



## **Design Education – now you see it; now you don't**

### **A position paper prepared by the Design and Technology Association and the National Society for Education in Art and Design (NSEAD)**

Since 1945 there have been various attempts to develop design education in secondary schools, although successive governments have recognised the importance of design ever since the Great Exhibition of 1851. After the Second World War, design education was generally seen as element within either 'Art, Craft and Design' or within 'Craft, Design and Technology' (CDT), the latter a subject that developed in the 1960s out of a general dissatisfaction with traditional boys' crafts (woodwork and metalwork) and girls' crafts (needlework, cooking, child care and home economics).

The paradigm shift that was required to establish CDT was hampered by a reluctance of many teachers to move away from the safe ground of their training and long-established workshop practices. At the same time, most art teachers were aware to some extent that 'art' and 'design were interdependent and interrelated. However this was not enough to change practice in schools that was essentially fine art-based with some additional craft activities such as pottery, textiles (woven and printed) and, occasionally, jewellery.

For a period in the 1960s to mid 1980s 'Design Education' offered a new rationale for integration into the art curriculum. The work of Peter Green<sup>1</sup> at Hornsey College of Art and the Royal College of Art's Design Education Unit under the guidance of Professor Bruce Archer were particularly important in this respect. The active intervention of the Design Council with a number of reports<sup>2</sup> and the 'Schools' Design Prize' were also significant in establishing awareness of the 'subject'. Design was seen as a critical area of experience and learning in the contemporary world that required a strong cross-curricular approach in schools. Baynes' seminal paper 'Defining a Design Dimension of the Curriculum'<sup>3</sup> provides a full account of some subtle ideas about the cross-curricular nature of design education that deserved to have flourished much more. Unfortunately these were discarded in the development of the predominantly subject-based national curriculum in England (but much less so in Scotland).

Even before the National Curriculum was mooted, then Secretary of State Sir Keith Joseph was concerned about overlap and repetition in the school curriculum. This is probably why the early National Curriculum proposals referred to 'Art' and 'Technology' as foundation subjects. Significantly,

the word 'design' disappeared from both subjects, giving a perhaps unintended but nevertheless clear message to teachers. While art did not regain the title 'Art & Design' until 2000, technology had an even more troubled genesis.

Duncan Graham, one time chair and chief executive of the National Curriculum Council, observed: 'When technology first appeared on the agenda of the National Curriculum Council it is fair to say that nobody was clear what it was and it was left to the working group to invent it'.<sup>4</sup> He suggested that technology had all-party support from the politicians because it promised to break down the academic and vocational divide in education and, very provocatively, he proposed that technology could be '... at the beginning of that revolution as for the first time thinkers will be forced to make and the makers will be forced to think'.<sup>5</sup> Graham also revealed that he was uncertain about where the concept originated of technology in the national curriculum, but he expressed the view that both civil servants and politicians:

...felt it was time to do something to remove the grip of woodwork and metalwork for boys and needlework and domestic science for girls, following the successful experience of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI).<sup>6</sup>

It is significant that design education does not appear to have been discussed at all in the early 1990s.

Following criticism from the National Curriculum Council and the Engineering Council, then Secretary of State John Patten announced in 1992 a 'carefully delineated review of the technology Order' to be carried out by HMI. Following the HMI report there was further delay as Patten announced in July 1993 that the introduction of revised technology Order was to be postponed for one year to permit further development and consultation. The new Order did not come into effect until September 1995. Gordon Warren, a former HMI and then director of the Design and Technology Association, commented on the proposals, saying 'To relate [activities] always to a 'product' outcome was seen to limit significantly the opportunities to develop design capability'.<sup>7</sup>

The Dearing review of 1993-94 recommended reducing the national curriculum to 'manageable size' with a focus on the core subjects of mathematics, science and English. The statutory requirement for technology at key stage four was reduced to a short course. The 1995 Order, which renamed the subject 'Design and Technology' (following the introduction of a separate Order for information technology) could perhaps be accepted as a definition of 'school technology', but it did not fully address the much wider field of designing and making, aspects of which may require knowledge and understanding of a vast range of appropriate technologies.

With the introduction in 1995 of the revised National Curriculum Order for D&T standards improved markedly because the clearer Programme of Study helped teachers plan more effectively. There was a return to a higher proportion of practical work, rather than paper-based project work, with pupils developing better D&T capability. Many teachers found the original Order for D&T problematic: not only was it difficult to understand and open to wide differences in interpretation, but also there was insufficient time for teachers to plan the required new approaches. The 1995 programme of study

defined the knowledge and skills more clearly. In 2000 there was further pressure to slim down the requirements, particularly for primary schools, and the programme of study was reduced, but supported by exemplar schemes of work and guidance. The revised programme of study set in statute the teaching methodology with three different types of activities – product evaluation, focused practical tasks, and design and make assignments. There was also a focus on inclusion so that the programme of study accommodated a wider range of pupil ability. The programmes were also updated to include modern technologies, such as smart materials and CAD/CAM. The attainment targets were reduced from two to one for holistic designing and making. For the first time the subject had an ‘importance statement’ which defined what the unique contribution of the subject is in the curriculum and a vision for it.

From 2000 some departments have struggled to live up to the vision set out in the importance statement. Over several years, Ofsted investigations had shown that making skills were better taught than designing skills. Consequently, in 2005, the KS3 National Strategy Foundation Subjects D&T programme was implemented to improve specifically the teaching of designing and planning for progression. Providing professional development for teachers to support their teaching of designing skills, has resulted in significant positive impacts. However, the limited national roll out of the training meant not all teachers have been able to benefit and thus the overall impact on the subject community as a whole has been reduced.

Research into D&T teaching provides a strong set of supporting statistics; the subject improves pupils' self esteem, motivation and achievement, for example. According to Ofsted reports, D&T subjects show the greatest improvement in terms of results and that pupils with special education needs make better progress in D&T than other subjects. Other research shows that it is the least truant lesson, while simultaneously it contributes to improved numeracy and literacy. Against these success stories is the potential threat to reduce D&T's contribution to the KS3 curriculum. Numbers of students passing GCSE examinations in D&T fell by approximately 10% in 2005 as a result of the removal of the subject's statutory nature at Key Stage 4 (KS4). Educators and industry are worried that this decline might continue as a result of the current White Paper's recommendations.

England and Wales were the first countries in the world to introduce Design and Technology as a compulsory subject for all pupils from 5-16 over 15 years ago and have pioneered its development, with considerable interest from around the world.

Art was also subject to revision by Dearing but this was essentially limited to a précis of the previous Order. The title ‘Art’ was retained although, as before, a footnote stated ‘Art should be taken to include art, craft and design’. Despite the subject's re-designation 'Art & Design' by QCA in 2000, little progress has been made to halt the subject's retrenchment into a limited fine art approach. What remnants can be traced in schools today of the 1970s and 1980s developments in design education

within art and design – and whatever happened to the crafts in education? Ten years ago Mason and Iwano<sup>8</sup> reported on the crafts decline in curriculum and now they have all but disappeared in many art and design departments.

Evidence in the 2004 NFER report *School Art: What's in it?*<sup>9</sup> confirms concerns about the content of the art and design curriculum in many schools at the present time. NFER noted various prevalent characteristics of 'school art' including the use of painting and drawing as the predominant medium in which pupils work and the emphasis placed on development of art form skills. Sparse evidence was found of effective use of ICT – a finding that was earlier confirmed by the Arts Council England report *Keys to imagination: ICT in art education* that concluded:

Overall, evidence from the whole array of research sources paints a disappointing national picture. It shows little consolidated progress in effective integration of ICT into art and design education in schools, even while there are undoubtedly areas of practice which are effective and occasionally inspirational. Moreover, results from national ICT surveys suggest the situation is getting worse not better.<sup>10</sup>

Significantly, the subject specific section in the Annual Report for 2004-05 of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools<sup>11</sup> makes no specific mention of design education – despite it supposedly being a key element of 'art and design'. Clearly design education continues to be much neglected – Ofsted does note however that the art and design curriculum has narrowed and suggests '...more needs to be done to transform the relationship between art and design in schools, the creative industries and the cultural sector'.

Has the time come when the needs of pupils, higher education and employers would be better served by a bold revision of the fundamental approach to this area of study by embracing and developing a concept of design education across the curriculum?

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## References

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  - <sup>2</sup> For example the following Design Council reports: 'Design Education at Secondary level' (1980); and 'Design and Primary Education' (1987).
  - <sup>3</sup> Baynes, K (1985) 'Defining a Design Dimension of the Curriculum', Journal of Art & Design Education, Volume 4, No. 3., pp. 237-243, , Abingdon: Carfax Publishing.
  - <sup>5</sup> Graham and Tytler (1993) 'A Lesson for Us All: The Making of the National Curriculum', Routledge, London.
  - <sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, note 5.
  - <sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, note 5.

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