

Creating a Parents' Leaflet

Abstract

Since design and technology was introduced into the primary curriculum in 1990, the vast majority of teachers, parents, and governors have never experienced the subject for themselves in school and certainly not in primary school. Often there are misunderstandings as to the nature of the subject, and sometimes its value in the curriculum. Schools need to adopt a variety of strategies to reach all those connected to it, to aid understanding. Parents' evenings, workshops and displays have all proven successful but some are unable to come into school for a variety of reasons. Thus a leaflet explaining the value of the subject and how to help at home is another way of 'spreading the word'. Putting together such a publication needs thought, and the needs of the audience must be carefully considered. Lisa Hope shares the way in which she did this – a design and make assignment in itself. She identifies her successes, and also highlights changes to future publications. Whilst each school will need to create a leaflet for their own audience, it is hoped that this will provide a useful starting point.

Rationale for Parents' Leaflet

I thought it would be highly beneficial to create a leaflet explaining all about design and technology for parents as it is a relatively new subject, and one that they would probably have no experience of in their own education. As noted by Benson (1997),

'...before 1990, the subject existed in many forms and aspects were covered in a variety of curriculum areas; but from 1990, design and technology as an identified curriculum subject has been introduced...'

After the subject was introduced, it was concerning that there was a lack of understanding about it. This factor is discussed by Cross (1994).

'But there is a skills gap, a product of limited technological education in the past and of society's present ideas about technology education, about who technology is for and who can participate in it.'

Hopefully my booklet will go some way towards de-mystifying the subject for the parents at our school.

Initially I planned out my ideas for the text I was going to include in the leaflet and on reading through it I realised that on reflection there were too many words. I edited my work thus far and aimed to be as succinct as

possible. I also decided that it was important not to alienate the intended audience with over-technical vocabulary, whilst still providing an explanation of the key terminologies of the subject. This is quite a difficult balance to strike.

I developed the leaflet in short sections, following the processes involved in design and technology. I felt this would be a clear way of introducing the subject to parents. I feel that this shows the parents what is involved in design and technology.

For the format of the leaflet I decided that variety was imperative to make it appealing and for it to achieve its purpose – to be read by the parents, so that they can be informed about design and technology. I included lots of visual elements in order to entice the intended audience to read it. I drew some of my own icons and scanned in and re-sized some photographs I had taken as evidence of design and technology work. These included pictures of the children working and their finished products – an attraction for parents as it made the booklet highly personal, and they could spot familiar faces.

As we completed our design and technology work in booklets in Key Stage 1, I also scanned in and resized the examples of the children's work.

To appeal to the intended audience I decided to intersperse my text with quotes from the children about the various elements of design and technology. I scanned in their handwriting as I felt that this would demonstrate the children's ownership of the subject in our school. It would also be more interesting for the parents to read and highlight the importance we give to the children's views at the school.

I felt it was important to make the booklet pertinent to our school, so I included our school logo on the front of the leaflet.

Towards the end of the booklet, I provided a list of ways to encourage learning in design and technology at home, many of which they probably already do. I intended to promote the sort of activities which could seriously enrich their children's work in design and technology at school. I hoped it would also banish any myths or misconceptions the parents may have about the subject and in inviting them to help to even awaken a genuine enthusiasm for the subject. I believe that partnership between home and school, working together can only be mutually beneficial. As noted by DATA (1998):

'Many parents will be unaware of the role of design and technology within our lives.'

Lisa Hope

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In the Foundation Stage your children's work in Design and Technology is very practical and a lot of discussion takes place.

In Key Stage One the children's Design and Technology work is collected in working booklets, specially designed for each of the units of work. We feel this helps to give Design and Technology the status it deserves.



Our working booklets.

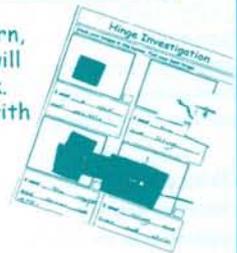
Researching

Children take on the role of a 'real' designer by starting each design and technology project by researching. The children are encouraged to draw on their previous experience and consider similar products that already exist. We use books and first hand, practical experiences where possible to explore and investigate. This helps them to generate their own ideas.



Focused Practical Tasks

Next children are encouraged to learn, practice or enhance the skills they will need to undertake their design task. These may involve ways of working with different materials, how to use particular tools or techniques.



"... it makes us learn about what is design and technology and what you make and what material you need to make things with."

This can be redressed by providing information. In communicating with parents, recognition should be made of the role that they have already played and their continuing involvement is crucial to successful learning.'

At the end of the booklet I included the children's drawings of themselves and their views about design and technology. I put these on the back page as I felt this would create a 'feel good' factor which would leave the parents with the ideas of the most important people, the children.

With hindsight I can see some elements of the leaflet that I would do differently. I would have taken digital photographs, rather than scanning real photographs as they reproduce with more definition when photocopied. I intend this leaflet to evolve over time. It could be distributed annually with some modifications regarding the latest developments in design and technology and the inclusion of up-to-date photographs and quotes from children. The feedback from parents about the booklet was positive and many expressed interest in finding out more about the subject. Certainly the involvement of the children was welcomed and valued by the readers.

Bibliography

- Benson, C. (1997) *Curriculum Bank Design and Technology KS 1*, Leamington Spa: Scholastic
- Cross, A. (1994) *Design and Technology 5-11*, London: Hodder and Stoughton
- DATA (1998) *Design and Technology Handbook for Pre-School Providers*, Wellesbourne: DATA