

Design and Craft Studies at University of London Goldsmiths' College – the Anatomy of a College Programme.

A year ago a contribution by a fourth year student at Goldsmiths' College attracted widespread interest in the whole of the College programme for potential teachers of design and craft. As a result members of the College staff were invited to write about their courses from Foundation Studies through to final professional practice in which they not only described but also explained their work with students. This group of four articles is their response.

Introductory Thoughts

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By agreeing to ask one's immediate colleagues to write a group of articles for an educational journal, one is subscribing to the premise that readers will find the work of the department of interest. The compliment behind the initial invitation is sufficient to take one to the point of no return, before the difficulties present themselves. From then onwards, the going gets harder.

To begin with, there is the inbuilt risk of rushing readers through a four year course in a few pages. This would be so superficial as to be positively dangerous as it could not hope to bring out the essential but often subtle threads of philosophical reasoning on which the entire course is founded.

Secondly, in trying to avoid the former, there is the danger of outlining the direction of the syllabus by delivering a 'blow by blow' account of the schemes of work involved in any one year.

Thirdly, and perhaps the most significant of all, to cover the work of the department by seven individual writers would necessitate breaking down the course into manageable pieces and worse still, assigning each piece to a single colleague to deal with in isolation. This would be the very antithesis of all that we believe in and therefore has to be avoided.

Essentially, we believe fundamentally in team teaching and the importance of personal relationships. This belief makes a 'scheme of work' as such, impossible, as the entire course must be seen as a fluid, 'living' thing which exists only to satisfy the needs of students. As these needs change from person to person and from year to year, it will be realised that it would be impossible to work within a rigid structure. It follows from this that the entire course must be seen as a whole and not as a collection of parts. Every thread within it, is woven most carefully into the next so that any one part of the course supports or relies on the others. The overall planning of this is done by the entire departmental staff. To administer the final plan, one colleague takes the responsibility for each year group, so that he can serve as a personal tutor to each student within that group as well as ensuring that the agreed objectives are met. To assist in this respect, student liaison representatives are appointed for each year group and through this machinery, the students have the opportunity to help in the planning of their own work programmes.

Similarly, at appropriate times within the course, they are involved in the evaluation and assessment of their work. The course exists for students, it follows therefore that it can only be successfully operated with the co-operation and complete involvement of the students.

It will be appreciated therefore, that to take any part of this course out of its context for highlighting in a series like this would be disastrous as it could so easily give quite the wrong impression. To overcome this has invariably resulted in an element of compromise, but I trust that the ends will justify the means. We have agreed four areas which we thought would be of interest and in which colleagues would be free to write without the necessity of linking their respective contributions to that of others. In fact, we deliberately structured this by putting the first contribution which dealt with the design component in the London B.Ed. degree course into an earlier issue of the journal. This was written by the student concerned, Kevin Campbell, who was with us during the years 1968/71. Although standing very well on its own, we hope that it may also have prompted interest in the three year course which preceded it.

Before looking at the other three areas specifically, therefore, it would seem desirable to look at the objectives and outline of the course generally in an attempt to lessen the inevitable compromise. We recognise the imperative need for teacher education as our first priority, realising that this must of necessity include preparing the student for teaching also. It is essential therefore that a student understands his college course and the way in which it is structured to meet specified objectives. In this way, we hope each student will develop his or her own philosophy towards craft education during the course, to enable him to be motivated from within when teaching. Each project undertaken is therefore thoroughly discussed with him in terms of objectives and a student is expected to make a written evaluation of each in educational terms, establishing his own criteria against which to make his judgements. This is particularly valid in the first part of the course which deals with the Foundation Course. To explain the significance of this more fully we have decided to devote one of our articles to the Foundation Course itself.

The experience gained in simple problem solving during this Foundation Course gradually matures in the context of real design involvement. This is done in progressive stages. Firstly, by way of tightly controlled 'briefs', then on to more open ended projects, when pre-selected materials are not specified, moving gradually towards completely free 'briefs' and ultimately to the situation whereby the students identify their own problems from which they prepare their own design briefs. As this depends on an individual student's abilities and interests, it is essential that this phase of the course is planned in close co-operation between the student and his tutors. Some prefer to pursue their known strengths, whilst others seek experience in less familiar areas during this final stage of initial training. Both types of student are necessary, for whilst we recognise the need for specialists in the team teaching situation, it would seem essential that any specialization for teachers in the 1970's and 80's must be born of breadth in the first instance. There are no longer limits to the areas in which a child's design activities may take him. Depth study, therefore, in the form of material or worse still area specialization, must come as late in the course as possible preferably, in the case of the more able students, after their period of initial training. The less able student wants to establish his confidence in a

restricted area of work in his third year, but the more able students seek a deeper involvement in broad areas of design activities. This was well illustrated by Kevin Campbell's article in the earlier issue of this journal. Our second article, Design Opportunities, explains this more fully.

As our third year coursework is prematurely curtailed by a term's final teaching practice in the Spring term, followed by final examination in the Summer term, we thought it would be of interest to confine our thoughts in the last article to our approach for the preparation for teaching. Irrespective of the coursework that has preceded it, our students usually find this the most exciting and rewarding part of their course.

It seems paradoxical to say, therefore, that although craft programmes in schools are now becoming more exciting and demanding than at any time previously, fewer sixth formers – male or female – are being attracted towards craft teaching as a career. As a branch of the profession we are laying up serious trouble for ourselves if this present trend continues, as our work is now more intellectually demanding than ever before. It is because of this and its ever widening scope that it is bringing more upper sixth form pupils into the workshops and studios during their 'minority time'.

To meet this exciting prospect we must train more design teachers who are themselves intellectually and technically competent to extend this current development. External school examinations are encouraging this extension into areas of Design and Technology and, like those of the University of London, are generally structured so that they can be taken at the end of a 'personal' course done in minority time without any special examination preparation at all, providing a depth of involvement is evident. If more could be persuaded to take 'A' Levels such as this, it would go a long way to offset the problem of the choice of optional subjects, taken as early as the third year in many cases, which often denies our area of work to many pupils. The new salary structure and the possibility of reading first or higher degrees should help to offset some of the disadvantages felt earlier, but at the present moment, neither would appear to be having the desired effect. Certainly, all that is being built now by colleagues in schools will collapse unless their pupils come forward for training in order to carry on and develop this stimulating work. Three and four year courses in Colleges of Education for design teacher training are of necessity more realistic and student centred than hitherto as I sincerely hope these following articles will illustrate. It is my personal hope that some sixth formers will be encouraged to read them and to visit College departments throughout the country in order to use the facilities and resources there whilst working on their own projects and to explore the prospects and implications of a three year course informally, before being asked to make any decision concerning their options for Higher Education. Certainly, as schools welcome our students for periods of Teaching Practice, so we in turn would welcome a similar response from sixth form pupils who would like to visit us informally with a view to considering seriously the possibility of making a career in Design and Technology.