

Craft has had a long association with organised education. For the majority of this time, craft has struggled to define and justify its existence in terms of the aims of education as a whole. I would suggest that it has constantly failed to do this and continues to fail. Despite its efforts to become a facet of education, craft in schools is still justified and taught instrumentally. It exists as a form of training, not a means of education.

Education versus Training

Any attempts to define the terms 'education' and 'training' in terms that would stand up to rigorous philosophical education would demand an impractical amount of space and time. I will therefore propose some loose working definitions from my own personal point of view and leave it up to the reader to accept or reject them.

I see the process of education as a development of a structure and a philosophy through which observations, knowledge, ideas and emotions can be ordered and understood (although it must be recognised that this structure does not exist as an empty framework but only because of its constituent elements).

Once this structure is recognised it becomes the tool to gain an overview of human experience. Any new information can be fitted into the existing pattern or it can challenge and change the perception of that pattern.

A useful analogy is the view that in a drawing or painting, the spaces or negative shapes within and between objects are just as important as the positive shapes of the objects themselves. To perceive the whole picture, the objects and their spaces must be regarded as a harmony.

At a simplistic level, education is the ability to recognise and appreciate the pattern as being as important as the knowledge and experience that constitutes the pattern.

Training tends to value the products of a certain period of teaching rather than the process of ordering that teaching into education's overview. Thus a well trained craftsman will possess skills that are observable through the products that he or she produces. In itself there is nothing inadequate with being well trained, but unless the person is also well educated they will always be in possession of seemingly autonomous and dissociated parcels of knowledge.

Such limitations can be very useful and this use has been long appreciated. The 1852 H.M.I. Report for Schools proposed:

"... Any education of the children of the labouring classes that is not accompanied by industrial training and their actual employment in manual and useful labour, will entirely fail in checking the growth of crime."

Since the boundaries of a person's training can be defined, as a person's 'training' runs out simultaneously with the limit of their acquired skill and knowledge, the person can be manipulated and controlled by controlling what is taught. In the same way, a mynah bird can be taught to speak beautifully without ever understanding a word that it is saying and without ever being able to formulate a new sentence from its acquired vocabulary.

Craft Education or Craft Training?

I would suggest that craft in schools has never developed from training into education because it has always sought to gain status through the apparent usefulness of its skills and products. It justifies itself instrumentally and thus remains instrumental. As the supposed need for various skills and products changes, craft teaching must distort and mutate in order to encompass the trends and preserve the validity of its justification. Teaching blacksmithing and technical drawing may have given way to technology and graphical communication but the purpose remains the same. The teachers and their subject become trapped within the confines of their own justification and may fail to make the conceptual connection between their subject matter and the rest of the educational pattern. If the teachers fail to see the connections, the pupils have little hope.

If craft continues to justify itself in this way, the future is grim. The products of traditional craft are becoming less and less useful in terms of work and employment, thus the long held justifications will start to lose their foundation. The rapid expansion of craft teaching into the 'new' areas of computing and technology can only provide brief respite from this process. As long as craft continues to justify its new subject matter in the terms of nineteenth century popular education it cannot escape the process of decay.

Not only is craft teaching still a form of training, it is rapidly becoming training to little observable purpose. The new initiatives of the M.S.C. and the Y.T.S. schemes have predictably been embraced by craft teaching with enthusiasm. These schemes bring new recruits into static or contracting sectors of industry. The much lauded concept of transferable skills is a sham. The skills are transferable only as far as the trainers allow them to be. The trainees become so many mynah birds.

This training is still an overt method of social control, as is obvious from the structure of the trainee's points of assessment. The respect for traditional figures of 'authority' and acceptance of the work ethic constitutes a major part of the disciplinary training.

Perhaps the lack of practical purpose to craft teaching of most types makes the need for a pliable, docile and unimaginative population even more acute.