

# TEACHING LANDSCAPES

## Report by the Fine Art Group

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The research reported here into fine art is part of a larger project that investigated what is distinctive about teaching and learning practices in a range of art and design disciplines at the University of the Arts London. The research set out to provide rich, in-depth data that increases understanding of these complex phenomena. This report contributes to the larger picture and is written independently of research carried out into other disciplines. Therefore, its findings need to be compared with those of other disciplines, in order to fully tease out what is distinctive fine art.

### **2.0 METHODS**

The overall methodology and the methods used were determined by the group of researchers which worked on the project. These decisions were made in the light of advice provided by Paul Trowler, Professor of Higher Education at Lancaster University, who was the consultant for the project. The research set out to discover what was happening, rather than to be evaluative. The same methods were used by all researchers. However, it is important to note that for this kind of research, the personality and experience of each researcher will undoubtedly vary and influence the outcome. For this reason, all researchers were themselves experienced tutors in the fields they researched. Hence they were experts. The advantage of this is the quality and depth of understanding they can bring to data collection and analysis. However, a possible disadvantage could be the danger that they would impose their particular bias on the data. To reduce this risk, it was decided that wherever possible more than one researcher would investigate each discipline. In the case of Fine Art there were two researchers. They did not know each other before beginning the research and undertook their respective data collection and analysis independently, only comparing data after they had produced their respective findings.

#### **2.1 Sample**

It was decided to draw the sample from the population of fine art tutors at the University. Special case sampling was used and informants were selected for interview because it was anticipated they would be a rich source of information (Patton, 1990). Six people were interviewed (three females and three males) and they came from two Colleges of the University and four fine art disciplines: painting, sculpture, drawing and photography.

### **College One**

1 male, teaches on the BA Photography Course

1 female, teaches on the BA Painting Course

1 female, teaches on the BA Drawing Course

### **College Two**

1 male, teaches on the BA Sculpture Course

1 female, teaches on the BA Sculpture Course

1 male, teaches on the Painting Course

## **2.2 Design of instrument**

The data were collected using a schedule for conducting semi-structured interviews. The project consultant, Paul Trowler, took a lead in designing this instrument and his suggestions were then modified in the light of discussion by the group. For example, a question was added about the amount of teaching experience, since it was thought this might be an important variable. The schedule had three sections: the first collected factual information; the second asked questions related to photographs and the third asked general questions. The schedule was piloted and minor modifications made.

## **2.3 Data collection**

Informants were interviewed through semi-structured interviews. Researchers asked open questions, which had been worked out in advance and should not be changed. However, unlike in structured interviews, supplementary questions may be posed and the researcher has leeway to respond to individual circumstances in the field (Patton, 1990).

Before the interviews, interviewees were asked to take photographs of their teaching area and select one in particular that they would like to talk about. In addition, other photographs were shown by the researchers during the interviews and interviewees were asked to comment on these. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

## **2.4 Data analysis**

Data were analysed by the two researchers working independently. Data were extracted and organised into four main themes: space; discipline; student, tutor. These themes have also been used as headings for this report.

## 3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Space

The relationship of tutor, student and discipline to space is complex. The space or type of learning environment affects the content and delivery of the fine art curriculum and can reinforce or challenge the traditions of the discipline. Space is a term used by fine art academics in a number of contexts; in the experience of the researchers most frequently it is used to define the physical arena where the work is made or placed, but it may also be simultaneously used in a slightly expanded sense to include spatial aspects of a student's artwork. Hence work produced by students on a Drawing, Painting or Sculpture course could involve an engagement with space and to be realised this artwork could require a greater space than students are normally allocated – and would not necessarily even be indoors.

#### *3.1.1 Traditions of space usage and their impact*

According to King-Hammond (2007) it is those courses that can offer good quality studio space that are the most successful. The importance that space plays for fine art teaching was stressed by interviewees. All the Fine Art Practitioners (FAPs) interviewed identified their courses as 'studio practice' and this appeared to be crucial way of defining the focus of their courses: 'the material culture is hugely important' (FAP2). This studio practice means that the majority of the students' course work was produced onsite, within the University workshop and studio provision. Studios are divided, often with screens, to provide 'a base studio space, which every full-time painting student has allocated to them. And it's a certain number of square metres per student. The space is progressively bigger and of better quality as the students go through the three years' (FAP6).

FAP2 talked about the evolving architecture and its impact on the building usage. She described a building that included both nineteenth century and modernist buildings as typical of most University sites and commented that it 'very much affect[ed] what happens within the studios'. In her opinion the way buildings are currently used is 'partly historic and partly economic'. She believed that other disciplines [she cited Graphics and Photography] would also benefit from the traditionally generous studio allocation her subject [Painting] has received. This was born out by the other interviewees [from Photography and Drawing] who stated that their subject areas would benefit from greater studio allocations. FAP2 went on to suggest that 'most art schools operate in buildings designed for practices that are...belated ..now', so there was a sense of adapting and re-organising available resources. In general there was a belief in the benefits of increased physical space being allocated to studio-based courses, whereas the opposite had been happening:

'Studio space is quite limited' (FAP4); 'In an ideal world there would be more space and certainly there was a lot more space per student on the painting course...10 years ago' (FAP6).

### *3.1.2 Types of space*

#### *3.1.2.1 Studio space*

With the exception of those working in a Sculpture department, where no particular space (e.g. workshop) was considered more important than the others, the most important 'space' for the FAPs was the studio, that is the working site and 'home base' for the students' work. The studio was used as a tool for the delivery and management of the course in a number of ways.

The 'curation' or mix of students was important aspect of peer learning. The two interviewees that allocated students' studio space on the Painting and Drawing courses in one college (FAP1 & 2) physically grouped students in ways that they thought would enhance their learning. For example mixing second and third year students (FAP1 & FAP2) or mixing 'complementary or different practices' (FAP2). It is interesting that, unlike the Continental European atelier system where students will work in the 'school of' the lead tutor/artist, the groupings here are often used to 'bounce off different practices rather than being in groups which would tend to have...a certain agenda or...way of making' (FAP2). It is also noteworthy that mixing students who are at different stages is an important component of the apprentice system of learning (Rorabaugh, 1986).

It was important to have students onsite for course delivery, for example tutorials could be convened at short notice and be 'short and regular' (FAP2 & 1). When a base studio wasn't available this was regretted and meant that it 'completely alters the way you do things....it can't really happen organically' (FAP3).

The effectiveness of teaching was also enhanced by students' working processes being available for staff and student viewing. This allows for tutorials to be conducted in the students' working space so that staff and students can walk around the studios, building an interaction that was 'fluid....conversational.... less passive' (FAP1). On the other hand, when this wasn't able to happen it was problematic as FAP3 reported:

The big thing from my point of view is that when you have a studio space you see students making mistakes all the time in front of you. When you don't you don't tend to see the mistakes because you stick those in a drawer....and it's one of the most productive things about being an art student is that you see other people making not very good work sometimes...

It was felt that the studio space was closely allied to fine art. Nearly all fine artists have a dedicated space for producing (and storing) art. This research found that having a demarked space or allocated space allowed students to work in a way that gave them visual access to their research material - often pinned on studio walls. It allowed them to work on the 'flat bed picture plane' and on the walls as well as allowing time for works to dry (FAP2). It also provided an opportunity for them to think about their visual artwork in relation to the physical space it was in, something seen as academically desirable by all the FAPs.

### *3.1.2.2 Gallery space*

The gallery spaces discussed included both on and off site environments. All FAPs deemed it important to see the students' work 'isolated' or away from the space where it was made, in order to take stock of the work and critically analyse it. In a gallery space students learn 'how [their work] exists in the world' (FAP1). The fact that the gallery space is seen as crucial might be surmised from the fact that, when asked to photograph any aspect of their teaching for this project, two out of six interviewees chose to photograph a gallery space.

FAP1's image specifically showed a group critique taking place onsite in a gallery space that was also a corridor where the interruptions of people passing down the corridor 'was somewhat irritating and disruptive'. However she continued: "in some ways I wouldn't change that much about that particular situation because.... there is something about how informal the space is'.

FAP3's image was of an offsite gallery space which was a deliberate attempt to address the issue of lack of studio space. FAP3 explained, 'when I arrived on this course they weren't very good at discussing the decisions they were making and vital decisions about how to interact with the viewer. At the critique depicted the students are required to talk about the decisions they have made relative to the space'. More information about the exhibition of work can be found in the discipline section of this report.

### *3.1.2.3 Project space*

Project spaces were deemed to be important in a sculpture department:

As well as the studios, we have a project space, which is really an important part of our teaching and learning environment... lots and lots of activity happens in here... For example, students, um, put in proposals and put on two day exhibitions. And, and even then they can, it doesn't have to be a two day exhibition, it can just be simply trying something out, so someone in there at the moment knocking around, testing things out, making a video. Um, we also use it for meetings with students, seminars, student presentations, um, we, the first years do workshops in there, and also we do

interviews in there sometimes... And it sort of becomes amazing to have a sociable function, a social function, because, um, there is quite often little openings in the evenings so, first, second and third years get to know each other and they get to see people's work. Sort of really, to my mind, one of the most valuable things we've got. (FAP4)

It should be noted that there are also project spaces set aside within allocated studio space on the Drawing, Painting and Photography courses – although these are not referred to in these interviews. These spaces can be booked in advance for a number of days (the longest session is one week) by students who wish to explore installation, large scale or other work that would benefit from a larger space than they are individually allocated.

#### *3.1.2.4 Workshop space*

All three FAPs who were shown an image of a room that contained a suite of computers responded that it looked like the kind of space they would use as a technical resource, for technical instruction rather than for teaching. FAP3 reported technical workshops are dealt with by technicians or lecturers come in to specifically do workshop delivery and by and large we don't get involved in that'. However, a computer was seen as 'a tool within the studio environment' and FAP2 reported, 'we have sort of roving computers that we can roll around on trolleys'. The IT suite was seen as:

a tool to show them through an application.....I think that rather than choose to work in that environment they would probably choose to have their own computer which they are [using]...at home or in the...studios. (FAP2).

A desk-based environment was seen as foreign to a fine art course (FAP1). Other workshop spaces (metal, woodwork, screen print etc) were only mentioned in passing by one of the sculpture FAPs and not by any of the other interviewees, although they would be likely to be important spaces in relation to some fine art courses (e.g. Sculpture, Printmaking, Photography etc.).

#### *3.1.2.5 Other spaces*

Other spaces used for delivery on the courses mentioned by interviewees were lecture halls and seminar spaces for the delivery of the courses' theoretical provision. The consensus here was that these spaces should be fit for purpose and the difficulties of rearranging rooms for multi purpose were noted by two of the FAPs.

FAP6 explained how on a Painting course, different spaces were used in different ways. So for formative assessment and informal critiques, the studio space was used. However, for summative assessment they would use other spaces.

There are also kind of more formalised, cross-year, cross-pathway and cross-mode critiques which happen outside of the studio space and in other seminar spaces or the lecture theatre for example. And those, because they take students from different parts of the campus that are some distance away from each other...those events need to happen outside the studio. (FAP6)

From the point of view of the two FAPs who teach on a Sculpture course, the studio space, where students are allocated their own space, had a less prominent role and instead they talked about 'the general area' which included several spaces, with staff offices and the project space being singled out by one of the Sculpture staff interviewed:

There are also kind of there're lots of different things that make that teaching environment and that extends from things like the kind of hub of the office, you know, the HQ, the office and all the stuff that goes on in there, and I do quite a lot of teaching in the office actually. You see it as part of the teaching environment. And then also to the studio, um, the workshops, um, and the general, you know, the yard even, just the general area. (FAP4)

### **3.2 Discipline**

Corner (2002) and Rinder (2007) have identified a strong trend in university fine art teaching away from teaching specific disciplines or expecting students to master a medium of choice. This was borne out by many of those interviewed for this research. The undergraduate courses on which the FAPs teach have single discipline nomination (Drawing, Photography, Painting, Sculpture) however, students' work rarely confined itself to single medium. In one of the two Colleges where this research was undertaken, all of the FAPs described their courses as being fine art based with FAP3 clarifying 'it is a course that sites itself relative to art subjects rather than to professional photography or a more industry facing vocational approach'. In the case of the Painting course at the other college, the interviewee claimed that it was focused on painting only, although evidence seen by the researchers, such as the Degree exhibitions, somewhat belies this.

All but one of the FAPs had taught on other fine art undergraduate and postgraduate courses. There was a strong sense of shared values within the wider category of fine art; 'within fine art...I don't think there is really significant differences' (FAP3). 'Largely I think there would be a form of consensus' (FAP2), although a difference of approach between individual tutors and media was noted. FAP2 described her sense of her subject as 'beyond medium specific – a philosophy'. Sculpture was also defined very broadly:

I teach Sculpture, which, um, encompasses eh, certain amount of theoretical and contextual kind of, not exactly 'contextual studies' but you know, the contexts of sculpture, the wider context, the wider context of Fine Art and then also Professional Practice writing proposals, exhibiting, you know, all of that, feeds in to what I teach. (FP4)

### *3.2.1 Skills*

Singerman (2007, p100) expresses the view that within university art departments 'the assumption is that young artists no longer learn traditional craft skills.' Yet FP6, in discussing the exceptional Painting course, felt strongly that teaching painting involves teaching traditional skills, while acknowledging that it was bucking a trend and 'could be perceived as being nostalgic or reactionary'.

Within the fine art field I think painting is different and what's special about it is that the very traditional, manipulative technical skills need to be taught in quite a traditional way. Through demonstration, and hand on, advice, trial and error and that can, I think, I believe, that that kind of activity is perceived as not being valuable by the majority of people in the sector. When I say people I mean practitioners, researchers, tutors. And I think they're wrong... It takes the students a long time to develop a way of painting and therefore moving on, progressing through different kinds of imagery and engaging with different ideas than it does if the students are working with say photography or video, they can move through ideas far more quickly because they don't have the impediment of having to acquire those technical skills. (FP6)

A course that still teaches 'traditional' skills can be assumed to be unusual, as the interviewee acknowledges. However, as the fine art curriculum has dispensed with teaching skills, it has accommodated other things (Singerman, 2007). King-Hammond (2007) notes how the fine art curriculum keeps being added to as students seem to need ever greater amounts of technical, critical and conceptual knowledge, in particular because of the influence of new technologies and a greater emphasis on critical studies and professional development, including teaching entrepreneurial skills. In 1982, Allison identified four domains within the Fine Art curriculum: Expressive/Productive; Perceptual; Analytical/Critical; and, Historical/Cultural. Hickman (2005) simplified these to just three: learning to produce art, learning about art and understanding each. While confirming these three, this research uncovered a fourth: professional practice, i.e. learning how to embark on a career as an artist. In both Colleges, although delivered as a separate course (Personal and Professional Development) it is also embedded in all aspects of the course delivery (see 3.2.4).



Do practical skills need to be in the curriculum of those learning to be artists? In fact, there is likely to be a continuum along which most courses and FAPs would fit. At one end, as one interviewee advocates, there would be an emphasis on teaching traditional skills. At the other end of the spectrum others might argue for teaching ideas tout court. This dichotomy is not new and can be traced back to the Renaissance (Wilde, 1999). Artists ever since have played down the need for technical skills, in part because they wished to have higher status than those who earn their living through craft (Edwards, 1999; Hartt, 1994).

In UK higher education this came to the fore in the early nineteen-sixties when three influential reports into teaching art and design at higher education were produced by the National Advisory Council for Art Education (1960, 1962 and 1964), under the chairmanship of Sir William Coldstream (known as the 'Coldstream Reports'). Despite various reforms and structural changes that have since taken place, these really established the framework for this subject up to the present day. In particular, to provide academic credibility the Coldstream Reports crucially moved the teaching away from skills-based, more technical teaching, to one where creativity and student development was fostered in studio teaching and this was accompanied by courses in art theory and history, with an expectation that students would have to be literate (Thistlewood, 1992).

There was a sense in all but one of the interviews that the making of the work was somewhat secondary to the promotion of the dialogue around it. It may well be the case that this current generation of Fine Art Practitioners/Educators holds a greater belief in the expanded role of the artist as both cultural producer and commentator than previous generations. However, it is more likely that the more 'tacit' learning and attainment of knowledge is perhaps more difficult to articulate in relation to the set of interview questions. Moreover, it is an aspect that is rarely acknowledged in the discourse about fine art (Dormer, 1994). It seems highly likely that the strongly held belief in a studio-based education that was voiced by all the FAPs asserts the value all the FAPs placed in 'learning through making'.

### *3.2.2 Distinctiveness of discipline*

It is notable that, when asked to express what was distinctive about fine art as a taught discipline, its ability to absorb a wide range of practices and approaches was emphasised by all FAPs in one College. It is 'much more open ended in terms of what we expect [as an] outcome....there is more interpretation...it is less prescriptive that you see in the humanities or sciences' (FAP1). Another practitioner agreed the course foregrounded the student's ideas and then 'they have to identify what process they want to use which relates to the idea' and this leads to 'all sorts of ways of working' (FAP3). Another suggested that 'there is an individual attention to the students at graduate level' (FAP2).

According to Siegusmund (1998) a subject is a coherent set of knowledge and beliefs and if this no longer exists in fine art, then it becomes no more than a vehicle for teaching something else. However, this research found something different. For it is important to note here that whilst not always stated explicitly all the FAPs appear to draw on their own professional experience when developing their course's ethos, maintaining the long-standing tradition of tutor/artist-practitioner within H.E. art and design. This is allied to the general sense of looking to the professional sphere for models of practice and must account for this acknowledgement/embrace of the expanded possibilities of what constitutes a fine art practice. The implication of the last two points leads to the conclusion that although the FAPs aren't able to define fine art, it does exist and they can certainly recognise it when they see it!

### *3.2.3 Teaching & learning strategies relevant to the discipline*

As noted, only one of the five courses represented by FAPs for this research appeared to have even a notions of a set of skills and knowledge that all students would seem to learn. As Singerman (2007) points out, there is no longer anything that **all** fine art students need to learn. Rather, students work in a range of media and this leads to discipline delivery that is often *tailor-made* for the individual student (Corner, 2002). As FAP2 explains: 'I think that fine art education has developed to focus a lot more around the individual rather than a laid out "text book" of subjects that one must get under one's belt'.

As has already been pointed out it would be rare to deliver practical inductions to a large group beyond the first year of a three-year undergraduate course. For this research, the FAPs were clear to differentiate between technical instruction and teaching, that was 'ideas' led.

The following strategies were discussed as being particular appropriate to the teaching of studio fine art. One-to-one tutorial: this is seen as a very important strategy as it gives the students engaged in very different practices 'individual attention' (FAP2). It appears that the delivery of one to one tutorials has changed over recent years;

Our individual tutorials a very much shorter nowadays they tend to be twenty minute slots and they rely to some extent on the relationship between the student and their individual tutor to know each other and have those tutorials quite regularly. (FAP2).

A lot of it happens in smaller increments along the way; so... there might not be a heavy two-hour lecture for them to attend, but there might be a series of ten-minute exchanges that keep them thinking and developing, so it is by design, and by the nature of the subject. (FAP1)

When I first started teaching, it really was sitting down and having an hour and a half chat...whereas, I think I am so much more strategic now and I think in some ways I am a considerably better teacher. (FAP4)

These tutorials are also documented or recorded by either staff and student. This is another more contemporary feature of course delivery within the subject area, but it is unclear from the interviews if this change is led internally by the discipline or by external educational developments.

Critique: as already stated the group critique (that is a critical analysis of an individual's work with one or more members of staff present) is one of the most common learning and teaching strategies on fine art courses (Blair, 2007; Soutter, 2006) and critiques were photographed by two of the FAPs to illustrate their teaching activities. There is a range of ways to conduct them and FAP3 suggests some of them:

Sometimes it might be...[that] a student ...is asked to prepare [something] to talk about to the rest of students. Sometimes the person who makes the work doesn't talk about their work... Sometimes they break into small groups and discuss work and then...present what they thought.

Critiques were also considered a good opportunity for students to receive a range of views.

I think that it's important that the students are exposed to a number of different voices. So they will have the dominant voice, which is their academic tutor, perhaps the most supportive voice. But they will also be exposed to a number of contrary voices that contradict each other and perhaps contradict their academic tutor. And I think that's part of a healthy, the healthy dynamic of a teaching environment. It forces the students to exercise their own judgement and their own evaluation of the advice that's been offered and decide which is most relevant to them at that particular point and take responsibility for adopting that advice, taking it on board. (FAP4)

However, Soutter (2006) cautions that certain kinds of work are better suited to this form of teaching than others. In particular, 'work with a discursive, self-critical quality can yield complex, satisfying discussion, while work that is primarily intuitive or expressive in nature often leads the conversation back to the artist in a series of frustrating cul-de-sacs' (Soutter, 2006, pp177-179). Research by Blair (2007) found that critiques are ineffective in feeding back to most students and boost the confidence of the tutors rather than the students. Moreover, discussing critiques tends to overlook the fact that they

are carried out in numerous different ways (see the importance of range of approaches, 3.2.4 below).

Exhibition: the exhibition is a term used to refer to a number of activities within contemporary practice (not necessarily an exhibition in the traditional sense of sculptures and paintings on floors and walls in a room); the important aspect of it is 'to consider the place for the work' (FAP1). Sometimes this takes place in an offsite project.

What we found was in this crit situation students are much more ready to talk about work and discuss it, perhaps because they're not in a college environment. So what happens on the day like this is that we have the crit all day and they have a private view at the end of it and a bit of a party and it's just a very different kind of atmosphere. (FAP3)

Presentation: presentation can (like the critique) include the verbalisation of students' ideas and intentions' and can be done either with an audio/visual presentation or during an exhibition of the students work.

I thought it was appropriate to the subject that the presentation of the work became a central...seen outside the studio in a considered way" (FAP1)

It is worth pointing out that all of these are traditional ways of learning and teaching fine art (MacDonald, 2005). The way students are allocated a main tutor echoes the beaux-arts model. Although this is often student-centred, it can also be tutor-centred. In the past it was a well-known phenomenon that different tutors, courses or colleges could produce students with distinctive styles which, if happening today, somewhat belies the claim that the teaching is student-centred. Further research is needed to uncover whether tutors make an effort to diagnose the needs of their students and adjust their teaching accordingly. All the same, it is important to note that, by comparison with teachers of many other HE disciplines, art teachers are likely to be student-centred. After all, they encourage students to find their own voice or style, which many view as a form of self-discovery (Enwezor, 2006) and are likely to accommodate, if not celebrate, diverse outcomes (Wilde, 1999; Danvers, 2003), as the next section illustrates.

#### *3.2.4 Range of content and approaches*

It was seen as important that a wide range of teaching and assessment strategies (i.e. those mentioned above and others) were employed. FAP3 states:

Crits are done differently every time – so they don't get used to just ...coming in and doing things the same way...[it] breaks the

monotony basically and gets them to look at work from all sorts of different angles and different ways of doing it. (FAP3)

He went on to note the importance of a moving between formal (needing preparation and planning) and informal (spontaneous or 'ad hoc') teaching strategies. This belief in employing a diversity of approaches was also borne out in assessments, as FAP2 notes, 'most of the assessments we would try to make different strategies'. FAP1 describes the assessment of a unit where

Assessments took place at three different points throughout the unit. They get a presentation about their work, with a proposal and then we review the work without the student there...and the assessment was a combination of those...things.

The range of approaches reflects an attempt to address the diversity of the discipline's productions as well as the expanded role of the contemporary fine artist (as maker, commentator, critic, manager, publicist etc).

### *3.2.5 The discipline's professional sphere*

In the literature there is an opinion expressed that being an artist is some sort of higher calling, which is being sullied by students demanding to learn how to market themselves as artists, rather than learn how to produce high quality work (Corner, 2002; Fendrich 2007; Singerman, 2007). However, this research found an enthusiasm amongst FAPs for teaching Personal and Professional Development.

Both the range and the content of the courses are developed to reflect the breadth of the professional sphere and draw out a range of skills necessary to operate professionally. These are designed to foster a necessary independence, as FAP2 explained:

I think quite a lot of the group teaching situations are extremely useful in helping the students to develop a lot more independence....they would develop these discussions without staff being there...

The FAPs employ teaching strategies that prepare students for negotiating an audience for their work, in their many and varied forms. It should be noted that none of the interviewees were directly responsible for the delivery of the theoretical component of their courses and so the issues of teaching strategies for writing were not developed during these interviews but are nevertheless seen as a crucial part of the courses' delivery.

### 3.3 Tutor

All tutors conducted their own research and had longstanding individual and collaborative fine art practices. One researcher noted that the FAPs talked with passion and interest about both their discipline and their teaching roles. It appears that the FAPs consider their teaching to be an extension of the own art practice and seek to apply creative solutions to course delivery, based on their knowledge of the field and their observations from teaching. FAPs were keen to deliver more than the minimum teaching delivery a course required.

Two of the full-time and one of the part-time FAPs had teaching qualifications, gained while undertaking their current teaching role. Two, who had not yet taken the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching (PG Cert), nevertheless had attended a staff development course on supervising PhDs, which had clearly had an impact on their views about their teaching practice. One, who held a fractional post, did not have a teaching qualification but had substantial teaching experience. There may be an emergent pattern where younger, full-time FAPs are beginning to see themselves as career academics/researchers rather than artists whose career path lies outside the academy. The notion of beginning a teaching career as an Associate Lecturer, to get a 'foot in the door' (FAP1), before moving into a fulltime role was noted. However, one, who had been teaching for four years and had completed the PG Cert viewed this as warning not to become a full-time tutor at the expense of his own art practice: 'I suppose there was just a sort of warning in the background about why I was there rather than in the studio and that I had better beware and remember that I'm first of all an artist and I think I wasn't the only one in the room who thought that' (FAP5).

It is of interest that tutors found it difficult to calculate ('hard to pin down' FAP3) how many (contact) hours they taught a week, with three providing a wide variation in their estimates (i.e. between 5 – 20 hours pro rata), although they all held the same role as course leader in the same University. This seems to indicate a great deal of flexibility in how they interpret and manage their roles, which is probably dependant on the flexibility in the curriculum already identified.

Ambivalent opinions were expressed about the degree of flexibility and autonomy they enjoyed. As one expressed it: 'It's great to do what I want to do, but sometimes I would like a decision to be made!' (FAP5). For all that misgivings are expressed in the literature about the way HE art education is becoming more bureaucratic and centralised (Corner, 2002; Danvers, 2003), it is apparent from this research that tutors are still allowed considerable leeway.

### *3.3.1 Role of the tutor*

The individual nature of the student's learning and practice is also manifest in the tutor/student interaction. The approach to the student learning is holistic. The student's ideas and work may address a wide range of issues, including the student's own beliefs, personal and autobiographical subject matter. FAP1 puts it like this: 'I think we really do get to know the students, so that our understanding of them extends far beyond the work they show'. As already noted, the one to one tutorial system relies 'on the relationship between the student and their individual tutor to know each other' (FAP2).

As explained in the section above titled *Teaching & learning strategies relevant to the discipline*, tutors tend to adopt student-centred approaches. They see themselves as facilitators in the students' learning rather than imparters of specific bodies of knowledge. FAP3 stated this clearly: 'If there's anything that describes what you do as a lecturer it is that you try and instigate discussion and learning to take place rather than feed information to students'.

One of a tutor's roles is to act as a critical observer or 'audience' for the artworks produced. FAP1 describes her activity during a critique as 'pointing out things and drawing relationships between things', that is to teach 'by example'. Teaching by example is one of the main planks of the beaux-arts tradition – and of the apprentice system of learning.

FAP3 also noted the usefulness of staff 'to pay a bit of a devil's advocate' to facilitate discussion. He continued: 'I think it's interesting for the students to see that the same sort of discussion that they're having between each other can take place...between staff'. Team teaching, with two or more members of staff working with either a group or individual student was seen as beneficial.

### *3.3.2 Assessments*

Tutors assess student work by consensus. FAPs expressed the opinion that best practice allowed for marks to be agreed through discussion and debate. The agreement over the sense of the discipline already noted meant that FAPs can mark work in an arena where there are no 'right answers'. Although marks are allocated 'relative to the learning outcomes' all FAPs agreed that ideally all assessments should be conducted by (at least) two members of staff, 'it's not a scientific exercise, it comes out through discussion' (FAP3). FAP 2 agreed saying that she marked 'with two members of staff for parity and for fairness and equality'.

The theory of assessment in art education is to a large degree based on the work of Elliott Eisner. He invented the connoisseur model to justify the way work is assessed by those with expertise (Eisner, 1985). The topic continues to be debated, not least because Eisner's model cannot guarantee reliability and validity – and hence fairness. Moreover, it fails to address the socio-

cultural bias that might lie behind these judgments. It is pertinent therefore, that this research found that within course teams at least, there is agreement: 'Surprisingly, or perhaps not surprisingly, when the whole team are convened for parity meetings and I suppose most controversially when we are assessing or examining the final degree shows, there is a lot of agreement about the general level of achievement about a given student' (FAP6). All the same, while confirming that course teams form communities of practice, it begs the question whether another course team would share these views. When investigating assessment in art education, Mason *et al.* (2005) found that.

There was very little hard, empirical evidence...to support frequently conflicting claims. Although there was also a considerable amount of unsupported theory or rhetoric, there was little empirical research. This suggests that more reliable and valid research in this area of the art curriculum needs to be carried out. (p3).

### *3.3.3 Workload*

One theme that emerged was that tutors are having to teach more students in less time, while also having more administrative responsibilities than ever. Those who had been teaching for a number of years were especially aware of this, as this quote from FAP5 illustrates.

When I first started teaching, and there was, um, there seemed to be time...I think I can get quite um, muddled at times, with just the sheer amount of different things that I have to do. So, on the one hand, I quite enjoy having the challenge of lots of things to do...but on the other hand, there are days when I feel really ineffectual when, when in fact I have got so much admin and different things coming at me...it's finding the time, in terms of the curriculum and also the time, in terms of preparing it. Um, and I think, I think one of my, I suppose one of my big problems is that I would just like to clone myself a few times, which sounds terribly vain, and sort of conceited really because, because I think I've got more to give than I do give. Instead I am, I am sort of, you know, typically stuck behind the computer answering 53 emails: why am I getting 53 emails in one morning?

## **3.4 Student**

The characteristics of the discipline and its use of space outlined above are played out in the FAP's understanding of the student experience. The individual nature of the students' learning and interests, the fact the work is produced within the studio system, onsite and the relationship to the professional sphere of contemporary fine art practice all have an impact on



the student. The students' sense of themselves as unique practitioners is fostered by individually 'tailored' teaching. FAP2 reflects on a third year assessment: 'We find it usually best to sit down with an individual student and to speak to them individually about issues coming up in their work'. Most explicitly she suggests that the dominant characteristic of undergraduate fine art teaching is that students 'develop their individual methodology'.

### *3.4.1 Student learning*

A number of aspects of learning were touched on during the interviews, although as these were not the focus of the questioning the following notes are not exhaustive. Students were encouraged to be objectively critical. FAP1 used the critique to help students to understand that there was an 'appropriate [critical] discourse' for the work 'because they are still very reluctant to be critical of each other's work and [they need] to understand that is not personal'.

Oral articulation was also promoted through various strategies. Discussion amongst students was seen as extremely desirable as outlined above. The studio working environment and group teaching strategies are designed to promote peer learning. FAP3 emphasised: 'This is a really key important point...that they're making very particular decisions and discussing it and seeing how some students make much more informed decisions than others...relative to strengths and weaknesses'.

Self-evaluation and self-assessment were seen as an important aspect of the student's learning. All FAPs agreed that online learning was complementary to other course delivery and could not replace studio teaching. Three saw the potential of the online facilities in promoting discussion and debate on their courses, but there was some concern about the parity of student access to computer facilities, while others were sceptical about the role of e-learning. Overall, this research would support the contention of Ferguson (2007) that although new technologies open many new ways to learn, teach and produce art, and that 'this is obvious to anyone under 20' (p104) it doesn't yet appear to have had anywhere near the influence it could on those now teaching the subject.

There was a strong sense in some of the interviews of pastoral care by tutors and a concern for student welfare that went well beyond the realm of pedagogy. 'There are students who kind of drift along, they kind of really having had a hard time. And we phone them up. We chase them' (FAP4).

### *3.4.2 Size of student groups*

Whilst concern was expressed about the growth in student numbers, FAP4 recognised the benefits of teaching relatively small groups of students.

I used to teach on a large, um, Fine Art course, broad-based Fine Art course, I used to be a Programme Leader of a big Fine Art

course, and um, that, and I really enjoyed it, the students were fantastic and everything. But with kind of 110 in each year group, you are constantly thinking about parity and, they were, in terms of social side of it, students might form cliques and, and groupings, but you could end up with people who, who really were rather left out, I think. And, um one of the things here, with year groups of 25, 27, everybody knows each other, they look out for each other. And it means that the staff or you know, it's a much more kind of, much more sense of a team, actually. And um, with the staff involved in that team as well and the technicians, you know, and the students. (FAP4)

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