Senior Secondary Art Appreciation and Criticism and Students with Intellectual Disabilities: A Perfect Marriage or Not?

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Abstract

In 2009, the Education Bureau published the first senior secondary Visual Arts curriculum supplementary guide for students with intellectual disabilities in Hong Kong. Before that, there were no formal senior Visual Arts curricula for teachers in either type of school. The introduction of art appreciation and criticism to teachers is highlighted particularly in the Guide. It emphasises art appreciation and criticism as being one of the major components of the curriculum, in addition to art making. However, teaching art appreciation and criticism to students with intellectual disabilities in the Hong Kong educational context is considered ambitious and challenging. The aim of this paper is critically to examine the fundamental underpinnings of the new curriculum in terms of its theoretical and pragmatic implications for teachers and students with intellectual disabilities.
disabilities as set out in the supplementary guide. The author adopts contemporary concepts of teaching art appreciation and criticism as the theoretical and methodological analysis framework to argue and respond to the above-mentioned underpinnings. This paper finally concludes with some constructive insights that urge policy-makers to reflect on such issues.

**Key words**

Art appreciation and criticism, senior secondary, students with intellectual disabilities
Introduction

In 2009, the Education Bureau (EDB), formerly the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB), introduced the first senior secondary Visual Arts curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) in Hong Kong (Curriculum Development Council, 2009). The Visual Arts curriculum is compulsory for junior (Forms 1 – 3) secondary students only. Senior (Forms 4 – 6) secondary students may take Visual Arts as one of the electives only if their school offers Visual Arts. Previously, there were no official or centralised curricula, syllabuses or directions for the teaching of Visual Arts to students with ID in either type of school. The introduction of art appreciation and criticism to teachers is highlighted in particular in the Visual Arts curriculum. It emphasises art appreciation and criticism as being one of the major components of the curriculum, in addition to art making.

The EDB published the Visual Arts Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4 – 6) (VA Curriculum Guide) in 2007 and the Visual Arts Curriculum and Assessment Supplementary Guide (Secondary 4 – 6) for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (Supplementary Guide) in 2009, explicating the rationale, framework, approaches, strategies and assessment procedures for use with students (Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007; 2009). The Visual Arts Curriculum Guide is written for the context of mainstream secondary teaching, while the Supplementary Guide is intended particularly for students with all grades of ID. One point worthy of note here is the emphasis on teaching art appreciation and criticism in both guides, a practice which was originally unknown in special schools. However, since the promulgation of the new curriculum there have been very few scholarly papers which have discussed the teaching of art appreciation and criticism to senior secondary students with ID (e.g., Tam, 2013; Tam, Lau & So, 2011). The majority of the available literature focuses on developing teaching methods for art appreciation and criticism in the general educational context;
very few studies have considered the implementation of art appreciation and criticism in the ID student context. The relationship between art appreciation and criticism and students with ID is thus an undiscovered area. This represents a gap in our understanding.

According to the EDB (2014), there have been no professional development programmes related to teaching art appreciation and criticism offered to teachers of students with ID until now, although the EDB claims that the Supplementary Guide does provide a framework for teachers for reference when they are designing the relevant curricula (Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2009). In this context, teaching art appreciation and criticism to students with ID in the Hong Kong educational context is considered challenging. The aim of this paper is critically to examine the fundamental underpinnings of the new curriculum set out in the Supplementary Guide in terms of its theoretical and pragmatic implications for teachers of and students with ID. This fundamental underpinning will be explored in two essential questions: 1) what are the philosophical underpinnings of teaching art appreciation and criticism to students with intellectual disabilities? 2) What are the key issues and challenges concerning students with intellectual disabilities in the learning of art appreciation and criticism? The author adopts contemporary concepts of teaching art appreciation and criticism as the theoretical and methodological analysis framework to argue and respond to the above-mentioned questions. An examination of the evolution of curricula in terms of their aims, rationales, structures, focuses, approaches and assessment procedures will provide insights into the corresponding changes in pedagogical considerations. This paper finally concludes with some constructive insights that urge policy-makers to reflect on such issues.

Problems with Teaching Art Appreciation and Criticism to Students with ID
According to the EDB (2014), there are 514 secondary schools and 60 special schools in Hong Kong. The special schools are diverse, including schools for children with visual impairment, schools for children with hearing impairment, schools for children with physical disability, hospital schools and schools for social development, and schools for children with ID (Education Bureau, 2014). Students with ID are classified in three grades, namely the mild, moderate, and severe/profound grades (Education Bureau, 2014). In general, students of all kinds have the right to study in ordinary schools, though most students with ID are placed in special schools. Some severe / profound-graded ID students who have both multiple physical disabilities and ID are allocated to residential schools to receive special care and education (Legislative Council Panel on Education, 2014). Obviously, the needs of the ID students in these three grades are very different. Students with ID are allocated to special schools that correspond to their level of ID. Even so, the variation among students within the same special school or within the same class can be huge. Within the same class, it is possible for one student to have a mental age several years older or younger than his or her classmates. It is evident that to implement a new Visual Arts curriculum specifically suited to the diverse needs of students with ID is a difficult task.

To serve the aim of inclusion, the EDB announced that students with special educational needs could be educated under a single curriculum framework designed for all students (Curriculum Development Council, 2009). This policy sanctioned the use of the same curriculum for both mainstream students and those with ID. Nevertheless, the phrase ‘under a single curriculum framework’ does not mean that students with and without ID use the same curriculum. Differentiation is an important concept in the education of students with special educational needs. Since this is the case, the two curricula need to be more or less the same. In this sense, the decision to establish a senior secondary Visual Arts curriculum for students with ID that is almost identical to the mainstream version may have been based on idealistic motives. This raises a question about
theories of inclusion or integrated education, and although the EDB has claimed that the system of placing students with special educational needs in ordinary schools in Hong Kong is a kind of integrated education, it is clear that it is not inclusive education in the local context. Particularly in recent years, the EDB has emphasized a Whole School Approach to support students with special educational needs (Education Bureau, 2014).

Although the Visual Arts curriculum does not provide a full description of the diverse needs of students with ID in learning Visual Arts in either mainstream or special schools, it does highlight the importance of inclusion and is regarded as a framework for the curriculum (Curriculum Development Council, 2009). Therefore, it is assumed that the curriculum is written for and can be applied with students with all grades of ID in both school contexts. One assumption of the curriculum is that students with ID can derive the same benefits from art appreciation and criticism as mainstream students. The author of this paper questions whether this is a philosophically sound approach to addressing the multitude of concerns inherent in the special education system in Hong Kong.

Contemporary Perspectives on Art Appreciation and Criticism in the Educational Context

In art education, there is very little literature on the philosophy behind and the teaching strategies for teaching art appreciation and criticism for students with ID, compared to teaching it to students in the mainstream school context. References to teaching practice could only be found in the guidelines published in different countries. For instance, one of the practical guidelines is the Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Mild General Learning Disabilities published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2015) in Ireland, which describes the rationale for teaching Visual Arts and provides curriculum examples for teachers nationally. Unlike the movement of Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) developed by scholars like Eisner (1988)
and Smith (2000) in the 1980s and 90s, and which became an influential idea, practical teaching model, and standard for art teaching in the US, there are no standard or influential teaching approaches to teaching art appreciation and criticism to students with ID. Obviously, this topic is an important but un-investigated research area.

Contemporary notions of teaching art appreciation and criticism focus on inquiry into the meaning of artworks – art interpretation. From a postmodern view, artworks are socio-culturally constructed works in which artists use visual forms, symbolic systems and metaphors to depict their perspectives on the world and to understand the society and culture (Freedman, 2003). Viewers use their life experiences to connect with, interpret and respond to the artworks; thus, to interpret artworks is to connect and respond (Parsons, 1992). Anderson (1993) regards art appreciation and criticism as talking or writing about art. Responding to an artwork can take different forms, such as visual, written and linguistic forms, and these forms can be transferrable and universal (Lau, 2013). Although these forms have different attributes, they can be interlinked with no contradiction when interpreting artworks. Artists use visual languages to express their ideas and viewers uses oral or verbal languages to express their opinions on the artwork. Both are thus trying to express their feelings and thoughts, but using different forms of expression. In this sense, art interpretation can be carried out in different ways without necessarily causing any problems.

Another aspect of art interpretation and criticism emphasises the difference between modernist and postmodernist views of art appreciation and criticism. In the former view, art interpretation is context-free and is not concerned with the socio-cultural meaning hidden behind the artwork (Parsons, 1992). Art interpretation consists solely of descriptions of the visual quality and visual effect of the artwork, and of forms of artistic expression such as artistic style, visual elements and design principles. In the latter view, by contrast, art can only be understood within
its socio-cultural contexts and relationships and cannot be explicated without taking these contexts into account (Efland, Freedman & Stuhr, 1996). This method of art interpretation largely relies on verbal language, because viewers need to use verbal language to discuss the relationship between art and culture (Barrett, 2003; Sullivan, 2005). Another perspective on art appreciation and criticism is concerned with the analytical skills used in art interpretation. Although, as mentioned above, the interpretation of art can take different forms, sophisticated analytical skills play an important role in it. These analytical skills include both rational and emotional aspects, which in the field of education can enhance students’ abilities in thinking, organising and presenting the meanings of artworks (Tucker, 2002). From a cognitive perspective, when we interpret an artwork, we will combine our subjective experience and intellectual analysis to create the meaning of the artwork and the artwork will reflect our life experiences at the same time (Parsons, 1992).

Art educators have developed various methods of inquiry, and these methods have been widely recognised and practised by secondary school teachers. Most of the discussions in secondary school art interpretation involve talking about art in a classroom setting (Cotner, 2010; Soep & Cotner, 1999) and developing a practical model for teaching art appreciation and criticism (Hickman, 2005). Although the teaching of art appreciation and criticism in schools has been discussed for the last two decades, whether or not school art appreciation and criticism should be based on the practices of professional critics is still debatable. Some argue that professional practice can provide guidelines and expert views for students to follow, and this is all too important, particularly for a beginner who is learning how to respond to artworks (e.g., Leshnoff, 1995). Some challenge the view that professional practices should be used in the school context and are afraid that this kind of practice will limit the development of students’ critical thinking and will not help them broaden their understanding of art appreciation and criticism (e.g., Beach & Freedman, 1992). In the Hong Kong educational context mainstream secondary teachers are most
familiar with Feldman’s (1992) and Anderson’s (1997) models of art appreciation and criticism. Nevertheless, some art educators criticise these models on the basis that they neither cultivate students’ independent thinking nor help them to understand everyday culture (e.g., Barrett, 1994; Freedman, 2003). Their models have, however, become the conventional model used in secondary schools (Tam, 2007). In particular, Feldman’s aesthetics scanning model of art appreciation and criticism was put on the recommended reading list in the Visual Arts Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6) (Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007).

In terms of the practice of teaching art appreciation and criticism in the secondary school context, Feldman (1994) suggests four essential steps to guide students in interpreting art: 1) description; 2) analysis; 3) interpretation, and 4) judgment. According to Feldman (1992), description refers to immediately recognising and describing the content and subject matter of the artwork which are obviously perceived. An example of the suggested question to be provided for students to answer is: “What do you see in the artwork?” Analysis refers to the formal analysis of the visual elements and design principles used in the artwork, such as composition, techniques and colours. Teachers may ask students about the form of the artwork. For example, “Can you identify five visual elements that appear in the painting?” Interpretation is the most important step of all in Feldman’s model. It requires viewers to explicate the meaning of the artwork, the socio-cultural context of the artwork, the artistic phenomenon, and the motif of the creator based on the available evidence. It involves cognitive skills, logical thinking and personal experience, which are projected onto the artwork in order to interpret the feelings and intentions behind the artwork. One example of the type of question proposed for students is: “What clues do you see that support your ideas”? Finally, judgment refers to evaluating the overall strengths or merit of the artwork. An example of the type of question that may be posed is: “Do you think this is an important artwork, so that
museums should collect it for some reason”? In addition to description, analysis, interpretation and judgment, Barrett (2000) highlights the fact that students’ higher order thinking skills can be stimulated through art appreciation and criticism. According to him, there are no right or wrong art interpretations in the art educational context, but there can be good or bad interpretations.

In addition to the fact that description, analysis and evaluation are required, art interpretation may be considered to be even more difficult as higher order thinking skills are needed to organise and connect relevant data to make a final interpretation of the artwork (Barrett, 2000). Since there is insufficient evidence supporting the capability of art appreciation and criticism to develop higher order thinking skills in students with ID, it is uncertain whether such students would be able to engage in higher order thinking in art appreciation and criticism, especially the moderate and severe/profound grade students.

**The Main Contents of Both Guides**

In Hong Kong, the new special school curriculum is based on the idea of “one curriculum framework for all” proposed by the EMB (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2005, p. 67). This idea was derived from the concept of inclusive education. According to the corresponding action plan EMB published in 2005, all students, including those with special educational needs, are entitled to be educated under the same curriculum framework in the name of inclusion. The document offers guidelines on how to adapt the curriculum to suit the different learning needs and capabilities of students. Under this framework, the new senior secondary curriculum for students with ID states that it is specifically designed to cater for the differences among students (Hong Kong Education and Manpower Bureau, 2005).

The Visual Arts curriculum at the senior secondary level largely focused on teaching subject knowledge and modes of artistic expression. Although the objectives for both the cognitive and
psychomotor domains of learning were specified in the curriculum, aspects of teaching Visual Arts to students with special needs were excluded. The teaching of art appreciation and criticism was also a concern and mentioned in the curriculum. However, no connection between the teaching of Visual Arts for mainstream students and for students with ID was indicated in the curriculum. It appeared therefore that the curriculum was designed for students in mainstream senior schools rather than for special schools. Indeed, the Supplementary Guide (Curriculum Development Council, 2009) and the VA Curriculum Guide (Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007) are very similar (see Table 1).

The Supplementary Guide consists of six major chapters, namely Chapter 1 Introduction, Chapter 2 Curriculum Framework, Chapter 3 Curriculum Planning, Chapter 4 Learning and Teaching, Chapter 5 Assessment, and Chapter 6 Learning and Teaching Resources. The majority of the directives in the Supplementary Guide are taken from its mainstream counterpart: there are only two pages containing different new instructions and ideas regarding the needs of students with ID. For instance, both curricula are described as a “flexible, coherent and diversified senior secondary curriculum aimed at catering for students with varied interests, needs and abilities” (Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007, p. i; Curriculum Development Council, 2009, p. i). In the section containing the rationale behind the curriculum, the mainstream VA Curriculum Guide argues that the Visual Arts curriculum can enhance comprehensive individual development, cultivate cognitive abilities, promote individual and social values, strengthen general learning abilities, foster aesthetic potential and enrich various aspects of everyday life; however, similar statements are made in the Supplementary Guide without considering the specific context of ID students.
### Table 1 A Comparison of the Two Different Curriculum Guides

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<td>● contribute to the quality of life through the power of aesthetic experiences</td>
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<td>● contribute to the development of cognitive abilities</td>
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<td>● promote individual and social values</td>
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<td>● ensure greater coherence within the curriculum as a whole and serve to strengthen students’ learning through the cross-curricular links between art and the other KLAs</td>
<td>● strengthen general learning abilities</td>
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<td>● nurture and develop the aesthetic potential of young people and enable them to participate in the fast-growing creative industries of Hong Kong</td>
<td>● foster aesthetic potential</td>
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<td>● develop skills and abilities through studying art and applied them in many aspects of daily-life and work</td>
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<td>● enrich students’ arts experience</td>
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<td>● enrich students’ arts experience</td>
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The rationale and the aims presented in the Supplementary Guide and mainstream VA Curriculum Guide are identical. Regarding the framework of the curriculum, there are four key learning targets on which learning activities should be based to facilitate the achievement of the aims of the curriculum. These are: 1) developing creativity and imagination; 2) developing skills and processes; 3) cultivating critical responses, and 4) understanding arts in context (Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007). The learning activities are organised into two domains called Visual Arts Appreciation and Criticism in Context and Visual Arts Making, respectively. The former encompasses an assortment of processes through which students participate in the critical appreciation of any kind of artwork, art form or artistic phenomenon. The latter refers to the creation of any artwork, whether tangible or conceptual, that should be informed by time spent engaging in Visual Arts Appreciation and Criticism in Context. Five ways of responding to artworks were suggested for Art Appreciation and Criticism: “literal description, comprehensive feeling, formal analysis, interpretation of meanings, and value judgment” (Curriculum Development Council, 2009, p. 16). This approach is overall similar to Feldman’s (1992) aesthetic scanning method, mentioned earlier in this paper,
for teaching art criticism in the mainstream secondary school context, a method which involves the following four steps or stages: description, formal analysis, interpretation and judgment.

As discussed previously, teachers in Hong Kong mainstream secondary schools are already familiar with using Feldman’s model to teach art appreciation and criticism. Undoubtedly, the model does provide a fundamental framework for teaching art appreciation and criticism, but the target students are mainstream secondary students. Therefore, it is doubtful whether teachers in special schools could use the model to teach students with ID with the same effectiveness as in mainstream schools. Unfortunately, no research studies have yet attempted to explore this issue. Besides, both guides defined assessment as an important and fundamental element of classroom instruction which should be used to gather evidence about students’ learning (Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007; Curriculum Development Council, 2009).

In assessment, the rationale for studying Visual Arts, aims and objectives, and learning targets are also the assessment tools. Both guides make particular mention of research portfolios as a school-based assessment method. Both guides also state that students can provide evidence of progress in learning over time based on the spirit of self-directed learning, recording their reflections, any improvements, and any important achievements (Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority , 2007; Curriculum Development Council, 2009). Another assessment method suggested in both guides is critical studies. Mainstream students and students with ID are encouraged to pursue their own themes to conduct research on the topic (Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007; Curriculum Development Council, 2009). The mainstream VA Curriculum Guide contains some guiding principles for both internal and public assessments (Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority,
2007), but since students with ID are not required to sit for public examinations, the Supplementary Guide only includes guidelines for internal assessment (Curriculum Development Council, 2009).

Critical Analysis of the Supplementary Guide

The Supplementary Guide does contain some potential benefits. Firstly, it demonstrates a vision and future direction for teachers in teaching art appreciation and criticism in both the mainstream secondary school and the special school contexts. It confirms the important position of art education as being a part of general education and of equal importance to other learning areas. The Guide promotes the ideal concept of inclusion. Under the concept of one education for all, every student should have the opportunity to receive art education, particularly in special schools. Secondly, teaching art appreciation and criticism should be conducted by well-trained professional art teachers who have knowledge of aesthetics and education. In the long run, the role of art teachers is becoming more important and is thus being promoted. Thirdly, the Supplementary Guide offers a framework for teachers to develop their school-based art curricula based on the needs of their students. For example, the flexibility of the assessment methods provides various opportunities for students to improve their learning. Next, the guide emphasises the fact that in one way art appreciation and criticism celebrates and speaks for our culture; therefore, it can enhance and cultivate students’ aesthetic sense and appreciation of our life. Finally, it is believed that the EDB has made every effort to incorporate some principles of inclusion in the curriculum for special schools. In the past, with a legacy of segregation deeply entrenched in the education system, the aims of special education were limited predominantly to the teaching of skills students needed to cope with everyday life needs (Li, Tse & Lian, 2009). The introduction of this curriculum is a step towards offering an improved Visual Arts education to students with ID, since previously they did not have any Visual Arts Curriculum guidelines at all.
Nevertheless, the Supplementary Guide contains three weaknesses and disadvantages with regard to the interests of students with special needs. Firstly, the major flaw lies in the fact that most of it is copied from the mainstream VA Curriculum Guide. When comparing the content and structure of the two guides, they are to all intents and purposes the same. The interests of teachers from special schools are hardly addressed. One significant example is that one of the curriculum aims in the mainstream VA Curriculum Guide is “to enhance cultural and cross-cultural understanding through exploration of the art of diverse cultures” (Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007, p. 4). However, the same aim in the Supplementary Guide is worded as follows: “to enhance students’ cultural and cross-cultural understanding and appreciation by understanding multi-cultural arts and the expression methods of classical, modern, Chinese and foreign arts” (Curriculum Development Council, 2009, p. 9). In essence, the central idea is identical, but the wording of the latter is verbose and less comprehensible. Similar modifications appear throughout the Supplementary Guide. This issue is related to the fundamental underpinnings of the new senior secondary Visual Arts curriculum for students with ID and its implementation.

While the Supplementary Guide does include some different input, the inclusion of only two pages of original and relevant insights is hardly satisfactory. Thirdly, it is necessary to inform teachers how the content of the curriculum can be taught and how it is relevant and conducive to the learning of students with special needs (Curriculum Development Council, 2009). Kui, Cheng and Tam (2008) identified four major learning obstacles they encounter in the local context, namely a limited attention span, communication difficulties, memory deficiencies and clumsiness in fine and gross motor skills. The Supplementary Guide should offer suggestions for tackling these particular problems in order to support effective planning and implementation in special schools. In addition to proposing ways in which the current Supplementary Guide might be
improved, it is essential to identify the cause of the problem in the first place. Ultimately, teaching senior art appreciation and criticism in the special school context is challenging. For instance, one learning focus in the Supplementary Guide suggests that teachers use the art appreciation and criticism method to teach students with ID to describe, analyse, interpret and evaluate artworks; they are also required to provide justifications and demonstrate their views on the artwork in a written format (Curriculum Development Council, 2009). Because of the varying challenges ID students are dealing with, not every student with ID is able to use the written format to interpret artwork. There should be any other alternatives, the oral format for example. Besides, it is unlikely that students with severe/profound-graded ID would be able to think about the socio-cultural aspect and meaning of an artwork. This discussion raises the essential question of whether it is appropriate for teachers to use this art appreciation and criticism method to teach students with ID. The above-mentioned three issues are discussed further below.

The Difficulty of Implementing the New Senior Secondary Visual Arts Curriculum for Students with Intellectual Disabilities in line with its Philosophical Underpinnings

The new curriculum provides senior secondary teachers who teach in special schools with an idea of some principles for reference. However, methodically speaking, it is only through a systematic and holistic examination of the theoretical and practical issues associated with the new curriculum that meaningful conclusions about how effective it is or might be can be drawn. As stated above, the new senior secondary Visual Arts curriculum for students with ID is for the most part copied from the mainstream curriculum, and this has been done on the basis of the theory and ideology of inclusion. If the supplementary guide is no more than a replica of the mainstream VA Curriculum Guide, then why would teachers not simply use the mainstream VA Curriculum Guide? That would seem to be a better manifestation of inclusion. From a theoretical and
philosophical perspective, does the idea of inclusion imply following the mainstream curriculum without taking into account the differences between the students?

From an educational policy perspective, the EDB has failed to explicate how teachers should implement the curriculum in the real-life context of a special school. There are several reasons, therefore, why the official documentation is difficult to translate into practice for students with ID. It is important to note that the Supplementary Guide is only problematic in the context of special schools; as discussed previously, the variation among students with ID is large, and even if they study in the same special schools. Thus the Supplementary Guide that is largely copied from the mainstream VA Curriculum Guide cannot help their teachers in any way to address their diverse needs and conditions. Although a few paragraphs in the mainstream VA Curriculum Guide are dedicated to explaining how to cater for this kind of learner diversity, the classroom situations and interactions in mainstream and special schools are so different in terms of students’ abilities, attitudes, motivation and discipline that neither of the guides could be made to work effectively in a special school.

Theories of Inclusion

The entire issue of ID is discussed only briefly in the Supplementary Guide. The author doubts that this integrated approach is a manifestation of inclusive education. According to Booth (1996), the term “inclusive education” usually refers to one of two processes: “the process of increasing the participation of pupils within the cultures and curricula of mainstream schools and the process of decreasing exclusionary pressures” (p. 34). His definition of inclusive education opposes the use of special schools, since they constitute a form of exclusion from mainstream schools. In a broader sense, however, Vlachou (2004) examines the concept of inclusion and identifies five levels of schooling at which the obstacles of learning and participation exclusion can be removed
or minimised. These are known as the intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical and evaluative levels of schooling. As suggested by Vlachou (2004), the rationale behind a curriculum reflects the conceptual framework of the level of school education. However, the fact that the Visual Arts curriculum for these students with ID is essentially a duplicate of the one for mainstream school students is, at both the intentional and curricular levels, only a partial manifestation of the philosophy of inclusive education. This so-called “integrated approach” complies with the principle of “one curriculum framework for all” proposed by the EDB which allows students with ID to achieve their potential and enhance personal development so they are able to contribute to the community (Hong Kong Education and Manpower Bureau, 2005, p. 67).

Since students with ID who study in special schools are not required to participate in the public assessment programme leading to the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education, their learning progress is assessed internally. According to the mainstream VA Curriculum Guide, internal assessment refers to “the assessment practices that teachers and schools employ as part of the ongoing learning and teaching process during the three years of senior secondary studies” (Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007, p. 47). The guide suggests that internal assessment needs to be more formative in nature and focus more on the ongoing enhancement of teaching and learning. In this respect, the assessment practice for students with ID is congruent with Vlachou’s (2004) inclusion-related assertion that “evaluation is (or better should be) an educational medium through which educators can secure information they can use to enhance the quality of their work” (p. 17). Based on this analysis, it appears that the VA Curriculum Guide displays the principle of inclusion in three out of the five levels of schooling Vlachou has proposed (2004). Although he explicitly states that all five levels of schooling should be taken into account for successful inclusion, this is unrealistic within the Hong Kong educational context.
A Question Related to Teaching Art Appreciation and Criticism

Art appreciation and criticism is the new learning focus in the new senior secondary Visual Arts curriculum in Hong Kong. According to Danto (1981), the meaning of art is socially and culturally constructed by its context. In other words, to interpret art is to connect the social relationships between artworks, artists and viewers, as well as to convey its socio-cultural meaning. In the teaching context, the activity of art interpretation involves and plays a role in investigating the symbols, metaphors, structure and meaning of art in context (Barrett, 2000). Barrett (2003) has suggested that when students learn art criticism in the school context, they need to employ higher order thinking skills to interpret the meanings of artworks. However, teaching ID students such abstract and complex concepts could be a very challenging endeavour. Some scholars argue that they are not necessarily abstract or complex, and that a simple verbal expression such as “I like this picture”, or even a smile, can be considered a form of art appreciation and criticism (e.g., Tam, Lau & So, 2011).

Responding to an artwork, however, should be more than that, and this makes art interpretation more difficult and complex. For instance, one teaching example offered in the Supplementary Guide suggests that teachers use the art appreciation and criticism method to teach students with ID to describe, analyse, interpret and evaluate the Marilyn Monroe print created by Andy Warhol (Curriculum Development Council, 2009). This example is borrowed directly from the VA Curriculum Guide. In this example, students are required to make a critical analysis of, provide justifications for and give the socio-cultural context of the artwork and Pop Art, as well as demonstrate their views on the artwork in a written format. Although students with varying degrees of ID can respond to this in many ways depending on their levels, to make a critical analysis and provide the socio-cultural context of the artwork requires the use of higher order thinking skills.
that may be beyond the capabilities of severe/profound-graded, and even of some mild-graded ID students. Compared to description, analysis and evaluation, interpretation is the most difficult aspect of interpreting an artwork, because students not only have to employ higher order thinking skills, they also need to synthesise all the data they have observed and analysed and make a logical explanation of the artwork. Therefore, students with ID might find that to describe, analyse and evaluate an artwork is easier than to interpret it. The examples given in the Supplementary Guide need to be revised in accordance with the diverse levels of ID students.

The Supplementary Guide suggests that teachers consult certain chapters from the basic education curriculum guide in order to enable them to adopt an integrated approach. However, the relevant indications are relatively brief and insufficient. Moreover, the Supplementary Guide does not explain why on some occasions teachers should refer to the mainstream VA Curriculum Guide and on other occasions they should stick to the basic education curriculum guide. This in turn gives rise to the question of what it is that differentiates the new senior secondary Visual Arts curriculum from the Visual Arts curriculum in basic education for students from Primary 1 to Secondary 3 (equivalent to Grades 1 to 9). The answer is unknown. Whether teachers and students with ID feel comfortable with the new method of art appreciation and criticism, which relies heavily on their being able to describe, analyse, interpret and evaluate an artwork in the form of verbal and written presentations in the special educational context, is doubtful.

**Concluding Remarks**

Over the last two decades in Hong Kong, the author has not seen any growing importance being attached to research into the senior secondary Visual Arts curriculum for students with ID. Although the Supplementary Guide attempts to analyse and validate the concept of the one-curriculum framework, little is known at present about the underlying conceptual framework and
working method of the curriculum for students with ID. The validity of the conceptual framework of the curriculum needs to be established, confirmed, and modified through the use of empirical evidence before it is implemented. The policy of teaching of art making together with art appreciation and criticism is the major concern. Besides, it should be noted that the curriculum framework and Supplementary Guide make few attempts to establish a relationship between the one-curriculum framework and classroom practice. While there is a strong assumption of a link between the ideology of inclusion and the integrated approach adopted, little empirical evidence has been found to support the practicality of such an approach. No research findings are yet available internationally concerning the teaching of art appreciation and criticism to students with ID. Owing to the absence of any literature on this subject, the theoretical view has not been sufficiently supported by direct research to clarify which approaches should actually be adopted in teaching art appreciation and criticism. There is no empirical evidence available on how best to teach art appreciation and criticism to students with ID. Future research is therefore required.

One important question that should be mentioned here is whether teaching art appreciation and criticism in the context of students with ID is similar to teaching it in the mainstream student context. It will be a great challenge to use the contemporary approach to teaching art appreciation and criticism to teach students with ID. Students in the mainstream schools are required to respond to art in written form; however, the use of written form might be difficult for students with ID. Therefore, it is suggested that other forms of expression, such as verbal language and body language, could be used in teaching art appreciation and criticism to them. Indeed, students with ID can feel free to describe, analyse and evaluate artworks based on their feelings, emotions and logical thinking. They can also use various skills and different types of knowledge to interpret artworks. When they are attempting to interpret a work of art, teachers should lead them to reach a balance between emotional expression and higher-order logical thinking skills. Some scholars
claim that description, analysis and evaluation may be easier for students with ID to handle, but
the extent to which students with ID might be able to articulate art interpretation is unknown.
Although students with ID can still try to interpret art, without actually making an interpretation,
for some students with moderate-graded or severe/profound-graded ID who have difficulties in
making interpretations, teachers might temporarily omit the most difficult part – interpretation -
and put the initial focus of the learning on description, analysis and evaluation. This would,
however, affect the completeness of the art inquiry method and it is doubtful whether such a type
of ‘art interpretation’ that does not actually include any interpretation can still be classed as art
interpretation.

In the development of the new senior secondary Visual Arts curriculum in Hong Kong, the
different contexts for learning and teaching at senior secondary level have not been given careful
consideration. Practical guidance on the application of the curriculum in daily practice is not
provided. The curriculum appears to support the ideology of a one-curriculum framework, but this
may conflict with actual practice in special schools. Without adequate practical guidelines and
examples to follow, teachers in special schools may be unable to make the curriculum work in
their classrooms. The Supplementary Guide presents the framework from an ideological point of
view, without specifying in enough detail how the ideas are meant to be applied in practice; as a
result, teachers may have difficulty implementing the curriculum.

Therefore, the Supplementary Guide is regarded more as a philosophical platform than as a
practical guide for teachers teaching ID students to take reference from, being full of assumptions
and ideals that are impossible to implement in the real educational context. These assumptions also
drive the argument that current art education policy is inadequate, as it does not serve the needs of
ID students in the real world context. With reference to the previous discussions, the needs of ID
students in Senior Secondary Art Appreciation and Criticism are diverse, and involve the difficulty
of actually implementing the New Senior Secondary Visual Arts Curriculum for Students with Intellectual Disabilities in line with its philosophical underpinnings, the theory of inclusion, and the question of whether to teach art appreciation and criticism to these students at all. Policy-makers are urged to reflect on such issues. Firstly, the EDB should revise the Supplementary Guide to make it a curriculum framework which mainly describes and explains the philosophy and rationale behind teaching art appreciation and criticism to senior high students with ID. Secondly, the EDB should provide a real practical guidelines and examples for teachers in special schools. In addition, the absence of a clear theoretical basis to support the curriculum presents a great challenge. Therefore, comprehensive research into both the ideology of inclusion and the practical application of this ideology is required. The final proposal put forward in this paper is that the relationship between the one-curriculum framework and the teaching methods used to apply it should be viewed as being of both theoretical and practical importance.

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