

A fish-on-a- stick, a YoYo and a spatula!

Initial teacher training and technology in the National Curriculum

Georgina Stein
Roehampton Institute, London

A seminar group, consisting of 15 BA Qualified Teacher Status students in their second year at Roehampton Institute, London, embark on session one of an eight session Design and Technology Course.

A illuminative discussion about the nature of Design and Technology in the National Curriculum and the differences between Craft, Design and Technology (CDT) and Design and Technology evolved, as an audit of previous concepts, knowledge, skills and attitudes took place. This audit procedure forms part of an individual current-status competence exercise designed to illustrate and assess prior learning experiences.

After demonstrating some personal experiences of 'Technology', a female student vividly described herself, and a collection of mutually confused friends, as 'victims' of CDT. She carefully recalled the 'YoYo Project'. It was obviously memorable, but why?

The 'YOYo Project' required all the pupils to make a YoYo! The YoYo had to be made from metal and it had to be identical to the YoYo previously made by the teacher. All the pupils made the YoYo at the same time and they all went through the process at the same rate. When asked about the aims and intentions of the 'YoYo' teacher, she explained that she thought he wanted her to acquire metalwork 'skills'.

I enquired, 'Who identified the need?' (I mused on the idea that either a world-wide shortage of YoYos had been recognised during this period of time or a deeper rationale for the activity, lay buried beneath what initially appeared to be a rather superficial activity). I was disappointed, but not surprised, to discover that the need had only been identified by the teacher.

Trying to explore the situation further, I asked whether she had been able to make any decisions for herself at any stage during the project. Of course, as I suspected, she had not been allowed to take part in any decision making, problem solving, designing or evaluating processes.

In an attempt to clarify the structure of the CDT course, she went on to explain that the only other CDT experience she could remember whilst at school was making a 'spatula'. The spatula saga unfolded. Again, all pupils made a spatula. This time she explained that she was required to develop woodwork skills. I asked if she had achieved the aims and intentions of the course. She just laughed!

There was no need to question her further about her perception of the skills she was encouraged to develop. I must say though, throughout the discussion, it was obvious that she had developed an attitude towards CDT.

In expectant anticipation of a 'quality' learning experience, I turn to the other members of the group, and asked them about their previous experiences. One female student explained that they had not been given the opportunity to do 'CDT' at school, because it was a 'boys' subject.

It was at this point that the 'Fish-on-the-Stick' appeared. It was transported into the discussion by another student who could hardly speak for laughing as she recalled the events that surrounded her CDT experience.

The student explained that the teacher gave each pupil a rectangular block of wood. This was followed by weeks and weeks of sanding. After the appropriate amount of sanding had taken place, the teacher then drilled a hole in the centre of the wood. (Trying to hide my amusement, I encouraged her to continue).

She explained that a stick, of a predetermined length, was then rammed into the hole which had been created by the teacher. (The whole group erupted with laughter, as the picture began to unfold). Finally, a previously machined fish was given to all of the pupils. Weeks and weeks of more sanding took place. An appropriately placed hole was then drilled in the fish by the teacher. Hence a 'Fish-on-a-Stick' was created.

The activities she described, encapsulated her CDT experiences during her secondary years. As I thanked her for her contribution, she told us that she was allowed to varnish the 'Fish-on-the-Stick!' Apparently, it took her quite some time to get the varnish off her hands. I think it will take her a lot longer to erase the experience from her memory. Personally, I hope that she never forgets her CDT experiences.

Technology teaching and learning today has 'hopefully' changed, although I am sure that the 'Fish-on-the-Stick, the YoYo and the Spatula' teachers are still operating in some schools. The Technology curriculum should actively encourage pupils to take responsibility for their learning. It should build on their previous learning experiences and develop far more than just limited, context-free skills in a small number of pupils.

At Roehampton Institute, previous concepts, knowledge, skills and attitudes are recognised. Student teachers are actively encouraged to carefully examine their capabilities, so that their current-capabilities can be enhanced and extended. To take part in this process, it is essential that an individual audit takes place. This requires the learner to first recognise what they do, and do not know, and understand in relation to Technology in the National Curriculum.

This process can be a very rewarding exercise. After identifying what needs to be achieved (future-status goals), progress is made through projects identified by the learners, in negotiation with tutors and other students. Continuity and progression are addressed. Individual students determine their short-term and long-term goals. 'Quality' experiences are pursued. Concepts, knowledge, skills and attitudes are developed.

The needs of all BA (QTS) 'Technologists' at Roehampton Institute are addressed. Students are currently busy wrestling with new concepts, knowledge, skills and attitudes. Their creative and critical thinking is also developing. They are reading, researching and reporting and more, much more is taking place within a limited time and with limited resources. This 'real-life' experience of Technology challenges the learner to develop more than just a few isolated skills!

A predominantly skills-based curriculum could be an alternative approach to teaching and learning Technology in the National Curriculum! However, could such a curriculum be devoid of individuality and fail to address previous learning. Such as curriculum could possibly include a 'Fish-on-a-Stick, a YoYo or a Spatula! I know what kind of Technology Curriculum experiences I would prefer as a teacher and as a learner. Do you?

Stobart Davies Ltd

Priory House, Priory Street, Hertford SG14 1RN
Tel: 0992 501518 Fax: 0992 501519

*Specialist booksellers for all your
hobby, craft, design and
woodworking books.*

Send now for your **FREE**
catalogue.

