

Collaborative Learning Design – A Solution to the Crisis in Art Education?

This workshop reports on the experience of a collaborative open education project led by the University of the Arts London and explores how this relates to recent discourse about the perceived crisis in art education. In the UK this crisis is manifesting itself in poor student satisfaction ratings, steep drops in undergraduate applications and, of course, in the removal of government funding to support teaching. While craft-based ‘making’ courses such as ceramics and textiles are in danger of largely disappearing from UK arts undergraduate curriculums due to cumulative cost-cutting.

UK art colleges, have on the whole, been slow to embrace technology and offer open and flexible learning opportunities. They have remained educationally conservative with a teaching model that is locked behind closed doors and firmly anchored in the constraints of a physical location, which demands that learning can only happen at the locations, times and modes that suit teachers, administrators and management. The result is a sector at risk of becoming marginalized, with a reduced subject base and increasingly vulnerable to a rapidly changing economic and social environment.

The concept of jointly designing open learning resources and entire courses and then sharing them openly and freely with the world presents a powerful and subversive counterbalance to those tendencies towards a narrow and exclusive approach to art education. By positioning our work within a wider and growing global cultural and educational commons we can draw on powerful source of support (a form of counter cultural capital) that can help in creating a more inclusive and dynamic form of art education.

This paper/workshop describes the experience of collaborating within and between institutions to create open learning resources and courses and explores some of the key issues that this has thrown up including; revealing personal and institutional philosophical positions, technical infrastructure problems, digital skills needs amongst staff, the use of ‘educational’ language and the pedagogical design skills required for open and flexible learning. The paper/workshop examines the prospects for such collaborative open educational activities in playing a role in the development and reinvigoration of art education in a time of crisis.