

# Evaluating a Design and Craft Department

The pressures for institutional evaluation have been accelerated as the demand for greater public accountability has increased. This increased demand has been brought about by shrinking resources, falling rolls, increased consciousness of public rights, and concern for the quality of education provided in our schools. Shipman (1979) illustrates this point:—

“Suddenly we are in a buyer’s market for schooling. Each school has to retain public confidence or that public is likely to assume that it is failing. We can no longer assume that lack of information will be taken as a sign of confidence and efficiency. All who educate are under pressure to assess their effectiveness and to make that assessment public. You can label this accountability. It is really a move to an open schooling. It is no use being effective without being responsive.”

There have been different approaches to these pressures for greater accountability, ranging from HMI testing programmes and inspection through to LEA initiated schemes. The professional response has been self-evaluation.

Self-evaluation is, of course, nothing new. Teachers have always evaluated the curriculum/organisation and made changes to suit their perception of the situation. However, this evaluation has often been non-systematic, informal and private to individuals (Simons, 1981). Recent trends in education have changed this approach. There is a move towards the systemising and broadening of the evaluation process. As Elliott (1980) says, ‘The age of privacy is over for schools’.

If a formal system of curriculum review is missing, then it is likely that curriculum development will be at a much slower rate than that required to prepare our pupils for an ever-changing world. Simon and Levin (1973) illustrate this point:—

“Unless an educational setting develops a process for evaluating its own day-to-day operations, it will be unable in any systematic fashion to respond to evolving shifts in aims, priorities and clientele”.

This comment, although written in 1973, is surely as relevant to a Design and Craft Department as any other area of the curriculum.

This article describes a scheme of departmental self-evaluation which was initiated in the Design and Craft Department at The High Park School, Stourbridge. It is based upon the supposition that there is a need for a thorough and systematic process for reviewing the curriculum, particularly in the ever-changing area of Design Education.

The scheme has evolved from a school evaluation programme based on the Solihull ‘checklist’ document (Solihull Educ. Comm., 1979), which provided a useful interim measure and indicated general areas requiring more specific review. Many of the items identified during this phase of the programme related to the curriculum. It seemed logical to conclude that a series of departmental reviews could provide a manageable, systematic framework to aid the improvement of the curriculum offered to our pupils. The scheme

described here provided a ‘pilot’ run for such an approach. It now forms the basis for the school policy for departmental self-evaluation.

The remainder of this paper describes the evaluation under the following headings:—

- (i) Problem areas.
- (ii) Guiding principles.
- (iii) Framework for the review.
- (iv) The report.
- (v) Outcomes/conclusions.

## Problem Areas

There are many problem areas which have to be considered before a self-evaluation programme can be implemented in a school. Eraut (1981) pinpoints two main arguments against school self-accountability:—

- (i) The teachers lack the necessary skills and attitudes.
- (ii) The whole approach lacks external credibility.

The Schools Council GRIDS Project (Guidelines or Review and Institutional Development in Schools) suggest that there are four major barriers to the successful adoption of self-review in schools:—

- (i) The inter-relationship between the two purposes of such a review — professional development and social accountability.
- (ii) The lack of time and resources for teachers, heads and external support agencies to carry out this process.
- (iii) The lack of validated self-review schedules and developmental procedures.
- (iv) The general lack of experience of successful ways of carrying out the diagnostic phase and extending it into the planning and development phase.

Another major problem which becomes apparent when a system of evaluation is discussed within a school is the fear of threat that some staff feel from the proposed process. The use of classroom observation with the evaluation process causes some anxiety and the use to which evaluation findings will be put, particularly in a time of falling rolls, can be another area of concern. It is vital that issues such as these are considered prior to the introduction of the review programme.

However, to counter these problems one could argue that the evaluation process will itself help to develop the necessary professional skills and attitudes. In other words, teachers will never develop these skills unless they participate in reviewing the curriculum. It also seems likely that development of methods/instruments of evaluation will be aided by constant trial and adaption in schools.

The problem of external credibility is also relevant. It would appear that this can be aided by



using external consultants. They can help to:—

- (i) Give a broader base for curriculum discussion.
- (ii) Provide external validation of the process.

The fear of threat felt by staff when an evaluation programme is discussed is a very real problem. It indicates that the strategy of implementation of an evaluation programme is *the* most important factor to consider when setting up such a scheme. The soundest instruments of evaluation will be worthless if the strategy of implementation is badly handled.

### Guiding Principles

Following a discussion of these problem areas and by using a checklist (Nuttall, 1981), which looked at evaluation under the headings of Context, Process, Reporting and Action, it was possible to distinguish the principles which would guide the evaluation. The GRIDS Project provided a useful list of such principles and formed the core of those adopted for this departmental review.

The aim of the scheme was to help review and develop the department's curriculum and organization so that the teaching/learning process could be improved. In other words, the emphasis was heavily on professional development. However, it was felt that if at the same time we could publicly show our concern and intentions for the curriculum, then we could move towards balancing the supposedly conflicting interests of public accountability and professional development.

The principles listed below provided the underlying base on which the departmental review was developed:—

- (i) that the central focus should be on the department and not individuals within the department;
- (ii) that departmental staff should be consulted and involved in the process as much as possible;
- (iii) that decisions about what happens to any information or reports produced should rest with the teachers concerned;
- (iv) that external consultants should be used where the department judges this to be appropriate;
- (v) that the evaluation should be monitored by an internal review panel;
- (vi) that the demands made on key resources like time, money and skilled personnel, should be realistic and feasible for the department/school;
- (vii) that a real effort should be made to look at the key issues;
- (viii) that the evaluation should involve some form of judgement and not be merely a description of the curriculum.

### The General Framework for the Review

The reasons for the evaluation and the principles for guiding the programme had been discussed and documented. The next stage was to work out the detail for the evaluation process.

HMI (1981) suggest that schools could start with some very simple questions

'What are you doing?'

'Why are you doing it?'

'If you want to change it, how and why?'

If we add the question, 'How effective are we in achieving what we set out to teach?', then we have the general framework for the approach adopted at High Park. Two main sections evolved:—

- (i) What are we teaching? Why?
- (ii) How effective are we in achieving what we set out to teach?

There are also general areas of organization and management which do not directly fit under (i) or (ii).

## 1. REVIEW OF AIMS/OBJECTIVES/CONTENT

What are we teaching? Why?

The aim during this phase of the evaluation was to look at the aims and objectives of the department and how they were translated into classroom practice. One of the difficulties was to cover the specific curriculum areas within the department in depth and at the same time discuss the more general areas which cut across these subject boundaries. It was therefore decided that this phase of the evaluation should proceed on three levels:—

### (a) Whole Department

Discussion of the general principles, problem areas, methodology and strategy for implementation took place during an initial series of departmental meetings. Papers were prepared outlining these points and topics which cut across subject areas were also discussed. At this stage, a timetable for the first phase of the evaluation was drawn up.

Departmental meetings continued on a monthly basis after the initial series of meetings. They were used to discuss general issues affecting the review and to keep staff in touch with progress in the various subject areas. Minutes were taken at each meeting.

### (b) Subject Areas

Three main subject areas are identifiable within the department:—

- (i) CDT
- (ii) Art
- (iii) Food/Fabrics

It was decided that in order to make the evaluation manageable and specific it would be necessary to look at the curriculum using these three subject areas. The head of subject was responsible for organizing, within the general framework, the evaluation for his/her area. External consultants were invited in each of the three subject areas:—

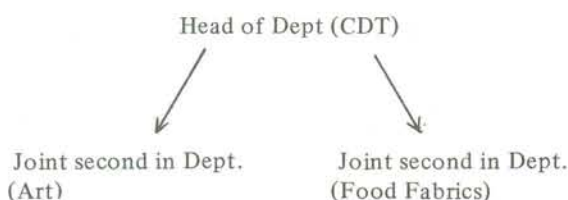
CDT — Mr. R. Farman (Dudley LEA Adviser)  
Art — Mr. A. Hughes (Head of School of Art Educ., Birmingham Polytechnic)  
Food/Fabrics — Mrs. M. Cooke (Senior Lecturer Home Economics, F.L. Calder College, Liverpool).

Meetings took place after school with each subject area generating its own timetable. Two, half-day sessions were also set up for each area and

the appropriate external consultant was invited to these sessions. Each meeting was minuted and the external consultants also provided written reports (see method).

(c) *Subject Heads* (CDT, Food/Fabrics/Art).

The department is organized as follows:—



The evaluation was co-ordinated by these three subject heads. A double lesson was timetabled each week for approximately one term. The time was used to ensure that the evaluation was progressing satisfactorily and so that discussions could take place to enable successes to be shared and problem areas avoided.

### Method

The procedure given below was carried out in each of the three subject areas described above. The exercise was co-ordinated through departmental meetings and meetings of subject heads.

- (i) The first stage was to examine the department's aims and objectives. A variety of information and published literature was used as a basis for discussion:—
  - Existing departmental syllabus,
  - Published literature (APU, 16+ examinations, Educational reports, external examinations etc),
  - Views of staff and external consultants etc.
- (ii) The potential aims and objectives for the department were extracted from this literature/

information and placed on individual cards (See fig. 1.) The source was also given.

This approach was adopted so that the discussion would not be too abstract or philosophical. The cards also enabled material from a variety of sources to be brought together in a manageable way. It made it possible to discuss a particular area/course using a batch of these cards. The relevant area could be placed in order of priority and those which were not applicable could be discarded.

- (iii) As already stated, one of the problems was finding the right level on which to set the discussion. If it was too abstract progress could be extremely slow. If it was on too much of a practical classroom level then the basic reasons and philosophy for teaching could be neglected. A compromise adopted at High Park was to use the cards in the manner described above together with course planning sheets (figs. 2 and 3). This enabled us to discuss the aims and objectives of the department and the way, in very brief terms, they would be translated into practice.
- (iv) This documentation provided the basis for the discussion with the external consultants. Two, half-day sessions were set up in each subject area. The first to look at years 1–3, the second to look at years 4–5. The findings from this stage of the evaluation were summarized on charts similar to those illustrated in figure 4. The external consultants also provided written reports.
- (v) The department's summary and the reports from the external consultants were studied and amendments were made to the aims/objectives and course planning sheets. The specific details of the syllabus were then re-written.

Figure 1

### AIM

To encourage the acquisition of a body of knowledge relevant to the solving of technological problems.

I6+ (Tech)

## 2. EFFECTIVENESS

How effective are we in achieving our aims and objectives?

During the first stage, a comprehensive review of the curriculum had taken place. However, much of this review was through discussion and analysis outside the classroom. It was felt to be essential that the actual classroom processes and products should be evaluated. The most carefully thought out syllabus is worthless if it cannot be put into practice. Therefore, during this phase an attempt was made to review the actual classroom processes, and the products which resulted from these processes. Three main methods were used:—

### (i) Classroom Observations

This was the area which caused the greatest fear of threat and was the most difficult to implement. Stokes (1981) illustrates some of the difficulties. "It is essential in the process of monitoring that the relationship between the head of department and teacher should not be damaged. Monitoring should be constructive in its effect. If it is badly implemented, it can be positively destructive of



Figure 2

Design and Craft Dept.— Planning Sheet

FORM/GROUP	SUBJECT	8 WEEK COURSE	8 WEEK COURSE

The High Park School

the work of the department for it will lower the morale of the staff and antagonize them". However, he goes on to state that having acknowledged the difficulties one should not draw back from the task of assessing the practical teaching in the classroom.

It seems to me that it is vitally important that this area, though controversial, should not be neglected. The classroom is the place where curriculum discussion stops and action takes place. However, the problems must be carefully considered and procedures must be sensitive and aimed at

improving professional practice rather than grading and assessing the teacher.

The system which finally evolved at High Park involved:—

- (i) Each member of staff to be seen teaching by the head of department on at least two occasions in each school year
- (ii) The Solihull document CI 'Evaluating a lesson' to be used to provide a framework (Solihull Educ. Comm., 1979).
- (iii) The findings to be confidential. No report to

Design and Craft Dept. — Year Planning Sheet

Figure 3

Form	Subject	Autumn		Spring		Summer	

Fig 3

The High Park School

be made. Private discussion between head of department and individual.

- (iv) Principal aim – to improve practice and so improve quality of service given to pupils.

#### (ii) Course Evaluation Session

Each year the department puts a great deal of time and effort into the setting up of Open Day exhibitions of work for parents and pupils of the school. It was felt that this opportunity could be used to get a more systematic and professional evaluation of work actually produced by pupils. Consequently, a course evaluation session was set up on the day before Open Day. Three external consultants were invited in:—

CDT – Mr. R. Farman (Dudley LEA Adviser)  
 Art – Mr. A. Hughes (Head of School of Art Educ., Birmingham Polytechnic.)  
 Food/Fabrics – Miss B. Fisher (Head teacher, Redhill School, Stourbridge.)

The Head of the school and a parent governor were also present, together with all departmental staff and two newly-appointed members of staff who were due to join the department in September, 1983.

#### Method

- (i) Examples of work from each course and ability range were displayed.

- (ii) Introduction to the whole group on the aim of the session and the evaluation so far.
- (iii) Heads of subject briefly described the curriculum in each area.
- (iv) The three groups (CDT, Art, Food/Fabrics) then viewed the exhibition with their particular external consultant and discussed the work in detail.
- (v) Written and verbal reports were received from each consultant.

The exercise had had three main aims:—

- (a) to enable departmental staff to keep in touch with developments in other areas within the department;
- (b) as an induction exercise for newly appointed staff;
- (c) to provide an externally validated evaluation of work produced by pupils.

The session proved to be extremely worthwhile. Many useful suggestions were received from the external consultants. The exercise of having to justify and explain the work to outsiders can only aid the professional development of staff. However, it must be seen as a non-threatening activity and again the strategy for implementation is of prime importance.

#### (iii) Analysis of External Examination Results

The use of external examination results as a tool of evaluation has to be carefully handled. There are many potential problem areas which have to be considered if they are to provide meaningful information. Gray (1982) and Shipman (1979) provide a comprehensive review of the difficulties and of the way schools might make best use of such results for evaluation.

Issues which have to be raised when comparisons are being made include:—

- (i) The ability and social class of the intake.
- (ii) The school examination entry policy.
- (iii) Examination results of different subjects and examination boards may not be comparable.

However, external examination results are generally regarded as an extremely important measure of school effectiveness. They provide students with a currency which is respected by parents and employers. The method of analysis adopted in the Design and Craft Department at High Park attempts to make comparisons within the school and between other schools. The process is far from perfect and it is hoped that improvements will be made in the future. However, it can still be a useful exercise as long as staff are aware of the limitations of comparing statistics from a variety of sources.

#### Method

- (i) The results for a particular year are charted (figs. 5 and 6). The national/regional figures are also provided. It is recognized that direct comparisons will be difficult to make due to the issues listed above. The first line gives the school numbers and percentages. The second lines gives the national/regional percentages.

Figure 4

DESIGN AND CRAFT DEPT - REVIEW	CDT SUMMARY PHASE 1
<u>MAIN FINDINGS</u>	
<u>Years 1 - 3</u>	
(i)	
(ii)	
(iii)	
(iv)	
(v)	
<u>Years 4 - 5</u>	
(i)	
(ii)	
(iii)	
(iv)	
<u>Action Taken</u>	
(i)	
(ii)	
(iii)	
(iv)	
(v)	
<u>Future Action</u>	
(i)	
(ii)	
(iii)	
(iv)	

Figure 4.



- (ii) Comparison is made with results from previous years in each examination subject (fig. 7).
- (iii) The estimated grades given by staff are compared with the actual results.
- (iv) The grades are compared with other subjects within the school. Examination board analysis used.
- (v) This information is used as the basis for discussion between the head of department and each member of the department.
- (vi) The head of department discusses the results with the Head of the school.

It is worth remembering that 'good' examination results do not necessarily mean a 'good' examination. Indeed, after the first stage of the evaluation (What are we teaching? Why?) decisions were taken to remove certain external examinations from the option scheme and replace with ones considered to offer a more relevant syllabus. These examinations had been successfully taught in the past and it was suggested that the school 'averages' may suffer as a result of the proposed change. However, this seemed to me to be a weak argument against change and that the more relevant curriculum would surely be taught at least as successfully as the one which it replaced. This issue illustrates the pressures that schools are under to produce 'good' examination results and the status they are given, regardless of relevance, outside the school.

### The Report

If we are to balance the interests of public accountability and professional development then it would seem appropriate that a report of findings should be produced. The Open University (1982) put forward three main reasons for reporting evaluation:-

- (a) to educate and inform;
- (b) to stimulate action;
- (c) to permit validation of the evaluation.

At High Park, it was decided at the outset that decisions about what happens to any information should rest with the teachers concerned (see guiding principles (iii)). It was also decided that the findings/discussion should be documented throughout and that decisions about what happens to the information should be made at the end of the year. The amount of documentation was considerable and it was therefore decided that to aid clarity the report should be produced on two levels:-

- (a) *A departmental report* – documentation of all meetings and findings generated during the process. It was felt that this document would provide a useful reference manual for departmental staff, but would be too lengthy for external consumption (at present over 60 pages).
- (b) *A summarized report* – a summary encompassing the main findings and giving the reports of the external consultants in full.

Content:-

- (i) Description of the evaluation scheme;
- (ii) Report of phase 1 (What are we teaching? Why?)
  - (a) Reports from consultants to be published in full,
  - (b) Summary of findings from each subject area, including outcomes;
- (iii) Description of methods of classroom observations;
- (iv) Description of course evaluation session. To include summary of findings and full reports from consultants;
- (v) Description of course evaluation session. To include summary of findings and full reports from consultants;
- (v) Description of methods of analysing external examination results and analysis;
- (vi) Final analysis including summary of main findings.

Hopefully, this report will be presented to Governors and LEA. The final decision will rest with departmental staff. However, this is one area which has caused me a great deal of concern. We are attempting to balance professional development and public accountability and yet it is possible that the report will not be seen outside the school. One might ask if the validity of the exercise has been established (O.U., 1982) if a report is not made available to Governors and LEA. The use of external consultants gave a certain amount of credibility to the review. This could be negated if the report becomes purely an internal document. It makes one wonder if decisions about what happens to information should be made at the outset of the evaluation programme. In spite of this, I am in no doubt that it is the process of evaluation that is of prime importance rather than any report that follows it.

It would also be beneficial to have the evaluation as a whole validated/audited by an independent external body. This could involve, for example, staff from a College of Education or University Faculty of Education. Validation would then be on two levels – the specific subject area and the overall evaluation scheme.

### Outcomes/Conclusions

As already stated, in my opinion it is the process rather than the product of evaluation that is of prime importance. By participating in an evaluation programme professional skills can be developed and positive attitudes towards curriculum review can be nurtured. However, at High Park many changes took place as a result of the self-evaluation programme. Some of these were in the minds of staff prior to the review, but it seems likely that they would not have been discussed and implemented without a formal and systematic approach. The confidentiality given to participating staff precludes a detailed description of these changes. However, it is possible, without infringing this trust, to illustrate some of the general outcomes of the evaluation:-



- (i) Greater emphasis on problem-solving in basic CDT modules in years 1-3.
- (ii) Introduction of greater technological content in Years 1-3 and years 4-5.
- (iii) Introduction of CNC and other computing facilities.
- (iv) Introduction of CSE Design Studies to replace CSE Woodwork. Option pattern also modified.
- (v) Move from technical drawing to graphic communication approach in years 1-3.
- (vi) Increased use of experimental and investigative methods of learning in Food/Fabrics.
- (vii) Total revision of 3rd Year Food/Fabrics scheme.
- (viii) 1-3 year Art courses reviewed and modified.
- (ix) 'Thematic' approach being considered in certain areas of Art curriculum.
- (x) Introduction of new methods of assessment for CSE Art and Craft coursework. etc.

This article has described an evaluation process which took approximately twelve months to complete. It has given the chance for us to look closely at the work of the department. Nevertheless, the process has not finished. Evaluation is a

continuous, ever-present feature of a school and we have a clear idea of areas requiring review in the immediate future:-

- (i) Department assessment policy.
- (ii) Development of classroom observation process.
- (iii) Development of curriculum issues highlighted during the evaluation.

However, a great deal of change has taken place as a result of this review. We now require a period of consolidation so that the changes can be implemented. The process is more time consuming than originally thought and it is important to have a certain amount of flexibility in the timetable.

In conclusion, it is important that the evaluation itself and the strategies for implementation should be evaluated. The scheme described here now forms the basis for departmental review in the school and lessons have been learned and problems identified which will aid future developments. It is difficult to measure the success of the programme so far, but it has certainly stimulated action and, in my opinion, increased staff consciousness of curriculum issues.

The Open University (1982) provide a list of criteria for judging an accountability procedure. These have been considered as the scheme has developed. I leave it to others to assess how the programme of departmental review at High Park measures up to these criteria. They suggest that an accountability scheme should:-

- (a) be fair and perceived as fair by all parties;
- (b) be capable of suggesting appropriate remedies;
- (c) yield an account that is intelligible to its intended audience(s);
- (d) be methodologically sound;
- (e) be economic in its use of resources;
- (f) be an acceptable blend of centralized and delegated control.

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Figure 5

LEVEL	A	B	C	D	E	A-E	TOTAL
DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY	No. + %						
NUTRITION AND COOKERY							
ETC.							

Figure 6

CSE	GRADE 1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL
ART AND CRAFT	No. + %						
ETC.							

Figure 7

GEOM. AND ENG DRW.	A	B	C	D	E	A-E	TOTAL
1983	No. + %						
1982							
1981							