

Looking Back

Looking back on the period of the past ten years-or-so one cannot help but realise that (apart from being ten years older!) a great deal of change has taken place not only in the basic thinking about, but also the approach to, creative design in education. Visits to Colleges, departments and schools at the end of last year tend to confirm this view. Yet prior to the School's Council Research Project at Keele many of the ideas and attitudes which are now so readily accepted as normal were being 'floated' by independent groups of enthusiasts who were restless and looking for something new in their approach to craft work. They sought an approach which would lead away from merely sound training in technique to using technique to further intellectual development. This was to be achieved, as Bernard Aylward once remarked, 'without throwing the baby out with the bath water'. It is worth remembering that earlier craft teachers had spent years making it a thriving and much respected infant. The objective of change was to enable the baby to reach maturity, not to kill it off.

The beginning of the movement was the drift away from furniture making in schools, together with fitting and beaten metalwork, by cabinet-making-orientated woodwork teachers and their engineering-minded metalwork colleagues. These men ventured away from their traditional training and experience, adopted new materials and looked outside the classroom for their inspirations. The result was the spectacle of young people in schools researching the needs of handicapped children or old people, designing and then making equipment to suit these needs. The outcome was the learning of new technologies, a social awareness that might not otherwise have existed and an involvement of the school with the community. As teachers gained experience and confidence they began to explore the possibilities of co-operating with colleagues in other departments and thus gave rise to the beginnings of faculties in schools.

These developments were nothing short of revolutionary for many people and it was not surprising that they met opposition and that some teachers found it difficult to come to terms with the wind of change blowing draughtily through the schools. But change has been effected and in no small degree by the innovation of in-service training under the guidance of Advisers. One recalls that this was once the province of Saturday morning activities by the Institute of Craft Education!

During the halcyon days of the late '60s early '70s the heady mixture of innovation and enthusiasm, supported by a seemingly ready supply of money, made the future look rosy. Over the past two/three years departments and faculties have begun to feel the financial pinch in common with education as a whole. One senses that as the squeeze tightens so horizons also shrink and possibly some of the vigour may have gone out of current trends as resources become less readily available. Or will the financial strictures merely stimulate the natural ingenuity of teachers of Design and Technical Studies to

overcome these difficulties? Certainly inflation and cuts have made things difficult for teachers in these areas of work.

The new approach to our subjects has proved to be demanding and challenging and in some respects not as easy to control as the traditional craftwork. Many teachers have come to be grateful for the ready supply of new books which have appeared on the market to help them. Inevitably some of these books have been no more than updated versions of earlier editions but others have been excellent examples of a positive attitude towards the problems involved and have offered some original thinking about the alternative paths to be followed. Several new journals have become available during the past ten years, some supported by considerable financial resources and all making a useful contribution to the progress of design education. Probably none, however, have influenced thinking quite as much as *Studies in Design Education and Craft*. The readership figures are obviously very much larger. Over the years some of the articles – and the editorials – have made a tremendous contribution to the thinking of teachers and sharply pin-pointed many of the problems to be taken into account as they moved forward.

When drawing up new schemes of work to take into account the changed attitudes towards creative work the needs of society, as well as the young people themselves, must be taken into consideration. We must realise that we are not producing exciting schemes of work merely to further our own personal enthusiasms and interests through children. The work done in schools must certainly stimulate the imagination of the young people, and it must lead to intellectual, personal and social development. But it must also provide a tool for living like any other aspect of the curriculum, regardless of the Mode in which it is presented. We must not forget that the bulk of our school leavers do so at 16+ and offer the subjects they have studied as evidence of their fitness for certain forms of employment or training. It is important then to make sure that our creative work contains enough 'common core' material to meet the needs of employers as well as educationalists. More important, perhaps, than we tend to think, is the need to give the work a recognisable and understandable name. I am still trying to determine what a recently deceased Mode 3 examination in Modern Living was all about! This is equally important at 'A' level if we are to avoid producing examination subjects which are of little value in the fields of Further and Higher education.

After some 70 years practical/technical subjects have gained respectability and credence in schools. For the past ten years we have been trying to re-direct and define the thinking behind these subjects. Where do we go from here in the next ten years? That is the next challenge.