

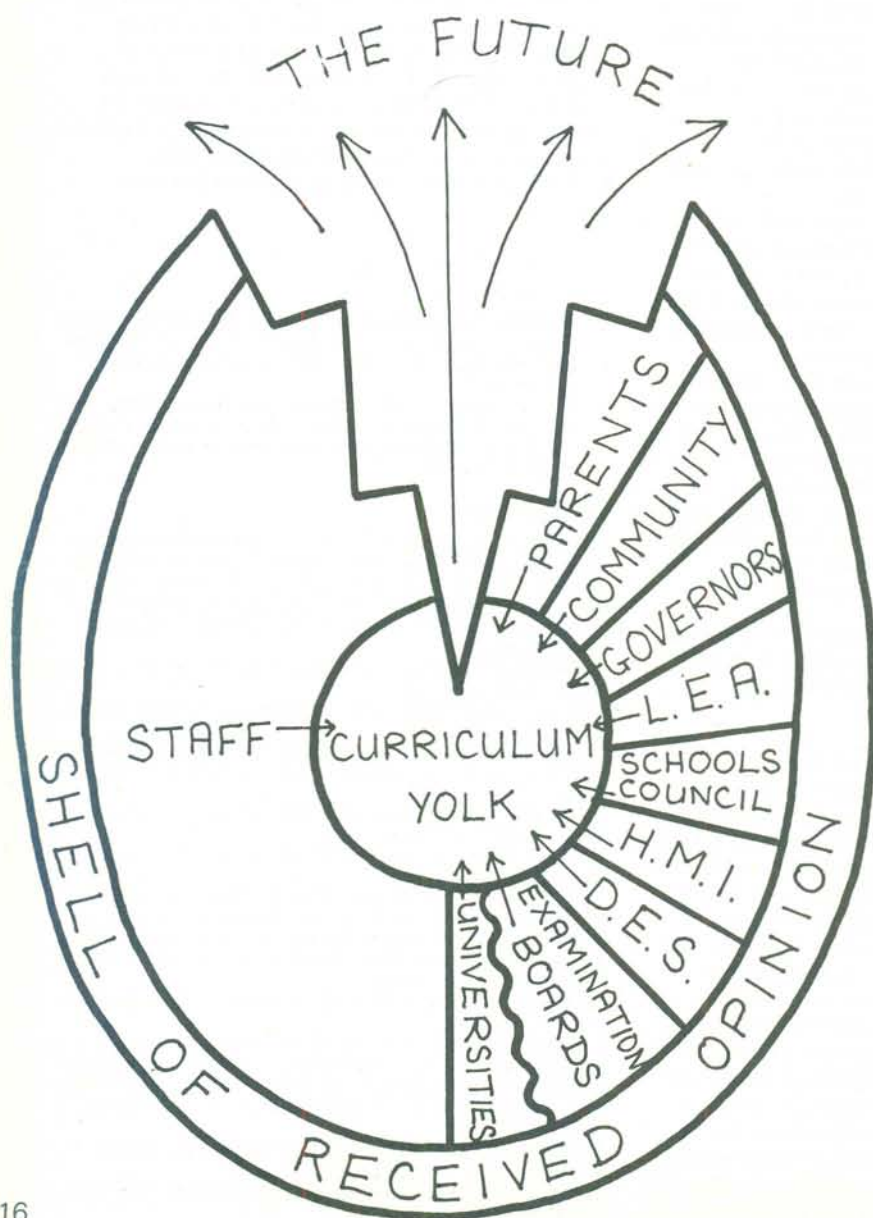
# Influences on the School Curriculum - A Head's View

The influences on the school curriculum have increased, are increasing – and ought to be increased further. No school is an island entire of itself; too many try to be.

**THE SHELL OF RECEIVED OPINION.** Figure one shows the shell of received opinion which surrounds and constricts the school's curriculum. Schools are usually envisaged as places where the culture and knowledge of the past is transmitted in traditional ways to those who will live in the future.

This 'received opinion' says that exams are vital; and yet many jobs at 16 are offered before exam results are known. The purpose of education is held to be to enable pupils to get a respectable job; and yet Agriculture, Music, Art and Design are held in

Figure one:  
Influences on the School:  
Is its curriculum fertile?



low esteem by parents, despite being among the most job-specific subjects. Received opinion encourages us in 'the happiest days of our life' syndrome. In 'Titbits' recently, a letter appeared from a man of about 45 who every now and again puts on his school cap of thirty years before and then 'smells' the stationery cupboard and the workshop, those happy aromas of by-gone days. This syndrome leads to the belief that although society is changing, schools should stay as they were and uphold traditional values by traditional methods; unfortunately most schools do not even enforce cap-wearing now. It is a received view that a 'grammar' school is 'per se' 'good'; the fact that the word now applies to independent schools, selective schools and non-selective schools and is therefore meaningless escapes notice. A curriculum is done in a school, it is said; the school is regarded as having a custodial function from about 0900 to about 1600. Schools that work longer hours but finish early in the afternoon are unpopular. Neighbours of our school were afraid that our pupils were 'casing the joint' when they were out on a housing survey. A last facet of a received opinion that is important relates to the financing of schools: 98% of the day-to-day running costs go on salaries; 2% on materials for learning. Any industry so resourced would go bankrupt. Of all subjects, Design suffers most by this.

**THE SCHOOL STAFF.** Figure one shows the influences inside the shell which fertilise the curriculum yolk and burst through the shell. All will be referred to below. The first and biggest is the staff of the school. They are so vital because the curriculum is their job. If they are narrow specialists who teach a subject, not people, then the yolk will be sterile. If there is a declining number of teachers relative to pupils, then there will be less teacher mobility and less promotion however creative the teacher is, and less young staff. Ossification of the curriculum can set in. If senior staff are preoccupied with discipline, then development lags. There is no real learning without discipline, but there is none without development either. If inertia sets in, centred round the same exams and courses for many years, there is a gradual run-down of useful learning. Reorganisation, different sized year groups – such variables as these force comprehensive schools to re-thing far more



than selective grammar schools ever did. If a department is proud of its achievements, morale may be good, but attitudes may be too conservative. In the case of Design, it must be 'imaginatively taught' as the DES document 'The School Curriculum' says, if it is not to be regarded as practical hand work for those with no brains. Design is intrinsically the most creative of all subjects; it must not just consist of pride in the tightness of its joints lest rheumatism takes over.

A staff can produce fertile developments in the curriculum through working parties to draw up the ideal curriculum and then recommend its practical implementation which has to be considered by the whole staff. It is essential that the working party represents as many interests as possible among the teaching force, and, following an exalted precedent, is about twelve strong; it is also vital that it knows that its recommendations are likely to be accepted by the Head, who will normally be a member of the working party. Lastly, the staff influence the curriculum through the timetabler: she or he must be a dynamic forward-thinker, not only an exponent of the art of doing pencil and rubber jigsaws.

**EXAMINATION BOARDS AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS.** Examination Boards and Higher Education influence the curriculum greatly. The former are highly efficient at administering set patterns, but are not gifted curriculum developers. Unfortunately we teachers are lazy when it comes to examinations: we hide behind them, saying, 'Well we have to teach the syllabus set, don't we?' The answer is, 'No we don't'; all Boards encourage, largely unsuccessfully, teachers to draw up experimental syllabuses of their own; we have used Mode III CSE and Mode III O level far too much for the less able and wonder why Mode III is looked down upon. I have taught a Mode III joint CSE and O level course for a total year group, and it was an exhilarating experience.

Higher Education institutions are far less amenable to pressure from schools than examination boards are. They find it academically respectable for themselves to examine their own students, with external moderation, but have looked askance at schools doing the same, particularly at A level. Schools are far too much orientated to Higher Education which only 9% of the population receives. The days are past when schools for those over 14 were largely Public or selective grammar schools aiming at H.E. The curricula then drawn up are largely still extant. The presuppositions of such curricula are seen clearly in the attitude to Design A level. It is still struggling for acceptance in universities despite the fact that a major firm, British Aerospace, names it specifically as a highly desirable subject for those applying for Technician Apprenticeships in their company.

What can be done? Realistically, examinations will remain. But the Boards should be renamed to remove the universities' titles; and links to higher education should be reduced. Teachers must not simply accept what comes out of 16+ and I level

negotiations, but fight to increase the teacher participation already at the heart of CSE. It is not enough for Heads to do this; subject teachers with a wide view of education need to do it in each area. Design A level is a test-case: with its great emphasis on creative problem-solving and on skill in hand and eye as well as brain, it is vital for our survival as a skilled country. It should not be called clumsily 'Craft, Design and Technology' since, to lay people such as myself, the word 'Craft' is redolent of the mystery of medieval guilds, or the smell of fish-glue in dusty workshops; while 'technology' is soulless, cramping and indubitably male. The Civil Service now accept A level Design as an entrance qualification; we must keep up the pressure on all universities to do the same and also to treat it as the equivalent of other A levels, not simply a third back-up subject. The sexism attached to many subjects and especially to Craft is now diminishing — whoever heard of Boys' History and Girls' History as we used to talk of Boys' and Girls' crafts? But 'Design' has a positive correlation with increases in girls' entries, whereas Craft, Design and Technology does not. Katherine Whitehorne put it, 'As Mrs Wat Tyler doubtless said, "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then handling the more complicated bit of machinery?" 'Craft' has unfortunately become entangled, too, in Parent-craft courses where this question has been set, 'When you breast-feed your baby, how would you . . .?' Boys are unlikely to see themselves as parents in this hangover from a Mother-craft exam. The words we use, especially those we employ without thought, are vital. In this field of sex discrimination the curriculum has still a long way to go before nomenclature and syllabuses catch up with progressive thought.

DES, HMI and SCHOOLS COUNCIL. The influence of the DES, HMI and Schools Council is great, not because it is prescriptive but because it is not. The HMI booklet 'Curriculum 11-16' revolutionised thought about subjects in school for those who studied it carefully. Inspectors visit schools and make recommendations which frequently fuel the engine of change which some staff are striving to keep running. Central direction of the curriculum is more of a joke than a threat. Religious Knowledge is the only subject prescribed by law to be taught! As a Christian I am pleased that it is not in fact taught in every school. Too often the dead vaccine of school RE inoculates young people against catching the real fever of genuine religion. It is the documents like 'The Practical Curriculum' and the HMI's 'View of the Curriculum' which are really influential. The DES has also put out papers, but they have been so bland and unmemorable that their influence is less.

Action is needed in this field towards more central direction in certain areas. The rationalisation of A level Maths is long overdue. The school year in which a foreign language is begun should be laid down; minimum rates for capitation and numbers of teachers and non-teaching staff should be nationally determined. HMI need to be more passionate and less



dispassionate when talking publicly as individuals. The credo of the Civil Service should not apply to them; to jolt us into curriculum change they should be gadflies, like Socrates. More HMI need to have taught for long periods in comprehensive schools; their comments on mixed ability teaching are not encouraging and yet in many subjects, given sufficient committed teachers and non-teachers, together with resources, it can benefit the most able, for example, by providing individual materials in a way streams or sets cannot. The Schools Council is being hypocritically castigated for producing teaching packs that are now not used; what school has not had hundreds of books that are now not utilised? The Schools Council's influence through the cannibalisation of its materials and now its in-school centred work has been vast. As the main national body focussing on the curriculum as its major role, it needs all teachers' support. It should be more strongly represented in the negotiations to reform 16+, A level and I level and would be a better decision-making body on these exams than the commercially-orientated Boards, or the politically-orientated DES.

**THE LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY.** LEA direction of the curriculum is negligible except on financial grounds. Its biggest influence is that rates supply much of the money for schools. Since they are unjust and psychologically suspect, unlike Income Tax, which is unpopular but rational, this is now having a serious influence on the curriculum. Capitation has plunged in many areas; non-teaching staff have been cut; teaching ratios worsened and temporary posts become more common.

Advisers are a further part of an LEA's influence on the curriculum, varying wildly in their effectiveness. The existence of a Libraries and Resources Adviser, now axed, in Leicestershire, ensured that each new school was built with a properly-designed Resources Centre; in Bradford a Computing Adviser will ensure rational development in this area. Like that of HMI, the overview of Advisers is important: where there is knowledge there is power.

LEA facilitation of change in the curriculum should be greater. All Local Education Authorities should have a Curriculum Development Fund of, say, £50,000 p.a. to enable innovation to begin. All should give Advisers significant sums of money for disbursement to innovatory projects. Every 'area of experience', not 'subject' should have an Adviser. 16-19 development should be encouraged, as Bradford has done, by appointing an Assistant Director for all 13+ LEA education. This has greatly helped the founding of Commonwealths such as the North Bradford Tertiary Commonwealth where five schools, one FE College, The Youth Service and the Careers Service are running unified 16-19 work. Through this, curriculum development has burgeoned. Design A level was not done in any of the institutions; it now flourishes as a cooperative venture taught at 1600 on two nights a week. Finally, but most importantly, CLEA should press

most urgently for the abolition of rates and replace them with a national local tax on wealth. It is 383 years since Queen Elizabeth I in 1598 began rates; surely the second Elizabeth could update the system?

**GOVERNORS.** Governors are interestingly shy over the curriculum, although they do have oversight of it. As a Head, my Articles of Government say that I am 'responsible to the Governors for the curriculum of the school'. I have sat for some years on two Governing Bodies and I have never heard a Governor try to determine what should be on the curriculum. Governors are interested and want to know what happens from Heads of Department and by observing classes. Their main influence in practice comes when they help appoint staff.

Governing Bodies are at present on a watershed of their development. The Taylor Report's recommendations beckon them towards greater power and involvement; certainly the equal representation of LEA, Community, staff and parents would be a great improvement. The removal of most governorships from political nomination would result in more knowledgeable, regular and committed governors. Their opinions on the curriculum would be valuable, but controlling it by edict would not assist progress in this complex field.

**THE COMMUNITY.** Apart from parents, local employers have a justifiable interest in the curriculum. In the Keighley area of Bradford they have produced with teachers a check-list of their basic mathematical requirements in a profile form. In Bradford, firms' representatives regularly visit schools and sit in on classes; twinning is well-developed; work experience for pupils occurs on a large scale; and the Careers Service helps to place teachers for three weeks annually in firms. All this has a trickle-down effect on the curriculum and is common in many areas in England.

There should be no control of the curriculum by the community but certainly more dialogue and inter-activity is needed. By 1983 non-manual jobs will for the first time outnumber manual and so standards in schools will need to continue to rise as they have done in the last 50 years. The Community representatives on Governors should be saying 'Why do you teach Latin, or Design?' The irrelevance of much of the curriculum is becoming clearer as exam certificates cease to be passports to jobs. The teaching of life skills is increasing rapidly. Unlike most subjects, Design will survive because it teaches creative self-fulfilment for the individual; one does not have to appeal to a deferred gratification in its defence.

**PARENTS.** The development of parent interest in the curriculum is beginning. Parent-Teacher Associations are becoming, in the age of cuts, pressure groups for the school and on the school. Parent-Governors are undoubtedly the most effective governors; they know what they are talking about and what questions to ask; they are deeply committed to the school. They probe widely and insistently on exam results at Governors' Meetings and almost all parents want to see a school's results



in the press. Parents are very energetic in raising money for new areas of the curriculum.

But the complexities of curriculum planning are left wholly to the staff. I asked in a letter to 1700 parents what comments they had on our curriculum, as we began a working party on it. Not one replied. At another school I tried to persuade the PTA to offer a prize for a pupil's appropriate technology design — to no avail. Most significant of all, in Bradford we are parental choice area; a parental decision as to school are made mainly on the basis of transport difficulties, uniform, discipline and past traditions: the differing curriculum of one school from another has little importance, and as a parent myself I am quite ready to believe that my local comprehensive school has a good curriculum and send my daughters to it since it is the nearest. Schools are chosen by the young people themselves for social far more than curriculum reasons.

What should we do about parental influence on the curriculum? We should enthusiastically publicise schools as the Education Act requires. It is not expensive to do. Real parental knowledge may gradually replace coffee-morning gossip. Pyramids leading to comprehensive schools should be encouraged by doing everything short of direction to persuade all pupils from certain primary or middle schools to go to certain secondary or upper schools. Our first loyalty is to pupils and undoubtedly they gain if the curriculum can run through with proper liaison, from 5-16. Where 15 schools randomly feed four secondary or upper schools, the task of curricular construction on a rational basis becomes impossible. Inside school, likewise, we should accept a pupil's choice of subject, not a parentally imposed choice. The latter may reflect what the parents' ideal curriculum

should be for his or her son or daughter; but the former is more practically likely to work.

**THE FUTURE.** The greatest influence on our school curriculum should be what has not yet happened. Toffler has said, 'Our schools face backwards towards a dying system rather than forwards to the emerging new society'. For a child born today, 97% of all the world's knowledge when he is 50 will have been discovered in his lifetime.

I have a vision of complex technology with a low energy input such as computers, complemented by a simple technology with high human energy input such as the use of bicycles, windmills and wheelbarrows. Our bodies were meant to be used, not just transport our brains. Fossil fuels will not last forever and human skills are becoming more not less vital. We must educate all young people and the surrounding community in Design and its skills of brain, united hand and eye; otherwise the future will lead to control by a techno-fascist elite who alone understand society: we are already seeing the beginning of this with the huge power of computer installation employees to stop the work of all banks or the government.

**CONCLUSION:** Staff design and implement curricula far more than any other group. If the creative, integrative voice of Design teachers is silent — and it often is in staff meetings and working parties — then a holistic curriculum looking to the future I describe will be very difficult to implement. We need proud, productive teachers of Design whose presence and views are respected by all the staff. They are vital because only they can remedy our major curricular problem: 'This', says Philip Coggin, 'is the British Disease, the separation of thought from feeling, learning from life and industry from education'.

## CRAFTS CONFERENCE FOR TEACHERS

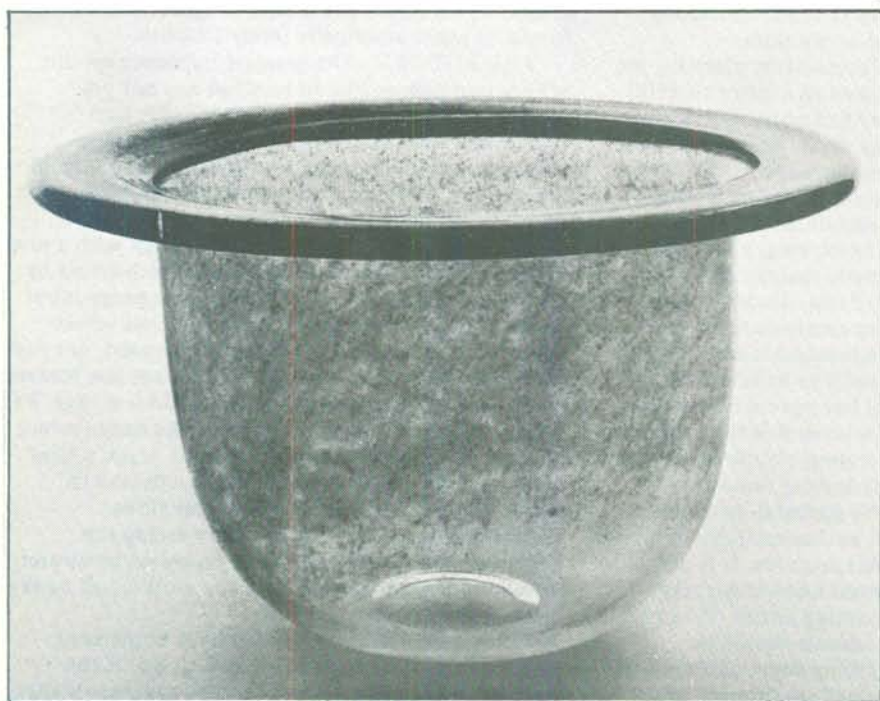
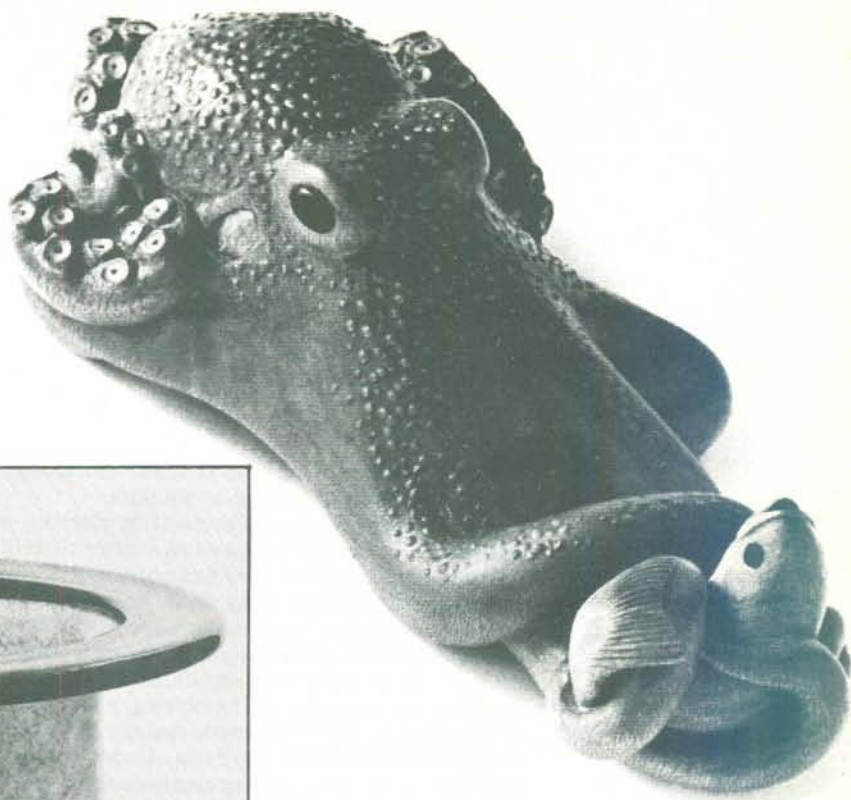
Victoria & Albert Museum and Imperial College, University of London  
20-23 April 1982

The Crafts Council in association with the Society of Education through Art is organising a 3½ day conference to explore and discuss the work and ideas of twentieth-century craftsmen with the teaching profession.

The programme will include lectures on developments in the crafts in the twentieth century, illustrated talks by craftsmen working in wood, metal, textiles and ceramics, discussion of educational issues and visits to craft workshops and galleries. There is no fee for the conference, but board and lodging for residential participants will be approximately £65, meals only for non-residents £35.

Further details and booking forms are available from Caroline Pearce-Higgins, Education Officer, Crafts Council, 12 Waterloo Place, London SW1. Tel: 01-930 4811.





*Above: Small wood-carving of an octopus by Sue Waight, selected by John Makepeace for the 'Makers' Eye' Exhibition at the Crafts Council.*

*Right: Glass bowl by Chris Williams, selected by David Watkins for the 'Makers' Eye', Exhibition Crafts Council.*

*Below: Winged ceramic bowl – bronze finish by Colin Pearson selected for the 'Makers' Eye', Exhibition Crafts Council by David Pye.*

*Photographs by Ian Dobbie*

