

Design and Chelmer Valley High School

There is no single department in the school concerned solely with Design. Although nowadays we have honours degree courses devoted wholly to Industrial Design, at school level Design is treated more generally: to use a current image, it stretches across the curriculum, like language; and in so doing concerns a number of subjects. It is within the Faculties of Expressive Arts, Creative Studies and Scientific Studies that one encounters those departments concerned with Design in one or more of its aspects which, for the purpose of classification, might be described as: the aesthetic, the functional, and the ergonomic.

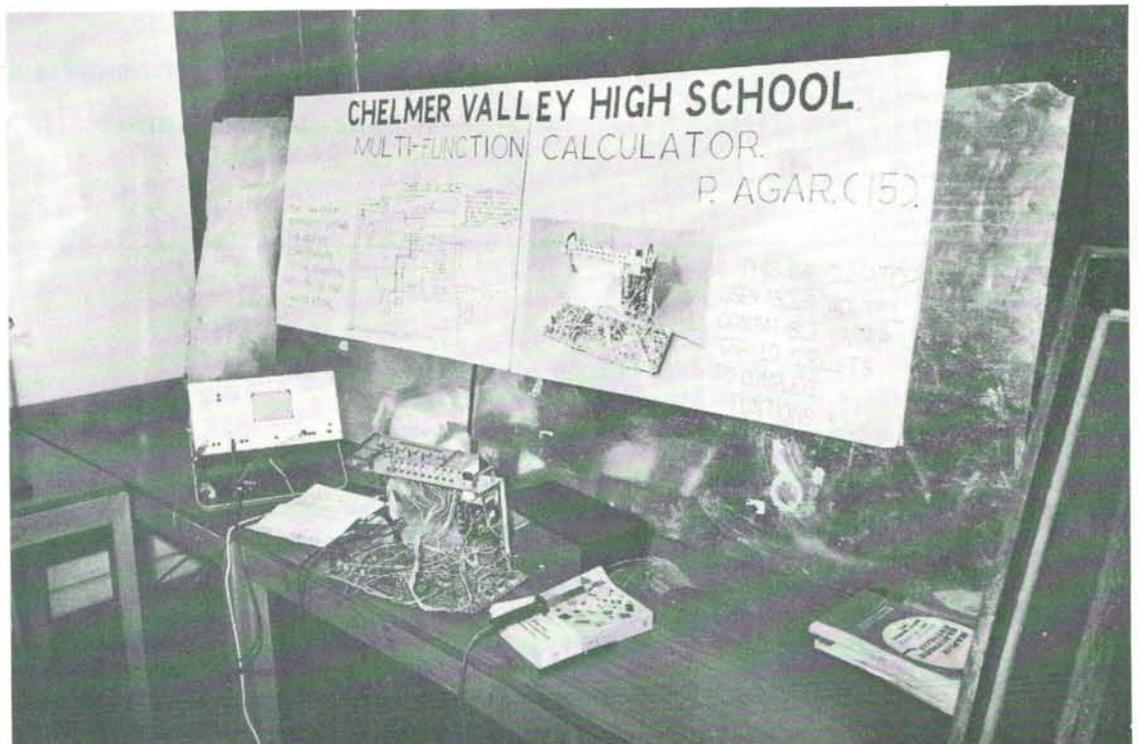
Traditionally, arts, crafts and science departments (in schools) have always taught their Design with those aspects in mind: little has changed although there may have been a renaming of departments; for example the Craft Department might become the Faculty of Creative Design. People do not change, however, and the good, simple, human processes involved in designing have endured redesignation and withstood redefinition.

The need to clarify the contribution of a department within a Faculty of Design arises, of course, when studies are arranged in the fashionable inter-disciplinary manner. I am thinking of the recently developed 'O' and 'A' level engineering science courses which call for teaching from both science and craft sides. Design is, perhaps, egg-shaped and can clearly mean what you want it to mean: in my experience this is certainly true of the concepts which guide and the standards which are achieved in Design – like much in education, they vary.

The Design Council GEC School Design Prize is right not to specify what is meant by Design (except to exclude the 'purely decorative'). Any piece of design must, I believe, be a result of its maker's wishes and feelings as well as a striving for 'fitness of purpose': it should not be a piece of functional tailoring to fit some rigid, prescriptive concept. The moment you define, you also exclude; and what you exclude may contain something new; and novelty is an essential of design. As with Karl Popper's concept of truth, it is impossible to conceive of or achieve the ultimate since you would need to be able to recognise its characteristics in order to identify it, and it is only because you cannot do this that you need to search at all. Therefore, and in the same way, Design must have unlimited and unlimitable meanings.

Another argument against formally defining the design concept is that not only will you exclude creative notions, you might also exclude creative talents. The Schools Council and others, under the

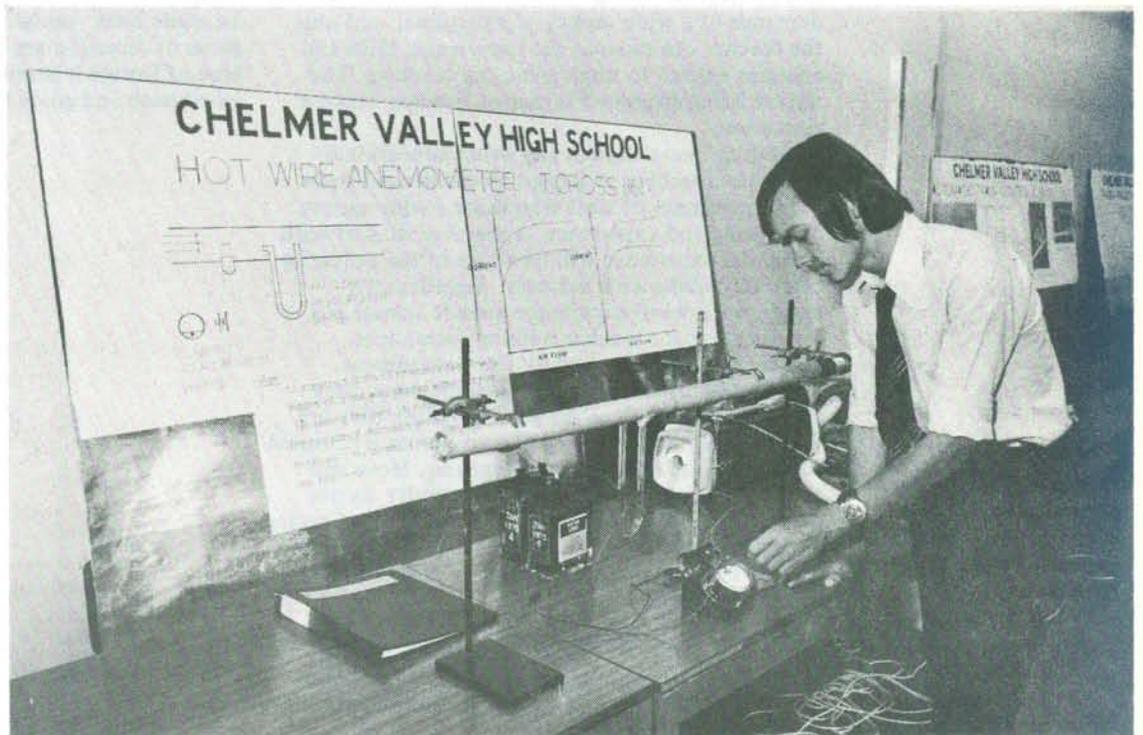
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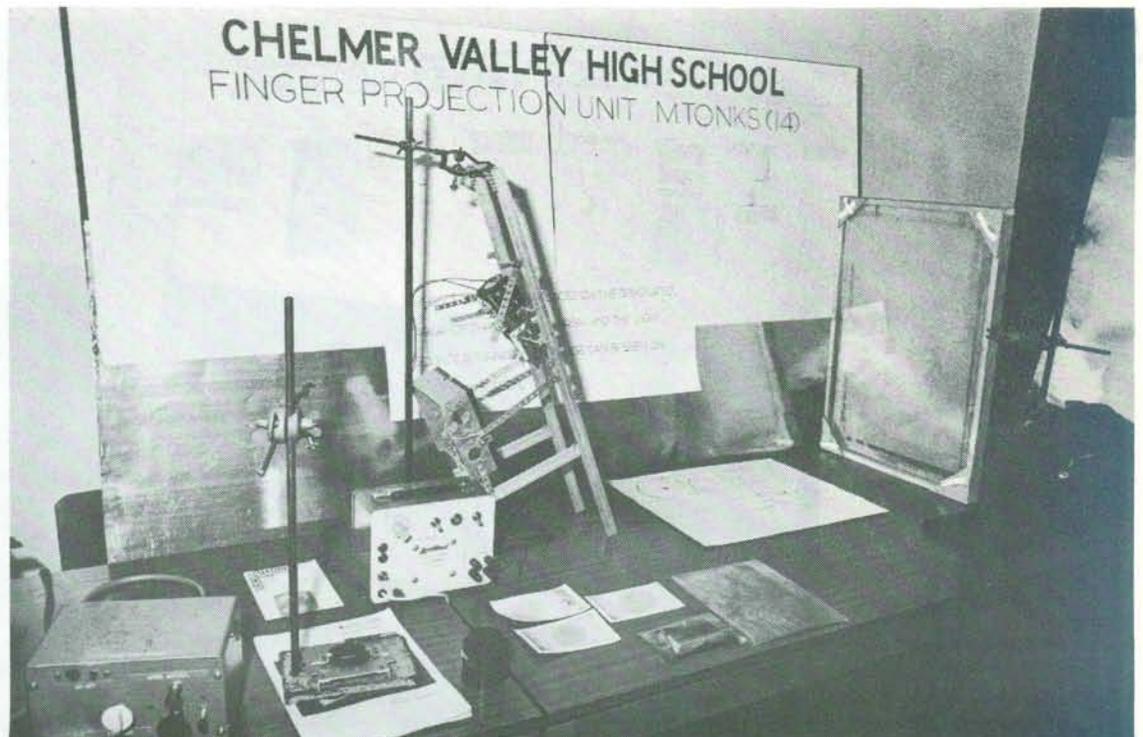
associated name of Nuffield, have promoted highly developed schemes of teaching which preach and prescribe, lay down ideals and warn severely against bad old ways. This is all very well; however, the

individuality of the teacher is lost as a result of the so-called 'child centred' ideas on which much of Nuffield philosophy is based. Some say that money would be better spent on improved and wider

Automatic train control.



Finger projection unit.



education for teachers than on the current industry of inventing yet more pedagogical doctrines. Good teaching is a result of good teachers before it is a result of any system. Only the individual teacher can be flexible enough to accommodate the varying demands of a wide variety of situations; and only the teacher can provide the experience, skills and energies needed to implement any teaching. The notion being suggested is that of 'teacher centred' education.

Perhaps more than in any other educational topic, the teaching of Design would benefit from the involvement of staff who share a wide variety of training and experience. A member of staff with industrial experience will be aware of the potential offered by links with industry. Significantly, compulsory work experience outside school as a qualification for teacher training entrance is currently being discussed by the Government. In this school, we have links with industry; they are informal as well as formal; and often they are very fruitful. Parents, too, as consultants are pleased to share in the experience of teaching. More and more, teaching is becoming a community service occupation and, in order to attain society's changing expectations of him, the teacher may need to reach further into the world outside if he wishes to be understood and accepted.

The Design Council GEC Schools Design Prize recognises that this is so: 'The Prize will be given for design of objects intended for manufacture by industry'. You might design better mousetraps but

before manufacturers beat a path to your door your design must relate to a need of society.

There may be much about Design that it is difficult or unwise to define; but concerning the designer and the teaching of Design, one point must be made clear: social involvement and a personal sense of direction are both essential. And if this is true of Design it should also be true of our attempts to educate and guide the young.

*Hot wire
anemometer.*

