Coming of Age

It will probably not have escaped your attention that plans for developing the curriculum for 2000 are well in hand. In the autumn, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority circulated a pamphlet 'The next steps in developing the school curriculum (May 1998-September 2000)' and in it they laid out the procedural framework within which the revisions were to be drafted, consulted upon, revised and promulgated.

In outline, the following schedule is running:

Phase 1
May-Aug 1998
preparation
•invitation seminars

Phase 2
Sept-Dec 1998
development
• evaluating the current situation
• ensuring links to literacy, numeracy, key skills, ICT
• develop revised subject Orders

Phase 3
Jan-Mar 1999
informal consultation
• invited comment from interest groups

Phase 4
Apr-Aug 1999
formal consultation
• questionnaires and surveys

Phase 5
Sept 1999-Sept 2000
publication, distribution, dissemination
• requirements sent to all schools
• publish guidance materials

We are now well into phase 3, but at the time of writing this editorial (December), we were in phase 2. I say 'we' were in phase 2, not because I wish to claim any significant role in this process, but rather to indicate that we – the collective profession – are all involved in this process whether we like it or not. And there is a quite different atmosphere about *this* process of revision when compared to that which prevailed during previous drafting and revising processes.

In 1988/9 – in all the debates and upheavals that led to the publication of the Parkes' report and the 1990 statutory Order – the prevailing atmosphere was one of missionary zeal. Here we were in the UK breaking new ground, creating something new, radical and exciting. Building on the established strengths of separate disciplines (principally HE and CDT) we created the only comprehensively procedural statutory Order in the whole National Curriculum. Design and technology was defined as a creative *activity* in which pupils were expected to develop *capability* rather than as a body of knowledge and a set of skills – which was the prevailing pattern of description for subjects in the National Curriculum. We really did lead the world, and subsequently many nations (e.g. Australia, USA, S. Africa) have followed the lead with very parallel versions of our original construct. Even UNESCO declared itself enthusiastic.

But only shortly thereafter – in the early 1990s – the atmosphere was very different. The complexity of the 1990 design and technology Order, compounded by a series of quite idiotic decisions in SEAC about procedures for assessment, created serious difficulties in schools. Eventually the assessment madness provoked the quite astonishingly solid boycotts of SATs in 1992 and 1993 and the general level of turmoil and disaffection had serious knock-on effects in design and technology – the newest and most easily attacked member of the club (SATs you will remember only applied to English, maths, science and technology). Just a few short years after the zeal of creating the new, radical design and technology, came the retreat and retrenchment that eventually resulted in the 'Dearing' 1995 Order. Actually this Order was much better than it might have been, coming as it did after the far more reactionary re-drafts of 1992 and 1993. But despite the benefits of the 1995 Order – principally in terms of simplicity – there is no doubt in my view that it was a step backwards. It was less designerly, less entrepreneurial, less challenging ... and conversely it was more straightforward, more limited and more safe. In the transition to the 1995 Order, perhaps the greatest loss was the vision of the role of design and technology that had been so expertly articulated in chapter one of the (1988) Interim Parkes' report. In responding to the final draft of the 1995 Order (in July 1994) I pointed out what seemed to me to be ... the banality of what I assume is now the capability statement for design and technology.

> 'Design and technology requires pupils to combine their designing and making skills with knowledge and understanding in order to design and make products.'

Why? Who would want to? What's it all for? Do we just want lots more 'products'? There is no sense of pupils critically reflecting on their environment with a view to getting stuck in to doing something about it. There is no sense of actively intervening to improve the made world. The capability statement is dull and serviceable rather than inspiring and providing purpose to the roles of designers and technologists.

Prof Richard Kimbell

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EDITORIAL

Whilst this is all now water under the bridge, I have recently been reminded of these debates by the current activities in QCA as they undertake the redrafting process for 2000. As part of this process, I was interested and pleased to receive an invitation to take part in a round-table discussion at QCA about what modifications (if any) might be thought appropriate in design and technology.

I do not intend to report on the substance of that discussion – but rather to reflect on other features of it. I found myself sitting around a table with 20 or so people with a close interest in design and technology – from universities, LEAs, exam boards and other organisations, and with a balanced representation of primary and secondary practice. We were presented with procedural timetables and draft documents and we were encouraged to engage in discussions that might take design and technology forward. It was a fascinating day, and two features of it are of particular interest.

First, there was a quite astonishing degree of consensus around the table. If one person raised a point it would typically be endorsed and enriched by a contribution from another member of the group. There was no slanging match – no dispute – little controversy. Rather there emerged a series of statements that were universally agreed and approved. This stands in sharp contrast to my experience of such meeting in previous eras. In 1981-3 when we were trying to draft the National Criteria (e.g. for CDT / HE), or in 1985 when we were working on GCSE criteria, or in 1988 when the first National Curriculum Order was being debated; meetings were full of factions winning points and losing points. Draft statements from one interest group or another were shredded with vicious attacks and vitriolic interventions. As I have said elsewhere, there was blood on the walls in Notting Hill Gate. The recent meeting at QCA had a very different, concensual tone.

Second, there was a clear desire to make an overarching statement about design and technology; what it stands for; why we want youngsters to study it; what it uniquely contributes to the curriculum. Before getting into the detail of the substance of the Order, and any changes one might or might not wish to make, we felt the need to articulate the overriding principles and purposes of design and technology. Fortunately this desire was mirrored in QCA's own agenda. They too see the need to spell out the distinctive contribution of individual subjects; their aims, values and purposes. In 1990 – when the first design and technology Order was published, there were many of us who were deeply disappointed that chapter one of the Interim

Parkes' report was not published and distributed widely as a statement of principle to underpin the Order. And, as I pointed out above, in 1995 when the revised Order appeared, the overriding capability statement was seriously deficient. Good guiding statements of principle help us to interpret the detail of the Order, and prevent us from losing sight of the main game.

Both these features of the meeting – the desire to make clear statements of principle and the remarkable consensus as to what these principles are – suggest to me that design and technology is coming of age. We have moved beyond the faction-fighting of the 1980s and have established a subject that is becoming not only increasingly well rooted in practice, but is also more fully understood in theory. And this journal has played a significant part in both respects.

We should therefore welcome the discussions that will lead to the revisions for 2000. There may be changes on the horizon (probably evolutionary rather than revolutionary), but at least we now have a better understanding of what we mean by design and technology, and a fuller repertoire of classroom practices to exemplify it.

Please note that 'An Investigation into the Interaction of Teaching and Learning in Primary Design and Technology, Academic Ability and Classroom Behaviour' which appeared in Volume 3 Number 3 was written by Teresa Linton and Marion Rutland.