



Call For Papers and other Contributions

Whose Quality? One Day Symposium on Quality and Value in Art and Design Education

Thursday 7th April, Feral Art School,
22 Alfred Gelder Street, Hull, HU1 2BS

Feral Art School is one of over thirty (Kosmaoglou 2021; Hudson-Miles 2022; Hudson-Miles, Goodman, and Jones 2021) independent art schools formed since the UK coalition Government published the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding & Student Finance, or Browne Review (Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills, 2010). In response to the trebling of tuition fees, some of these alternative providers offer education which is free at the point of delivery. Even those that do charge nominal fees for their courses usually also offer an alternative vision for art education beyond the customer / provider model. In addition, by focusing on the direct needs of those either excluded from, or disillusioned by, mainstream HE, not to mention local communities and their artistic ecosystems, such institutions radicalise the notions of inclusion and widening participation to which the neoliberal art school pays lip service. The Arts and Humanities Research Council's recent report, 'Understanding the Value of Arts and Culture' (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016), argues for the arts as a force for inculcating engaged citizenship and civic agency. Beyond the conferment of diplomas, alternative art schools embody this engaged, critical citizenship, whilst also offering wider benefits to local wellbeing (100-112), regional innovation (86), community building, and urban regeneration (71-4). Yet, Feral Art School, in common with many other alternative art education providers, has experienced a reluctance by the academy to engage in partnerships. Frequently, the quality management systems which claim to safeguard the integrity of the system are employed to entrench monopolies and ring-fence funding opportunities.

Many alternative art schools cannot offer formal qualifications because of their outsider status. Many would not wish to do so, because of the autonomy they would have to cede as part of bureaucratic, institutional partnerships. The perception, accordingly, is that alternative providers must offer sub-prime or low-quality provision, despite the qualifications and experience of many of the educators who work within them. When quality becomes a gatekeeping mechanism, used not only to demarcate the art school inside from outside, but also to prevent alternative providers entering the market, we believe that it is time to question the situation. What purpose does the concept of 'quality' actually serve? Is there a better way for artists and educators to define the quality of art education, beyond the 'total quality management' [TQM] thinking (Brigham 1993: 42) which has increasingly been transposed from the postwar business sectors onto US and UK university systems. Obvious TQM mechanisms regulating the neoliberal art school are the NSS customer satisfaction surveys and the role of quangos like the QAA. Does art education really need this TQM apparatus?

Ultimately, the largely unchallenged adaptation of TQM by university leaders implies that the mission of universities and businesses are precisely aligned. For Readings (1996: 22) the 'invocation of "quality" is the means of that transformation, since "quality" can apply to "all areas of campus life" indiscriminately'. Indeed, Lakomski and Marshall (1998, p. 234) highlighted in the late 90s that academics seemed unable to agree on an institutional definition of quality, or what it represented. TQM ideology within universities depends upon a singular and unchallenged problematic: that higher education is a business, and that students are its customers. Though this cannot be dismissed lightly in an age of increased tuition fees and exponentially accruing student debt, its totalising character can certainly be challenged. Should TQM mechanisms apply to educational spaces outside the neoliberal art school, and if so, how? How do we begin to measure quality beyond consumer satisfaction, especially within alternative art schools which are often not-for-profit organisations, cooperatives, or structures where no financial exchange takes place? Hickman and Akdere (2017) argue that by focusing 'only on satisfaction of students and/or their potential employers, [HEIs] are failing to account for most of their stakeholders'. Who are these wider stakeholders?

We contend that the incremental 'financialisation, commodification, and marketisation' (McGettigan 2013) of art education has made the conceptual and pedagogical critique of quality and TQM systems more urgent. Therefore, we are inviting educators, artists, and other stakeholders working in all areas of art

education to convene in a one-day symposium. This symposium, which will be delivered in a hybrid face to face and online format, will aim to define a collective vision of the quality of art education, beyond the instrumentalism of managerial ideology. Needless to say, a secondary aim of this symposium is to facilitate the development of solidarity, dialogue, collaborations, and creative partnerships between arts educators and wider partners across the sector.

The symposium will take place in the Feral Art School building and our exhibition space on Humber Street in the cultural quarter of Hull. Delegates are invited not only to experience the resurgent cultural ecology of Hull, but also to collaborate in forming the undercommons (Harney and Moten 2013) of the neoliberal art school.

Please send abstracts of no more than 500 words to feralartschool@gmail.com by 18th February.
Notification of acceptance by 25th Feb.

Responses may take the form of:

- a 15-20 minute academic paper, delivered live, online, or pre-recorded
- an artwork
- a poster
- a performance
- a short presentation
- interactive activities or workshops

Selected responses will be considered for publication, in a form of which will be determined at the symposium.

Questions to consider may include:

- What does a quality art education look like in the C21st post-covid context?
- What do art educators mean by 'quality'?
- What does one consume, as a consumer of art education?
- Who are the broader consumers of education?
- Is the term 'consumer' an appropriate description of a key partner in the education process?
- What is the relationship between the commodification of art education and the concept of 'quality'?
- To what extent is TQM compatible with art education?
- What sort of art schools do we want?
- What sort of partnerships do we need to offer a vibrant art school experience?
- What sort of models of art education should we be developing?
- What is the relationship between quality and 'cultural value'?
- Has quality become a barrier to engagement?
- Does the artworld require formally accredited university degree courses anymore?
- Is it possible to develop an alternative artworld quality mark?

REFERENCES

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- Hudson-Miles, R., Goodman, J., & Jones, J. (2021) 'What Artists Want, What Artists Need: A Critical History of Feral Art School, Hull, UK', *International Journal of Art & Design Education*.
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