

## Finding it sticky: ESJ and the foundation art, architecture and design course

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*'The university becomes less the centre and control of learning and more a fulcrum or catalyst where learning is facilitated via access to many forms of knowledge and via different systems and locations of delivery.'*

- Orr and Shreeve

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### Introduction:

In 2019, I began teaching on the Foundation Art, Architecture and Design (AAD) course. As a new tutor, I was offered the opportunity to study with the Centre for Professional and Educational Development towards a Post Graduate Certificate of Education and Fellowship of Advance HE (formally the Higher Education Academy). While devising a project proposal for the *Curriculum Evaluation and Development* module, I began researching curricular models suitable to my pedagogic context with the school of AAD. I found challenges in identifying models appropriate to the AAD context due to the ambiguity of creative practice and AAD's fervent pursuit of Education for Social Justice (viz Education for Social Justice Framework, 2019 [ESJF]). Marrying ESJ with a curricular model was challenging because in seeking to welcome diverse student cohorts to develop socially engaged forms of creative practice, we (tutors) have to expand beyond the accepted canon and allow for new forms of knowledge. I propose that other Schools and HE institutions may find this research useful - and applicable - as it briefly examines the history of art curriculum models to offer some practical suggestions about how to implement a creative and inclusive curricular model that supports a widening participation approach.

### Curriculum: Path or Trail?

The genesis of the AAD foundation course can be seen as a weave of various curriculum models (see Houghton's model, below). An 'Apprentice curriculum' is found on Stage 1 of the AA3001/AA3002 modules, where we focus on skills training during weekly workshops that cover mark-making, observational drawing, typography, print and model making. The studio modules conclude with a Final Major Project (FMP) which bears some relation to the Apprentice curriculum's conclusion of a masterpiece; although a foundation student's FMP can take any form and is not required to demonstrate the acquisition of craft skills. A student's FMP is assessed on both the process they document, alongside the final outcome/s and in this respect, diverges into the much later 'Conceptual curriculum' which was devised in the 1970s as a response to the new imperatives

of Modernism where the engagement in ideas is of more importance than the production of artefacts. A thread of the 'Academic curriculum' can be found in the course's Stage 2 Transcription project that requires students to identify an existing artwork from the UK's National Gallery collection and translate the work in some way. Elements of the 'Formalist curriculum' can also be found. The Formalist curriculum (Bauhaus) is incorporated via the colour wheel and colour composition projects on the AA3004 module. A studio typography project could also be understood to inculcate Formalism concerns surrounding geometry as the project requires letterforms to be composed in a geometrically harmonious composition. It is for this emergent practice that I wanted to discover a model.

The popular conception of a curriculum model is that it focuses on outcomes. When I initially tried to shoehorn parts of the foundation course into an outcomes model, a peer told me that I was '*at risk of producing convoluted learning objectives and unintelligent, "thick" curriculums... [which] may inhibit students*'. I realised that I needed to find a curricular model that was suited to the AAD context and could accord with the ESJF. There are a lot of interactions in the AAD school which are ineffable and in being so, welcome in the whole student, not those with traditional academic and cultural capital (and eloquent control of the English language). AAD studio teaching heavily relies on many forms of multimodal communication that encompasses visual, embodied, and emotional exchanges; we often watch each other delicately manipulate materials in order to describe and learn about how to use new media. And, most importantly, the AAD does not work towards anticipated outcomes. As Buss puts it, '*art and design students do not follow a path, they leave a trail*'. Unlike some Schools that can educate towards predefined knowledge, the AAD necessarily centres around the creation of new knowledge via interaction with a community of practice (Farnsworth, Kleanthous & Wenger-Trayner, 2016). I do not, and cannot, know the outcome or result of my learning and teaching as knowledge resides in people (both mentally and physically), networks, communities and materials, and is constantly being redefined and changing as those forces interact. New knowledge is the expected outcome!



**IMAGE 1: AAD foundation course crit. identifying & discussing what knowledge has been created.**

In addition to needing a curricular model that allows for multimodality, multimodal communication and a lack of defined knowledge, the foundation course also necessitates teaching across the three disciplines: art, design, and architecture. These disciplines all have different histories, pedagogies and curricular approaches. From Level 4 (first year BA) it's accepted that they warrant separate curricula however, the Level 3 AAD foundation teaches across them and therefore requires a curricular model that allows for a multi-disciplinary approach whereby students develop an awareness and appreciation for others' creative practices with many students developing into multidisciplinary arts/ designers/ architects. A further fundamental requirement was the acceptance of digital technologies as an integral element of creative lives and pedagogy (Stewart & Lynds, 2019): post-pandemic curricula models require an acceptance of online identities, digital creative practices and online learning spaces.

## The Bauhaus legacy - and Houghton's Model

There are numerous accounts arguing the benefits and shortfalls of different art, architecture and design schools. Some educational establishments have attained almost mythical status, including amongst others, the Bauhaus<sup>1</sup>; California Institute of the Arts<sup>2</sup>; and Goldsmiths during Sir Michael Craig-Martin's era<sup>3</sup>. Compared to the fascinating accounts of different characters, pedagogies, and communities that have developed around Western AAD courses, there is comparatively little written about their curricular models, with the exception of the Bauhaus. Nicholas Houghton's research usefully categorises the evolution of the curricula in Western art schools<sup>4</sup>:

The **Apprentice curriculum** where a master teaches material skills and the pupil's education concluding with a final masterpiece demonstrating their readiness to establish their own practice.

The **Academic curriculum** centred around the drawing of classical myths and biblical stories. Although it was based on laborious copying to inculcate proportion, harmony, symmetry, perspective and foreshortening the pupil's status as an artist was elevated above a craft practitioner in accordance with the Renaissance notion of art as an intellectual pursuit and even a calling.

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<sup>1</sup>More is written about Walter Gropius's Bauhaus than any other AAD school in history so I'll refrain from offering any nuggets about this extraordinary German school and leave readers to enjoy their own googling.

<sup>2</sup>Known as CalArts, this school follows a Conceptual Curriculum that foregrounds research and analysis rather than instinct and intuition. Alongside other conceptual artists including Judy Chicago and John Baldessari, Michael Asher taught at CalArts for many decades. One of Asher's crit's is the setting for an entire chapter of Sarah Thornton's *Seven Day in the Art World* in which Thornton describes the crit as '*an institutional critique that reveals the limits of the rest of the curriculum*'.

<sup>3</sup>Sir Michael fostered a new pedagogic approach that abolished the separation of media so that painting, sculpture, printmaking, textiles etc. were all fostered under a single tutor. From Sir Michael's BA Fine Art sprung the YBA (Young British Artists) which is a label loosely applied to a group of conceptual artists that includes amongst others: Tracey Emin, Sarah Lucas, Michael Landy and Damien Hirst. Their artworks such as 'My Bed' (an unmade bed strewn with detritus) and 'Mother and Child (Divided)' (a cow and her calf in formaldehyde) caused media sensations and public outrage. Supported by the advertising agency of Charles Saatchi, some of the YBAs went on to become multi-millionaires.

<sup>4</sup>Houghton acknowledges that design has a different and particular curricular to art but due to limitations of space limits his article to only art schools. Admittedly, this is a little narrow for my purposes but still useful.

The **Formalist curriculum**, associated with the Bauhaus and Gestalt psychology. It held that art has a common language, that of colour, shape, texture and line and the particular properties of a medium. (Intriguingly, Houghton notes that this model is still common to foundation courses).

The **Expressive curriculum** flipped from the common language to Modernism's other preoccupation with improvisation and the idea that an artist's work was imbued with their personality. According to this model, art schools should not teach skills but rather support students to find their style and view artistic production as a way of life.

The **Conceptual curriculum** dismissed the production of artefacts and the teaching of detailed material skills to focus on ideas, processes, and conception and concept of an artwork which pupils are required to explain and interpret for others. The Conceptual curriculum extended the reach of art to include text, performance, installation, video and sound. The California Institute of Arts was, in the 1960s, one of the founding schools to use this model and still encourages students to engage with critical theory, institutional critique and challenging texts such as those by Lacan and Derrida.

The **Professional curriculum** expounds that being an artist is a carefully calculated strategy that necessitates a vocationally focused education in preparation for entry into the commercial art world. It emphasises knowledge of curation, (social media) self-promotion, contracts, written skills and intellectual property rights. Students are pushed towards the development of an artist brand.

There are vestiges of all of the curricula that Houghton identifies informing the current AAD foundation course (see above). Arguably, the most significant influence remains the Formalist curricula of the Bauhaus school with its corresponding curricular model [IMAGE 2]. AAD (formerly The Cass) overtly attempted to emulate this seminal Formalist school under Robert Mull, who was Head of School until late 2015 (Marrs, 2015). In *The Cass 2014-15* annual year book, Mull stated that he aimed to build the 'Aldgate Bauhaus' (Mull et al. 2015, p. 61); a message he reinforced via his referencing and reworking of Walter Gropius's original Bauhaus curriculum model to suit AAD ([The Cass Session](#), p.9).



**IMAGE 2: Original Bauhaus' educational curricula diagram model and its reworking to become The Cass curricula model in 2015.**

## The difference between AAD and many other schools

I was perplexed by a number of Houghton's conclusions as they starkly differed from my experience working within London Metropolitan's AAD. Houghton assures us that his research covers art schools from fourteen countries and 'a large number of texts' and concludes that 'contemporary art students are learning a set of thinking, critical and business skills in place of those which involve the hand and the eye' (Houghton, 2016, p.11). The AAD has maintained and prides itself on its workshops (ceramics, woodwork, metalwork, upholstery, finishing, sewing, photography, print) that form '[Make Works](#)', along with the expert technicians who run them. Our workshops and facilities remain a unique selling point of the AAD school. A second and more glaring conflict with Houghton's findings is that art schools are '*strongly biased towards those from privileged socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds.*' A bias towards privilege could not be more inaccurate in relation to the AAD past and present. At its inauguration in 1848, the founding aim of the AAD was 'to improve the intellectual and moral conditions of the industrial classes'<sup>5</sup>. As a post-1992 university which has grown out of the [amalgamation of a succession of institutes and polytechnics](#), the AAD has a fundamental respect for, and an interest in, skilled material use and the education of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. During Mull's leadership, the AAD articulated its ESJ goal of supporting 'socially engaged forms of creative practices' and expanded this to include an 'obligation to play our part in making London' (Mull et al, 2015, p.7)<sup>6</sup>.

## Our approach to ESJ: Allowing for the ambiguity

Today, the AAD foundation course uses the ESJF to support our curriculum as a result of which our students develop socially engaged creative practices and come to see themselves as agents of social change (Giroux, 2020). Foundation projects focus on validating and honouring students' identities and their lived experience. We consciously build L&T spaces that support us all to reimagine a more equitable future. There is not room to expand on how each of the six elements of the ESJF are enacted but suffice to mention that the curriculum has been structured to allow accessible, diverse, multi-modal interactions which challenge power structures, hidden curriculum, unconscious bias, and allow for the development of new knowledge.

As is well documented, the wider UK political framework has driven the valorisation of explicitness and a target-driven culture (Phillips, 2019) making constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996) an appealing principle as it calls for teaching and assessment to be mapped against the desired learning outcomes. While constructive alignment retains some value in terms of challenging the alignment of Learning Outcomes (LO) with the larger context of modules and the subject standards (benchmarks) it's arguably an unsuitable principle for the foundation<sup>7</sup> pedagogy which holds that ambiguity is essential and uncertainty is productive and supportive to learning (Belluigi, 2013; Orr & Shreeve, 2018). As all learning and teaching is dynamic, we can not critically align against

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.londonmet.ac.uk/about/our-university/our-history/>

<sup>6</sup> see [https://issuu.com/londonmetuni/docs/final\\_cass\\_book\\_singlepages?e=9279591/14296164](https://issuu.com/londonmetuni/docs/final_cass_book_singlepages?e=9279591/14296164)

<sup>7</sup> I have blogged about Constructive Alignment: <https://simonesreflections.wordpress.com/2019/03/10/ced-deliberations-about-john-biggs/>

knowledge that we have not yet defined. Our curricular model therefore must allow for ambiguity as a necessary condition of the learning and teaching. Rather than constructively aligning against already known outcomes, we need a model that allows for a responsive environment in which students and tutors build their collective understanding of the concept, techniques, skills etc.

### **Finding the sticky curriculum**

Orr and Shreeve's sticky curriculum is a curricular model that centres around the student's creative self, with five concentric layers and allows for all forms of multimodal communication. Its creators have described the sticky curriculum as:

*'emergent, responsive and opportunistic, and participants need to engage with the unforeseen and unexpected. The paradoxical tensions between setting out the road map and not knowing where we are going is essentially required to allow creativity and individual learning to occur'*<sup>11</sup>

The sticky curriculum promises changes in learning but also disruptive moments in teaching as it's built around an appreciation of social learning in creative education and its integrative contexts where ambiguity is an inherent element; allowing fluidity between the studio and life. The model considers the purpose of education as the core driver of the curriculum, rather than content (Wesch, Davidson & Bass, 2014) as the

*'curriculum as knowledge per se becomes problematic. This is particularly so where the content (knowledge) is obscure and hard to write down and codify as it is in art and design...the content appears to be minimal'* (Orr and Shreeve, 2018. P. 19).

The model thereby aligns with a Social Constructionist approach (Gutiérrez, 2008; Burns, Sinfield & Abegglen, 2019) to education, where *'no true perception of reality exists, but that people construct their knowledge of the world, their ways of understanding it, between them'* (Abegglen, Burn & Sinfield, 2016). As the model is specifically created for art and design pedagogy it also allows for all modes of communication and accepts that a student's creative practice can be built in any environment, digital or otherwise.

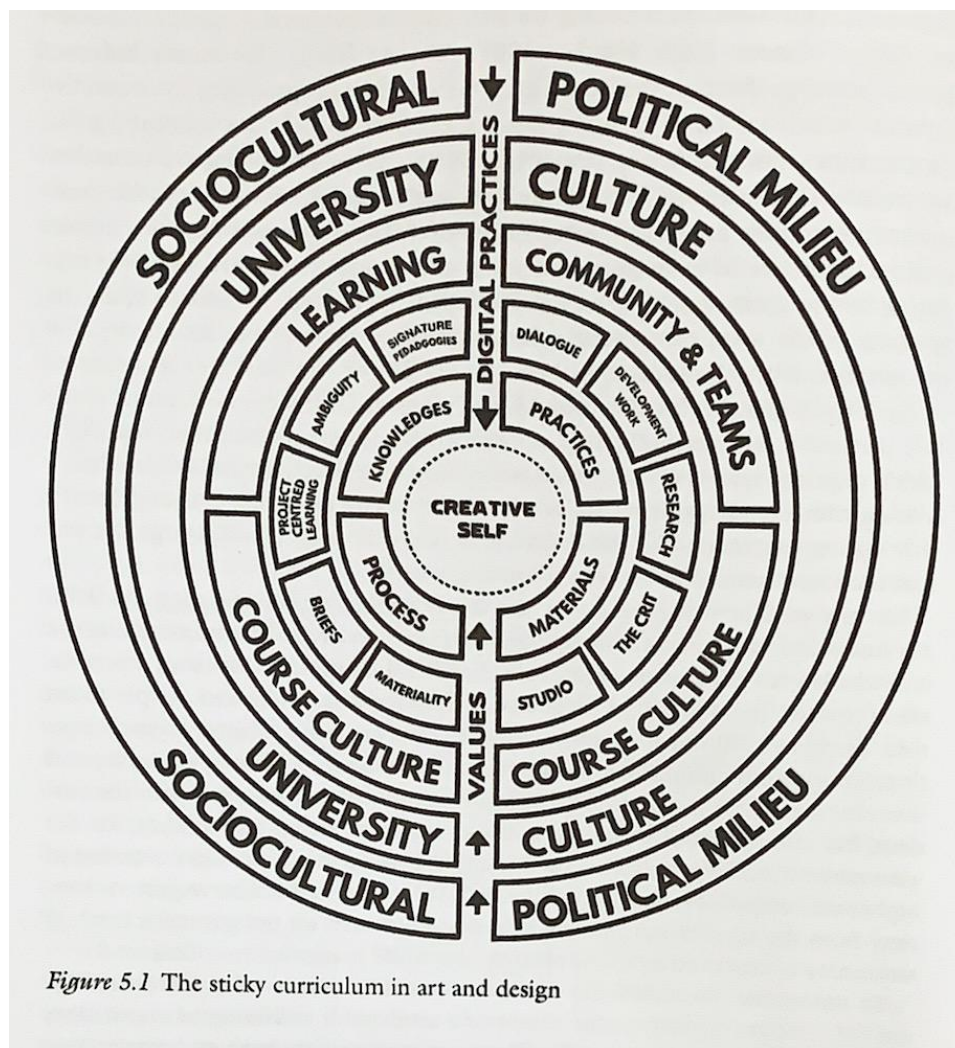


Figure 5.1 The sticky curriculum in art and design

### IMAGE 3: Orr & Shreeve's sticky curriculum model

#### Centering on the creative self to welcome the whole student

Integral to the foundation course is an effort to welcome the whole student into our epistemic community. It is also a tenet of the university's ESJF that we welcome students' knowledge, experience, heritage, politics, identity, traditions etc. and encourage them to link their learning to their lived experience. This pedagogic aim is overtly manifest via the 'This is Me!' project on the AA3004 Formats module, for which students are asked to use an A6 sketchbook to express something about themselves<sup>8</sup>. In doing so tutors begin to scaffold students' sense of belonging and self-efficacy, helping them to gain the confidence to succeed academically and beyond (Gutiérrez, 2008). This involves accepting students for who they are and validating the people they have already 'become', as they engage in a complex web of activity (Orr and Shreeve, 2018) to become artists on their own terms.

<sup>8</sup> The brief is very open with students permitted to use any media to express any element of themselves, their interests or skills. Students are encouraged to use the sketchbook in a liberal way enabling them to present drawing, painting, collage etc. or deconstruct the sketchbook and use the pages to make sculpture, fashion accessories, etc.



It takes time to assure students that we really do want them to bring themselves and their unique viewpoint into their creative practice (but their work does not need to be an embodiment of themselves). Like many of the students that I have had the pleasure of teaching, and learning from, I returned to higher education after years of formative experiences; becoming a mother, working in IT, and 'finding myself lost' (Anderson 2021) in my thirties. I entered The Cass (as it was) with notions of being taught technical skills. I needed support to stop mimicking artwork of the existing canon, have confidence in my viewpoint and find my own authentic creative practice. While this pursuit of an authentic and original creative practice is common to AAD courses and an activity that continues after graduation, the foundation course serves as a gateway to affirm students' nascent creative practice and their place within HE. Through a whole range of activities we help students to find a fit within a creative discipline and thereby see a future for their practice.



IMAGE 4: Student work 2021 'This is Me!' project

## Conclusion: Daydreaming about future AAD curricula models

There is ever-increasing dissatisfaction in art (Bishop, 2012), architecture and design communities about how our labour plays a part in advancing market forces at the expense of democracy<sup>9</sup>. Dan Graham voices the view of many makers, practices, collectives and educators that '*All artists are alike. They dream of doing something that's more social, more collaborative, and more real than art*'. Suhail Malik, the Co-Director of the Masters Fine Art at Goldsmiths, has argued for some time that the next step for contemporary art is to exit the art market (Malik 2013). If we do manage to move away from capitalist market pressures and imagine a more just future, we would need a curricula model focused on how artists, designers, architects and makers nurture each other's practices and collaborate on the urgent themes. Perhaps a 'Just Curriculum' might evolve? In the meantime, the sticky curriculum provides a model that is '*global, connected and concerned with social justice with a focus on creativity and resilience*' (Orr & Shreeve, 2018, p. 157). In doing so it is well suited to enable us to pursue our ESJ aims while also accommodating and supporting the foundation course's learning and teaching in a complex context with supercomplex students.

Having identified a curricular model that fully supports the tenets of our ESJF the only apparent restraint is time. Time is needed to listen, reflect and work with colleagues to scaffold our development and that of the supercomplex contexts our students navigate (Abegglen, Burns, Maier & Sinfield, 2020). Like all pedagogic endeavours, this is a collective effort: The Foundation teaching team is hungry to apply, critique and develop the sticky curriculum and surface its implications for furthering our ESJ efforts. London Metropolitan could supercharge its ESJ delivery via granting staff time to focus on and consider the nuances of how our curricula could further enfranchise students and democratise our learning and teaching (Giroux, 2020).

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<sup>9</sup> e-flux.com (an online platform that offers critical discourse in art, architecture, film, and theory with journal commissions that aim to publish '*some of the most influential writings on art, film, history, technology, and politics*') offers a treasure trove of opinions on the crisis in art, architecture and film under headings including: 'Neo-Liberalism', 'Post-Consumerism' and, 'State and Government'

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## **Biography**

Simone Maier grew up near Melbourne and scrapped through her first BA (English Literature and Visual Arts) from Monash University, Australia. She moved to the UK in 2000. She returned to HE in 2017 thereafter attained a 1:1 from London Metropolitan University for a BA Fine Arts (Hons) and became the inaugural recipient of *The Cass Scholarship in Creativity and Diversity* that sponsored her to study towards a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCert) which she was awarded with distinction in 2019.

Simone's creative practice engages with sculpture. Reoccurring themes include the boundaries between poetry and sculpture which she was examining during her MFA at Goldsmiths, University of London before academic strikes and Covid-19 intervened.

Since 2019 she has taught as an Associate Lecturer at London Metropolitan University. Simone has had research published in several academic journals and holds a Fellowship of the AdvanceHE.

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