise where we are at the moment, look back at what we were doing in the immediate past and take a perspective on where we might be in the near future. Through its patterns we can construct our daily experience in retrospective and prospective linear sequences, or in cycles. Using the hour and minute hands, we can also reconfigure our time in other ways linking across this linear and cyclic pattern. Similarly, research methods can take the form of reasoning from one transitional point to another and can also be used to construct knowledge through patterns of cross-connected arguments. *In view of what has already been established about the focus and ethos of this research, the graphic image of a clock face presents an appropriate and useful way of conceptualising the multi-dimensional character of processes employed.*

## RESEARCHER INCLUSIVE PROCESSES

However multi-dimensional in character and function, the processes employed in this research have a common root which can best be seen by considering a process that might at first sight have little relevance to a discussion about knowledge construction. That the apparently simple process of describing is in fact complex, since it necessarily reflects the mindset of the describer, is shown in the way that language is employed. Passive and active language modes have been respectively likened to a mirror and a construction yard (Potter, 1996). In the first mode, language can be passively descriptive in the way a mirror reflects whatever faces it. In this mode, the act of describing conforms with the conventional view that the value of a description is measured by its perceived accuracy in relation to what it purports to describe. The second mode of descriptive language is pro-active, though retaining the same requirement to be accountable to what is being described. Metaphorically expressed by Potter (1996) as a construction yard, it is closer to most of the descriptive processes used in this research and

... suggests the possibility of assembly, manufacture, the prospect of different structures as an end point and the likelihood that different materials will be used in fabrication ... The world ... is constituted in one way or another as people talk it, write it and argue it.  
(Potter, 1996, p.98).

In other words, the superficially simple act of describing can be a dynamic process of constructing reality. Our pre-dispositions are embedded in the languages we use to describe our environments, and while we might aim and manage to reflect what is already in existence, we also inevitably construct it in our own terms. Since this mode of descriptive activity is far from the polarised

certainties of true or false, it is sensitive to divergent values. A story, wryly told by a colleague whose paintings had been damaged by fire in his studio, provides a neat example of this. A valuation officer employed by his insurance company asked him how much a new unused canvas was worth. On being told the amount, the officer pointed to smoke-damaged paintings and commented that he would therefore value those, as canvases that had been used, at less than half that amount. The valuer and the artist saw the same physical phenomena but their descriptions diverged dramatically according to the values embodied in their respective professional languages. As will be seen in Chapter 3, the reverse can as easily be the case in art and design where tutor and student while holding different values converge in constructing a solution to a particular real life problem. *When the act of describing involves understanding the perceptions of others within a shared set of values, it constitutes a process whereby knowledge is socially constructed.*

The social dimension of knowledge construction has far reaching ramifications. To the extent that the researcher is recognised as an active participant in what he or she researches to that extent the resulting research can be considered as researcher inclusive, referring to the way in which ‘descriptions, analyses and criticisms etc. and the social settings occasioning them are all mutually interdependent’ (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p.33). Hardly a new challenge for educational research, this type of relationship between researcher and what is being researched has been systematically explored through reflexive research processes during the last decade (McNiff, 1993; West, 1996). The methodological position of such studies poses a serious challenge to the

objective stance of traditional educational research, the radical nature of which is revealed when considering how claims to knowledge made on the basis of researcher inclusive investigation can be regarded as valid. For such knowledge claims a

... multivalent logic is required which recognizes the dialectical quality of sense-making. Its validity principles are properly based on an experiential coherence which is neither insistently 'objective' nor ineffably 'subjective'. Validity thus becomes a matter of the authenticity of shared knowledge among a community of sense-making reflective practitioners. Although knowledge-claims cannot be substantiated in any formal manner, they must resonate with experience so that it is meaningful and insightful for practitioners to 'know' in a particular way rather than in some other way.

(Usher and Bryant, 1989, p.166 - their underlining and inverted commas).

I would claim that this research achieves such a multivalent logic. A dialectic on several levels, it actively seeks to reconcile concepts and theories that are customarily either polarised or at least seen in contrast to each other.

Coherence is achieved by maintaining a systematic approach to methodology in which experiential evidence, my own and that of others, provides criteria for assessing fitness for purpose. Lastly, this research translates Usher and Bryant's concept of 'a community of sense-making reflective practitioners' not only as academic researchers but also as the art and design sector of post-16 education in which I am professionally involved. This touches on another aspect of researcher inclusive processes that needs to be briefly considered. In describing a personal journey towards better understanding of one aspect of my professional concerns, and also in providing a vehicle for my reflection on that understanding, this thesis shows some commonality with biographical research (Erben, 1996). There is however a caveat in that biographical methodology can

slide into solipsism and this research therefore stops somewhat short of the view that

...in asking questions of others, I [am] asking questions of myself; and wanting to understand the conditions for effective learning in other's lives, I [want] to understand more about those in my own. All research crosses boundaries between self and others, professional and personal lives. (West, 1996, p.12).

Taking an intermediate position between Usher and Bryant (1989) and West (1996) connects directly with an earlier discussion about the 'subject' of this research. It was established in the Introduction that the research is designed to systematically and accountably construct an understanding of a particular phenomenon on the basis of evidence. It is therefore more appropriate to think of the research as bringing something into focus, rather than as subjecting a previously identified item to analysis. It now becomes apparent that employing this terminology avoids being ingested by value systems associated with polarised concepts of research methodology. If 'subject' is taken in the manner of 'objective' research language to mean anyone who provides the necessary evidence, he or she is effectively depersonalised to the point of being an inanimate component in a structure owned by the researcher. Though this may be as benign and justifiable as the hospital practice of removing individual identity tags of patients - jewellery, beards, personal clothing, etc. - it is just as unacceptable with regard to the feelings of the people concerned. If 'subject' is taken in a less technical sense to mean simply the phenomenon being investigated, the language again carries alien values, as it implies separation from an 'objective' researcher. The very word 'subject' is so closely meshed with 'object' that it is virtually impossible to use it without tacitly accepting in-built polarities and hierarchies. Used in their adjectival forms, the two words

can easily become morally invested with almost Orwellian polarisation: 'subjective: bad' and 'objective: good'. It is not that the chimera of a totally impartial language is being sought, but that the connotations ineluctably carried by the language chosen to communicate this research should be fit for the purpose. Far from merely a poetic alternative to 'subject', the term 'focus' as both verb and noun is at once more accurate and more appropriate. *Researcher inclusivity, defined as actively acknowledging the positive role played by the inter-relationship between the identity of researcher and what is researched, forms a key feature of the processes of knowledge construction employed in this research.* The reflexive ethos is also the rationale for drawing directly on processes of knowledge construction typical of art and design, the paradigm of which is juxtaposition.

## THE PROCESS OF JUXTAPOSITION

In considering juxtaposition as a process of knowledge construction, the discussion moves into less orthodox territory. As an introduction to what is meant by juxtaposition, it will be useful to start by examining the linguistic devices employed in this thesis for expositional purposes. The Introduction includes a number of instances involving students and tutors that are presented as indicators of the existence of marginalisation. The point is worth reiterating since, contrary to conversational usage, citing examples of the existence of a phenomenon does not constitute an argument for its validity. Examples are used on numerous occasions in the thesis with their proper purpose of clarifying what is being discussed in general terms by citing specific cases of its

occurrence. The literary device of metaphor is used less often, and with the more expressive function of making what is being discussed more immediately apparent. Metaphor operates by elision of (usually) two meanings into one and is thus essentially poetic since the reader is required to make an imaginative connection rather than a rational deduction in order to comprehend. With regard to this thesis, the devices of example, indicator and metaphor are not employed for the purposes of establishing knowledge. They are essentially expositional in making clearer or more vivid what is being communicated.

The use of analogy requires deeper consideration since it also is frequently mis-used in general conversation to either prove or refute an argument. Properly employed as an expositional device, analogy makes the characteristics of an unfamiliar item more apparent by showing commonality with those of another that is already familiar. Analogy thus operates in one direction in that the meaning of the compared item changes whilst the meaning of that to which it is compared remains fixed. For example, Becher and Trowler (2001) make a semi-humorous analogy between academic and tribal cultures (quoted on p.27 above). They expound an unorthodox view of universities by anthropologically likening them to more commonly understood communities. It should be noted however that tribal culture is not the matter under consideration nor is its meaning changed in any significant way through being employed as an analogy. Indeed, success in employing an item as an analogy depends on it forming a fixed meaning through which the yet-to-be fixed meaning is established. These points about the role and function of analogy are being made in some detail in order to distinguish what is meant by juxtaposition. First, the operation of

juxtaposition is reciprocal in that when knowledge items are placed side-by-side the meanings of both items change simultaneously in relation to each other.

Second, juxtaposition operates over a period of time since it poses a network of interacting meanings that can sustain extended exploration. In the third place and unlike analogy, which is a premeditated device used by one person to change the understanding of someone else, juxtaposition implies a balance of power between those involved. Because its network of meanings can be explored, juxtaposition can be as much a means of understanding for the communicator as the results are for the person to whom the communication is made. Lastly and crucially for this research, juxtaposition carries a generative function. Contextualising knowledge items by placing them side-by-side enables those involved not only to re-interpret both items in themselves but also to construct further knowledge based on those new interpretations. On these grounds, it is claimed that juxtaposition constitutes an accountable and transparent process of knowledge construction and one that is appropriate for the purposes of this research.

In proceeding to substantiate this claim, it will be useful to initially set the discussion within the framework of standard research methodology. Bearing with customary categories for a moment, qualitative types of research have evolved in response to criticism that quantitative methods based on scientific precepts tend to employ categories that are alien to the every-day life, issues and concerns of individual people (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). Though an array of qualitative methods have been vigorously propounded by their exponents,

those categorised as ethnomethodological are the most relevant to the purposes of this research. Following Cohen and Manion (1989), this is because

Ethnomethodology ... is concerned with how people make sense of their everyday world. More especially, it is directed at the mechanisms by which participants achieve and sustain interaction in a social encounter - the assumptions they make, the conventions they utilise, and the practices they adopt. Ethnomethodology thus seeks to understand social accomplishments in their own terms; it is concerned to understand them *from within*.

(Cohen and Manion, 1989, p.33 - their italics)

One pertinent feature of ethnomethodology is that whatever the phenomenon being investigated, its meaning - far from being absolute - is taken to be inextricably bound up with its context. Any action, perception or communication - significantly including the way people respond to researchers - is held to be fully understandable only when its time, place, circumstances and manner of presentation are taken into account. It could be claimed that this is equally implicit in quantitative research methodologies, such as surveys conducted with minute attention to procedural and statistical detail. This is the crucial point of difference: scientific methods by the very manner and circumstances in which they are conducted run far too high a risk of encouraging responses which do not correspond with those people might give under different conditions. Good examples of this are provided by student satisfaction surveys conducted by universities (Harvey, 2002). These construct student responses to questions about university performance as a collective barometer of institutional pressures, and are simply not concerned with how students feel about their own learning. While scientific methods are fit and reliable instruments for verifying the effectiveness of systems or measuring human behaviour, they are of little use as ways of understanding the thoughts

and feelings of living people. This is particularly so when the research focus, as here, is on how other people construct an understanding of themselves in a specific environment. For any relationship between people and their environment to be fully understood, the multi-layered context of both the inquiry and the dynamics of all the people concerned must to be taken into account. While the following examples illustrate the importance of context, they also present a cumulative rationale for juxtaposition as an appropriate process of knowledge construction in this research.

An instance of where the term 'juxtaposition' can be taken quite literally occurs in traditional approaches to teaching students how to produce a painting, irrespective of whether it represents the visible world or forms a self-sufficient structure in its own right. They are taught that a small area of mixed paint might look pinkish, for example, next to others but if these are changed it can then take on a greenish hue, and may change again when seen in the light of all the colours on the canvas. In other words, critical reflection in the action of applying paint forms a continuous process of knowledge construction which ensures that eventually all the colours aggregate to form a coherent entity in the form of an artwork. Standing back from this discussion for a moment to take a reflexive position on it, placing painting next to research methodology is itself an act of juxtaposition. It shows that painting, whatever else it may be, can be understood as a process of knowledge construction, clarifies juxtaposition as a research process and, through synthesis, further substantiates the hybrid and reflexive character of this research.

The argument for juxtaposition as a knowledge construction process can be taken forward by reference to museology. Re-constructing the knowledge of visitors is arguably a major function of museums and galleries and customarily achieved through chronological displays of artefacts using conventional categories, such as national origin, medium or previous owners. Though questioning these largely art historical methods is not new (Wright, 1989), alternatives are now being actively explored. In the Tate Modern gallery recently opened in London, one of Claude Monet's enormous paintings of waterlilies is hung directly opposite an equally large installation by the contemporary artist, Richard Long, in a gallery just large enough to hold both of them. This emphatic juxtaposition connects and transforms the two apparently dissimilar works in three ways. First, their being presented under the rubric of 'Landscape' simultaneously sets Long's installation in the genealogy of European responses to the natural world and relocates Monet's 'old master' amongst the environmental concerns of current artists. Each shifts the temporal and cultural context, and hence meaning, of the other. Second, the viewer is encouraged to see a connection between the gestural marks left by Long as he applied liquid white clay with his hands to the black painted gallery wall with those left by Monet as he trailed a brush loaded with oil paint across stretched canvas. The knowledge construction process here operates physically as well as intellectually, heightened by the way the viewer is unavoidably positioned between the art works. In addition to significant changes of meaning in relation to each artwork, juxtaposition facilitates synthesis as a third process of knowledge construction. The two artworks function interactively to re-interpret the act of painting as a performance in which an artist physically,

sensorily and cognitively engages with his or her natural environment and in doing so produces a visual record of his engagement. It is worth contrasting this juxtaposition for a moment with the more traditional hanging favoured by the National Gallery in London, where the viewer is constrained to walk sequentially along lines of paintings grouped according to eras of historical development in Western European painting. Here an essentially literary contextual narrative pre-ordains how viewers construct their knowledge. At the Tate Modern, an opportunity is provided for viewers to construct their own new knowledge through having to make sense, literally, of their physical and conceptual position between the Long and the Monet.

The role of juxtaposition as a process of changing critical understanding is demonstrated by a socio-cultural study of suburban architecture (Oliver and others, 1981). Illustrations of visual and physical features of suburban housing are placed next to accounts of various socio-cultural changes that occurred between the wars. This reveals, for example, that the type of windows and the town planning typical of suburbia were respectively manifestations of concurrent concerns with the physical benefits of sunshine and open air. Using a mosaic of such juxtapositions, the authors of the study not only re-interpret social change and urban planning in the inter-war years but also posit a new and positive concept of suburban living. In contrast with its prevailing image of dreary conformity, suburbia is re-constructed as an epitome of social optimism and success in achieving a desirable life-style. The authors of this study function in the same way as the painters or curators in the earlier examples of purposeful contextualisation: they juxtapose knowledge items not only to revise

the meaning of each but also to provide a situation with the potential for constructing new knowledge.

This sequence shows that juxtaposition is not a matter of absolute values nor proving truths. It is essentially one in which the ‘ validity principles are properly based on an experiential coherence that is neither insistently ‘objective’ nor ineffably ‘subjective’ (Usher and Bryant 1989 p.165). Furthermore, it is evidently a knowledge construction process that can be carried out with equal effect through critically handling materials, organisationally changing perceptions and academically re-evaluating concepts. It also reaffirms the methodology of this research as hybrid (employing processes drawn from related fields on the grounds of fitness for purpose) and reflexive (on the same grounds, relating processes to the focus of research). To further substantiate the apposite nature of juxtaposition, it can be noted that the process has already been used. Placing the personally negative experience of some art and design students next to the commonly positive image of art schools put each in a different light, revealed the paradox involved and thus generated the focus for research. It is now possible to give a somewhat general term a more precise meaning with regard to the methodology of this research. *Juxtaposition is taken to mean the act of placing items of established or accepted knowledge side-by-side, thereby positing a reciprocal context for each which not only changes the meanings of the items themselves but also carries potential for constructing new knowledge.*

Juxtaposition forms a key process of knowledge construction in this research, aligning it with the methodologies of those researchers who

... deal with multiple, socially constructed realities or 'qualities' that are complex and indivisible into discrete variables; they regard their research task as coming to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them. To make their interpretations, the researchers must gain access to the multiple perspectives of participants ... The researcher becomes the main research instrument as he or she observes, asks questions, and interacts with research participants.

(Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p.6)

With this definition acting as a summary of the processes that characterise this research, it is now possible to consider the techniques through which they are conducted.

## TECHNIQUES FOR DESCRIBING

Drawing again on art and design, an analogy serves to clarify how specific techniques for handling information complement and support processes of knowledge construction. The activity of producing sculpture can be regarded as a set of processes whereby the sculptor creates sensory and intellectual knowledge by shaping materials through techniques, such as industrial production or modelling by hand. For the purposes of this research, techniques are defined as tools for shaping information and correspond with the descriptive processes of mirroring, constructing and re-structuring.

The task of mirroring the constructions of others requires that they be reflected as accurately as possible and this is achieved by *the technique of suspending judgment*. It has been argued (Berger and Luckman, 1991) that the type of

inquiry associated with phenomenological approaches offers the most suitable techniques for dealing with this responsibility since it systematically avoids explanations of cause and assertions about meaning. To briefly illustrate what that means in relation to mirroring student experience, reference can again be made to the Introduction, where it was indicated that though some students are marginalised in art and design no assumptions should be made at present as to why. Judgment and what might appear to be common sense interpretations are consciously being suspended or, to use the term favoured by phenomenologists, 'bracketed'. The technique of suspended judgment taken from the discipline of phenomenological analysis is employed in this research, mainly because it offers an accountable way of guarding against the imposition of habitual and possibly limiting values on what may potentially be new knowledge.

Suspending judgment is not however only a means towards a more disciplined reflection of exactly what is presented to the researcher: it is also a technique for constructing more accurate descriptions. This is especially pertinent when the view is taken, as here, that we construct our environments in culturally and historically pre-determined ways. An archaeological analogy may clarify how the technique of suspended judgment is appropriate for this research. It is as if there are some irregular mounds in a field which, despite very little being actually known about them, are unquestioningly perceived as evidence of a castle or a battle. Systematic investigation is likely to provide more reliable and authentic information about the mounds and, if what is discovered is shown to carry wider significance, it may be possible to re-structure what is commonly understood about the entire landscape.

Other techniques are ancillary to juxtaposition in supporting it as an active process of knowledge construction, and also in rendering it accountable and open it to scrutiny. While already employed, these need now to be considered in themselves starting with *the technique of tracking*. In addition to when, where and how an animal moves, following its footprints can reveal its species, gender, size and health. Tracking instances of student experience in the Introduction provides an example of how this technique operates in this research. Continuity is shown by the period of time covered by the instances, and cross-referring them reveals that this is a phenomenon with a number of distinct facets. The resulting knowledge of the existence of marginalisation is grounded in a record of continuity and affirmed through a series of manifestations. Tracking thus has a formative role in identifying the instances as indicators of the focus for research or, to continue the hunting metaphor for a moment, tracking results in the knowledge that the animal, whatever it turns out to be, is out there somewhere.

For the purposes of this research, the technique of *mapping* complements that of tracking and also carries a constructive function. Whereas a map is generally understood as a diagram drawn to tangibly correspond with points on the surface of the earth, the activity of mapping is drawn from the field of topological mathematics where the correspondence is more coded. Mapping has the potential to become a technique for constructing knowledge, so long as judgment is suspended about what might be mapped and what constitutes a map. The London underground map is a classic example. Train lines are shown as schematic sequences of stations, taking little account of comparative

distances and orientation but highlighting those stations where the lines connect. Since the map is designed with the peculiar needs of the underground train user in mind, it is eminently fit for its purpose but seriously misleading if one tries to use it as a map of London. It constitutes a form of presentation in which

... A new pattern will be recognised only by an observer who has available, or develops, an appropriate range of mental sets, abstract or otherwise, upon which to map the data, and who actively seeks not to corroborate the habitual but to *conjecture potentiality*.  
(March and Steadman, 1974, p.30 - my italics)

Taking conjectured potentiality to be a prior requisite for constructing new knowledge, mapping supports juxtaposition by forming a technique for establishing authenticity. If a pattern or structure can be shown to be sufficiently congruent with one already accepted as authentic, then it in turn can be regarded as authentic. It would be a mistake however to see mapping as a technique concerned with absolutes of truth or falsehood, since lack of congruence can indicate other conditions. For example, conjecturing art *and* design as a sector of post-16 education conceptually peculiar to Britain was achieved by mapping its characteristic pattern onto those of other countries and finding a lack of congruence.

Another technique further confirms the point that this research lies broadly within generally accepted paradigms. Employing a diversity of techniques is a recognised research method for understanding the complexity and richness of human behaviour (Cohen and Manion, 1989) and one which coincidentally also employs an analogy taken from spatial relationships. In topographical terms, triangulation is used by structural surveyors and navigators to locate a point on

the surface of the earth as the crossing point of sight-lines taken from a range of measuring points. With regard to this research, this means achieving authenticity, not on the basis of proof assembled from a detached point of view and through a single research orthodoxy, but by establishing a sustainable position through taking purposefully catholic perspectives selected on the criterion of fitness for purpose. This technique involves citing research reports, critical studies, historical accounts, newspaper articles and art works together with my own experience and that of others as means of evaluating specific pieces of information. The *technique of multiple perspectives* operates rather like tightening guy ropes, the tensions of which pull against each other and serve to stabilise the construction in hand. Taking multiple perspectives therefore forms a recurrent technique in this research, and has already been employed to establish that art and design is ambivalent when viewed from the standpoints of institutional practice, professional careers, social image, and teaching interests. On a larger scale, marginalisation is brought into focus in this research as the crossing point of sight-lines taken from three primary points of view - those of institutions, myself and - most importantly - students.

With regard to the last of these sight-lines, there is a cluster of issues about the techniques necessary to understand the student point of view that can more usefully be discussed in Chapter 4 when they are integral to the course of the research. At this point, the overall methodology for this research can be summarised in three statements:

- in view of the research being located in art and design, the general methodology is necessarily eclectic with approaches, processes and techniques chosen on the criterion of fitness for purpose and in accordance with the focus and ethos of research
- reflexive processes that acknowledge the active role of the researcher in the interaction between experiential knowledge and systematic inquiry are central, and include juxtaposition as a multi-dimensional process of knowledge construction
- techniques correspondingly draw on an eclectic range of knowledge categories and, while mostly standard, include some that are designed to meet the specific requirements of this research

## CHAPTER 2

### PRECEPTS IMPLICIT IN EDUCATION FOR ADULTS

While there is very little published and reliable evidence for how art and design students perceive their own learning, it would be short-sighted to assume that usable information could only result from sector-specific studies, since another authoritative and substantial body of relevant knowledge is readily available. As observed earlier, generic studies of student experience have proliferated during the last two decades. For demographic reasons, these have served to direct attention to older learners and the Open University has come to have a central role in disseminating the results of critical studies and research findings concerned with the theory and practice of education for adults. Frequently produced in collaboration with The Society for Research into Higher Education, this authoritative stream of knowledge converges with that derived from practice within the older traditions of socially motivated education (Jarvis, 1991). Education for adults forms the focus for research and practical activities sponsored by the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education. There is also a parallel thrust to identify a distinctive academic discipline of adult learning (Usher and Bryant, 1997). More recent concerns are with practical issues attendant on life-long learning (Longworth, 1999) and widening access (Bourgeois and others, 1999). The emergence of this sub-division of the field of education draws attention to the fact that a higher proportion of the national body of students are now effectively adult. This point will be explored in depth

at various points below, but for the moment I would maintain that evidence from research projects, critical studies and debates conducted within the generic field of education for adults provides a means of addressing the knowledge gap that exists about the ways in which art and design students perceive their own learning.

## A PROBLEMATIC CONCEPT

Even if it were possible to do so, producing a synoptic account of education for adults or attempting to establish its basic principles fall well outside the scope of this research. Nevertheless, there are numerous features of current thinking about education for adults that are directly relevant, one of which requires immediate discussion. Despite its long history (Kelly, 1992), what is meant by education for adults is problematic. Some examples of publications over the last two decades demonstrate the point. Concurrent with and to some extent consequent on the remarkable success of the Open University, earlier publications sought to establish a theoretical base for teaching or to disseminate good practice in learning (Smith, 1984; Rogers, 1986). Subsequent approaches to education for adults were concerned with establishing a field of study and research (Usher and Bryant, 1989) and were linked to either concurrent demographic developments in higher education (Tight, 1990) or new directions in learning theory (Brookfield, 1993). Rapid changes in the national economy prompted a more economic focus in post-16 education and generated concern with the needs of learners (Thorpe, Edwards and Hanson, 1993; Jarvis, 1995; Edwards, Hanson and Raggatt, 1996). There were moves to introduce

alternative teaching and learning methodologies, either linked to increased interest in widening participation (Stuart and Thomson, 1995), shifts of academic concepts (Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997), or changes in institutional practice (Brockbank and McGill, 1998). Most recently, attention is turning to education for adults in the context of wider changes (Bourgeois and others, 1999) or radical revision in higher education (Boud and Solomon, 2001), and the political issue of life-long learning (Smith and Spurling, 1999). It is significant that a number of these publications have either appeared in several editions over two decades or include re-prints of earlier articles, both indicating a continuous state of evolution and revision. What is or is not included within the general concept of education for adults, what wider purpose it serves and, indeed, what it actually means are all matters of continuous debate, not least because it is unclear exactly who as students benefit from education for adults.

Though the idea that an adult is a mature and responsible person would seem to be beyond dispute, even cursory consideration reveals that the matter is far less straightforward. Recent national changes in educational funding through the Learning and Skills Act 2000 confirm the long standing habit of local education authorities in taking nineteen years of age as the point at which learners are classified as adults. For whatever reasons, an adult would thus seem to be someone who is chronologically at a stage when they could have completed the maximum period of school-based education. However, educational bureaucracy is a limited form of authority and the state of being an adult relates to changing social mores. If the proportions of birthday cards on sale in the shops can be taken as indicators, British tradition assigns twenty-one to be the age of

maturity but eighteenth birthdays are increasingly being celebrated as the turning point. More binding categories need also to be taken into account. An eighteen year old can hold a driving license which forms a measure of personal responsibility. He or she could also be married with a child which in our multi-cultural society entails a recognisable level of social and personal accountability. None of this however resolves the problem, since the capacity to behave responsibly does not go hand-in-hand with advancing years. Most of us, like King Lear whose fool observed that his master should not have been old until he had become wise, are mature in some respects and less so in others. Skills, knowledge and understanding develop at very different rates in each individual. Possession of an academic doctorate, for example, is no guarantee that someone can quickly calculate the cost of groceries in a supermarket. The central problem that an individual can be considered adult by widely variable criteria is encapsulated in the comment that

The problem of defining an adult - and a non-adult - is so great that at times those bodies with greatest experience of making such decisions have given up. UNESCO in 1976 determined that adults are those people whom their own society deems to be adult.  
(Rogers A, 1986, p.6)

Moving to more concrete evidence, specific instances of why adulthood alone is too relative, contingent and mutable a concept to form the reason for marginalisation amongst art and design students have already been recounted in the Introduction. The problem voiced by the student who had modelled the clay head was that she felt her life style and personal values as a married woman were being questioned, not that she was being talked to as if she were a younger person. The apprehension voiced on behalf of the Afro-Caribbean sister had nothing to do with her chronological age. The groups attending part-time

included younger and older people. Perhaps the most constructive approach is simply to accept that being regarded as adult is contingent on variable circumstances:

Adulthood may ... be considered as a state of being which both accords status and rights to individuals and simultaneously confers duties or responsibilities upon them. ... however, we also have to recognise what a heterogeneous group of people adults are. It is this amorphous group which forms the customer base or audience for adult education ... (Tight, 1996, p. 14)

Tight's observation suggests an alternative way of accounting for marginalisation. Might it be more a matter of neglecting the heterogeneity of educational provision necessary for such a group? If art and design were found to be somehow inherently inimical to the type of education suited to adults, it would go a long way towards accounting for why some students might feel out of place. Not surprisingly in view of the previous discussion, the first step in examining this possibility is problematic in that there is no generally agreed definition of what is meant by education for adults.

The position is especially confusing in Britain where 'adult education' came to have a specific meaning, particularly during the middle of the last century. It effectively referred to evening classes through which anyone could engage in life-enhancing education or acquire new skills, and unemployed people could increase their chances of gaining work. Practical or academic study could result in a qualification from a recognised national body, such as The Royal Society of Arts or City and Guilds London Institute. With voluntary bodies, universities, local education authorities and central government all providing classes independently of each other, opportunities were fragmented, localised and

isolated from mainstream education (Kelly,1992). Adult education was nevertheless regarded as a life-enhancing experience and it enjoyed immense and widespread public support. As Kelly points out in his prologue, this diverse pattern of socially motivated learning has changed radically during the last thirty years, not least through the Open University and the realisation that more formal education can and should continue throughout life. In the transition between these older and newer concepts, 'adult education' has come to carry the pejorative connotations of hobbies or spare-time activity - either way, not regarded by main-stream education as productive or worth-while learning (Tight,1996, pp.60-61). The more positive social values of adult education have been reframed through government intervention, most recently in the form of life-long learning (Longworth,1999). Coupled with the need to revise long-standing concepts of post-16 education in response to current economic and demographic challenges, this places the whole field of adult education, perhaps more than ever before, in a position that is both ironic and complex (Usher, Bryant and Johnston,1997 ).

In an attempt to reflect this complexity, the expression 'education of adults' has been proposed (Jarvis,1995, pp.20-23) on the grounds that it acknowledges the openness of the field and its relevance to mainstream education, and avoids the negative stereotyping associated with 'adult education'. Jarvis explains that

education of adults refers to ... any educational process undertaken by adults, whether liberal, general or vocational, and located in the spheres of adult, further or higher education ... [it] also implies that education is not completed at any age in the life span (Jarvis,1995, p.22)

Though as he acknowledges, the term 'education of adults' is somewhat cumbersome, alternatives such as 'life-long learning' tend to carry political connotations that are almost as heavily value laden as 'adult education'. Despite this disadvantage, his suggestion - slightly modified to acknowledge that it refers to a service - is the best available. *The expression 'education for adults' is used here to cover all types of institutionally based education voluntarily undertaken by people who regardless of personal chronology can be regarded, in at least some ways, as more advanced and experienced than those attending school.* This concept of education for adults embraces the learning experience of a twenty-three year old woman undertaking a full-time university course of undergraduate study in philosophy as much as that of a production-line worker in his fifties acquiring computer skills through attending evening classes at his local community centre. Nevertheless, there is good reason why the more limited field of 'adult education' should not be rejected along with the name. It has generated a wealth of critical literature which though disparate is pertinent to this research. Perspectives that represent some of the more salient positions in this body of knowledge can be juxtaposed in order to track any elements they may share. While this is not intended to produce a comprehensive definition of education for adults, it should result in precepts that are sufficiently authenticated by both practice and theory to serve the purposes of this research.

## AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The relationship of theory to practice can be used as a touchstone in establishing what is or is not an academically acceptable body of knowledge (Bright, 1989).

The deeply rooted academic tradition for taking a hierarchical view of this relationship has been defined as 'technical rationality' (Schön, 1987). Evolved from the post-renaissance Western European belief that methods associated with the natural sciences enable man to control his environment,

... technical rationality holds that practitioners are instrumental problem solvers who select technical means best suited to particular purposes. Rigorous professional practitioners solve well-formed instrumental problems by applying theory and technique derived from systematic, preferably scientific, knowledge.

(Schön, 1987, pp.3-4)

As an epistemological position, technical rationality is rejected with regard to the methodology of this research on the grounds that it effectively relegates practice to a secondary league of knowledge through constructing it as contingent on established bodies of theoretical knowledge designated as primary. Nevertheless, the concept cannot be dismissed as simply a matter of academic jousting, since it permeates through layers of social, political and cultural life. It is evident, for example, in the well-established prejudice that favours certain types of employment, such as law or medicine which are associated with scholarly achievement rather than manual work. In Britain at least, such distinctions are also directly related to social classes. Academically, technical rationality lies at the root of systems that distinguish between 'pure' and 'applied' research. Tension between the intellectual discipline demanded for theoretical discourse and achieving effectiveness in successful practice has

been succinctly identified as a dilemma between rigour and relevance (Usher, 1989). Despite earlier development outside the university system (Carline, 1968; Macdonald, 1970; Ashwin, 1975), art schools were subject to technical rationality in the hierarchical form of 'fine' and 'applied' art. As recently as the mid-1960s, the idea of fine art - the adjective says it all - as a pure creative activity that necessarily informed and inspired design practice in coping with the demands of the commercial world was a feature of government reforms in post-16 art and design (Ashwin, 1975).

The position of technical rationality as an all pervasive view of how theory relates to practice has been heavily criticised (Usher, 1989). It is inadequate as a universal model for bodies of knowledge because theory cannot tell us exactly how to practice, though it can act as a guide or exemplar. Conversely, situations and circumstances in practice do not provide definitive guidance for which aspects of theory need be employed at any particular point. There is always room for selection of reference points, interpretation and the exercise of judgment on the part of practitioners. Usher illustrates this by noting the familiar feeling of knowing how something is done but not being able to do it, and its mirror image of being able to do something but not being able to say how. Practice therefore cannot simply be a matter of applied theory, and the hierarchical relationship between theory and practice becomes unsupportable. The concept of technical rationality poses a further problem in that it presupposes an accepted, discrete and consistent body of theory on which practice can be based. Usher sees this as a major barrier to employing the concept of technical rationality in constructing education as an academic

discipline. There is no discrete body of theory to which education can exclusively lay claim. Rather, it draws on a variety of other disciplines such as philosophy, psychology or sociology, some of which are themselves contested fields of study. The problems surrounding technical rationality are compound since it also holds that while ends may be value laden, the means of achieving them are decided by rational choice, efficiency and effectiveness. In the field of education, means and ends continually interact with each redefining the other: they cannot be separated in a quasi-scientific manner. Having assembled these arguments, Usher rejects technical rationality as a corner-stone of education seen as a discipline of study and develops the idea that, under certain conditions, practice itself can constitute a high order of knowledge (Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997). For this to materialise, practice needs to take the form of a dialogue between theoretical rigour and practical relevance conducted by the practitioner during the course of his or her actions. Usher thus comes close to the concept of 'reflection in practice' (Schön, 1987) as a distinct form of knowledge creation and explains that this

... relationship between theory and practice is one that can only be understood in terms of particular socio-cultural contexts ... Here, the notion of a 'problem' does not refer to a universal or transcendental problem of theory and practice but is the signifier between the contest of different meanings of what a particular practice is about, what its ends are and how those ends are best achieved.  
(Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997, p.141)

Usher proposes that education is a form of knowledge in which theory becomes effective in action through academic disciplines acting as guides for practice.

Nevertheless, there is a problem with his approach, since establishing an epistemology tends to be an academic pursuit framed within the traditional

culture and pre-occupations of universities. Usher is concerned with the experiences of people, teachers or students, only in so far as they provide evidence on which to base a theoretical position. His perspective on practice is conditioned by the intention of justifying adult education as a specific sub-category of education within an academic framework. One feels that his arguments are addressed more towards convincing academic colleagues and less towards understanding the experience of learners. Though Usher's argument provides a useful analytical tool in this particular discussion, it circumscribes the usefulness of his ideas in relation to the wider focus of this research.

#### EVANGELISTIC EDUCATION FOR ADULTS

Another product of technical rationality is that it can create feelings of mutual distrust between theoreticians and practitioners. Something of this pervades the extensive debate about andragogy, which has been proposed as 'the art and science of helping adults learn' (Knowles, 1990, p.55) and is here considered as a case of theory evolved from personal experience. Knowles used his extensive practical experience of adult education in the United States as a basis for developing the idea that teaching adults is necessarily and radically different from teaching children because adults

... have a need to be treated with respect, to make their own decisions, to be seen as unique human beings. They tend to avoid, resist, and resent situations in which they feel they are treated like children...Adults tend to resist learning under conditions that are incongruent with their self-concept as autonomous individuals.  
(Knowles, 1990, p.56)

Despite, or perhaps partly because, of passionately arguing for his concept, Knowles' approach has attracted considerable attention. His tendency to rhetoric has led one critic (Davenport, 1993) to question whether Knowles' observations are descriptive (how things are) or prescriptive (how things ought to be) and whether he presents a theory of teaching or learning. Knowles' position is seriously weakened by being based on the notion that education for adults must differ from that provided for children since it provides for people who are older and, he assumes, therefore wiser. He makes the mistake of taking for granted that there is an all-embracing linear and universally consistent progression from childhood to adulthood, as if people learn in uniform rates across all aspects of their experience. In the light of this and earlier discussions in this chapter, it is not surprising that Knowles' assumptions have been criticised on the grounds that learning undertaken by older people has more to do with individual circumstances, characteristics and goals than chronological age (Davenport, 1993). Most damagingly from Knowles' pragmatic perspective, Davenport also cites studies conducted during the 1980s which show that students taught under andragogical principles did not necessarily benefit from the approach. Knowles has also been taken to task for his idealistic and abstract approach in over-emphasising self-direction and emancipation at the expense of recognising the practical realities of current education. In a world where students are encouraged to behave as customers but where freedom of choice is in fact limited by resource constraints, issues of context together with those of power and institutional culture are more important than differences of age. It has been argued (Hanson, 1996) that andragogy is based on an abstract concept of the individual but that learning how to cope

successfully in practice is more relevant to students than a utopian striving to achieve self-realisation.

A central issue for critics is that constructing andragogy as irredeemably opposed to pedagogy threatens to polarise the whole topic of education for adults. Though in later publications Knowles acknowledged this as a problem, (Jarvis, 1991), his style of presentation, notably checklists of common factors showing how pedagogy is a negative activity and andragogy a positive one, reinforces the image of confrontation. It will have become apparent by now that andragogy, a theory that on the face of it would seem to account for marginalisation, is in fact of very limited value to research such as this which explicitly rejects polarisation. The debate around andragogy however is of some use since it serves as a reminder that practice needs to be guided by critical reflection in the balance between rigour and relevance. Knowles was surely right about there being differences, but the understanding now is that he was wrong in constructing them as differences between pedagogy and andragogy, and that his methods of doing so are flawed. Andragogy as an overarching theory of education for adults is now more or less obsolete (Tight, 1996, p. 105) and the word itself tends not to feature in the general lexicon of education for adults, except ironically when criticising the approach of Knowles. The concept of andragogy is now more useful as a lighthouse signalling a source of danger rather than as light at the end of a winding tunnel.

## SOME PRAGMATIC APPROACHES

Critics of andragogy place considerable value on the practical circumstances of adult learning and this important factor has been taken as a starting point by others. This approach has been particularly developed in Britain, perhaps because of the diverse and fragmentary nature of its adult education provision.

(Kelly, 1992). Complexity due to a wide variety of agencies working independently, and not infrequently, in competition with each other can be simplified by applying the criterion of who decides what is worth learning.

Groombridge (1990) uses this measure to identify just three modes of adult learning. Prescriptive learning entails dependence on a teacher for what counts as knowledge. While traditional schooling is the paradigm, most first degree work in universities and learning how to drive a car are also prescriptive.

Popular learning is where a group of like-minded people decide what they need and what is good for them. Community groups and hobby-centred societies fall into this category. Partnership learning, when the curriculum is agreed by teacher(s) and learner(s), is typical of craft classes in adult education.

Throughout this typological exercise, Groombridge draws attention to the way in which values become entwined with forms and circumstances of educational provision, emphasising that education operates in the real world. An example of this is the conflict of interest that can occur when providing agents differ on what they consider to be appropriate in education for adults. Such conflicts can disadvantage adult students, especially where the demands of training for industrial employment take priority over liberal education as a means of personal development (Edwards, 1991). The rigour and relevance dilemma also

feature in two other pragmatic but differing views on how learning experience relates to practical provision.

One of the strongest and most influential exponents of this theme has been Carl Rogers. Writing from a background in psycho-therapy (Rogers C., 1983), he maintained a careful balance between promoting a cause and substantiating it through qualitative research. In doing so, he avoided the problems encountered by Knowles in evolving a theoretical position from experience in practice.

Rogers is particularly noted for his concept of 'person centred learning' which he saw as less a method of teaching and more a way of being. He described it as

... a set of values, not easy to achieve, placing emphasis on the dignity of the individual, the importance of choice, the significance of responsibility, the joy of creativity. It is a philosophy built on a foundation of the democratic way, empowering each individual.  
(Rogers C., 1983, p.95)

He defines the role of the teacher as a 'facilitator' for whom the primary task is

... to *permit* the student how to learn, to feed his or her own curiosity. Merely to absorb facts is of only slight value in the present, and usually less value in future. Learning *how* to learn is the element that is always of value, now and in the future.  
(*ibid.*, p.18 - his italics)

Rogers' stance is not an easy one for people living in Britain in the early twenty-first century, since it is difficult to share his idealism. His ideas have a peculiarly American slant in the combination of liberty, freedom and democracy, and his focus on personal rather than social development begins to look like 1960s-style narcissism. His views provide an uncomfortable antecedent for the type of self-fulfillment which the British media labelled as the uncaring 'yuppie' culture of the 1980s.

For many educationalists, irrespective of sector or level, maintaining the values associated with this liberal view of education is a matter of immediate practical concern. The long-established tradition that education is a means of freeing the human mind and enabling positive change to take place - the liberal or emancipatory view of education - is seen as subject to epistemological and sociological threats (Barnett, 1990). In terms of the knowledge involved in liberal education, Barnett observes that claims to objective understanding and critical assurance have been undermined by the relativism of post-modernist thinking. Socially, universities are being constrained to adopt utilitarian functions since they are now large and numerous enough for government to cast them in the instrumental role of agents for social and industrial change. Barnett re-constructs the idea of higher education in a form that neutralises the effects of these two threats and does it by shifting the focus from institutionally determined teaching to what and how students learn. He maintains that in future higher education will need to be characterised by what the student achieves as a result of his or her experience. He concludes that for student experience to qualify as higher education it should include the student freely developing the capacity to conduct a 'radical critique' in open and informed dialogue with others about his or her understanding of what they claim to know. Furthermore, students themselves should actively contribute to the whole process through effectively engaging in some type of independent inquiry.

Neither Rogers nor Barnett specifically address education for adults but their ideas have a direct bearing on the present discussion. Such terms as 'dignity of the individual' or 'empowering the individual' used by Rogers begin to echo

some of the student experiences related in the Introduction. In fact, some of those anecdotes date from the 1970s and 80s when Rogers' ideas were being applied in practice throughout British education. In describing both the contemporary position and reflecting on a possible future, Barnett emphasises the role of the learner and effectively proposes a synthesis between 'freedom to learn' (to coin Rogers' phrase) and social responsibility in learning. Bringing this perspective together with those considered earlier in this chapter, reinforces the impression that establishing why some students are marginalised in art and design is going to be a complex task. The simplistic notion that the phenomenon can be explained by pointing out that they are adults will evidently not suffice. Neither what it means to be an adult nor what is meant by education for adults is a sufficiently agreed concept to form the basis of such an argument. A further difficulty is that discussing the topic of education for adults too often takes the form of expounding a particular point of view by negative comparisons with another: theory ranked above practice; andragogy ranged against pedagogy; and instrumentalism contrasted with liberalism. This connects with the linguistic problem that identifying something as 'different' frames its identity in relation to what it is not, rather than being constructed in its own terms. It is already clear that such thinking is alien to the ethos of this research which takes the position that hybrid perspectives are likely to be more useful in understanding the complexities of day-to-day experience in a post-modern era. Juxtaposing differing perspectives on education for adults is a revealing process of knowledge construction. Though presented here neither as fundamental beliefs nor as a collective definition of education for adults, some precepts are evidently widely held by practitioners and theorists alike. Thus,

education for adults - whatever its precise form or context - can be broadly characterised as:

- *practice guided by theory and reflection* - knowledge is likely to be gained through some form of practice, informed and evaluated by reference to selected theories, and continuously directed through critical reflection in action
- *contingent and reciprocal in purpose* - the form and manner of study are likely to be continuously re-defined in relation to each other, according to practical circumstances and a continuum of learner purposes ranging from pre-determined goals to self development
- *student centred but contextualised through others* - establishing a body of knowledge is likely to be approached by learners from individual perspectives but with critical understanding achieved through open dialogue with others

It is useful to pause at this point to reaffirm the purpose behind identifying these precepts. One possible explanation for the phenomenon of marginalisation in art and design might be that it represents a conflict between academic precepts inherent in the sector and those that are typical of education for adults. In assaying this possibility, the amorphous and contested field of education for adults has been approached through juxtaposing several distinctive and sometimes conflicting positions derived from both theoretical debate and

practical experience. As a result, three percepts have been revealed as generally implicit in education for adults, and they can now be taken as threads to track a path through the maze presented by art and design. In so doing, the intention is to establish whether or not institutional practice in this sector is compatible with education for adults.

## CHAPTER 3

### PRACTICE AND PURPOSE IN ART AND DESIGN

Published material which relates to current practice in art and design notably tends to focus on matters that concern institutional providers. Critical papers and conference presentations (Hetherington, 1994; Swift, Jacquie, 1999; Furlong, Gould and Hetherington, 2000) tend to take the form of narratives by artists or craftspeople, less frequently designers, about their particular concerns and approaches in teaching. Often these link various and sometimes disparate topics in a stimulating and personally focused manner, reflecting the integrative and challenging ways of working favoured by many practitioners (for example, see Hall, 1999). Others are more polemical, relating to the position of practising artists engaged in teaching (Thompson, 1994) or comprising views of what art schools are or should be (Farthing, 2000). While the well-testified relationship between the two roles of teacher and artist is a mainstay of art and design (Ashwin, 1994), texts resulting from the artist-as-teacher perspective need to be read with caution. Framing the relationship as an unofficial form of state patronage for artists (Williams, 1994) confuses the roles of practicing professional, artist-in-residence and teacher. Lack of clarity occurs when writers are ostensibly describing what exists but in fact are prescribing what they think ought to exist (London, 1989). Other texts express strongly felt positions through a quasi-autobiographical mixture of analysis and opinion (Gooding, 2000). The problem with this type of evidence is that it often takes

the form of an isolated assertion with authors citing either a highly selective and limited number of references, or sometimes none at all. The resulting positions and points of view, no matter how stimulating or insightful they may be in other respects, are too solipsist and obfuscatory to be useful for present purposes. In so far as is possible, this research draws on studies that identify, describe and critically evaluate extant practice in an accountable and transparent manner. They can therefore be taken as sufficiently reliable to substantiate lines of reasoning, assay experiential knowledge or support critical reflection.

A further point is that the vast majority of available critical material that focuses on teaching and learning in art and design is largely concerned with school-based education. The problems inherent in maintaining that adult learning is categorically different from that of younger people have already been noted in the discussion about andragogy. Nevertheless, learners involve themselves with universities and colleges on a voluntary basis. Practices and structures in these institutions are manifestly different from those in secondary schools, thereby predicating a necessarily different educational context. Unfortunately for this research, this fact renders the vast majority of studies in art and design education beside the point. While acknowledging that learning is a continuous personal experience, this research is concerned with a feature of the learning conditions and ethos in a specific sector of further and higher education.

Bearing all these points in mind, the evidence needed to track the precepts drawn from education for adults through day-to-day practice in art and design is somewhat less than substantial. It is also fragmented and sometimes problematic.

## PRACTICE GUIDED BY THEORY AND REFLECTION

Some understanding of the academic discipline involved in art and design can be gained by applying the ideas of Usher (1989) and asking what theories form a critical base for guiding and directing practice. With regard to art and design, the term ‘discipline’ is often used in a loose way as a synonym for subject, study area or course, exemplified in terms such as multi-disciplinary (ADAR, 1995). When ‘discipline’ is used more tightly to mean an established body of academic knowledge with its own distinctive critical discourse by which practice is informed and guided, the sector presents a peculiar set of circumstances. As a sub-set of education, art and design can be considered as

... a field of study, rather than a discipline, because its data, what counts as evidence, is so varied that no clear or consistent single method or approach to it is sufficient, and it has no *inherent* methodology.  
(Swift, John, 1999-a, p.13 - my italics)

Whilst it is evident from the previous chapter that the same view is taken in this research, the notion of academic discipline continues to surface in art and design. Study of the history of art and design is not infrequently designated in undergraduate programmes (for example, at Birmingham Institute of Art and Design) as a necessary theoretical component of practical courses. However, the implication that art and design history therefore forms a theoretical base for practice needs to be critically examined.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there was a long-standing belief in art and design institutions that students benefited from studying artefacts from the past (Macdonald, 1970; Allthorpe-Guyton and Stevens, 1982; Efland, 1990). The effects of this tradition on the curriculum in art schools can be seen in what was virtually a design text book from the late 1940's which

specified that students should be provided with art history only in so far as it enriched and inspired their practical work (Cannon, 1948). Some ten years later, the National Advisory Council on Art Education aimed to ensure rigour through introducing new degree-equivalent art and design courses. In what became known as the First Coldstream Report, it recommended that fifteen per cent of any course of practical art or design should be devoted to academic studies and that art and design history in particular should be an academically examinable subject (Ashwin, 1975).

The discontent generated by this imposition was partly due to approaches adopted by art history lecturers, some of whom supported art history as a subset of the academic discipline of history despite the context in which it was being taught (Collins, 1989). Collins observes that art history must be distinguished from the discipline of history in that the source material is of a different kind. Documents are scrutinised by historians as evidence through which they construct the past and upon which they conduct their discourse. Art objects, however, co-exist as past evidence and as present events that can be interrogated in the light of their role in contemporary culture. Since Collins takes the view that art history is 'the history of recycled problematics', he claims that understanding creative problems in a historical context elucidates those encountered in contemporary practice. The key element here is that in studios and workshops the creative problems are those associated with students' own contemporary practice. Whilst the study of art history may be a requirement, its relevance to practice is selective according to need - as perceived by students. Collins' argument reflects the dominant ethos in art and design throughout the

last three or four decades, and in my experience summarises what is effectively current practice. As an academic discipline, art and design history constitutes a selective - even optional - reference point for practice in art and design and therefore cannot form its theoretical base.

While the National Advisory Council on Art Education named only historical study as an examination requirement, it also recommended the introduction of complementary studies in the form of other academic subjects as a means of strengthening and broadening the training of students (Ashwin, 1975).

Complementary studies quickly became a vehicle for introducing diverse fields of academic knowledge into the curriculum. Though many of these were ephemeral (cybernetics, for example), the psychology of perception had a more profound impact. The psycho-analytical approach advocated by Anton Ehrenzweig (Ehrenzweig, 1967) was explicitly related to methods of teaching art students, and I remember books such as Gombrich (1959) and Gregory (1966) coming close to achieving text book status. Socio-political studies later came to have considerable influence, albeit in highly visual and accessible forms, and it is noticeable that another frequently used text appeared as a television programme before it was published as a paper-back book (Berger, 1972). While the concept of complementary studies is now more or less abandoned, 'theoretical studies' has come to be used very loosely to cover both art and design history and more vocationally relevant study, such as languages or business studies. More recently, fine art courses have tended to include reference to a variety of theoretical positions and seminal texts (Harrison and Wood, 1992) in what has become known as 'art theory' in the wake of more conceptual ways of working.

Even if this off-shoot of cultural studies turns out to be less ephemeral than earlier examples, there is no evidence to suggest that it will eventually constitute a generally acknowledged theoretical base for practice in the sense under discussion here. In addition, it is specific to fine art practice and, by definition, directly contributes little to practice in design.

One other area of knowledge needs to be briefly considered since it is directly involved in practice. More or less systematic ways of organising colour in studios and workshops are habitually referred to as ‘colour theory’, but it can be shown that this tradition is seriously flawed. Ways of conceptualising and organising colour featured prominently in the Bauhaus curriculum during the twenties and thirties, but the internationally renowned artists who taught them were guided by a bizarre conglomeration of quasi-scientific and spiritualist beliefs (Gage, 1993). Though the Bauhaus approach in general came to have a profound influence on practice in British post-16 art and design during the nineteen sixties and seventies (de Saumarez, 1964), it was grafted onto an indigenous wariness of theory which included any systematic study of colour (Cannon, 1948). It is therefore not surprising that colour ‘theory’, whatever its practical value in studios and workshops, is a misnomer in the context of this discussion.

The central point is that whatever academic disciplines, humanities or sciences, have been brought into art and design, none of them constitutes a coherent and generally acknowledged theoretical base for practice. Their relationship with practice is secondary, supportive, contingent and, most tellingly, optional. Art

and design is clearly not a discipline in the sense of constituting a teaching and learning structure in which a coherent and established body of academic theory is systematically applied to the real world of practice. Nevertheless, academic disciplines, especially that of history based on artifacts as primary sources, are consistently employed to guide and inform practice.

## CRITICAL REFLECTION IN PRACTICE

A very different means of guiding and informing practice needs to be distinguished from the study of art and design history as it forms an even more consistent feature of art and design. Teaching and learning through reference to variable models of excellence can be tracked from Renaissance apprentices working for a master craftsman (Lucie-Smith, 1981) through to eighteenth century students drawing from casts of classical sculpture (Efland, 1990). It is ubiquitous in both formal and informal art education throughout the nineteenth century (Carline, 1968; Macdonald, 1970; Allthorpe-Guyton and Stevens, 1982) and continues in the way post-war art students drew and painted in the style of their tutors (Hassell, 1995). It features explicitly in a more recent account of how craft skills can be learnt through imitation (Dormer, 1994), and is articulated as a preferred way of learning in the critical views of art and design expressed by contemporary artists (Furlong, Gould and Hetherington, 2000). It currently provides the rationale for a private initiative to re-establish craft apprenticeships (Cohen, 2001). The strengths and weaknesses of formal or informal apprenticeship as the predominate teaching and learning method in art and design can be examined through considering the specific and well-

documented situation when students are learning to draw by copying the drawings of others.

It was common practice during the first half of the nineteenth century to set pupils the task of copying their teachers' drawings (Macdonald,1970). While this undoubtedly encouraged mechanical imitation, concurrent advice from the teacher, now unfortunately lost to us, would presumably have helped the learner develop at least some critical understanding. Nevertheless, there are echoes of such advice in the numerous drawing instruction manuals which were published during the period. That a classic example of the genre (Ruskin,1971) comes close to forming a transcript of verbal guidance is shown by comparing the author's text with reminiscences of his idiosyncratic lectures and surviving examples of his demonstration drawings (Hewison, 1996). In an appendix to his book, imperiously entitled 'Things to be studied', Ruskin praised the distinctive drawing style of a topographic artist, Samuel Prout (1783-1852), but advised that:

... his somewhat mannered linear execution ... may occasionally be copied for discipline's sake, with great advantage ... Then work from Nature, not trying to Proutise Nature ... but only drawing *what you see*, with Prout's simple method and firm lines.  
(Ruskin,1971, p.221-2 - his italics)

A much more recent equivalent publication puts the same point in a different way. In an instruction manual (Simpson,1982) which, like that of Ruskin, takes the reader/practitioner through a course of drawing, the author re-affirms that:

... it can indeed be very instructive to copy drawings to discover how a particular part has been carried out. It is important to make these features, taken from various sources, of service to your vision and ideas and not to use them merely as mannerisms.  
(Simpson, 1982. p.138)

Mapping the published advice of Ruskin onto that of Simpson shows congruity in using the drawings of artists, including themselves in both cases, as models of excellence. Simpson begins to identify the critical processes through which students learn to understand their own drawings through copying those of others when he writes :

The process of translation to paper ... is assisted by our technical ability and our knowledge of visual language; and since this is a trial-and-error process, it is monitored by our self-criticism. Finally, the whole process is to some extent tempered by our knowledge of art history in particular. *We mentally compare our efforts to what we know to be possible.*  
(Simpson, 1982, p.13 - my italics)

Lucid though this is in revealing how models of excellence exist in mind as well as in sight, Simpson is vague about what actually takes place as the learner critically reflects on his or her own drawings in the light of models of excellence. Ruskin had no doubt about this and roundly asserted that in the process of copying the taste of the learner would be either improved or corrupted depending on the quality of the model. While today we are far less ready to make such moral pronouncements, particularly where aesthetic judgments and cultural values are involved, there are some technical benefits to be gained from employing models of good practice. Both Ruskin and Simpson believe that copying drawings enables the student to acquire dexterity in material handling and the ability to comprehend and use alternative formal vocabularies.

There is however a deeper level of understanding which must be present if the learner is to acquire something more than know how. Ruskin described what he meant by such understanding, when he advocated that things should be drawn in

the light of their laws, history and origins. He required that his reader/pupil should deduce the story told by the subject through painstaking scrutiny of its appearance. Ruskin emphasised this as a discipline, oscillating between seeing and making, in which the guiding principle was a profound sensitivity to visual appearance acting as a door to understanding. He integrated intensive observation, moral values and step-by-step technical guidance to form a notably vivid description of how critical reflection guides the practice of drawing. A measure of his success is provided by the book not only becoming the Victorian equivalent of a best seller, but also by its continuing relevance a century or more later. On occasions, though with suitable caveats about Ruskin's lofty style of writing, I have recommended students to read his book to help them with their drawing. For reasons of its clarity alone, it has been useful to consider this historical example of how a deeper type of understanding can be encouraged through engaging in critical reflection concurrent with and about the act of practice.

Nevertheless, an instruction manual can at best, even with Ruskin's vivid language and Simpson's clarity, form only a monologue. Dialogues between student and teacher have been recorded and examined in the United States (Schön, 1987). Schön's case study conducted in the design studio of a school of architecture reveals a situation that is immediately recognisable as typical of British art and design (Cowan, 1994). Schön describes how the tutor sits by the student as she is working in the studio and through critical discussion, question-and-answer and practical demonstration he enables her to understand the design

process in which she is engaged. Schön maintains that this form of dialogue constitutes a discipline of reflective 'conversation' between the designer and his or her problem, in which

...the practitioner tries ... to control variables for the sake of hypothesis-testing experiment. But his hypotheses are about the situation's potential for transformation, and as he tests them, he inevitably steps into the situation. He produces knowledge that is objective in the sense that he can discover error - for example, that he has not produced the change he intended. But his knowledge is also personal; its validity is relative to his commitments to a particular appreciative system and overarching theory. (Schön, 1987, p.79)

In other words, the practitioner is both exterior to and an integral part of practical inquiry, enabling him or her to respectively balance critical rigour and personal relevance. Schön notes that learning such a process naturally generates some confusion for the student. Interestingly, Schön's discussion of some of the issues surrounding teaching and learning through and about practice, reflects the very process with which he is concerned. It is as if he circles the point, never being able to fully identify it but reframing it or re-phrasing it in a series of attempts to communicate to the reader. According to Schön, the reason is that :

...the paradox of learning a really new competence is this: that a student cannot at first understand what he needs to learn, can learn it only by educating himself, and can educate himself only by beginning to do what he does not yet understand. (ibid., p.93)

To support this, Schön notes that authorities as far apart as Socrates and Carl Rogers seem to agree on this central paradox, but he brings a new dimension to the discussion by regarding tutor and student as simultaneous learners. The tutor makes reflective processes available for use by the student by openly

acknowledging his own learning processes and thus poses a challenge to conventional views about teaching. Schön considers that Rogers:

reframed teaching in a way that gives central importance to his own role as a learner. He elicits self-discovery in others, first by modeling for others as a learner, the open expression of his own deepest reflections (however absurd they may seem) and then when others criticise him, by refusing to become defensive. As he expresses his own uncertainties and convictions, emphasises the 'merely personal nature' of his views, and invites and listens to the re-actions of others, he seeks to be literally thought-provoking. He believes that the very expression of thoughts and feelings usually withheld, manifestly divergent from one another, has the potential to promote self-discovery.  
(ibid., p.92)

By these means, both student and tutor experience teaching and learning in art and design as a predicament. Whilst the student must make a leap of faith, the tutor knows that she has to provide herself with good reasons for doing so, without him being able to tell her how to do it.

Schön's case studies of learning seem a long way from a Victorian instruction manual and juxtaposing them shows obvious contrasts. Ruskin was writing a didactic text for imaginary pupils, whereas Schön reports a case study of interaction between a real student and her tutor. Ruskin's magisterial self-confidence has little in common with the uncertainty that characterises the teaching style described by Schön. Nevertheless, by asking the crucial question of what exactly constitutes the model presented to students in each case, a surprising similarity emerges. Ruskin wrote with the tacit assumption that he, the master, had a pedagogic responsibility to set a good example. In conjunction with reproductions of his own drawings and those of others, Ruskin's highly personal ways of seeing and understanding were directly

offered as models for the student. Schön shows a more sophisticated position when he reports how the tutor circles and assays what he wants to say through a variety of methods, including verbal/visual dialogue. Comments from the tutor acknowledge his own capacity to learn in a reciprocal process of critical reflection on and in practice. Thinking, perceiving, questioning and evaluating are demonstrated by the tutor as he talks to the student about the conduct and outcomes of their interaction. The model is less the pronouncements of a tutor and more the process of learning experienced by both tutor and student through their dialogue. Though Ruskin and Schön share the unquestioned assumption that a student acquires understanding by operating in the manner of his or her tutor as a human model of excellence, demonstrating notable continuity in art and design practice, the differences are also revealing. Ruskin expected his students to absorb the certainty of both what he wrote and the confidence with which he wrote it. Schön's tutor encourages his student to make positive use of the uncertainty learnt through the shared form and content of their dialogue. Each author reflects the spirit of their own times.

Juxtaposing its inherent discipline of critical reflection in practice with the nature of art and design as a field of study reveals it is a form of knowledge gained through practice itself. Those theoretical disciplines that appear in art and design do so only in a contingent manner and serve to guide and evaluate practice rather than generate or direct it. The primary means of acquiring knowledge in art and design is continuous critical reflection in practice guided by reference to theory as and when appropriate. The process of juxtaposition

makes it clear that *there is no academic reason why art and design as a field of study should be inimical to the first of the precepts drawn from education for adults, and marginalisation amongst art and design students must therefore be due to some other factor.*

## CONTINGENT AND RECIPROCAL PURPOSES

Can the second precept be tracked through art and design? Raising questions about the purpose of art and design involves considering how it can be justified as knowledge. Barnett offers a point of entry into this type of discussion by taking the term 'rationality' to mean the process through which beliefs and actions are justified as knowledge (Barnett, 1990). He holds the view that rationality in higher education takes the forms of groundedness, enlightenment and emancipation. Rationality can be a matter of giving reasons, of justifying thought or action by reference to what is generally accepted. Such grounding represents a significant transition from personalised to contextualised knowledge which Barnett considers is a basic condition for all education. It fails however in situations where general acceptance has led to intellectual ossification through blind adherence to unchallenged assumptions. This situation requires a sharper rationality involving academic scepticism, critical examination and insight, and one which can be thought of as enlightenment.

Barnett argues that groundedness and enlightenment are forms of rationality which lead towards self-awareness, self-criticism and reflection. When fully

developed, these in turn generate personal emancipation: the third form of rationality which allows the possibility of new thoughts and actions and thereby an extension of individual and shared knowledge. Since Barnett is looking at higher education generally, his concepts of groundedness, enlightenment and emancipation ought to be applicable to the specific sector of art and design. Groundedness can be seen in the well established justification for art and design as preparatory to future professional practice. Students are required to develop a sense of personal integrity which enables their attitudes, procedures and outcomes to be measured against the standards of the profession they are destined to enter. Fairly obviously typical of designers (Lawson, 1983), this is also present, though in a more diffused and critical way, in the views of at least some contemporary artists (Kent, Chapman and Chapman, 2000). In Barnett's terms, such groundedness represents a significant move away from predominantly self-centred stances. However, professional norms can solidify into self-serving restrictive practices and an enlightened approach is needed in order to maintain professional integrity and relevance. At a time when professional practice is undergoing a crisis of confidence in precisely these aspects (Schön, 1987) the questioning, criticism and reflection, that Barnett identifies as characteristic of enlightenment, can eventually lead to emancipation, which translates into creative exploration of new forms of both education and future professional practice. It can thus be argued in the terms proposed by Barnett that art and design includes all three forms of rationality - groundedness, enlightenment and emancipation - and can therefore be claimed

as knowledge aligned to its ostensible purpose of preparation for professional practice.

However, despite the directness with which it maps onto art and design in one way, a problematic hierarchy of values is embedded in Barnett's concept of rationality. Knowledge which is justified by reference to accepted standards (groundedness) is regarded as of lower value than enlightenment (critical reflection) and emancipation (creativity). In a field of education which takes the accepted standards of professional practice in the creative industries as a key measure, this is clearly unacceptable. Furthermore, emancipation permeates all stages of teaching and learning in art and design and is not confined to a final flowering at the highest stage of development. For Barnett's approach to be useful in this research, his alien hierarchy needs to be re-configured in order to re-relate groundedness, critical reflection and emancipation in a way that is consistent with how teaching and learning in art and design weaves through, crosses between and continuously revisits (Schön, 1987) a number of different but equally valued rationalities. Again employing clock-face numerals as a useful analogy, Barnett's rationalities can be located as cyanosures, rather like twelve or six o'clock points, on a cyclic pattern of rationalities. Looking at the reasons for justifying art and design in this way, it becomes apparent that two particular equal value rationalities are dominant in the way that the sector can claim to be a useful form of practical knowledge.

## INSTRUMENTALISM AND EMANCIPATION

Tracking the reasons for justifying art and design as a body of practice-based knowledge reveals that seeds of conflict were sown in an early government attempt to improve the quality of British industrial products in the face of economic competition from Europe. The Board of Trade set up the Government Schools of Design in 1837, representing the first parliamentary intervention in British education (Macdonald, 1970). However, these design specific establishments soon saw the first appearance of a recurrent problem which has been summarised as a constant struggle by successive governments to ‘divert art schools from their overwhelming predilection for fine art towards industrial art, design, craftwork and general education’ (Macdonald, 1973, p.90). In this context, some chronological comparisons are illuminating. In 1768, some forty or so London-based artists sought to strengthen their economic and social position through founding the Royal Academy of Art as an explicit means of training small numbers of new recruits to their profession (Royce, 1986). In 1973, with around three thousand students studying fine art in Britain and with comparatively few opportunities for them to become professional artists (Macdonald, 1973), such professional instrumentalism had become highly questionable. Thirty years later, the 1973 annual production of fine art graduates has more than doubled, with just over a hundred centres offering three-year degree courses (UCAS, 2002). Notwithstanding the current high profile of young British artists and the concomitant proliferation of galleries, maintaining fine art as specifically vocational in function is now totally unsupportable. Conceptualising the study of fine art as liberal education or

as a means of acquiring variously marketable skills (Furlong, Gould and Hetherington, 2000) offers a justifiable alternative. There is a certain irony here however in that the sheer number of students wishing to achieve personal emancipation through fine art is helping successive governments to achieve their historic objective of steering the whole sector towards a more economically instrumental role.

By comparison with the position of fine art, one could be forgiven for supposing that teaching and learning in design is inherently more instrumental with regard to purpose. The design manual, already noted in considering the role of art history, (Cannon, 1948) stands as an indication of a different tradition. The author, who based the book on his practice in teaching design studies at Guildford School of Art, was at pains to relate pattern design to wider human experiences - other visual, performing and literary arts, students' home culture and the cultures of other civilisations. He also indicated an emancipatory intent, albeit in benignly paternalistic language, when he wrote that students should leave design teaching as 'entirely free people, with the beginnings of a personal style and confidence' (Cannon, 1948 p. 135-6). A more patrician note was sounded in the First Coldstream Report twelve years later, when it recommended that, alongside the new specialist design degree areas of study, 'courses of a more strictly vocational kind' should be available. These were to provide design training, since :

There is also in many fields of industrial production the need for large numbers of workers who are not necessarily creative, but who are sufficiently responsive to the ideas of those who are, to be able to interpret their designs perceptively and sympathetically.  
(Ashwin, 1975, p.100)

The unacceptable assumption that creativity is provided by an elite whose ideas are put into practice by conscientious workers not blessed with the same capabilities is a clear example of technical rationality (p.70 above) applied to art and design. Despite this hierarchical division being embedded in subsequent institutional practice through validation of degree-equivalent courses by the Council for National Academic Awards and of vocational courses by the Business and Technical Education Council, it was not entirely a matter of segregation. Published in 1970, the Joint Report of the National Advisory Council on Art Education and the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design recommended adopting a more liberal approach to vocational courses in design than had been proposed ten years earlier. It considered that such courses should include the personal development of the students by covering 'a wider area than that encompassed by the strictly vocational needs of the course, whether educational or training' (Ashwin, 1975, p.131).

Seen in the longer time span of the two hundred or so years of evolution of art and design, this represents a surprising symmetry between design and fine art. They were both initially conceived as instrumental but developed more or less emancipatory elements, showing that it would be simplistic to equate them respectively with instrumental and emancipatory purposes. What continues to evolve in practice is much more complex and interrelated. When considering the purpose of art and design, dominant factors would appear to be external factors on which the sector is contingent, rather than its inherent characteristics. This is especially evident in the controversy surrounding the introduction of modularity during the 1990s. While debate has subsided sufficiently for modularity to be more or less accepted in post-16 education (UCAS, 2002), the

dialogue that it generated between instrumentalism and emancipation continues to be pertinent.

## THE TOUCH-STONE OF MODULARITY

The 1990s saw new forms of art and design courses evolving in day-to-day practice. Based to a greater or lesser extent on flexible learning, curriculum choice and credit accumulation, these have been grouped under the generic term 'modularity' (Buss, 1995). Much of the debate about this phenomenon merged cause with effect, so it is useful to distinguish solutions being put forward from the problems that give rise to them. Modularity comprises a wide range of organisational responses to incipient problems that were identified much earlier (Wright, 1988). Wright considered that the ideological position of universities as discrete and self-regulating was being challenged and, along with other public services and professions, universities would in future be rendered more accountable, particularly by the state. He observed that the problem was likely to be exacerbated by new types of students coming into higher education and went on to enumerate the radical changes that he foresaw would arise from these challenges. The dominance of high levels of subject specialisation so characteristic of degree courses would be seriously undermined. The exclusiveness of higher education which tends to be measured by the number of unsuccessful applicants would give place to a more open approach. This in turn would relate to a shift towards preparation for employment and a more externally driven approach to teaching, with courses framed in terms of explicit educational outcomes and benefits to students. Wright observed that the

inevitable erosion of subject discipline predicated radical change in structures of power and authority, and consequently in the values held by those who work within them. He predicted that without a concomitant change in organisation there would be a conflict between what higher education was expected to deliver and what those responsible were predisposed to deliver. He concluded by advocating that institutions should develop their own identity in relation to new requirements and avoid the potential trap of imitating commercial and business organisations from which those requirements emanate. Some fifteen years later, these predictions have proved uncannily accurate and in general institutions have seriously engaged with the radical re-organisation of structures and ideologies called for by Wright. Modularity, a particular educational strategy for dealing with the challenges he identified, generated a national debate about the relationship between preparation for professional employment (instrumentalism) and liberal education on a personal basis (emancipation) in art and design.

Many and various forms of modularity were developed, along with intense discussion about their philosophical implications (Buss,1995). Instances of these illustrate how extensively the instrumental/emancipatory problem permeates art and design. Some social considerations are brought together in the idea of consumerism applied to art and design education (Jones,1995). The danger in modularity identified by Jones is that the traditional holistic balance in which students creatively transform information will be replaced by a structure that impels them simply to acquire it in a mechanistic manner. A contrasting view maintains that instrumental approaches of the state and emancipatory benefits for the individual are not necessarily in opposition. Modularity, as a

means of solving the problem of what and how to teach and learn in the current context of need, presents a challenge to the creativity of design tutors in revising the curriculum (Kavanagh, 1995). There is the opportunity to generate a 'new agenda' in which the experience of design students can be widened by complementary training in aesthetic, cultural, technological, social and political skills. Kavanagh's position represents an attempt to maintain an integrated concept of education for professional design practice while extending its boundaries to address current challenges. He sees modularity as a means of balancing the practical realities of government purposes and the personalised creative benefit for all participants: tutors, students and the wider public.

The problem of maintaining professionally relevant and coherent vocational education whilst providing for individual choice underlies much of the debate about modularity. Trow (1995) describes an educational scheme that solves this problem through individually constructed programmes of study orientated towards professional fields of practice. While this represents the middle ground between professional education and student choice, more instrumental examples can be found. Modularity can be framed in response to a specific industrial impetus (Morgan, 1995). Instead of the traditional position of the curriculum deciding the structure, modularity allows the reverse and thereby encourages a more industrially related ethos on the design disciplines. Specifically, Morgan notes the impact of this on fashion students for whom modular study could emphasise the means of production, marketing, design problem solving and team work at the expense of assembling final collections of personal designs. Crucially, he sees this as no less creative than the evolution of craftsmanship that integrates thinking and doing, but accepts that it is a fundamentally different

educational experience with the learning experience being more closely related to employment within the fashion industry.

In strong contrast to this perspective, the opportunity for student choice intrinsic to modularity can promote the idea of students taking more responsibility for their own learning. With the various forms of independent study, which operate through learning modules, the shift is towards collaborative learning between tutors and students. Within the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design at the University of Central England, I have introduced a teaching and learning structure that aligns university-based rigour of study with student-driven relevance (Jones, 1993). Evaluating previous experience, auditing personal capabilities, identifying learning intentions, managing time and organising resources are all incorporated in the central discipline of students negotiating and writing their own programmes of study. Instrumentalism is identified less with external imperatives and more with individual learning needs expressed by students in socio-economic terms as enhanced employment prospects or career re-direction. Emancipation is seen as the capacity to question the status quo, wherever it is located, and to creatively evolve new directions. In this case, instrumentalism and emancipation are brought together as two sides of the same student coin.

An argument based on cultural theory (Collins, 1995) criticises modularity as inimical to fine art values since it is based on a technical rationality model. Collins argues that the value systems of science have been imposed on art to remedy the perceived inefficiency arising from aesthetic/expressive values that underpin the discourses involved. He identifies symptoms of this in modularity, especially in the way modular structures of learning emphasize inputs and outputs and the subordination of qualitative to quantitative measures. Crucially, modularity shifts power into the hands of educational managers and de-skills

teachers, because operational competence is essentially based in system skills as distinct from academic skills. Students, far from being empowered, are subordinated to modular matrices for reasons of economic viability, since only cost-efficient modules can be offered. The key concept is not consumer choice but economic expediency. Collins sees his position as much more than a plea for a return to bohemian anti-institutionalism in the face of calls for greater efficiency: it is nothing less than a continuing full-scale confrontation with fundamentally opposing values.

The notable diversity amongst these positions shows that tension between concern for individual student development and the integrity of professional bodies of knowledge inherent in art and design continues with undiminished strength. Modularity provides a touch-stone for revealing this tension since it simultaneously undermines subject disciplines through student opportunity for choice and supports the traditional art and design concern for student individuality. Thus what might be conceived as an apparently simple confrontation between education and training is now taking much more subtle forms. Instrumental approaches are not confined to government ministers, politicians or institutional managers, since teachers and students themselves can use art and design to achieve a priori cultural or social purposes. Conversely, emancipatory approaches are not the prerogative of idealistic teachers or students. While the immediate reasons for developing modular approaches may be economically and politically driven, current debates echo those of the past. The central dilemma that rumbled on through the nineteenth century and re-surfaced during the 1960s and 70s has re-appeared with renewed vigour. Art and design is simultaneously contingent on immediate circumstances (personal and institutional) and distant imperatives (economic and governmental) and its purposes are correspondingly reciprocal in oscillating between personal emancipation (liberalism) and professional training (instrumentalism).

Through mapping precepts drawn from education for adults onto art and design, it is clear that there is considerable congruence with regard to the first precept. Learning through practice - informed and evaluated by reference to selected theories - is central to art and design. The type of learning involved is experienced through dialogue between tutor and student, conducted concurrent with practice and serves to guide, inform and stimulate action through a process of critical reflection. It is also evident that the second precept drawn from education for adults maps successfully onto art and design. Instrumental and emancipatory approaches continue to interact with each other in defining and redefining its purposes which are themselves contingent on personal, local and national circumstances. It is now evident through the process of juxtaposition that precepts discerned in education for adults are also inherent in the institutional culture and day-to-day practice of the sector. *With regard to the type of learning discipline involved and the purposes of that learning, no reason can be discerned as to why students who are variously and to a greater or lesser extent at different stages of development, socio-culturally diverse, or equally committed elsewhere should be institutionally marginalised in art and design.* However, a third precept was drawn from education for adults and that has now to be considered. The problems encountered in mapping this precept - that learning is student-centred but contextualised in others - onto art and design are discussed in the next chapter.

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## CHAPTER 4

### STUDENT PERSPECTIVES: PROBLEMS OF EVIDENCE

Processes and techniques have been applied to types of information which, despite diversity of form and origin, share a common factor. The first two precepts that have been mapped onto art and design are essentially concerned with the character and purpose of formal learning, and therefore the most authentic sources of evidence are those people who, on account of their positions of institutional responsibility or authority, are in the best position to articulate academic perspectives. By the same token, the most authentic sources of evidence for student perspectives are most likely to be students themselves. This assertion is graphically supported by the way in which some artists recollect their experiences under less than happy educational systems (Furlong, Gould and Hetherington, 2000). It is unlikely that a similar perspective would be expressed by the tutors concerned. In mapping the third precept, accessing and handling what students say about their experience of learning present a number of challenges. This chapter is concerned with identifying what form the evidence needs to take, how it could be acquired and what techniques would be needed to describe it.

#### PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EXPERIENCE

Evidence so far considered in this thesis has been generated by teachers, educational researchers, theorists and critics, historians, institutional managers and government representatives. This reflects the implicit fact that it is such people who have ready access to the means of publishing their views by virtue of institutional roles. Students on the other hand, usually have fewer

opportunities and less incentive to publish and are generally not expected to do so in any formal way, particularly at any level lower than post-graduate. However, it would be wrong to see this as a negative situation. Students at undergraduate and pre-graduate levels are unlikely to have the necessary skills or experience to publish their views in formal debate. Also and from personal experience, students often take a pragmatic line on this matter. They tend to see education as serving their purposes in gaining entry to a career or the next stage in their development, and thus see no need to engage in debates conducted by those who are more permanently engaged in what might be called the education industry. Whatever the reasons, accessible evidence for what students think and feel about their own experiences of learning is small in quantity by comparison with the amount of evidence that reflects institutional views on education.

The last decade has seen a massive increase in student numbers and a continuing government drive to widen participation, concomitant with growing prevalence of market principles in post-16 education (Elliott, 1999). This situation has generated virtually a national growth industry in collecting and analysing data on student satisfaction, the quantity of which has been augmented in recent years to meet the demands of the national Quality Assurance Agency. All this does not contradict the general fact that there is a paucity of published information about the learning experience of students. The paradox arises from the disproportionate amount of attention given to what higher education means for providers (the public sphere of experience) compared with what it means for students (the private sphere of experience). It has been explained (Haselgrove, 1994) by citing residual values that stem from traditional public school structures and which, until recently, have permeated British higher education. While women and varied social groups had gradually, and with considerable difficulty, been admitted to universities during the earlier part of the last

century, they were expected to conform to a well-established national ethos. This characteristically made a clear socio-political distinction between public and private roles, and accounts, to use a colloquial expression, for 'the stiff upper lip' approach to public office. In the public sphere of traditional universities, the formal duties of tutors and students were respectively conceived as giving and receiving an academic education. Whatever took place in their lives outside these duties was regarded as separate matter and not the business of education. Haselgrove holds that newer types of student - older people, married women, distinctive ethnic groups, those with disabilities and those wishing to study part-time - are less ready to accept this predominantly male class-specific ethos in higher education. They expect institutions to pay more attention to the private spheres of their experience. Haselgrove concludes that students will come to expect more holistic and personally fulfilling experiences than hitherto. The same point is developed in other studies (Stuart and Thomson, 1995; West, 1996; Bourgeois and others, 1999) showing that my investigation into the learning experience of art and design students is contextualised in a wider research concern for the private sphere of student learning experience.

#### FINDING SUITABLE EVIDENCE

In clarifying what type of source material is likely to qualify as suitable evidence for the private sphere of learning experience, it is useful to consider the type of evidence produced as a result of one institution's concerns with student satisfaction as a measure for its performance. The sophisticated methodology adopted by the Student Satisfaction Unit of The University of Central England in Birmingham (UCE) is based on consumer research technology (Green and others, 1994). At UCE, annual surveys are undertaken for three reasons: to

identify what students expect in relation to what the University provides, to measure satisfaction as an indicator of effectiveness, and to focus on student experience. The underlying intention is coloured by traditional utilitarianism: achieving the greatest happiness, or satisfaction, of the greatest number. Such surveys have the merit of acknowledging the value of student views, but they do so only within terms that any university can readily and effectively address. Thus some social matters such as learning support systems are included, but the quality of student experience as measured by criteria arising from the concerns of students themselves is absent. Since the function of such student satisfaction surveys is to measure university performance, they operate exclusively in the public sphere of student experience and therefore produce results that provide little or no evidence suitable to the purposes of this research.

Another potential source of evidence, in the form of accounts of how students think and feel, also needs to be approached with caution. Juxtaposing two contrasting instances identifies the problem. London (1989) maintains that painting and drawing is an instrument of deeply personal, almost spiritual, transformation for students and illustrates the point with hypothetical dialogues between 'Companion' (tutor) and 'Artist' (student). A small selection demonstrates the approach.

- Artist: ...Then it seemed I just had to use that blue, that pale, warm blue in the center, it seemed to throb with a kind of life, a - I don't know, but it seemed very necessary.
- Companion: The blue felt necessary for you, in what way?
- Artist: In what way, in what way is blue necessary, pale blue, warm blue, soft, flat, warm blue necessary - (After a long and necessary pause)
- Companion: What is there in your life that speaks of soft, flat, warm blue?
- Artist: Hope, maybe hope, summer days, carefree days.
- Companion: Just any hope?
- Artist : No, not just any hope, hope in my accepting self, hope in

accepting my color, my femininity, hope - I don't know,  
in my - oh no, really I think it's hope that my spirit remains  
uncrushed, still after all these years.

(London, 1989, p.70)

This can be compared with the following excerpt taken from a recorded discussion between a tutor (Q), and student (P), both engaged in solving an architectural problem in a design studio:

P: Yes, this was the main thing to get down - how that basic unit - I was thinking in much closer terms coming through the thing -

Q: (Cuts her off) Yeah, and the other thing is the subjection to a common set of geometry. You'll see that will be a common problem that will come up with everyone, either too much constraint or not enough. How to do that, that is the problem of the problem.

P: It's amazing - intuitively you look at the shape and you know it's wrong but it's very hard to get down to the reason ...

Q: Yeah, well that's what you are here for. So - I'd worry about the basic geometry on site. I wouldn't concentrate on the roof. The principle is that you work simultaneously from the unit and from the total and then go in cycles - back and forth, back and forth - which is what you've done a couple of times stutteringly. You have some ideas of the whole, which is the grid thing, but you don't know its dimensions. You've done something about this by eliminating that idea, which I think is a good decision. You keep going on - you are going to make it.

(Schön, 1987, p.55-6)

Putting aside notable contrasts of content and style, the question here is how useful these examples might be as evidence of student experience in art and design. Both extracts appear to provide information about how students struggle with problems associated with intuitive understanding. However, Artist is a fictitious character invented by the author to voice his philosophies, whereas P, a real student, is recorded by Schön as she struggles with her problem. With regard to evidence in this research, it is proposed to consider only those sources, such as the Schön extract, that authentically reflect how students themselves actually perceive their own learning.

Another potential source of information on student learning experience needs to be considered at greater length, simply because to many it would be obvious with regard to art and design. It is customary in art and design to assume that an understanding of students' thoughts and perceptions can be gained by direct reference to what they make during the course of their studies. A portfolio of life drawings (Brown, 1929-30) produced by Rosalie M. Brown while she was a student at Oxford School of Art offers an opportunity to assay the value of this assumption in relation to the purposes of this research. By comparison with the many institutional life drawings held in college and university archives, these twenty-eight drawings are unusual in carrying substantial commentaries written by a tutor. Though variable in length, they typically consist of between fifty and seventy words per drawing. The tone is conversational and it can be inferred from the way they physically overlap the drawings that the tutor's advice was written concurrent with teaching. They can therefore be taken as components of the type of critical reflection in action which has already been seen as characteristic of art and design. In corroboration of this, the commentaries strikingly echo what in my experience can be heard in art and design studios today.

Since nearly all the sheets fall into a precisely dated sequence, it is visually evident that Rosalie Brown gradually learnt how to observe and draw some of the subtleties of three-dimensional form. The drawings thus constitute evidence of her experience of acquiring skills, but on their own they tell us nothing about the way she understood that experience. We have no idea whether she enjoyed it or not, or whether she saw the experience as connected with her personal or social life. There is no indication of how she valued the experience and, on the evidence of the drawings alone, it could just as easily have been routine or even alien to her. However, the written commentaries reveal something about the

tutor who, from the date of the drawings, is most likely to have been male. On one drawing, he wrote:

You see the head is symmetrical so that what you find on one side you expect to find perhaps somewhat modified on the other. that gives your drawing balance & harmony & compactness Only of course you'll expect that all the curves will be flatter the side which is nearer to you than the other [accompanied by a small drawing of an arch to demonstrate his point]

(Brown, 1929-30, MS 4 - drawing dated October 10, 1929)

These notes provide a precise, if small-scale, insight into the tutor's values. He writes in the basically Renaissance belief that organisational principles of correspondence, balance and harmony can be observed in the human figure and that these principles permeate not only drawing but architecture as well. Nor is it fanciful to detect a balanced and benign tone in his language: what and how he writes suggests that his world view was calmly regulated and measured against assured ideals. The portfolio offers a clear demonstration of the major problem inherent in using students' visual products as evidence of their experience of learning. The drawings provide ample evidence of Rosalie Brown's developing capability to draw from life and to that extent they reflect her learning experience. Nevertheless, they are silent about how she valued that experience, whereas the written comments on the drawings are comparatively eloquent about the values held by her tutor. Ironically, the portfolio offers more personal information about the anonymous tutor than it does about the named Miss Brown. Since they provide no evidence of how students reflect on their own learning experience, institutional artefacts produced by students form inappropriate sources of evidence for the purposes of this research. It is clear

from examining the Brown drawings that whatever type of evidence is suited to the purposes of this research, it must be in verbal form.

## APPROPRIATE FORMS OF EVIDENCE

Having seen that some sources of evidence which might be thought of as appropriate are in fact unsuited to the purposes of this research, it is now time to consider the problem more positively. A primary criterion for selection of evidence must be the circumstances under which it is generated. To see why, it will be helpful to recall the woman with the clay model who recognised that institutional values were at variance with her view of herself as housewife (see p.15-16). For her to have made this statement at all, she must have been confident that her views would be respected and that enabled her to say what she thought. A similar position needs to pertain in order to gather appropriate evidence for this research. The challenge is essentially sociological in that any institution by its very nature is the historical product of pre-defined structures and codes that control the conduct of the people within it (Berger and Luckman, 1991). One such control mechanism is

... the acquisition of role-specific vocabularies, which means, for one thing, the internalization of semantic fields structuring routine interpretations and conduct within an institutional area. At the same time 'tacit understandings', evaluations and effective colorations of these semantic fields are also required.  
(Berger and Luckmann, 1991 p.158)

The extent to which language enables individuals to feel that they will or will not be heard depends partly on how they see themselves in relation to their institutional role, since it is:

... possible to detach a part of the self and its concomitant reality as relevant only to the role-specific situation in question. The individual then establishes distance between his total self and its reality on the one hand, and the role-specific partial self and its reality on the other. (ibid., p.162)

This sociological perspective begins to explain some features of the way art and design is being approached in this research. It clarifies, for example, why historical evidence had to be used to understand the predefined structures and codes inherent in the institutional culture of art and design. It supports the view that the way institutions conduct themselves on a daily basis indicates fundamental attitudes and thereby justifies the focus on institutional practice.

This sociological view of institutions also allows the inference that to interview art and design students in the presence of their work would be a misleading way of assembling evidence about their perceptions of learning. This is corroborated by my own experience of students discussing their practical work in relation to narrowly institutional reference points. For example, they will often start discussing their portfolio with the phrases such as 'We were asked to...' or 'This was X's project' (X being the tutor), and it is not uncommon for a student to point to his or her own drawing and say 'This was X'. Interviewing students with their portfolios runs too high a risk of being conducted through 'role-specific vocabularies' producing material that is no more appropriate as evidence for identifying the private sphere of experience than that resulting from satisfaction surveys or words put into the mouths of fictitious students.

Some guidelines begin to emerge from this discussion about suitable source material. It should be expressed through language that the individual students

would naturally use in talking about themselves. This automatically begs the question of which of our richly varied forms of verbal expression, each of them attuned to differing daily circumstances, can be thought of as more 'natural' than others. In accordance with the ethos of this research, the view is taken that in these circumstances each student needs to be trusted to decide what is fit for his or her purposes. The methods for collecting their evidence should therefore encourage students to actively choose which language they use, thereby enabling them to communicate their experience and contextualise it in whatever manner seems appropriate to them. They, as distinct from an outside mediator, would thus decide what constitutes their 'self' through what evidence they choose to provide or withhold. When assembled under such conditions, the evidence is more likely to form a more reliable and authentic indicator of the private spheres of their experience. *Appropriate evidence should comprise observations, descriptions, opinions and interpretations freely communicated by students, in terms determined by themselves and expressed in the language of their choice.*

## STUDENTS AS SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

During the preceding discussions, reference has been made to the three real people engaged in learning through art and design: the woman who perceived a conflict between her life-style and college culture, Schön's architectural student identified as P, and Miss Brown through her drawings. While it is reasonable in the context of general discussion to consider the evidence they provide on the

principle of fitness for purpose, the evidence for a focused investigation would need to come from learners on a more systematic basis. In order to be able to reflect on their own learning, they would need to be consciously aware that they are engaged in an appropriate type of learning, which for practical and logistic reasons means they will be students attending a college or university department concerned with art and design. This raises the questions of what type of student comes to participate in the investigation.

The complex nature of the issues entwined in this question can be gauged from the codes embedded in the role-specific vocabulary routinely used to refer to students who are perceived as different. As has already been seen, the expression 'mature students' is intentionally positive, but is contingent on a variably personal and culturally relative attribute. The term 'non-standard' categorises students admitted under special circumstances, those who are in some way disabled, and older students in an unacceptably negative way and without regard to their specific characteristics. It also encourages the view that all such students are institutionally 'difficult', the immediate reason for which is a matter of practicality. At a time when economic pressures demand that more students are educated at less cost than hitherto, students who are different can easily be seen as a cause of extra and burdensome work. In addition to special consideration, such students often wish or need to study part-time and this is problematic for institutions largely organised around the requirements of full-time students. More than a decade ago, it was a mistake to think of this as merely an organisational matter of inconveniently small numbers since the number of people studying part-time exceeded those engaged in full-time study

(Tight, 1991). That factors of status and attitude are also involved is supported by national statistics quoted by Tight showing that in the late 1980s whereas around 150,000 people were studying part-time for first degrees and post-graduate awards, some 200,000 were studying on 'other advanced' courses, with some 190,000 of that number located in polytechnics and colleges (Tight, 1991). With the institutional propensity to identify students according to their study mode, 'part-timers' can be added to the list of unsatisfactory terms routinely used to refer to students who are likely to provide the evidence required for this research.

Following the dictum that to understand the culture of an institution its history needs to be understood (Berger and Luckmann, 1991), tracking reveals a deeply-rooted and complex relationship between part-time study modes, relative status of students, perceived difference and marginalisation in art and design. In mid-nineteenth century regional Schools of Design, mixed classes had already begun to highlight organisational and social tensions. The stated government policy of linking payment by results to training younger working class males for industrial employment conflicted with practical reality. The income on which the government schools depended was largely derived from fees paid by often older and mainly middle class women. At Norwich School of Art in 1869, for example, this tension was openly expressed as a conflict of interest between 'Artisan pupils' and 'Ladies' (Allthorpe-Guyton and Stevens, 1982). Thus, at a period when a national pattern for post-school art and design was being established, tension between student groups institutionally differentiated by age, gender and class already existed. The social element in this is apparent in that art and design was generally less available to lower classes, despite avowed government intentions. Economic considerations discouraged employers from

supporting such education, and governments were noticeably reluctant to provide scholarships enabling working class youths to enter the Schools of Design as day-time students (Macdonald, 1970). Later in the century, the Arts and Crafts movement encouraged participation by women students, a number of whom attended in a hybrid role as pupil assistant teachers (Allthorpe-Guyton and Stevens, 1982). Social distinctions were carefully observed and students were offered an education which enabled them to become skilled and capable within their social or gendered background (Swift John, 1999-c). The pattern survived into the period after the 1914-18 war, when trade students, mainly comprising young men, were distinguished from those who were studying art and craft as a form of liberal education and who tended to be women from wealthier backgrounds (Ashwin, 1982).

The inter-war years also saw a shift in balance between modes of study with steadily increasing proportions of full-time trade students, though most students were still attending on a part-time basis and at least in some art schools there were more women than men (Ashwin, 1982). Outside the art schools, the practice of art and craft was concurrently being promoted, particularly to women, as domestic embellishment or as secondary sources of income. As an example of this, what was virtually a correspondence course in the form of a multi-part magazine included instructions not only in a range of craft techniques, but also in marketing and retailing the finished products (Homecrafts, 1928). Following the gradual decline of the Arts and Crafts movement in art schools through which women had been notably successful (Swift John, 1999-c), such socio-commercial enterprises served to re-confirm a changing form of categorisation. In comparison with the professional education of young largely male students, that of adults especially women was considered worthy but essentially of secondary value. By the 1950s, such students had become firmly identified as 'amateurs' (Hassell, 1995) who in my experience

were synonymous with part-time students well into the 1960s. The way this divisive position was resolved can be tracked through government reports (Ashwin, 1975). The First Coldstream Report of 1960 led the way in recommending that the numerous colleges failing to gain approval for the new Diploma in Art and Design should diversify into vocational and leisure classes. The Summerson Report four years later re-inforced the amateur/professional divide by voicing concern that part-time classes might be 'inimical' to the development of high level work and might drain valuable resources from the new degree equivalent courses. In 1970, the message was clearly spelt out in the Second Coldstream Report that where art colleges were included in polytechnics it was government policy that all forms of study other than full-time degree level work should be moved out to 'non-Polytechnic institutions' (Ashwin, 1975).

By the mid-1970s, most polytechnics had followed these recommendations with alacrity and had largely abandoned specific provision for 'non-standard' students, including part-time modes of study. Dedicated part-time classes either disappeared, were absorbed by adult education services or transferred to further education colleges which typically provided for a wide range of students through dedicated classes, variable fee structures and differing modes of study (Bournville, 1973, for example ). I remember at the time that this was almost universally welcomed by polytechnic staff, since 'low level' further education work was openly disparaged. Thus, through a long term combination of economic pressures, a socio-cultural distinction between amateurs and professionals, and government intervention, a certain type of art and design student came to be identified as the norm. He or she would be in their late teens or early twenties, attending full-time and dedicated to a particular

professional direction within an institutional concept of art and design. As confirmation of this, a systematic study conducted in an art school about to become a polytechnic (Madge and Weinberger, 1973) refers to no other than this student norm. This can be interpreted in several ways. It may be that only students recognised as the norm attended the fine art, foundation and graphic design courses featured in the study. However, forty years personal experience of degree and pre-degree courses leads me to have severe doubts that the student group was so homogeneous, especially at foundation level. The numbers of different students may have been too small to have any significant impact on the results, or they may have shown no interest in taking part in the study, or the researchers may not have perceived any difference as worthy of being noted. Whatever the explanation of their absence in the Madge and Weinberger study, it is evident from historical accounts that throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries art schools had consistently categorised students using socio-economic criteria and that these had come to favour the norm (Allthorpe-Guyton and Stevens, 1982; Ashwin, 1982; Swift, John, 1999 -c). Personalised evidence can be found for the presence of different students at Camberwell College of Art between 1943 and 1960 (Hassell, 1995).

Significantly, this is drawn not from institutional records but from reminiscences and autobiographies of former students revealing that at least they were aware of notably varied types of people attending the art school during post-war years as a result of immigration, demobilisation or national service. Some reminiscences record that the mixture of more experienced people and adolescents made for a stimulating and lively atmosphere in the college.

Throughout the third quarter of the last century there was the facility, which I

remember as jealously guarded and familiarly known as the 'loop-hole', to admit those whose portfolios demonstrated they had sufficient ability even though they lacked the formal qualifications stated as standard entry criteria (Ashwin, 1975). While there were probably fewer such students than is generally supposed, the doors were indeed open to what were known as 'non-standard' students. Attendance however did not necessarily mean acceptance into the institutional culture of art and design. It is therefore correct to use a sociological term and describe such students as marginalised in the sense that, though they differed from the student norm, no allowance was made for that difference in the codes of conduct, rules of operation or terms of reference by which everyday institutional life was directed.

The action of identifying the exact criteria for which students come to participate in this research presents a further problem. Marginalisation is a matter of context-sensitive perceptions and personal feelings about the self and it would therefore be procedurally counterproductive and ethically questionable to explicitly or implicitly ask students to identify themselves as 'different' in order to participate in this research. Notwithstanding this methodological problem, including such students in the research is appropriate on the grounds that as adults, in the sense employed in this research, they learn because they consciously want to (Smith, 1984) and are thus more likely to reflect on their learning. Furthermore, adulthood in learners is characterised by full development as an individual, by having the perspective of experience and by a sense of autonomy and responsibility (Rogers, 1986). This multi-dimensional approach reappears in the view that adulthood results, not from biological

ageing alone, but also from social experience as a member of a group or generation and from individual life events (Squires, 1993). The perspectives of Smith, Rogers and Squires, indicate that students who could most usefully contribute to this research are unlikely to be the norm, would be rich in experience and should participate according to more sophisticated criteria than merely biological age.

Earlier discussion of the historical position of adult learners in art and design has shown that they have been consistently identified with part-time modes of study. It is now time to examine this relationship with a view to establishing the type of student who is most likely to provide appropriate evidence. Etymologically, the term 'part-time student' is a reminder that institutions tend to categorise such people as a sub-species of full-time students. However, temporal distinctions between full-time and part-time study are misleading, as Malcolm Tight in his extensive study of part-time higher education points out :

Perhaps the most important difference between full-time and part-time forms of higher education is that ... the latter is based on the assumption that students are employed or have other obligations which make them *unable* to commit themselves full-time to study. Yet ... the difference is not quite as clear-cut as it implies. Full-time forms of education typically only involve the student in a part-time commitment to study ... Full-time students have a good deal of time free for holidays, leisure and socializing. Many also take up part-time employment as a means of supplementing increasingly inadequate grant awards. The difference between part-time and full-time higher education is, therefore, relative rather than absolute. (Tight M, 1991, p.112 - my italics)

In questioning the way in which students are categorised by the balance between study and non-study time, Tight uses the word 'unable' thereby drawing attention to the point that people who study on a part-time basis are often considered as disadvantaged in relation those who study full-time.

In art and design, this can appear as a crude equation between rate of study and quality. It is not uncommon to hear it said of students attending part-time that if they were really serious they would make the effort and sacrifice to attend full-time. This attitude is not a localised or recent aberration since it can be traced back to the Summerson Report, published by The National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design in 1964, which revealed official thinking at the time:

The presence in colleges of junior and part-time classes requires especially careful consideration. Although in exceptional circumstances this work would not necessarily be inimical to the proper environment for Diploma studies, we had to consider whether the volume or standard of such work would interfere with the successful running of Diploma courses.  
(Ashwin, 1975, p.107)

In reporting on colleges, the veiled civil service language of the report gives way to a brisker style with the assertion that ‘in far too many cases Diploma students were being expected to share accommodation with part-time students’ (Ashwin, 1975, p.110 ). The use of negative words, such as ‘inimical’ or ‘interfere’, and the implication of an unacceptable presence in a ‘proper’ learning environment effectively relegates people who studied part-time to an inferior category. It becomes evident how circumstances, if not attitudes, have changed since these pronouncements when one considers the impact of introducing student loans in 1997. Tight’s statement about the relativity of part-time and full-time study, quoted above, is even more pertinent at a time when, according to a recent Market and Opinion Research Institute survey, over a third of students ostensibly studying full-time in higher education are increasingly supporting themselves through substantial amounts of part-time work (Sanders, 2002).

In the light of this personal, organisational and historical nexus of values, it is clear that the criteria on which students are included in this research needs to be strategically handled in order to ensure that outcomes are both authentic and reliable. While triangulating various perspectives comes close to identifying the type of student who is likely to provide the necessary evidence, one question remains to be considered. If research is concerned with student experience, why focus only on those who are perceived to be different ? In several ways, this has already been answered. First, there is a pragmatic reason. It was argued in the Introduction (p.14) that generic student experience, even within art and design, is too diverse and a sharper focus is needed for this research. Second, my work in Birmingham has involved initiatives aimed at providing for people who would not otherwise be able to benefit from art and design and part of the motivation for this research is to see why these appear to be successful for such students. The third reason can be explained by reference to the research technique of suspended judgment and the methodological imperative to avoid either/or categorisation. The phenomenon of perceived difference has yet to be fully described though it is already apparent that it carries negative implications in so far as institutions are concerned. The act of taking evidence from students who conform to the expected norm alongside those who are perceived as different from it would embed positive and negative values into the investigation from the outset. In order not to prejudice the outcomes by being constrained to describe difference in negative terms, this research has to be constructed in a way that allows other possibilities to emerge. Difference may indeed prove to be only perceived and not actual, it may be revealed as positive, or may emerge as something quite new for which an appropriate term has yet to be found.

In the light of this discussion and the earlier one about types of evidence, it is now possible to specify both the type of student who could provide evidence and also how that evidence should be characterised and collected. *Students providing appropriate evidence need not necessarily be older than others but should be rich in socio-cultural experience and are likely to be studying part-time under circumstances that identify them as different from the norm. The evidence they give should be in the form of freely generated verbal accounts, with their own views communicated according to their choice of focus.* How these criteria are met by processes and techniques used in the investigation is described in the Appendix.

#### AN ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

Turning to how the investigation can be conducted, the method of investigating accounts collected from appropriate students is chosen on the principle of fitness for purpose and is broadly ethnomethodological. Cohen and Manion (1989) define this type of investigative research as

... concerned with how people make sense of their everyday world. More especially, it is directed at the mechanisms by which participants achieve and sustain interaction in a social encounter - the assumptions they make, the conventions they utilise, and the practices they adopt. Ethnomethodology thus seeks to understand social accomplishments in their own terms; it is concerned to understand them *from within*. (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p.33 - their italics)

Cohen and Manion distinguish the schools of ethnomethodology as 'linguistic' and 'situational'. The former is concerned with the way everyday language is shared between participants as both a bonding agent and as a means of making

personal sense of their circumstances. An important feature of the linguistic school of thought is that it examines how conversations often convey much more than is actually said. Situational ethnomethodology is more outward-looking and puts the emphasis on how people construct order in their environment. Researchers seek to understand the ways in which people negotiate the social context in which they find themselves. In my research, linguistic and situational ethnomethodological processes are brought together to investigate the ways in which student accounts of their circumstances and experience can be taken as indicators of how they see their own learning in relation to the context of the institutional culture of art and design.

Ethnomethodology has been questioned on the grounds that it gives too much scope for the researcher to impose his or her definitions, expectations and interpretations (Cohen and Manion, 1989). This concern is addressed in the present investigation by particular features of the techniques through which it is conducted.

## INCLUSIVE AND EXCLUSIVE TECHNIQUES

It is recognised that investigating student accounts involves examining evidence from a particular source. Distinguishing between sources of evidence is a feature of the historical mode of research, which can be defined as synthesising evidence in 'an act of reconstruction undertaken in a spirit of critical enquiry designed to achieve a faithful representation' (Cohen and Manion, p.48).

Though this research is not being claimed as historical in type, the way historical research categorises sources of evidence is pertinent to its methodology.

Secondary sources in the form of published views, critical studies or research reports serve to ground any reasoned research position in an existing body of shared knowledge. Primary sources impose the additional responsibility of faithfully presenting new evidence before it can form the base for constructing a new reasoned position. In terms of historical research methodology, primary sources comprise

those items that have a direct physical relationship with the events being reconstructed ... not only written and oral testimony provided by actual participants in, or witnesses of, an event but *also the participants themselves*.

(Cohen and Manion, p.55 - my italics).

Within the framework of this research, accounts provided by art and design students form primary sources of evidence, and investigating them entails responsibly reporting the way that the students understand their own learning experience. The investigation is carried out by describing student perceptions, initially by mirroring them as authentically as possible and then subsequently constructing them to form a reasoned critical position.

The manner in which these techniques are put into practice again raises the key issue of my role as the investigator concerned. In accordance with the generally reflexive nature of this research, the methodology for investigating student accounts should not only actively recognise the personal presence of the investigator but should also ensure that the findings are authentic. Though in some respects mutually exclusive, these requirements can be synthesised through a sequence which results in a justifiably comprehensive methodology. The influence of the investigator is recognised as an intrinsic factor at the outset, put to one side as much as possible whilst evidence is collected and

mirrored, and then re-incorporated when the evidence is reconstructed and interpreted. In this sequence, my views and prior experience are incorporated in originating the investigation and in evaluating the results, but systematically minimised when collecting and describing the student accounts. Requiring the researcher to adopt such contrasting roles effectively determines that the investigation is conducted in four phases:

- I examine the issues surrounding researcher inclusive approaches in order to identify a reliable and supportable methodology for the investigation
- accounts are collected as texts, through a system that operates according to common criteria and standard processes
- texts are described using systematic and accountable techniques for identifying patterns in the form and content of each account
- I construct these patterns as findings of the investigation and present them in the form of a hypothesis.

The second, third and fourth of these phases are recounted in the next chapters, but the first can be completed now by identifying the investigative techniques necessary to authentically mirror what students say in their accounts.

## PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

The investigation is based on accounts in the form of either the spoken word recorded on tape and transcribed verbatim, or original manuscripts. The rationale for this is essentially ethnomethodological in that:

... action and meaning are always tied to particular contexts and cannot be understood from an external or objective standpoint ... Much importance is therefore attached to the accounts that people give of their

behaviour, that is, how they describe and explain what they are, or were, doing in particular situations. These accounts are, in fact, the actual 'methods' that people use to produce and manage situations. As a result, the analysis of conversation both naturally occurring or as part of some in-depth interview, has become a central part of ethnomethodological inquiry.  
(Layder, 1994, p.83)

With regard to this research, student accounts 'cannot be understood from an external or objective viewpoint' because I, as the investigator involved, am part of the particular educational context in which the accounts are located. The techniques employed to describe students accounts therefore need to be as free as possible from my personal concerns as an individual and as an investigator. Something of the difficulty that attends this methodological challenge is recorded by West when he says of a series of interviews he had conducted that:

The empathetic, dynamic collaboration carried us along; after she had gone, and in the quiet of diary writing, I worried about how much I had said; about how I might have shaped the story telling, consciously or unconsciously. Had I used my own experience and position of power and authority to take the tale in particular directions? .... There was, and is, no final way of knowing ...  
(West, 1994, p.184-5).

Taking an indication from West's question and answer, selectively drawing on phenomenological approaches offers the most likely way of reaching an acceptable level of researcher exclusion. Acknowledging the principle of fitness for purpose and following Cohen and Manion (1989), three different precepts inherent in the diverse viewpoints subscribing to phenomenological methodologies are particularly pertinent to this investigation. First, the methodologies are based on the primacy of experience in understanding, and consequently involve finding out through directly focusing on our experience of reality rather than on its physical presence. This means taking the experiences that other people present to us at face value. Second, this way of knowing

about the world constitutes a process of responsibly interpreting the multiple realities of daily experience. The potential methodological conflict between accepting face values and actively interpreting phenomena is avoided by the third precept. This involves consciously excluding our habitual ways of interpreting the world, and is effectively the knowledge construction technique of suspended judgment. For phenomenologists, it is a matter of consciously putting aside, or to use their term 'bracketing', our customary perceptions and understanding. While these precepts are taken as a guide in designing the methodology for how student accounts can be investigated, an observation needs to be made with regard to the overall methodological ethos of this research. *Since the system of techniques used to investigate student accounts forms a discrete operational sequence within the general framework of the research methodology, it is described separately in an Appendix to this thesis. Appending the description in this way serves to emphasise that this system of techniques constitutes the only part of the research where the aim, in so far as it is possible, is to exclude the presence of the researcher.*

## CHAPTER 5

### INVESTIGATING STUDENT ACCOUNTS

In conducting this investigation, it is taken as axiomatic that the way we understand our own learning experience is evident not only in where we choose to focus within that experience but also in how we communicate that focus to others. Applying this principle to an investigation of eleven personal accounts provided by marginalised art and design students has a significant effect on the techniques and processes employed in the various phases of investigation. In the researcher-exclusive or mirroring phase, the principle determines the particular techniques needed to authentically understand what each person communicates (see Appendix). At researcher-inclusive or constructive phases, the principle predicates that the way of reporting this understanding needs to be designed to ensure respect for the holistic character of the accounts. In this chapter, I accept at face value the combinations and sequences in which each person brings together focus points (themes) and language (communicative functions) in his or her account. In one of them (pages 146-148), for example, the student adopts a deflective manner and she tends to avoid talking in any depth, whilst in another (pages 156-158) the student writes openly about himself in a much more assertive way. When however these students turn to more social aspects, their personal perspectives are reversed: she is quietly confident in her secure position but he is aware of being in a state of transition. While both are talking about their present experience of learning, the fact that

each employs variable types of language is taken to indicate that they both have ambivalent perspectives on it. On such grounds, the way in which I can best communicate how the eleven accounts describe the learning experiences of the individuals who generated them is less through detached textual fragments - vivid though these can be - and more through constructively describing the patterns formed by the ways in which each person interrelates thematic meanings and communicative functions. The chapter is thus essentially synoptic in character, and concludes with those patterns that are common to all accounts being proposed as a hypothesis of the way in which institutionally marginalised art and design students understand their own learning experience.

#### INTERVIEW WITH LINDA

Linda was studying full-time as an undergraduate student and was in her late thirties. The immediately noticeable feature about the transcript of her interview is that it contains a remarkably high number of spaces. She pauses momentarily before many words, intersperses longer pauses between phrases or sentences - often coupled with 'um' or 'er' - and there are extended silences lasting up to eight seconds at a time. The interview took twenty-two minutes, and concluded eight minutes short of the maximum allowed by the tape. Noting only the longer pauses and extended silences in the transcript shows that just over a third of the lines included at least one such interruption of speech. Linda offered eighteen responses of varying lengths. Twelve of these began with a lengthy silence and seven either ended in a long drawn-out silence, or with a concluding word following a long pause. Looking at the silences within

responses, there appears to be two functional types. Some indicate a change in nuance or emphasis: sentences break off abruptly to be followed by a longish pause and, later, by a parallel and connected but not logically continuous train of thought. These are often associated with halting and repetitive phrases. A second and more frequent type of pause represents a temporary suspension of speech, in that the train of thought continues silently to be picked up again in the ensuing narrative.

These functional types of silence seen in the context of Linda's slow and quiet responses are sufficiently striking to demand that as much attention is paid to how she talks as to what she says. It could be inferred from the silences that open or close most of her responses and the clarity with which she finished the interview that she is not only thinking carefully about what she wants to say, but is also reluctant to continue talking unnecessarily. This inference is supported by the frequent pauses where she seems to be looking for the right words, sometimes correcting herself with preferable phrasing and indicating a concern to use exactly the right language. At least twenty pauses are more anticipatory in function, since they immediately precede a significant word or observation. When she is about to make a provocative judgment such as identifying something as 'rubbish' or finding study 'easy' or criticising the course for lack of facilities, she pauses. On a more private note, there are silences before she mentions her first unhappy marriage and her second good marriage. Similar lengthy pauses occur when she talks about changes in herself and her personal development, but, most noticeably, they cluster round her observations on other students and when she talks about the death of her daughter. Whatever the

differences in precise function, all the pauses and silences connect with the content of what she says and strongly suggest that Linda's manner of speaking, far from being a mere conversational idiosyncrasy, indicates what aspects of experience carry most importance for her. There was a natural conclusion to the interview with Linda saying that there was nothing else she wished to talk about. It was as if she had said all that was either necessary or desirable about her experiences.

It is possible to distinguish five themes amongst Linda's responses: her personal development, her thoughts and feelings, people to whom she feels close, her course of study and people in general. The frequency with which these themes occur is illuminating. Well over half of all single communications are concerned with her own development, either describing it (37%) or noting how she thinks and feels about it (26%). The next most frequent theme (19% of the communications) is people to whom she feels closest - mainly her fellow students - and then, less frequently, her course of study (9%) and people in general (8%). Linda addresses these themes by either describing an event or situation factually, or reflecting on what it means to her, often linking it with evaluation. She readily moves from one mode (descriptive) to the other (reflective) and often within the same sentence. Even when asked to simply say more about her background, she begins by describing her life but quickly transfers to reflecting on her experience and evaluating it. In fact, some 65% of all single communications, whatever the theme, are in the reflective/evaluative mode.

Bringing together the manner in which Linda talks and what she talks about, suggests that she is someone who sees her own experience in a multi-layered manner. Not only does she tend to see events and circumstances in terms of how they impact on her, but she is aware that her own perceptions, changing over a period of time, are important aspects of what and how she is learning. However, this should not be taken as self-centred since her conscientious use of language shows that she is anxious to be both clear in her own mind and understood correctly by others. It is as if she is concerned not to mislead or misinform anyone. In turn, this reflects the high value she places on relationships with people immediately around her, and on her usefulness to people in a wider sense. As part of this, she mentions that she values having lived in another country and this links Linda's account to that of a man following the same course. German by birth, Dio had lived and studied in other countries before coming to Britain in his twenties and expressed a similar appreciation of the insights gained from the change in experience.

#### INTERVIEW WITH DIO

In response to the prompt to talk about his experience prior to his course of study, Dio offered an account that occupies about 60% of the total transcript. He seems to have recognised that this suggests a more than expected interest in his own processes of development, since towards the end he identified the time of the interview as very important to him. He observed that this was the first occasion when he felt he had sufficient time and appropriate critical means to examine his own biography in depth. A closer structural analysis reveals

frequent use of a particular way of grouping his thoughts. He initially presents an event or circumstances, and then follows it with an alternative as a re-statement or an amplification. For example, he says that he was apprehensive about going to 'an academic art school', as he put it. He feared 'that there would have to be a certain standard of work - even in terms of taste. That it'd have to be broad minded, modern, skill shown in it ...' While there is nothing intrinsically notable about this, the fact that each of the six pages of transcript contains at least two substantial examples, and some consist almost entirely of such constructions, suggest that it could indicate something about Dio's approach. Despite a tendency to punctuate his thoughts with conventional expressions that suggest uncertainty, such as 'you know' and 'sort of', there are other forms of speech that begin to identify his type of understanding. However, it would be more useful to consider these after a closer examination of what he chose to talk about.

Whilst a line-by-line count suggests that Dio is as interested in recounting the events of his life as he is in communicating what they mean to him, detailed investigation of what he says and how he says it suggests otherwise. Some 45% of the whole transcript is taken up by observations and thoughts about himself, all subjected to constant self evaluation. He appears to be aware that he was watching himself perform under various historical circumstances. When he observes of his enjoyable early days in England, that he did not see himself as having to fulfill a certain 'role', the use of the word 'role' puts a distance between himself then and himself at the time of recording the interview and implies a sense of evolution in his own understanding. Not surprisingly in the light of this

way of thinking, he is conscious of an interest in education, both as a self-reflexive activity and as a service he can provide for others. This theme occupies a further 12% of the total. Of the remaining themes, members of his family take up 18% of his thoughts and descriptions. He has lived for substantial periods of time in Germany, Canada and the UK, so predictably travel, time, different societies and different uses of language also concern him, together accounting for 19% of the total transcript. The smallest proportion (11%) is concerned with his studies and issues about art.

The interview with Dio presents a number of situations where form and content combine to indicate his type of understanding. The most obvious of these is his use of quasi-reported speech. There are fourteen instances where he expresses an idea or a thought process as if someone is speaking. For example, he illustrates what he considers to be the superficial attractions of a skill acquisition approach to art and design education in the words of an imaginary participant: 'Wouldn't it be nice to do book-binding or metal-work!'. When he wants to describe stereotypes of masculine thought, he expresses them through the reported speech of an imaginary first person: 'That's what I want to do' and 'That's what my day is going to look like'. Dio even applies this reflexively when he describes his understanding of how various subjects inter-link, as being more gradual and subtle than saying to himself 'Click, I know it now'. It is as if, even in his own case, he can most easily understand and articulate an idea through the voice of another, albeit imaginary, person.

The second form/content unity appears in relationships between sentences which often take the form of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Dio states a contrast, on which he then reflects and subsequently goes on to generate an understanding. For example, he describes his feelings on starting the course through identifying the dualism of avoiding mindless domesticity through his own studies, whilst keeping the household going as his wife pursues hers. He reflects that this gave rise to a confident feeling that he had chosen rightly. Earlier in the transcript, he recounts how through his training at a Rudolf Steiner college in Germany he became aware of an antipathy between the social purposefulness of teaching and the egotistical character of art. Dio then considers that the range of subjects offered at the college enabled him to construct positive links between them. Elsewhere, he notes the contrast between what Europeans tend to think of American social attitudes and what he and his family actually found when they moved from Europe to the United States. He reflects on how beneficial and encouraging this was for the whole family, especially his wife. This in turn leads him to value the opportunity to break away from restrictive patterns. He raises these issues again at both ends of the interview through the contrast between his German and English characteristics. Dio synthesises these at the beginning in seeing that a German sense of accountability enabled him to direct himself when he began to be dissatisfied with the freedom he experienced in Britain, despite having moved to avoid restrictions in Germany. The Anglo-German dualism re-appears most strikingly when he talks about his surprise at finding that while he speaks English very well, his thought processes are Germanic and this becomes evident when he writes. This realisation enabled him to be more comfortable with being

German and to regard the pleasure he had felt in British people not perceiving he was German as, to use his term, 'silly pride'. The sense of cultural dualism that permeates what Dio says also underlies the thinking and experiences of another student following the same undergraduate programme.

#### INTERVIEW WITH BARBARA

Coming to full-time undergraduate study after a steady progression through informal learning and a part-time access course, Barbara was in her late twenties at the time of the interview. More than the two so far examined, the transcript of her interview raises the particular issue of cultural interpretation. It could be assumed that her grammatical constructions, repetitions, colloquial English, and breaks in continuity indicate a more conventional response than those of either Dio or Linda. Closer examination shows that this would be to seriously misunderstand the transcript as an account of individualised learning. Barbara's description of her poor schooling offers a partial explanation for some of the language she uses but other interconnected features suggest that investigation of what she is saying needs to avoid pre-occupation with linguistic canons.

Whereas employing a wide vocabulary could be taken as evidence of sophisticated understanding, a more confined vocabulary is not necessarily evidence for the contrary. While largely employing socially current vocabulary, Barbara also uses words, such as 'psyche', 'flac', 'materialistic', 'negative' and 'positive', and 'culture' suggesting another level of awareness. Repetition in various forms is a particularly noticeable feature of this account and therefore deserves attention. The re-iteration of the word 'struggle' - five times in seven

lines - at the beginning of the transcript indicates something more than a lack of alternative words to describe what she felt. On occasions, she uses the device of almost repeating what she has just said by way of further clarification and emphasis. Between two thirds and three quarters of all lines contain a change in thought sequence, indicated by a break in sentence construction. Slightly, under half of these are significant diversions of thought as distinct from interpolations or delayed continuity. As with the transcript of the interview with Linda, many of Barbara's responses start with a lengthy pause and often a question seeking clarification of the prompt or guide lines for her response. These suggest a lack of self-confidence and a concern to express thoughts and observations as clearly as possible. Taken together all these features are sufficient to suggest that, far from looking *at* the language, one needs to look *through* it in order to understand what is being said. It may be useful to examine a particular passage to demonstrate this point. Talking about her schooling, she says:

I mean, I didn't do A level art and I didn't attend school much. I hated school - I hate being told what to do. When I say I hated school, I loved being there but I hate the presence of teachers. To me I find them too rigid and I hate being told what to do. So I hardly used to attend school that way. But here - I mean, there - I missed out going onto A level art and now doing the history of art is a real boost to me. I really enjoy just knowing about art in general - learning - so here I find I'm always learning.

This section of the transcript shows a constant shift between past and present: 'hated' school but 'hate' being told what to do; 'loved' being there but I 'hate' the presence of teachers; and most clearly in 'but here - I mean there - I missed out...'. The latter suggests that Barbara was aware that her crossing between past and present experience could confuse someone else, no matter how real the connection might be for her. The point here is that the shifts of

tense, though not necessarily a conscious device, can be seen as grammatical analogues for the way past and present feelings interlock. Towards the end of the interview, Barbara explicitly connects her present endeavours with a reference to her past concern to gain her mother's approval, again suggesting that past and present recurrence and interaction are central to her thinking. It is for such reasons that the transcript presents particular problems: cultural preconceptions about 'correct' English need to be put on one side in order to fully understand what Barbara is saying about her experience.

In discussing the way that Barbara uses language, matters concerning content have necessarily been raised. As these are looked at in more detail, the inference that the past/present interchange is more than a matter of grammatical expression is born out by what Barbara says. Even when specifically prompted to talk about her past, Barbara constantly interleaves it with the present. During her first response of forty-five lines, well over half contain grammatically irregular changes in the tense of a verb or direct shifts to her current feelings. It is useful to compare this with Dio's first response of a hundred and seventy lines which was similarly centred on his feelings but all expressed in the terms of the past and, however strong the sense of a continuum, without any direct reference to the present. Like Dio who was also identifying himself with more than one culture, she uses invented or reported conversations to articulate her thoughts and feelings as a black, more experienced, student in a predominantly white institution. When these features of the way she speaks are related to what she says about how she inter-relates with other people, it becomes evident that what they say and think are very important to her. There is the sense of having to

prove herself to the rest of the family, whose values she as the 'black sheep', to use her own perhaps ironic words, feels she cannot share. When she talks about her children, she sees them in relation to this division but on her side. Tutors, either unaware of black artists, biased or apparently threatened by adult students, seem to be in another less antagonistic camp, but one with which she also has to contend. Her friends appreciate her paintings but do not understand how she feels about them. Her perception of being a black student is demonstrated as one of dislocation when she says that sometimes she feels 'like a fish out of water in this place'. This can be seen as linking with her determination to do what she wants, as when she regards Euro-centric history of art lectures as a challenge for her to undertake her own search for information. However, she asserts her happiness with the present more than once. For example, she says that

When I'm here I really am happy, cos I'm in my own environment' ... learning and just growing and it's something I'm interested in a lot so I like being here ... That's where I am at the moment - I'm just happy doing that.

In such passages, Barbara is most concerned to do what she wants, partly perhaps from a sense of defiance but also as a means of identifying her own individuality. Family and past, children, painting, tutors, other students, friends and black artists are all described or discussed as contributing in different ways to this self-identification. It would be wrong to interpret her overall approach as confrontational, though she herself describes it as aggressive. She expresses the ambivalence in her experience about this when she says that she has to be assertive sometimes, '... or you'll just be - you know .. I won't say stepped over but you've got to sort of fall back'. Elsewhere she makes it quite clear that

she sees co-operation between people as part of her deeper beliefs since we are on this earth to help one another. She wants to teach and she appreciates the support of other students. The extent to which her awareness coincides with that of others more or less determines her sense of who she is.

The reason why the transcript initially presented problems of understanding now becomes clear. Barbara herself sums it up when she says that art is 'just there deep-rooted even in my blood and I'm just expressing it now in this course'. That is what she is doing in this interview: expressing how she feels. It is the unity of statement and value judgment implied in the idea of 'expression' that explains why this transcript is far less open than others to a form and content analysis. What superficially appeared to be a somewhat rambling description communicated through repetitive vocabulary, on closer examination turns out to be sophisticated self awareness vividly expressed in terms of how an individual relates to other people.

#### CAROL'S POEM

Barbara's account is easier to understand when juxtaposed with an unsolicited text produced by a younger student whilst attending full-time on the Foundation Art and Design course in my department. Carol submitted an account of her learning experience to a competition organised as part of Adult Learners' Week celebrations in Birmingham during May 1996. She chose to write in poetic form and entered the results under the category 'Learning That Changed My Life' for an award as Adult Learner of the Year, which she won. The dominant

feature of the short poem (285 words long) is the sense of a highly individual voice audible on three levels. Most obviously, she uses a language structure drawn directly from Caribbean rap singing, with rhyme and assonance at the end of each line. She thus expresses her thoughts and feelings in highly rhythmical and culturally identified speech patterns which bring writing, speaking and singing together. At a second level, she employs strikingly original similes and metaphors, as she when she says she was as small as her father's fist when she developed a feel for art. She says she had to dig her identity out of the earth, perhaps making a metaphorical reference to the biblical parable of the talents. She sees objects as symbols: a desk can stand for both office drudgery or self-improvement through learning, and educational experience is like being in 'a good boat'. Carol is consciously bringing together a highly potent form of black cultural expression and an expression of her own individuality. The third level on which an individual voice is apparent is as an autobiographical narrative, not least because it includes self-reproach and asserts the determination to succeed. Like Barbara, she describes herself in relation to her parents and her children and sees that education provides her with an opportunity to make a fresh start in her own terms. In fact, the more concentrated and explicit text provided by Carol draws attention to what was implicit in Barbara's account. Both people are highly conscious of how a powerful and collective black culture and the identity of themselves as individual creative women are intertwined. Each of them expresses this sense of unity through speech rhythms that reflect rap music: Barbara implicitly and Carol explicitly. Other senses of female identity feature in the next two interview transcripts provided by students who were

attending an access course offered through flexi-time study by a college of further education.

#### INTERVIEW WITH MARIE

Marie was older than Barbara and much older than Carol at the time of the interview. She was very apprehensive about it and felt unsure of what she ought to be saying. This is evident in the way that a precise narration of the events in her life, without any evaluative element, accounts for over half the total (282) number of lines in the transcript. She starts with a step-by-step account of her earlier experiences with the focus almost entirely on informal and formal art/design training. There is almost a fatalistic element at this point: she accepts that as a daughter she should work for her father, that she should become a teacher like her husband, that being female she would inevitably study fashion and textiles, and as a housewife would sign up for vocational education through City and Guilds courses. She recounts her own education and her career as a teacher in a distant, matter-of-fact manner. There are many automatic interjections, but interestingly usually at the start of a response and there are some twenty-five lines in all that can be regarded as having a deflective function. The prompt is questioned or she plays for time while she thinks how she can respond - either way, she diverts attention away from herself. All these together suggest rather shy and somewhat mechanical responses accompanied by an underlying intention to do what she felt was being asked of her. In fact, she recognises this when she observes, perhaps self mockingly, that '...if I'm told to do this, that or the other - I'm very good, you see, I'll get down to it.'

Colloquial interjections with little real meaning, such as 'and that kind of thing', 'see how it goes', 'you know' and 'sort of' are also frequently used with the effect of deflecting any further or deeper discussion. It is as if she is voicing, though in a less direct way, the same thoughts as the student recalled in the Introduction who did not want to question why she was about to go home and cook her husband's dinner. Despite Marie's comment that 'stuck at home doing your housework is deadly boring', there appears to be a safe and pre-determined quality in much of what she says and how she says it. She feels she has had to do certain things at certain times and has apparently lived her life in the shadow of firstly her father and then her husband. The college is close and very convenient and 'its nice to do something a bit different'. All these features tend to add up to what from experience I know to be a favourite institutional stereotype of older women as part-time students. The assumption is that they are passively conventional 'housewives', showing little initiative and are simply amusing themselves at art school.

Investigating the transcript as evidence of the private sphere of student experience shows that in the case of Marie this stereotype can be firmly rejected. The first evidence for this is that nearly half the lines are concerned with evaluating events and circumstances. Beneath the conventional phrases, she seems to be musing over what is happening, perhaps trying to understand or come to terms with it. For example, she reflects on the contrast between her experience as a teacher and being a student when she says ' I can see what I would tell them as a teacher but it's a lot harder when I look at my own work to see what's wrong with it'. She is wary of change in herself but recognises and

accepts it, saying that she does not want to be competitive “ but ... you look at other people's work and you think ‘Ooh, that's a lot better - perhaps next time I should try that sort of thing’”. Marie has a way of closing a line of thought when she feels it is leading in a direction for which she is not yet prepared. She uses expressions such as 'I think we might have to leave that one for a bit longer' in a gently firm way. Surprisingly in view of initial impressions, some 15% of Marie's lines are assertive in this manner and most of them are about herself. She does not want to be told what she already knows and feels that the course ‘ ... makes you feel more alive ... an aim in life ... to get on with my own thing at home’. However, she is more reticent than other students and says less about herself and her feelings. At 45% of the total, communications concerned with describing or evaluating her course of study form the highest proportion of such comments from any of the eleven students. If this were to be attributable to her husband being a lecturer in art and design, it would confirm the impression of someone living in the shadow of others. Notwithstanding this possibility, the overall impression is of a student who is gradually developing a sense of individuality and self-confidence after a long period of seeing herself in a secondary role to others. The sense of wariness evident in Marie's account takes on a positive tone, in contrast to that in another interview conducted with a much younger student following the same access course.

#### INTERVIEW WITH SAMANTHA

Most of Samantha's responses start with a pause for thought or an observation prefaced by 'I suppose ...' or 'I don't really know'. In addition, some thirty five

lines are in effect repeats of what she has just said. However, the impression of nervousness and uncertainty indicated by such features is counteracted by the first thing she says: an assertive 'Right'. In fact, this directness emerges as a dominant tone in the whole interview, since about 22% of all communications are assertive and critical. Re-iteration of 'I,' 'me' and 'myself' on fourteen occasions in the first ten lines, re-inforces this impression of self-centred confidence. While this might suggest an out-going and breezy attitude, the breakdown of narrative and evaluative communications begins to suggest otherwise. Less than 10% of the whole interview is concerned with recounting the facts of her life and experience, whereas if reflective comments, self-assessment, and value judgments are grouped together, about 60% of all communications are evaluative. Several sections, totalling twenty six lines, are expressed in terms of remembered or re-constructed conversations. The formal balance of communications in this transcript begins to suggest a more complex approach than might be inferred from an initial reading.

The largest single proportion of communications at 37% is concerned with various aspects of herself and how she sees herself. Something of her range of views is indicated in the earlier sections of the interview where she says she is not practical, but prefers to work with her hands. Routine she finds deadening, but she feels she can cope with regular employment concurrent with her studies. At a later point in the interview, she values the flexibility she perceives in art-related employment because she could integrate it with family life. The confidence she gains from having decided to return to study is initially shaken but restored by discussion with the tutor. She evidently has perceptions of

herself that are both practical and realistic but she is also aware that, to use her own term, she is 'a day-dreamer' and needs 'something different each week'. In general she is not sure where she is heading but is at last succeeding and she feels she has some confidence in herself. When she talks about her studies and concurrent work, 17% and 12% respectively, she seems to polarise them. The world of college represents freedom from the regulations and 'nine-to-five' mentality of work. Furthermore, it enables her to see things differently, which she values. On the other hand, the organisation and 'red-tape' she has come across in college disturbs this impression of individual freedom. About 15% of communications are concerned with how she sees herself in relation to other people. Samantha feels that some aspects of her approach have been determined by her traumatic experiences within her family; she is grateful for tutorial guidance; she is glad, as one of a group of part-time students, that she gets the respect from tutors she feared would not be available. Throughout her comments on people around her, there is an implied tension. It is important to her own self-esteem that other people have positive opinions about her, but she resists any routine situation through which others might influence her freedom of choice. Nevertheless, in one instance the tutor was able to explain a different perspective on a difficult assignment and Samantha was able to accept it. She describes changes she is aware of in herself when she says she sees things differently. Art is clearly for her a matter of daily perception as well as a practical activity. At one point, she observes that:

Whereas you'd look at things before and they were just - I don't know - a picture on a wall or a ... You look at it and you think of everything. You might look at a building and sort of think about the structure and about the architecture and you sort of ...everything looks a bit different - sort of much broader.

Despite her protestations, she is willing to accept the points of view of other people and, in one sense, can accept being told what to do if it is a matter of perception. The overall impression is of coping with contradictions in her sphere of private experience. A matter-of-fact and practical person is attracted by the apparent freedom of art college. A need to be valued by others is accompanied by a strong sense of personal independence. She wants to change and sees the value of doing so, but is apprehensive and very wary about being changed. In many ways, Samantha's experience is a mass of contradictions.

So far accounts have been described in terms of both what was said and how it was said. For reasons detailed in the Appendix, this dual approach is closed when considering the next three accounts and the following discussion is concerned only with content. These accounts were produced as conference presentations by undergraduates studying full-time.

#### DIANA'S PRESENTATION

Diana was in her mid-fifties at the time when she wrote her account. In the section concerned with getting into higher education, Diana chooses to highlight three interrelated aspects: her childhood, her social position and her need to find a 'new pathway'. There is a perception of artistic inheritance, rejected and taken up again, in the way she identifies her upbringing. The social milieu with its associated duties, opportunities and pitfalls is thought of as a protecting element. Towards the end of the section, she strikes a more personal note in

observing that she needs to make a specific choice and find a new challenge in the light of her own mental and emotional well-being. There is a sense of an organic rightness about the way she recounts her whole development. In the section devoted to being in higher education, Diana switches from the active seeking out of the first section to an almost passive acceptance of events. Her progression into higher education is written almost as if it was something that swept her along with it. She says she felt as though she was being 'dragged into a new dimension' and found the teaching style both bewildering and exhilarating. Again, she sees this in the context of responsibilities to her family, and particularly notes the problem of juggling time between study and looking after people. She singles out the importance of other students in sharing experiences and providing mutual support. Relations with tutors are less straightforward, but she notes that, while older students may pose experiential threats to some tutors, associated problems can be solved. Diana concludes by pointing out that older students have less time than younger ones to arrange their futures.

In a way, this sense of arranging things reflects Diana's whole outlook: ordered and balanced. She is now taking up what she perceives as her artistic inheritance, albeit at a delayed date. She was somewhat phased on entering higher education but has been able to accommodate it within her life patterns and to her own satisfaction and benefit. There is tension but it can be resolved. She feels that she is now in a position to return something to society in thanks for the benefits she has received. One senses that for Diana her studies and her life fit together, not least because of the effort and thought she has put into ensuring that they do so. The second student in this group had also made a

conscious effort to link his learning with experiences gained during his long lifetime.

## KEN'S PRESENTATION

Ken was by far the oldest student who participated in the investigation and had come to undergraduate study long after retirement. Nevertheless, his energy and determination was such that he subsequently went on to win a national Adult Learner of the Year award. While family has been important for Ken, he recounts his life history in terms of different careers and forms of employment. He shows a strong awareness of abstract concepts and ideals, such as life experience, fulfillment and freedom. Like Diana, he came to a point where he felt he needed a new departure or a challenge which was provided by art and design study, initially at access but subsequently at degree level. Formal study has not been a straightforward progression and Ken has had to learn how to question his work and operate as a student. He also values the mix of students and notes the daunting problems of resolving sometimes conflicting personal demands of study and domestic responsibilities. The importance of student support services within an education institution is noted and he particularly notes the need for financial advice enabling students 'to reconcile their dreams with reality.' There is a sense of gratitude that someone older should have the opportunity to study and this has generated a sense of responsibility and desire to re-pay society for the privilege. Though no less personal when compared with that of Diana, Ken's account is more concerned about seeing his experience in a wider context of pragmatic life philosophy. He is voicing a unity of learning

and self similar to that of Diana but expressed more in terms of abstract ideals. These are noticeably absent from the more self-consciously robust third conference presentation.

#### CAROLYN'S PRESENTATION

Younger than Diana and Ken, Carolyn expressed her thoughts and feelings in a more forthright and direct manner, though her account is similar to theirs in a number of ways. Like them, she felt a similar need for challenge in the face of boredom and redundancy. Her impatience to learn, which she notes as being mentioned by an adult education tutor, remained unsatisfied by painting - as she puts it - 'water-colour daffodils week after week'. Again like Diana and Ken, she found that the early stages of study in higher education were difficult - so much so that she describes the initial experience as a shock. Interestingly and like other participants in this investigation, she felt the need when writing her account to reject the inferred criticism of being 'a bored housewife'. Carolyn also states boldly what the other two imply: that tutors can be prejudiced against older students. Her determination to continue with her studies is evident in the way she was able to accommodate not only the births of two children but also desertion by her partner. In fact, Carolyn's account, while more dramatic, extreme and humorous, is concerned with essentially the same issues as the other two. Each person notes a turning point when he or she was looking for a personal challenge or a new direction that higher education eventually provided. All three recognise the considerable personal benefit to themselves in terms of confidence, acquired skills and a sense of future direction. Negative attitudes of

some tutors also feature to a greater or lesser extent in the accounts. Each person is also immediately aware of the need to balance time devoted to learning against that required in relation to domestic responsibilities. This correspondence is all the more striking since not only are there differences in age, gender, marital status and general education, but the individuals are very different in social position, financial resources, personality and cultural background.

The final pair of written accounts are in the form of life-histories and illustrate the diversity of students who participated in this investigation. Both were studying part-time, Paul with an access course at a rural college of further education college and Janet for a degree with an urban university. While they were roughly the same age and each of them was married with a family, their socio-economic backgrounds were rather different with Paul as an unemployed craftsman and Janet as the wife of a general practitioner. These two accounts are thus contrasted but also display a number of similarities.

#### PAUL'S ESSAY

A wide range of experiences, including service in the Royal Army Dental Corps, training as a State Registered Nurse, employment as a store detective and managing kennels, were consciously redirected by Paul after a near-fatal car accident at the age of forty nine. Following subsequent A level study at a grammar school, he undertook an Access to Art and Design course at a local

technical college. Towards the end of this two year part-time course, he was required to write an essay about an artist/designer whose work he felt had influenced his own development, and Paul chose Alexander Calder (1898 - 1976).

Throughout his essay, Paul describes his own making abilities, starting with childhood memories: a card made for his grandmother; a model plane produced for his father, who promptly criticised it and threw it back at him; and a motor cycle pannier that proved his father wrong about its feasibility. Early employment in the Merchant Navy provided an opportunity to carve models of ships in soap and sell them to passengers, but subsequent apprenticeship to an upholsterer was curtailed by personal conflict with his employer. When he describes his main career in orthodontics - constructional and cosmetic aspects of dentistry - it is also partly in terms of meeting the needs of difficult patients, including his father. Following a very brief account of the life and work of Alexander Calder, Paul goes on to cite characteristics they have in common. The first of these is that their early awareness of making things was in relation to members of their respective families. Fathers and mothers are noted as important to both of them, and Paul's grandmother is again mentioned as an influence. Another parallel which he notes is a pre-occupation with ingenious - sometimes humorous - approaches to problem solving, both in relation to unorthodox attitudes to materials and in relation to other people's expectations and perceptions. In describing his main career, Paul's humour takes an ambivalent turn. He offers a comic description of his first introduction to orthodontics, a form of employment that he subsequently enjoyed and

eventually came to look on as an art form. He found it both rewarding in itself and a means of acquiring practical skills and knowledge that he could apply to jewelry and antique restoration. On the other hand, he was keenly aware of the negative aspects of orthodontics and states how he felt trapped in a limited technical field with relatively low financial rewards. In describing his journey of discovery from a detached, often wryly ironic, position, Paul makes cross-references between various phases of his career and skill development. In the later sections of the essay, he switches to the present tense and compares a picture of Calder's workshop with his own living room. He claims it as an organic art form in its own right citing how it now exhibited a working order very different from that it presented during his time as a dental technician. He explicitly compares his own capabilities and progress to those of Calder when he writes

In many ways I feel akin to Calder in mind, because of his problem solving. This is something I love doing. Having taken a different route to him, I am only now beginning to take on his freedom of spirit. It has taken me fifty-three years to reach the point that he reached in his twenties ... To summarise, Calder shows me that there is hope for me yet. All of the experiences I have had must lend themselves to my future Art creations ... With my wealth of experience and the influence of Calder, now is the time to create rather than copy. I AM AT LAST FINDING ME. (Paul's capitals and underlining)

Paul's account reveals a number of distinctive features. The emphasis in his chosen title, 'Me Searching For Me (Calders Influence)', is significant as out of the six and a half page essay only the equivalent of one page is directly concerned with his ostensible subject. Furthermore, no illustrations showing the work of his hero are included but there are nine of Paul's own sculptures and models. His essay is clearly centred on himself and his experiences rather than forming the type of art historical essay required by his course. It is as if he is

standing behind himself, looking over his own shoulder and describing what he sees in a manner that is highly personal but not private. Though he noticeably personalises the assignment by referring to Calder as 'Sandy' almost seeing him as a spiritual mentor, Paul also measures his achievements by how they are regarded by more immediate people: other generations in his family, mates in the army or customers on board ship. The shift to the present tense and the sense of confidence in the conclusion suggest that the process of writing the essay was consciously used by Paul to take stock of his position and re-orientate himself in the light of Calder as a role model.

Turning from how he expresses himself to what he says, he believes he has been continually concerned with craftsmanship, notwithstanding the major turning point formed by the accident. That craftsmanship is a substantial concern to him is borne out by attention to detail and technical skill evident in the accompanying illustrations of his work, which largely consists of imaginative working machines in the manner of Leonardo da Vinci. However, the consistency with which he seeks for parallels between himself and Calder suggests he is writing with the benefit of hindsight and is pre-disposed by recent experience to select episodes from his distant past to substantiate and justify his current self-perception. Interpreting Paul's account in this way is supported by the conclusion : he is now sufficiently confident to re-interpret his own past as a continuous if varied and uneven development. In this sense, 'finding me' can be translated as 're-making me' - a process he has undertaken through the medium of an essay about Alexander Calder. A comparable process is evident in the

second account in this sub-set though it is notably unlike Paul's in other respects.

#### JANET'S REFLECTIONS

Three months after starting a degree course, Janet gave birth to her daughter, Grace. Since she was attending part-time, she was able to continue her studies by taking advantage of the flexible structure of her course. Janet found however that both her understanding of her studies and the value she placed on them were changing as a result. In particular, she became deeply aware of conflicting demands of simultaneously developing as an artist, a mother and a wife. She used the course requirement that theoretical units of study be included in a negotiated programme to resolve some aspects of this situation by means of a self-devised unit she entitled: 'A study of female artists who are mothers, how they have combined their dual role, and in what way, if any, motherhood has influenced their work'. Her study was guided by advice from tutors and, while closely related to her own position, comprised a number of historical and contemporary case studies, the latter conducted through taped interviews. Following the conclusion of the study, in which she identified some common dilemmas and problems for women artists Janet appended a list of observations under the heading 'Personal Reflections'.

The initial impression is that the list is arbitrary: twenty five fragments of text varying in length from one to twelve lines and ranging across time and place. On closer reading, these apparently unconnected items fall into four main

categories. The first can be identified by its format, a perceptive assertion combined with a challenging question, and is used three times - once at the beginning and twice at the end of the section. Janet starts her reflections with the arresting observation that ' It's easier to ask for child-minding help while we do cement mixing to prepare a base for our shed than for college work. Why ?' The second and largest category comprises vivid descriptions, her language often implying an evaluation of the specific event, for example:

14 2 94 I have just opened the computer up to do some work. Grace is asleep. The phone has rung. The children have twittered in the kitchen. Drinks have been made. And now Grace has woken - its time to close it down.

There are nine of these diary-like items and, though they include negative reflections on the stresses of coping with conflicting demands and on the sense of wasted time and effort, some of them carry positive notes. When she recounts her own reactions to watching how Grace is learning, she comments: that 'slowness of life can be frustrating but getting beyond it can be a privilege to be part of it'. Sometimes the comments are self-reproachful, nevertheless there are also descriptions that indicate a sense of elation. She had, for example, made complicated domestic arrangements to attend a termly review by students and had suffered a frustrating journey through rush hour traffic. She writes:

I was half an hour late. Because my friends welcome me and understand my plight, I keep going. They invite me to join in with what they are doing, exhibitions, life classes ... and I feel hopeful. I feel recharged and ideas about my current work flood into my mind.

The third category comprises five fragments and shows her pausing to consider her reactions to the comments from tutors. She recalls that one had said to her

'I think you are doing brilliantly - allowing for the fact ...' and she comments that 'the patronising reaction can be real, and can be misinterpreted by me feeling sensitive.' There is an awareness of students who are mothers being regarded as different by other students and tutors, who she says generally undervalue them and make it clear from the beginning that they do not expect much from them. She is also keenly aware of how different it is for men since they have 'no fluctuating emotions, no guilt to carry'. The remaining category forms an irregular running commentary on the immediate difficulty of writing: the problems of taping an interview while keeping the recorder out of reach of her infant daughter, or of being just about to start when her daughter wakes up.

Janet's 'Personal Reflections' are perplexing in that they appear to be fragments which, though thematically related, are presented without any logical sequence of time, place or reasoning. The contrast with the rest of the study, which is conventionally structured, sequentially presented and well-reasoned, is striking enough to suggest that the format is more than an arbitrary conglomeration of random observations. The device of using the arresting observation/question format at the beginning and the end indicates some form of structure. It is also possible to discern patterns amongst the twenty five fragments, suggesting a perhaps unconscious attempt to discover or impose an order. A ten-line description of how frustrating and complicated organisational options were eventually resolved includes four short, sharp and conflicting questions. The fragments that follow this section decrease rhythmically in length: four, two, three, two, and one suggesting a gradual calming down - only to be immediately followed over the page by one of the longest reflections on the problems of

'coping'. On such evidence, Janet's apparently casual miscellany can be constructed as a literary expression that evokes the pressures under which she is working. The form of her text echoes her fragmented life: sudden switches of attention; returning to themes after an interruption; episodes of intense self-awareness interleaved with periods of external demands; and all held in place - like book-ends - by an acute awareness that she has the ability to ask searching questions. Knowingly or otherwise on the part of Janet, the title is very accurate: her account in its content but most noticeably in its form does indeed mirror her experience.

Comparing this account and that of Paul serves to introduce discussion about the findings that result from this investigation of student accounts. Janet sees her position as immediate, present and family orientated. Her husband has a busy diary to which she feels she must relate, but daily focal points are her baby and other children. She responds to the immediate support and sympathy of other students. Paul, by contrast, only once mentions his children but frequently refers to his own childhood and his relationships with past family: father, mother and grandmother. On a social level, Janet's account with its reference to commuting by car and a home computer suggest a relatively comfortable life-style as the wife of a professional, though whether the shed building was from choice or necessity is not stated. Since he left school as early as possible to serve in the armed forces, became apprenticed and considers himself as having a trade, it is reasonable to conjecture that Paul thinks of himself as of a different social class. Certainly, a comparison between the ways in which they use written language indicates that Paul might have experienced poorer schooling

minded, Paul's ambitions are deeply rooted in his technical capability and Janet is concerned with day-to-day arrangements and organisation.

Notwithstanding divergences, Paul and Janet provide accounts that display some interesting similarities. Most strikingly, they both identify themselves with artists of note, and look to them as measures for their own achievements. While in Paul's case this is partly directed by a course requirement, it is evident that the life and work of Calder acts as a measure for something much more personal. To the extent that he can identify with Calder, Paul feels he qualifies as an artist. Janet expresses the similar feeling when she states quite clearly that she is undertaking the main part of her study to provide herself with exemplars of how being an artist and a mother can carry both personal and wider benefits. This common need for a personalised measure is also embodied in real people who are close to them. In her reflections, Janet most obviously sees almost everything with which she is concerned in relation to her present family. Paul mentions his children only in passing and sees himself more in relation to his own childhood and past family: his parents and his grandmother. They both seek approbation by those they respect: Janet is worried about how tutors see her and Paul was anxious to gain his father's approval. Both of them, however, sense the paradox that in seeking such approbation they are also posing challenges by the fact of who they are in relation to the source of approval. Paul, as a son, was delighted to prove his father wrong and Janet, as a married student with children, sees tutors' low expectations of her as something to challenge. The peer group, other students in the case of Janet and in the case of

Paul his various friends and colleagues, feature as sources of valued support in the struggles of both people.

This sense of an ideal to which they aspire takes on even more immediately personal forms in both accounts. They both express an awareness of being re-directed and confused by a major intervention in their lives: the birth of Grace for Janet and the accident for Paul. Both are looking to resolve this sense of disorientation and, though by these accounts neither has found it, their methods for arriving at this goal are remarkably similar. Janet accepts the conflicts in her life and seeks to cope with them through her course of study. As she puts it:

Undoubtedly the tensions and constraints caused by the differing demands can build negative feelings. Because undeniably the situation exists and fundamentally and biologically will not change, I feel I need to think about the subject positively. I want to see at the end of my study a hopeful future with tangible examples of how being an artist and mother can and does work to the benefit of all.

Paul is more blunt and says with Calder as a model there is hope for him yet. In order to understand their positions and evaluate their achievements to date they measure themselves against an ideal vision which, in both cases, is based on someone else. Janet sees herself in relation to the perfectly balanced artist/wife/mother modelled on the artists she studied, and Paul aims to become a free creative spirit like Calder. To the extent that they are getting closer to their ideal futures through the act of producing accounts of their own learning to that extent they are succeeding. The very act of writing about themselves enables them to accept disorientation as an integral part of the opportunity to review and rebuild themselves.

## HYPOTHESISING STUDENT EXPERIENCE

It is now possible to consider what, taken as a whole, the evidence from these eleven people reveals about how they perceive, understand and handle their experience as students. In analysing the accounts, it becomes apparent that considerable commonality lies beneath the variations. Though even the shortest of passages can intertwine complex strands of thought, feeling and observation, a number of recurrent themes can be disentangled. Though all students could have chronicled events they had experienced in a more distant manner and in a few instances did so, they choose to focus in the main on how they understand, feel about, react to and interpret what is happening. The students communicate a sense of continuity in generally measuring their current perceptions by comparison with their previous perceptions of themselves. They are able to see that values they had held in the past are being replaced by others, and that this constitutes a significant change in personal understanding. Whilst the interviewees were asked to compare past and present experiences and were thus directed towards realising that they were moving from one state of awareness to another, it was not prescribed that they should recognise this as a fundamental learning experience. That this crucial distinction can be made is strongly supported by those students who provided unsolicited accounts and were therefore not responding to the same invitation. Of their own choice, they used similar measures and recognised the personal importance of the same learning experience. Some of them go beyond this recognition and are explicitly or implicitly aware that in the very act of giving their account they are reflecting on their experiences and hence re-evaluating themselves and their

achievements. To see that this affords them an opportunity to further review their own development - to use it, in effect, as a student-led tutorial - reveals how continuous and reciprocal self-evaluation forms an all-pervading aspect of the students' experience.

This sense of self-awareness in learning is not achieved lightly and students frequently talk about the practical difficulties of coping with two levels of experience. On the most immediate level, day-to-day problems are uppermost in the form of regular conflicts between personal responsibilities, typically those associated with home life, and the requirements of formal study. Contrary to what might be assumed, this is not specific to gender or mode of attendance, since to a greater or lesser extent the problems of coping feature in all accounts. For some students, it is clearly a perennial and frustrating struggle which they can accept and accommodate by persuading themselves of eventual benefits. Others have been able to organise themselves and allocate time and energy proportionally. Either way, the potential for conflict and the need for acceptable balance are always present. The other level on which students are aware that they have to cope is more directly academic. They voice confusion and apprehension about how their own values or expectations are sometimes at variance with those implicit in the courses they are undertaking. While family, friends, employers and even they themselves might not readily share the values that underpin the practice and structures they find in educational establishments, students nevertheless feel that some sort of entente has to be established. They respond to this challenge in different ways. For some, it is a state of ambivalence that they are in the process of resolving and, on the whole, are able

to accept. Others see it as a yet another obstacle to overcome, and they engage in doing so without confrontation but also without compromise.

The need to accommodate plurality of values features in most of the accounts. Though references to the values held by others are rarely antagonistic, they are frequently ambivalent. Families often constitute a source of gratefully acknowledged support, but can also be a source of discomfort. Rivalry between siblings, expectations of parents, demands of partners are cited as factors that caused students to resist in order to ensure that they were able to study.

Erstwhile friends outside the institution can be seen as sceptics who need to be convinced. Some students clearly want to prove through their studies that other people hold wrong opinions about them. Tutors are sometimes included in this as having low expectations of adult students, or as being oblivious of what is important to them. They are perceived as personifying values that present further challenges to some of the students. Though they evidently sense some antipathy from tutors, it would be wrong to interpret the relationship as confrontational since students also realise that challenging their own existing values is an organic and valuable feature of learning. Some students perceptively note that challenge can be a two way process and that some tutors feel threatened by them as students. A sort of reverse personification features in how students cope with the ambivalence they feel about other people and they distinguish between the real human beings and the beliefs they represent. Students may be able to live, work or study sympathetically with others as people but do not necessarily want to share their attitudes and beliefs. In relation to positive benefit derived from others, student peers and the value of

interaction between students are frequently cited. In several instances, there is almost a sense of gratitude for the privilege of being a member of the group. Looking at the whole range of how other people are discussed in the accounts, it can be inferred that students measure themselves and their successes by reference, negatively or positively, to the views of other people around them.

This should not however be taken to suggest passivity. The students place a high value on the opinions of others, without allowing them necessarily to determine their own future directions. There is a sense of determination running through the accounts that could be explained as a natural response to personal opposition or as a direct result of practical struggle in order to study. In either case, perceived adversity forms the spur to success. Several accounts however provide evidence of other incentives. In various ways, most students trace their return to education or part of their motivation to an intervention in their lives. For some this is an acutely traumatic event: a road accident or the death of someone close. For others, it is chronic, taking the more gradual form of increasing dissatisfaction with their lives or alienation from what was evolving around them. The disappearance of an accustomed place in the order of things, such as parenthood or employment, is also noted as a motivating factor. Such events need not be negative, since the births of children feature in several accounts. Students see life events, though perhaps only in retrospect, as turning points. The interventions in their lives become opportunities, incentives or imperatives for them to make decisions about what to do next. However, determination can result as much from striving for the future as from re-acting to the past. While a home life balanced with an art related career represents one

aspiration, the general preference is for something less specifically material.

Several foresee a future of social usefulness for themselves through offering a service to a particular community, especially through forms of teaching. Others find it difficult to be specific about the long term but feel sufficiently satisfied with the present, or imagine a future in which they would in some way be making the best use of their educational achievements, and this is a strong motivational factor for most of them.

Students' relationships with role models tend to be more ambivalent. Since the model tends to be an heroic type about whom they have read but do not know, it is more a matter of a generalised ideal than imitating a real person. Given the life experience of all the students concerned and the fact that two thirds of them are studying at undergraduate level, this is unlikely to be naiveté and needs to be considered in the context of how they are learning. However much they may benefit from being a student, each of them is very aware that it is only one of a number of roles they undertake every week. It could be argued that students' thinking about the future tends to be in terms of an ideal because they understand very well that if at least a partial level of personal satisfaction can be achieved in whatever future lies ahead, that will be sufficient. Under these circumstances, an ideal is less an aim and more of a measure: the closer achievement gets to the ideal the more successful the individual feels.

The aspect that not only forms a common denominator for most of the previous features but is also of overwhelming interest to each of the students is that, in different ways, they are all concerned with a sense of identity. It might be

observed that this is predictable in that the interview prompts encourage students to focus on themselves and some accounts are produced by strong personalities. A moment's reflection shows the position to be otherwise. With the freely generated accounts, students need not have approached them in the way they chose. Paul's peers, for instance, responded to the same assignment in a more orthodox manner by writing standard art historical essays about artists or designers. Though not required by the course to do so, Janet chose to append her personal reflections to a historical and critical study of women who were artists as well as mothers. The interview prompts were open and could have been used by students to dwell on more institutionalised subjects, such as past academic achievement, courses of study or the institution itself. That this is so is shown by the fact that most of the interviewees did indeed discuss such topics in passing, but chose to spend most of the time talking about themselves and how they felt. On the other hand, the conference format imposed on three accounts encouraged students to focus on their experience in a way that would be accessible to specialists in other academic areas and thus avoided specifically localised detail. A salient feature of all accounts is that, given the choice, students construct their learning in terms of their thoughts and feelings about changes in which they perceive themselves as pro-active in responding to a continuing challenge

It is also worth noting what they do not choose. The students could have interpreted the questions in terms of the subject they were studying, but on the whole chose otherwise. This is understandable in students following an access or foundation course, since they are in a new environment and are likely to refer

back to previous experience on more familiar territory. However, about two thirds of the participants were undergraduates and they might be expected to make more references to their subject of study. Bearing in mind that a strong emphasis on experience was the central focus in the varied circumstances under which the texts were generated, it is significant that students on the whole related 'experience' more to themselves and less to their subject of study. Even those who think in terms of 'being an artist' see their aims as personal rather than professional. They prefer on the whole to talk about their learning as people, rather than in any focused vocational sense as potential artists or designers.

One or two of the accounts suggest levels of self-determination that border on self-centredness, but closer examination reveals more sophisticated perspectives. Firstly, students often include those nearest to them, people such as children or partners, when talking about themselves. They tend to feel that what affects or concerns themselves has as much impact on those who mean most to them. Inclusion of others within the perception of self also extended to social elements or groups, as distinct from actual people. For some, there is a sense of 'ought' in this: the awareness of a greater duty, which might account for some students talking as if they were watching themselves. Some of them either state or imply that they want to demonstrate their gratitude for having the opportunity to do this by enabling others to receive similar support. This relatively objective view is thus more than standing back and critically evaluating their own achievements. It involves locating themselves in a wider social and moral context, allowing types of awareness that are inconsistent with

self-importance or self-aggrandisement. Nor is it a predominantly retrospective view, since several students envisage an ideal role for themselves in the future. They see where they have come from, where they are now and also have some idea of where they might be going.

It may be useful to clarify this synoptic approach to navigating the self with an analogy. Walking through a modern city, which one is visiting for the first time, can be a confusing experience. Large buildings range as flat cut-out shapes layer upon layer in a seemingly impenetrable wall in front of you inducing a strong sense of not knowing where you are or where you are going. Contrast this with having a map of the city as you walk: you can trace where you have been, know where you are now and envisage where you could be going. The accounts suggest that each student is drawing up a personalised map with which they can orientate themselves. They may still have a great deal to discover and learn with only a hazy idea of how they are going to do it, but the map enables them to take, as it were, an overview of their position.

In drawing conclusions from this investigation, the reasons for undertaking it should be borne in mind. Accounting for marginalisation amongst art and design students reveals that there are no academic or functional reasons why the sector should be inherently suited only to the student norm. With regard to the learning processes involved, there is the central problem of insufficient evidence about student learning experience in art and design. Accordingly, an investigation has been conducted into accounts produced by students who are perceived by themselves and others as different in comparison with the student

norm. From the descriptive processes of mirroring and constructing this evidence, it is clear that such students are distinctively active in their approach to learning rather than being passively different. In terms of human experience, the nuance between these two phrases is crucial. While both carry the implication of being apart from others, to identify someone as different is to measure them by characteristics they lack, whereas in being regarded as distinctive an individual is recognised for her or his intrinsic qualities. On the evidence of their own accounts, the learning approach described by these students demands to be recognised in a positive rather than negative light.

Analysing their own self-determined accounts reveals that these art and design students who, on the rationale of their circumstances and course of study, can be considered as institutionally marginalised in relation to the student norm, see their learning experience in the following ways:

- they understand that worthwhile learning is a personal struggle as it requires them to accept deep changes in how they think about themselves and to deal with a range of new and often conflicting values
- learning is often a matter of responding positively to the complicated challenge of re-evaluating themselves in the light of new knowledge and at the same time accommodating it in accordance with who they feel themselves to be

- they think of their studies less as specifically vocational preparation and more as a means of meeting their own need for change, often spurred by an important life event, and leading towards more personally or socially recognised forms of success
- success in learning is often a matter of being able to cope with continually balancing the practical demands of daily life with their own personal needs and the requirements of the course of study they are following
- real people to whom they feel closest, usually past or present family, often other students or friends outside the educational world, and sometimes their tutors, are variously important to them as measures of successful learning
- more distant measures are provided by their sense of responsibility to what they consider to be society, or by reference to achievers about whom they have read or heard and on whom they can model themselves
- learning is important to them as a means of helping to resolve social or cultural divisions in their lives and this generates a sense of urgency or determination to succeed in transforming their ideas about themselves
- learning is a process of continuously making links between where they have come from, how they feel about themselves at the moment and where they think they may be heading in the future.

These eight common features in what the students say about their learning experience represent the key findings of this research. *It is proposed that these features constitute a way of functioning as an art and design student that can be hypothesised as a distinctive form of institutionally based learning.*

## CHAPTER 6

### THE HYPOTHESIS SUBSTANTIATED

Though the hypothesis of distinctive learning is grounded in evidence drawn from student accounts, it needs to have resonance beyond its immediate context and origins if it is to be completely supportable. It is proposed to identify such support by mapping the hypothesis onto accepted theory and established practice, starting with some psychological positions on how people perceive and understand themselves in relation to learning.

The idea of self in relation to learning has been seen as a psychological issue for at least half a century. An American educationalist, Arthur T. Jersild writing in the late 1940s considered that

The self is a composite of thoughts and feelings which constitute a person's awareness of his individual existence, his conception of who and what he is... The self is reflexive - it is an object to itself and it can be both subject and object. It is both a knower and a thing that is known, a perceiver and a thing perceived. As a knower, the self is able to take a 'panoramic view of the total personality' ... The self is both constant and changeable.

(Jersild, 1952, pp.9-10)

Despite incorporating subjective/objective polarity, the way this concept of self foreshadows a number of elements in the hypothesis under discussion is all the more striking in having originated under different circumstances and at an earlier period. Though the definition provided by Jersild indicates that the hypothesis is likely to be supportable, it is not sufficiently outward-looking for present purposes. Since the hypothesis is concerned with the essentially self-

extending activity of learning, it can be more usefully located in psychological terms by considering theoretical positions on the expansive idea of self as personality (Hjeller and Ziegler, 1992). A general agreement that personality is the evolving and complex sum of what characterises an individual does not prevent it being regarded as a relatively stable personal attribute that gives rise to consistent patterns of behaviour. Considering various types of personality theory, as expounded by Hjeller and Ziegler, may reveal sufficient congruence with student accounts to support the hypothesis.

## PERSONALITY THEORIES

Hjeller and Ziegler (1992) describe the cognitive theory of personality proposed by George Kelly (1905-1967) which holds that perceptions are essentially relative, that there is no single correct view of reality and that knowing about the world is a matter of choosing from alternative views. Kelly saw each person as quasi-scientist seeking to understand a confusing world by testing his or her experience through applying frameworks which he called 'constructs'. He considered that people interpret and anticipate experiences in terms of whether they are similar to or contrast with their own personalised constructs.

Unfortunately, Kelly did not elaborate on the precise nature and functions of these constructs, but some elements of his personal construct theory begin to support the hypothesis. For example, when two people share similar views or, using the technical expression employed by Kelly when they 'construe the construction processes' of each other, they are likely to act in similar ways.

Crucially, congruence is between their methods of personal construction, not in similarity of resultant behavior or educational experience. The theory thus enables the focus to fall on process rather than product. Mapped onto what students say about themselves in this research, this explains how it has been possible to establish commonality between otherwise very different student accounts. They are similar in their methods of coping and thus 'construe the construction processes' of each other. A more idealistic aspect of personal construct theory is social corollary, by which Kelly meant one person trying to understand how another person constructs and perceives their reality. They need neither agree with each other nor share similar outlooks: they simply need to understand each other's pattern of behaviour - which, in passing, can be noted as corresponding with part of the motivation for this research. Directly in relation to the hypothesis, another feature of personal construct theory is its acknowledgment that the capacity to change one's constructs in the light of experience is a necessary condition of the capacity to learn and develop. Kelly considers that people whose constructs can assimilate new experiences and thus generate more sophisticated frames with which to approach subsequent experiences, is someone who genuinely learns. Conversely, if someone continuously measures their experiences by the same rigid constructs, it is questionable whether they are learning at all. Indeed, if one accepts that we learn from the sense we make of experience, such a person could be regarded as not having had experience in any significant way.

Such features of George Kelly's personal construct theory directly map onto those of the hypothesis of student learning experience. The students on whose

accounts the hypothesis is based apply personally derived frameworks, measures or constructs in order to understand their experiences. In an informal way, they are plotting their own positions in terms of how much or how little they can align themselves with the attitudes of others, particularly tutors, families and friends who represent often contradictory ways of understanding. Considering personal construct theory as one sight-line on the position of the hypothesis substantiates student awareness of the reciprocal relationship between their perceptions of themselves and their new found knowledge. Furthermore, in coping with the practical demands of daily life and of their learning, the students are effectively continuously revising their personal constructs. In conclusion, four features of the hypothesis about student learning are supportable in the light of personal construct theory.

Amongst the better known humanist approaches to personality theory is that of Abraham Maslow (1908-1970). His ideas are rooted in the existentialist belief that man is solely responsible for the choices he makes, but has the duty as a free agent to achieve his maximum potential. Maslow's concern for the whole individual led him to place a high value on creativity in its widest sense. To illustrate his ideas, he envisaged a hierarchy of needs ranged in a pyramid from those associated with basic physiology through the social needs of belonging and self-esteem to the highest point of realisation of individual potential.

Physiological needs and a sense of safety and security are most apparent in children, while the need to belong and to give and receive love are features of development in young adults. The two uppermost tiers of the pyramid, the need for self-esteem and actualisation, associated respectively with achievement and

realisation of potential, are constructed by Maslow as characteristic of adults. However, as Hjeller and Ziegler imply, there is a hint of Darwinism in the very idea of 'needs', as if people were driven inexorably towards self-actualisation with many of them never reaching that state. Though Maslow vigorously denied it, his hierarchy of needs looks like a hierarchy of people with a 'super' breed at the top of the pyramid. The personality theory proposed by Maslow provides humanist support for the hypothesis in the way it enables the students' appetite for change leading to personalised forms of success to be conceptualised as a basically human determination to succeed. One must look elsewhere for support in relation to the sense of social responsibility which is also a feature of the hypothesis.

The theoretical position of Carl Rogers (1902-1987) reflects widely ranging concerns and activities and consequently has had considerable impact in a variety of fields but particularly in education. Rogers' views on student-centred learning have already been considered in relation to education for adults but here the focus is on his approach to personality theory. His views have considerable resonance with the ethos of this research, since he maintained that the behaviour of anyone can only be understood through a phenomenological understanding of their perceptions and cognition - not in terms of what we perceive, as if there were a shared objective 'reality' beyond ourselves, but in terms of how we perceive it. The position of Rogers differs from that of Kelly however in that the latter held that we understand each other through reference to how each of us constructs reality, but also acknowledged that there is an objective reality which each individual constructs in their own terms. The

phenomenological viewpoint of Rogers is more stark: there is no reality other than that perceived and interpreted by any one person at any one time. Rogers developed a more constructive line from this idea by considering it as a means whereby people are able to determine their lives within their capabilities and by holding the view that they are responsible for doing so. A further component of his phenomenological approach is equally positive: that it is natural and desirable for people to realise their potential and to progress in autonomy and individuality. In contrast to Maslow, who shared a similar view of human experiential progression, Rogers evolved his views from practice as a therapist and postulated that the behaviour of each person results from his or her unique and current perception of the world. It was this sense of the unique personality that led him to take up the essentially moral position within phenomenological thinking that no one can claim superiority of perception. No sense of reality is any more 'true' than any other and consequently no one has the right to impose his reality on others. The stance also led him towards a holistic view of personality and rejection of methodologies that seek understanding through examining isolated components. In highlighting personal experience and adopting a phenomenological perspective, Rogers moved an expansive and socially responsible concept of self to the centre of his theories. He did not, however, start with this view, but eventually came to understand, significantly as a therapist listening to the way his clients expressed their concerns, that 'find oneself' is a central concern, at least in cultures that embrace European thinking. As reported by Hjelle and Ziegler, Rogers held the view that

— the self-concept often reflects how we view ourselves in relation to the various roles we play in life. Such role images are formed as a result of increasingly complex transactions with other people. A person's self

-concept may thus include a conglomeration of self-images such as parent, spouse, student, employee, supervisor, athlete, musician, and artist. (Hjelle and Zeigler, 1992, p.498)

The Rogersian concept of self is neither a quasi-scientific psychological postulation (personal construct theory), nor a mechanistic agent of control (hierarchy of needs) but one that includes the multiple contexts of any given moment. It represents a cross-section of an individual's conscious experience at any one time and therefore reflects his or her total personality.

It is appropriate to conclude this review of relevant personality theories with that of Carl Rogers since his more expansive idea of self is reflected in all eight features of the present hypothesis of learning. That this is unlikely to be coincidence is suggested by the equally evident connections with Jersild's much earlier concept of self which had rather different origins. Furthermore, it has been shown that the hypothesis also corresponds with some of the salient features of other theories, though these diverge in various ways from those of Rogers' position. The hypothesis evidently has sufficient in common with a range of well-established and accepted psychological theories about self and personality for it to be supportable. With such assurance, the hypothesis can now be juxtaposed with some recent studies of the type of practice that is more or less based on these theories.

## THEORIES IN PRACTICE

In view of how the facilitation of learning features in post-16 practice (Brockbank and McGill, 1998), it will be useful to continue with the ideas of

Carl Rogers. Though he was writing (Rogers C, 1983) as a therapist, Rogers consistently uses the term 'facilitation of learning' and thus signals a wider perspective than the conventional teacher/taught relationship. In essence, facilitators enable students to learn by providing them with practical and human resources, rather than giving out information themselves. The emphasis is on each student learning how to learn by developing the capacity to search for knowledge using diverse resources and to use that knowledge in a variety of circumstances. Thus the role of facilitators connects with some features of the student accounts considered in this research, suggesting an affinity between the mode of teaching espoused by Rogers and the type of learning epitomised by the hypothesis.

There are however problems in citing Rogers' educational position in substantiating the hypothesis. The key book in which he expounded his position (Rogers C, 1983) was effectively a reprint of an earlier text with an added update. As such, it represents 1960's ideals re-interpreted a decade and a half later. The need to cope with the practicalities of multiple roles and plurality of values, which features in student accounts as a major issue, does not appear in Rogers' guidelines for facilitators. In this respect, the third edition (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994), is initially disappointing. The apostolic quality of Freiberg's writing coupled with specific application to American schools and industry render it difficult to make a direct connection between his updating of Rogers' ideas and what British adult art and design students are saying about themselves. Nevertheless, towards the end of his revisions Freiberg makes an interesting observation. He accounts for the partial lack of success in spreading

person-centred approaches by noting that it entails devolution of power from teachers and students: idealistic concerns for the welfare of others can be overridden by the threat of losing one's own power. This focus connects with the position which has developed in Britain where Rogersian ideals of personal choice and responsibility, instead of being side-lined as in the United States, are more widespread but in a peculiar way. The emancipatory idea of student-centred learning has been redefined as the economic and political concept of the student-as-customer, bringing instrumental arguments for education increasingly to the fore. Predictably, this results in a confusing situation, since

... what is taught should, we are told, relate to the needs of society, of the economy, and of the learner's own personal growth. But there is no evidence of the cultural analysis essential for knowing what these social needs are ... nor, with regard to the economy, is there clarification of skills, qualities and knowledge which a successful economy requires of the educational system, nor, finally, are we given a clear picture of the kind of personal growth which education aims to enhance. Above all, there is no attempt to see how these different aims can be reconciled to each other ...

(Pring, 1995, pp. 83-84)

Attention is drawn to this aspect of the wider political debate about education since it connects with reservations being made here. Despite the strong inspirational support for the hypothesis provided by extensive practice based on Carl Rogers' ideas, a central problem remains. There are features of current adult students' practical experience, products of the intervening decade and the current socio-economic climate, of which Rogers' original ideas could not be expected to take account.

There is a further issue about the ideas of Rogers in relation to this research.

The specific type of student-centred learning, or facilitation, that he advocated

has permeated thinking about more flexible approaches in post-school education in the United Kingdom (McGill and Beaty, 1992; Brookfield, 1993; Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997; Brockbank and McGill, 1998). The concept of student centred learning underpins the promotion of learning contracts (Stephenson and Laycock, 1993), and the development of modular courses in art and design (Buss, 1995). More pertinently in relation to this research, various forms of radically student-centred learning, such as negotiated study (Jones, 1993) and independent study (Funnell and Smith, 1994) also share the Rogersian ethos. In view of the fact that several of the students contributing to this research were earlier or concurrently engaged in negotiated study at the University of Central England Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, citing Rogers' ideas as substantiation can only be taken as partial support for the hypothesis. Triangulation with theories other than those of Carl Rogers is required if the hypothesis is to be properly and fully substantiated by evidence from the field of education for adults.

A synoptic overview of education for adults based directly on practice (Rogers, 1992), includes a survey of approaches from a teacher's perspective with a commentary grounded in psychological theories. Alan Rogers considers that Carl Rogers and Maslow help to construct learning as meeting inner needs and drives, but notes the limitations in their thinking that have already been noted here. In his critique of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Alan Rogers maintains that students have a variety of needs not only within a group but as individuals, and that the mixture of needs will change according to the situations of individuals and how their learning progresses. Rogers points out that though education for

adults is mostly concerned with self-actualisation, it is by no means certain that this top tier of need in Maslow's hierarchy is triggered by satisfaction at lower levels. However, Rogers recognises they are interconnected in observing that:

... when some of our student participants come to our programmes from a desire for social relationships or to gain some sense of esteem, as many do, they are being driven by needs that must be satisfied at least partially before further learning can take place.

(Rogers A., 1986, p.64)

Since humanistic learning theories envisage the self-impelled learner as inter-actively engaged with everything around him or her, Rogers designates them as 'environmentalist'. In this sense, the environment is much more than the merely physical and includes communications between human beings, social dynamics and the world-pictures we build for ourselves, or indeed all these together.

Rogers cites the more political views of Paolo Freire, who sees the learner as struggling with the environment and who identifies stages of learning as, initially, task-related and then concerned with inter-personal relationships. The third stage was called 'conscientization' by Friere, as it comprises

... transformation through learning of the awareness of surrounding reality, the development of a concern to alter it, and a realistic assessment of the resources and hindrances to such a process and the conflicts it is bound to provoke.

(ibid., p.55)

Rogers concludes his overview of teaching and learning methods that relate psychological theories to the learning environment with the apt comment that:

Such views rely on the innate drives of man and woman towards autonomy and understanding ... Learning through life is ... an active engagement with our environment and with ourselves, a struggle that actually increase tension, a dialectic in which we seek to alter both our environment and ourselves in the constant search for something better, some ideal. Learning is seen as the processes by which our sense of discontent with the now and search for transcendence can express itself in a quest for perfectability. (ibid., p.57)

The hypothesis can now be claimed as supportable in theoretical terms since it concurs with established thinking about teaching adults which, using Alan Rogers' taxonomy, is grounded in psychological theories of learning that take account of how individuals perceive themselves in the context of their own environment. Further confirmation of the hypothesis is provided by considering how this more expansive concept of self is manifest in pragmatic approaches to practice in education for adults. The current position is summarised succinctly by Peter Jarvis when he refers to various, sometimes conflicting, views on what constitutes 'self' in the context of adult learning (Jarvis, 1995). He agrees with the initial thoughts of Carl Rogers that the concept of self is complex and loosely defined but argues that

... the self and the mind are learned phenomena that emerge through the same process of transforming experiences into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, feelings, etc. which are stored in the brain and from which emerge both the mind and the self. It is from this body of knowledge etc. that individuals are able to impose meaning on their own situations and experiences.  
(Jarvis, 1995, p.57)

The process of juxtaposing the hypothesis with theoretical positions on adult education for adults has a decidedly positive outcome. The hypothesis is sufficiently congruent with that practice in education for adults which is based on the central concept of an active and constructive self for it to be considered as supportable. However, it is also a recurrent factor in this research that accounts of the practice of learning tend not to reflect the student perspective. In order to fully substantiate the hypothesis, attention needs to be given to the findings of studies in which students themselves and what they say about their thoughts and feelings as learners are directly in evidence.

## STUDIES OF STUDENT EXPERIENCE

In accordance with the overall ethos of this research, studies of learning experience are being considered here less in the spirit of proof and more in substantiation for the hypothesis through concurrence of thinking. One aspect of learning experience that has received critical attention is the position of women as students. Reference to one particular project (Morrison, 1996) is useful to the present research as it looks at women studying part-time.

Morrison finds that, though part-time study allows students to organise and schedule their various activities and responsibilities, institutional provision for part-time study tends to ignore

... the potential and actual tensions facing female students who need to organize time in terms of study-based and/or work-orientated careers, and in terms of traditional and multiple patterns of socially organised and sexually stratified divisions of labour. The structure of part-time courses investigated did not explicitly challenge traditional assumptions about women's domestic roles; neither did they bring about any radical change in the way the college was organized.

(Morrison, 1996, p.213)

In parallel with the construction of public and private spheres of student learning experience (Haselgrove, 1994), Morrison identifies college-based experience as visible learning and home-based learning as invisible, pointing out that this separation presents challenges for women in terms of who they see as laying claim to their time. Morrison includes numerous examples of what students write or say about their experiences of coping as women engaged in institutional learning. She quotes students voicing a strong sense of tension between domestic duties and commitment to study, and attendant feelings of inadequacy in relation to other students, thereby confirming the perceptions of

the female art and design students on whose accounts the hypothesis is based. Morrison introduces a further aspect in one case study, when she reports that a particular woman would have been classed as a failure by institutional standards, since she attended erratically, did not sit examinations and eventually withdrew from the course. Further discussion revealed that, contrary to expectations, the student regarded her study time as personally rewarding and beneficial. She had become more confident, had developed communication skills, had learned how to cope with caring responsibilities and, most significantly for her, she had acquired and retained a job. As Morrison notes, institutional criteria for such success simply do not apply. It is evident that what constitutes success in the public sphere of learning experience and what is seen as worthwhile and positive achievement by students in their private sphere may diverge sharply. Though the accounts investigated in this research are less dramatic, several show that the benefits of education most highly valued by students might almost be regarded as incidental by institutional standards. Perhaps this can be accounted for by Morrison's lists of the ways in which current attitudes to education for adults could be challenged, improved and developed. She sees that the institutional predilection for regarding study as linear and inflexible conflicts with that of students which relates more to the economic and personal needs of women and men. Morrison concludes with a plea for fragmented time to be seen as positive means by which the family, part-time education and employment can become complementary factors in the total learning experience.

Another study (Rosen, 1993) looks at the position of black students in higher education. Her findings are based on interviews with students and she includes

their comments in her report. Some of these describe vividly how the perception of self by an individual is determined, negatively or positively, by the reactions of parents, teachers, and fellow students. An account of one student's experiences reveals how she passed through a variety of stages, each of them determined more or less by who was around her. She counteracted the hostility of childhood racism with aggressive behaviour, but the inability of teachers to recognise her potential encouraged subsequent perception of herself as a failure. At college, she identified strongly with other black students and, like them, adopted various types of 'mask' as a necessary survival strategy. She came to understand that white students' command of language, by which she had been initially overawed, was also a form of mask. The account reveals how a sense of self can develop as a sense of responsibility to a group with which the individual identifies. It also shows how institutions, no matter how positive and supportive, can be distrusted by students as a result of their own life-long negative experiences. One solution to this is solidarity: institutions can be made more amenable to individuals through mutual support within a group, and may even be changed by concerted group action. Through such means, the eventual benefit of formal educational experience can be both personal and social.

Rosen reports students as saying:

What it has done is to make me more aware of who I am and what I believe and given me the chance to look at other people as well ... We're all responsible for each other now. There's a lot of competition on this course and we don't want anyone to fail ...

(Rosen, 1993, p.191]

Rosen comments that membership of a group not only empowers individuals and promotes self-growth but also protects those within it. A number of the points raised by Rosen reappear in what the art and design students say about

their experiences in this investigation. The two black students, whose accounts have been investigated, feel strongly about the wider sense of cultural identity without having the immediate support of other black students. One of them expresses shock on finding that the institution is, in some aspects of the curriculum, oblivious of this sense of identity. Though none of the other accounts mention the need for masks or survival strategies, several experienced an initial sense of inferiority, similar to that noted by Rosen. Feelings of sympathy and solidarity with other students and the awareness of a responsibility to return the benefits of education to others all find echoes in what Rosen describes. The appetite for change together with the sense of determination that accompanies it, and the importance of other people in determining self-perceptions emerge as common features. Not wishing in any way to minimise the traumatic experience they can experience in post-16 education, it is significant that in a more intense form black students tend to express views that are evidently shared by other student groups. This adds strong support to the way in which my research constructs institutionally marginalised students as a heterogeneous group, united in their sense of being different from the student norm rather than separately characterised by individual attributes.

Attention has been drawn to the alienating effect of institutions, particularly in terms of socio-cultural values, by three further studies that focus on other forms of commonality amongst students who are regarded as different. In a recent study concerned with older students attending part-time at two universities (Bourgeois and others, 1999), the reported perspectives, especially when the

words of the students themselves are quoted, directly reflect those of the art and design students featured in this research. The Bourgeois study makes the point that issues of institutional flexibility with regard to the changing student profile are most evident at initial levels of learning experience and that this is a matter not only of practical arrangements but also of attitudes. For example, though they might start their studies in a tentative way, adult students tend eventually to be more confident and outgoing than younger students in seminars and presentations. Tutors attribute this to their broader and longer life experience. They note how experience also equips older students with wider and stronger reference points for evaluating what and how they learn. In particular, students and tutors alike agree that adult students are able to conceptualise and make sense of their experience in the light of their studies.

Because it is concerned with students who are adult and studying part-time and with lecturers of varying ages, and both groups include men and women, the study reveals an attitudinal nexus in which the perceptions of tutors and students and their perceptions of each other are reciprocal. This is especially pertinent in that it concurs with one of the earliest observations made in the Introduction to this research, when it was pointed out that students are perceived by themselves and others as different for a variety of interconnected reasons. Bourgeois and others (1999) confirm that while the perception of difference does not result from a single factor, there is the common element that those who are institutionally marginalised as a result tend more than other students to consciously interrelate their learning with their experience of life, both practically and conceptually. It is not simply a matter of biological age. A

student may not be older than others but his or her life may be much richer due to cultural, domestic, economic or personal circumstances. Conversely, an adult student may be leading a socially circumscribed life but could nevertheless be profoundly aware of it as valuable experience. Rather than individually attributable characteristics such as age, gender, cultural, social or economic circumstances, it is the experience of a wider life that forms the crucial factor in determining whether or not a student is perceived as different. Furthermore, the affinity between adults engaged in part-time undergraduate study and the students who participated in this research shows that this is so regardless of whether life experience is prior to or concurrent with institutionally based learning. With this level of congruence, the Bourgeois study readily confirms that the hypothesis, far from being specific to its circumstances, finds strong support in the wider field of post-16 education.

The importance of life-experience also features in another research project, which records the experiences of nearly fifty continuing education students (Weil, 1993). Weil tracked the progress of six of them and identifies some key issues. The feeling of disjunction on re-entering formal education, often associated with complex inter-relationships of past and present and experienced as fragmentation of personal and social identity, needs to be managed. She lists specific instances where students feel such disjunction, most of which are echoed in the eleven accounts featured in my research, and identifies ways in which students combat this feeling of disjunction. They may seek an equilibrium that assimilates new challenges without the sense of self being fundamentally in question. Alternatively and if the appropriate support is available, they may see

learning as constructive and enabling, no matter how challenging. A third way of managing disjunction depends more on other people and facilities providing compensation for disjunction. Weil refers to the process whereby this happens as mediation and can be in the form of support from tutors, a bridging course, peers or partners. Whatever the source of such compensation, the process is continuous, erratic and, from her investigations, can be seen as centring on themes that matter to students in their struggles to overcome disjunction. She considers, quoting critical comments from several students, that teachers traditionally underestimate the effect of their own personal stances and attitudes. She shows that students learn as much from how they are taught as from the delivered curriculum and that much of what they learn carries negative connotations, particularly with regard to their status.

One of the students who contributed to her project noted the irony of teachers being themselves mature learners but generally incapable of understanding how their own adult students might feel. This student had experienced integration and sympathetic teaching in further education, but on transferring to higher education had found that the tutors adopted different attitudes. Other adult students note that they were treated as if they were in secondary school, reviving unwelcome memories of negative aspects of education. Weil suggests that respecting adults for who they are and accepting that students have their own lives and circumstances may, as far as teachers are concerned, also involve recognising previous damage and what is necessary to repair it. As another student observed, people often return to formal learning as a result of divorce, illness or some other traumatic life event with the feeling that they need to start

again. They need to re-build their confidence through taking on academic challenges.' Weil reports part of a dialogue between herself and two black students in which it becomes apparent that this confidence is embodied in how they talk about the things that mean most to them. The overall suggestion is that tutors place far less value on this activity and consequently do not generally promote a sufficiently encouraging learning environment. Another recurrent theme amongst students is the belief that their learning is holistic, and they do not want to compartmentalise their lives. As Weil puts it,

... there seemed to be a vital need to make connections: with one's life, with other disciplines, with issues that personally mattered, and with experience that was both prior to and had also emerged out of that course.

(Weil, 1993, p.174)

Weil associates her analysis with the idea that 'adult learners do not bring their experience with them into education; they *are* their experience' (ibid. p.175 - her italics). She concludes by maintaining that the perspectives of adult students raise fundamental questions about the quality and responsiveness of education in frameworks that are often left out of institutional debates. The answers do not lie in alternative theories (andragogy, experiential learning or distance learning) or new learning programmes (modular, access or open) but in

... the much finer nuances of expressing respect, concern and care for individuals, and in giving priority to the needs for adults to build upon and make sense of their experiences within the context of their own and others' 'life worlds'.

(ibid., p.175).

The congruence between the accounts reported by Weil and the hypothesis resulting from investigating accounts by art and design students is re-iterated in another study undertaken with marginalised students (West, 1996). In the first two chapters of his report on a three year project, West describes his research

processes which have already been noted as having a bearing on the methodological stance taken in this research. With regard to his findings, West re-confirms many of the points already made in my research, including the paucity of information about students' personal views. West strongly endorses the observation that the results of quantitative and instrumental surveys purporting to identify student reactions in fact reflect ideological imperatives that are essentially economic and vocational (West, 1996, pp.1-2). He does not deny the wider validity of such surveys, but agrees that they seriously neglect students' personal approaches that enable them to eventually cope with changing career and employment patterns. My research shows that what students say is closely intertwined with how they say it and how it is interpreted, a view supported not only by West's argument about the need for correspondence between subject and methodology in research (West, 1996, p.12) but also by his whole approach and rationale. The methods he uses to investigate biographical narratives result in immediate and directly personal evidence, revealing that students tend to use such narratives to re-align and to reflect on their past and present experiences. The same capacity to re-construct while in the act of re-counting is variously demonstrated by several students whose accounts are investigated in my research. With regard to findings, West again challenges conventional research positions in asserting that he is not revealing facts and that no general truths can be deduced from what he finds:

... its validity primarily lies in the meaningfulness of the analysis to other sense-making practitioners wrestling with similar questions, as well as the extent to which the interpretations illuminate the struggles of learners elsewhere, in analogous situations.  
(West, 1996, p.13)

With this approach, he logically resists prescriptive ‘conclusions’ but in his last two chapters identifies a number of common themes that re-occurred throughout the interviews and conversations he conducted with students. In his penultimate chapter, West discusses the practical difficulties encountered by his interviewees in the process of entering access study and progressing to higher education. The feelings of being out of place, of marginalisation and of not being understood underlie a great deal of what students said. There is a strong connection between public and private experience in which students’ perceptions of how they are regarded and where they are in the system intermeshes with how they feel and think about themselves, who they are and what they are becoming. More positively, West’s students testify to the value of support from other students on a personal level as well as in relation to academic development and the perception of their achievement being located in the estimation of others is particularly strong. In each of these aspects, West’s students voice the same concerns and joys as the students whose accounts feature in this research. Both sets of students draw attention to the major importance of other people in their sense of achievement. This especially centres on other students, though the reassurance that derives from the good opinion and support of tutors is also acknowledged as a contributing factor. Such feelings range from the particular, such as a sense of group support in a specific seminar, to the general in which changes in personal roles, family context and class background all contribute to how individuals see themselves. Most of West’s students bring past and present experiences together in narratives that border on poetry in the interplay of words, inflections and pauses. Again, the means of expression becomes part of what students want to

say in that it enables them to unite and correlate what otherwise might be disparate or contradictory elements of their experiences. West claims that:

A dynamic, if incomplete, struggle for self-hood - for some cohesion, integrity, authenticity, and agency - lies at the heart of these biographies. Without some success in the struggle, there is and can be no confident and assured risk-taking; or little or no experiment with alternative identities. It is only when self becomes sufficiently strong that one can enthusiastically enter transitional space - between one's self and others, reality and illusion - to take risks.  
(West, 1996, p.211)

With notable congruence provided by the methodology and findings of West's study, it is now possible to summarise what has become evident through juxtaposing the hypothesis with established theories and authentic practices. Strong correlation is revealed between the hypothesis and a range of psychological positions on personality and self. Its eight features are also consistent with many of the ways in which the educational theories grounded in these positions are operative in education for adults. Furthermore, congruency is powerfully evident between the hypothesis and findings from empirical studies that seek to identify issues and principles of practice, particularly from the perspectives of marginalised students. *There is persuasive evidence that the hypothesis of learning as constructed through this research is substantiated and therefore eminently supportable in the light of current positions on both theory and practice in the field of education for adults.* It now remains to see what can be constructed by juxtaposing the hypothesis with day-to-day practice in art and design.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE HYPOTHESIS JUXTAPOSED WITH ART AND DESIGN PRACTICE

A survey conducted into student perceptions of adult education (Sargent, 1996) can serve as a bridge between generic issues and those specific to the sector on the grounds that it specifically refers to various crafts. It is apparent from the report on the survey that the distinction between vocational and non-vocational learning is more a matter of concern for managers and funding agencies than it is for students. To a minimal extent, adult education offers a progression route into formal learning, but primarily serves student purposes in other ways.

Sargent cites gardening as a classic example of how people may be learning a wide range of practical skills and theoretical knowledge, regardless of whether they engage with it as a 'hobby' or as leading to employment. The same subjects may be vocational for some people and of general interest to others, and the age of students may also determine whether they regard an activity or subject as leisure or learning. Wider social changes can also effect how people regard adult education. From the perspectives of students, distinctions between vocational and non-vocational learning are variable, transformable and may be invisible, since they depend on learner motivation and circumstances rather than subject classification or form of provision. Turning to participation rates, Sargent notes that the ratio of women to men on non-award bearing courses is generally very high. Thus, in highlighting the questionable distinction between

vocational and non-vocational learning, Sargent raises the issues of gender-related perceptions about participants in adult education and also re-iterates the importance of taking the personal circumstances of students into account.

Whilst her findings corroborate some of those in my research, they also point to some issues that need to be considered in relation to the current position of art and design, and tantalisingly serve as a further reminder that there have been very few systematic studies of student experience in the sector. In this chapter, the two most substantial studies in this field are therefore considered in some depth as measures for the hypothesis.

#### EXPERIENCE IN PART-TIME FURTHER EDUCATION

A perceived lack of information about the variety of craft opportunities available through the adult education services of local authorities caused the Crafts Council of Great Britain to commission a survey. This was based on over a thousand responses from students engaged in 136 courses in seven strategically selected regions of England and Wales (Knott, 1987). Though her report on the research is primarily concerned with variables in teaching, resources, organisation and management, Knott also looks at how students perceive their learning and points out that

.. value for money was very much an individual question. For many there was an end product of quite specific worth; for some the skill gained was of commercial value; others regarded their experience of attending the course as of itself worthwhile. What is clear from the evidence is that part-time craft courses must be regarded as educational and not recreational  
(Knott, 1987 p.38)

Statistical evidence about student numbers included in the survey show that rather more than twice as many women were engaged in the crafts in adult education. Knott compares this with the ratio for vocational education generally and suggests that men are more likely to join courses that are clearly work-related. Observing that the notion of 'male' and 'female' crafts has to some extent been eroded, she reports that traffic across traditional divisions is largely in one direction. More women tend to be taking courses previously identified with male interests, but there were still courses, such as the textile crafts of lace making, quilting and macramé, where the survey found that no men had enrolled. This corresponds with empirical evidence from the annual enrolment figures for City and Guilds courses within my own department at The University of Central England. Out of some one hundred and fifty students following courses in photography, ceramics, life drawing and textile crafts under a quarter are men, with textile crafts almost entirely undertaken by women. A quarter of the ceramic students are men, as are more than half of the numbers enrolling for photography. Following Knott's line of construction, it may not be a coincidence that the City and Guilds photography class, which has by far the highest male participation rate of any of the courses, is the only one of these courses advertised by the University as vocational. Knott also identifies variations between craft subjects with regard to the age and prior educational experience of participants, and deduces that 'only a few crafts (and notably carving) were truly open to people of either sex, all ages and all educational levels' (Knott, 1987, p. 45).

Turning to more experiential evidence, Knott looks at student motivation. The influence of other people is important in some subjects, notably mixed crafts and general textiles, but the most powerful motive is shown to be the desire for a new interest. Knott comments that generally students take their courses very seriously, often with impressive determination and tenacity, but only a few develop and take their involvement any further, unless specifically encouraged to do so. Knott records a high level of general satisfaction, and a mostly middle position on the relative values placed on product and process. The completed piece of work is important to students but they also value the craft process itself. She mentions the idea of learning new skills and responding to new challenges, but it is worth noting that less than 6% of respondents voice these feelings.

The way students evaluate social aspects of learning is noteworthy. They seem to distinguish between purely social activities and those activities that relate closely to the learning atmosphere of the class. Many students value the communicative dimension of adult education and derive great benefit from being with others who share their enthusiasms, though Knott strongly refutes the cliché that part-time adult education is largely for people who have little else to occupy their minds. She finds the median position that social aspects of learning are not rated very highly by students but that very few felt they are not important at all. Tutors' perceptions of student motivation place the opportunity to learn practical skills and benefit from professional advice as by far the most important, which seems to coincide with Knott's view that there is considerable demand for courses in specialised crafts. In general, her

interpretation of the data seems to largely reinforce the traditional view of the amateur artist or craftsperson: someone who has sufficient spare time to become devoted to an identifiable craft or material-based activity, but tends to see the activity as an end in itself and not necessarily related to other aspects of his or her life.

A note of caution is needed here in that Knott's survey was conducted some time ago. Not only have local authority adult education services been subjected to withdrawal of funding, but further education colleges and latterly higher education institutions now provide more opportunities for adult learners. In addition, social developments have altered people's perceptions. Enough changes have taken place during the fifteen years following the Craft Council survey to question the concepts of work-related learning embedded in the interpretation of the data. In my experience, proficiency in such crafts as machine knitting, embroidery or clothing design, despite not being ostensibly vocational, are not infrequently seen by women as leading to paid work that they can undertake at home. Inevitably, such observations about the survey tend to modify the relevance of some findings to the purpose of this research, but do not essentially change the overall picture. Knott's findings are mirrored by enrolment patterns in my Department and concur with what Sargent says about adult education generally. *It is evident that vocational and non-vocational distinctions are neither as clear nor relevant to participants in adult education craft courses as administrators or government policies seem to suppose or intend.*

Knott describes an hermetic world in that the adult education courses neither build intentionally on the previous learning of participants, nor lead to subsequent learning in any formal sense. My experience suggests that this sense of isolation, though recurrent in adult education, is not necessarily an inherent feature. In 1993, I had the task of incorporating a group of long-established and popular adult education classes into a BTEC validated Foundation Art and Design course. This was undertaken with some reservations, bearing in mind the differences involved. The Foundation course, overwhelmingly in practice if not by intent, enables young full-time students to identify and progress to their future subject of under-graduate study. The adult education classes on the other hand were attended part-time by predominantly middle aged people who wanted to learn specific skills associated with painting, drawing or sculpture for their own sake. As such, the classes were exactly as those described in the Crafts Council survey. The Foundation Course structure was modified to provide for part-time attendance mode and groups were taught separately from students attending full-time, though the former adult education students followed the same curriculum. The results were surprising. Only a small number withdrew and the majority, with some apprehension, welcomed the challenge and were soon producing work which, though significantly different in type, was comparable in standard with that produced by younger students. This would suggest that students traditionally associated with adult education, when offered more challenging assignments, can respond accordingly and begin to see learning as something much more all-embracing than the acquisition of limited practical skills. That expectations on either side are a key factor is supported by the students involved in this exercise. They said that the transition was not what

they expected and it was much more difficult than they had anticipated, but that what they were now doing was more worthwhile.

One anecdote indicates the depth of their response. An elderly woman was, for the first time in many years of attending adult education classes, drawing the difficult subject of a flight of stairs looking downwards. She was attempting to correlate her view with the drawing, without resorting to systematic perspective theory, and was predictably encountering problems. I asked to stand in her position at the easel, which was a novel idea to her, until I explained that my advice would be more directly useful if I were to see the stairs precisely from her viewing position. My suggestions for alterations to the drawing were promptly rejected by her on the logical grounds, which I had overlooked, that her eye level was some ten inches lower than mine! She was thus able to demonstrate an awareness of the perceptual relationship between who she was, in terms of her physical person, and the 'correctness' of the drawing she was constructing. She had understood that the drawing was as much about becoming aware of her own point of view, literally in this case, as it was about the representing the physical presence of the stairwell. Nevertheless, this whole experience also corroborates the findings from the Crafts Council survey in terms of progression. While a few of the adult education students went on to study successfully at undergraduate level, a significant proportion felt that the Foundation level experience was sufficient and chose to join a non-award bearing general art class. Ten years later, many of them, including the woman who drew the stairs, are continuing to attend this class.

Findings of the Crafts Council survey, supported by my experience, have been discussed at some length because they substantiate the hypothesis in an unexpected way. While acknowledging that what students learn in adult education classes can be worthwhile, something essential to deep learning is missing. The clues lie in Knott's analysis of the survey data, and by implication she makes two informative points. Firstly, she lists the influences and motives that stimulated people to take up crafts, and these most frequently depend on the potential student encountering craft products in friends' houses, exhibitions, shops, craft fairs or at demonstrations. It can be inferred from these influences that the motivating factor is predominantly imitative: the wish to be able to make something that resembles an admired exemplar. This corresponds with the view that intelligent and sensitive imitation is integral to the development and continuity of craft traditions (Dormer, 1994). It is not however an approach that can easily accommodate radical questioning, and the findings of the Crafts Council study support the view that there is a strong conformist ethos in adult education.

The second point can be inferred from Knott's conclusion to the section on student involvement (Knott, 1987, p.56) where she proposes four levels. Though these are presented sequentially, incidentally corresponding with Maslow's hierarchy of need considered in Chapter 6, she notes that they can characterise individual students at different times and in different circumstances. Some students find the classes they attend are sufficient and they do not want to pursue their interests beyond attendance time, nor are they usually interested in other crafts. Others move readily from one activity to another but without any

heavy commitment. There are others who sustain more interest in their craft and may concurrently take up another. Finally, there are those who are so deeply involved that craft forms a major element in their lives. In Knott's first three levels, adults learn and develop in an hermetic manner in that they experience personal benefit but their study is separated from the rest of their lives. Such compartmentalisation discourages the development of a private sphere of learning, since the latter constitutes the very space in which the private self and public learning interact. The dominant approach of many participants in adult education involves separation of these worlds, not interaction. Comparing Knott's fourth level with the students on whose accounts the hypothesis is based suggests that consciously undertaking deep learning is a necessary condition for awareness of learning experience.

A moment's reflection on how this connects with the type of teaching and learning that was found in Chapter 3 to be typical of art and design, begins to explain a peculiarity of the sector. Encouraging close reference to exemplars of excellence in art or design is an integral part of learning through practice. Such referencing can range from unquestioning imitation of a given set of marks to being informed and stimulated by a teacher in the evolution of new levels of personal practice. Correlated with Knott's findings, this suggests that the unquestioning desire to emulate which, rightly and beneficially, has a place in adult education classes, can unthinkingly be taken as the salient characteristic of adult students generally. Knott's list of involvement levels is a powerful reminder that there is a spectrum of studentship. She identifies those who are most likely to be satisfied with producing an acceptable imitation of a model of

excellence alongside those she recognises as having a deeper interest in learning as a major feature of students' lives. My recent experience in developing a higher level qualification in Creative Arts for City & Guilds strongly supports Knott's categories of attitudes to learning, and indicates that it is her fourth group who could make a ready transition to the type of learning advocated by Barnett (1990) as a necessary condition of higher education. In fact as has been seen, higher education institutions tend to assume the reverse. Prevalent enough in the past to be voiced in national reports (Ashwin, 1975), the assumption that the presence of part-time (ie adult students) would somehow dilute the quality of learning for full-time (ie young students) accounts to a considerable extent for the national lack of part-time provision at undergraduate level in art and design. Knott's findings, supported by my experience with City & Guilds, suggest that this is founded on the mistaken assumption that adults will automatically tend to be at the imitative rather than the innovative end of the spectrum identified through the Crafts Council survey.

A central factor in this assumption can be identified through tracking the history of the word 'amateur'. The word became widely used in its etymological sense as a lover of art in the later eighteenth century when the practice of drawing or water-colour painting was regarded as a highly desirable social accomplishment, especially for young women. No doubt partly due to mediocre work resulting from this fashion, the word 'amateur' soon acquired negative connotations, especially amongst those professional artists who were obliged - often with explicit distaste - to supplement their incomes through private tutoring (Clarke, 1981). The evolution of art schools and social developments in the earlier

twentieth century, recounted in Chapter 3, contributed to a downward slide in the meaning of 'amateur'. In the light of such a history, it is easy to understand why art and design institutions, encouraged by government policies in the 1960s, should have come to label adults studying part-time as 'amateurs' and to regard them as neither professional nor serious. It is not an exaggeration to say that as far as the institutional culture of art and design was concerned, the amateur's love of art had become, to borrow Oscar Wilde's epithet, 'the love that dare not speak its name'. Without this historical background, it is difficult to account for the almost entirely pejorative application of the word 'amateur' to older people or indeed anyone studying part-time. The will to succeed, evident in more than one of the accounts investigated in my research, is implicitly linked by the students themselves to their desire to shed the epithet of 'amateur'.

#### EXPERIENCE IN FULL-TIME HIGHER EDUCATION

Disparaging part-time study is one particular effect of a more extensive feature of art and design: instrumentalism associated with professional ideologies.

During the last two centuries institutional cultures have upheld and furthered practices and aesthetic beliefs, directly in relation to the professional fields served by art and design and characteristically in resistance to economic or political intervention. The self-professed image of art schools as bastions of individual and sometimes anarchic creativity holding out against invading bureaucratic philistines is a constant feature of their recent history (Macdonald, 1970; Melly, 1972; Williams, 1999; Gooding, 2000). Historical accounts and

studies show this has evolved as a predominantly male orientated and, to a surprising extent, reactionary institutional culture (Allthorpe-Guyton and Stevens, 1982; Hassell, 1995; Swift, John, 1999-b; Swift, John, 1999-c). While today students and tutors alike continuously redefine their positions through reflective dialogue (Mitchell, 1996), students who determinedly identify frameworks for their studies that are alternative to the prevailing institutional culture run the risk of being isolated within the system (Brighton and Chadwick, 2000). Evidence for how negative this could be can be found in what is in effect the only substantial sociological study of institutional attitudes in art and design so far undertaken (Madge and Weinberger, 1973).

Before looking at the findings of this important study, several notes of caution need to be sounded. It was undertaken specifically to see how students were socialised into the culture of what was then known as an art college and the questions put to them were thus institutionally framed and expressed. While responses were collected and analysed less for what they communicated about students and more for what they indicated about a system of socialisation, the report includes a substantial section devoted to student perceptions. The findings are also specific in time and place and result from inquiry into the workings of a particular institution. From the general tenor of the study report, it is clear that the authors were fully aware of the various tensions prevailing nationally in art colleges during the late 1960s. While these were not necessarily negative, circumstances and perceptions converged to produce those demonstrations, occupations of college premises and general disturbances that became headline news in 1968. In addition, the particular institution in which

Madge and Weinberger conducted their study - Coventry School of Art, though thinly disguised in the report as Midville College - was subject to a particular ideological swing towards verbalisation in the visual arts which eventually gave rise to the Art Language movement. While Madge and Weinberger wisely reserve this aspect for separate discussion, it nevertheless colours the background for much of the material they present. It was noted in Chapter 3 that the study refers only to stereotypical students and therefore reflects the perspectives of younger people at a time when they differed, especially with regard to personal finances, from those of today. For all these reasons, the findings of the survey need to be used selectively. In particular, the picture of student experience it presents is best used as a historical reference point for measuring whether or not the position has changed over a period of thirty years. Nevertheless, in view of the wealth of resulting material and its unique status, the Midville study requires detailed consideration in so far as it deals with student experience.

Alongside observations on data made by the research team on which most of the report is based, responses from students reveal an overwhelming emphasis on the value that they and staff place on personal development, individuality and freedom. The researchers note that, since art is considered to be an all-embracing activity, this concept of personal freedom brings together educational independence for each student and professional independence for artists as a social group. It can be inferred from much of what they report that this assumed unity raised a nexus of dilemmas for students. Many of the comments recorded by Madge and Weinberger reveal that students had had the sense that

they were special since childhood and school days. A strong sense of self-direction, increasing as the three year courses proceeded, was characteristic of both graphic design students and those studying fine art. There were nevertheless divergences: the former were more concerned with career opportunities and the latter were keener on personal development placing a high value on the freedom to be different. What precisely was meant about this feeling of being different, as distinct from that investigated in my research, took a number of forms, but was commonly identified in a somewhat circular manner. Students wanted to disassociate themselves from something which they found alien, such as authority, scientific thinking and even students following another course. This was reflected in how they felt about belonging to a group: the graphic design students became more of a coherent group as their studies progressed, whereas those studying fine art felt less kinship with each other.

The prevalence of individualism varied in that more female than male students felt it was important. The emphasis on individual development tended to favour cognitive, conceptual and external modes, rather than expressive, intuitive and internal ways of working. The authors of the report attribute the sense of disorientation voiced by students, especially in connection with transfer between courses, to the teaching device of lengthy periods of self study interspersed with hard-hitting group criticisms. This method, which tended to offer technical advice in private during periods of study, but shifted to more value-laden public criticism on conclusion, put women at a particular disadvantage. The authors note in the section on students' futures that women seemed to be looking for careers that offered both security and independence, the ambiguity of which

would only be resolved for some of them in fantasy or through temporary objectives. They conclude their survey report by observing that the whole process of socialisation into art is beset with such dilemmas.

The chapter entitled 'Independence as a Student Value' is of particular significance with regard to my research, since it includes six accounts written by students about their experiences. Before examining these in detail, it is important to note how they were generated. When the students were asked to provide autobiographical statements,

... they were given some headings (which were not always followed) to serve as guide lines:

- (i) Motivation. Influences for and against artistic activity  
(e.g. parents' interests, attitudes, values).
- (ii) Ideas and attitudes approved and disapproved of at school,  
Pre-Dip and Dip. College, concerning art.
- (iii) Your ideas, feelings and beliefs about your own work  
and art in general.

(Madge and Weinberger, 1973, p.124- their brackets and layout)

The resulting statements thus stand halfway between the institutionally determined responses of student satisfaction surveys and freely generated accounts of the type included in my research. In being asked to state their views in this way, Midville students were constrained to pre-cast their perceptions in a polarised manner. Furthermore, the language used for the guidelines includes a number of 'trigger' words, revealing that the researchers were aware of nuances in the role-specific vocabulary of a particular institutional culture. Words, such as 'motivation', 'influences' and 'ideas', carry specific and often localised connotations in art and design and are used in this way as much now as in 1969. The phrase, 'your own work', is particularly powerful, resonating with the belief that art products are almost synonymous

with self. Consequently, Midville students would automatically have taken the third guideline as a signal that they were expected to talk in a highly introspective manner about their art-works as extensions of themselves but not significantly about private matters. Bearing these provisos in mind, the student accounts reported by Madge and Weinberger offer a unique opportunity for comparison with those considered in Chapter 5.

The six Midville statements, though reflecting varied personalities and approaches, share a range of features. As directed, students explored their motivation, developmental influences and study choices in terms of people they knew (parents, teachers and tutors), and in terms of artists with whom they felt an affinity. They all evinced strong beliefs about the positive value of art practice, with the sense of themselves and their art work very closely intertwined on social, personal and ideological levels. One of them said that she lost confidence in her studio work when she started ten different projects and 'got knocked off all of them'. As a result, she experienced 'incredible deprivation' and led a wild social life because she 'was too frightened of people to face them'. Another female student turned unity between self and art into a defence against public criticism when she claimed that her motivation was

... certainly not communication, unless it is a visual communication back to me from my idea. So, I am purely selfish about my work (though I have no qualms about this), I do not feel any real sense of affinity with any other person either working in the way I work or otherwise. In short, motivation at the present time is ME ... the underlying idea behind my work is to make more of me so I can see it.  
(Madge and Weinberger, 1973, pp.128-130)

With this perceived unity between self and product and a keen sense of public exposure through their work, it is to be expected that tutorial criticism of what

they made would elicit defensive responses from students. When confronted with new or conflicting approaches, students spoke of 'two terms of hell' or 'purging' and 'brain-washing'. One male student felt he had been 'completely stultified, suffocated' by a tutor and did not recover from the influence for a long time. Such feelings were most frequently expressed about transferring from one environment to another, especially between school and college. Albeit stated by some students in dramatic terms (one admitted she had 'exaggerated a little' ) comparable problems of adjustment were voiced by most students. A more disturbing element that can be discerned in the students' remarks is a reluctance to articulate some feelings. In an otherwise frank and openly critical statement, a male student declared that he was not prepared to voice his thoughts about the use and future of art. The assertive female student, quoted earlier, said mysteriously that there was

an excellent reason for working hard and long, in my case, but I'd rather not disclose it. This little questionnaire is stripping me down slowly but surely ... but this is one thing that I'd rather not put in writing.  
(Madge and Weinberger, 1973, p.129)

While such comments should not necessarily be construed as sinister, it is evident that, for whatever reason, students were conscious that some areas in their overall experience were not for open discussion.

Something of why students may have felt in these ways can be gauged from one of the most striking features of this section of the report. In each case, there is a remarkable contrast between the student's own account and the course report on the student provided by the tutor. There are some obvious explanations. Notwithstanding the angled questions, students were offered

considerable latitude and talked, sometimes at great length, about their own values and the ambivalence and stresses associated with their position as students. They were invited to talk about the one topic they knew very well, namely themselves. The tutor on the other hand was required by the nature of his employment to comment formally on a number of students. Though his reports were therefore constrained to be short, to the point and evaluative, they reveal a dramatically personal attitude. He consistently used adversely critical words relating to students as people: they were variously stubborn, neurotic, shallow, self-indulgent or 'puddingy'. Where he used words that edged on being complementary, he quickly qualified them. One student was considered capable, but 'gives the appearance of working seriously' and exhibits 'self-satisfied smugness'. Another was rated as 'interesting' but 'painfully slow' and representing 'a slightly higher grade of mediocrity'. In fact, 'mediocre' and 'banal' are his most frequently-used adjectives.

It would be wholly unjustified to take the comments made by one (fortunately anonymous) individual as typical of an institutional approach at Midville College, since reports by other tutors and comments by students show the position to be otherwise. However, it is worth looking beneath the tutor's penchant for verbal abuse to discern what may have generated it. There are hints that he held art-orientated ideals for what students could become, and seemed to be measuring what they actually achieved by reference to his unarticulated pre-conceptions. He noted a male student's introspective mode as being of potential value to his art but found his present work banal.

That the tutor also had views about how students could achieve his ideal is revealed when he says of another student that she is

Mediocre certainly, and there will have to be radical changes in her life-style etc., before she is capable of transcending the banality of her present work.

(Madge and Weinberger, 1973, p.144)

It is as if the tutor was castigating the students personally for not living up to his expectations of what he thought they should be producing: he was making the laws, acting as judge and delivering sentences. In the face of this type of attitude, it is hardly surprising that students reacted negatively. Their statements indicate various states and stages of alienation, confusion, confrontation, withdrawal and aggression. While as one of them noted, the students had access to other tutors with more sympathetic attitudes, it is a testimony to the students' resilience and determination that in general they appear to have valued their studies. Nevertheless, some of them felt very threatened and would, one feels, carry the scars of the experience for some time afterwards. The point I would make here is that the attitudes of one tutor and the reactions of his students constitute a documented example of confrontational teaching and learning in art and design. Bearing in mind the tensions peculiar to art colleges generally and to Midville in particular at that time, this instance could be regarded as pathological in that those inherently constructive features of art and design teaching and learning identified in Chapter 3 had become negative and dysfunctional. Learning from human exemplars had been taken over by doctrinaire teaching attitudes. Students were being required to conform to unspoken standards that might, under more conducive circumstances, have served as models of excellence. Guided

reflection in practice had become distorted into a game that required students to second guess what the tutor seemed to want. Most damagingly for students, the social dimension of their learning (contextualisation in others as guides or measures) was being destroyed by a tutor vilifying their personalities and lifestyles. As with other disciplines, studying a pathological situation in education can help acquire a better understanding of what constitutes a healthy one.

Though Madge and Weinberger did not analyse their findings in this way, it can be deduced from their report that, aberrations aside, day-to-day teaching and learning experiences at Midville were fortunately generally healthy in this respect.

In concluding this discussion of the Midville study, it will be useful to consider how students are affected by the central dichotomy between the necessarily academic stance that tutors must adopt by reason of their employment and their espousal of anti-academicism on a more personal level. Though Madge and Weinberger did not express it in such lapidary terms, they effectively pose the central question of whether Midville students were being socialized into art or the institution. For the purposes of my research, this may be interpreted as a recycled problem in art and design that is particularly pertinent for students. In regarding tutors as models of excellence, are students seeing them as personally creative artists or designers who professionally challenge the market and public taste, or in their institutional roles as educational authorities to be challenged by students? Answering this question involves mapping the historical evidence provided by Madge and Weinberger in their case studies of tutor/student perspectives onto the hypothesis about student learning proposed in this

research. The Midville students were certainly having to continuously evaluate their personal responses. Indeed, the survey itself clearly provided an opportunity to do so, and one which some of them evidently welcomed. The sense of self -construction is vividly and sadly shown in the way one student described the slow and painful process of recovering from damaging experiences, saying that it was only her present happiness that enabled her to realise how miserable she had been before. All six accounts show a marked capacity to assimilate change as a spur to further action or resolution. The changes with which the students had to contend were less concerned with their circumstances outside college and more with institutionally determined matters, particularly in how being a student related to being a professional artist. This is evident in the way one student claimed that

We live in a world of constantly changing images; no repeated human situation ever produces identical experiences ... [my] work represents a personal involvement in the transitory visual situation and the arresting of that movement into a physically static format.'  
(Madge and Weinberger, 1973, p.139 )

In the way that it employs jargon and jumps from universal pronouncements to somewhat opaque statements about practical intentions, this style of writing is typical of what artists traditionally write in catalogues to public exhibitions of their work. The student was actively rehearsing his future professional role.

While the student/artist relationship formed an arena for debate and action, Midville students expressed considerable stress in coping with the personal difficulties it generated. The estimation of others was a pivotal factor in these difficulties. Some students cited encouragement from parents and family but others experienced strong opposition on the basis of art being a worthwhile

hobby but not a serious profession. Later in students' careers, teachers and college tutors replace family as other people whose respect they value or whose opposition they combat. For the students, self-estimation could arise as much from support by tutors as from taking issue with them. Motivation ranged between the extremes of working in order to please a tutor with whom a student had fallen in love to unforgiving hatred of a 'hypnotic, tyrannical master-mind'. Though other students tended to be cast as allies or parallels, there appears to have been no sense of a group. Some described artists with whom they identified and who formed role models for them. Another only mentioned artists from whom she wished to distinguish herself with the implication that this was against the advice and preferences of tutors. In one way or another, people in authority or artists whose work was admired, along with an appetite for personal development seem to have been the strongest motivating factors.

Though there is little indication that they had any concrete goals, students explicitly or implicitly evinced the idea that they were 'finding themselves' - a sense of self which was framed in terms of wanting to be an artist. Seen in the light of the tutor's personalised attacks on their life-styles, it becomes evident that tutor and students alike shared the strong belief that the demands of private lives and personal circumstances hampered or blocked the possibility of achieving this goal. In this, professional instrumentalism in art and design neatly grafts on to the rigorous separation of private lives and public learning that traditionally permeates post-16 British education (Haselgrove, 1994 - a). For several of the female students in Madge and Weinberger's survey, the closely associated issue of conflicting gender perspectives, particularly between

themselves and tutors, was crucial. That this was not a one-sided view is amply demonstrated by the tutor's comments which in some cases are aggressively misogynist.

What then can be drawn from juxtaposing what Madge and Weinberger report students as saying about their experiences with the hypothesis constructed through my research? Virtually all individuals in both student groups engage in continuous evaluation of their own responses to learning development and are clearly aware that they are constructing and re-constructing themselves in the light of the changes they are assimilating. Coping with plurality and ambivalence is common to both groups and their socio-cultural values are similarly situated in the estimation of others. Lastly, the concept of self, however defined, is more or less central to all the students. The overall similarity of thinking and feeling suggests that, as far as art and design is concerned, students' learning experience reveals a considerable measure of continuity not only over time but between older and younger students. It has been seen in earlier chapters that art and design as a sector of post-16 education in the UK is characterised by continuously employing models of excellence in practices, products or behaviour as guides in studio/workshop teaching and learning. Awareness of continuity and its relevance to learning (Ruskin, 1971; Simpson, 1982) is not confined to tutors as students readily identify with past as well as present artists or designers as exemplars of good practice (Allthorpe-Guyton and Stevens, 1982). Continuity in teaching and learning can be encouraged through tutors themselves, intentionally or otherwise, forming models of excellence (Hassell, 1995). With this in mind, it is to be expected that

the six Midville students and the eleven whose accounts feature in this research would show considerable commonality in how they articulate their experiences of learning.

Nevertheless, there is a tendency for researchers to be concerned with student perspectives only in so far as they reflect institutional pre-occupations. While to some extent this is true of Madge and Weinberger, they had a somewhat wider agenda in hoping that their study would show how students responded to 'the instabilities, ambiguities and contradictions inherent in the role of artist and art student at that time' (Madge and Weinberger, 1973). In addition to this caveat, differences between the Midville accounts and those of students who feature in this research can be attributed to specific circumstances. To judge from available evidence, the Midville subjects were all in the traditional age range for students. Motivation by life events and a wide range of personal roles are thus less in evidence with them than amongst the students who feature in this research. With more life experience, either prior to or concurrent with their studies, they cope with a quantity and range of roles, only one of which is being a student. These result in their values, through partly situated in the estimation of tutors and other students, being less determined by institutional culture. The importance of the wider context is evident in that it often provides the motivation for study. Personal or economic changes in people's lives can cause them to look to educational institutions for some form of long term re-direction. There is a further aspect to differences between the students whose accounts form the base for the hypothesis proposed in my research and those at Midville College. The question was raised on p.217 above about whether students

perceive their tutors as models of professional excellence or as institutional authorities to be challenged. The learning environment at Midville, at least in some respects, rendered this particular 'recycled problematic' stressful and disorientating for students. Socio-economic changes since the 1960s have impacted heavily on the personal circumstances of students and for the students of today there is a third element in the question in that their referential context is much wider. Consequently, the students featured in my research focus far less on their tutors as measures for their estimation of self and so are less vulnerable to the vagaries of institutional culture. Such differences between the students featured in my research and those at Midville significantly re-focus the discussion on the social context of their learning.

#### SOME EMERGENT ISSUES IN ART AND DESIGN

In accounting for these differences, the thirty-year interval between the Midville survey and the present research is already apparent as the major factor.

Superficially, little appears to have changed: despite the recent drive towards widening participation, the standard art and design undergraduate was, and still is, a young adult studying full-time and coming from a white middle class home (Macleod, 2002). From immediate experience, I know that this standard was maintained in the sector through a selective entry system that operated well into the 1990s. The conservatism of art college culture is also evident in the way that study categories - fine art, graphic design, fashion and textiles, and three dimensional design - though somewhat arbitrarily established in the 1960s (Ashwin, 1975), continue to dominate (UCAS, 2002) despite curriculum

development consequent on economic, social and technological changes in the intervening years. Whilst institutions certainly experienced changes throughout the 1970s and 80s, it was within an overall sense of continuity (Hilton, 1991; Buss, 1995).

Incorporation of art schools into polytechnics during the early 1970s however brought about one particular change. Rooted in self-consciously bohemian lifestyles (Hassell, 1995) and developing as a focus for anti-establishment attitudes (Melly, 1972), a particular way of transmitting institutional culture was typical of art schools during the middle of the last century. My own recollections of this and those of former colleagues are confirmed by pictorial and anecdotal evidence in published accounts (Allthorpe-Guyton and Stevens, 1982; Ashwin, 1982; Hassell, 1995). While it revolved round social events, including parties held in studios and classrooms with the enthusiastic participation of tutors, it was more important as an accepted style of teaching and learning. Local public houses and tutors' homes were the main venues where tutors and students met socially in what, in my memory, were effectively informal tutorials through which cultural and specifically professional values were debated and shared. This internal social structure served to celebrate, transmit, disseminate and perpetuate a much valued institutional culture which carried the licence to challenge existing mores and knowledge, and the duty to realise one's own creative potential as an artist. I can recognise the network of personalised relationships and relationships evident at Midville as representing a late flowering of this ethos which effectively disappeared when the art schools were incorporated into polytechnics (Hilton, 1991). More recent interventions in the

form of widening participation and annually increasing numbers of students, already seen in the course of this research as generally impacting on post-16 education, add significantly to the reasons why what current students are saying departs in some ways from what was expressed by those at Midville.

Another difference that emerges from juxtaposing what the students in this research say about their experience with the responses of Midville students is that the latter were all studying fine art, the teaching of which at that time evidently minimised group identity amongst students in favour of individualism. Furthermore, a great deal of what they were saying reflected specifically on fine art as a specialist activity which was generally contrasted, not least by students themselves, with graphic design. The relevance of this to my research becomes clearer through reference to a later study conducted at Leicester College of Art (Cornock, 1983). Cornock locates his research in the climate of uncertainty generated by the move towards tutorial teaching and away from programs of common activities. He seeks to establish a fine art based methodology through which students can develop strategies for re-directing themselves in the course of their studies. Adopting a broadly phenomenological approach, he asked some of his students to provide detailed accounts of their working processes, specifically excluding aesthetic judgments on the products themselves. He found that they distinguished 'work' as either physical activity undertaken in the studio or reflective activity operating widely but largely outside studios. Students saw reflection as interrupting or 'retarding' their more highly regarded physical activity but paradoxically offering a means of shifting to a higher level in evaluating the artifacts they made. They regarded the two

modes as cyclic enabling them to think of their work as both physical products and a developing continuity of purpose. On the basis of this insight, Cornock was able to construct a logical, but not necessarily chronological, methodology of learning. This takes the form of a sequence of activities that represent a dialogue between visualisation and verbalisation with the latter gaining in importance as the method progresses. Learning stages move from generation of images through material and craft exploration, through selection and synthesis of intuitively recognised significant visual forms to reflection, enabling the student to articulate his or her ideas in verbal form. This stage was regarded by Cornock as the first point at which knowledge of the achievements of others consciously enters the process. Thereafter, it is a process of presentation in which artifacts are assembled to reveal a working process back to the student themselves, and eventually moving into the public domain whereby both physical products and working processes can become the subject of professional discourse. Cornock emphasises that it is crucial for students to be conscious of this as a working method if they are to develop the capacity to manage their own creative processes and to develop a continuity of purpose.

Cornock identifies students' awareness of themselves in the professional context of functioning as an artist. Visualisation is in the form of material handling and verbalisation is in the context of dialogue with professionals as teachers and conducted in their language. Cornock's findings can be seen as a more systematic version of Schön's reflection in practice and specifically located within the professionally orientated framework of fine art teaching and learning. As such, it offers an exposition of the principle that such education can be both

liberal education and vocational preparation. The student is knowingly engaged in a working process that is within their powers of direction and subject to critical reflection in practice, whilst producing artifacts that are guided by and subject to existing standards of experience and knowledge. Cornock's fine art students thus contrast in some ways with students whose accounts form the basis for the hypothesis in this research. Whatever their individual career or learning direction, each of these students is engaged in generic art and design studies, rather than specifically fine art. The professional framework in which Cornock's students evolved their working processes is thus weaker or even irrelevant for the students who participated in my investigation. It is particularly significant that while the courses undertaken by the students in my research encourage them to think in terms of future career direction, they choose to focus their accounts more on themselves and their circumstances and less on the professional nature of their studies. The intervening period of time and the learning frameworks inherent in their courses offer partial explanations why the student accounts on which the hypothesis is constructed diverge from those of students at either Midville College or Leicester Polytechnic. There are however other factors to consider and these are on a grander scale.

At this point, it may be useful to recall what has so far been established through this research. It is now evident that a significant proportion of students, despite having no single identifying characteristic, are consistently regarded by themselves and others as different, and consequently marginalised within the institutional culture of art and design. In view of the fact that such students are often more diverse and experienced than others, it was conjectured that

marginalisation might be due to institutional practice in the sector being inherently incompatible with values typically associated with the type of education suited to adult learners. To test this possibility, three widely acknowledged precepts derived from contrasting approaches to education for adults were mapped onto evidence about practice in art and design. Employing this technique reveals that in terms of educational discipline both education for adults and art and design constitute fields of practice that are similar in being optionally guided by variable theoretical positions and directed through critical reflection in practice. Furthermore, the resulting knowledge in each case is reciprocal and contingent in being continuously redefined in response to changing practical circumstances through a dialectic of instrumental and liberal purposes. Successfully mapping two of the three precepts drawn from education for adults onto art and design shows that while perceived difference and consequent marginalisation amongst students undoubtedly exists there is no apparent reason, in terms of either practical discipline or cognitive purpose, why it should do so.

The third precept, that learning is student-centred but contextualised in other people, was difficult to map onto art and design because reliable evidence for how students in the sector perceive their own learning is scarce by comparison with generic evidence from the broader field of education for adults. A systematic investigation of accounts provided by appropriate art and design students was undertaken to meet this knowledge gap. What they say about their experience reveals that, despite being aware of their negative institutional status in relation to an assumed student norm, they see themselves and construct

their learning in a notably positive manner. They are able to do so because each student contextualises his or her learning less in terms of academic disciplines and institutional categories and more in relation to holistic perceptions of their total selves. This perspective on learning is substantiated as more than a localised occurrence by a positive correlation with theories of self and personality, and with the findings of research projects undertaken within the generic field of education for adults. On these grounds, it is proposed that the type of learning experience evinced by students who are marginalised within the institutional culture of art and design should be recognised in its own terms rather than being seen as merely different. *Juxtaposing the way marginalised students construct their learning experience with the conclusions of comparable studies reveals that it has sufficient resonance with wider theoretical and practical knowledge to merit hypothesising it as a distinctive approach to institutionally based learning.*

Mapping the hypothesis onto such studies as have been made of art and design students however shows rather less resonance, though the findings from a survey of part-time adult education classes (Knott, 1987) correlate with it in one important respect. Though most students attending such classes compartmentalise their learning, a significant minority take the reverse view and see their learning as engaged and interacting with the rest of their lives. They thus have much in common with those students on whose accounts the hypothesis is based. Both student groups knowingly take risks with their learning, accepting it as a challenging activity through which they constantly re-construct themselves. Since they are thus engaged in an appropriate type of

learning (Barnett, 1990), neither adult education students engaged in constructive learning nor those whose evidence features in my research could be considered as manifestly out of place in higher education.

This provides an answer to a question that formed part of the motivation for this research. One of the more personally reflexive intentions was to ground specific higher and further education courses in terms of student experience. The position at the start of this research was that the courses, which I have introduced at foundation and undergraduate levels in my role as a manager, are known to be successful from an institutional point of view in that they readily attract newer types of students into the university. The research presents the necessary time-span and critical framework in which to reflect on the reasons why this is so through an investigation of how students perceive and construct their learning experience. It is now evident that students are able to benefit from these courses because the structures involved enable them to more easily align formal study with other commitments in their lives. This is a matter of adopting an approach to teaching and learning that acknowledges the importance of the private sphere of student experience through practical structures (part-time and flexible modes of study) and educational ethos (facilitation of student-centred learning). Besides meeting institutional requirements, the courses are successful in student terms because they recognise, accommodate and encourage the inter-relationship between the private and public spheres of student learning experience.

The hypothesis can be substantiated further by juxtaposition with the findings from the unique study of how pre-graduate and undergraduate students are socialised into the institutional culture of art and design (Madge and Weinberger, 1973). Thirty years ago art and design students were evidently coping with ambivalence and plurality of values and their perceptions of learning were modelled on those of others, especially their tutors. The continuous process of constructing the self was also evident, painfully so in some cases. However, a notable divergence appears in the concept of self involved. The Midville students saw themselves in the simultaneous roles of young professionals and students developing personal independence but within the concepts and constraints imposed by the prevailing institutional culture. By contrast, the students on whose accounts the hypothesis is based are de-constructing and re-constructing themselves in a wider social frame in which institutional culture is only one factor. Furthermore, the others in whose estimation their learning is situated are as likely to be other students, families or friends as they are to be tutors. Lastly, the students in this research differ from those at Midville in that they see their learning as a past, present and future continuum that intertwines with significant events in their wider life experience. The sense of self they evince is more socially than institutionally constructed.

Recalling some of the issues raised about the sector in the Introduction, it is now evident that colleges and university faculties engaged in art and design do indeed follow the self-referential pattern recognised by sociologists as typical of institutional cultures. Despite national imperatives to widen participation and the established ethos of encouraging individuality, art and design institutions

largely continue to construct the student norm as someone in their late teens or early twenties, culturally and economically middle-class and attending full time. He or she is assumed to be free of family commitments or personal ties, and is therefore expected to be totally committed to studying art and design as an intending professional. It was conjectured at the start of this research that art and design might be no different from other sectors of post-16 education in the way it distinguishes between the public and private spheres of student experience, and this has proved to be the case. *The propensity to marginalise those students who do not conform to the assumed norm identifies the institutional culture of art and design as one that is at variance with the private sphere of student learning experience.* While establishing whether this is or is not the case was another reason for undertaking this research, it was also the intention to ask how and why such marginalisation results from perceptions of difference.

## LIBERAL APPRENTICESHIP IN ART AND DESIGN

Constructing an answer to these questions requires further consideration of the type of learning encouraged in art and design. In Chapter 3, it was established that critical reflection in practice is central and that models of excellence are consistently employed as measures and reference points. Contemporaneous or historical artefacts and practitioners in the form of tutors or more distant heroes serve as exemplars which students, to a greater or lesser extent, are expected to imitate, emulate or, significantly in terms of encouraging creativity, supersede. Teaching is variously seen as a matter of directing, guiding and encouraging

students towards achieving these expectations, which in turn colours the way that students tend to construct their own learning (Dormer, 1994; Brighton and Chadwick, 2000; Farthing, 2000). Upholding professional standards of commercial activity and personal integrity through positing models of excellence not only characterises the recently evolved institutional culture of art and design (CHEAD/CNAA, n/d; Buss, 1995), but also that of the 1940s and 50s (Cannon, 1948; Hassell, 1995). It is equally evident in accounts of art school culture during the previous century (Allthorpe-Guyton and Stevens, 1982), and formed the basis of the earliest examination systems (Carline, 1968). It formed the avowed purpose for founding academies of art in the eighteenth century (Efland, 1990) and can be tracked back to medieval craft guild traditions (Lucie-Smith, 1981). Art and design displays remarkable continuity in its customary approach to teaching and learning. This observation is grounded in the way that specific features of contemporary practice can be tracked throughout the development of the sector. For example, continuity has been noted in how the comments written by a tutor on a student's life drawings in the late 1920s are echoed in today's studios and workshops. The approach of Ruskin to the central activity of observational drawing is still relevant as an instructional model today. Institutional problems with regard to tension between adult and younger students of a hundred years ago are mirrored in the more recent ostracisation of amateur art classes. Most tellingly, students are constantly exhorted to regard contemporaneous and historical practitioners as models of good practice. It is here maintained that the apprenticeship approach connects generations of students and tutors and creates a remarkable continuity of purpose and professional identity within the institutional culture of art and

design. *Learning through acknowledged models of excellence, both material and human, is sufficiently well-established, extensive and consistent for it to be maintained that the sector standardly employs an apprenticeship method of preparing entrants to the professions it serves.*

This chain links continuity with progression since it not only transmits professional knowledge, skills and understanding from one generation to another but also encourages each to surpass the achievements of its predecessor. Consistently, explicitly and in addition to training the young professional, art and design aims to educate and emancipate the individual person (Macdonald, 1970; Efland, 1990; Hassell, 1995). This generates a dialectic of action and reaction as students rebel against the institutional system in which they find themselves in order to establish their own self-realisation, thereby creating the next orthodoxy ready to be rejected by a later generation of students (Ashwin, 1994). On the grounds of this interplay between encouraging innovation and maintaining tradition, the system of practice-based learning employed in art and design can be identified as essentially apprenticeship but carrying a decidedly liberal element. In this respect, the sector might appear to be consistent with wider trends, since governments of whatever political persuasion have been promoting practice-based learning for some time (FESC, 1987) and in 1993 introduced a national scheme of Modern Apprenticeships (Pring, 1995). The irony that this scheme actually excludes young people from learning by working alongside such skilled craftspeople as furniture-makers or horologists has not gone unnoticed (Cohen, 2001). Liberal apprenticeship in art and design is in fact a far cry from the current government scheme in that it not

only maintains the personal transference of professional skills and practical knowledge from teachers to learners but also actively encourages them to question the professional status quo. The present position with regard to traditional apprenticeship effectively presents a symmetrical paradox: the government scheme revives the name but has lost the spirit of apprenticeship, whilst art and design has abandoned the name but maintains its spirit.

Institutional culture in art and design is permeated by the spirit of liberal apprenticeship in a significant way. It is as if students and teachers alike agree to engage in a game which is academically and professionally rigorous but is simultaneously rendered socially and personally relevant through a tacit agreement that rules and purposes can be creatively interpreted, judiciously modified or flagrantly broken. Collaboration is nevertheless more than a matter of pragmatic convenience: it is the dominant feature of critical reflection in practice (Schön, 1987) and is therefore central to art and design. Evidence for the resulting pattern of strictures and tolerances is provided by the way students simultaneously recall the value of being taught and the joys of rejecting their teaching (Hassell, 1995; Furlong, Gould and Hetherington, 2000). While not wishing to imply that promulgating this pattern is conscious policy within the sector, I see it as at least professionally appropriate. Culturally and economically, it is incumbent on those engaged in the creative industries to provide services or products that accord with either what society needs or what it can be persuaded to accept. Practitioners have the responsibility to meet, extend or challenge such expectations, depending on the openness of the society

in which they find themselves, the nature of their economic position, and their personal circumstances or temperaments. It is no coincidence that if the phrase 'learning requirements' were to be substituted for 'such expectations', this last sentence could equally apply to the institutional culture of art and design. In many ways, the sector forms a controlled and circumscribed mirror-image of standard ways of working in the creative industries. It has come to form a sheltered environment relatively free of practical constraints and economic risk in which students learn how to creatively explore and prepare themselves for challenging roles as professionals in the creative industries.

This pragmatic relationship, evolved between institutional culture and the industries it serves, begins to provide the key to understanding why liberal apprenticeship is so prevalent in the sector. It continues to flourish as a learning method simply because it is a tried and tested means of preparing young people for entry to a professional career. It can be applied across a diversity of educational situations ranging from the acquisition of specific competencies (Dormer, 1994) to the exploration of dedicated ways of problems solving (Schön, 1987). As has been seen, it is flexible enough to encompass part-time adult education in the acquisition of craft skills (Knott, 1987) and fine art practice at under-graduate level (Cornock, 1983). At post-graduate level, many students need to engage in a quasi-apprentice mode in order to become proficient in skills necessary for conducting research (Newbury, 1996). The mechanism that enables art and design to continuously oscillate between promoting rigour (learning standards and career preparation) and achieving

relevance (transferable skills and personal benefit) is now evident.

Apprenticeship fosters rigour through the requirement that students achieve levels of learning and prepare for careers according to standards respectively laid down by institutions and codes of conduct expected by professions. The liberal element is however sufficiently strong to ensure that they also develop a sense of personal emancipation through acquiring transferable skills and deriving personal benefit from their learning. *Liberal apprenticeship is a tried-and-tested, well-established model of learning in art and design because it is especially appropriate for preparing students for professional careers in the creative industries.* In fact, it has proved successful enough to effectively argue (Ashwin, 1994) that most of what is valued in current practice in art and design is the result of this model of learning.

Before proceeding further, the term ‘model’ needs some clarification, since it carries a variety of meanings in both daily conversation and in specialised usage. In discussing art and design as a field of study in Chapter 3, detailed reference was made to practice of employing models of excellence. In that context, it meant people or artifacts serving as exemplars for students to emulate. Identifying liberal apprenticeship as a model should not necessarily be taken to imply a similar didactic function. Neither does it carry any predictive connotation. Because liberal apprenticeship has been identified as underpinning the institutional culture of art and design, it is not thereby being claimed as a universal. Nor is ‘model’ being used as a loose synonym for ‘theory’ (Cohen and Manion, 1989). At this point in the thesis, it carries the tighter meaning and specifically expositional function of

... an abstract way of presenting the relations between social phenomena. [It] will not necessarily perfectly represent the actual social world but will provide devices which simplify and aid understanding of the essential mechanisms involved.

(Abercrombie et al, 1994, p.269).

In this perspective, it is possible to conceive that there might be a different model which can 'simplify and aid understanding of the essential mechanisms involved' in art and design at the moment.

#### QUESTIONING THE PREVALANCE OF LIBERAL APPRENTICESHIP

Despite being profoundly integrated into the institutional culture of art and design over a long period of time, liberal apprenticeship is not beyond question in the light of current circumstances. Though the problem, which is basically one of ideological instrumentalism, has been present for a long time (Macdonald, 1973), it has steadily come to the fore in recent years. Tracking one manifestation illustrates how it is intrinsic to daily practice in the sector. During the second half of the last century, it became routine to expect students starting an art and design course to suspend critical judgment in order to learn new directions and develop new ideas through open minded exploration of materials, processes and ideas. Rooted in the principles of the Bauhaus approach to art and design (de Saumarez, 1964), this is reasonable in the context of practice based learning (Cornock, 1983) and sufficiently widely accepted to feature in the common measures of learning now introduced on a national basis in Foundation courses (Edexcel, 1999). This approach to induction is founded on the psychological belief that arriving at creative solutions requires a temporary phase of 'not knowing' or fragmentation: the

equivalent of adolescence in the transition to a more developed state of knowledge (Ehrenzweig, 1967). There is however evidence to show that this essentially constructive approach can take a destructive turn. During the 1960s, it was standard practice to teach in a manner designed to systematically purge new students of their established experiential values (Thistlewood, 1981; Madge and Weinberger, 1973). Though such extreme activities, which I remember being openly presented to students as form of initiation test, are now a matter of history, they find an echo in the continuing custom of disparaging students' earlier achievements in art and design. This problematic tradition is confirmed as typical of the apprenticeship model of learning and more than a peculiarly institutional habit by the fact that 'a state of mind that gives *us* a fresh start' (my italics) could recently be stated by professional craftspeople as a condition for taking on new apprentices (Cohen, 2001).

That liberal apprenticeship is effectively teacher-centred is also evident in the transition from school to higher education in art and design. The final year of school education in Britain naturally puts strong emphasis on preparation for General Certificate of Education Advanced Level examinations, which renders much of the sixth form learning experience a matter of time management and collaborative self-direction with goals and deadlines clearly understood by students. In addition, the Advanced GNVQ program in schools and colleges encourages students to take a more active role in how their learning is evaluated, presented and managed. I recall a recent occasion when students starting a Foundation course in art and design told me that compared with their immediately previous experience in the sixth form, they found it irksome to

study under what to them was a more authoritarian and less individual approach to teaching and learning. Though the large numbers of students and competitive element on Foundation courses are factors here, such responses serve to strengthen questions surrounding the practice of liberal apprenticeship. *The problematic concept inherent in liberal apprenticeship of each learner forming a tabula rasa denies the sense of experiential continuity in the learner, thereby identifying liberal apprenticeship as a teacher-centred model of learning and distancing it from the perspective that is being established in this research.*

Another aspect of the tutor/student relationship which, though for the most part constructive, points to other questions about liberal apprenticeship is the balance of interests involved. Critical reflection in action (Schön, 1987) is primarily manifest in art and design in the way tutors and students engage in dialogue concurrent with the latter's creative practice. The tutor virtually fulfills the role of a 'master' from whom students learn not only practical and creative skills but also how to conduct themselves according to the expectations of their intended profession. From the student's point of view, it is not difficult to see that there may be worrying relationship between this private on-course interaction and the public methods by which their work is evaluated through open critical discussion in the presence of others (Jones, 1996). The form and manner in which these critical discussions are conducted continue to raise the issue, seen earlier as a key concern for Midville students, of the potential conflict between the public and private spheres of students experience (Mitchell, 1996). Taking this point further, examination decisions in art and design are

customarily made by tutors and external examiners on the basis of a display of products and in the light of institutional requirements and professional standards. Though it is standard for the formal assessment regulations of universities, colleges and national awarding bodies to allow for 'extenuating circumstances', these only apply to exceptional social or medical situations. The private sphere of learning experience, which is the values it carries for every student in relation to who they are and how they see themselves, has in practice little bearing on how learning is examined. A by now familiar problem reappears in the way that liberal apprenticeship, however appropriate it may be for institutions, begins to look ambivalent when seen from a student point of view. *Consistent application of the liberal apprenticeship model in art and design, however appropriate from institutional and professional perspectives, perpetuates disengagement between the public and private spheres of student learning experience.*

To understand why this is problematic in the current period, the advent in Britain of a mass system of higher education needs to be taken into account. While generating a range of issues for the whole of post-16 education (Hayton and Paczuska, 2002), the drive towards 50% of the population having experience of higher education raises problems that are particular to art and design. First, there is the severely practical matter that continuing to consider each student according to individual needs through the liberal apprenticeship model is being rendered economically unviable in the current climate. In my experience as a manager, static or decreasing levels of staffing combined with increasing student numbers render such lengthy personal attention unrealistic.

The problem is exacerbated by the practical nature of teaching and learning in studios and workshops, and the limited relevance of mass lecture programmes which could otherwise alleviate the situation. We may soon reach a time where the type of extended dialogue between tutor and individual student typical of critical reflection in practice (Schön, 1987) becomes an occasional or special event rather than a daily occurrence.

The second problem is that art and design is only slowly and reluctantly responding to the issues raised by the shift towards mass higher education. More than decade ago, it was generally thought that modularisation provided a national solution to dealing with the resulting challenges. Dividing courses into study components each with specified learning requirements would allow common course elements to be delivered more efficiently, introduce curriculum flexibility, place more responsibility on students to engage in independent study, and facilitate provision for part-time study. From the perspective of administrators in higher education, it appeared that modularising existing courses might just achieve the Holy Grail of simultaneously maintaining rigour and relevance, providing for more students, widening participation and reducing overall running costs. Several factors were overlooked in the resulting drive to restructure courses and, with hindsight, modularity did little to promote flexibility for the learner and traditional patterns of education continue to exist in universities (Hayton and Paczuska, 2002, p.152-3). With regard to the specific case of art and design, not all students were ready for the responsibility of academic choice and needed to be taught how to make the best use of it. The

required teaching was not necessarily available with result that the jibe of ‘pick and mix courses’ was often closer to what took place in practice than the proponents of modularity cared to recognise. Furthermore, a considerable number of professions served by the sector require cumulative acquisition of material handling skills concurrent with an increasing knowledge base, which is at best difficult to achieve through modularised learning. Most problematically, whilst modularity carries the potential to provide subject flexibility and choice for students, it can do so only according to institutional capability. Practical considerations in running material-based workshops determine that modules need to attract minimum student numbers in order to be economically viable, and this disadvantages minority interests and activities. Limitations on curriculum choice also arise from what each institution considers acceptable in academic or professional terms, and from the designation of particular modules as compulsory pre-requisites (Buss, 1995). In more regressive forms of modularity, these factors add up to disintegration of coherence in established courses and little opportunity for individual choice by students (HEQC, 1994). Academic boundaries may ostensibly be extended through modularising courses but in so far as student experience is concerned they may still be pre-determined by institutional concerns and preconceptions. In some ways, modularity became a self-defeating exercise and, at best, forms only a partial answer to the dilemma presented by the imperative to maintain vocational relevance and academic rigour in an age of mass education.

A more unsettling and long-term problem for art and design is that the liberal apprenticeship model of teaching and learning endemic in the sector is at

variance with the expectations of the increasing numbers of differently experienced students now entering post-16 education generally. It is clear (Smith and Spurling, 1999, pp.200-208) that such types of student expect higher education institutions to take their practical circumstances and socially developed selves into account when organising facilities for study. The students whose accounts feature in this research felt very much the same. For art and design institutions, organisational problems become compounded with challenges to inherent value systems when a majority of students starts requiring flexibility. *Art and design is facing the challenge that more students than hitherto are coping with diversity of experience, roles and values in their learning experience, thereby implicitly questioning the fundamental position of the liberal apprenticeship model.*

The overall problem with liberal apprenticeship is chronic rather than acute and is thus not open to short-term remedial action. Liberal apprenticeship is a tried and tested way of inducting new recruits into professional disciplines and evidently suits those students seeking preparation for a named career in the creative industries (Harvey and Blackwell, 1999). It does not however suit an increasing proportion of students in that it harbours a problematic assumption about the relationship between the public and private spheres of student experience. Evident at Midville College in a pathological form, it is neatly symbolised in Cyril Connolly's dictum that 'there is no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hall' (Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, 1979). While presumably rooted in the widely accepted and romantic idea that genius is beyond the dreary concerns of everyday life, this attitude gains considerable

credence in the light of the personally emancipatory function of creative practice. As evidence of this, I have heard it expressed in staff rooms and assessment discussions in the more subtle form that any student who is serious about art and design as a career will demonstrate his or her commitment and ability by moving away from the parental home to undertake a degree course. The sometimes explicit corollary is that a student who is not able or does not wish to move away from home is therefore deemed to be less than serious about a professional career. Though a practical issue for higher education as a whole according to reports of results from recent generic surveys (Swain, 2001), the belief that the home life of a student is at best separate from, or at worst directly impedes creativity is a matter of ideology in art and design. Nevertheless, the accounts investigated in this research show that the private and public spheres of student learning experience are indeed often at variance with each other, making it clear that the Connolly view is neither inherently wrong nor outdated. The problem lies in how the view is embedded in institutional culture. It is customarily presented to students, and often accepted by them, as a crude choice that they personally have to make and one that is regarded as a test of their creative ability and potential. The choice is particularly evident on Foundation courses where, in my experience, there is still an assumption that the 'better' students will naturally choose to apply for full-time undergraduate study at other than immediately local universities. The most recent changes to student finances and the introduction of new widening participation initiatives (THES, 2003) are further determining that this type of choice is now unrealistic or inappropriate for an increasing majority of students. In addition, widening participation is resulting in more students framing professional instrumentalism

and personal emancipation in their own socially constructed terms rather than those that suit the habitual categories and behavioural expectations that typify institutional cultures. *This research establishes that current circumstances not only make it untenable to expect students to choose between the public and private spheres of their learning experience but also indicates that systematically separating the two is becoming increasingly obsolete.*

Other questions about the universality and continuing reliance on the liberal apprenticeship model form matters of more than pragmatic necessity. One could define good tutors as those who take the liberal apprenticeship model literally and manage to facilitate emancipation of the individual whilst transmitting rigorous professional standards. Two practical conditions, both necessary and interdependent, have to be met if this double role is to be as sustainable in future as it has been in the past. For students to prepare for professional careers in this sense they should want to learn according to the professional standards upheld in institutions, and responsibility for those standards needs to remain with the academic integrity of professionally knowledgeable tutors. During the course of this research, evidence has been cited which suggests that the first of these conditions is under question by the diversity of purpose amongst newer types of student now entering post-16. My current experience in a university suggests that the second might also have a less than certain future. Tutors tend to feel that their personal academic integrity is being replaced by a requirement to comply with external benchmarks for learning and to conform with the increasing demands of institutional bureaucracy and national inspections. The continuation of both conditions is

dependent on institutions being able to keep pace with changing employment demands in the creative industries and simultaneously with the not necessarily corresponding changes in student demand for courses. *The teaching and learning conditions on which the fundamental position of the liberal apprenticeship model depends are likely to become less prevalent in future than hitherto.*

Lastly, continuing reliance on liberal apprenticeship connects awkwardly with the economic and political position of art and design. The sector fulfills the role of a professionally vocational training agent but the supply and demand rationale on which that role is predicated looks increasingly unsupportable in a period of mass education. Nationally, there are simply not enough specialist professional jobs to meet the career expectations of the increasingly large numbers of people being educated in art and design (Bentham, 5/12/99). When explaining this at schools careers conventions, I use the example of undergraduate courses designated in whole or in part as concerned with design for the theatre. Throughout the last decade, fifteen such courses (ADAR, 1995; UCAS, 2002) have been producing around two hundred and fifty specialist designers each year. Given the number of professional theatres in the country employing dedicated designers, taking into account earlier graduates already in employment, and recognising that people come into theatre design by other routes, theatre design as such must be a severely overcrowded profession. The inevitable result is that many would-be theatre designers find employment in other fields. While this is not necessarily a criticism of the quality of theatre design courses, it re-iterates the point made at the outset of this research that

one possible solution to the problem would be to re-cast art and design as a vocational form of liberal education. Students could thus purposefully acquire skills and knowledge, and the capability to subsequently apply them to various types of visually creative employment. It is customary to take the view that studying fine art, which forms a focus for debate on this issue, equips students to do just this and those who do not achieve recognition as professional artists are sufficiently educated to adapt to other ways of life (Gooding, 2000). There is now evidence from a report on a recent survey (Daniel, 2002) that this view is disingenuous and sets up a potential conflict for students between the desire for media and peer recognition as an artist and the reality of how they actually earn a living. The Daniel report suggests that though the majority of fine art students do in fact adapt they do so despite rather than because of their studies. In my experience, such adaptation is usually accompanied by a lingering sense of guilt at not achieving the status of a professional artist. On the other hand, the same report shows that those studying jewellery design evince a stronger sense of connection between studies and future career, and again experience would suggest that this is typical of design students generally. In broad terms however, there is evidence of dislocation in art and design between its ideological purpose (professional vocationalism) and its actual function (preparation for a changing job market).

In view of a more extensive survey (Harvey and Blackwell, 1999) showing that 20% of all art and design students progress to employment not directly related to their studies, the wider context has to be taken into account in this discussion about the current vocational role of art and design. In an era which has created

the somewhat elastic concept of life-long learning (Smith and Spurling, 1999), post-16 professionally vocational education tends to be seen as preparation for careers that are more diverse, fragmented and extended than hitherto. Since 1986, generic capabilities such as teamwork, time management and, most noticeably, proficiency with computers have been branded as transferable skills and embedded in National Vocational Qualification standards as knowledge and capability which, though acquired in one context, are usable in a variety of others (Debling, 1991). The acquisition of transferable skills in the form of Key Skills is now actively promoted in schools and colleges through a national system of examination (Martinez, 1997). On the other hand, vocational courses in further education focus on those highly specific skills that tutors, employers and Training and Development Lead Bodies consider necessary for a career in a particular profession or industry (Raggatt, 1991). This vocational dilemma is currently posed at further education level in art and design, and - if past experience can act as a guide - is likely to impinge on higher education in the near future.

Through the knowledge construction process of juxtaposition, a mismatch has been identified between the hypothesised learning model and aspects of current practice in art and design. In particular, a number of problems have emerged about the centrality of liberal apprenticeship as the model of teaching and learning that typifies the institutional culture of the sector. These problems raise a major issue for art and design. *The positive dialogue between maintaining the ideal of emancipatory education for the individual and responding to the national imperative for economically relevant training, which is a key feature*

*of the institutional culture of art and design, is hardly likely to be maintained under current circumstances by continuing to rely on the liberal apprenticeship model of teaching and learning.*

## CHAPTER 8

### A SOCIAL MODEL OF LEARNING AND DISCUSSION OF ITS IMPLICATIONS

In this concluding chapter, the research findings are brought together and discussed in two stages. First, they are consolidated in the form of a proposal for a distinctive model of learning operative amongst students in art and design. Second, the model is considered in relation to current issues generally facing post-16 education, and some specific implications that it carries for the short and longer term future of art and design are identified and discussed.

#### THE FINDINGS: A SOCIAL MODEL OF STUDENT LEARNING

This research reveals that students who are customarily marginalised within art and design institutions construct their learning experience in a strong and distinctive manner. This has been hypothesised as institution-based learning that actively and positively encompasses the wider social context, resulting in a holistic and student-generated perspective on the experience of learning. The hypothesis has four determining features, the first of which is that it authentically represents student perspectives because it is grounded in a phenomenological investigation of what they say about their own experience of learning. Second, it is feasible since it is the result of systematically and

accountably applying processes and techniques of knowledge construction chosen as fit for the purpose of research into an aspect of practice in art and design. In the third place, the hypothesis is tenable. It correlates strongly with not only a wide range of established theoretical and practical knowledge but also with the findings of comparable studies. Finally, the hypothesis is pertinent in that it resonates with discussions about current developments in art and design. On these grounds, the hypothesis is claimed to be supportable as a model of student experience in which the learner:

- *recognises, accepts and assimilates radical change* by constructing institutionally-based study as an extended personal dynamic of past, present and future development
- *understands the experience as a continuum of coping* with conflict between public and private spheres in the total experience of learning
- *locates learning in the estimation of others* to whom the learner feels responsible, either as personifications of values, goals and measures or as beneficiaries of their acquired learning
- *is motivated by an appetite for personal change* arising from significant life events and tends to focus on the prospect of long term benefit rather than on immediate institutional goals

- *unifies learning in a holistic concept of the reflective self* while understanding the experience as a continuum of personal de-construction and re- construction.

The model consolidates the primary findings of this research in that it locates student learning less in relation to institutional preoccupations and more within the wider framework of the learner's whole life, thereby defining it as *a social model of institutionally-based learning*. I now want to take this further and claim that, while identification of this approach to practice-based learning constitutes an addition to generic knowledge about the learning experience of students, it carries more significance for art and design in the current socio-political and economic context. The introduction of student loans, widening participation in post-16 education and rapidly changing employment patterns in the creative industries are increasingly causing many more students than hitherto to interrelate the private and public spheres of their learning experience.

Generating a majority experience of learning that is closer to that of customarily marginalised students, these circumstances argue against the continuing ubiquity of the liberal apprenticeship model of learning in art and design. The social model of learning not only reinstates the importance of the private sphere of learning experience for the student but, crucially in the current climate, offers a means of maintaining balance between professional instrumentalism and personal emancipation in art and design.

## PERSPECTIVES ON THE SOCIAL MODEL

A primary factor in the social model of learning is that it is more contingent on the socio-cultural and economic circumstances that impact on learners and less on the institutional culture that is particular to art and design. In this respect, constructing the model is especially timely. The research through which the model was generated began during the period when government grants helped to ensure that those who were capable of studying at undergraduate level were financially able to do so. This funding pattern was dramatically interrupted for students starting undergraduate courses in 1999-2000. Ignoring the modest adjustments to student funding recommended by The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing, 1997), the government withdrew the system of state grants and replaced it with one which required students to take out personal loans to pay for their tuition fees and subsistence costs. The cumulative impact of this on the personal finances of students is sufficiently far-reaching and widespread to generate an unprecedented number of articles about post-16 education in the national press. Though a National Union of Students survey revealed that 42% of undergraduates in the United Kingdom admitted to combining paid work with their studies, some universities reported proportions of more than 80% (Schofield, 2000). It is further noted in the same article that the introduction of personal loans constrains a higher proportion of students to continue living with their parents whilst attending a local university in order to save on family expenditure. Turning from financial to academic concerns, another report considers the findings of recent studies which show how domestic circumstances impact on graduateness. In the view of tutors and

university support staff, the sense of independence and maturity expected amongst undergraduate students tends to be delayed in the personal development of those who are living with their parents (Swain, 2001). With the caveats that these are media reports based on institutionally orientated surveys conducted only with undergraduates, the stage has obviously been reached where there is nation-wide evidence that the concurrent socio-economic circumstances of students significantly affect their attitudes to learning. For all post-16 students, the reciprocal relationship between institutionally based learning and whatever they regard as their own socio-economic context is evidently an increasingly important factor in their total experience of learning. Taken in this perspective, the social model of learning which was constructed from accounts provided by marginalised students now has considerable bearing in the wider frame of current student experience in art and design.

From a specifically art and design perspective, the social model of learning presents a challenge to values upheld within the institutional culture of the sector. It exposes the error built into the pejorative assumptions that students who live at home, especially if they attend part-time, are weaker students who are less than professionally serious about their studies. Nor is it a matter only of values associated with attendance modes. With government imperatives for widening participation resulting in more younger students from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and more older students with life experience entering post-16 education, the student norm identified in the preceding chapter is now revealed as an atavistic stereotype. The model of social learning is more typical than art and design institutions generally assume on account of there now being

more students who, ostensibly attending full-time, are effectively attending part-time. Under these circumstances, de-categorising students would recognise that to a greater or lesser extent they all have commitments in addition to their studies. This of course would present a radical challenge to the ways in which art and design institutions organise educational provision - but that is the point at issue. The idea that operations (means) are somehow objective and separate from value-laden results (ends) is effectively an instance of technical rationality infiltrating the institutional culture of art and design. As has been indicated in this research, there are good grounds in art and design for arguing that means and ends are equally value-laden and mutually intertwined. Therefore, organisationally dispensing with 'full-time' and 'part-time' categories would go a long way towards addressing the negative values associated with such polarisation.

Reflecting on these matters in the light of the findings of this research confirms that the institutional culture of art and design is facing an unprecedented cluster of challenges. Successive government interventions in student funding and the imperative to widen participation effectively combine to question the sectoral predilection for liberal apprenticeship as a model of learning. The advent of the creative industries underlines that the more circumscribed forms of professional employment for which the sector has traditionally served as preparation are in a state of flux, and the last fifteen years have accordingly witnessed the huge impact of electronic media in art and design education. Taken together, these form a clear signal that the strong sense of continuity in the way art and design functions is currently being undermined. Borrowing Dean Acheson's aphorism

about mid-twentieth century Britain, one could say that art and design ‘has lost an empire and has not yet found a role’ (Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, 1979). Transition of sectoral identity on this scale inevitably has an impact on student experience and it is now apparent that this is a major factor in the phenomenon that forms the focus for this research. *Under current socio-economic circumstances, marginalisation in art and design is not a matter of characteristics or circumstances individually attributable to specific students but a symptom of the failure by institutional culture in the sector to recognise that student experience increasingly exhibits a social model of learning.*

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Identifying and accounting for marginalisation in this way fulfills the primary motive for undertaking this research, and it now remains to conjecture some of the potential effects of actively recognising the social model of learning in art and design. The established balance of function in the sector between professional instrumentalism and personal emancipation is currently under threat. With regard to professional instrumentalism, the new technologies are rapidly reshaping the professions for which art and design prepares new entrants thereby raising questions about concepts, attitudes and beliefs built into the sector. In recent years, other subject-based sectors of higher education, engineering for example, have been radically overhauled in order to maintain their relevance to changing professional demands. In the light of my research, it is conceivable that art and design might be currently experiencing the early stages of a comparable transformation. The emergence of more hybrid

professions and multiple career routes further support the view that the curriculum divisions habitually employed by institutions (fine art, fashion and textiles, three dimensional design and graphic design) may soon become obsolete.

Turning to personal emancipation as the other half of the art and design equation, this research reveals that a comparably significant change is underway as a direct result of the government imperative to widen participation. Coupled with the introduction of student loans, this is producing a generation of students who are not only less heterogeneous but openly exhibit more diverse attitudes to post-16 education than hitherto. The focus on student experience in this research has produced sufficient evidence to justify taking the social model as typical of how most students are likely to approach their learning experiences in future. As more students engage in the learning task of reconciling a wide range of conflicting practical, social, economic, cultural and personal demands, institutions will be constrained to undertake a radical reappraisal of both theory and practice with regard to teaching and learning. Alongside liberal apprenticeship which primarily serves the purposes of the professions and institutions, methods that more fully and effectively serve the purposes of an increasing diversity of learners will need to be employed

While there have already been institutional shifts of attitude brought about by student satisfaction surveys and increased emphasis on measures for supporting student learning, there is still a long way to go. Part of the problem is identifying what students actually need - a process which this research shows is

often predetermined by what institutions, in their own interests, are prepared to provide. It also reveals that it is a nonsense to talk of 'student need' as if it were homogenous. Needs differ according to individual students and their circumstances and thus have to be understood from a variety of perspectives. While modularity in all its various forms has been introduced into art and design ostensibly to address diversity of student learning requirements, in practice it has become a more complicated form of liberal apprenticeship in offering the learner little more than the choice of working alongside several 'masters'. For students engaged in interrelating how and what they learn more closely with their own purposes and circumstances of study, this is not enough. Teaching methods need to become aligned to the various ways of learning, without dividing students into categories that for institutional convenience are regarded as homogenous and absolute. That, in effect, is the key point constructed through this research. Art and design institutions do indeed at the moment make such divisions between students and in so doing prioritise those whom they construct as potential professionals over those whom they construct as amateurs. It is here contended that the way out of such polarisation is to recognise in practice that the learning experience of all students encompasses both the models identified through this research. Institutions should accept that learners orientate themselves towards liberal apprenticeship or social learning according to the time, place and purpose of their study, their own circumstances and the stage of their personal and professional development.

The research also suggests that the present time is a watershed in another sense: from now onwards art and design must recognise that it has more in common

with other sectors than is generally assumed. The period when art schools could conceive of themselves as homogeneous and elite communities united in a stand against the creatively ignorant is firmly in the past. As Britain moves inexorably towards a system of mass education increasingly mediated by new technology, the art and design sector of post-16 education - like the students it traditionally marginalises - now appears to be not so 'different' after all. Nevertheless, this research shows that the challenges it currently faces, though generally common to all post-16 education through the catalyst of government intervention, are exacerbated by specific features of the sector. Art and design has to firstly acknowledge, quickly absorb and then purposefully deploy the demands of a rapidly changing social, economic and political environment. On the evidence of this research, it is contended that this could be achieved, at least in part, by radically changing institutional practice in order to actively recognise the private sphere of student learning experience. The distinctive balance of economic vocationalism and individual emancipation which is intrinsic to the institutional culture of art and design has to be re-constructed to actively recognise the social model of learning if the sector is to meet the demands of the early twenty-first century.

# **APPENDIX**

## **SYSTEMATIC TECHNIQUES FOR ASSEMBLING ACCOUNTS AND DESCRIBING TEXTS**

Supplementing Chapters 4 and 5, this Appendix recounts the system of techniques employed during the researcher exclusive phases of investigating student accounts. The system was designed to maximise the authenticity of accounts by minimising the impact of the investigator. Techniques were selected according to fitness for purpose from those advocated for conducting interviews and describing accounts by authorities on ethnomethodological and phenomenological research (Cohen and Manion, 1989, Chapters 10 and 13)

### **ASSEMBLING ACCOUNTS**

This researcher exclusive phase was conducted with the following criteria:

- those students who contribute accounts should be appropriate to the purpose of the research in being institutionally perceived as different
- the influence of the researcher should be minimised particularly at the point when potential contributors chose to engage with the investigation
- the accounts should be in text form, freely generated and expressed in terms chosen by the contributors themselves

The resulting eleven accounts are grouped here according to the techniques with which they were assembled.

## FIVE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Enabling appropriate students to contribute to the investigation as interviewees presented a strategic problem, since any system that openly served to label them as 'different' would be procedurally counterproductive and ethically unacceptable. This dilemma was resolved by describing the research to all students undertaking formal courses of study that by implication provide for 'different' students, and then asking for self-selected volunteers. Two such courses were separately approached on the grounds that they met the main criterion, operated at various levels of post-16 education and were readily accessible in practical terms at the time of the investigation. Five volunteers came forward. Linda, Dio and Barbara were studying full time on an undergraduate course leading to BA Hons Art and Design by Negotiated Study offered by Bournville Centre for Visual Arts at The University of Central England. Marie and Samantha were undertaking a part-time access to art and design course offered by Stourbridge College of Further Education.

The system for conducting semi-structured interviews and ensuring that the resulting transcripts met the stated criteria for student accounts to be included in the research was sequenced as follows:

1. All the students on each course were briefed about the form and purposes of the investigation with the respective course leaders participating in the ensuing discussions.
2. Any student deciding to volunteer as contributor was requested to contact the investigator, individually and at a later point.
3. Interviews were arranged to coincide with student attendance patterns and in liaison with respective Course Leaders but conducted privately in a quiet room with only the researcher and the contributor present.
4. All contributors were asked for their permission to tape the interviews and had the same amount of tape time available to them.
5. Open questions and invitations to talk were used verbatim for each interview thereby prompting contributors to focus on their thoughts and feelings about past and present experience of learning, and future expectations.
6. Supplementary prompts, modifiable according to the progress of the interview, were used if contributors lost their train of thought or needed encouragement.
7. Interviews were paced according to the speaking rhythms of contributors but were timed to ensure that all of them responded to the full set of prompts.
9. Verbatim transcripts, including records of pauses, laughter and any other non-verbal responses, were made from interview tapes by the investigator and tested for accuracy by cross-checking in order to form the required texts.

In the particular case of the interviews with three undergraduate students, issues of confidentiality, possible conflicts of interest and measures for authenticity were discussed at considerable length in the initial briefing. I as the researcher, though Head of Department where the contributors were studying, had no direct teaching responsibility on their course and no executive role in assessment of their work, and these were deciding factors for students. The Course Leader was a significant presence in the discussion, voicing reservations or concerns that he knew students held but might not otherwise have expressed. The three contributors stated subsequently that they were satisfied on the issues raised in the discussion and agreed to contribute to the investigation.

### THREE UNSOLICITED ACCOUNTS

Though these accounts had been written within the framework of each contributor's course of study, they were freely generated prior to the investigation in forms and with focus points that contributors had chosen for themselves, and thus readily fulfill the criteria for inclusion. Each text came to my notice by chance. Janet was attending part-time on the same BA Hons Art and Design by Negotiated Study course as the three undergraduate interviewees. Paul was engaged in a part-time access to art and design course at Burton-on Trent College of Further Education. Carol was studying full-time towards a Diploma in Art and Design Foundation Studies at Bournville Centre for Visual Arts. Each text was included in the investigation with the contributor's permission, following a full individual briefing from myself as the researcher about the purpose, form and potential outcomes of the investigation.

### THREE CONFERENCE PAPERS

The remaining accounts also resulted from serendipitous circumstances. They were written by three undergraduate students (Diana, Ken and Carolyn) studying full-time for BA Hons Art and Design by Negotiated Study. The accounts had previously formed presentations by students to a conference entitled *The Student Experience* held at Newcastle University by the Society for Research into Higher Education in 1988. The students concerned were self-selected since they were the only ones studying on the second year of the course who responded positively to the suggestion that they could present conference papers. The themes of *Getting in*, *Staying There* and *Moving On*, the length of the papers and the formal language were all pre-determined by the conference organisers. Subsequent to the conference presentation and independently of it, I asked the presenters if they would allow their papers to be included in this investigation. After a group briefing about the investigation, they privately discussed the request and agreed.

The papers were thus included in this investigation only after discussion between the contributing students and myself, as both Head of Department and the researcher involved, about the associated ethical issues. They were satisfied that the required conference format was such that it sufficiently minimised the influence of the researcher. Their papers had been written independently of the investigation in the pre-established format and were not subsequently changed. Rehearsals for presentation, though conducted with myself as Head of Department, had been rigorously confined to the timing, pace, expression and

etiquette appropriate for reading papers to a conference audience. It was noticeable that the students scrupulously observed their right of privacy when discussing the content of their papers by asking me to withdraw when they did so. Thus the circumstances under which the accounts were written for the conference conveniently fulfilled most of the criteria that were subsequently specified for the inclusion of student accounts in this research. Since however the form of these accounts was pre-determined by conference requirements, their value as texts in this investigation is a matter of content.

#### MEASURES FOR ENSURING TEXTUAL AUTHENTICITY

The following operational techniques were used to minimise the effect of the researcher when each of the eleven accounts was produced or selected:

- details of the investigation were presented in standard written form and the opportunity for questions was made available, thereby enabling groups and individuals to decide on a fully informed basis whether or not to contribute
- ensuring that all contributors knew they had the right to withdraw from the investigation if they felt that the authenticity of their accounts was being compromised or that the investigation was too intrusive
- where direct personal contact was involved in assembling the accounts, as the researcher I spoke impassively, offered no guidance or hints about what students should say or write, and made it gently clear that I would not be drawn into discussion while the account was being produced
- with the three unsolicited accounts, the ethical or procedural issues were

negligible since they were produced by students who had not been taught by the researcher, were written before the investigation took place, and were included in the investigation with the students' consent after the they had completed their courses.

## DESCRIBING THE TEXTS

Interview transcripts and conference papers were deemed as texts alongside those that were unsolicited, resulting in eleven paper documents. In this phase of the investigation, the texts were constructively described, with judgment consciously suspended, by applying the following sequence of phenomenological techniques to the paper documents:

1. The researcher observed an organic feature that was common to all texts: an average of eleven to twelve words was sufficient for one communication, and, in standard word-processing, this average broadly equated with one line of text
2. Each line of each text was described by the researcher according to its communicative role, producing categories such as narrative, assertive, speculative, deflective, evaluative or reflective
3. Each communication, or line of each text, was also described by the researcher in terms of its meaning, producing such themes as money and time, course of study, subject of study, other people, thoughts about self,

future prospect and jobs

4. Patterns were observed in the characteristic way that contributors combined categories of communication (form) and meaningful themes (content):

Relative proportions of text devoted to themes

Re-iteration, sequence and combinations in communicating themes.

Themes explicitly or implicitly chosen or not chosen

Interpretation of ambiguous situations or open questions

Relative proportions of communicative categories in each text

Communicative and thematic rhythms peculiar to each text

The characteristic pattern of each account shows how individual people constructed their own learning experiences. The model of social learning identified in Chapter 8 was constructed by the researcher from the commonality of these individual patterns.

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