

Purposes and Practices in Middle School - Art and Design Education

Introduction

Teachers have never before been the subject to such scrutiny and the current 'Debate', whatever its outcome, has left no stone unturned. Consequently it is refreshing to witness quite a flurry of activity in and outside of schools to marshal the facts and establish a new professionalism in the area of art and design.

Research is always being carried out and as often as not by teachers in the classroom. Even without being aware of the precedent they are creating for their colleagues, teachers of art and design have been in the vanguard of such practices.

Art and Design has undergone a drastic change and this is well documented. Both the National Society for Art Education and the National Association for Design Education have made significant contributions and affected the current dialogue and debate that exists.

What is often forgotten and neglected are the consequences of large scale and administrative changes that are brought about by legislation, different patterns of training, and in-service developments.

Parallel to such developments are the new patterns of schooling culminating in the move towards first, middle and upper schools.

Arising out of the far sighted development in the West Riding with Sir Alec Clegg - Middle Schools have been or are currently being implemented in a large number of Authorities.

Schools naturally reflect such changes and for better or worse have to grapple with the problems.

Until comparatively recently little evidence existed either in the theoretical or empirical field to accompany such changes.

Policies and strategies for the teaching of art and design arrive spasmodically or through the initiative of local advisers.

The Middle School is a comparative newcomer in the education stakes and have emerged to face criticism from several quarters.

Their comparative late arrival on the education scene has left them little tradition (except in the case of progressive primaries) to draw on.

Expertise in the form of specialist equipment or training is gradually building up. Teachers who formerly had primary experience lacked the in-depth knowledge of tools and equipment etc. Staff employed in the secondary sector looked somewhat askance on the differing career structure of the Middle School.

The Upper Schools have been left wrestling with the problem of maintaining standards (who isn't concerned with this problem) and many teachers in this sector complain of inadequate knowledge and lack of clear grounding provided. Even when Middle Schools clearly succeed in establishing a grounding in basic concepts and skills the inevitable transfer problems create a pattern of intervening variables which depress performance even for a short while. Teaching staff in Upper Schools guard their domains and often complain that foundations of experience hitherto in their control have been lost

and cannot be compensated even in the best organised Design Departments.

The accent on maintaining the highest standards required by parents and employers has to be borne in mind. Clearly there exists the need for a great many teachers to get together and work things out - at best the Upper Schools may have to react in a truly professional way to the problems manifest in a technological society.

Parents too need to be re-assured also in the race to achieve academic respectability both at Upper School and Middle School level. The lessons learned in the attempt to introduce a design based philosophy to secondary sectors need to be absorbed into the Middle School.

As John Tomlinson has pointed out teachers need to call on the resources available at first-hand without having to re-invent the wheel over again' (Schools Council Newsletter).

The Plowden Report drew attention to educational problems in the mid sixties and has been succeeded in part by many reports. We need to have a system which extends the best (whatever is meant by this term) aspects of primary education, the concept of individualising instruction in an open learning situation in which innovation is relatively easy. The idea of innovation and good practice is synonymous with these aims as I shall make clear. Positive motivation to more and older children than was the case hitherto was argued and it was these children 'who should be able to find approval and encouragement from the adults with whom they came into contact rather than with the system of specialised instruction'.

There are many issues arising out of this last paragraph and some of these will hopefully be realised in the course of this article not least the business of specialised instruction.

Displays form an important part of the school setting a high standard of presentation and creating an exciting visual environment. Work based on Africa Theme – developing two and three dimensional work based on African art and a visit to the Museum of Mankind.



The character of art and design activity itself has also undergone drastic changes and a new rationale is gaining wider acceptance than previously.

The nature of art and design activities has changed – at first it revolved round the idea of the 'materials circus' or give them the paints and 'let them get on with it'. Permissive anarchy ruled in the case of expressive modes of activity. Conversely too strict adherence to the problem solving factor will inhibit the 'aesthetic' understanding of the future designer and craftsman.

Hopefully a new articulate attitude will pervade education together with a better understanding of Craft and Design as a result of several projects not least the Keele Programme and the 8-13 Art and Craft in the Middle Years based at Goldsmiths College and more recently the Conferences on the future of the Art Curriculum based at the Design Education Unit of the Royal College of Art.

The author in this article attempts to answer three fundamental questions germane to the issue of art and design in the Middle School –

- (a) What is it we should teach?
- (b) How should we teach them?
- (c) What methods should we adopt?

It is believed that by articulating some of the problems surrounding these issues the author will have deepened the contribution to the dialogue and debate on 'relevant curricula'. It is hoped through the examination of these questions to illuminate the philosophy and practice of art and design in a middle school.

In doing so it will enable teachers to make a clearer analysis of their own situation and assist the emergent Middle School to gain a much needed insight into the role of art and design in the curriculum.

The practical activities with which this article is concerned accords to areas defined by Hirst² as Educational Objectives, Content and Methods which all combine in the performance of education. This

includes the skills, qualities of mind, attitudes and values which we wish to see in our pupils as well as the acquisition of knowledge. The latter principle accords with the means by which the tasks are presented.

Eisner has an important qualification to the setting of aims and objectives which concerns the quality of educational experience – namely 'ambience' – referring to the ethics, value systems, roles and structures within the environment of the institution.³ In a situation where art and design are not valued or accepted it is difficult to prove the credibility of its contribution to the framing of overall curricula guides.

Context

The school is a purpose built Middle School served by four feeder primary schools catering for pupils between the ages of eleven to thirteen. This situation is gradually altering as children are progressively accepted at 10 plus and 9 plus ultimately making the school a 9-13 Middle School. New curricula patterns will inevitably emerge but the framing of overall aims is flexible enough to be adapted to new situations as they emerge. The facilities within the school includes a workshop area inclusive of wood-work benches, centre lathes, brazing hearth, pillar drill, metalwork bench and vices, wood storage rack, supplemented by a walk-in store. Adjacent to this area is a ceramics bay with a 'College' type kiln, storage areas, wet/wedging bench, sink and under bench storage areas, as well as an electric potter's wheel. Divided by a glass partitioned screen with door through is an art area/studio, within this area most of the two dimensional work is carried out including screen printing, photography and the traditional skills of drawing and painting, lino printing etc.

The department is complemented by two areas, a fully equipped Cookery/Home Economics area, with food preparation areas and cookers, and a Needlework room, where both creative and traditional aspects of fabric crafts are carried out.

Materials from a local curriculum development group MORFACS are given extensive trials within the school. Work on the 'printmaking' module is in progress.



These areas are fully utilised by staff and pupils alike throughout the timetable and are related by block timetabling, physical proximity, shared resources and a common set of ideas and philosophy.

They are grouped as shown in Diagram 1.

Aims

The aim of all these subjects is to understand a range of materials and achieve success in techniques of expression, construction and research. As well as this it is deemed necessary to understand a variety of equipment and care for materials and tools together with the development and application of an increasing range of concepts. Included amongst these are mathematical, aesthetic and scientific — but manual dexterity is not neglected however.

Furthermore, the ability to communicate effectively is extremely important and pupils always need to make considered, rational judgements whilst at the same time, discriminating in practical situation and seeking advice whenever necessary. It is hoped, that through this, pupils will show increased confidence and work sensibly respecting the opinion of others at all times.

Within the two and three dimensional areas, which consist of a studio and workshop area, are included both aspects of Art and Craft as well as creative use of materials found in wood, metal, plastic and clay. Overall, it is hoped to encourage understanding of structure through form and materials in two and three dimensional art forms, including colour, line, texture, pattern, shape. Care is taken to understand the nature of the pupil's previous experience in art by talking to teachers in their primary schools. The teaching scheme is structured and supplemented through a programme of appreciation and observation, coupled with visual aids and the use of instructional materials and work packs stored in the department's resources area.

Three dimensional design is explored in a similar manner corresponding to work previously carried out in two dimensions. Techniques in the craft are dealt with by a creative approach using wood, metal,

clay, plastic. All pupils, it is hoped, will learn and experience the physical nature of materials in relation to the basic laws governing design and good craftsmanship should be encouraged at all times.

The administration of the groupings is affected in two main ways. The first is block timetabling. This allows the Head of Department considerable flexibility and freedom to organise courses and to ensure that groups are parallel and the allocation of teachers and classes is apportioned fairly. The second is a rotational timetable which, in year one, enables all pupils to have an introductory course in each area for at least ten weeks (no less).

The school, at present, accepts children from four feeder Primary Schools who have not yet made the change to Lower School status. Therefore, children enter at eleven years of age and are, at present, in mixed ability classes. At thirteen they transfer to an Upper School.

The aims of all the areas is set out:

Aims of all Design Subjects

1. To understand a range of materials and achieve success in techniques of expression, construction and research.
2. To understand a variety of equipment and to care for materials and tools.
3. The development and application of a greater range of concepts — mathematical, aesthetic, scientific.
4. To discriminate in practical situations and seek advice whenever necessary.
5. To show increased confidence and work without interference, respecting opinions.

Objectives

1. To encourage an understanding of structure through form and materials.
2. To encourage an understanding of two and three dimensional art forms including colour, line texture, pattern, shape and form.
3. To supplement previous art learning and employ further means to increase their understanding and appreciation of the arts and their culture.

'Feeling is another kind of seeing' – definitely encouraged. Books and objects provide untold wealth of opportunity to explore and re-create. They are silent witnesses to inspiration in many forms.



These are specified in the content areas as follows:

- a) A visual grammar course including an analysis of point, line, colour and pattern.
- b) An emphasis on structure in both designed and natural objects.
- c) An emphasis on pattern and texture as an integral part of the environment and its subsequent exploitation.
- d) The quality of clay – its discovery, uses and function.
- e) Appreciation and understanding of the role that art plays, its culture and history, coupled with visits, displays and visual aids.

General Organisation

During year three children follow a course with four teachers in four main areas. The first of these is in Art – here, as in all of the areas with the exception of Home Economics, pupils follow a similar pattern. An introductory talk with slide and tape demonstration is arranged and supplemented with exhibitions grouped around the theme. It is during this year that the formal aspects of the visual arts are investigated.

Line, Pattern and Texture, Colour and Shape, and Space are the titles that form a resources collection. These contain slides, tapes, cassettes, worksheets and booklets from which pupils work, currently being developed as part of a local 'Morrell Fund Project' to develop curriculum materials for non-specialist teachers in Middle Schools. Teachers have some degree of flexibility and they bring their ideas and explore themes within their respective groups. The theme of Line has been explored in art where initial exercises in the manipulation of tools and mark making objects was undertaken. Further experiences were in the manipulation of string, collage and panels showing progressive developments. Weaving was carried out and provided an insight into organised lines in warp and weft, etc. together when simple looms were constructed and an exciting range of results was produced.

Claycrafts – The vital quality of clay

We can use clay for its expressive properties and as a constructive medium.

Since clay is a fundamental organic material it lends itself naturally to modelling, relief work and constructional effects. Without resorting to the wheel, pupils are able to seek variety of expression and handling by means of pinching, coiling, slab and associated techniques. Clay is dried, fired and glazed and it is appropriate to introduce the pupil to sawdust fired pottery. The application of scientific knowledge and skills can be brought up in the chemistry of glazes, etc. Most of this is exemplified using the unit as an element in constructive clay work. Natural objects and stimuli are vitally important to motivate the pupil since they are unable to handle, feel, explore and respond to touch – correspondingly to react through the medium of clay.

In year four sees the continuation of both Aesthetic Studies and Design throughout the second year. There is an element of design application and fabric printing evolves as an element of craft teaching. There is flexibility of arrangements in grouping, and there may well be a common theme uniting the three and two dimensional work, e.g. Interlocking Shapes.

In year two there is the introduction of opportunities including claycrafts, fabric collage and printing, screen printing and jewellery (enamelling) as well as a core element of design in wood and metal.

The possibility of links with other areas, Humanities, is being investigated particularly in preparation for a 10 plus intake.

Design is grouped around –

- a) Manipulation of materials
- b) Formal design –
 1. Form and Function.
 2. Colour and Form.
 3. Pattern and Environment.

See Diagram 2.

Diagram 1: Ryelands Middle School 11-13 year olds Mixed Ability teaching groups. Chart explaining the Departmental structure.

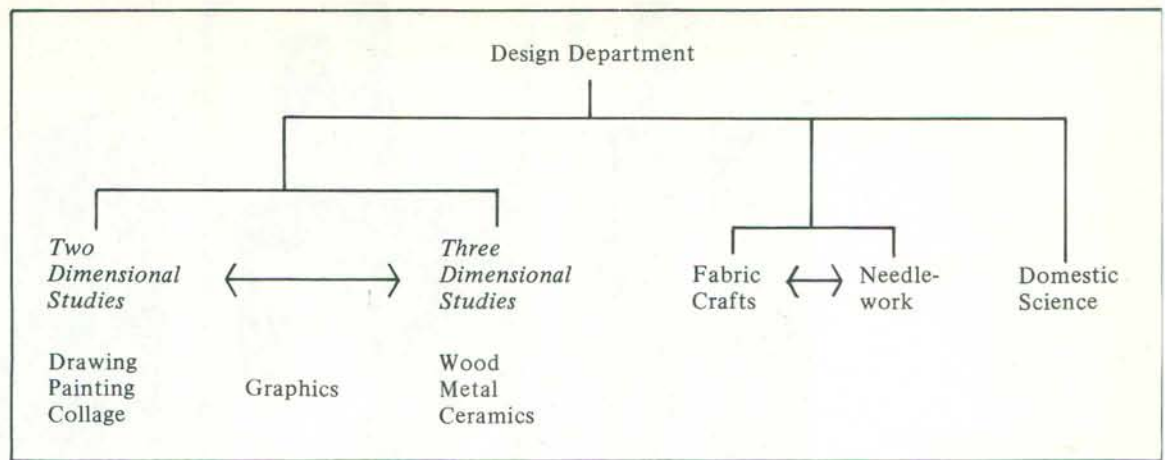
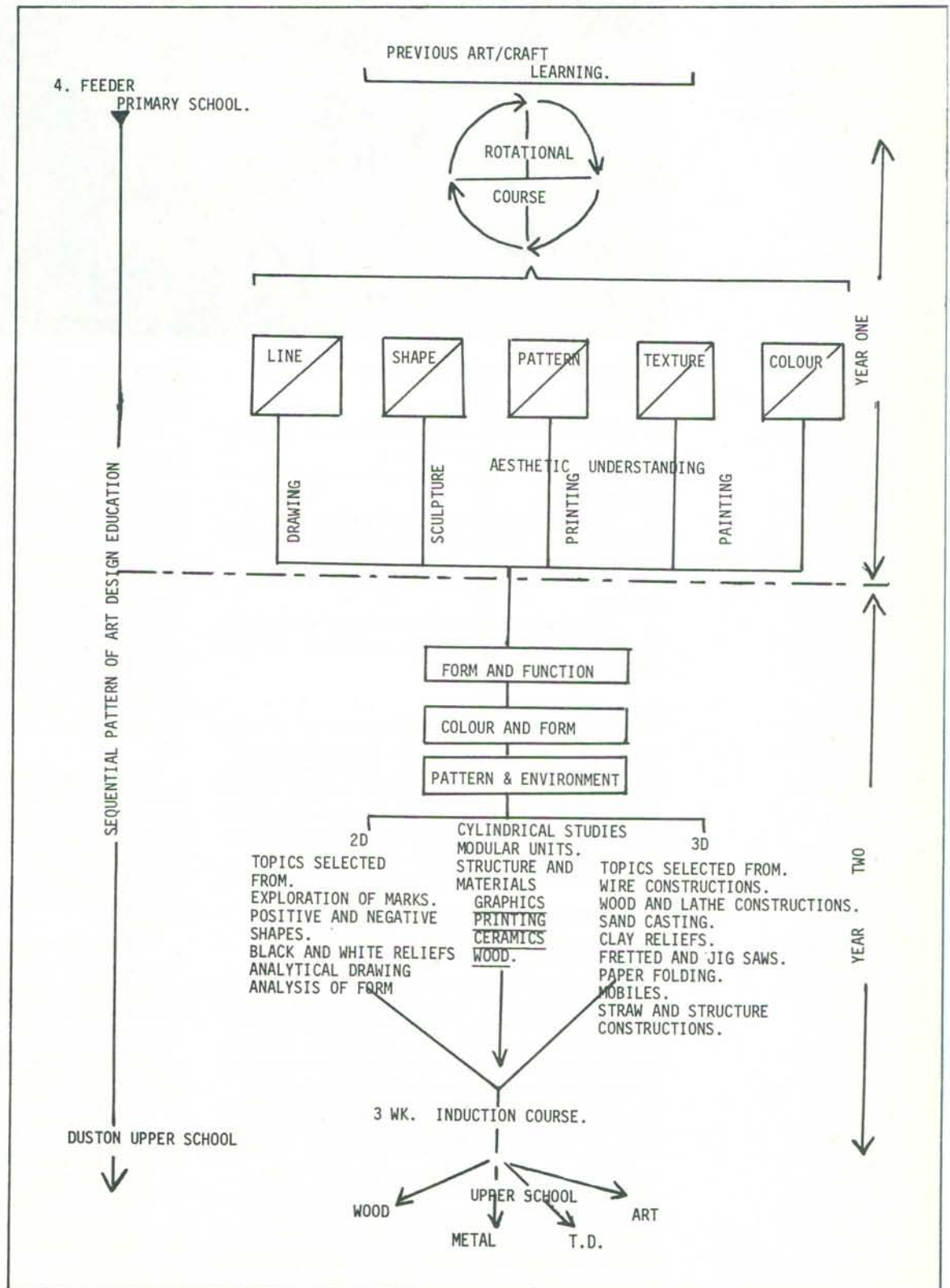


Diagram 2



The use of workcards and self motivating activities is encouraged.



Towards a Curriculum Model

The design team consists of four teachers each of whom takes responsibility for each area of specialist activity. There exists a well ordered environment and equipment for each of these and the teacher is relatively free to pursue some aspects of the curriculum in content. The overall philosophy is summed up in the aims of the department set forth in paragraph 1, AIMS OF ALL DESIGN SUBJECTS. I shall for the purpose both of teaching strategies and evaluation schedules confine my comments to the art and craft/design location in order to talk specifically how these areas have been covered.

Since I do not presume to know how to teach any other subject, I feel that sufficient breadth of experience be allowed for in determining the pattern adopted in any one area — e.g. Needlework, although there is to some extent some overlap into the design field in all three of these.

The criteria for determining the objectives were discussed and defined as a result of continuous dialogue and are subject to modification at any stage, although it is assumed for the purpose of this article that they will stand until a better alternative is presented.

I feel it is important to create a pattern of leadership and direction and this will become evident in the accompanying diagrams and the more specific elements of the course content.

In defining the model I have attempted to encapsulate several important elements currently being studied as a result of the 11-16 Curriculum Document (HMSO).⁴

The main categories for the model centre on Content, Activity, Concepts, Skills and Application as well as a time element. See Diagram 3.

Content:-

It may seem inappropriate to begin with content but this is given further amplification in the details of the programme which follow pp.00.

However, the point to bear in mind is that the idea of content embraces materials, techniques, expression and communication.

Materials:-

Certainly we have to have something to talk about, feel about, act upon, discuss, sculpt, carve, model, tack, pin, or hem, etc. and this I have chosen to talk about in terms of materials.

They, the students, should develop an awareness of different materials through a practical survey of their basic characteristics comparison, fitness for purpose, visual surveys and even physical testing. It may require them to think about the materials they are handling, how they react, what happens to them, how they alter their shape, how paper changes, etc.

Techniques:-

Techniques are methods regulated by the material and machine constraints that allow the student to operate to maximum advantage with the minimum of frustration.

We need to demonstrate to children the necessity for appropriate techniques seen in their setting.

Certainly we need to be aware of the danger of one kind of teaching of techniques masquerading for personal expression or being unduly regarded by the teacher as key elements. Nevertheless little progress will be made in practical or theoretical approaches to the visual and plastic arts if we do not grapple with this problem.

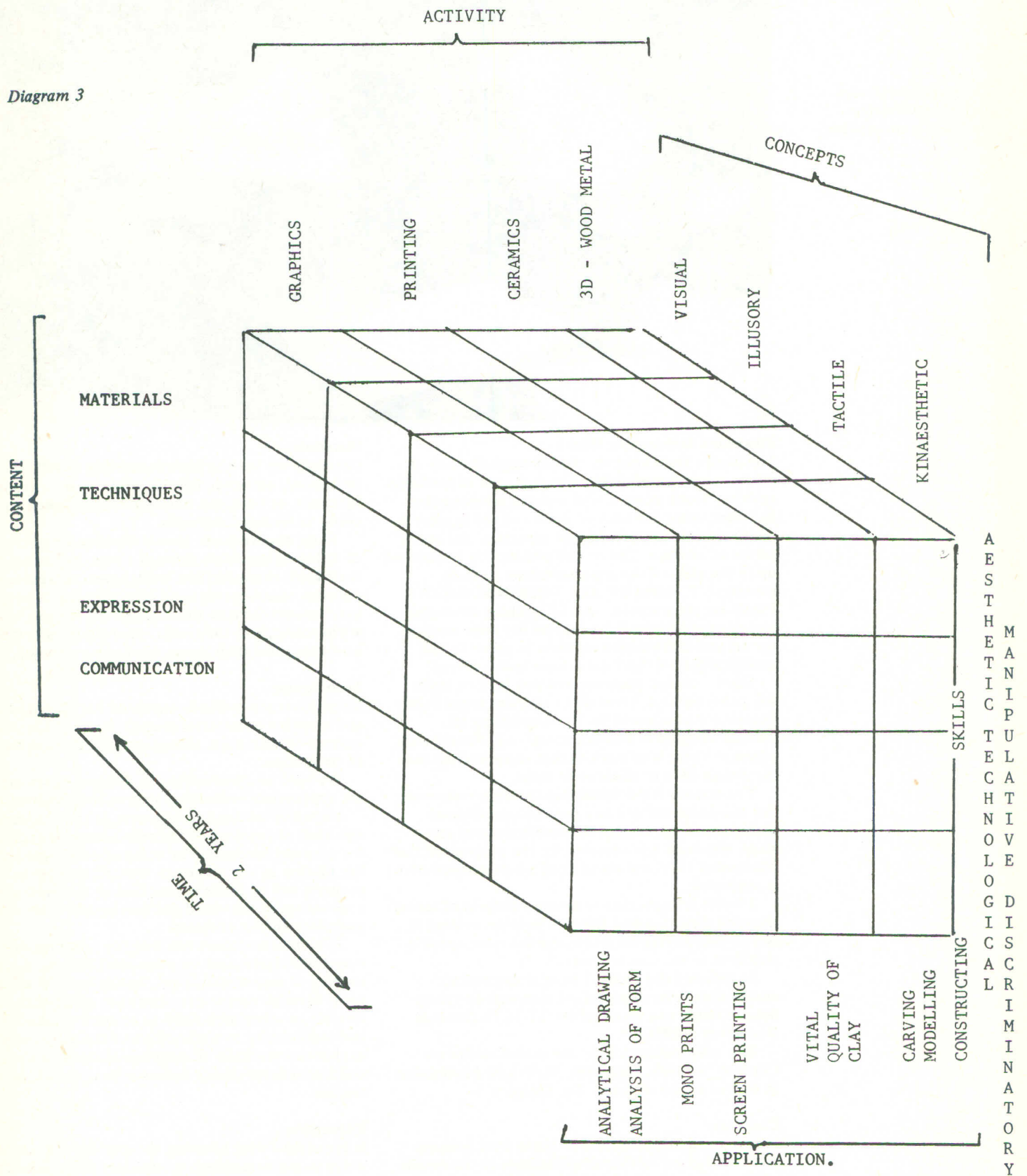
In some cases there will be little point on the unnatural regard paid by some craftsmen to the making of teapot stands etc., but rather a development through simple exercises each sufficiently flexible to allow each child to operate satisfactorily and individually to a stimulus and the subsequent exclusion eventually of copying, although some children will inevitably follow others, even the teacher.

Expression:-

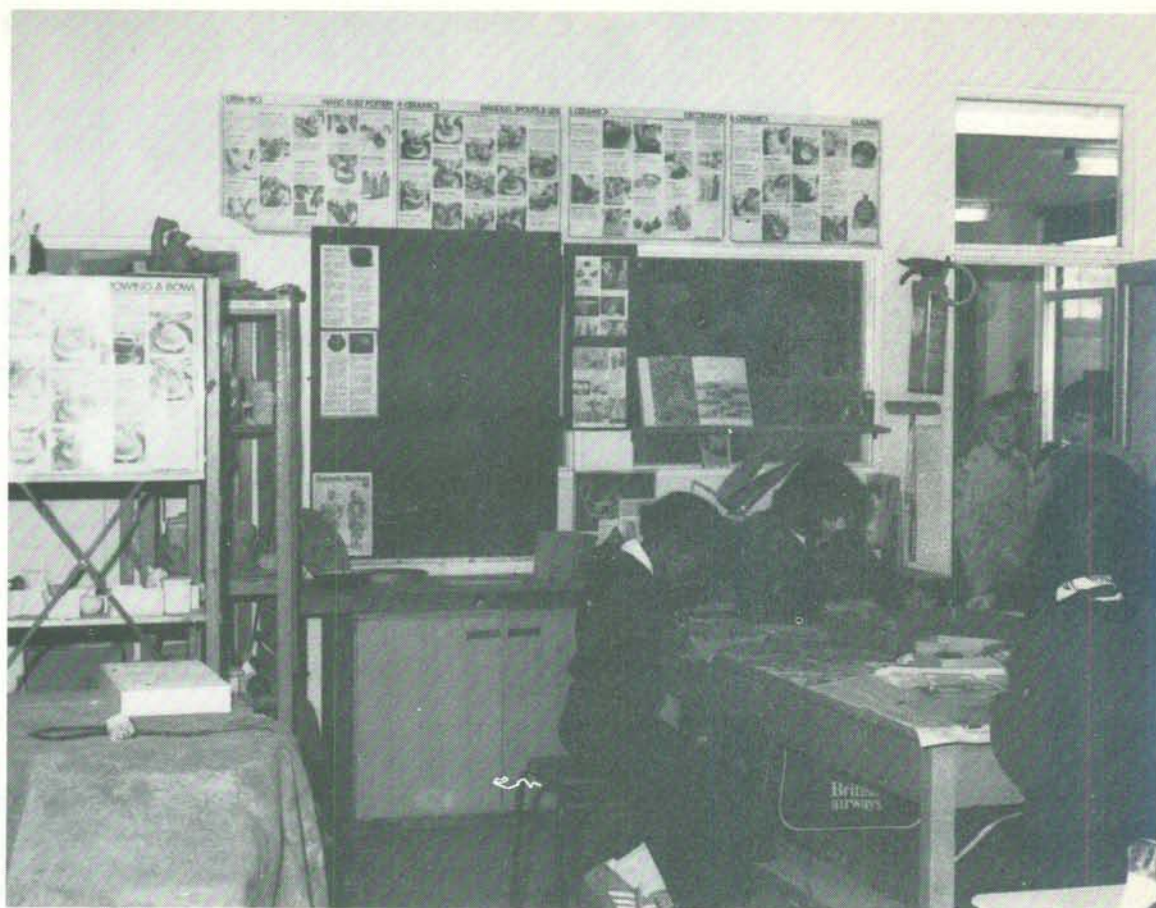
Is concerned with allowing the student the opportunity to say something, to cultivate their response that through materials and techniques they become a vehicle for expression. It helps develop powers of imagination and communicates thoughts and feelings through the design experience. More importantly it

CURRICULUM MODEL ART CRAFT DESIGN

Diagram 3



The creation of a stimulating environment is one of the characteristics of the department.



allows each individual to develop a means and ability to communicate personal images.

Communications:-

Is vitally important since much weight is attached to this aspect of work both inside and outside school. All pupils should possess a rudimentary knowledge of some of the techniques of visual communication in signs, symbols, colour, shape, form line etc. and be able to select the appropriate method of communication for a specific situation.

Activity:-

The activities that are found under this heading are Graphics, Printing, Ceramics and Three Dimensional work in wood and metal.

Concepts:-

These are the key elements since it is with these that we are most concerned. What concepts should we expect them to know, understand value and apprehend.

Visual:-

Visually we require them to develop the capacity to understand the components of visual design — broken down into elements such as Line, Pattern etc. Furthermore, to understand — that 'seeing' involves direct sensory experience leading to the recognition of visual and tactile relationships. Thus seeing is concerned with the perceptual skills.

Pupils ought to understand the significance of line as a vehicle for describing an object or interpreting its function on paper. The illusory qualities are often present in art, they may be variations of lines massed together which deceive the eye. The mere act of painting is itself an illusion since it creates spatial depth from a seemingly apparent flat surface.

Tactile qualities and concepts are very important and can only be apprehended through the exercise of touch, children need to see, feel, hear, touch, handle, explore, at this age.

Tactile:-

Recognition and assessment of material in terms of surface, texture, weight and their characteristics observed by comparative values.

Kinaesthetic:-

Concepts would seemingly be the domain of the P.E. specialist but there is a lot that can be achieved by the teacher in this area.

The student seeks to understand and come to terms with the material and may be involved in gesture, movement, mime, all in their way contributing to a mental construct concerned with the body and related to manipulative and dextrous skills.

Activity and related learning in this area may well affect or at the least enhance a young person's appreciation of space, shape, form, etc.

Skills:-

Skills and techniques go hand in hand but it is the technique which once mastered allow the practitioner to be deemed skilful. These skills I have listed as Aesthetic, Manipulative, Technological (Constructive) and Discriminatory.

There is a link between all these but I shall tease them out to proffer some guidance in the matter.

The student must feel he has the necessary practical skills and any problems should be within his level of ability, be demanding, but not impossible. Confidence must exist in his own ability and that of the teacher so that they can ensure success through a collaborative effort.

New skills can be learnt as the problem demands, if an attitude of confidence is maintained.

Aesthetic:-

Aesthetic Skills refer to the observation of the environment — the selection and recording, the learning to look, see and understand. Osborne makes the point 'that the concept of a skill at this stage is 'perceptient experience' that a skill is a trained or cultivated activity to perform in a certain way and the term frequently carries with it an

Enjoyment and application go hand in hand – initial experiments in weaving.



implication that a person can perform with more than average dexterity'.

Manipulative:-

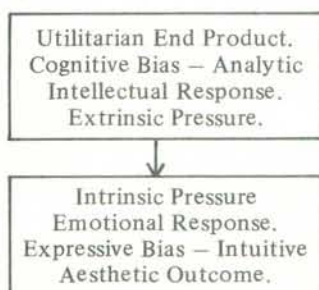
Manipulative Skills concern the exploration of form and materials and include experiments in respect of dexterity and processes, tools and machines. It is concerned in part with the working qualities and properties of the material.

Technical:-

Such Technological skills include the study of physical forces behind the material and how they have to be assembled, the behaviour of construction. It may well involve the development of structures in clay, wood, card, wire, metal, etc.

Discriminatory:-

Skills are concerned with making the student more aware, considering the need to prepare young people for an increasing inter-dependence within environment. With this in mind, we should attempt to choose the 'sensitively responding and discriminating user or consumer as our model and prepare students for some principles underlying their functional or aesthetic significance'.⁵



Application:-

The application of these proceeding elements is carried on in four main ways.

The first of these is concerned with drawing; painting and graphics. These are tools, or media, through which the young person comes to terms with the stimuli – we are keen to introduce young people to starting points as illustrated, drawing is seen as a tool for 'Analysing Recording, Responding and Communication'. (SC. Bulletin Art 7-11).

The element of printing is concerned with providing the pupil with the means to extend two dimensional studies, line, pattern and texture as an integral part of the environment.

The vital quality of clay is seen both as an expressive medium and also one in which certain fundamental constructive methods are obtained.

Sculpture concepts are covered in the element of Modelling Constructing and Carving. Such activities are concerned with giving students the opportunity to obtain three dimensional expression. There is exploration of surface, roughness, texture, hollow-ness, and the awareness of space and variety of masses in a piece of sculpture are important.

Above all, pupils should be able to in the above – Make distinctions using a subtlety of qualities, values, hues, positive and negative and subsequently prove their growing awareness of the visual world.

They should demonstrate an awareness of the natural and man-made world, and create in both two and three dimensions, including drawing, painting, sculpture, graphics, with appropriate knowledge of the media and process involved.

They should recognise a variety of forms for inspiration and content in their art work and possess the ability to plan and effect their own work and its subsequent evaluation.

Evaluation:-

Two reasons would seem to arise, why we need to evaluate, the first that we need to convey information to the pupils on how well they are getting on (feedback) and we also need to test out whether we are successful or not in achieving our objectives. A

point worth considering is whether the curriculum bases are worthwhile and secondly, we need to gauge the extent to which the pupil learns from his contact with the programme. Both aspects of formative and summative evaluation are included in this category.

Conclusion:-

The foregoing has been an attempt to set down the aims, goals, and objectives, for the teaching of art, craft and design in this particular teaching situation.

Clearly, there is no one right answer in art education. In the middle years we need to lay a foundation that has sequence and is linked to what has gone before and what is to follow. Art has a unique position within the school as an essential component in education of all young people. In all the activities in art and design, we need to use creative, intuitive and emotional responses as well as developing rational means of thought and communication.

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Boys are encouraged to participate fully in the Home Economics area as is witnessed here.

