

**Issues and Challenges in  
Implementing the 1999 Curriculum  
for Visual Arts:  
Case Study in a Junior School.**

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**B.Ed.**

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the Master of Education Degree.*

**Date: July, 2005.**

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**This dissertation is dedicated to my  
father Des and to my late mother  
Teresa.**

## Table of Contents

<b>Graphs.....</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Declaration.....</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges</b>	
Introduction.....	1
The Visual Arts in Irish Primary Schools, 1831- 1971.....	2
<i>Curriculum and Society.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>The Rise of the Academic Tradition.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>School Conditions.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Poor and Erratic School Attendance.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>3R Subjects as Institution.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>The impact of Educational Philosophy, 1900-1922.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Church and State Influence on Curriculum, 1922-1971.....</i>	<i>9</i>
1960 – 1971.....	11
The 1971 Primary School Curriculum, Issues and Challenges.....	11
<i>Role of the Child.....</i>	<i>12</i>

<i>Role of the Teacher</i> .....	13
<i>Curriculum Content</i> .....	15
Reviews and Evaluations of the 1971 Curriculum.....	16
<i>Implementation of Curriculum Approaches</i> .....	17
<i>Teachers' Skills, Knowledge and Resources</i> .....	17
<i>The Syllabus and Organisational Matters</i> .....	18
The Report of the Primary Curriculum Review Body (1990).....	19
Issues and Challenges in Implementing the 1999 Curriculum for Visual Arts	
<i>The 1999 Primary School Curriculum</i> .....	24
<i>1999 Primary School Curriculum, Visual Arts</i> .....	25
<i>Curriculum Emphases</i> .....	26
<i>The Teacher's Role</i> .....	26
Curriculum Evaluation and Dimensions of the Research Dissertation.....	27
<i>Implementing Individual Creative Approaches in Visual Arts</i> .....	28
<i>Implementation of Guided Discovery Teaching Methods</i> .....	29
<i>Uptake of New Strand Areas</i> .....	30
Overview of Dissertation.....	31
<b>Chapter 2: Issues in Change and Implementation, Review of the Literature</b>	
Introduction.....	36

THE CHANGE CONTEXT.....	37
Institutional Context... ..	38
<i>School Culture</i> .....	38
<i>The Conservative Function of Culture</i> .....	39
<i>Levels of Culture</i> .....	39
<i>Culture and Curricular Change</i> .....	40
<i>Curricular Change and the School as a Social Institution</i> .....	41
<i>The Curriculum as Shaped from Without, Curriculum as Institution</i> .....	42
<i>The Role of the Teacher</i> .....	43
<i>Teachers' Agendas</i> .....	43
<i>Teachers and Motivation</i> ... ..	44
<i>Mismatch between Change Agenda and School Milieu</i> ... ..	45
The Organisational Context... ..	46
<i>Class Profile</i> .....	46
<i>Time</i> .....	47
IMPLEMENTING CHANGE IN CURRICULUM: THE NATURE OF CHANGE.....	48
Coping with Change .....	48

Change Anxiety.....	49
Resistance to Change.....	50
Adapting to Change.....	51
<i>STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION</i> .....	53
Making the Case for Change.....	53
Teachers' Commitment to Innovate.....	55
Practicality of the Change.....	55
Will and Motivation.....	56
Characteristics of the Innovation.....	56
False Clarity.....	57
Working through Change.....	58
Pressure to Change.....	59
Support in Change – The Principal and School Leadership.....	60
Support in Change – Policy Makers.....	60
Outside Agencies – Parents.....	61
The Local Community.....	62
Conclusion.....	62
<b>Chapter 3: Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed</b>	
Introduction.....	68

Rationale for the Study.....	68
Aims of the Study and Areas of Particular Focus.....	70
The Research Context.....	71
Planning the Research and Research Design.....	72
Research Approach.....	75
The Questionnaire.....	77
<i>Questionnaire Design</i> .....	78
<i>Questions and Question Type</i> .....	80
<i>Choosing the Population</i> .....	83
<i>Piloting the Questionnaire</i> .....	84
<i>Distributing the Questionnaire</i> .....	87
Interviews.....	87
<i>Style of Interview Used</i> .....	89
<i>Choosing the Interview Population</i> .....	90
<i>Conducting the Interviews</i> .....	91
<i>Recording the Interviews</i> .....	95
Data Analysis.....	96
<i>Analysis of Questionnaire Data</i> .....	96
<i>Analysis of Data from Interviews</i> .....	99
Accuracy, Bias, Validity and Reliability.....	101

<i>Accuracy</i> .....	101
<i>Bias</i> .....	101
<i>Validity</i> .....	102
<i>Reliability and Authenticity</i> .....	104
Conclusion.....	106
<b>Chapter 4: Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999) in a Junior School: Issues and Challenges</b>	
Introduction.....	111
PROCESS VERSUS PRODUCT, ENCOURAGING INDIVIDUAL CREATIVITY.....	113
Introduction.....	113
Description of Art in the School Prior to 1999, <i>The Art Culture of the School: A Concern for Product</i> .....	114
Implementation of Curriculum Approaches since 1999, <i>Embracing Curriculum Change</i> .....	118
Pressures that Teachers experience that Impede Implementation.....	119
<i>Pressure for Product</i> .....	119
<i>The Impact of Parents and Special Occasions</i> .....	120
<i>Pressure from Management</i> .....	122
<i>Pressure from Teachers</i> .....	124



<i>Time and Organisation</i> .....	127
Factors Encouraging Change.....	129
<i>Professional Development</i> .....	129
<i>Teachers' Professionalism</i> .....	131
<i>Conflict</i> .....	132
<i>The Impact of New Teachers</i> .....	133
Conclusion.....	134
TEACHER AS FACILITATOR OF LEARNING/ GUIDED DISCOVERY	
METHODS	
Introduction.....	135
Factors Influencing Implementation.....	136
<i>Junior School Issues and the Teacher</i> .....	136
<i>The Teaching of Art</i> .....	138
<i>Class Profile: Class Size, Student Diversity and the Need for Help in</i> <i>the Classroom</i> .....	141
Conclusion.....	144
UPTAKE OF NEW STRAND AREAS	
Introduction.....	144
Implementing New Strand Areas.....	145
Teacher Creativity and Skill.....	149

Resources and Access to Resources.....	151
Teacher Development in Art.....	153
Conclusion.....	154
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion of Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum</b>	
Introduction.....	156
IMPLEMENTING INDIVIDUAL CREATIVE APPROACHES AND GUIDED DISCOVERY METHODS IN THE VISUAL ARTS CURRICULUM, 1999 – ISSUES AND CHALLENGES	
Institutional Issues.....	157
<i>The Change Context</i> .....	157
<i>Attempting to Change a School Culture</i> .....	157
<i>Teachers Dealing with Multiple Demands</i> .....	159
<i>The Institutional Character of the Curriculum</i> .....	160
<i>School and Teacher Values</i> .....	162
<i>Isolated Teacher Culture and the Culture of Individualism</i> .....	164
<i>Teacher Beliefs</i> .....	165
<i>Teacher Seniority</i> .....	166
Organisational Factors.....	167
<i>Time</i> .....	167

<i>The Classroom Environment</i> .....	169
<i>Instructional Arrangements</i> .....	171

*UPTAKE OF NEW STRAND AREAS*

Teacher Creativity and Skill.....	172
Resources.....	173
The Change Process.....	174
Teacher Development.....	174
The Role of Pressure in Change.....	175
Support.....	176
The Role of Conflict in Change.....	177
Conclusion.....	179
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>188</b>
<b>Appendix</b> .....	<b>198</b>

## Graphs

<b>Figure 3.1:</b> Frequency with which teachers use art as inspiration and not as something to copy.....	98
<b>Figure 4.1:</b> Teachers' responses to the statement 'The Visual Arts occupy a position of importance in the school'.....	115
<b>Figure 4.2:</b> Frequency with which teachers teach art with small groups of children.....	140
<b>Figure 4.3:</b> Frequency with which teachers engaged with Drawing.....	146
<b>Figure 4.4:</b> Frequency with which teachers engaged with Paint and Colour.....	147
<b>Figure 4.5:</b> Frequency with which teachers engaged with Print.....	147
<b>Figure 4.6:</b> Frequency with which teachers engaged with Clay.....	148
<b>Figure 4.7:</b> Frequency with which teachers engaged with Fabric and Fibre.....	148
<b>Figure 4.8:</b> Frequency with which teachers engaged with Construction.....	149

# Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university.

Signed: Catherine Hickey

Date: July, 2005

*Catherine Hickey*

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## **Abstract**

The 1971 child-centred curriculum for primary schools, *Curaclam na Bunscoile*, has been reviewed and revised and the most recent curriculum, the Revised Primary School Curriculum (1999), has been introduced into Irish primary schools. Revisions to the nine subjects on the curriculum have been gradually phased into schools and such phasing in of the curriculum subjects is on-going. Alterations made in the subject area of 'Art and Craft', under its new title 'Visual Arts', have been quite extensive.

Changes to the subject involve a broadening of subject content. In terms of pedagogy, the 1999 curriculum for Visual Arts calls for a return to the child-centred, heuristic, teacher-facilitated methods espoused in the 1971 curriculum and emphasises the 'creative process' in children's art work. Calling for a return to such a pedagogical approach implies that this approach has, to some extent, been lost in the classroom. Sugrue would contend that 'it is more accurate to say that primary education in Ireland is more child conscious rather than child-centred' (1990, p.5). He would also call for 'an effort to determine the extent to which these principles need to be enshrined in practice, before it can be asserted that child-centred education is widely practiced in classrooms' (*ibid*, p.6).

This study researches the implementation of aspects of the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999) in a junior primary school in West Dublin. Within this context it specifically examines:

- The implementation of individual/creative approaches in the teaching of Visual Arts;

- The implementation of guided discovery methods of teaching in Visual Arts;
- The uptake of new strand areas.

The study shows curriculum change to be a complex endeavour where new curriculum change proposals get 'caught into a complex of institutional and cultural issues' (Callan, 1995, p.105).



## **1. Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges**

### **Introduction**

In the school year 2001/2002 teachers in Irish primary schools began implementing a new curriculum for Visual Arts as part of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum. This study researches the implementation of aspects of the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999) in a junior primary school in West Dublin. Specifically it aims to examine:

- The implementation of individual/creative approaches in the teaching of Visual Arts;
- The implementation of guided discovery methods of teaching in Visual Arts;
- The uptake of new strand areas.

Chapter One seeks to place Visual Arts in its social and historical context and examines the issues and challenges that have affected Visual Arts in the primary school up to 1999. Having discussed the historical context of the subject under study, the chapter concludes by setting out the dimensions of the research and providing a brief outline and description of the chapters within the dissertation.

**The Visual Arts in Irish Primary Schools (1831-1971).**

*Curriculum and Society*

The school curriculum does not exist in a social, economic or cultural vacuum' (Callan, 1995, p.94), neither is it 'possible nor appropriate to isolate the social dynamics of educational reform from the wider cultural and economic influences or structural relations' (Sugrue, 2004, p.175). When tracing changes in curricular provision at primary level, from the inception of the Primary School system in 1831 right up to current times, it can be seen that 'an educational curriculum.... expresses a compromise between an inherited selection of interests and an emphasis of new interests' (Williams, 1965) or as Kelly puts it, curriculum is 'a battleground for competing ideologies' (2004, p.20).

Curriculum and society are, therefore, inextricably linked and so school curricula, as 'social artefacts' (Goodson, 1994, p.18) are telling. Curricula can tell us how at any time knowledge is perceived in society and which types of knowledge hold esteem, what is the role of the teacher in the society or school and where do children fit in the equation. Studies of curricula at any time are also useful in showing us who are the vested interests at that time as 'changes in curriculum are often brought about by the power of dominant interest groups' (Callan, 1995, p.96). It is, therefore, necessary to examine the context in which the National Board was set up in 1831 to understand why Visual Arts did not appear on early curricula for this country and to understand the underlying issues and challenges that affected the curriculum at the time.

**1831-1900**

***The Rise of the Academic Tradition***

Three major traditions of argument about the nature and purpose of curriculum exist: the academic, the utilitarian and the pedagogic (Goodson, 1993). The first primary curriculum in this country, as introduced in the first schools by the National Board in 1831, saw the introduction of an 'academic' approach into a 'new, and for its day, radical system' (Coolahan, 1983, p.36). The curriculum of 1831 was narrowly focused on the 3 R subjects, Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. This narrow curricular focus essentially had as its aim the achievement of basic levels of literacy and numeracy amongst the school going population in a time when theorists such as Adam Smith had 'urged that the state should promote literacy and numeracy at elementary level as an essential factor for industrial progress' (Coolahan, 1981, p.4).

By virtue of its focus on achievement of these aims, the curriculum was product driven. Schooling was 'bookish' where 'a central part of the teacher's material and equipment was intended to be the books produced by the board' (Coolahan, 1983, p.47). Visual Arts did not appear on the curriculum of the early primary school. It did not have any status as a subject at that time as it was not within the realms of what schools were setting out to achieve. Therefore, in the early years of Irish primary schooling the issue of what knowledge was important to achieving society's goals at that time and the school's role in this regard influenced the curriculum of the day and left Visual Arts out in the cold.

### ***School Conditions***

Conditions on the ground and in classrooms of the time would have impacted on whether or not a teacher could take on art as a subject, regardless of whether it was on the curriculum or not. One such issue that teachers would have to cope with was that of class size. The 1830s were the era of mass education and Joseph Lancaster's mass education methods were in use in England. In such an approach it was envisaged that one master could teach up to one thousand children, mainly in an effort to ensure education would be economically viable and that the curriculum would be the kind that would 'encourage the lower classes to function efficiently in their allotted place in society' (Gordon and Lawton, 1978, p.56).

Although this was not quite the case in the Irish primary system, enrolment in classes was still very large by today's standards. The restricted physical space of the classroom combined with the classroom furniture, heavy wooden desks fixed to the ground in rows, would have made it difficult to carry out any teaching in the Visual Arts. Moreover, classrooms were basic and teachers did not have the resources to implement a Visual Arts programme had they so desired or had such a subject existed on the curriculum. The Powis Commission of 1868 gives an insight into the workings of the system at this time.

Teachers kept one fifth of schoolhouses in repair themselves. Only one third of the schools were held to have 'good' roofs, floors and windows and less than half had playgrounds and enclosing walls. Over a third of schools lacked toilets. About 400 schools were reported deficient in desks, lighting ventilation and heating.

### *Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

More than half the schools had no pictorial charts and maps were deficient in about 700 schools. (Coolahan, 1981, p.25)

The lack of such basic amenities in schools must have provided many impediments to teachers work and conditions were certainly not conducive to instruction in the Visual Arts.

#### ***Poor and Erratic School Attendance***

Also at ground level, the issue of poor and erratic attendance in schools served to push Art into the background and strengthen the position of the 3Rs within the primary school curriculum. Irregular attendance created an urgency about the work of schools that had an impact on the curriculum and what was taught in the classroom. 'Enrolment was not synonymous with regular attendance in these pre-compulsory attendance days' (Coolahan, 1983, p.51). For example, in 1870 it was calculated that the percentage of those enrolled who were in daily attendance amounted to only 30 per cent (Coolahan, 1981).

In such a context if, and when, children did turn up to school the emphasis was to get children to read, write and perform arithmetic tasks in the short time that was available to them rather than be concerned with subjects reserved for aesthetic pleasure. This sense of urgency contributed to the general consensus that the 3Rs were the important knowledge and the knowledge worth transmitting to students at the time, and so, in the early years of the National Board, 'the drive for literacy and numeracy was underway' (ibid, p.51).

***3R Subjects as an Institution***

In the decades following 1831 and leading up to 1900 the 3Rs retained firm control over the primary curriculum and the curriculum served the function of preserving society. Reflecting the values of society at the time, Art did not appear as a subject for study on the curriculum. It could be seen that schools and society impacted upon each other. Society valued the 3Rs and so they were the main focus of schooling. Schools focused on the 3Rs and so this knowledge became more valued in society. In this way the 3R primary school curriculum was becoming institutionalised and the 'academic' subjects of Mathematics and English gained a foothold as the important subjects in the psyche of the Irish people.

Goodson maintains that since the nineteenth century 'academic subjects' and written examinations have become closely interconnected (1993, p.25). The interconnectedness between 'academic subjects' and written examinations was strengthened further in this country by the introduction of Payment by Results in 1872. Teachers' pay was to be determined according to the results of written examinations given in the 'academic subjects'. This sent a clear message to teachers that there was little scope for broader approaches to curriculum inclusive of the Arts subjects. In classrooms around the country academic knowledge was of greater value to any other type of knowledge as it served vocational or occupational purposes (Goodson, 1993). During the latter part of the nineteenth century, as was evident from the focus of evaluation, there was little 'concern

### *Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

for the value of what was being offered' and more concern with 'the effectiveness of its 'delivery'' (Kelly, 2004, p.12).

#### ***The Impact of Educational Philosophy, 1900-1922***

During the first seventy years of the National School System the academic curriculum was developed to serve the occupational needs of society. Knowledge purveyed in schools was of the rationalist kind supported by philosophers such as Plato, Descartes, Kant and Hegel and took as its starting point the 'supremacy of the intellect over all other faculties' (Kelly, 2004, p.26). Also in these years, the views of Joseph Locke were prevalent in the system. The mind was seen as a 'tabula rasa', a blank slate, and knowledge was to be received by the primarily passive learner (Kelly, 2004, p.28). 19<sup>th</sup> century children, as learners, were to be seen and not heard and most knowledge worth having was to be found in books (Coolahan, 1983).

At the turn of the century the Irish primary curriculum, however, took on a new character influenced by contemporary philosophical educational thought. The period around the early 1900s was characterised by,

A search for theoretical backing for reformist ideas in education, such as more humane treatment of children and more enlightened methods and curricula. (Gordon and Lawton, 1978, p.64)

The traditional emphasis on book learning in primary schools was coming under increasing criticism and many educationalists felt that the practical subjects should find a

### *Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

place on the primary school curriculum. Child-centred educationalists such as Montessori, Froebel and Pestalozzi argued that the curriculum should take more cognisance of the nature of childhood and that the needs and interests of the child should be of central importance in the development of programmes of elementary education (Coolahan, 1973). The Belmore Commission of 1897 suggested that the primary school programme should include practical subjects. At the turn of the century the primary curriculum broadened, retained the 3Rs at the core but included a wide variety of other compulsory subjects. The Revised Programme of Instruction of 1900 saw Visual Arts, in the form of 'Drawing', take its place on the primary school curriculum for the first time. This came in a period when 'Ireland opened windows onto international thought on Education and there was a resurgence of interest, as in the early part of the nineteenth century' (Coolahan, 1981, p.9).

It was also around the same time that Payment by Results 'fell out of favour' (Coolahan, op.cit) and so teachers experienced more freedom in their attempts to implement the new curriculum. It was reported that there were difficulties implementing many aspects of the broader curriculum, including Drawing, mainly for reasons that teachers were lacking in training to cope with curricular changes, but mostly for the fact that those involved in educating had now become used of the narrow 3R curriculum and still held the belief that the 3Rs incorporated the most important body of knowledge worth transmitting (Benson, 1979). However, the broadened curriculum at this stage was very much a step forward in giving Visual Arts some form of curricular recognition.



***Church and State Influence on Curriculum, 1922-1971***

Kelly asserts that 'all approaches to curriculum planning are ideological' and that this 'alerts us to the political dangers which must be recognized and addressed' (2004, p.26). He also argues that 'implicit in any set of arrangements are the attitudes and values of those who create them' (ibid, p.5). In the years following 1900, the church and the state exercised momentous influence on the Irish primary school curriculum and certain political and social ideologies were in evidence.

In the early years of the 1900s 'Ireland was rural and its economy was agrarian, it was argued; practical wisdom and the Three Rs (at most) were all that were needed for most people (Garvan, 2004, p.129). The primary curriculum was narrowed in 1922 on the establishment of the Irish Free State to reflect the opinion that the Three Rs encompassed all knowledge that was worth pursuing. However, this narrowing of the primary curriculum by the government of the day was also a highly political act. It reflected the government's aspiration to give the Irish language a position of importance on the curriculum in order to advance the wider causes of the revival and restoration of the Irish language in society and 'the inculcation of patriotism and an informed love of one's country's history and social culture' (Garvan, 2004, p. 141). It was believed that time given over to the pursuit of Visual Arts could be put to better use in advancing the cause of the Irish language and so 'Drawing' was dropped from the curriculum. Government policy, therefore, ground its ideological axe through the vehicle of the school curriculum

*Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

with great effect as can be still seen where 'Gaeilge' has 'unaltered status' as 'the only compulsory subject for young people from age 6-18' (Granville, 2004, p.91).

The primary curriculum remained largely the same with only some minor alterations in the years following and leading up to the 1971 'Primary School Curriculum', '*Curaclam na Bunscoile*'. Irish, English, Arithmetic and Singing formed the basis of the core group of subjects studied. In senior classes some History, Geography and Algebra were taught (Benson, 1979). Religion was taught in all classes. Garvan argues that there was 'general acceptance of a static situation' in these times (2004, p.136) and that the ideological controls of the church and the state were repressing education in that,

Puritan patriots and priests had tried gamely to preserve and reproduce a certain social type, pious, familial, loyal to the native acres, culturally ingrown and obedient to clerical guidance in matters moral and intellectual. (2004, p.145)

The general static situation referred to was mirrored in the general static situation of the primary curriculum. Art, as a subject of study, had no presence on the landscape of the primary school curriculum, a condition that was further exacerbated by the introduction of The Primary School Certificate Examination in 1943. The Primary School Certificate Examination, a compulsory exam to be taken in the last year of primary school, played its part in ensuring that the curriculum remained rigid and uninspiring. By exercising control over teachers and what was taught in schools it ensured that teachers delivered results in the essential core curriculum subjects and so furthered the dominance of the 'classical humanist tradition' of the curriculum (Callan, 1995, p. 93).

**1960-1971**

The 1960s were a time of change in Irish society characterised by ‘ecclesiastical upheaval’, a ‘political new departure’ and an ‘economic shift’ (Garvan, 2004, p.144). In such a time of change it was felt that a ‘silent but very groundswell of increasing discontent with the existing system was occurring’ (ibid, p.141-142). Changes in society led to changes in the Irish Education system and in the primary school curriculum. While the curriculum was ‘informed with the view that the purposes of schooling is the inculcation of religious ideals and values and the preservation and transmission of our cultural heritage’ (Callan, 1995, p.93), the rapidly changing economy meant that, as Garvan strongly puts it, ‘education designed to produce pious patriots and nationalist priests would have to be replaced by education and training for economic growth’ (2004, p.144). The *‘Investment in Education’* report of 1965 offered a ‘devastating’ assessment of the existing system and ‘effectively legitimised a revolution in Irish education’ (Garvan, 2004, p.153). 1967 saw the abolition of the Primary Certificate Examination and the end of the ‘rigid compulsory programme for all schools’ was heralded by the introduction of the Primary School Curriculum of 1971 (Ireland, Government of, 1971, p.17).

**The 1971 Primary School Curriculum, Issues and Challenges**

The New Curriculum of 1971 was highly innovative for its time. It was influenced by the child-centred pedagogy of John Dewey who believed that ‘if the adult generation imposes

### *Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

on the young its own values and its own knowledge, the process is one of indoctrination rather than education' (Kelly, 2004, p.37). The philosophies of Froebel such as that of 'harmonious development' were also in evidence (Gordon and Lawton, 1978, p.65) as were the developmental stages of psychologist Jean Piaget who had shown that children learn more effectively from organized concrete situations (ibid, 1978, p.157). Five principles of education informed the new curriculum. They were as follows;

1. The full and harmonious development of the child;
2. Due allowances for individual differences;
3. The principles of active learning and discovery methods;
4. Integrated curriculum;
5. Environment based learning.

The subjects for study were Religion, Irish, English, Mathematics, Social and Environmental studies, Art and Craft Activities, Music and Physical Education.

#### ***Role of the Child***

The new curriculum gave a new role to the child at the centre of the educational process. In this approach to curriculum children were to be seen as 'complex human beings with physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs and potentialities' (Ireland, Government of, 1971 p.13).

### *Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

With specific reference to Art and Craft, the child's role was 'never passive', 'always doing, making, experimenting, expressing some facet of his character and personality' (Ireland, Government of, 1971, p.279). Work in school was to be 'a self activated learning process on the part of the pupil rather than a lesson imparted by the teacher' where the 'desired result is not the excellence of the finished product but the physical, mental and emotional experience gained by the child' (ibid, p.279). This marked a significant change from previous curricula where the child was merely the passive receptor of adult approved knowledge and knowledge was to be transmitted to the 'tabula rasa' of the child's mind (Kelly, 2004, p.28).

The curriculum aimed to prepare the child 'to take his place ultimately as an adult in society both in work and in leisure' (Ireland, Government of, 1971, p.13) and so in this respect the new curriculum acknowledged the ties that education has with society and the role of curriculum in this regard. The inclusion of Art and Craft as a subject on the curriculum was a major departure. Art and Craft was included for its 'intrinsic value' and was seen as a subject that would promote the ideals of the new curriculum where it was 'doubtful that any other aspect of the curriculum can do so much to foster simultaneously intellect, imagination, observation and manipulative skill' (ibid, p.279). Therefore, in a sense, Art and Craft became an important area pedagogically.

#### ***Role of the Teacher***

The role of the teacher changed with the new curriculum (1971). The new role was to be one of 'added responsibility' and this new responsibility was to bring with it 'its own

*Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

rewards – a deeper professional consciousness and a greater opportunity for personal fulfilment’ (Ireland, Government of, 1971 p.22). It was removal from the constraints of the previous rigid system and the abolition of the Primary Certificate that was to give the individual teacher ‘more freedom’ (1971, p.21). Flexible time-tabling ‘rather than clearly defined half-hour periods’ was advocated and teachers were encouraged so that ‘general reading, attendance at in-service courses, study circles, teachers’ centres, and lectures’ would help ensure that ‘the work in each area of the curriculum is planned along the most suitable lines’ (Ireland, Government of, 1971, p.22). In general, a professional approach by teachers was advocated in the 1971 curriculum and the curriculum threw the gauntlet to teachers to accept this challenge and abandon the previous teacher as ‘transmitter role’ (Callan, 1995, p.93).

The changed role of the teacher was particularly in evidence in the area of Art and Craft where the didactic, ‘teacher imparted lesson’ was to be replaced with the ‘child-centred approach’ (Ireland, Government of, 1971, p.286). With specific reference to Art and Craft, teachers were encouraged not to ‘impose adult standards of criticism’ on the work of the children but to ‘encourage, stimulate and give tactful guidance’ (ibid, p.286). The teacher was also expected ‘never to intrude on the child’s activity’ (ibid). Lessons in drawing techniques had ‘little place in the primary school’ (ibid, p.287). The teacher’s role, therefore, was to change dramatically from the didactic approach to the use of guided discovery methods such as were advocated by Piaget.

***Curriculum Content***

In terms of content of the curriculum, teachers were not furnished with achievable targets and objectives but rather 'suggestions were made for appropriate learning activities' that they could try out in their classrooms as contained under various headings (White Paper, 1980, p.25). For example, in the junior primary syllabus three areas of Art and Craft activities were identified for study,

1. Play activities
2. Picture and Pattern
3. Construction.

The teacher was given the freedom to do as he/she saw fit with activities suggested under these categories and was only advised that 'no individual activity should be favoured to the neglect of all others' and that teachers should 'resist the temptation to devote too much time to a pet craft' (Ireland, government of, 1971, p.280).

In terms of the curriculum allowing such scope and freedom for teachers what was essentially in evidence in 1971 was a dramatic shift from the 'rigid, lock-step uniformity that characterised much of primary schooling prior to 1971' (Sugrue, 2004, p.188) toward a more open, progressive, discovery, child-centred pedagogy.

The suggestions that were made for appropriate learning activities were also to allow 'the greatest degree of flexibility....to suit the circumstances of each school and, indeed the

### *Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

needs of individual children' (White Paper, 1980, p.25). The fact that the curriculum made no attempt to allow for a developmental progression of skills and allowed maximum freedom to teachers to choose which aspects of the curriculum they would implement meant that there was a significant variance between the experiences children were receiving in the area of Art and Craft in schools around the country (Benson, 1979).

#### **Reviews and Evaluations of the 1971 Curriculum**

In the years following the implementation of the 1971 New Primary School Curriculum many evaluations of the curriculum were carried out. The Conference of Convent Primary Schools, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) and the Department of Education all investigated aspects of the implementation of the New Curriculum and reported on their findings.

The general findings from these reports seemed to point to an increase in quality of education in Irish primary schools since the release of the curriculum in 1971 and this in particular in schools that reported a higher degree of implementation (Benson, 1979). Sugrue believes that 'since 1971, teachers had come to enjoy the relative autonomy and discretionary judgement that a child-centred policy conferred upon them' and that they made 'heroic efforts to implement progressive principles against enormous constraints' (2004, p.191). However, others would contend that there was a looseness about the



### *Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

manner in which the reforms advocated in 1971 were implemented (Coolahan, 1981).

The OECD report of 1991 goes further and suggests that,

Despite the vision and thoroughness of the 1971 primary school curriculum proposals and the many practical innovations since carried through by dedicated teachers, the evidence suggests that emphasis is still largely on a didactic approach and often, in later primary years, in a relatively narrow range of subject matter (p.67).

#### *Implementation of Curriculum Approaches*

In terms of the new subject area of Art and Craft, the Benson Report of 1979 indicates that the curriculum approaches for Art and Craft were 'very much in use at junior level' (p.31) and that teachers felt they were attaining the objectives in this area. This was more true for schools with 9 teachers or more than for those schools with 1 to 3 teachers. However, the White Paper (1980, p.26) suggests that a major obstacle to teachers 'taking a radically different view of their role and function' was 'the occurrence of large classes of over 40'. Under such conditions of teaching, the claim that curriculum approaches for Art and Craft were 'very much at use' may be a matter of contestation.

#### *Teachers' Skills, Knowledge and Resources*

Although student teachers were now required to take basic curriculum studies of Art and Craft in colleges of education, and practicing teachers attended in-service in order to help implement the new subject, teachers did admit that they felt they lacked the 'skills,

### *Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

knowledge and resources to teach the area satisfactorily' (Benson, 1979, p.31). In this regard, in-service was inadequate to provide for the needs of teachers and failed to prepare teachers to implement Art and Craft.

#### *The Syllabus and Organisational Matters*

The difficulty also lay with the actual syllabus itself where many teachers regarded the syllabus as being 'unrealistic and demanding excessive expertise' (Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum, 1990, P.64). Many areas of Art and Craft were not seen as being suitable for boys and many craft activities did not 'recommend themselves to the general run of teachers other than the few enthusiasts' (Benson, 1979, p.31). The curriculum's lack of formal structured content or acknowledgement of developmental stages played its part in rendering the syllabus 'unrealistic and demanding' and was to cause 'considerable problems for pupils and teachers' (Coolahan, 1981, p.135). A further bone of contention was the question of resources and organization matters as referred to by Benson (1979). Those aspects of the curriculum that were reportedly implemented, such as the area of picture making and painting, were those which were easily resourced and required less in terms of organization.

### **The Report of the Primary Curriculum Review Body (1990)**

In the twenty years following the introduction of the 1971 curriculum Ireland was continuing to change economically, culturally and socially and participation rates in education were on the increase. These changes in Irish society, along with the influence of Ireland's membership of the European Union and new developments in educational thought, led to the establishment of the Review Body on the Primary School Curriculum in 1987 by then Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke. The Review Body on the Primary Curriculum aimed to,

Review the successes of the primary school curriculum to date, to identify its weaknesses whether in design or in implementation and to set education at primary level on course to meet the needs of the next century. (1990, p.5)

The Review Body examined, reviewed and made recommendations concerning the aims and objectives of the 1971 Primary School Curriculum. It also examined existing curricular provision for each subject area, reviewed research on classroom practice and made recommendations for future policy regarding its provision in schools.

In general it was felt that a major flaw of the 1971 curriculum was the fact that no rationale was given for teaching the Arts subjects as a whole, that each discipline was treated in isolation. In response to this the Review Body devised a 'general statement of aesthetic principles from which the aims and objectives of all the arts disciplines could be derived' (Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum, 1990, p.59). These

*Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

principles were drawn from aesthetic educational research and encompassed the 'historical, critical-appreciative and expressive aspects of arts education' (p.59). It was maintained that these aspects of the arts should be reflected in balance within an Arts curriculum but that the present curriculum was,

seriously imbalanced in this respect and overwhelmingly emphasises expressive activities at the expense of critical and appreciative responses to art. (p.59)

This imbalance it was felt should be addressed in light of provision of a future curriculum for Visual Arts.

The Review body examined the 1984 Department of Education report on Art and Craft which was based on responses to questionnaires by teachers, principal teachers and inspectors. This examination aimed to assess the extent to which the 1971 curriculum for Art and Craft had been implemented into primary schools thus far. A summary of the major findings of the Department of Education Report (1984) are listed below;

- Some 57 per cent of the teacher respondents report that their initial training did not equip them adequately to implement the syllabus in Arts and Crafts.
- Principal teachers report that Art and Craft activities are conducted at all levels in almost all schools surveyed.
- The difficulties expressed by the respondents can be attributed to
  - inadequate training
  - inadequate supply of materials and facilities

*Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

- large classes
  
  - The majority of inspectors feel that not enough time is being spent on Art and Craft activities.
  - The inspectors feel that much more time should be spent on Art appreciation.
  - A majority of teachers see Art and Crafts as being as important as Language, Mathematics and Social and Environmental studies.
  - Up to half of the teachers in the survey reported that their classrooms did not have modern furniture, running water or adequate storage facilities.
  - Many teachers devote as little as one hour per week to Art and Crafts.
  - Teachers find it difficult to evaluate progress in Art and Crafts.
  - Visits to galleries etc. do not occur frequently.
  - In general less than half of the suggested Craft activities are attempted.
  - Needlework is the Craft activity most frequently covered in girls' schools. The teaching of cookery is confined to schools where facilities exist. Housecrafts are not favoured in boy's schools.
- Summary of Department of Education Report (1984), extract from Review Body on Primary Education Report, 1990, pp.66-67.

The findings suggest that Art and Craft had been implemented into schools to one degree or another but that non-implementation had been influenced by certain institutional and

*Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

organisational factors such as time, class size, resources. The findings of the report give little information about the quality of implementation in schools, the implementation of curriculum approaches or about which aspects of the content of the syllabus had been implemented and why. The report suggests an ad-hoc approach to curriculum implementation where, for example, 'in general less than half of the suggested craft activities are attempted'. However, in these matters Sugrue would contend that 'this dearth of evidence, particularly in relation to the dynamics of classroom routines and rituals, (that) shapes both the deliberations and recommendations of the PCRB as well as the power relationships between the major players' (Sugrue, 2004, p.186).

It is in light of these findings on the implementation of the 1971 curriculum that the Review Body recommended a major revision of the Art and Craft curriculum. Such a revision should attempt to achieve a balance between making art and appreciating art. The Review Body also suggested that four major components would be taken into account when developing such a revised curriculum,

1. **Materials and techniques** - The child's ability to handle an increasing range of materials should be developed.
2. **Perception** - The child's ability to see the world around him or her with 'increasing degrees of depth and analysis' should be increased upon.

*Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

3. **Visual Knowledge** - The development of the ability to use the basic vocabulary of line, colour, shape and texture should be advanced.
4. **Creativity** - The fostering of children's unique talents and abilities. (PCRB, p.67)

The Review Body suggested that Principal teachers should play a more emphatic role in developing Art and Craft within the primary school and should encourage visits to museums and exhibitions and visits to the school by artists etc. They should also take a more active role in organising the Art and Craft curriculum within their schools in a manner that cultivates a better understanding of the developmental aspects of Art and Craft.

The 1990 Review Body report also recommends that children's art work should be evaluated by the teacher in order to help discern strengths and weaknesses. This was to be a change from the 1971 curriculum where Art and Craft activities were perceived as being outside the realms of evaluation. A number of criteria for assessment of Art and Craft work were also recommended. These included evaluations of children's technical ability, critical vocabulary and ability to use a variety of media.

A further recommendation made by the Review Body was that a major increase of resources for Art and Craft should be made to primary schools. In the light of large

## *Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

classes that can cause a problem for Art there was also a perceived need for properly equipped Art rooms in primary schools.

### **Issues and Challenges in Implementing the 1999 Curriculum for Visual Arts**

#### ***The 1999 Primary School Curriculum***

In the years following the 1971 Curriculum Ireland has continued to change at an unprecedented rate economically, socially and culturally and participation rates in education are higher than ever before. Change is, and has been, the most dominant feature on the Irish landscape for the last thirty five years. Sugrue argues that the 'post modern condition of uncertainty, unpredictability and unprecedented possibilities as well as market forces, globalisation and economic concerns have gained heightened significance in an open economy such as Ireland's'. He contends that 'curricula and the routines of schools and classrooms cannot be inured from such wider socioeconomic forces' (Sugrue, 2004, p.169).

It is this post-modern context where 'everything is placed in a cauldron of uncertainty' (Kelly, 2004, p.34) that has informed our most recent Primary School Curriculum, The Revised Curriculum of 1999. The 1999 Curriculum 'reflects the educational, cultural, social and economic aspirations and concerns of Irish society. It also takes cognisance of the changing nature of knowledge and society and caters for the needs of individual children in adjusting to such change' (Ireland, Government of, 1999, P.6).



### *Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

The curriculum is informed by the findings of the report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (1990) which reviewed and reported on existing curricular provision. It encompasses the child-centred philosophical thrust of the 1971 *Curaclam na Bunscoile* and the Education Act (1998). The curriculum also reflects the 'thinking and aspirations of the National Education Convention on Education (1994) where the keynote to developing the curriculum was 'consultation and partnership' (Report on National Education Convention, 1994, p.9) and is reflective of the espoused policy of the White Paper on Education, *Charting our Education Future* (1995)' (Ireland, Government of, 1999, P.2).

#### ***1999 Primary School Curriculum, Visual Arts***

The Visual Arts Curriculum (1999) aims to provide a 'broad-based and balanced' programme for all primary school levels (Teacher Guidelines, 1999, p.6). It includes six strand areas:

- Drawing
- Paint and Colour
- Print
- Clay
- Construction
- Fabric and Fibre

### *Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

Each strand is presented in two strand units: *making art* and *looking and responding*. In the course of their work with art, pupils are introduced to the elements of line, shape, form, colour, tone, pattern, and rhythm, texture and spatial organisation. The curriculum promotes a balance between working in two-dimensional and three dimensional media. Assessment of children's work forms an important part of the teacher's work in Visual Arts.

#### ***Curriculum Emphases***

The essential emphasis of the Revised Curriculum for Visual Arts is on 'understanding the creative process children go through in making art' (Teacher Guidelines, 1999, p.11). In this approach the '*process of making* is as valuable as the final product' with the emphasis being on children 'exploring and experimenting with the expressive possibilities of different materials, tools and media and with the choices they offer for different tasks' (ibid). Children at all times should be 'involved in a creative way rather than in a passive or imitative way' (Teacher Guidelines, 1999, p.12). Children should be the 'designers' of their own work and 'this role should not be taken away from them' (ibid). Therefore, the critical emphasis in the 1999 Curriculum for Visual Arts is that children's work in art should be their own individual and creative work.

#### ***The Teacher's Role***

The 1999 curriculum for Visual Arts promotes 'guided discovery' as the most appropriate approach that teachers should take when teaching art in order to promote and facilitate

### *Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

the individual creative process of the child's work. The 'guided discovery' approach places the teacher in the role of facilitator rather than that of instructor. In the words of the curriculum,

The task of the teacher is not to teach clever techniques or to demonstrate ways of producing images and forms he/she finds acceptable but to build on interests and strengths by drawing the children out and making suggestions where appropriate. (1999, p.12, Teacher Guidelines)

In this regard the teacher's role involves being, 'more of a catalyst than a teacher of technique' (ibid, p.54). The curriculum does, however, allow that, 'certain practical skills, such as the use of scissors and adhesives may occasionally require a more direct method' (ibid, p.54).

#### **Curriculum Evaluation and Dimensions of the Research Dissertation**

Implementation of the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999) began in the school year 2001/2002. Two years after implementation was initiated the Inspectorate carried out an evaluation of the implementation of Visual Arts in Irish primary schools. The report of the Inspectorate was published and released to schools in May, 2005.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) also reviewed the implementation of the Visual Arts curriculum. The NCCA review was carried out in the school year 2003/2004 and the final report of the Primary Curriculum Review was also published in May, 2005.

## *Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

The findings of both of these evaluations span a broad range of curriculum areas. However, for the purposes of this study, here the findings on implementation of curriculum emphasis, teacher role and uptake of new strand areas will be focused on as they pertain to the research in this dissertation.

### *Implementing Individual Creative Approaches in Visual Arts*

In terms of the implementation of individual creative approaches to the teaching of Visual Arts, the Inspectorate reported that 'the majority of teachers were found to have comprehensively embraced the principles of the curriculum and displayed a willingness to experiment with different approaches in order to foster creativity' (Ireland, Government of, 2005, p.41). However, it did report that 'in some classrooms insufficient motivation, overprescriptive starting points, lack of appropriate strategies and failure to provide stimuli prevented the realization of curriculum objectives' (ibid). Also it was found that in some classrooms 'pupils' creativity was hindered through the use of 'templates', poor lesson stimulus, inadequate attention to differentiation, and insufficient opportunities for individual expression' (ibid).

The NCCA (2005, p.122) reported that lack of storage facilities in the classroom for students' Visual Arts work and for art work in progress were proving to be an

### *Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

impediment to the implementation of individual creative approaches where the 'process of making is as valuable as the final product' (Teacher Guidelines, p.11).

The reports of the Inspectorate and the NCCA suggest that teachers experience difficulties in implementing individual/creative approaches in the teaching of Visual Arts in the 1999 Curriculum. This study aims to unearth some of the difficulties that teachers in one junior school in West Dublin experience in implementing individual/creative approaches to the teaching of Visual Arts. It also aims to discover which factors have encouraged change of emphasis in teaching Visual Arts in the school under study.

#### *Implementation of Guided Discovery Teaching Methods*

The report of the Inspectorate (2005) suggested that 'the majority of teachers used a wide range of guided-discovery methods' (Ireland, Government of, 2005, p.41). However, it was found that in a few classrooms 'activities were almost entirely teacher-directed, with an overemphasis on copying and the production of 'template' or formulaic art, at the expense of creativity' (ibid, p.42).

The NCCA provided some suggestions why this may be the case and reported that class size, classroom space and insufficient time were teachers' greatest challenges in implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (2005, p.121-122).

### *Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

In this study the researcher investigates whether or not 'guided discovery' methods are in use in the school under study. The research is concerned with uncovering some of the factors that have influenced implementation of this aspect of the curriculum and aims to discover some of the issues and challenges facing teachers as they attempt to implement guided discovery methods of teaching and learning with children in classrooms.

#### *Uptake of New Strand Areas*

The Inspectorate reported that the strand areas of Drawing and Paint and Colour were implemented effectively in most classes (Ireland, Government of, 2005, p. 39). However, in the strand area of Print, 'weak practice was observed in a third of the classrooms' (ibid). In the strand area of Fabric and Fibre, 'in almost a quarter of classrooms weak practice was observed' (ibid, p.40). Further weak practice was noted in the area of Construction and teachers failed to plan for lessons in Clay.

The NCCA reported that the strand of Paint and Colour was the strand which teachers identified as the most useful, followed by Drawing, another two dimensional strand. It recommends that teachers require further support and ideas for using the three dimensional Visual Arts strands; Clay, Construction and Fabric and Fibre (Summary of Findings and Recommendations, p.4 and 5).

Following from the findings of the Report of the Inspectorate and the NCCA report, it would seem that there are some issues and challenges facing teachers as they take up new

strand areas of the Revised Curriculum for Visual Arts (1999). This study investigates which strands of the Revised Curriculum for Visual Arts had been implemented in the school under study at the time of research and aims to discover some of the issues and challenges that have faced teachers in the school as they implemented new strand areas.

## **Overview of Dissertation**

**Chapter One** - placed Visual Arts in its social and historical context. It described some of the issues and challenges that have faced Visual Arts and teachers implementing Visual Arts curricula in the past.

Both the report on the 'Evaluation of Curriculum Implementation in Primary Schools' (Ireland, Government of, 2005) and the 'Primary Curriculum Review, Final Report' (NCCA, 2005) indicate that teachers continue to face difficulties as they implement the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999). This study is concerned with uncovering some of the difficulties, issues and challenges encountered by teachers in one Dublin junior primary school as they attempt to implement new curriculum proposals in the Visual Arts.

**Chapter Two** - presents a review of some of the key research writings on change and implementation. In particular it focuses on:

- The change context;
- The nature of change;
- Strategies for effective implementation

*Visual Arts in the Irish Primary Curriculum: Issues and Challenges*

**Chapter Three** – describes the methodology used to carry out the research in this study. It outlines the rationale for methods used, the procedures used for selecting the research population, the interviewing procedures and the type of data analysis that was applied in this study.

**Chapter Four** – presents the findings of the research.

**Chapter Five** - Explores some of the issues that have arisen in the course of this study and notes some areas of concern for future curriculum development with teachers.



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## **2. Issues in Change and Implementation**

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter One highlighted some of the issues that have faced the Visual Arts as a subject on the primary school curriculum. It also brought to light some of the challenges that teachers have encountered when implementing programmes in the Visual Arts in the past.

In Chapter Two some of the key writings on change and implementation will be discussed. As the main focus of this study centres on the implementation of aspects of the Visual Arts curriculum (1999) in a Dublin junior school, a review of the relevant literature on implementation is a necessary and enriching aspect of the research. It is one that will show that there are many factors involved in implementation. Because of the cultural rootedness of schooling and curriculum, its interconnectedness with society, coupled with the multiple demands placed upon teachers 'the management of change should never be underestimated in terms of its complexity' (Bennett, 1996, p.64).

The chapter begins by discussing the role of school context in the change process. It illustrates the affects of institutional issues in the local context, such as: the affects of school culture in the change process, the institutional nature of the curriculum itself and the role of the teacher in change. It also examines organisational factors known to influence change, for example: time, class size and class diversity.

The second part of the chapter is concerned with the phenomenon of the change process. Fullan (1991) attributes much of the lack of success of change projects to lack of understanding of this phenomenon.

Finally, the chapter concludes with an examination of some strategies which have been known to influence successful change processes.

### **The Change Context**

Proposed changes or new ideas and activities to be realised must be interfaced with existing structures, activities and individuals within the organisation of the school community. The manner in which such interfacing occurs conditions to a significant degree the nature and quality of the outcome of implementation. McLaughlin would argue that it is 'crucial to understand the contextual factors associated with various programme activities and outcomes' (1987, p.176). Callan believes it is 'necessary to devote as much time to the context into which a curriculum is to be implemented, as to the design of the product itself' (1997, p.23). To this end, an examination of the educational context of change is necessary in order to understand the possible factors that influence the extent to which aspects of the 1999 curriculum for Visual Arts have been implemented in the junior school under study thus far and to help to understand the picture of the curriculum that is emerging in the school.

## **Institutional Context**

### ***School Culture***

Schools as organisations have a culture that fashions behaviours and provides a structure and stability to behaviour within the organisation. The culture of the school setting may be something that staff members in a school, for example, may not be critically aware of. Schein describes culture as,

The deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic 'taken for granted' fashion an organisation's view of itself and its environment. (1985, p.6)

Organisational culture is pervasive in schools and new staff members are initiated into the culture in subtle and sometimes not too subtle ways. Schein describes this phenomenon,

As these assumptions and beliefs permeate the entire organisation they become invisible; they become so accepted, so automatic and ingrained in the organization's routines and practices that they are automatically taught to its new members, by both precept and example, as the 'correct way to perceive, think and feel. (1992, p.12)

***The Conservative Function of Culture***

Evans would argue that culture may have a conserving function in an organisation and, therefore, school culture will impact on how an innovation is met within the institutional setting. In his words,

A careful look at the true nature and functions of organisational culture reveals that it operates at a profound level, exerting a potent influence over beliefs and behaviour to preserve continuity and oppose change. (2001, p.41)

The conserving function of organisational culture is reflective of the 'collective expression of the conservative impulse within individuals' and is one that 'strongly supports continuity' (ibid, p.44). Schein would contend with the view of culture as a conserver and argues that if an organisation has enjoyed success with its assumptions or culture in the past that it will be reluctant to change because their assumptions 'justify the past and are a source of their pride and their self-esteem' (1985, p.292).

***Levels of Culture***

Evans identifies three levels of culture: 'artefacts and creations, values and basic assumptions' (2001, p.42). He argues that one can draw inferences about a school's culture by examining artefacts and values but that in order to obtain an understanding of its basic assumptions one needs to participate in the life of the school for a long time (2001).

***Culture and Curricular Change***

Curricular change can form a challenge to the culture of the school, for example, the Visual Arts curriculum challenges the way in which teachers approach the teaching of Visual Arts by emphasising the individual creative process over the outcome or product of the work and, therefore, the Visual Arts curriculum challenges the way in which art is being taught in the school. However, we can learn from research that changing the culture of the school is a lengthy and difficult process. Vaill would argue that real culture change is 'systemic change at a deep psychological level involving attitudes, actions and artefacts that have developed over substantial periods of time' (1989, pp. 149-150). He goes on to argue that 'in reality, their unique common psychology is likely to ignore most of the new criteria and changes, bend slightly to those that are not too challenging, and resist those that amount to direct confrontation' (1989, p.150). In this sense, because of the cultural rootedness of curriculum, its content and pedagogical practices, realising significant change in curriculum content and practices is a demanding and complex undertaking.

The research in this study examines the culture that exists in the school and focuses on how this culture impacts on the implementation of the Visual Arts curriculum. It also aims to discover whether school culture may be subject to change as a result of the uptake of some of the suggestions put forward by the Visual Arts curriculum.



### **Curriculum Change and the School as a Social Institution**

At school level local factors relating to the school's institutional context may dictate the success or failure of curriculum innovations, or perhaps more realistically, the shape of what emerges as curriculum. In this sense, policy cannot mandate what matters (Fullan, 1993) and 'implementation dominates outcome' (McLaughlin, 1990, p.12). Local factors can, for example, act as a brake slowing down the process of curriculum innovation and implementation. Reid describes the school as a 'social system', or setting which is characterised by human relationships. It is in this social setting that the school goes about the business of teaching and learning. He calls this activity the 'technology' of the organisation. In his words,

It is through the social system that the technology of the organization is implemented; in the schools principally by teachers, administrators and ancillary helpers.

The curriculum thus emerges as,

The resultant of a balance that exists between three salient features of the school as an organization - technology, social system and theory. This balance is affected by inputs and outputs from the school. (Reid, 1999, p.126)

Social systems, in the above sense, mould and shape curricula which are delivered into 'a complex of institutional and cultural issues' (Callan, 1995, p.105). This moulding and

### *Issues in Change and Implementation*

shaping of curricula by the school as an institutional context in part accounts for the organic state of the curriculum and the 'gradual and continuous nature of curriculum change' referred to by Goodson (1983, p.406). The 'gradual and continual nature of curriculum change' can also be attributed to the continual changing local or social context which creates 'substantively and strategically different settings for policy' (McLaughlin, 1990, p.12).

#### **The Curriculum as Shaped From Without, Curriculum as Institution**

The government White Paper on Education, *Charting our Education Future* (1995), acknowledges the central role of society and the social setting in determining what emerges as curriculum. In fact, the White Paper (1995) places society in such a critical role in curriculum and education as to be the ultimate determinant of educational outcomes. For example, it states that,

It is the wider community and indeed society generally, not the Department, who are the primary determinants of education outcomes. (White Paper, 1995, p.193)

The process of society influencing and controlling educational outcomes is, therefore, exercised in the relationship between schooling and society where society expects education to deliver results. After all, 'the whole purpose of engaging in processes of education or instruction is to bring about desired outcomes and the curriculum is the instrument for achieving these' (Reid, 1975, p.241). In this way Reid would argue that,

### *Issues in Change and Implementation*

'interested publics pay for and support education and hand over its work in only a limited and unexpected sense' (1999, p.143). If it is the case that curriculum practice strays too far from 'the category as understood by interested publics' the result is 'loss of support, student alienation, and failure and collapse of efforts to sustain the legitimacy of the activity' (Reid, 1999, p.143). Callan contends with this view of society as exercising control over curriculum and argues that,

Curriculum legitimacy is established to the extent that it reflects the culturally held conceptions of the public concerning learning and knowledge, and in this sense curriculum is tradition bound. (1995, p.109)

In researching the implementation of the Visual Arts curriculum in a junior primary school, particular attention is given to the question of how the parent body, as a most significant part of the wider community, influence how teachers choose to implement the Visual Arts curriculum in their classrooms and to some degree determine what emerges as curriculum in the school.

### **The Role of the Teacher**

#### *Teachers' Agendas*

The teacher plays the most important role in implementing new initiatives such as curricular innovations. In the words of McLaughlin, 'organisations don't innovate or implement change, individuals do' (1987, p.174). As individuals, teachers have their own agendas and 'act not only from institutional incentives, but also from professional and

### *Issues in Change and Implementation*

personal motivation' (Sabatier and Mazmanian, 1980). Teachers, as individuals, tend to 'effectively negotiate their response, fitting their reaction to the multiple demands, priorities and values operating in their environment and the effective authority of the policy itself' (McLaughlin, 1987, p.175). In this regard, change is ultimately a problem of the smallest unit in that the implementation of change boils down to the individual. The research examines this issue as it relates to the implementation of the Visual Arts curriculum by looking at the 'multiple demands' that teachers face on a daily basis and discovering how these demands and priorities influence the implementation of the Visual Arts curriculum in the school. The researcher aims to discover how teachers have 'effectively negotiated' their responses to the curriculum to fit their reaction to the 'multiple demands, priorities and values operating in their environment'.

#### **Teachers and Motivation**

The teacher's role as a 'giver' working in a 'lonely profession' (Sarason, 1996, pp. 199&196), in a context of 'overloaded improvement agendas' (Fullan, 1991, p.69), may, at worst, lead the teacher to a state of 'burnout' (ibid. p.203) which is not conducive to implementing new changes. The teacher who avoids burnout may do so by forming an attachment to routine that is also not conducive to implementing change proposals in the school. In the words of Sarason,

The culture of the school where the teacher is alone with many and diverse children, subject to all kinds of internal and external demands to give and do, and where the level of giving tends to far exceed the level of getting, the modal teacher is hard put to escape the psychological effects of routine. (1996, p.202)

### *Issues in Change and Implementation*

Callan argues that 'there is a tendency for individual teachers to excuse their non-involvement in new programmes on the basis of adequate supports whether in the form of money or proper school management' (1997, p.27) but it may simply be the case that teachers lack the will or motivation to change and do not see themselves as 'agents for cultural change' (ibid, p.28) or recognise that they 'have a make or break role in any curriculum innovation' (Kelly, 2004, p.9). This study seeks to explore this issue and to discover whether there is a cohort of teachers who fail to support the innovation that is the Visual Arts curriculum on the basis that they lack the required motivation to change and that they have become attached to routine.

#### **Mismatch between Change Agenda and School Milieu**

The agenda of teachers, who face the reality of school life, may not match the agenda of the authors of change. For example, curricular changes, such as the changes advocated in the 1999 curriculum for Visual Arts challenge teachers to change their role and to move from didactic methods to the role of teacher as facilitator of learning. However, the reality remains that school-learning is 'primarily didactic in nature, the teacher is the primary initiator; students work alone; lessons are structured around content with a focus on factual content' (OECD: Review: Ireland, 1991). The mismatch between curriculum intention and the reality of the school milieu in which they are to be realised (Callan, 1997) remains a problem for teachers in schools. This issue highlights what Evans calls, the need for a 'match between the agenda of its authors and that of its implementers'

(2001, p.80). In response to this issue, Callan calls for 'an examination of the goals, roles and structures of our system...simultaneously with the introduction of a programme premised on different educational values than currently exist' (1997, p.23-24).

## **The Organisational Context**

### **Class Profile**

The context of the classroom and the profile of the class, for example, class size, class behaviour and class expectations, impact on how a curriculum innovation may be adopted in the classroom in that teachers may not consider certain innovations feasible in their set of circumstances. Teaching is in itself complex due to large class size, in the words of Sarason, 'the complexity of the task reflects in large measure the fact that a classroom of twenty five or more children is a lot of children for any one person to handle' (1996, p.187). He goes on to further qualify this point by arguing that, 'one of the most frequent fantasies in which teachers indulge....is how enjoyable life in the classroom would be if class size were discernibly decreased' (ibid, p.192). In the stressful context of large class size, coupled with diversity of children, 'teachers resort to strategies of teaching which are designed for coping with the situation rather than for generating innovative or creative teaching' (Callan, 1997, p.26). Furthermore, the ethos of the school may support silence in learning activities, which may not encourage the heuristic approaches to learning promoted in recent curriculum policy. This type of ethos may prove a 'powerful constraint to engaging in active methods' and the possibility of

### *Issues in Change and Implementation*

noisy classrooms may put teachers off engaging in discovery type activities (Callan, 1997, p.25). The 1999 curriculum for Visual Arts promotes heuristic methods of learning. The research aims to uncover how class size, coupled with diversity of children and school ethos impact upon the uptake of such heuristic methods of teaching in the Visual Arts in the school under study.

#### **Time**

Time may prove a constraint for teachers in implementing new curricula and innovations where teachers already experience the burden of a heavy work load. Evans writes that 'the pressure to manage so many clients and cover so much material naturally inclines educators towards the pragmatic rather than the theoretical and toward the short-term rather than the long term' (2001, p.85). It is for this reason that 'teachers questions about change tend to be quite pragmatic' (ibid, p.80). Schlechty writes about the 'immediacy (that) pervades school life' (1990, p.91) and Sarason argues that 'teachers and other school personnel have inordinate difficulty in thinking other than in terms of covering x amount of material in x amount of time' (1996, p.188). Time may also be an issue for the type of changes advocated in new curricula, such as the use of active/discovery methods of teaching and learning, in terms of there being the need for more time to plan. In the words of Callan, 'time is a problem in relation to teacher planning time for active learning. They (teachers) perceive active learning classes as requiring time to prepare materials, to garner ideas, to discuss with some colleagues ways of approaching topics' (1997, p.24).

## **Implementing Change in Curriculum: The Nature of Change**

Neglect of the phenomenology of change – that is, how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended – is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reform. (Fullan, 1991)

### **Coping with Change**

Change is a salient feature of modern life and organisations such as schools are bombarded with continual change efforts and related policies and strategies which aim to change or upset the existing 'status quo'. In the words of Sarason, 'ours is a society in which all its major institutions have been under pressure to change' (1996, p.45). The curriculum changes for Visual Arts heralded by the 1999 curriculum are only one of such recent changes in the primary school. The need to learn how to cope with change in modern times has been noted in recent Irish educational policy. For example, the 1999 Primary school curriculum espouses the view that,

The ability to think critically, to apply learning and to develop flexibility and creativity are important factors in the success of the child's life. The curriculum places a particular emphasis on promoting these skills and abilities so that children may cope successfully with change. (Primary School Curriculum, 1999, p.8)

In such a period of rapid change there is a need for schools to develop appropriate mechanisms for dealing or coping with changes. In the words of Hoyle, 'organisations



### *Issues in Change and Implementation*

that don't learn at a faster rate than the environment changes will eventually die'(1973). Kanter takes this notion further and points to the need for organisations to set up organic task forces or task teams that can respond to changes as they arise and that can be broken up and reformed again according to the needs within the organisation (1983).

#### **Change Anxiety**

Change, although inevitable, is something that most humans and indeed most organisations may not truly welcome. In the words of McLaughlin, 'most institutions and individuals are allergic to change' (1987, p.173). Moreover, change may even be accompanied by anxiety and fear. Fullan refers to this as the 'anxieties of uncertainty' which precedes the 'joys of mastery' (Fullan, 1991). Evans discusses the need to 'reduce the anxiety surrounding change, the fear of trying' (2001, p.57). For people in comfort zones within organisations the fear and anxiety that has been associated with change may make it all too easy to 'rationalize the value of the tried and true and the impossibility of the new' (ibid, p.56).

When faced with a change of significant proportions implementers often experience a sense of loss which is akin to bereavement. Evans has identified four issues that arise in the early stages of implementation: loss, incompetence, confusion and conflict (2001, p.74). The sense of loss of old practices and beliefs is heightened in the early stage of implementation as practitioners may feel aggrieved that old, often long held and maybe dearly loved practices or beliefs may be sullied or disconfirmed. This is not an experience

### *Issues in Change and Implementation*

that teachers in school relish and in the words of Evans 'disconfirmation can engender much fear and loathing – so much that people often dismiss the information as irrelevant, which lets them repress any anxiety or guilt' (ibid, p. 57). When teachers were asked to change the way they taught the Visual Arts in the Junior school under study the 'disconfirmation' of their old practices by the visiting curriculum facilitator led to much 'fear and loathing'. The researcher probes this issue with the teachers in the school and through the research gets a feel for how teachers have experienced the change.

#### **Resistance to Change**

If human beings, as individuals within organisations do not welcome change, and are indeed somewhat fearful of it, implementers of change should expect resistance to their plans and proposals. Machiavelli pointed out this problem as far back as 1513 when he wrote that,

There is nothing more difficult to carry out nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all who profit by the old order and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit from the new order.

This can be said to be still true in the contemporary context where writers such as Evans, for example, argue that 'the strength of our tendency to seek patterns, the tenacity with which we cling to purposes and relationships, leads us at first to resist change, often fiercely' (2001, p.59). Resistance to change proposals, therefore, is inevitable.

### *Issues in Change and Implementation*

In an organisational context, such as that of the school, human resistance to change may be magnified in that there may be a group resistance in operation. Schon would point out that 'organisations are dynamically conservative; that is they fight like mad to remain the same' (1971). Evans argues that change in an organisational setting is difficult and that 'unless something increases the cost of preserving the status quo, the conservative impulse and the cumulative impact of culture and past learning are too strong to permit innovation' (2001, p.57). Organisational resistance may arise out of the culture of the school as was discussed earlier. In the words of Evans, 'a careful look at the true nature and functions of organisational culture reveals that it operates at a profound level, exerting a potent influence over beliefs and behaviour to preserve continuity and oppose change' (2001, p.41). The research examines the school as an organisation and tries to discover whether or not the school has 'fought like mad to remain the same' or whether something has occurred that has 'increased the cost of preserving the status quo' and furthered the implementation of the Visual Arts curriculum in the school.

#### **Adapting to change**

While resistance to change is inevitable, so too is the very fact of change itself which means that often resistance may be futile. People, when faced with change may ultimately adapt their practices to incorporate or facilitate change. Evans would say that there are 'tendencies within the individual that support adaptation' and argues that these tendencies arise out of our 'tendency to seek patterns' which is the very tendency that leads us to resist change in the first place (2001, p.59). When faced with permanent

### *Issues in Change and Implementation*

change Evans would argue that people must 'learn to reformulate the purposes and attachments that are threatened by change' (ibid).

Organisations, such as schools, adapt or accommodate to change but usually in ways that require the least amount of effort and the least amount of real change. In the words of Sarason,

Like almost all other complex traditional social organisations, the school will accommodate in ways which require little or no change...the strength of the status quo – its underlying axioms, its patterns of power relationships, its sense of tradition and therefore what seems right, natural and proper – almost automatically rules out options for change. (1990, p.35)

Evans would argue that historically curriculum reforms have been the aspects of schooling most stubborn and most likely to adapt to rather than to adopt fully a change (2001).

The adaptation of policies and curricula presents a problem to policy makers in that 'policy makers can't mandate what matters' (McLaughlin, 1987, p.172) or in other words 'implementation dominates outcomes' (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984). In this respect change can be seen to be 'non-linear' (Fullan, 1993) and local conditions assume a significant importance in implementation matters. Hamilton develops the notion of schools adapting to change further and argues that 'when an instructional system is adopted, it undergoes modifications that are rarely trivial'. He goes on to argue that 'teachers, students and others interpret and reinterpret the instructional system for their

### *Issues in Change and Implementation*

particular setting' (1975, p. 182). Elmore describes this phenomenon as the 'power of the bottom over the top' (1983) where ultimately local agencies, for example, those working in schools control the outcomes of implementation by 'adapting' rather than 'adopting' new instructional systems, policies etc. (Darling-Hammond, 1990, p.235). The moulding of curricula to suit the school's particular context is the more realistic and professionally enriching view of curriculum implementation, therefore, and the literature would suggest that change of significant proportions is difficult to achieve. The study engages with this issue as it relates to the implementation of Visual Arts in one Dublin school and will try to assess how the school and its teachers have, thus far, adapted the curriculum to suit its particular setting and purposes.

## **Strategies for Implementation**

### **Making the Case for Change**

In every situation where a new curriculum or educational innovation is to be implemented there is the need for practitioners to be persuaded that change is required and so successful implementation rests to some degree on whether practitioners have attained some degree of acknowledgement that change is actually necessary. Fullan describes implementation as a 'developmental process of change for teachers attempting to use an innovation, which can involve alterations in materials, instructional practices and beliefs about the teacher/learning process' (1992, p.30). Change at the level of beliefs entails a complex process of 'redoing' and 'rethinking' (Fullan, 1993) and will depend on

### *Issues in Change and Implementation*

whether policy makers can 'make the case for innovation, to emphasise the seriousness of the problem and the rightness of the solution' (Evans, 2001, p.55). Schein refers to this initial stage as 'unfreezing' and 'unfreezing' is what Evans would call, the first task of change (2001). The research is concerned with the extent to which teachers felt there was a need for change and attempts to discover where persuasion to change came from, whether, for example, in the form of in-service training and government publications or through school visits from a curriculum facilitator or perhaps from new staff in the school trained in college in the 1999 curriculum.

The above view point would seem to indicate that change or implementation will not occur unless the matter of changing practitioners' beliefs prior to innovation is dealt with, however, this is not entirely true. There is evidence that seems to show that belief can also follow action (Fullan, 1986). A study by McLaughlin, Shields and Rezabek (1985) into local responses to policy changes supporting educational change put forward the case that 'belief and commitment can follow mandated or coerced involvement at both the individual and the system level' (McLaughlin, 1990, p.13). In this sense, 'individuals required to change routines or practices can become believers' (ibid, p.13).

### **Teachers' Commitment to Innovate**

Commitment to an innovation is often reliant on whether the practitioner, in this case the teacher, feels that an innovation is worthwhile in terms of its' educational value to students. In the words of Fullan, 'innovations are more likely to get implemented and stay implemented when they result in visibly improved student outcomes' (1992, p.36). This is what Evans would call the 'desirability' of the change (2001, p.74). Desirability of the change arises out of beliefs about the worthwhileness and relevance of an innovation but also arises out of dissatisfaction with the status quo (Evans, 2001).

### **Practicality of Change**

The practicality of the change from the teacher's point of view also determines whether or not an innovation will be implemented in the classroom. Evans calls this the 'feasibility' of the change (ibid) and Fullan describes it as the 'quality and practicality of the change' (1992, p.30). Fullan would say, 'the practicality of an innovation depends on the trade-off between the personal costs (time and effort for example) and actual benefits of staying involved' (ibid). The outcome then is determined by 'ensuring that teachers perceive a need for change and that they perceive that the proposed change will actually benefit themselves and the pupils in some way' (Bennett, 1996, p.46). The researcher is interested in finding out how feasible teachers find the changes brought about in the

Revised Curriculum for Visual Arts and whether they find the changes to be practical and of quality.

### **Will and Motivation**

The perceived educational benefits of a change and the practicality of what is actually involved in implementing change contribute to will or motivation to change. Will or motivation to change is essential in bringing about change. McLaughlin would argue that will or motivation to change mandates what matters and not policy (1990). In her words 'the presence of the will or motivation to embrace policy objectives is essential in the generation of the effort and energy necessary for a successful project' (ibid, p.13). Will or motivation to change may also be influenced by the local situation, the situation on the ground. If school administrators do not support change efforts then teacher's will or motivation to implement change may be dissipated where, 'although teachers on a site may be eager to embrace change effort, they may elect not to do so, or to participate only in a pro-forma basis, because their institutional setting is not supportive' (McLaughlin, 1990, p.13).

### **Characteristics of the Innovation**

As schools are busy institutions that are often faced with 'overloaded improvement agendas' (Fullan, 1991 p.69) and are 'caught between the demands of multiple constituencies' (Evans, 2001, p.75) the more clear and structured an innovation is the



### *Issues in Change and Implementation*

higher the chance of successful implementation. Evans would argue that 'innovation is easiest to accomplish when its ends and means are sharply delineated and neither too extensive nor too intricate' (ibid, p.74). He goes on to argue that participants need to know the 'why, what and how – why the reform is being pursued, what it actually consists of, and how it is to be implemented – and its how important – how it ranks relative to other projects in which they may be involved' (ibid, p.75).

#### **False Clarity**

One of the problems facing a school in its reform efforts is the issue of 'false clarity' (Fullan, 1991, p.35). False clarity may arise when reforms are in themselves confusing and divergent (Evans, 2001) and teachers may not fully understand the change. It is also said that if it is a case where there are multiple efforts of improvement being implemented at the same time 'no single project receives adequate attention, resources, planning, or dissemination; staff time and effort are fragmented; frustration abounds' (Evans, 2001, P.77). The absence of clarity, the possible presence of 'false clarity' (Fullan, 1991, p.35) and the simultaneous implementation of innovations may lead to gaps between policy and practice or may lead to a situation where there is *innovation without change*. Bennett describes this phenomenon as a situation where 'an organisation believes it has introduced a change and its members have adopted the trappings of change but actual practice remains the same' (1996, p.45).

### **Working through Change**

In order for adaptation of new innovations to occur there is the need for those working with the proposed changes to work through issues that arise in the early stages of implementation such as 'loss, incompetence, confusion and conflict' (Evans, 2001, p.55). Working through such issues has been likened to working through the stages of grief, as was indicated earlier in the chapter. Evans describes this period as one of 'distress and ambivalence as people try to grasp the full extent of what is being lost and modify their pattern of meaning to incorporate the new' (ibid, p.60). Working through this stage is necessary in order to finally accept change and commit ourselves to something new. Fullan would argue that 'all individuals who will be affected by it (change) must have the chance to work through, become familiar with it, see how it fits, and discover what they can gain from it as well as what it will cost them' (1991, p.127). Evans describes this phase of the implementation process as the second task of change, moving from loss to commitment (2001).

The need for implementers to work through change in their own way and own time has implications for how innovations should be handled both at school level and by policy makers. Fullan would suggest that a kind of thinking should prevail in schools where problems are seen in a positive light. In his words, 'problems are our friends' (1993, p.21). He would argue that most cases of successful implementation follow a period of working through problems, learning new things and feeling anxious and calls this period

### *Issues in Change and Implementation*

of working through 'the implementation dip' (Fullan, 1993). Evans points out the need for policy makers and reformers to be aware of and sensitive to this period of time. Having assimilated the reform for themselves and found their own meaning in it he argues that 'denying others a similar journey.....expresses arrogance and contempt for the meaning of other people's lives' (2001, p.63).

#### **Pressure to Change**

In making the journey from 'old competence' to 'new competence' (Evans, 2001, p.63) there is a need for a combined balance of pressure and support from policy (Elmore and McLaughlin, 1982; Fullan, 1986; McLaughlin and Pfeifer; Mountjoy and O'Toole, 1979; Zald and Jacobs, 1978). In the words of McLaughlin, 'pressure is required in most settings to focus attention on a reform objective; support is needed to enable implementation' (1987, p.173). Evans argues that 'pressure can make change inevitable and thus spurs the process by which we finally accept loss and reformulate our pattern of meaning' (2001, p.71). Fullan would contend that 'implementation is more likely to happen when there is clear, consistent communication and pressure from the priority to the quality not the case of implementation, otherwise most innovations will be 'down-sized' or adapted away' (1992, p.38-39). This is an area for investigation with regard to the Visual Arts curriculum. Has there been pressure for teachers to change their teaching in the area of the Visual Arts thus enabling an embracing of the pedagogy of the new curriculum? If so, where has pressure come from and has it been helpful to the implementation process?

### **Support in Change – The Principal and School Leadership**

Pressure on its own is not enough. Support from school administrators and policy-makers is essential in promoting implementation among others depending on what the substance of the change is. The support of school administrators and policy makers is demonstrated when teachers see 'real efforts being made to identify and resolve problems arising during implementation, and real recognition being given to those who progress making the change' (Fullan, 1992, p.39). The school principal plays a crucial role in this regard and studies indicate that the presence of a strong leader is a factor that is vital to success in school innovation (Elmore and McLaughlin, 1982). Fullan sees the principal's role as crucial in the process of implementation. He argues that 'principals who are successful managers may be directive or responsive in their approach but they cannot just leave the responsibility to adopt and carry out changes to their teachers' (1992, p.49).

### **Support in Change – Policy Makers**

From the point of view of policy makers, the provision of effective and ongoing in-service is essential to the implementation process. Fullan would argue that 'ongoing professional development is perhaps the most critical direct factor affecting implementation' (ibid, p.45). Evans is of the opinion that in-service should be 'coherent, personal and continuous' where 'sessions must be relevant to the innovation and unfold in a logical way that provides teachers with a walk-through of the specific objectives and

### *Issues in Change and Implementation*

the methods for achieving them' (2001, p.64). Fullan argues that 'the issue is less a question of quantity than of availability of support during different stages of the change process, i.e. the need for assistance (both in-service and consultative) during as well as at the beginning of implementation' (1992, p.45). Huberman and Miles contend with this view and make the point that 'large scale, change bearing innovations lived or died by the amount and quality of assistance that their user received once the change was underway' (1984, p.273). Whatever supports available must be accompanied by a degree of pressure for either to be effective, in the words of Fullan, 'pressure without support leads to alienation; support without pressure leads to drift or waste of resources' (1991, p.91). The issue of professional development and the Visual Arts is researched in this study and the researcher regards it as a key feature in support provision.

#### **Outside agencies**

##### **Parents**

Outside agencies such as the parent body and the local community impact on the success of change efforts in schools. For example, Fullan argues that 'active parent opposition can easily thwart implementation, no matter how good the innovation or how committed school personnel are to use it' (1992, p.51). On the other hand closer partnerships between the home and the school bring better results (Fullan, 1993). The impact of the parent body and what teacher's feel parents expect is researched in terms of the Visual Arts. For example, do teachers feel that parents expect a product from their child in the area of the Visual Arts and does this impact on a teachers' will or lack of will to embrace

a curriculum that stresses the importance of the creative process over the finished product?

### **The Local Community**

The local community's back-up for innovations may influence implementation in the local context. In the words of Fullan, 'when community members do take an active interest in the adoption and implementation of particular innovations, their support for or against the change is likely to be a major factor in local decision making and commitment' (1992, p.51). The outcomes of implementation are also affected by changing local or social conditions or conditions within the organisation over time which means that implementation is never complete. In this sense implementation amounts to 'a continuous process, proceeding over time as policy, resources, problems and objectives evolve and are played against a dynamic institutional setting' (McLaughlin, 1987, p.175). Fullan would contend, in this respect, that 'change is a journey, not a blueprint' (1993, p.21).

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter some of the key research writings on change and implementation were discussed. The chapter highlighted the complexity of curriculum implementation through a discussion of some of the variables that have been known to impact on implementation. The school context presented itself as a most significant consideration in the implementation process. It contains institutional and organisational variables which can

### *Issues in Change and Implementation*

affect the change process. Curriculum change becomes even more complex when the curriculum is seen to be an institution in itself and one which can be stubborn to the change process.

The chapter highlights the need for understanding of the phenomenology of change for those engaging with curriculum innovation. It also presents some strategies to promote successful change in organisations.

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*Issues in Change and Implementation: Review of the Literature*

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*Issues in Change and Implementation: Review of the Literature*

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### **3. Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodology used for designing, collecting and analysing data in the course of this study. It commences by presenting a rationale for the research. The chapter describes the type of inquiry involved and gives some background to the research context. It focuses on the use of questionnaires, observation and interview as methods used in the study for collecting research data. The chapter concludes with discussion regarding the manner in which the researcher increased the reliability and validity of the research.

#### **Rationale for the Study**

The 1971 child-centred curriculum for primary schools, *Curaclam na Bunscoile*, has been reviewed and revised and the most recent curriculum, the Revised Primary School Curriculum (1999), has been introduced into Irish primary schools. Revisions to the nine subjects on the curriculum have been gradually phased into schools and such phasing in of the curriculum subjects is on-going. Alterations made in the subject area of 'Art and Craft', under its new title 'Visual Arts', have been quite extensive.

Changes to the subject involve a broadening of subject content. In terms of pedagogy, the 1999 curriculum for Visual Arts calls for a return to the child-centred, heuristic, teacher-facilitated methods espoused in the 1971 curriculum and emphasises the 'creative process' in children's art work. Calling for a return to such a pedagogical approach

*Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

implies that this approach has, to some extent, been lost in the classroom. Sugrue would contend that 'it is more accurate to say that primary education in Ireland is more child conscious rather than child-centred' (1990, p.5). He would also call for 'an effort to determine the extent to which these principles need to be enshrined in practice, before it can be asserted that child-centred education is widely practiced in classrooms' (ibid, p.6).

Implementation of the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999) began in the school year 2001/2002. This researcher was of the opinion that an examination of the extent to which the 1999 Curriculum's content and pedagogy had been implemented into the classroom was, at the time of research, both timely and appropriate. Findings reported in this dissertation now coincide with the release of two separate reports on the implementation of the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999) carried out by the Inspectorate and the NCCA and both published in May, 2005.

As the 1999 curriculum constitutes revisions to the previous 1971 curriculum and aims to re-focus teachers' attentions on the philosophies of discovery and child-centred learning, the researcher aimed to discover whether teachers had embraced these curriculum approaches in their classrooms. To focus on the entire Visual Arts curriculum would have proved an impossible task given the constraints of time and possibilities that the researcher was working under. The researcher, therefore, opted to focus attention on the implementation of aspects of the Visual Arts curriculum into the school in which she was working, a junior primary school in West Dublin.

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

The Visual Arts were chosen as the focus of the research for three main reasons. Firstly, the researcher held the view that Visual Arts occupied an important position as a subject in the school under study and that the school as an organisation was supportive of the Visual Arts. Secondly, as the researcher's interest pertained in particular to the pedagogical principles of discovery methods of learning espoused in the 1999 curriculum, it was felt that Visual Arts, due to its practical nature, may have been a subject where teachers could apply such pedagogies. The researcher was interested to discover the extent to which this was the case in the school at the time of research. Finally, as the content of the subject has been broadened, and has, since 1999, included such topics as Fabric and Fibre, Clay and Print, the researcher was interested to discover the extent to which these new topics or strands had been incorporated into the work of teachers in the Visual Arts. The study aimed to achieve an overall picture of the implementation of the Visual Arts Curriculum into the school in terms of the three aspects of implementation identified by Fullan; the use of revised materials, the possible use of new teaching approaches and the possible incorporation of revised beliefs (Fullan, 1993).

#### **Aims of the Study and Areas of Particular Focus**

The main aims of the study were as follows:

- To examine the implementation of individual/creative approaches in the teaching of Visual Arts where the 'creative process' is as important as the final product or

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

outcome of students' work and where teachers do not impose their own creative ideas on the children. In this regard, the researcher was concerned with pedagogical practice in the Visual Arts in the school under study.

- To determine some of the issues and challenges facing the teachers in this study in implementing individual/creative approaches in Visual Arts;
- To discover which factors have led to and supported implementation of this particular curriculum emphasis;
- To examine the implementation of guided discovery/teacher facilitated methods of teaching and learning in Visual Arts in the school under study;
- To uncover some of the issues and challenges facing teachers in implementing guided discovery methods of teaching and learning;
- To discover some of the factors which have led to and supported the implementation of this curriculum approach;
- To examine the uptake of new strand areas in the school and to discover which factors encourage and which factors impede the implementation of curriculum strands in the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)

### **The Research Context**

The research was carried out in the junior primary school in which the researcher works as a teacher, as has already been indicated. The school is located in a working/middle class area of West Dublin. It had just over 300 students at the time of writing and, as a

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

junior school, classes ranged between junior infants and second class. There were twelve main stream teachers in the school at the time of research. This number was complimented by the school principal, two resource teachers, one learning support teacher, one language support teacher and five special needs assistants. As the research pertained to the teaching of the Visual Arts in main-stream classes, the participants in the research were teachers of main stream classes only. As the researcher was herself a teacher in a main-stream class, the research focused on the work of eleven teachers in the school.

#### **Planning the Research and Research Design**

Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2000) would contend that the design of research is determined by 'fitness for purpose' (p.73) and thus the purposes of the research determine the methodology and design of the research. Morrison points out four factors that should be considered when planning research. Listed below they are as follows:

1. orienting decisions;
2. research design and methodology decisions;
3. data analysis considerations;
4. presenting and reporting the results. (Morrison, 1993)

With respect to planning the design of the research, the researcher felt it was necessary to consider all of the above factors and to design the research to best fit the purposes of



### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

achieving the aims of the research. The research was, therefore, planned in four stages. In the first stage the researcher identified the aims and purposes of the research which are listed in the preceding section, titled aims.

In the second stage of planning the researcher identified and gave priority to the constraints under which the research was to take place. In so doing, the time scale of the research, which was limited, had to be considered. The researcher also had to consider the target audience of the research, the costs involved, the main foci and the ethics of the research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). At this stage it was decided to limit the research to the researcher's own school and to take advantage of the research possibilities that were available by making the researcher's own school the research site. This would also allow for the time constraint and would make access to research participants less challenging.

In the third stage the researcher had to plan the possibilities for the research within these constraints. During this stage issues were identified relating to validity and reliability and addressing of such issues was attempted. Decisions were made regarding how data would be gathered and choices made regarding the main methodology of the research. The researcher considered questions regarding sampling and questions regarding how data would be processed and analysed. Validity and reliability and sampling are discussed later in the chapter in greater detail as they apply to questionnaires and interviews as tools for gathering research.

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

In the fourth stage the researcher decided on the research design and based its suitability on perceived best practice for achieving coherence and practicability. The research design that it was felt best suited the purposes of the study was research that would be based in the qualitative mode. The main source of data was to come from in-depth interviews with participants in the study. Prior to the interviews, questionnaires were designed and distributed to all the main-stream teachers in the school. The questionnaire was viewed as an effective way to gather data that could be further explored in the interview stage. It would also serve the purpose of providing an overall general picture of the Visual Arts in the school on which interview questions could be based.

The researcher did not set out to test or prove any hypothesis but wore the hat of the independent observer as much as possible during the course of the research. In-depth interviews carried out on five out of the eleven main-stream teachers, along with informal researcher observations made up the main body of the qualitative research. Tuckman (1972) highlights the advantages that interviews bring to research data. Amongst the advantages he notes the personal and intimate nature of interviews which allow a degree of flexibility to the researcher not associated with other data collection methods. The direct and immediate nature of the interview also ensures that there is an excellent return of data not typical of other data collection methods.

### **Research Approach**

The researcher is aware that each approach taken to research carries with it its own limitations and restraints. Nevertheless, the naturalistic approach to research was chosen which means that the researcher favours the opinion that, 'the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are being investigated; and that their model of a person is an autonomous one' (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2000, p.19). The naturalistic approach operates out of the view that individuals' behaviours can only be understood by sharing their frames of reference and appreciating the context of the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As the researcher has worked alongside the researched in the research site it was felt that this went some way towards the researcher understanding the frame of reference of the researched. The researcher endeavoured to understand actions taken by participants in this study through probing accounts given by the participants in the research. In taking this approach, the researcher saw herself as a research instrument (Eisner, 1991) but was aware that in acting as such she had to take into account her own subjectivity as researcher.

The paradigm that the researcher was operating out of was the interpretive paradigm which is characterised by a concern for the individual and the subjective world of human experience. This concern for the individual and for gaining understanding and meaning in a situation at a particular time was used because it would help the researcher best achieve an overview of curriculum implementation in the Visual Arts at the time of research. It

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

would also facilitate understanding of how this point had been arrived at but would not necessarily point to where things were going to. The interpretive paradigm was also more suitable to the research in that the research was small scale and, therefore, attempted to go into greater depth than a more large scale project would.

The interpretive paradigm places its emphasis on qualitative rather than quantitative methodology. In this study interviews and observations formed the main body of the qualitative research. The researcher came to this work hoping to work towards achieving understandings as issues emerged from the research and that understandings would be 'grounded on data generated by the research act' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In the course of the research, the researcher was seeking to understand behaviour within the school and did not seek to make generalizations or form hypotheses but wished to represent fairly what was happening in the school in terms of the implementation of the Visual Arts Curriculum. To this end, the researcher felt that the interpretive paradigm best befitted her purposes.

The remainder of the chapter looks at the design, piloting and use of the questionnaire, and the preparation and use of interviews. It then explains the process of data analysis used in the course of this study and defends the validity of the research.

## **The Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was used in the course of this research as an instrument for collecting mostly structured and numerical information from the respondents regarding the teaching of the Revised Visual Arts Curriculum (1999) in the school. Woods (1986) points out that one advantage of the questionnaire to qualitative research is that it can be used to gather information from a wider sample than can be reached by interview. He also points out that the questionnaire can provide a starting point for interviewing participants and that the time taken to fill out a questionnaire may allow for more thought and reflection in participants' responses and so questionnaires may in this sense provide more reliable data than interviews.

On the other hand, the limitations of the questionnaire are also mentioned in the literature. Tuckman (1972) points out that the questionnaire relies on the respondents to take the time to complete the questionnaire fully and with care. He would also contend that respondents may not respond accurately in that they may report what they feel that the researcher wishes to hear. In other words, the questionnaire may not be fully accurate as respondents may have their own agendas or issues when they engage with the questionnaire. Woods would contend that the questionnaire should be used in conjunction with other research methods (1986) in particular observation. In this way the limitations of the questionnaire can in some way be counterbalanced.

### **Questionnaire Design**

In designing the questionnaire the researcher felt that it was first necessary to specify the primary objective of the questionnaire (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2000). The researcher identified the primary objective of the questionnaire to be to present the researcher with an overview of the teaching of the Visual Arts in the school. The main purpose of this objective was that through analysis of the responses the researcher would begin to identify some of the potential issues to be pursued later at the interview stage.

The second phase of the questionnaire design involved the researcher identifying subsidiary topics that related to the central purpose of the questionnaire (ibid, 2000). In so doing, six broad subsidiary topics were identified. These included questions relating to teachers' professional training, be it their pre-service experience, in-service training or combination of both and their experience of teaching the Visual Arts curriculum. Questions 1- 3 of the questionnaire attempted to gather this information from respondents and used closed type questions which involve a mixture of multiple choice and ranking scale questions.

The second topic pursued by the questionnaire related to teachers' knowledge of the 1999 curriculum for Visual Arts and their ability to organise learning experiences in the various strand units of the Visual Arts curriculum. Questions 4 and 5 were concerned with this topic and were again closed type questions of the rating scale variety.

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

The third subsidiary topic related to the philosophical emphases of the curriculum and sought to ascertain the extent to which teachers felt the curriculum emphases were practicable in the classroom context. Question 6 was broken up into 5 Likert scale type questions where respondents were asked to gauge their response to statements which sum up the emphases of the curriculum. The Likert scale was used as a means to build in a degree of sensitivity and complexity to respondent' choices in this regard.

The fourth topic pursued by the questionnaire related to teachers' beliefs about the Visual Arts in terms of how it related to themselves as teachers and how it related to the culture of the school. Question 7 was an open ended question which aimed to gather information regarding teachers' criticisms or praise for the curriculum itself. Question 8 used a ranking scale to determine teachers' beliefs about the importance of Visual Arts as a subject on the curriculum. Question 9, 10 and 11 made use of a Likert scale to discover teachers' opinions on the place of Visual Arts in the school and was concerned with school culture.

The fifth topic aimed to unearth how teachers in the school organised the teaching of Visual Arts in the classroom. Question 12 was a simple straight forward question with only two possible answers which aimed at finding out how teachers organised their time in teaching the Visual Arts. Question 13 was a two part question that made use of the Likert scale to ascertain the frequency with which teachers engaged in whole class and small group lessons in Visual Arts. Question 14 was a simple multiple choice question

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

which offered respondents the choice of 1 of 3 options only. It aimed to discover whether Special Needs Assistants were involved in the teaching of Visual Arts.

The sixth and final topic related to supports and barriers that teachers experienced in their teaching of the 1999 Curriculum for Visual Arts. Question 15 and 16 were simple multiple choice question that aimed to discover whether respondents were satisfied with the level of resources available in the school and how they were organised in the school. Questions 17, 18 and 19 were open-ended questions which were directed at gathering respondents' ideas and opinions on the forms and types of barriers that they experienced in their teaching of the Visual Arts and the types of supports that they felt would assist them in their teaching of the subject. The full questionnaire used in this study can be viewed in the appendix at the back of this dissertation.

#### **Questions and Question type**

Although the emphasis in this research was qualitative, for the most part, the information sought from the questionnaire was both quantitative and qualitative. For this reason a mixed approach to questions was taken and questions were of the structured, semi-structured and unstructured variety (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2000).

The researcher made use of closed questions which included dichotomous questions, multiple choice questions and rating scales and rank order questions. Dichotomous questions were used when a simple yes or no response was required, as for example;



**Q.14 Does your Special Needs Assistant help you in any way in the area of the Visual Arts? (Please tick one box)**

Yes  No  Doesn't apply

Multiple choice questions were used when the researcher was trying to achieve a level of complexity from the response that could not be achieved by the use of dichotomous questioning. For example;

**Q.16 Are you satisfied with the way in which resources for Visual Arts are organised in the school? (Please tick relevant box)**

More than satisfied  Satisfied   
Less than satisfied  Unsure

The researcher made use of rating scales in order to determine degrees of response and intensity of response which were useful in that they built in a degree of sensitivity and differentiation of response whilst also generating numbers. In order to determine respondents' attitudes questions involving the Likert rating scale were used. An example of this type of question as it appeared in the questionnaire is as follows;

*Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

**Q.9 The Visual Arts occupy a position of importance in this school (*Please circle one number that is closest to how you feel*)**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	5

Rank order questions were used as a form of multiple choice question that allowed respondents to identify their priorities. Such question types enabled a relative degree of preference and priority to be charted. For example;

**Q.8 How would You rate these subjects in terms of their perceived importance in the Primary School Curriculum? (*Please rate on a scale of 1-9 where 1 is the most important and 9 is the least*)**

Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	English	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mathematics	<input type="checkbox"/>
S.E.S.E.	<input type="checkbox"/>	P.E.	<input type="checkbox"/>	S.P.H.E.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Music	<input type="checkbox"/>	Drama	<input type="checkbox"/>	Visual Arts	<input type="checkbox"/>

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

Open-ended questions were also used to ascertain respondents' views on various aspects of the Visual Arts curriculum. The researcher made every attempt to avoid leading questions, highbrow questions, complex questions and questions or instructions that would irritate the respondent. The researcher also avoided the use of too many open-ended questions understanding that probing responses to these questions may not be possible and also that they are demanding of the respondent's time. An example of one such open ended question as it appears on the questionnaire is as follows;

**Q.7 What criticisms, if any, would you have of the 1999 curriculum for Visual Arts?**

### **Choosing the Population**

Questions of sampling stem from the issue of deciding and defining the population on which the research will focus (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2000). As the research in question was focused on main-stream teachers in a junior school, and was concerned with their implementation of the 1999 curriculum for Visual Arts, it was these teachers that made up the questionnaire sample population.

A general rule of thumb for sampling is that the smaller the number of cases there are in the wider whole population, the larger the proportion of that population must be what

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

appears in the sample (ibid, 2000). It was for this reason that the researcher included all the population of main-stream teachers, in the questionnaire sample population. As was indicated in the earlier part of this chapter, there were eleven main-stream teachers, excluding the researcher, in the school under study. These eleven teachers made up the sample population for the questionnaires. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) would also contest that when the wider population size is about ten then the sample size should also be ten and, therefore, the sample should include the whole of the wider population.

#### **Piloting the Questionnaire**

In order to increase the reliability, validity and practicability of the questionnaire the researcher carried out a pilot (Oppenheim, 1992; Wilson and McLean, 1994). The draft questionnaire was piloted on a sample of four teachers, three of whom were inside the school but did not form part of the main study. The fourth was a teacher from a neighbouring school, consequently this teacher was teaching children from a similar socio-economic background as pertained to the study.

Respondents to the pilot were asked to comment on the clarity of the questionnaire items, instructions and layout. They were asked to give the researcher feedback on the type of questions used and their format and to comment on the ambiguity of the questions. Respondents were also asked to comment on the attractiveness and appearance of the questionnaire and the time taken to complete the questionnaire. Respondents were to identify whether the questionnaire was too long or too short, too easy or too difficult and

*Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

whether some of the questions were redundant questions which were of little value and inclusion of which was not necessary (Youngman, 1984).

In general, the response from the pilot was positive and respondents commented that the questionnaire, while it was comprehensive, was easy to navigate and did not take up an excessive amount of time in its completion. Respondents commented that a balance of closed and open questions had been achieved and that the questionnaire was varied and well presented. However, it was advised that question 3 was somewhat cumbersome and it was felt that if aims and objectives were to be conjoined that the question would be more straight forward. On this advice, amendments were made for the final questionnaire. Question 3 as it appears in the pilot was as follows;

**Q.3 As a result of the in-service that you attended, how well do you understand the 1999 Visual Arts curriculum for each of the following strand units? (in terms of aims, objectives and emphases)**

*Please write 1, 2 or 3 in each box where 1=very good understanding, 2=quite good understanding, 3=would benefit from further in-service. If you have not attended in-service please proceed to question 4.*

*Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

	Aims	Objectives	Emphases
Drawing			
Paint&Colour			
Print			
Clay			
Fabric&Fibre			
Construction			

Question 3 adjusted for the amended questionnaire placed aims and objectives in the same category and so question 3 as it appeared in the final questionnaire is as follows;

**Q.3 As a result of the in-service that you attended, how well do you understand the 1999 Visual Arts curriculum for each of the following strand units? (in terms of aims/objectives and emphases)**

*Please write 1, 2 or 3 in each box where 1=very good understanding, 2=quite good understanding, 3=would benefit from further in-service. If you have not attended in-service please proceed to question 4.*

*Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

	Aims/Objectives	Emphases
Drawing		
Paint&Colour		
Print		
Clay		
Fabric&Fibre		
Construction		

**Distributing the Questionnaire**

Having made the necessary amendments to the questionnaire, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to the eleven teachers that were taking part in the study. Questionnaires were distributed personally by hand and teachers were encouraged to complete and return the questionnaire within one week, which was the case for most of the teachers in the school.

**Interviews**

Having gathered, read, re-read and analysed questionnaire data, the researcher set about organising the interviews, an integral part of the research. The interview was used by the researcher as the principal means for gathering information which would have a direct bearing on the research objectives and for attaining depth in the data that was collected.

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

In the words of Tuckman, the interview gives information about a person's knowledge, values, attitudes and beliefs.

By providing access to what is inside a person's head, (it) makes it possible to measure what a person knows, what a person likes or dislikes, and what a person thinks. (Tuckman, 1972)

The interview was also used as a means to follow up unexpected results that arose at the questionnaire stage (Kerlinger, 1970) and was used to validate other methods such as the researcher's observations and questionnaires and to go deeper into respondents motivations and reasons for responding as they did (ibid, 1970).

The researcher, while aware of the advantages of using the interview approach in terms of its qualitative value, was also aware of the limitations that the interview format placed on the research results. For example, the interview may not be as reliable as the questionnaire as the anonymity of the questionnaire perhaps encourages greater honesty. The interview format is a format that will inevitably contain elements of bias (Kitwood, 1977) and controls may need to be built into the interview to counterbalance this. Other problems that may arise in the course of the interview may be such factors as how comfortable the interviewee feels about discussing various topics or the extent to which an interviewee decides to hold back information or indeed the extent to which the interviewer themselves is prepared to address a topic (Cicourel, 1964).



### **Style of Interview Used**

The style of interview favoured by the researcher was the un-structured interview. The researcher was guided by the purposes of the research (Kerlinger, 1970) in choosing this style of interview. While the purpose of the research was to gain insight and understanding regarding the practices of individuals in implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum, the researcher felt that an un-structured interview was the best way to achieve this purpose. The unstructured interview format also allowed the researcher to follow up issues that had arisen in the questionnaire stage and indeed issues that arose during the interviews themselves. The content, sequence and wording of the questions were decided by the interviewer and the interviewer was guided by the responses of the interviewees in this regard. The researcher based this approach on the views of Bogdan and Biklen (1992) who propose that during qualitative research questions are formulated *in situ* and in response to situations observed thereby allowing topics to be investigated in all their complexity.

The researcher was aware of certain characteristics that should form part of the qualitative interview format. These included finding out about the world of the interviewee as it related to the Visual Arts, for example, the researcher asked the interviewees questions about how they felt about Visual Arts as a subject and to talk about their own school experience of the subject. The researcher also sought to interpret central themes in the lives of the participant and to elicit description from the

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

interviewees regarding specific situations related to the research topic, for example, by asking respondents to describe how they felt about certain incidents related to the Visual Arts curriculum, such as, the school visit from the curriculum facilitator. The researcher also tried to display sensitivity in the approach to certain topics and aimed to make the interview a positive learning experience for those involved (Kvale, 1996).

#### **Choosing the Interview Population**

The researcher chose the interview sample based upon what she thought would most accurately represent the population being targeted. Due to time constraints and the qualitative nature of the interviews it was not possible for the researcher to reach all of the population of the research. Therefore, a sample had to be selected from the eleven teachers involved in the study that would best represent the group as a whole. The criterion that was used by the researcher was an examination of the heterogeneous group of teachers that were involved in the study. The researcher then applied purposive sampling to the procedure and handpicked teachers for interview on the basis of her judgement of their typicality (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2000).

The researcher felt that in order to accurately represent the research population at least one teacher would be selected from each year group. Another consideration was the teaching experience and college training of the interviewees. The researcher felt that teachers trained before 1999 should be represented and those teachers trained after 1999 should also be represented. It was also felt that untrained teachers should be represented

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

as should those teachers trained outside of Ireland. The final consideration in selecting a sample for interview was based upon the gender of the interviewees. The researcher aimed to gain a fair representation of male and female teachers as they occurred in the school. Taking all of these factors into consideration, the researcher selected a sample of five teachers out of the eleven participating in the study to take part in the interviews.

#### **Conducting the Interviews**

The researcher carried out a pilot interview on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, 2005. This interview proved helpful in facilitating the researcher to familiarise herself with the interview format, to help the interviewer become more critically aware of the 'interpersonal, interactional, communicative and emotional' aspects of the interview (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2000), such as, for example, becoming aware of the type of body language used by the interviewer and the interviewee and becoming sensitive to the hidden meanings they may entail. The pilot interview enabled the researcher to gain experience in becoming an adept active listener and to become aware of the dynamics of the situation, for example, when to probe an answer further or when to move away from a particular line of questioning.

The five candidates that were chosen for interview were approached personally by the researcher and their support with the research was sought. Having agreed to the interview, each candidate selected a time and date of interview that suited them. Following this arrangement, the five interviews that form the main body of this research

*Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

were carried out between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, 2005. The interviews ranged between an hour and an hour and a half in length and were mostly carried out in an empty classroom on the research site. One interview was carried out in the researcher's home. The researcher made every effort to ensure that teachers were at their ease and tried to create a relaxed, warm and supportive environment. In so doing, the researcher bore in mind the advice offered by Riches who states that;

Information of the highest quality is usually obtained from people when they feel that interview encounters are fair, relevant, stimulating and supportive. The gaining of quality information in an interview depends upon establishing good relationships between the participants. (1992, p.219)

The researcher commenced the interviews with some informal conversation to serve the purpose of placing interviewees at their ease. The interviewer also used this time to inform the interviewees regarding the nature and purposes of the interview and to discuss the process of recording that was to take place and to offer her assurances of confidentiality in this regard. In the words of Tuckman;

At the meeting, the interviewer should brief the respondent to the nature or purpose of the interview (being as candid as possible without biasing responses) and attempt to make the respondent feel at ease. He should explain the manner with which he will be recording responses, and if he plans to tape record, he should get the respondent's assent. (1972)

The interviewer made every effort to keep the interview moving forward and to give appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication to the respondent during the interview (Kvale, 1996), such as, for example, the use of encouraging nods or smiles.

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

In the course of the interviews various different types of questioning were used to elicit responses from the interviewee. Questions were often open-ended and centred around respondents' experiences and opinions. Closed questions were used when the interviewer was interested in uncovering factual information as it related to the respondent. Questions generally fitted into one or other of the following categories and some examples of the types of questions used are offered below:

- descriptive questions (Can you describe for me the way resources are organised in the school?)
- experience questions (Can you tell me about the in-service training that you received in Visual Arts?)
- behaviour questions (What does your Special Needs Assistant do during a Visual Arts lesson?)
- Knowledge questions (Tell me about the main changes that have come along with the revised curriculum for Visual Arts)
- Contrast questions (What are the main differences that you see between the way art is taught in the school now and ten years ago?)
- Feeling questions (How do you feel about teaching art?)
- Sensory questions (What was the mood like on the day that the curriculum facilitator came to visit the school?)

*Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

- Background questions (Where did you teach prior to...?)

(Spradley, 1979; Patton, 1980)

Other question types that were used in some ways related more to the process of the interview as opposed to the substance of the questions. An example of these questions follows:

- Looking for opinions (What do you think of...?)
- Asking for clarification (So, by that you mean that?...Would I be right to say?...)
- Asking for explanations (What exactly do you mean by....?)
- Seeking comparisons (Some would say that....)
- Asking for further information (Could you tell me a bit more about....?)
- Summarizing (I think I hear you saying that.....Would I be right then in saying....?)

(Woods, 1986, p.80)

### **Recording the Interviews**

The researcher made use of a tape-recorder to record all the interviews. This was done with the prior consent of the interviewee as was indicated earlier and respondents were also given assurances that they would not be identified in the presenting of the findings. The researcher felt that the tape-recorder was possibly the most un-obtrusive method available to record the interview and that it would free up the interviewer to concentrate on listening to the respondent and ensure that the researcher would not miss out on vital pieces of information that may be lost through note taking. Woods promotes the use of the tape-recorder as a method for recording an interview transaction;

There is no other way of recapturing the fullness and faithfulness of words and idiom, and it does release the interviewer from one difficult task, allowing concentration on others.

(Woods, 1986, p.81)

The researcher, however, is aware that the use of the tape-recorder may in some way constrain the respondent, for example, Merton et al. (1956) comment on the tendency for tape-recording to 'cool things down'. On balance of both these considerations, the researcher felt that a more faithful recording of responses was in fact the better option for the purposes of the research, and felt that tape-recording would allow for a more in-depth probing of respondents.

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

Field notes were taken during the interview and after the interview had taken place to allow the researcher take note of factors that may have been of interest to the research, for example, contextual factors regarding the visual and non-verbal aspects of the interview that the tape recorder cannot pick up, such as the body language or mood of the respondent during a particular line of questioning (Mishler, 1986). Other factors that would have been included related to particular questions that should be followed up in greater depth with the respondent or areas of questioning that would need to be returned to during the course of the interview.

The researcher opted to fully transcribe the interviews but is aware that much of the meaning is lost in the transcription from the oral word to written script (Kvale, 1996) and understands that written transcriptions cannot tell everything. It is for this reason that the interviewer kept field notes. The researcher can, at best, aim to be as faithful as possible in the reporting of the interviews to the field notes, the tape transcripts and her memories of the interview.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Analysis of Questionnaire Data**

The researcher's first task with regard to questionnaire analysis was to edit the questionnaires and thus carry out a checking process in order to identify and eliminate errors made by respondents. In so doing, the researcher used three criteria for editing



*Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

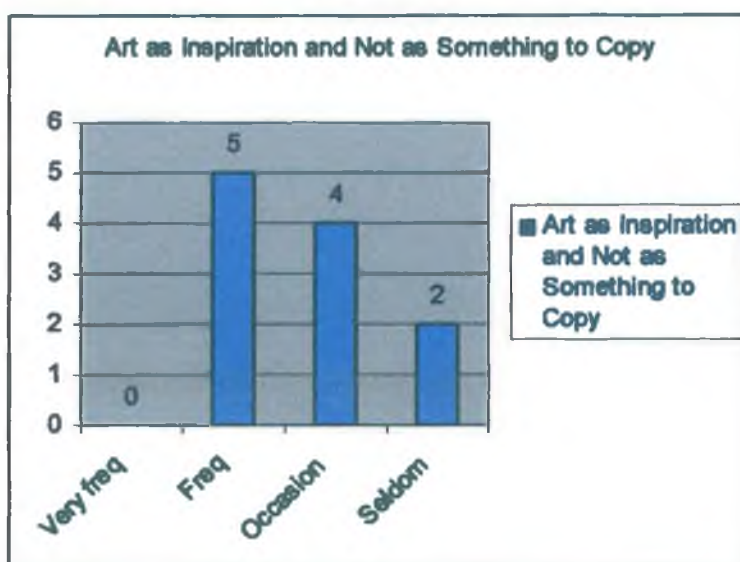
outlined by Moser and Kalton (1977). Questionnaires were first checked for completeness. The researcher checked that all questions were fully answered. The researcher then checked the questionnaires for accuracy. The researcher checked to see whether inaccuracies had occurred with regard to carelessness on behalf of the respondent. Finally, the questionnaires were checked for uniformity. In this respect, the researcher was aiming to discover whether all respondents had interpreted questions in the same way.

Having first checked the questionnaires in this way, the researcher then attempted to reduce the data to a form suitable for analysis (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2000). As the researcher was dealing with a relatively small number of questionnaires (eleven in total), it was possible for the researcher to go through each question individually and count up and record on spreadsheet format, the number of responses for each choice of answer. Responses for open ended questions were typed out to accompany the spreadsheet of results. This was the first level of 'data reduction' carried out by the researcher and it allowed the researcher to become familiar with the data in the questionnaires. An example of one of the items as it appears on the analysis spreadsheet is as follows;

<b>Q.6 Indicate the frequency with which you feel you can maintain the following emphases while teaching in the Visual Arts</b>				
<i>Art as inspiration and not as something to copy.</i>				
Very frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom	
0	5	4	2	

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

The researcher further analysed the data on the questionnaires and further reduced the data by working through each individual item or response on the spreadsheet and organising responses into graph format. The results of question 6 above have been used again to show how data was further analysed in graph format and the graph appears below:



**Figure 3.1 Frequency with which teachers use art as inspiration and not as something to copy. N=11.**

The use of the bar chart made analysis of the questionnaires more amenable to the researcher. Open-ended questions were, at this point, divided up into themes and colour coded, for example, the theme of parents as constraints to the implementation of

*Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

individual creative lessons in the Visual Arts curriculum arose. All answers that pertained to parents were marked or coded in yellow, noted and the results were to be used in conjunction with results from interviews and researcher observations.

**Analysis of Data from Interviews**

The transcribing of interview data has already been described. What followed from this procedure was an analysis and categorization of the ensuing data. The researcher followed the advice of Miles and Huberman (1994) who suggest that the coding of interview responses is an important way of reducing what is typically data overload from qualitative research. The researcher immersed herself in the tape transcripts, the tape recordings and the field notes and began interview analysis by dividing the information into categories for the purpose of analysis, therefore coding the data arising in the course of the interviews (Kerlinger, 1970).

The researcher went through the data in the transcripts systematically and wrote a descriptive code beside the script. In the following example it can be seen that the researcher used an abbreviation PRTS which stands for the influence of parents on the process of teaching the Visual Arts in a junior school. For example:

Text	Code
<i>'The reaction of mothers is something that you can become aware of'</i>	PRTS

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

This initial coding of the research data allowed the researcher to detect patterns and themes that were arising and to cluster these into general themes and sub-themes. For example, the influence of parents on the up-take of the implementation of the Visual Arts curriculum may be a sub-theme of the more general theme 'Factors that influence implementation'. The researcher also found it useful at this point to summarize in the case of each interview the main points arising out of the interview and the 'gestalt' or world picture emerging for each interviewee (Hycner, 1985).

The researcher tried to make further sense of the data by noting the themes which were arising in the interviews and used informed intuition to make conclusions. The researcher attempted to note relations between variables in order to get to the bottom of findings that were recurring in the data and to discover the real reasons and meaning behind the phenomena. The researcher, in her analysis of the data, listened to the full interviews several times and read and re-read interview transcripts in an attempt to enter into the world of the unique individual who was interviewed (Hycner, 1985).

At this stage of analysis, the researcher noted whether there were themes arising that were common to all or most of the interviews. She also noted themes that were unique to single interviews. The researcher then wrote a summary of all the interviews together which was to help explain the essence of the phenomenon being investigated.

### **Accuracy, Bias, Validity and Reliability**

The proceeding section is concerned with how the researcher approached issues of accuracy in the research. It aims to uncover the researcher's biases as she comes to the research. It is also concerned with the steps taken to best ensure, as far as it was possible, the validity and reliability of the research within the restrictions and limitations placed upon her.

#### **Accuracy**

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) would contend that accuracy can be improved upon by showing draft articles or interview transcripts to key informants and by checking the accuracy of their content with the subjects involved. To this end, the researcher offered participants the chance to view transcripts. However, none of the participants wished to take up this opportunity. The onus then falls on the researcher to ensure that transcripts were accurate to the best of her knowledge and ability.

#### **Bias**

The researcher is aware of the issue of bias as it impacts on qualitative research. The researcher can state that she had no particular bias either in favour of or against the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999). The researcher was aware that her position as a teacher in the school may have presented a concern as regards bias, however, she took her position

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

in the school to be beneficial to the naturalistic style of inquiry that she was pursuing. She felt that her position in the school could be used to help her 'grasp the point of view of the native' (Malinowski, 1922, p.25). The researcher also ensured that statements made in the reporting of data were backed up by data from the sources available to her such as the questionnaires, interviews and observations or a combination of these sources.

#### **Validity**

Validity in some cases refers to a 'demonstration of whether an instrument in fact measures what it purports to measure' (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2000, p.105). However, as findings from qualitative data cannot often be tested empirically, validity in qualitative research may refer to such questions as honesty, depth, richness and scope of data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the objectivity of the researcher (ibid). Gronlund (1981) would contend that validity in qualitative research is more a question of degree rather than an absolute state.

The researcher offers her assurances that every opportunity was taken, where possible, to ensure validity at each stage of the research. The internal validity of the work has been described, to some extent, in the previous section regarding accuracy and throughout the course of this chapter where the author describes procedures used for choosing sample populations for research and descriptions that were given regarding the conduct of the research.

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

The researcher made use of persistent observation suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a means of establishing the validity of data offered by participants. For example, the researcher consistently observed the art work on display outside and inside classrooms to validate the responses of participants with regard to whether creative/individual art work was on display in the school. The researcher also made efforts to observe classroom practice in art, where possible, to validate participants' responses as to how they organized their art teaching and whether they made use of Special Needs Assistants in the teaching of art and whether guided discovery methods of teaching and learning were in use in classrooms. She has also made use of triangulation by combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, such as the questionnaires and interviews, and observations, such as were mentioned above, as a means to establishing validity. The researcher aimed to report on the data in a balanced way providing reasonable amounts of evidence to back up claims being made.

The researcher does not claim external validity for this research and feels that generalizability will not apply to the findings. In this respect, the research could be regarded as a case study in that its findings will apply to one school only. This is not to say that comparisons cannot be made to other schools. Schofield (1993) would argue for clear, detailed and in-depth descriptions so that others can decide to what extent the findings of qualitative research are generalizable. Generalizability, therefore, will be the prerogative of the reader.

### **Reliability and Authenticity**

Reliability refers to 'consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents' (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2000, p.117). As this construct of reliability is not always possible in the qualitative study (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993), a more accurate description of reliability as it applies to qualitative research is a fit between what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

One way of controlling for reliability in interviews is to have a highly structured interview, with the same format and sequence of words for each respondent (Silverman, 1993). However, the researcher took the view of Scheurich (1995), that this was to mis-read the complexity and open-endedness of human interaction and that controlling the wording is no guarantee of controlling the interview. The researcher also felt that reliability would be increased if respondents were at their ease (Kitwood, 1977). For these reasons, the researcher favoured the more relaxed unstructured interview format, as was indicated earlier.

However, in an effort to increase the reliability of the interviews the interviewer did have an informal list of questions and topics that she covered with all respondents and was led in the order of questioning by the participants' responses. In a further effort to increase interview reliability and authenticity the interviewer aimed to ensure that the respondents



*Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

understood the questions in the same way (Silverman, 1995). For example, in cases where the interviewer aimed to ascertain the respondents' attitude to a situation, the interviewer worded questions in the same way, a suggestion which Oppenheim (1992) makes to address the issue of increasing internal reliability in interviews. In other situations, the interviewer made every attempt to make questions clear, and, if unsure whether the respondents understood the question, the interviewer rephrased the question to facilitate the respondents' understanding. The pilot interview was useful in giving the interviewer practice in this particular skill.

During interviews the interviewer also aimed to increase reliability by cross checking responses given by the respondent with the respondents themselves, for example, by asking respondents to re-confirm their answer by summarising their earlier response or by the interviewer summarising responses and in turn asking respondents to confirm the accuracy of the interviewer's interpretation.

The interviewer was also aware that she should aim to formulate her questions carefully so as questions posed did not influence the respondent to show him/herself in a good light (Tuckman, 1972). In taking care with this aspect of the questioning, the interviewer aimed to increase the internal authenticity of the interviews.

In attempting to address issues of reliability and authenticity, and fitting what the researcher recorded as data with what actually occurred, it was felt that the researcher should validate the findings (McCormick and James, 1988) with participants involved in

### *Design, Research Instruments and Methods of Analysis Employed*

the study. This has been discussed previously where, for example, the researcher offered to show tape transcripts to interviewees to validate the correctness of the data recorded. The researcher also showed the findings chapter to participants of the interviews and asked them to comment on the reportage of the findings. Changes required to increase reliability were made at this stage.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has described in detail the methods used to conduct school based research into the implementation of the Visual Arts curriculum (1999) in a junior primary school. It provides a rationale for the study and outlines the main aims of the research. The chapter outlines the approach taken to the research and provides a rationale for using such an approach. It describes the design, piloting and final usage of the questionnaire. The chapter also describes in detail the conduct of interviews and their significant contribution to the research. The analysis of the data was considered an important aspect of the research. The chapter concludes with an examination of the methods used to increase the validity, reliability and authenticity of the research.

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#### **4. Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999) in a Junior School: Issues and Challenges**

##### **Introduction**

The Revised Curriculum (1999) heralds some significant changes for teachers in the area of the Visual Arts. These changes span both content and pedagogy. While the content of the Visual Arts Curriculum has been broadened to allow for more balance and variety in the Visual Arts programme, the pedagogical aim central to the Revised Curriculum is to infuse creativity and individuality into children's art work at school. The curriculum, therefore, is concerned with art being about the child's own individual ideas and creativity and is not in favour of copying or replication art that precludes individual creativity. In order to achieve these aims, the curriculum brings with it pedagogical changes for teachers.

The research investigated the implementation of three significant aspects of change brought about by the Revised Curriculum in one West Dublin, junior primary school. The first two related aspects are concerned with pedagogical change. The third aspect is concerned with changes to curriculum content. The research investigated:

- The implementation of an approach to teaching art where the individual creative process of the child's work is as important as the final outcome of art work. Therefore, the implementation of an approach where teachers abandon replication or decorative style art lessons was under investigation.

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

- The implementation of an approach to teaching where the teacher's role is that of facilitator of the creative process rather than instructor in a set of pre-determined activities. Therefore, the research investigated the implementation of guided discovery methods of teaching and learning in the school under study.
- The uptake of new curriculum strand areas in the Visual Arts, specifically: Paint and Colour, Drawing, Fabric and Fibre, Clay, Print and Construction.

This chapter presents the findings of the research on implementation and discusses the issues and challenges in curriculum change in one junior primary school. While findings will be drawn mainly from the interview data, the data obtained from questionnaires and observation work will also be used to support discussion.

The chapter will be constructed around the three specific research questions mentioned above. The first part of the chapter presents the findings from the research on the implementation of individual creative approaches to the teaching of Visual Arts. It provides a description of the art in the school prior to implementation. It discusses some of the changes that are in evidence in the school since implementation of the new curriculum. Parents, school management, teachers themselves and time are presented as some of the factors which have impeded the implementation of individual creative approaches in the teaching of art in the school. Other factors, such as, professional development, teacher professionalism, the visit to the school from a curriculum facilitator and new teachers are discussed as factors which positively influenced the implementation of this particular curriculum emphasis.



### *Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

The second part of the chapter presents the findings of the research on the implementation of methods of teaching and learning where the teacher acts as a facilitator in the learning process; therefore it is concerned with the implementation of guided discovery teaching approaches. It presents issues in the local school context, such as the fact that the school is a junior school, the way the teaching of art is organised in some classes, and class profile as factors which have shaped the implementation of this curriculum teaching approach.

The final part of the chapter is concerned with the uptake of new strand areas in the school under study. It discusses teacher creativity and skill, resources, resource allocation and professional development as factors which have influenced the implementation of new strand areas in Visual Arts.

## **Process versus Product, Encouraging Individual Creativity**

### **Introduction**

One of the most significant aspects of the Visual Arts curriculum (1999) is a concern for how the teacher approaches the teaching of art. The 1999 curriculum aims to introduce creativity and independence into the art work of the child. The approach that is favoured

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

endeavours to direct teachers away from a concern with producing a high quality product in art. In the words of the new curriculum,

A pre-defined end product, developed through a pre-ordained process ('cut here', 'glue there'), is likely to exclude creativity and be of little educational value. (1999, p.55, Teacher Guidelines)

A child-centred approach that emphasises the creative process over the product of the work where the 'children's work is paramount' (ibid, p.55) is the crux of the approach to the teaching of Visual Arts in the 1999 Primary School Curriculum.

**Description of Art in the School prior to 1999**

***The Art Culture of the School: A Concern for Product***

Teachers in the school spoke about the school culture as one that valued and emphasized art and the importance of art as a subject was something that stood out as particular or peculiar to the school. Sarah described how art was and had in the past been important in the school;

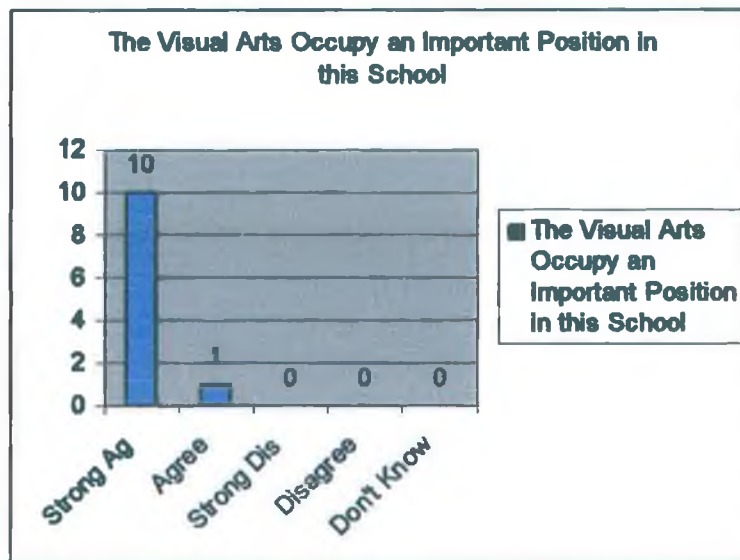
I think that traditionally this would be a school that would do a particular amount of art in comparison to other schools. It is probably one of the things that we are quite strong in.

The art work and colour in the school hall and on the corridors was something that immediately greeted the visitor to the school. Robin, a teacher in the school, made the following comment;

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

People often comment from outside in the community and other educational professionals, speech therapists, psychologists, students and inspectors remark on the standard of art and the colour used in the school.

The strength and importance of art as a subject in the school was something that teachers confirmed in the questionnaire responses. When asked on the questionnaire to respond to the statement 'The Visual Arts occupy a position of importance in this school', all eleven teachers agreed that Visual Arts were important to the school. Ten out of these eleven teachers strongly agreed with this statement. The graph below shows how teachers responded to the statement.



**Figure 4.1 Teachers' responses to the statement 'The Visual Arts occupy a position of importance in the school'. N=11**

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

However, although art was and had been valued in the school it would be fair to say that the prevalent type of art that existed in the school prior to the implementation of the 1999 curriculum for Visual Arts was art of a particular type. Prior to the 1999 curriculum teachers in the school favoured replication art and overemphasised the product of children's work. The children had very little creative input into their own work. Lessons in the Visual Arts were mainly teacher-centred and consisted of the teacher coming up with a lesson idea and the child copying or replicating this idea to produce products that looked the same and were not individual to the child. In this sense work carried out in the Visual Arts was pre-defined by the teacher. Helen described the dominant type of art in the school prior to 1999,

There was a lot of emphasis on copying what the teacher had done. The children's individual ideas were not really valued.

Another teacher, Nora, described a typical lesson in the Visual Arts prior to the revised curriculum;

They (teachers) would have had a sample of what they wanted the children to make and the children would have all made one. When they were teaching drawing they would have showed the children how to draw a tree and the children would have drawn their tree exactly the way the teacher did with slight variations.

There was an over reliance on the use of photocopied pages and template style art in the school. While this approach may have made life simpler for the teacher in terms of organisation, it failed to cater for the creative process or the individuality of the child. In Sarah's words;

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

There would have been a lot of paper plate work and a lot of work from photocopies, especially with infants. I know I was guilty of it. It just seemed so much easier and the children as well seemed to really like it. You'd give them a page that was photocopied or they'd have to construct something on a paper plate, maybe a character from their books or whatever. That would have been very much the type of product we would produce in the school.

Frequently entire year groups in the school would have made the same product in art at the same time and these would have been on display in the school corridors outside classrooms. Robin described what art was like on joining the staff of the school;

Definitely when I joined first there was more of the same art. Each corridor would produce the same product perhaps for every child in every corridor.

Teacher emphasis on the product of children's work as opposed to the creative processes involved in producing the product often meant that art lessons in the school involved the children in a class producing at least one product in art per week and so quantity of products produced in art as opposed to quality of experience became an issue for teachers in the school. In sharp contrast, the new curriculum approach is less concerned with turning out products and is more concerned with the time, effort, and individual creative endeavour that go into making one product. In this regard, under the new curriculum children will have fewer products to show at the end of their art work.

It is fair to say then that although art was an important subject in the school, the dominant type of art lesson was product oriented in that there was a concern for turning out large amounts of high quality art products. There was also a strong focus on replication in art

### *Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

in order to achieve art products of a certain standard. Sarah summed up her feelings on the matter;

I suppose we were very product driven really. Always we were being put under pressure to be product driven.

Some of the pressures experienced by this teacher to focus on product rather than on the creative processes involved will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

### **Implementation of Curriculum Approaches since 1999**

#### *Embracing Curriculum Change*

Teachers in the school had, at the time of research, made genuine efforts to embrace and implement the curriculum emphasis on creative process over the product of children's work and there had been a slow movement towards individual creativity in the art work of the children. The approach that teachers were now beginning to take could be said to be more child-centred. Teachers seemed to be less concerned with the outcome or the product of the children's art work. Around the corridors and in the classrooms in the school there was less replication art to be seen in comparison with the years prior to 1999. Robin described the changes that were in evidence in the school as teachers attempted to implement the approaches for the Revised Curriculum;

I find that there has been a slow movement towards individualism, that teachers are doing more of their individual work now rather than feeling that this should be done on a corridor basis or on a year group basis which I think is interesting

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

because it is not so usual now to see the same artefact being produced for every corridor whether it is paintings that look similar or construction or whatever.

Sarah also described the situation in the school in terms of the efforts teachers were making to embrace curriculum change;

Since the new curriculum people are making a much bigger effort to allow the children to produce their own things and to be creative with it.

The picture of implementation that was emerging in the school was one where teachers were adapting their practices as best they could to the curriculum and were making efforts to change their pedagogical approaches in the Visual Arts. However, taking on such an approach to the teaching of the Visual Arts was not without its challenges for teachers. In Claire's words;

I'm trying to get a balance. I am trying to do what the new curriculum says. Sometimes it works but a lot of the time I find it difficult and I find that I can become very frustrated when I am doing art if I try to follow to the letter what the curriculum is suggesting.

**Pressures that teachers experience that impede Implementation**

*Pressure for Product*

It could be seen that teachers had made efforts to embrace the pedagogical approach of the 1999 curriculum that emphasises the processes involved in creating an artefact in Visual Arts as opposed to focusing in on the outcome or the product itself. As one teacher put it 'there has been a slow movement towards individualism' in the school. However, interviews with teachers in the school uncovered some significant issues that had

### *Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

impacted and continued to impact on teachers' uptake of this particular curriculum emphasis that related specifically to the context of implementation and the school culture.

Teachers were hampered in their attempts to bring about this significant change to the approach taken in the teaching of art as it involved a change to the product driven art culture in the school which was a culture that favoured mass production of art products. Although this product driven culture was changing and had been broken down in some ways, there were factors present in the environment that ensured that teachers would remain to some extent product driven.

#### *The Impact of Parents and Special Occasions*

One such factor was teachers' perceived need to create a product to send home with children for special occasions such as Christmas, Easter, Mothers' Day and so on. In the words of Sarah;

All the occasions like St. Patrick's Day, Mothers' Day, Easter, I always think at these times of the year there is an awful lot of pressure put on teachers to work, work and churn out things to bring home and presents for the parents. You don't want to let your class go home empty handed.

Another teacher, Nora, described how occasions impacted on the extent to which teachers embraced this pedagogical concept;

I think that the school has embraced the new curriculum and has changed the approach to art but that the pressure to have pieces of art work for all the different occasions has somehow stood in the way and has put extra pressure on. Replication comes in there. At Christmas and Easter you get a lot of replication.



*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

This was an issue for all of the teachers that were interviewed. However, the root of the issue was not the occasions themselves. Teachers felt under pressure from the parent body to produce art and to have a particular standard of art product for the children going home from school. This particular factor impacted on teachers at all times of the year but was specifically heightened around special occasions. Claire described how teachers can become aware of the reaction of parents to the art products that their pupils make;

When you are bringing your small children out to the yard and they have something nice that they have made in school and they hand it to their Mum, the reaction of the mothers is something that you can become aware of. If the child comes home with a lump of clay with a stick sticking out of it and hands it to the Mum you'll hear parents saying, what's that?

It is hard to know whether parents actually did expect an art product home with their child or whether this was a perception that the teachers themselves had which caused a block to the implementation of a creative approach to art. Helen described the effort that it took for teachers to adapt and achieve a balance in this regard;

It is a difficult one to know how to tune it. I suppose to steer a middle course. I know that in the last two years I am not sending as much stuff home and there hasn't been any concern expressed by the parents.

In some ways teachers were still held back by a product driven approach due to a lack of communication about the change in approach in art between the home and the school. Certainly some teachers expressed their concerns in this area. Some teachers felt that if parents were aware that the focus on art hence forth would be on the creative process and,

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

therefore, that there would be less art products going home that they as teachers would find it easier to embrace the change. Robin's fears about the lack of communication between the home and the school in this regard were evident in the following comment;

I know there was an incident in the school a couple of years ago where some of the parents didn't get Mothers' Day art work and were quite concerned about that and so I think that the parents need to be educated in that regard as to what we are actually doing in the school in art.

Claire was also concerned about the lack of communication between the home and the school regarding the changes in the art curriculum. She felt that parents were making judgements about teachers and their competence based on the standard of art work that was coming home with the children. This was particularly pertinent due to the fact that the school was a junior school and teachers perceived that children did not have the language to explain to parents what they were doing in art in school. In Claire's words;

The parents have not been educated in the New Revised Curriculum. They don't know that art has changed so the whole thing could be misconstrued and you could be dubbed a bad teacher. You'll have your parents going what is this, what is that. They have no clue what the child is bringing home. The child may not even have the language to express what it is that they have made.

***Pressure from Management***

Teachers felt under pressure to produce products in art from the management of the school. Some teachers felt that the school management placed a value on product and replication art as opposed to individual creative art and that this was hampering their efforts to embrace the curriculum pedagogical approach that favours the creative process

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

over the outcome of the work. The pressure that teachers felt, in this regard, manifested in sometimes subtle and covert ways. For example, Helen spoke of the references that were made to art work in the school during staff meetings. In this teacher's words;

There is pressure from the management, the board of management and the principal and so on that you do produce an amount of work at all times...it is something that would be mentioned very often at staff meetings 'thank you to all the teachers for the wonderful displays'. It is something that is cited very often, the actual display of work on corridors and in classrooms.

Teachers also spoke about being under pressure to display art work on their noticeboards, in the school corridors, and in their classrooms and to change displays regularly. This would impact on a teacher implementing a process driven curriculum approach. In Sarah's words;

There's an emphasis on the product in the school. There's an emphasis as well on having things on your pin board, having new things there all the time.

Another way that teachers felt that management contributed to the persistence of a product driven culture in the school was through the fact that teachers would be asked to decorate the school hall with their children's art work for particular occasions such as for the Christmas concert. In Nora's words;

For every occasion the walls are expected to be decorated. Say the Christmas concert. It's not enough that we are putting on a concert; the walls have to be decorated with Christmas art.

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

However, the pressure for product that teachers attributed to the management of the school may have been down to the perception of individual teachers themselves. Although Robin felt that there was a pressure for product in the school it was felt that this arose from the teachers themselves and not from the management of the school. In the words of this teacher;

I have never been aware of anybody being taken to task for not producing art to decorate the corridors or art to send home. I must say the management have been supportive in that way. I think it would be driven by the individual teachers themselves. It is a perception that the teacher maybe has themselves.

The pressures that teachers can put on each other will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

***Pressure from Teachers***

Teachers in the school fed into the product driven culture of the school and so themselves contributed to the difficulties that they were experiencing in changing their pedagogical approach to focus more on the creative processes involved in art work.

One way that teachers influenced each other in this regard was by virtue of their seniority. Nora described the way that she felt pressure to persevere with a more product driven/replication approach to art on occasions when working with more senior teachers. Such teachers, she argued, were often less inclined to embrace the pedagogical changes suggested by the curriculum and preferred to maintain more tried and tested measures. As

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

class year groups planned their monthly scheme of work together she felt that the more senior teacher had a greater say in terms of what art was to be done for the month and that she would have to respect that. In her words;

It is very difficult if a more senior member of staff is teaching old curriculum because they are more senior than you and you are a junior member of staff, and you may not have as much confidence, and even if you do have that you may just have respect for them because they are older. They say to you that you should do this art and you just agree because you think, oh well, they're more senior.

Robin also encountered a similar difficulty in the school and felt that more senior teachers unwittingly contributed to the persistence of a product driven culture in the school by suggesting in planning meetings that all teachers in the year group would make a particular product in art in a particular week. However, Robin's own personal beliefs regarding the educational value of such efforts meant that this teacher did not bow to unconscious pressure that other more senior teachers were putting on. In Robin's words;

Some teachers do feel that we should all be doing the same work and not even that some teachers will say this is what I am doing and if you want a copy you are welcome to it and I think that is the danger. Many of these ideas are photocopied sheets with an art idea and I feel that that is too rigid and against the new curriculum so I accept the offerings and I put them on file but I don't use them.

Teachers perceived that art was a subject that their own ability as a teacher could be judged on in particular in a junior school. By producing and displaying high quality art products teachers perceived that they could gain recognition from management, auxiliary staff, parents and other teachers. Nora described the situation as she perceived it;

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

People do comment on art, parents the principal and other teachers. If you are continuously producing good art on a weekly basis it would up your profile. Teachers, parents and management would say that that person is good at art so, therefore, it does up your profile.

The phenomenon that involved some teachers continuing to emphasise the product in art meant that others inadvertently got drawn in and contributed to the persistence of a product focus in the school. Sarah described how this could happen;

It is fair to say that there are people who are held back by the emphasis on the product and having fantastic looking things and sometimes that might lead teachers like myself occasionally to say, do that again, it's not good and you would feel that it wouldn't be something that you could put up in the hall.

Occasionally this type of practice escalated to a level of competition amongst teachers that worked against the embracing of the curriculum emphasis on creative process. This was particularly evident around occasions of public art displays such as at the school Christmas concert. Helen described how this had happened in the school and the affects that it had;

There is a competitive element between teachers. Exhibitions are times when there is competition because there is no limit to what you can put up in the hall. There is definitely competitiveness there.

It was felt that while teachers were involved in impressing with the quality, quantity, display and turnover of art products it would be difficult to embrace the curriculum emphasis on the individual creative process. Teachers spoke of the difficulties that they

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

experienced in trying to take on a process driven approach to art when others were not doing so and felt that their attempts to embrace the curriculum approach that favours the individual creative process would reflect poorly on them as teachers. They pointed out the need for all teachers to agree to take on the new approach to teaching art. Sarah made the point;

I suppose ideally if everybody just says ok, we'll give the children complete freedom with their art work for one year and see what happens. But if certain teachers are going to continue to put in an awful lot of input and the teacher next door isn't I don't think that is going to have a good affect or be a good reflection of art in the school.

***Time and Organisation***

Time was an issue that caused difficulties for teachers in terms of embracing more individual creative and less product driven approaches in the classroom. One concern was that teachers felt that they had to organise their time in terms of what they felt was most important to get covered on the curriculum. Although they felt that art was an important subject on the curriculum teachers felt that their time should first be dedicated to the core subjects English, Mathematics and Irish. In a short school day it was often difficult to have time to cover art in an approach that was concerned with taking time and working slowly with as much emphasis on the creative process as on the product of the work. Helen felt that the curriculum approach was unrealistic given the time constraints that teachers were working under. In her words;

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

It's unrealistic. You're not going to have that amount of time to devote to art. We'd all love to but you can't between reading and doing your core subjects. You need to get them out of the way. It would be lovely to spend an hour and a half on art and really, really enjoy it but being realistic you have to take children in a group and it's more hurried trying to get it done rather than enjoying it yourself.

It was also felt that the short school day, the pressure to cover other subjects and the time constraints experienced by teachers sometimes meant that teachers left art until the last minute. On occasions like this teachers often felt that they would choose a replication style lesson for the sake of doing some sort of a lesson in art. Claire described an occasion that that might happen in the classroom;

If you know that you haven't covered your art for the week you might just do decorative art and put it down even though the revised curriculum would suggest that decorative art is not actually fulfilling your art curriculum. There are times when you just may have to do that.

Teachers also felt the constraint of time impinge on the regularity with which they could take a process driven approach to art in that they felt the affects of curriculum overload. In the words of Robin, 'time is a precious resource in the school because there is so much to cover in the curriculum'. The busyness of school life was also draining teachers of the time that was available to take up such an approach to art. In Sarah's words;

Everything in school is getting busier and busier and busier and so is the Visual Arts. Class size isn't getting any smaller. It's very, very hard to get all these things in.

Time was an issue too in terms of having time to organise and prepare for an art lesson for large classes particularly at the infant level. Preparation for art lessons that involved



*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

giving children the materials they required to be creative and to be the designers of their own product often involved a lot of teacher time that teachers felt was in short supply.

For example, Helen described the problem;

At middle level and at senior level they can do all the cutting themselves. Let's say if you were making fish and you said design your own multi-coloured fish. At infant level you would have had to cut up the materials so the children can choose what they want to create. They're not at a level where they can actually cut. Their motor skills aren't developed enough and they can't do it that quickly. They'd be forever doing it.

Having not had time to organise and prepare in full for this type of lesson teachers sometimes reverted to replication type. In the words of Robin;

With a large class of thirty odd children it can be very difficult to find the time. It would be easier to say let's do a painting on this theme and show the children a painting and say this is my one, you copy that. It would save a lot of time. Obviously when children are given opportunities to explore materials and think about something it could take a lot longer.

## **Factors Encouraging Change**

### ***Professional Development***

The two days in-service training teachers received in the Revised Curriculum for Visual Arts mainly emphasised the content changes involved in the new curriculum. While there was some emphasis on the pedagogical changes of the curriculum at that time, in-service failed to get across the significance of the change of approach to teaching in the Visual Arts. The result of in-service was that teachers in the school took up some of the content

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

changes of the curriculum, for example, teachers taught some of the new strand areas of the curriculum such as Clay and Fabric and Fibre. However, at the early stages of implementation teachers neglected to change their approach to the teaching of art as they were not aware that the pedagogical approach to art was the crux of the change in the revised curriculum.

Fullan (1993) argues that in order for change to occur, a certain amount of pressure is required. A very momentous event that occurred in the school that encouraged the uptake of pedagogical change was a school visit from a curriculum facilitator of implementation from the NCCA. The facilitator or *cuiditheoir* met with all the teachers in the school in their year groups and discussed the art work that could be seen around the school. Although there was a lot of art work in evidence in the school there was a strong product/replication focus to the work. The *cuiditheoir* was unimpressed with the art in the school and told the staff as much. In Robin's words;

He wasn't enamoured with the art in the school. I think the *cuiditheoir* felt that the industrious nature of the staff and children didn't necessarily equal acceptable art work. He raised the subject of decorative art and said that what we were doing was decorative art.

It was at this point and not during the earlier in-service that the importance of emphasising the individual creative process rather than the product in art work was communicated to teachers. This change in emphasis came mostly as a surprise to teachers at that time. Claire described the event as she remembered it;

### *Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

Things have changed because a *cuiditheoir* came into our school subsequently. I do remember being quite shocked at him telling us at that stage that the shift in the whole way that we teach art was the main thrust of the new curriculum and that is something that I hadn't been aware of up to that and that happened after our in-service.

#### ***Teachers' Professionalism***

The *cuiditheoir's* approach was not welcomed initially as it disconfirmed teachers' beliefs and sullied their practices in art up to that point. There was much ill feeling on staff regarding the *cuiditheoir's* approach to impressing change on the staff and about teachers having to change their approach to the teaching of art and to focus on the processes involved in art as opposed to the product. In Claire's words;

I do think that a little bit of give and take would have been better on the day and I felt that he just wanted to get his point across. I don't think that the staff were listened to.

However, teachers gradually began to take up the changes and the *cuiditheoir's* visit turned out to be highly influential in affecting change. Helen described how she viewed the situation in the school;

When we had the *cuiditheoir* in last year he was quite vocal when he spoke about the way things were done in the school and even though that day was not necessarily a positive I think that day was influential in how teachers approached their teaching of art.

It was felt that teachers began to change their way of teaching art mainly due to the 'hard working' nature of the teachers and because of teachers' desire to act as 'professionals'.

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

Sarah felt that teachers were trying to embrace the new curriculum approach because of their 'intrinsic good will' and because;

Teachers in the school are really hard working and dedicated and certainly want the best for the pupils and the best for the school. That attitude and that idea help teachers embrace it a bit more.

Claire also felt that teachers' professionalism was the main reason for change occurring in the school. In her words;

Teachers are taking it on board. They are doing their jobs and they are being professional about it. I think all members of staff are very professional. We do our best to do what was suggested because what we are expected to do is to teach the curriculum. That's what we are paid for and we do it.

*Conflict*

A further factor influential in bringing about change was a recent staff meeting debate which opened up a can of worms on the subject of individual creative process versus replicated product in the teaching of art in the school. At the meeting the issue was raised that, although there had been changes in the school and teachers were less concerned with product and the outcome of children's work in the Visual Arts, product/replication art persisted and was still prevalent in the school. The heated nature of the debate highlighted the depth of feeling and sensitivities of teachers around this particular area of art and around the disconfirmation of long held and familiar practices that teachers felt worked for them. Some teachers defended the older product centred methods as they

### *Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

were disconfirmed by other teachers who favoured the revised curriculum approach. In general this staff meeting spurred on changes in pedagogic approach to the teaching of art. The teaching of art with a focus on replication and product now sits less comfortably with teachers as they see that this approach is not valued by all in the school. In the words of one teacher;

I think to question something is always a good thing and I think that people perhaps are questioning their ways. I think people are slow to change. Sometimes controversy is needed to bring these discussions to the fore...I think the fact that the debate is opened now I don't think we will slip back. People are now maybe thinking twice about what they put up on their walls in art.

### *The Impact of New Teachers*

Teachers that had joined the staff of the school in more recent years and who had no experience teaching under the former curriculum were having a positive influence in the school in terms of implementing the approaches of the new curriculum for Visual Arts. Although junior teachers could be influenced by the product driven culture of the school and by more senior teachers, as was discussed earlier, it also was the case that junior teachers were influencing senior teachers. By implementing a more individual creative process driven approach in their classrooms some more junior teachers were leading other teachers by example. Teachers that had recently graduated from teacher colleges and joined the school also brought with them fresh ideas and new knowledge regarding the teaching of Visual Arts. One teacher felt that the role of the junior teacher as change agent in the school would be the most significant factor in determining whether the

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

school would eventually fully embrace an approach to art that favours the process over the product. In the words of Robin;

I think the people trained under the new curriculum in particular will have a role to play but often if you are new in the school it is difficult to have your voice heard and you don't want to rock the boat. As the ratio of new staff to old increases I think that could be the catalyst.

**Conclusion**

This section has been concerned with issues relating to the implementation of a pedagogical approach to teaching the Visual Arts that places emphasis on the individual creative processes of art work as opposed to on the final product or outcome of that work. It can be seen that significant shifts in attitudes and practices have occurred in the school as a result of the pressure for change introduced into the school by the curriculum facilitator. Further factors such as teacher professionalism, the influence of new teachers in the school and a recent staff meeting debate have provided support for curriculum change in the school. Other factors such as pressure and expectation from parents, school management and other teachers and the pressures brought about by time have impacted negatively on the implementation of this curriculum approach. The overall picture of implementation that emerges in the school is a result of a balance between those factors that have influenced implementation and those factors that impede implementation in the school.

## **Teacher as Facilitator of Learning/ Guided Discovery Methods**

### **Introduction**

The 1999 curriculum for Visual Arts promotes 'guided discovery' as the most appropriate approach that teachers should take when teaching art in a way that promotes and facilitates the individual creative process of the child's work. The 'guided discovery' approach places the teacher in the role of facilitator rather than that of instructor. In the words of the curriculum,

The task of the teacher is not to teach clever techniques or to demonstrate ways of producing images and forms he/she finds acceptable but to build on interests and strengths by drawing the children out and making suggestions where appropriate. (1999, p.12, Teacher Guidelines)

In this regard the teacher's role involves being, 'more of a catalyst than a teacher of technique' (ibid, p.54). The child-centred approach promoted in the 1999 Visual Arts Curriculum aims to develop the child's creativity and so;

In an art lesson, the children should remain the designers: this role should not be taken from them. (1999, p.12, Teacher Guidelines)

The curriculum does however allow that, 'certain practical skills, such as the use of scissors and adhesives may occasionally require a more direct method' (ibid, p.54).

## **Factors influencing Implementation**

### ***Junior School Issues and the Teacher***

Teachers in the school expressed major concern over the viability of applying a 'teacher as facilitator' approach in their classrooms. This was especially an issue for teachers in the junior school where children range from ages four to eight.

Many teachers did not agree that this curriculum approach was the best approach to take when teaching art in a junior school and their own beliefs on the matter influenced the extent to which they were implementing the approach in the classroom. Most felt that there was a need to teach children skills in art as you would teach skills in other subjects. They felt that to expect children to be able to create without much input from the teacher was problematic and not possible to maintain in the classroom in the long run. Claire was a teacher who was quite frustrated by this aspect of the curriculum and did not agree with the approach the Revised Curriculum takes to the teaching of art. In her words;

There are many other subjects that have areas of huge creativity attached to them, say like English. If you were teaching a child English you would not, on the first week of school, sit the child down and expect them to write a creative story if you hadn't first taught them how to write, if you hadn't given them broad rules about the English language in general. The same is true for art. You cannot expect a child to come into school in Junior Infants, their first year in school and hand them a material and ask them to go work with that and produce x,y, or z or suggest that there is some outcome they need to have without giving them some guidance.



*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

Claire was not alone in this regard. Other teachers, particularly at infant level felt that creativity was a successor of the achievement of more basic skills which needed to be teacher taught. Helen described where the focus for teachers lies at junior level;

At the junior level, it all focuses on the fine motor skills. Even picking up a pencil or a paint brush is a huge thing. Getting them to hold the paintbrush right is a huge thing.

It was felt that the curriculum approach that suggests that teachers should act as facilitator in the classroom was not workable in the context of the junior school and that young children would not be able to cope in this type of teaching/learning situation. Because of this teachers felt the need to input in the art lesson. In the words of Sarah,

In the junior school I think that children do need a lot of input. You can't just let them off and let them come up with anything. They just wouldn't have the capacity for that.

Some teachers were concerned that in teaching in a facilitative mode and not providing strong teacher guidance or input that the confidence of the child in art would be affected and that the children would not achieve their potential in art. For example, Claire argued;

I think that in terms of the child's confidence that when children produce things they need to be proud of what they have produced. They need to be proud to go home and show their Mums and Dads what they have produced. I am not talking about doing the lesson for them. I'm talking about giving them certain structures within which they can work.

Other teachers pointed out that it was difficult to know when to interfere or input in children's art work and when to leave children to their own devices and how much input in a lesson was appropriate. In the words of Robin;

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

It's very difficult to know when to help or not and often if you don't give some direction, particularly in art, you'll just have a big blob on the page and at the end of the exercise the child won't feel that they have achieved anything in particular.

In the final analysis teachers were using their own judgement in implementing this curriculum approach based on whether it was practicable in the classroom or not. When speaking about implementing a teacher as facilitator approach, Sarah suited or adapted the curriculum to the context that she was working in, a practice that writers such as Sarason (1996) and McLaughlin (1987) have referred to as was indicated in Chapter Two;

We have been great to implement the curriculum to the best that we can but we have to do it in a realistic way. There are things that you just know, as an experienced teacher, are not going to work.

Other teachers persisted in having strong input into lessons in art and chose to ignore the 'teacher as facilitator' curriculum approach. Helen made the comment;

Sometimes you look at some of the art and you think, there's no way that a four year old did that. It is more likely that the teacher made it themselves.

***The Teaching of Art***

An issue that arose in the school regarding teachers embracing a 'teacher as facilitator of learning' approach is the way in which art was taught in the school. Out of eleven teachers in the school seven teachers had a Special Needs Assistant (S.N.A.) in the classroom. Although the S.N.A. was allocated to one child with special needs in the

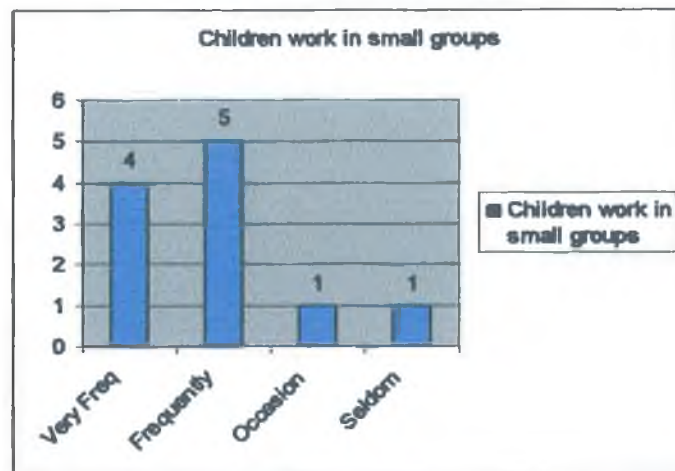
*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

classroom, teachers made use of their Special Needs Assistant to help out in other curriculum areas. One area where the S.N.A. was particular helpful was in the teaching of the Visual Arts. When asked in the questionnaire to respond to the question, *Does your Special Needs Assistant help you in any way in the area of the Visual Arts?*, all seven teachers with assistants responded that they received help in art from their Special Needs Assistant. One teacher remarked, 'She's wonderful'.

The interviews took a more in depth look at the role of the Special Needs Assistant in the teaching of art with a view to discovering whether the presence of an S.N.A. was interfering with teachers taking on the role of facilitator of learning in order to promote individual creativity in art work. In some cases the Special Needs Assistant was used by the teacher to help out at the planning and organisational stage of a Visual Arts lesson and so the S.N.A. was not interfering with the teacher's role as facilitator of learning. For example, Helen described how she would make use of the S.N.A. in the teaching of art;

I have an S.N.A. who would facilitate an awful lot of the art in the class. She would facilitate me to teach the art. I would maybe give her a list on Wednesday of the things that I would need and she will go off and collect them all which would save me a lot of time. When I come into the class I know that all the things are going to be there ready to go so that's great.

However, this was not always the case. Responses from the questionnaires would indicate that most teachers in the school straddled their teaching of art throughout the day and taught art in small groups at a table in the wet area of the classroom. See graph below:



**Figure 4.2 Frequency with which teachers teach art with small groups of children.**

**N=11**

In some cases, for those teachers with an S.N.A., this consisted of the teacher telling the Special Needs Assistant the idea for the art lesson and sending children over to the Special Needs Assistant who would then instruct the children and ensure that children achieved the teacher's desired result. The teacher would at this time be teaching other curriculum areas to the rest of the class. In such cases the teacher was not acting as a 'facilitator of learning' and the Special Needs Assistant had taken on the role of art teacher. Moreover, the Special Needs Assistant would not be aware of the approaches that the curriculum would suggest for teaching art. Nora described the situation for some teachers in the school;

I know that some teachers use the S.N.A. to teach art to small groups but I don't really agree with that because if the S.N.A. is doing the art with a small group I

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

don't think that the teacher has full control or I think that the S.N.A. would be inclined to do the art for them and guide the children too much. I think that's what happens when you let the S.N.A. do art.

Robin also felt that Special Needs Assistants were causing a block to the implementation of the curriculum pedagogical emphasis on teacher as facilitator and on the emphasis of the individual creative process in the curriculum. While teachers continued to use assistants to facilitate the teaching of art in this way certain pedagogical emphases will fail to be implemented in full. In this teacher's words;

I feel that often Special Needs Assistants feel that part of their duty is to help with art. It's kind of a vicious circle really. They might go around looking for work or samples that they can use because they feel that they have to be churning stuff over and over again which is a different problem.

*Class Profile: Class size, Student Diversity and the Need for Help in the Classroom*

Class size was a major issue that impacted on whether teachers could take on the role of facilitator of a creative process for their students. This was particularly prevalent at infant level where teachers felt that one person in a classroom full of demanding children was simply not practical in terms of the teacher being able to fully implement an approach that places the teacher in the role of facilitator of learning. Young children were too demanding for this approach to be effective. Teachers felt that this curriculum approach almost necessitated one to one adult help which was not available in the classroom and the need for extra adult help in order to facilitate this approach was keenly felt. Claire described what happens when teachers of infants try to implement this approach;

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

The children all have their pieces of fabric and they're sitting at their table with their scissors. You've got junior infants. The first cry is 'teacher, I can't cut this can you help me?' You're going to one table and you'll have the same cry coming from two or three tables at the same time, 'teacher I can't find my x, y, or z. You really would need one adult at each table to make sure that the child does not become too frustrated.

Helen experienced a similar difficulty;

It's probably junior infants really but even in senior infants or first and second class, there are a lot of times when you would need to be in the four corners of the room at the same time and you physically can't be.

While teachers often taught art in small groups in order to overcome this difficulty, this also presented problems for them in terms of trying to keep the rest of the class going in the meantime. Nora described the issue here;

You would need to multiply yourself. You cannot meet the needs of the children when there is only one of you and twenty two children. It is difficult when you are working with a group and have to keep an eye on the rest of them. It does put pressure on as a subject. To work this curriculum you definitely need at least two people in the classroom.

Diversity in the classroom put further pressure on teachers. Teachers described the effects of having a lively class, for example, which might lead the teacher to abandon the whole individual creative process approach where the teacher is acting as facilitator and instead, in the words of Robin, 'stick with safe lessons'. Sarah made the point that;

Ideally you should be able to do anything with any type of class but when it actually comes down to it you can't if the class is lively and difficult to control. It is very difficult to spend time doing the more active subjects, which would be art.

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

Teachers were also aware of the noise level of the class during lessons that involved the teacher acting as facilitator and the children producing their own individual art products. Teachers felt that if an activity meant that the class would be noisy that this would put the teacher off teaching that activity with the class. Teachers felt, in this regard, that if their class were seen to be noisy that they would not be perceived as being good teachers. In the words of Sarah;

A lively class would impact on the frequency with which you would engage with certain activities and ways of doing things. Especially if you have no Special Needs Assistant and you were to teach a whole class lesson there is the danger of the class being noisy. You don't want your class to be noisy. If the class is seen being noisy it looks like they're not working.

Diversity also impacted on teachers applying guided discovery learning approaches in the sense that teachers found it difficult to control and pace lessons for diverse groups of children with varying levels of needs. This was particularly the case in large groups where some children finished work in a relatively short time and others took a more slow and measured approach to their work. Helen described this difficulty as she experienced it;

If you are doing art as a whole class lesson, some of the children would be finished. Some children would take their time and put in great detail whereas others are finished quickly. To cater for them all is quite difficult really.

### **Conclusion**

Teachers in the school tried to embrace the pedagogical curriculum changes that placed them in the role of facilitator of the creative process in art. However, teachers experienced difficulties in this regard. Teachers' difficulties mostly stemmed from their own beliefs about the necessity of teaching skills in art at junior school level. Further difficulties arose from the way in which some teachers organised the teaching of art in the school. Finally, class profile impacted on how a teacher would embrace this pedagogical concept.

### **Uptake of New Strand Areas**

#### **Introduction**

Changes at the level of content brought about by the Revised Curriculum for Visual Arts (1999) are aimed at providing a 'broad-based and balanced programme' for primary school children (p.6, Teacher Guidelines). Essentially, the content of the primary school curriculum for Visual Arts has been broadened to include six strand areas that incorporate two dimensional and three dimensional work in art. The strand areas are as follows:

- Drawing
- Paint and Colour
- Print
- Clay



*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

- Construction
- Fabric and Fibre

The strand areas of Drawing, Paint and Colour and Construction existed in other forms in the previous 1971 curriculum. Therefore, strands that are new in this curriculum are, Clay, Print and Fabric and Fibre.

**Implementing New Strand Areas**

Teachers in the school had introduced the new strand areas into their teaching of art to the best of their ability and enjoyed having access to new materials and teaching art over a broader spectrum of strands. There was a greater balance of two dimensional and three dimensional art work to be seen in the school at the time of research. In Sarah's words;

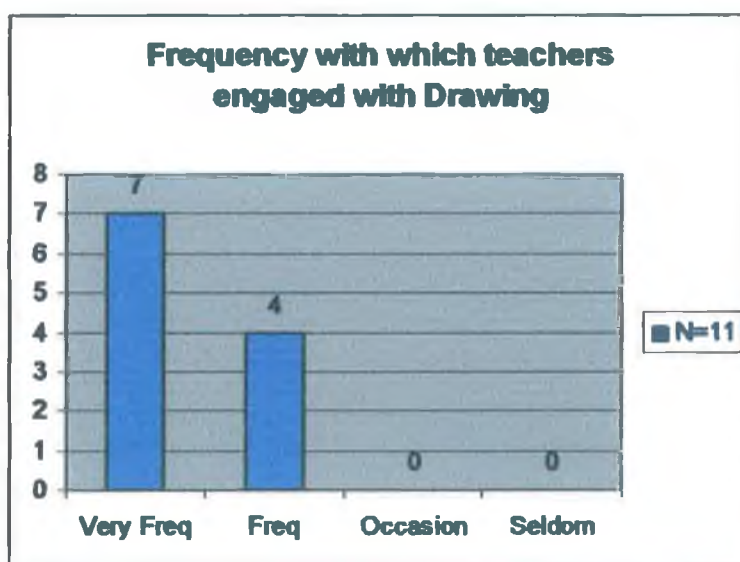
In terms of the new strands you can see work done in Fabric and Fibre and Clay. I definitely think that people have tried really hard to adapt. I think we use more strands now. We use more strands and we work with more materials.

This contrasts with the previous focus in the school where, in Nora's words, 'the main focus was on Construction, Painting and Drawing. There wasn't any emphasis on the other strands'.

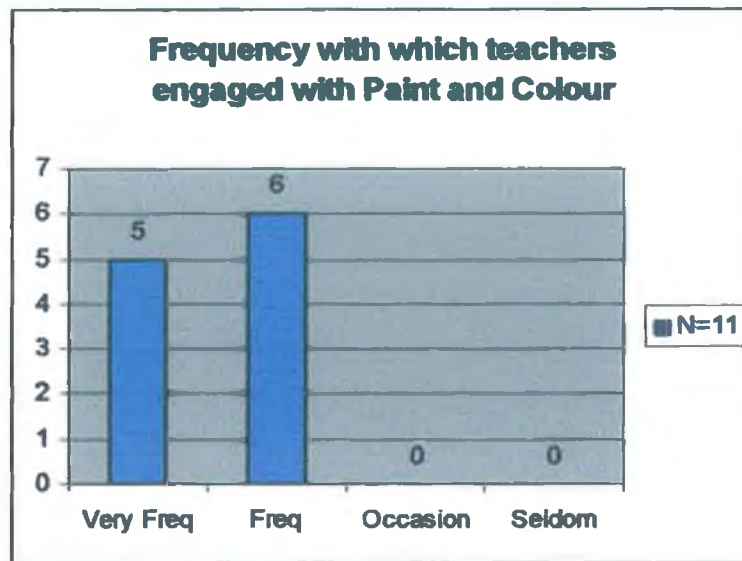
Although the new strand areas had been incorporated into teachers' practices in the classroom, the older strand areas, in particular Drawing and Paint and Colour, continued to dominate practice to a certain extent. Construction, Fabric and Fibre, Print and Clay

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

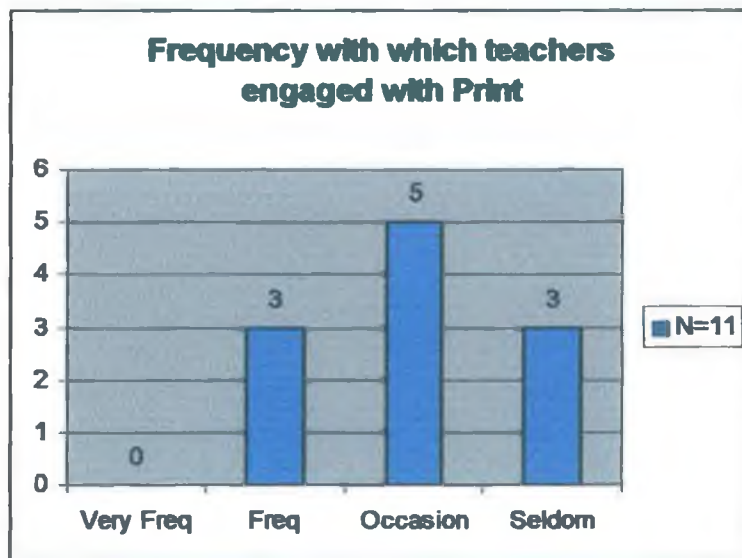
were strands that teachers would practice but would practice to a lesser degree in their classrooms. Responses to the questionnaires confirmed this. When asked on the questionnaire to indicate the frequency with which teachers would engage with the various strand units in their classrooms all eleven of the teachers responded that they would engage with Paint and Colour and Drawing either very frequently or frequently. However, the findings were more mixed for the other strands. All eleven of the teachers responded that Clay was engaged with only occasionally or seldom. Only three teachers responded that Print was an area that they would frequently engage with while five of the teachers engaged with Fabric and Fibre frequently. See graphs below for pictorial representation of teachers' responses.



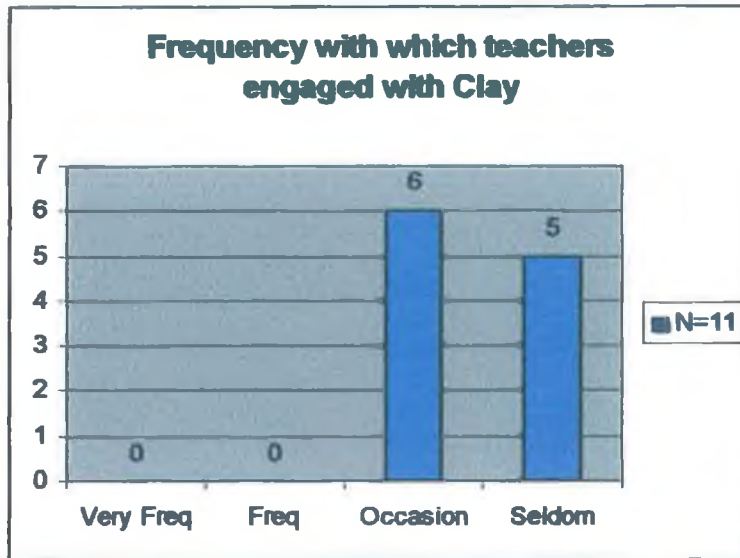
**Figure 4.3 Frequency with which teachers engaged with Drawing**



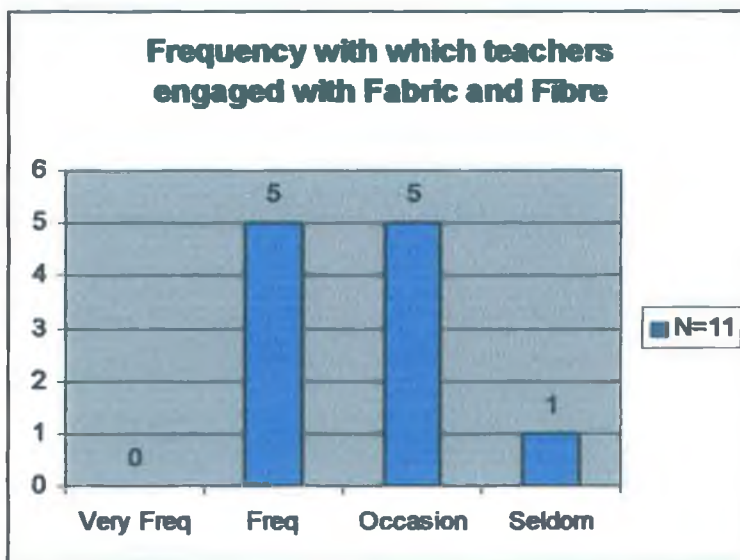
**Figure 4.4** Frequency with which teachers engaged with Paint and Colour



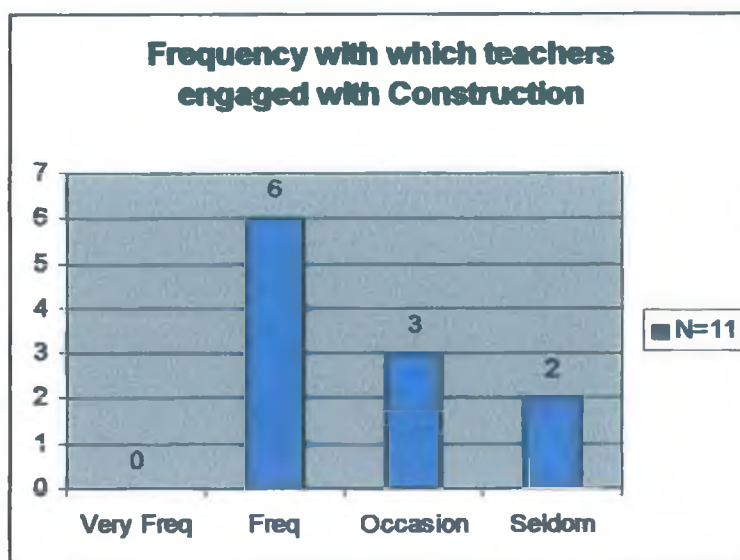
**Figure 4.5** Frequency with which teachers engaged with Print



**Figure 4.6** Frequency with which teachers engaged with Clay



**Figure 4.7** Frequency with which teachers engaged with Fabric and Fibre



**Figure 4.8** Frequency with which teachers engaged with Construction

### ***Teacher Creativity and Skill***

Teachers' own levels of skills in organising learning experiences in art impacted on whether teachers felt that they could introduce new strand areas into their teaching practices. Some teachers felt that their own skills in the new strand areas held them back in terms of whether they would teach a particular strand in their classroom. One teacher described how her own ability could influence her choice of what content to teach in the classroom;

**I would feel more competent in Painting, Drawing and Construction and Clay and less competent in Print and Fabric and Fibre. Having seen other people doing Fabric and Fibre I would tend to copy their ideas because I find it a bit daunting.**

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

Print is very daunting. I find it hard to think of ideas and it might put me off doing it sometimes.

Indeed most of the teachers felt more skilled in teaching the original strand areas. When asked in the questionnaire to respond to the statement, *I feel that I am skilled in organising learning experiences and teaching lessons in...the various strand units...* all of the teachers agreed that they were skilled in organising learning experiences in the strand areas of Drawing and Paint and Colour. However, the results were more mixed in the other strand areas with less than half of teachers responding that they were skilled in organising learning experiences in Clay, for example.

The lack of ideas for creative lessons in the new strands was causing a problem for teachers that could occasionally cause them to overemphasise lessons in the original strands such as painting rather than balancing work in all the strand areas. In Helen's words;

You do find yourself stuck for having a simple yet creative idea to do at junior level. Art can be very airy fairy and it's difficult to ground it.

Paint and colour and Drawing also continued to persist as the more dominant strand areas as teachers deemed these strand areas easy to organise, workable in the classroom context and believed that the children found them to be enjoyable. In school, where time was in short supply, strand areas that were easier in terms of organisation and management persisted. Sarah spoke about why a teacher would favour Paint and Colour over other strand areas;

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

I think paint is certainly the easiest subject in art. It's easier to get paint ready. In the other strands you have to be more organised and go and look for the various resources like in fabric you have to cut it and prepare it.

Nora also pointed out a reason why Paint and Colour would persist in the classroom;

Paint is much more accessible. It is easier to do it and it requires much less organisation in the classroom. It is also a very creative medium. It is probably the one that is easiest to work with, is cheapest and is one that the children actually enjoy.

Some teachers felt that the newer strand areas demanded more of the teacher in terms of organisation. They pointed to the need for extra adult help in the room when trying to organise art materials for lessons in Clay, Fabric and Fibre, Print and Construction. In Claire's words;

Print, Fabric and Fibre and Clay are probably the three areas that need far more adult help. They are three areas that require an awful lot more hands on help especially when you are working with glue and working with scissors.

***Resources and Access to Resources***

The relatively lower cost of paint and drawing materials in comparison to materials required in other strand units also accounted for the persistence in the popularity of Paint and Colour and Drawing. In Nora's words;

Paint costs very little and traditionally we've only had paint and a lot of drawing materials like crayons.

Materials used in other strand units such as Clay cost more money and so teachers in the school tended to use clay less as it was more of a precious resource in the school.

*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

Teachers also expressed a fear of wasting expensive resources such as clay. In Sarah's words;

Unless I have a very clear idea of what I am going to do we are lucky to take out the clay because I don't want to waste the money. I've had a few disasters. It was such a waste of money I think.

Resources were very well organised in the school and were held in a central area where people could access them readily. Teachers were pleased with the amount and variety of resources that were available to them and were generally pleased with the level of access they had to resources. Teachers felt that resources were available in the school to implement the curriculum. Robin described the way resources were organised in the school;

I think it is great to have a room. I was down there recently. There were a huge number of resources there to use so I don't think resources are a problem. I think that we are very well resourced in this school in relation to art.

From time to time certain resources were more readily available in the school. This often accounted for the popularity of strand units at any given time. Helen described how the availability of resources impacted on how she would choose to cover strand areas. In her words;

It varies from year to year. It depends on what materials are available. Last year I had access to a lot of fabric and, therefore, fabric became a very popular subject to use. This year we have been doing a lot of construction so it really depends.



*Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999)*

Some teachers did express the desire to be given some personal money so as they could purchase some of their own resources in art. In Helen's words;

A lot of people are spending their own money on things for their classrooms and there is only so much a teacher should have to do out of their own good will.

Teachers also felt that they would welcome increased government grants and funding for art. More often than not it was the case in the school that the art grant would be fully depleted in or around January of the school year. In Claire's words;

The beginning of the year is always the best time to access materials but like everything else they are restricted because of the amount of money that we have and that will probably continue to be an issue.

***Teacher Development in Art***

Teachers expressed concerns that their training and development needs in the area of the Visual Arts were not being met. Although they felt that the two in-service days had been beneficial and effective in terms of acquainting them with the new strands of the Revised Curriculum most of the teachers had difficulty remembering in-service five years later. Teachers felt that in order to continue to implement the newer strand areas that they would need some form of continual professional support or development. When asked in the questionnaire to describe supports that they felt were needed to help teachers implement the Visual Arts curriculum the responses were, for example; *Refresher days are always helpful after the curriculum has been fully implemented; Further review with*

*the help of outside facilitation where teachers can experiment with the strands they feel they have least implemented in their teaching.*

Teachers were also concerned that they did not feel that there were supports available to them to help them to implement the Visual Arts curriculum. In the words of Robin;

If there are any supports there I am not aware of them. I think if there are any courses there is the need to raise their profile and I think that the Department should be more proactive in arranging visiting artists to schools.

### **Conclusion**

Teachers had implemented the new strand areas of Fabric and Fibre, Clay and Print in the Visual Arts to the best of their ability and were enjoying the variety that the new strand areas had brought to their teaching. Teachers would experience their own levels of ability and experience or training as impacting on how and with what regularity they would teach the newer strand areas and would call for more professional support in this regard. Teachers were generally pleased with the organisation and availability of resources in the school. The availability of resources and ease of organisation and practicality of resources determined the regularity with which teachers would engage in work in the various strand units. The older strand areas such as Paint and Colour still dominated to a certain degree, mainly for the fact that paint lessons were easy to organise, enjoyable for the children and that paint is a relatively cheap and readily available resource.

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## **5. Discussion of Issues and Challenges in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum**

### **Introduction**

Chapter Four presented the findings of the research data on the implementation of aspects of the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999) in one Dublin junior primary school. In this chapter some significant issues that have emerged in the course of the study will be engaged with at a more critical and analytical level. Findings from the research will be examined and related to the literature pertaining to implementation, much of which has been discussed in detail in Chapter Two. In the course of this concluding chapter, experiences and understandings gained from the study will also be used to highlight certain areas for consideration regarding future curriculum development with teachers.

The chapter begins by discussing the issues and challenges that teachers in this study have faced in implementing aspects of the Visual Arts Curriculum investigated in the research. Specifically, it addresses institutional and organisational issues that have been found to impact on the implementation of individual creative approaches and guided discovery methods in the teaching of Visual Arts. It also looks at issues that have influenced the uptake of new strand areas.

Factors which have led to change in the school are also discussed in this chapter. Factors which have impeded change and those factors contributing to change are considered to be an 'overlapping series of dynamically complex phenomena' (Fullan, 1993, p21) which, together, give an overall sense of implementation in the school.

**Implementing Individual Creative Approaches and Guided Discovery  
Methods in the Visual Arts Curriculum, 1999 – Issues and Challenges**

**Institutional Issues**

**The Change Context**

In chapter two the significance of the change context in implementation was discussed in detail. This study further confirms that the local implementation context remains an important aspect of implementation (Sarason, 1982; Fullan, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994; Callan, 1994).

**Attempting to Change a School Culture**

Part of the school context significant for implementation is the culture of the school.

Reynolds and Skilbeck write that,

Over time...individual schools develop their own culture. What we often describe as the 'climate' or 'ethos' of the school is really the outcome of its normative and expressive order built up by successive intakes of individuals interacting with one another under the influence of expectations already established. (1976, p.34)

Teachers are influenced by and have to respond to the culture of the school in their decision making (ibid, 1976). Often the school culture exerts a conserving function over the level of change that may be permitted in the organisation of the school. In the words of Sarason (1990)

### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

The strength of the status quo – its underlying axioms, its pattern of power relationships, its sense of tradition and therefore what seems right, natural and proper – almost automatically rules out options for change. (Sarason, p.35)

The school culture of the junior school in question was an art culture and art held a very important position in the school. In Sarah's words,

I think that traditionally this would be a school that would do a particular amount of art in comparison to other schools. It is probably one of the things that we are quite strong in.

However, the art culture of the school was of a particular type and was one that favoured replication and product type art where the children had very little creative input in the work. As Helen remarked,

There was a lot of emphasis on copying what the teacher had done. The children's individual ideas were not really valued.

Effecting changes involved in the 1999 Revised Curriculum for Visual Arts where the individual creative processes of the child were to be valued above all was essentially effecting significant cultural change in the school under study. As culture exercises a conservative function over the level of change that may be permitted in an organisation (Evans, 2001) the strength of the existing art culture of the school was possibly the reason why, in the early stages of implementation, there was little change in evidence in the school. Teachers had accommodated to the changes in ways that involved little or no change (Sarason, 1990). It could be seen that the process oriented changes brought about

### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

by the 1999 curriculum for Visual Arts did not fit into the culture that already existed in the school. Callan points out the need to address the mismatch between school culture and curriculum change. In his words,

The move away from product orientation in learning to process orientation is premised on very different sets of assumptions and values about what learning should be taking place in our schools. The nature and strength of belief systems of teachers and principals embedded in organisations whose culture, structure and traditions vary considerably in regard to such change needs to be addressed. (Callan, 1994, p.120)

Sarason (1990) is of a similar viewpoint and makes the case for those working with curriculum change to make school culture a serious consideration,

The history of educational reform is replete with examples of interventions that either failed or had adverse effects because those involved had only the most superficial and distorted conception of the culture of the schools they were supposed to change. (Sarason, p.120)

#### **Teachers Dealing with Multiple Demands**

In attempting to change the school art culture and implement individual creative approaches and guided discovery methods to the teaching of Visual Arts, teachers in this study had to contend with expectations from a number of sources in the local context of the school. Consistent with the findings of McLaughlin, teachers in the study had to 'respond to multiple, simultaneous pressures and demands' (1990, p.15). Pressures and demands in the local context arose from sources both inside and outside of the school.

### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

The pressures that teachers experienced influenced their decision making regarding the implementation of the Visual Arts Curriculum confirming McLaughlin's view that,

Local factors such as size, intra-organisational relations, commitment, capacity and institutional complexity moulded responses to policy. (McLaughlin, 1987, p.172)

One such source of pressure and demands that teachers in this study spoke about arose from outside of the school and related to the institutional character of the curriculum itself.

#### **The Institutional Character of Curriculum**

In Chapters One and Two the curriculum was presented as an institution in its own right and could be seen to be controlled and shaped, to a large degree, by forces outside of the school. Teachers in this study experienced difficulty in implementing individual creative approaches in the teaching of Visual Arts as they had to approximate their practices in the teaching of art to expectations coming from outside of the school, in this case the parents of the children in the school. As parents expected teachers to send home art work with a product focus, teachers were almost afraid to go against what they felt parents expected. This is consistent with Reid's view that,

External forces and structures emerge, not merely as sources of ideas, promptings, inducements and constraints, but as definers and carriers of categories of content, role and activity to which the practice of schools must approximate in order to attract support and legitimation. (Reid, 1999, p.142)



### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

In the school under study, parents of children in the school acted as 'definers and carriers of categories of content, role and activity' and impacted on the extent to which teachers could implement curriculum approaches for the teaching of Visual Arts. The study indicates that teachers in the school were limited in what they could achieve without the support of outside publics, such as parents in this case. As Reid argues,

What teachers can achieve may be importantly limited by what the understandings of outside publics impose in the way of parameters within which choices must be made. (Reid, 1999, p.149)

The lack of communication between the home and the school regarding curriculum changes in teaching approaches further compounded this issue for the teachers in the school. Consistent with Fullan's belief that 'communication about specific innovations that are being implemented is a requirement of success' (Fullan, 1991, p.199), teachers were highly tuned to the fact that there was a lack of communication between the home and the school regarding changes in teaching approaches in Visual Arts. The fact that young children in a junior school could not be relied upon to communicate to parents about the changes and what it was they were doing in Visual Arts served to heighten the levels of teachers' fears and anxieties in taking up the new curriculum approaches. In this study teachers' concerns regarding parents and their opinions and judgements show the extent to which teachers were immersed in the institution of curriculum and that they were all too aware that,

### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

When curricular practice strays too far and too visibly from the category as understood by interested publics, the result is loss of support, student alienation, and failure and collapse of efforts to sustain the legitimacy of the activity. (Reid, 1999, p. 143)

#### **School and Teacher Values**

A significant number of teachers that took part in this study found that the institutional setting of the school did not offer them support in terms of implementing individual, creative approaches to the teaching of Visual Arts. Fundamentally, the values operating in the institution of the school did not match the values espoused in the 1999 Curriculum for Visual Arts. The lack of support for change within the institution of the school arose inadvertently from the management of the school who, in teachers' perceptions, continued to support replication and product type art. This finding is in keeping with Callan's view that the mismatch between process oriented curricula and the assumptions and values present in the school setting needs to be addressed (Callan, 1994).

Following from this, teachers in this study, while expressing the desire to try out individual creative curriculum approaches to the teaching of Visual Arts, were reluctant to do so as the institutional setting did not support, promote or value these efforts. This led, in the early stages of implementation, to the persistence of product driven art work confirming the views of McLaughlin who makes the point that,

Although teachers in a site may be eager to embrace change effort, they may elect not to do so, or to participate only in a pro forma basis, because their institutional setting is not supportive. (1990, p.13)

### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

Similarly, teachers in this study were dissuaded from using guided discovery methods of teaching and learning as these methods produced less in terms of art product. Teachers perceived that the school valued and rewarded quantity and turnover of art products. In response to this teachers persisted with didactic teaching methods and template based art work. Consistent with the findings of Eisner (1988), it could be seen in this study that 'efforts to help teachers learn how to teach inductively are not likely to succeed if the evaluation system the school employs rewards other types of teaching' (p.166-167).

Ultimately, however, teachers in this study valued their own reputations within the institution of the school over the educational value of new curriculum approaches. As teachers perceived that their ability as a teacher was judged on the standard of art on display on the walls outside their classrooms and in the school hall, teachers were reluctant to jeopardise their reputations and positions in the school by adapting curriculum approaches that could, in theory, undermine their teaching reputations. Therefore, teachers in this study adjusted their values to the values operating in the institution of the school. This finding is consistent with Reid's argument that,

Educator's models... tend to lack authority, and to be discarded rapidly in face of teachers' need to adjust to value systems of the schools where they must shape their careers. Hence teachers tend to promote stability rather than challenge it. (Reid, 1975, p.249)

The findings of the study would also confirm Hoyle's view that,

## *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

The most fundamental form of innovation is the transformation of teachers. All other forms of innovation – in materials, pupil groupings and so forth – are often dependent for their success upon a shift in the values of teachers. (Hoyle, 1973)

### **Isolated Teacher Culture and the Culture of Individualism**

Consistent with Hargreaves' view that, 'isolated teachers get little adult feedback on their value, worth and competence' (1994, p.167), in the school under study one of the only ways in which teachers could get recognition for their work was by impressing the management, auxiliary staff, parents and other teachers with the quality, quantity, display and turnover of the art work that they did with their class. For this reason, teachers were reluctant to adapt approaches to the teaching of art which could possibly remove this one source of professional affirmation from them. The isolated teaching culture of the school where teachers worked alone and praise was only forthcoming on work that was highly visible, such as in the Visual Arts, proved a barrier to the implementation of individual creative approaches to the teaching of art and led teachers to persist with product driven art approaches in the pursuance of professional affirmation.

Teachers in this study also spoke of the need for all teachers to embrace individual creative approaches in the teaching of Visual Arts otherwise they felt that curriculum change would not succeed and that individuals would continue impressing and gaining recognition for product type work carried out in Visual Arts. In Sarah's words,

If certain teachers are going to continue to put in an awful lot of input and the teacher next door isn't I don't think that is going to have a good affect or be a good reflection of art in the school.

This would seem to support Fullan and Hargreaves' theory that collaborative teacher cultures support and encourage change to a greater extent than teacher cultures where individualism prevails (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991).

### **Teacher Beliefs**

Fullan makes the point that in order for curriculum to be implemented effectively changes in belief need to occur (1993). Teachers in this study did not believe that guided discovery teaching methods in Visual Arts were appropriate at the junior school level and their own beliefs impacted on the extent to which they embraced guided discovery methods of teaching and learning in their classrooms. As teachers in the study did not agree on the need for change and the appropriateness of the change the findings are consistent with Fullan's theory that, 'the prospects for successful implementation are greater when those expected to carry out a change agree on the need and on the appropriateness of the innovations selected' (1992, p.34).

Furthermore, teachers in the study regarded teacher as facilitator of learning approaches to be unworkable in the classroom situation given the age group of the children involved, the large number of students and the lack of classroom help. It would seem that the changes involved in introducing 'guided discovery' methods of learning were not 'practical', did not address salient needs or fit well with the teachers' situation or include how to do it possibilities (Mortimore et al., 1988). Consistent with the research of Doyle

### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

and Ponder, it would seem that this curriculum approach did not pass the 'practicality ethic' test of teachers (1977-1978).

Fullan also makes the point that 'innovations are more likely to get implemented and stay implemented when they result in visibly improved student outcomes' (1992, p.36). Teachers in this study spoke about the negative affects that teaching in guided discovery mode could have on the confidence of the children and were unlikely to and did not implement this approach fully given the fact that guided discovery teaching did not, in their opinions, lead to 'visibly improved student outcomes'. In this sense, individual teachers, through their personal beliefs, moulded and shaped curriculum policy taking or leaving and adapting change proposals as they saw fit. Consistent with McLaughlin's theory teachers in this study have shown that, 'organisations don't innovate or implement change, individuals do' (1987, p.174) and that change is 'ultimately a problem of the smallest unit' (ibid).

#### **Teacher Seniority**

In the course of the interviews, teachers spoke about the reluctance of some more senior teachers to embrace individual creative approaches to the teaching of Visual Arts. Consistent with the findings of Eisner, it would seem that more senior teachers were inclined to persist with replication type lessons that formed part of their 'familiar teaching repertoires' possibly for the reason that,

### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

Familiar teaching repertoires require economy of effort, hence changes in the school that require new content and new repertoires are likely to be met with passive resistance by experienced teachers who have defined for themselves an array of routines that they can efficiently employ. (Eisner, 1998, p.159)

It was also found that senior members of the teaching staff had the ability to influence more junior teachers in terms of implementing curriculum approaches to the teaching of Visual Arts. In Nora's words, 'they say to you that you should do this art and you just agree because you think, oh well, they're more senior'. The fact that junior teachers took more senior teachers viewpoints into account when implementing the Revised Curriculum for Visual Arts confirms Hargreaves' finding that what teachers do in the classroom is 'powerfully affected by outlooks and orientations of the colleagues with whom they work now and have worked in the past' (1994, p.165). It would also give further weight to Sarason's theory that, 'schools...remain intractable to the desired reform as long as we avoid confronting their existing power relationships' (1990, p.5).

### **Organisational Factors**

#### **Time**

Confirming Hargreaves' theory (1994, p.99), it could be seen in this study that time was a 'subjective phenomenon' for the teachers in the school. Consistent with the findings of Goodson (1983), teachers in this study allocated more time and better time slots to the higher status core curriculum subjects of English, Mathematics and Irish. The persistence of product type art approaches was sometimes attributed to the lack of remaining time in the school day after other subjects were attended to. Like the teachers in Werner's study (1988), teachers in this study also felt pressure and anxiety because of excessive time

### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

demands to cover curriculum subjects, along with guilt and frustration because they were not implementing the new programme along the lines suggested in the Revised Curriculum.

Teachers in this study experienced their work as extremely busy, in one teacher's words, 'everything in school is getting busier and busier and busier'. Changes involved in the Revised Curriculum for Visual Arts were, as McLaughlin notes in the Rand Change Agent Study, 'simply part of a broader environment that pressed in upon their classrooms' (1990, p.14). Teachers found it difficult to make time to take up individual, creative approaches to the teaching of Visual Arts given the time constraints that they were already working under and the sense of curriculum overload that they experienced. Hargreaves argues that primary school teachers' work is 'profoundly polychronic' and that 'projects can be and must be pursued and interests and activities juggled according to the vicissitudes of the moment' (1994, p.104). Consistent with this theory, teachers in the school under study attended to demands according to their immediate priority at a given time. The 'polychronic' time-frame that teachers in this study worked under further compounded the difficulties experienced by teachers in introducing creative approaches and adopting guided discovery methods of teaching and learning.

Teachers also experienced time as a difficulty in terms of not having time to plan and organise for creative, discovery type lessons in Visual Arts for large numbers of students. Teachers perceived that the children in a junior school were too young to help them to



### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

prepare in the classroom leading them to fall back on replication style art lessons on occasion. These findings lend support to Callan's claim that,

They (teachers)...perceive active learning classes as requiring time to prepare materials, to gather ideas, to discuss with some colleagues ways of approaching topics. (1997, p.24)

#### **The Classroom Environment**

Westbury makes the point that,

We must see the classroom we know as an environment that contains demands (and therefore, implied tasks for the teacher) and constraints that are inherent in its nature, given existing goals, structures and resources. The interaction between the demands in the classroom and the constraints within it cause it to be a social setting that has only limited potential for manipulation by teachers. (1975)

Consistent with this theory, teachers in this study were limited in what they could achieve in the classroom given the 'existing goals, structures and resources' that they typically encountered in the classroom.

Teachers attributed much of their difficulty in implementing guided discovery methods of learning to class size and to the age of the children in the junior school. They spoke about the physical impossibility of trying to act as facilitator in the learning process and the need for them to 'multiply themselves' or 'be in the four corners of the room'. Similar to Sarason's theory that, 'one of the most frequent fantasies in which teachers indulge....is how enjoyable life in the classroom would be if class size were discernibly decreased'

### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

(ibid, p.192), teachers in this study spoke of how much easier it would be to implement guided discovery methods of teaching if they had additional help in the classroom.

Callan makes the point that,

Class contexts can lead to stressful teaching environments in which teachers resort to strategies of teaching which are designed for coping with the situation rather than for generating innovative or creative teaching. (Callan, 1997, p.26)

Consistent with this theory, teachers in this study encountered stressful teaching environments in particular in relation to teaching lively and diverse classes. Where classes were excessively demanding, teachers spoke about how such stressful classroom environments would necessitate abandoning individual creative type lessons and guided discovery learning approaches. In the words of one teacher,

Ideally you should be able to do anything with any type of class, but when it actually comes down to it you can't. If the class is lively and difficult to control it is very difficult to spend time doing the more active subjects, which would be art.

Callan also notes that 'noise is a factor which 'dampens teachers' enthusiasm for engaging in activities' (1997, p.25). Confirming this theory, teachers in this study were reluctant to take up active, guided discovery, creative approaches to the teaching of art as these methods could possibly be noisy and fly in the face of the school ethos of quiet working order. Therefore, in implementing such approaches in schools, 'one has to overcome the attitude that where there is noise, there is disorder and therefore no learning' (ibid).

### **Instructional Arrangements**

Hamilton makes the point that 'organisational structure' can create a number of problems when it begins to 'exert its own hegemony over the work of the individual teacher' (1975, P.190). Consistent with this theory, the instructional arrangements that some teachers applied in Visual Arts, where Special Needs Assistants took children for art lessons, exerted influence over the level of implementation of individual creative approaches and guided discovery methods of learning in some classes. While Special Needs Assistants were not aware of the changes involved in the 1999 Curriculum for Visual Arts they could not be expected to implement them in practice. Therefore, changes in approach to teaching the Visual Arts Curriculum required what Cuban calls, 'second order change', changes of organisational structure, patterns and practices of individuals (1988, p.228).

While teachers in this study employed a variety of instructional arrangements in the teaching of Visual Arts it could also be seen that the instructional system of the Visual Arts Curriculum,

Assumed a different form in every situation. It's constituent elements were emphasised or de-emphasised, expanded or contracted as teachers, students and others interpreted and reinterpreted the instructional system for their particular setting. (Hamilton, 1975, p. 182)

## **Uptake of New Strand Areas**

### **Teacher Creativity and Skill**

One level of change that Fullan refers to is change at the level of materials (1992). Although teachers in the school had changed their practices in terms of using a wider variety of materials in the new curriculum for Visual Arts, the persistence of the popularity of the strand areas of Paint and Colour and Drawing over Construction, Print, Clay and Fabric and Fibre was in part attributed to teacher skills and know how. This is consistent with Fullan's theory that 'it has long been known that skill and know how are central to successful change' (1993, p.16). It also reflects the findings of the NCCA who reported that 'Paint and Colour were the strands which teachers identified as most useful in the Visual Arts Curriculum, followed by Drawing' (2005, p.4)

Teachers in this study suggested that lack of creative ideas was a reason why the 3 dimensional strands of the Visual Arts curriculum were not as popular in the school. This finding is consistent with the recommendation made by the NCCA that 'further support and ideas for using the 3-D Visual Arts strands would support teachers in continuing to implement the full Visual Arts Curriculum' (2005, p.5).

The dominance of the strands of Paint and Colour and Drawing in this study was also attributed to their practical attractiveness for teachers in terms of organisation, time required for planning, and the effectiveness of how products looked on display. This

### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

finding lends further support to Mortimore et al.'s theory that practicality is a consideration of teachers when implementing new programmes (1988). It is also in keeping with Fullan's view that, 'the practicality of the innovation depends on the trade-off between the personal costs (time, effort) and actual benefits of getting and staying involved' (Fullan, 1992, p.36).

#### **Resources**

Williams (1980) makes the point that leaders must want implementation to the point of continually asking staff about implementation and committing resources to support implementation. Consistent with Williams' theory, teachers in this study attributed the availability, ease of access, and superior organisation of a wide range of resources, as organised by the school post holder for Visual Arts, as a reason why the new strand areas of the Visual Arts Curriculum had been taken up in the school.

Teachers in this study spent more time engaged with strands where the resources were less expensive and were in more plentiful supply in the school. Teachers also attributed the seasonal availability of certain resources as a reason why certain strands would dominate their practice. They would welcome increased spending on the Visual Arts and spoke of grants being depleted by January of the school year which impacted on the strands teachers could engage with. As a form of support, it could be seen that resources were 'critical during implementation' (Fullan, 1991, p.64).

### **The Change Process**

Given the issues and challenges to the implementation of aspects of the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999) discussed thus far, it would seem difficult for significant change to take hold in the school. Yet, despite these issues and challenges, teachers in this study spoke about significant shifts that have taken place where art work tends to be more individual in the school now and replication art and template based work are not as prevalent, as one teacher said, 'I find there has been a slow move towards individualism'. The following sections describe some change forces that have been operating in the school and that have affected this cultural shift.

### **Teacher Development**

Teachers in the study found the initial two days in-service that they received for Visual Arts to be helpful in terms of acquainting them with the new strand areas of the curriculum. They found the approach taken during in-service to be concrete and practical. However, consistent with the literature, this concrete and skill specific training was effective 'only for the short run' (Joyce and Showers, 1988; McLaughlin and Marsh, 1978, p.76).

Consistent with Fullan's theory that 'it is when people actually try to implement new approaches and reforms that they have the most specific concerns and doubts' (1991, p.85), teachers in this study felt the need for follow-through professional development during implementation in all areas of the Visual Arts Curriculum. Lending support to

### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

Fullan's theory, teachers in the school under study found that in-service training, like most forms of in-service, was 'not designed to provide the on-going, interactive, cumulative learning necessary to develop new conceptions, skills and behaviour' (ibid).

#### **The Role of Pressure in Change**

Fullan contends that,

There are many forces maintaining the status quo. When change occurs it is because some pressure has built up that leads to action. (Fullan, 1991, p.91)

Teachers in this study had accommodated to Revised Curriculum changes in the Visual Arts in ways that required the least amount of effort (Sarason, 1990) taking up new strand areas and using new materials but not changing their approaches to teaching the subject or incorporating change at the level of values and beliefs. They attributed the visit of an NCCA curriculum facilitator to the school about a year after in-service as the main source of pressure that caused them to think about and change their teaching approaches in Visual Arts and adopt more individual and creative approaches in their teaching.

Lending support to Evans' theory, it was clear from the interviews that teachers experienced the visit from the curriculum facilitator as an 'unfreezing' experience where the facilitator 'made the case for the innovation', 'emphasised the seriousness of the problem and the rightness of the solution', and 'challenged teachers' acceptance of and comfort with the status quo' (Evans, 2001, p.55). Also consistent with the literature

## *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

findings, it could be seen that teachers initially reacted angrily and at first dismissed the facilitator's disconfirmation (Evans, 2001). In the words of one teacher, 'it was a shock and there was an awful lot of disagreement'.

### **Support**

Pressure, however, needs to be combined with support if change proposals are to succeed (Fullan, 1991). Evans would argue, in this regard, that the change agent needs to,

Make clear his caring and support, his commitment to working with people to take the difficult steps towards new learning. (ibid, p.58)

This caring and supportive attitude was not experienced by teachers in the school at this time. In fact, in Robin's words, 'a lot of people felt intimidated to a certain degree'. The attitude taken by the facilitator showed little regard for the loss that teachers would experience in leaving behind the old product driven approach to art. There was a need for greater sensitivity and understanding of where the teachers were at in terms of the change. Marris expresses the need for reformers to give implementers the opportunity to assimilate change for themselves. In his words,

When those who have the power to manipulate changes act as if they have only to explain, and when their explanations are not at once accepted, shrug off opposition as ignorance or prejudice, they express a profound contempt for the meanings of lives other than their own. For the reformers have already assimilated these changes to their purposes, and worked out a reformulation which makes sense to them, perhaps through months or years of analysis and debate. If they deny others the chance to do the same, they treat them as puppets dangling by the threads of their own conceptions. (Marris, 1975, p.166)



## *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

Teachers in this study attributed curriculum change adherents such as young teachers trained in the Revised Curriculum as supports for the curriculum change. They also credited teacher professionalism as supporting the change, as one teacher said, 'teachers are taking it on board. They are doing their jobs and they are being professional about it'. Consistent with Fullan's theory that belief can follow mandated practice (1992), teachers in this study indicated that some change occurred as they began to implement the Revised Curriculum approaches for Visual Arts and that this has been a support for enduring change in the school. As Helen said,

I think that I am learning something by changing the possibilities and techniques, how the children might explore using new materials. Everything can be done in a different way.

It seems that although initially change has been stressful for the teachers in the school, it has also proved valuable as a learning experience. It is Block's belief, for example, that,

Every important learning experience we have ever had has been stressful. Those issues that create stress for us give us clues about the unlocked seeds within us that need attention. (Block, 1987, p.191)

### **The Role of Conflict in Change**

Fullan would contend that conflict is essential to any change effort (1993). Further pressure combined with support for change to a more process driven approach to teaching

### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

art arose from conflict within the school in the form of a lively debate that occurred regarding the matter in the school staff room. The heated debate provoked teachers once more to probe the meaning behind the educational value of a product driven approach to art. The staff meeting encouraged change by affording teachers the opportunity to think in a professional way about their practices regarding the teaching of art and helped to lead teachers to the 'deep ownership' that comes from the 'learning that arises from full engagement in solving problems' (Fullan, 1993, p.31). In this respect, teachers began to realise that,

People spark new ideas off each other when they argue and disagree – when they are conflicting, confused and searching for meaning- yet remain willing to discuss and listen to each other. (Stacey, 1992, p.120)

As Fullan would say, 'problems are our friends' (1993, p.p.21-22).

Furthermore, as a result of the staff meeting and the earlier visit from the curriculum facilitator, teachers were now realising that some teachers in the school were dismissing product driven art work as carrying little educational benefit. Therefore, those teachers who favoured product driven art work became a little more reticent about carrying out such work in their classroom and were almost shamed out of doing so. Evans points out that,

Unless something increases the cost of preserving the status quo, the conservative impulse and the cumulative impact of culture and past learning are too strong to permit innovation. (Evans, 2001, p.57)

### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

In the case of the school in this study the 'cost of preserving the status quo' had been increased as a result of these two significant occasions, the visit from the curriculum facilitator and the subsequent staff meeting debate.

It is most likely, however, that the greatest encouragement and spur for change in the school was a combination of the various factors already mentioned: the visit from the curriculum facilitator, the pressure from the staff meeting, the support of the junior teachers for change and the nature of the individual implementers as professional people.

As Fullan observes,

It takes a fortunate combination of the right factors – a critical mass – to support and guide the process of re-learning, which respects the maintenance needs of individuals and groups and at the same time facilitates, stimulates and prods people to change through a process of incremental and decremental fits and starts on the way to institutionalising (or if appropriate rejecting), the change in question. (Fullan, 1992, p.26)

### **Conclusion**

In Chapter Two it was argued that change is a complex and multifaceted undertaking. This chapter further confirms the earlier argument and shows change with teachers in schools to be an exceedingly complex endeavour. The nature of this complexity arises from the fact that Educational change involves, 'attempts at changing not just individual practitioners' practices, and their related values but also institutions' (Callan, 1994, p.1).

### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

It can be seen in this chapter that change in the school under study was influenced by a vast myriad of variables. The variables discussed in this chapter were in some cases institutional. For example, the culture of the school, teachers dealing with multiple demands, the values and beliefs of teachers and school management, the isolated teacher culture and culture of individualism and the seniority of teachers were just some of the institutional variables that impacted significantly on teachers implementing aspects of the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999).

Organisational constraints further impeded the implementation of the Visual Arts Curriculum in the school. Some organisational factors identified and discussed in this chapter included time, the busyness of the school day, class size, class diversity, noise, resources and the use of Special Needs Assistants in the teaching of Visual Arts. These factors restricted teachers in their endeavours to fully embrace curriculum change proposals.

However, institutional and organisational constraints were only part of the implementation picture for teachers in this study. The institutional nature of the curriculum itself also proved to be a powerful constraint for teachers implementing curriculum approaches to the teaching of Visual Arts and teachers were influenced in their decision making by the attitudes and opinions of parents and other interested publics. This study lent support to Reid's theory that 'school systems are organisations that are shaped from without' (1999, p.144) and that, 'even where proponents of pedagogical reform can convince professional colleagues of the value of their ideas, they

### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

still face the more essential and highly difficult task of converting outside publics' (ibid, p.147).

Given the institutional character of the curriculum, the institutional constraints teachers contended with and the organisational restrictions that teachers typically encountered it is difficult to see how change could take place in the school. However, interviews with teachers in this study and the observations of the researcher would suggest that important shifts in attitude have occurred in the school and curriculum approaches for the Visual Arts Curriculum are being implemented.

Certain factors or variables have influenced the significant change in school art culture from product focused, replication, teacher directed art to more individual, creative, teacher facilitated forms of work. Such factors included, for example, pressure to change arising from a school visit from an NCCA curriculum facilitator. Further pressure to change took the form of conflict in a school staff meeting which led teachers to evaluate their existing art practice. Pressure for change was combined with support for the change in the form of teacher adherents for curriculum change. Further support for the change was attributed to teacher professionalism. Also the changes that occur as a result of practice added additional support for curriculum change in the school (Fullan, 1992). In this study, the view taken by the researcher regarding factors operating for and against implementation echoes the view of Fullan who writes that,

### *Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

Factors operate as a system of variables over time. They are mutually reinforcing and the strategic importance and activities associated with any one factor can vary at different phases in the overall process. (Fullan, 1992, p.30)

Change at the level of implementing the new strands of the Visual Arts Curriculum and using new materials, the first level of change referred to by Fullan (1992), did not present much of a challenge to teachers in this study. However, curriculum change in the Visual Arts at the level of teaching approaches effectively required changes in teachers' practices, values and beliefs (ibid). Effecting such changes proved to be more difficult and teachers' practices, values and beliefs proved to be stubborn to change and difficult to penetrate. In this regard, the study has highlighted some areas for consideration for future development with teachers.

Firstly, the study would show that change proposals can fail if they do not impact the institution of the school, the culture of the school, the values and attitudes of teachers and the norms present in the local context and the institution of curriculum itself. Rather than blaming schools and teachers for failure to implement it is necessary to examine the curriculum policies and change proposals to see do they fit and can they work in the existing institution of the school. In this regard, the mismatch between curriculum proposals and the existing goals, roles and structures of the school need to be addressed (Callan, 1994).

Secondly, it would seem that if government departments are serious about introducing new teaching practices such as 'guided discovery' and individual approaches to teaching

*Discussion of Issues in Implementing the Visual Arts Curriculum*

in the Visual Arts Curriculum (1999) then there is the need for 'second order change', change at the level of school organisational structure, patterns and practices of individuals' (Cuban, 1988, p.228). Without such changes the mismatch between curriculum reality and curriculum rhetoric goes on.

Thirdly, the issue of teacher development needs serious consideration. Reformers need to make clear the need for change and the 'rightness' of the solution (Evans, 2001). Pressure to change must be combined with support in the form of on-going, relevant and practical professional development for teachers (Fullan, 1991).

Finally, schools, school leaders and individual teachers need to become active agents in change, they need to become aware of the change process and develop within their own schools collaborative working environments that support change and renewal. This study lends support to Bennett's view that,

The true realities of a change process are only to be determined by a collation of the unilateral perspectives of all the individuals involved. (Bennett, 1996, p.54)

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# **Appendix**

## **Teacher Questionnaire**

*Appendix – Teacher Questionnaire*

**1. Indicate how long you are teaching: (Please tick the relevant box)**

0-5 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	6-10 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
11-15 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	16-20 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
21 years +	<input type="checkbox"/>		

**2. Answer only if you completed your training in or after 1999. Please tick relevant box.**

**How adequate would you say your initial teacher training has been in terms of acquainting you with the 1999 curriculum for Visual Arts?**

Adequate	<input type="checkbox"/>	More than Adequate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Less than Adequate	<input type="checkbox"/>	Doesn't apply	<input type="checkbox"/>

**3. As a result of the in-service that you attended, how well do you understand the 1999 Visual Arts curriculum for each of the following strand units? (in terms of aims/objectives and emphases)**

*Please write 1, 2 or 3 in each box where 1 = very good understanding, 2 = quite good understanding, 3 = would benefit from further in-service. If you have not attended in-service for Visual Arts please proceed to question 4.*

	Aims/Objectives	Emphases
Drawing		
Paint&Colour		
Print		
Clay		
Fabric&Fibre		
Construction		

*Appendix – Teacher Questionnaire*

4. I feel that I am skilled in organising learning experiences and teaching lessons in the following strands of the Visual Arts curriculum.

*Please tick one box from the given choices of strongly agree, agree, disagree etc. that most closely represents how you feel for each of the six strand units.*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Drawing					
Paint&colour					
Print					
Clay					
Fabric&Fibre					
Construction					

5. Please indicate the frequency with which you engage in your classroom with each of the strands.

*Please tick one box that most closely represents your practice for each of the six strands*

	Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom
Drawing				
Paint&Colour				
Print				
Clay				
Fabric&Fibre				
Construction				

6. Please indicate the frequency with which you feel you can maintain the following emphases while teaching in Visual Arts (*In the case of each statement please circle one number that most closely represents your practice*)

Art as inspiration and not as something to copy

Very Frequently      Frequently      Occasionally      Seldom  
 1                      2                      3                      4



*Appendix – Teacher Questionnaire*

Children as designers of their own individual work

Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom
1	2	3	4

Teacher as facilitator not teaching techniques or interfering in creative process

Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom
1	2	3	4

Children given opportunities to explore a wide variety of media

Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom
1	2	3	4

Children responding to own work and work of peers

Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom
1	2	3	4

**7. What criticisms, if any, would you have of the 1999 curriculum for Visual Arts?**

*Appendix – Teacher Questionnaire*

8. How would You rate these subjects in terms of their perceived importance in the Primary School Curriculum? (Please rate on a scale of 1-9 where 1 is most important and 9 is least)

Irish	<input type="text"/>	English	<input type="text"/>	Mathematics	<input type="text"/>
S.E.S.E	<input type="text"/>	P.E.	<input type="text"/>	S.P.H.E.	<input type="text"/>
Music	<input type="text"/>	Drama	<input type="text"/>	Visual Arts	<input type="text"/>

9. The Visual Arts occupy a position of importance in this school (Please circle one number that is closest to how you feel)

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	5

10. The culture of this school is one that encourages students to enjoy the experience of their work in the Visual Arts as opposed to focusing on the outcomes of work (Please circle one number that is closest to how you feel)

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	5

11. Children's age and levels of abilities in a Junior School sometimes means that children cannot always complete all art tasks alone (Please circle one number that is closest to how you feel)

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	5

*Appendix – Teacher Questionnaire*

**12. How do you organise your time for teaching Visual Arts? (Please tick the box that is closest to representing your practice)**

One hour lesson per week

Block time (e.g. 3 hours one week, no art following week, 1 hour next etc.)

**13. Please describe how children in your class work during lessons in Visual Arts (For each statement circle the number that most closely represents practice in your classroom)**

Whole class work together

Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom
1	2	3	4

Children work in small groups

Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom
1	2	3	4

**14. Does your Special Needs Assistant help you in any way in the area of the Visual Arts? (Please tick one box)**

Yes

No

Doesn't apply

**15. Are there sufficient resources available in the school to implement the Visual Arts curriculum in the classroom? (Please tick relevant box)**

Yes

No

Not sure

*Appendix – Teacher Questionnaire*

**16. Are you satisfied with the way in which resources for Visual Arts are organised in the school? (Please tick relevant box)**

More than satisfied       Satisfied   
Less than satisfied       Unsure

**17. What outside/government supports (in terms of in-service, funding etc.) do you think are needed in order to help teachers with the Visual Arts curriculum? (Please write answer in box below)**

**18. What obstacles or barriers do you experience in teaching the 1999 Visual Arts curriculum? (Please write answer in box below)**

**19. Please suggest ways in which the school could improve in supporting the implementation of the Visual Arts curriculum?**