

# Green Paper or Green Light: The Design Teacher's Response\*

In what ways might teachers of craft and design be supported in any attempts to contribute to a response, assuming that such is desirable, to the call to ensure that children be 'equipped with a basic understanding – of the industrial activities, especially manufacturing, which create our national wealth'? It is, in the context of British schools, a novel idea for teachers to be charged in this way with such an apparently specific task as that implied in this phrase taken from the recent green paper<sup>1</sup> and, without careful analysis, it might suggest that curriculum planners should sit firmly in the utilitarian/vocational training camp. Quite apart from considerations of what is meant by 'manufacturing', how do we justify inclusion, within the context of time schedule for craft and design, those experiences designed to meet what we judge to be intended by the green paper statement? What sorts of experiences would these be? Could they be incorporated readily into the repertoire of craft teachers, would they require collaboration with colleagues in related areas of study, if relationships can be identified and agreed upon, and what sorts of adjustments and reorientations would be required from all concerned, including or perhaps more appropriately especially, the pupils? That is if something new is intended.

That history, geography, economics, and to a lesser degree, careers teachers are concerned with aspects of industry is true, and much of what is considered in history and geography, in respect of industrial influences, is likely to form part of whatever a school accepts as its common core. Economics and careers teachers are more concerned with what could be considered to be the ends of industrial activities. It seems to me that little attention has been given to, or is proposed for, the means. The questions which remain unanswered are those which ask that these considerations provide for a 'basic understanding', particularly of wealth creating industries. When we address ourselves to this notion, other disciplines begin to appear as sources of valued experience. Where in school for example would all those concepts associated with what we accept as an understanding of industrial energy, be considered? Where would pupils gain experience of changes in manufactured materials? Commonly informing the aims of each subject matter is the nature of thought *within* the discipline from which the school subject matter originated, rather than an emphasis on examination of the nature of interacting thinking required when it is necessary to produce a useful artifact, to an acceptable design standard, from appropriate raw materials, and to consider this with reference to energy, distribution costs and many other factors. It is the *centrality* of manufacture and production which I am arguing is the essence of what is being asked and that the concepts implied appear to relate more directly to what *Craft* teachers do than to anything else in the school curriculum.

This is not to argue that such a stance is without its dangers. Quite apart from the necessary examination of the place of distinctive subject matters; and the manner in which they may be found to contribute to such understandings as are asked of them, becoming a cause of hasty re-assembly of parts to a questionable whole curriculum; all those questions which cast doubt on the fundamental bias towards the commercial ethic will need consideration. This would of course not prevent the inclusion of such questions within the curriculum structure as aspects of moral education! None of this however seriously threatens the case that a much more central, but as yet undefined, place ought to be found for craft and design teachers in the whole curriculum transaction.

It has been argued that the provision of experience of those concerns which form the basis of school subject matter identified as heavy craft, light craft, art and craft, design, engineering studies and many others, might form a basis of coherence across the secondary school curriculum, as well as providing a part of the core, or even *the* core, when associated in rational ways, perhaps even fully integrated, with other school subject matter.<sup>2</sup> It was further argued

\* Following the Ruskin College speech on 18 October 1976 by the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Education and the Secretary of State for Wales, initiated national debates on Education. These initiatives followed strong critical comment in the press and elsewhere that standards of performance had declined and that the educational system was out of touch with the fundamental need for Britain to survive economically in a highly competitive world through the efficiency of its industry and commerce. Following these discussions the Green Paper, Command Paper 6869, was published.

that such a curriculum policy would support a less superficial consideration of concepts implied in the word 'technology', than might otherwise be the case, towards a more sensitive awareness of man's place in his world. The concerns which schools subsume as technology, range from the *knowing about* to the *knowing how* and particularly *why*.

Technology as the sphere of man's problem solving activity concerned with his utilisation of knowledge to, what is considered to be, human advantage, is a more demanding conceptualisation than those which concern themselves with parts to this whole. Should this, and could this, provide, if not a basis for the whole core, at least a major element of it? But if not integration why not interrelation of subject matter including selecting from as wide a range of disciplines as possible, towards green paper ends?

It is unlikely to be universally the case that many of what are known as the craft subjects are offered after the first and perhaps the second year in secondary schools to most pupils. Therefore either the craft emphasis becomes *weak*, in the sense that the pupils mainly concerned are seen as academically orientated, or the emphasis is *constrained* in the sense that, although more craft options may be selected and although much more can be considered, the pupils concerned are seen as leisure or vocationally orientated in a narrow sense. Another issue is the social function of schooling, where perhaps as a consequence of such policies as that referred to, some, maybe most, pupils may be readily identified by staff as either conformers or rebels. Richardson<sup>3</sup> has postulated that, in school, some, perhaps all, of conforming behaviour is a suppression of rebellion, and implies that this, and otherwise initiated conformity, is not wholly good for curriculum transactions. That rebellion is self-evidently bad is moderated by a view that some radicalness of view is good, in the same curriculum contexts, and that both rebellion and conformity are reactions to the inevitable dependence of the young on the old. Extending this thesis, it could be argued that, if the alleged dependency and suppressed rebellion of the conformers in school is juxtaposed, by direct classroom and workshop contact in mixed ability and mixed interest teaching groupings, with the latent dependency and rebellion of the incipient militants, not only will school experience contribute more effectively to the personal development, however defined, of the student but the social education enterprise of school will be enhanced. This is a brave assertion but it allows at least a marginally better chance for extension of the primary school ethic and provides in a very dramatic way, opportunity for 'prospective university students destined for business or professional careers to be educated alongside prospective 'early leavers' destined for routine jobs in factories and mines or for low-paid jobs in shops and offices'. Not only would the means to the end of 'well-adjusted individuals, able to take

their place in society', be catered for but in catering for such an aim, the means become the end and a totally different conception of schooling in craft, to that often found in British schools, would be in a process of implementation. Although such arguments already inform mixed ability and mixed interest teaching elsewhere in the curriculum this is not as widespread a practice for the craft subjects.

With such frames of reference as those proposed, the green paper implications appear much less utilitarian and therefore potentially more appealing to the teacher, without requiring any school adjustments more than those at present under consideration as mixed ability teaching, integrated studies, language across the curriculum, etc. and, therefore, more likely to appeal to teachers. Whether there will be a 'refusal to take advantage of such a situation'<sup>4</sup> with, available for support, the proffered educational justifications, outlined above, remains to be seen.

That more, perhaps urgently needed, debate is justified is self-evident.

#### References

1. Education in Schools. A Consultative Document. Cmnd. Paper 6869. London HMSO 1977.
2. Davison, W.A. Craft, Design, Technology and Industry. In Studies in Design Education and Craft, 10.7.
3. Richardson E., Authority and Organisation in the Secondary School, p.15. Macmillan 1975 Schools Council Research Studies.
4. Aylward, B. The Last Decade and the Next. In Studies in Design Education and Craft. p.14. 10.7.