Self Review: A local education authority's development programme for design education within the secondary curriculum

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As a previous Head of a Design Faculty, the practical problems of transforming traditional subjects into more relevant experiences for both pupils and teacher had offered a considerable challenge. The faculty was innovative, adopting a corporate professional style to the development of integrated learning programmes and team teaching, within a flexible organisational structure. As a consequence the faculty was often used as a satellite for in-service training, not only with the local education authority, but from many parts of the country. In September 1985 I was invited by the LEA's adviser for Design Education to take up a secondment leading to a M.Phil. award. The research was to be action-based meeting the requirement of the LEA that I should act both as a provider and facilitator for in-service training.

In this role the difficulties of helping others on a much wider scale to solve their educational problems presented an immense task with immediate obstacles:

1. Who was to fund the inset?

2. From my experience as Head of Faculty I believed that in bringing about change, value differences should be faced, that prescription is often open to misinterpretation. Rather it is the teachers themselves in the context of their own situation who need to systematically experience development for themselves as a continuous process. There appeared to be some dichotomy in terms of the LEA's expectations and my own research stance.

At the time of beginning the research the LEA wished to enhance its existing inset provision and funding was sought and became available through the Technically-Related Inset Grant (TRIST). I took the opportunity to quickly put together a submission outlining possible priorities and methods of delivery with 'best guess' costing. Fortunately I was given positive support, funding was approved by the Chief Adviser and newly appointed TRIST coordinator. This overcame the first problem. The second obstacle resolved itself during the actual research. I had for some time questioned the value of externally led inset; that whilst it may be of interest to the participants, follow-up action was usually fairly limited. The intention,

therefore, was to demonstrate an alternative approach which was to be developmental, participative and self-generating. It was in this context and in the spirit of action research that both were to be fused and reconciled.

The approach was to be based upon shared ownership within a structured partnership between the LEA, schools and schools operating in consortia matching development priorities and offering mutual support. A further intention was to demonstrate that such an approach was to be based upon the premise that internal review, professional development, inset, curriculum and organisational change interact, so proceeding hand in hand. Opportunities were provided with the inset programme for departments/faculties to work both independently and collectively in identifying their developmental needs. During the secondment I acted as a participant observer and facilitator. The actual study, submitted for a MPhil, was based upon the observations of the process involved with further consideration given to those variables which were to affect the delivery, evaluation and management of inset. There were several which interacted affecting both process and outcomes, examples included:

a) an analysis, in context, of present practices and to consider whether expectations for change can be justified in the light of the situation;
b) an area which appears to be seen outside the boundary of instruction and can be best described as those considerations concerned with the notion of accountability;
c) implications for management: curriculum/organisational change does not happen in a vacuum but within the organisation where management and leadership style will affect not only the product but also the process;
d) not least in importance, the actual people involved in the process and their interaction within it and perceptions of it.

Research into such elements provided 'academic rigour' and background, however, to view them as independent would be over simplistic and one must be aware of their inter-relationship.

The Schools' Council Guidelines for Review of Internal Development in Schools (GRIDS) was taken as a model for encouraging teachers involved in Design education to adopt a problematic approach to the needs/inset identification process. Part of the study to continuously produce materials to assist in this process. A number of key personnel were invited to act as consultants for a particular cluster of schools who were given the task of convening regular meetings, identifying commonality and priorities together with mounting mutually supporting inset. When needs could not be met external courses would be offered, usually across all schools, thereby fusing all activities as an integrated whole.

Internal review implies action taken. The results of my participant observation suggests that the results are more likely to be effective if all those whose practice is implicated are actively involved in the systematic identification of needs, determining the form of inset delivery and following evaluation. Whilst one of the main aims of the study was to demonstrate process rather than solely the resulting developments the following examples indicate direction:

a) greater emphasis on team teaching approaches, multi-disciplinary and cross curricula links, particuarly years 1-3, the emphasis on shared contexts.
b) modified block timetabling with both comprehensive and modular features.
c) interactive application of technology rather than discrete packages.
d) emphasis on experiential learning/teaching approaches and the development of issue based projects.

The research study does not necessarily confirm theory, at best it indicates a general conceptual proposal and further time would be needed to confirm any positive indication. The resulting documentation, therefore, consisted of some detailed study coupled with an explanation of process with developments. In general it is hoped that this would benefit the outcomes, as a greater element of objectivity may be introduced into the participant role through a reflective approach — to rationalise and plan inset

provision, to fulfil needs identified.

During the study many of the variables which affect change were analysed: the review and development process, accountability, inset, the managerial implications and the complex inter-relationships between attitudes and involvement. However, since the study, events have now overtaken us both in terms of direction and partnership in decision making. Baker's national curriculum proposals take any form of ownership away from the professionals. Evidence of this is the way in which the 'review' consortia teams have been replaced by 'subject' panels: C.D.T., Home Economics, Art and Design, Technology, each following the same restrictive approach, dialogue, and similar ground covered yet again, values, differences yet to be faced, the LEA 'riding the tiger'. If procedure intended to improve the quality of education are used to select schools and teachers to be penalised, then all the developmental potential and quality of professional review and the research programme will be lost.

We need to accept that accountability can be interpreted in a moral and professional as well as contractual sense. It is then possible to assume a concept of professional development which has the best chance of promoting positive change to meet the needs of any ever-changing technology.

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Conclusion

The development of Timaeus[6] has taken over two years but is now published and in use in schools and colleges. It will be hard to judge its success until it has been fully tested with groups of students over a full academic year. However it is anticipated that it will enhance students three dimensional abilities, not only by presenting a sympathetic environment, but by encouraging a systematic approach to the building and structuring of form.

Notes

1. Archer, B. Design as a Discipline, Design Studies Vol.1, No.1, July 1979.
2. Critchlow, K. Order in Space, Thames and Hudson 1969.
3. Lanteri, E. Modelling and Sculpture Vols. i, ii, iii, Dover 1965 (Chapman and Hall 1902, 1904, 1911).
4. Carseri 1750, The Imaginary Views — ed Miranda Harvey, Harmony Book NY 1979.
5. Newman, W.M. Sproull, R.F. Principals of Interactive Computer Graphics, McGraw Hill 1979.
6. Timaeus, a three dimensional modeller for the RM Nimbus is available from: Platonic Software, 21 Cromwell Road, Chesterfield S40 4TH