'Multi-cultural/Anti-Racist CDT'. A Response

Uma Pandya
Brentfield Primary School, Brent

As a primary advisory teacher for Equality in Design and Technology, I read Antonouris's article 'Multicultural/Anti-racist CDT' with great interest. This is partly because it had been the first article that I had come across that brought in the 'race/cultural' perspectives, in Secondary CDT, (for gender perspectives, see Grant 1984), Antonouris, in his article, seeks to justify multicultural education as good education in CDT, because it would go some way towards increasing cultural understanding and eradicating racism. In order to achieve this, Antonouris proposes that CDT teachers take a global perspective in this curriculum area, as well as taking into account the different local 'ethnic' groups who can be a source for ideas, materials and resources in crafts, designs and technologies. Hence creating a 'value' based approach, would offer scope for multicultural practice, therefore, providing 'Education for All'.

Antonouris seems to have good intentions with broadening CDT issues at a level not attempted before. Working through the two design briefs, 'Jewellery', ('you are to design and make a piece of jewellery, the shape, material and colour of which is to be based on a design from a culture of your choice') and 'Racial Similarities', ('design and make a system or device which will show that racial differences, as opposed to cultural ones, are only skin-deep'), Antonouris planned that discussions and understanding would ensue on intercultural knowledge, similarities as well as differences, stereotyping and combatting racial discrimination. However, I could not but feel that these two particular design-briefs not only fail to go far enough in addressing issues but there is a danger of tokenism and exoticism and more importantly, missing the whole point!

Yes it is important for a whole variety of reasons that we as teachers approach topics at the level of values or issues (Grant 1982), but this has to be right across the board, i.e. cross-curricular. So if one attempts a topic on jewellery with the aim of combatting racial prejudice and discrimination, how do we do this without stereotyping and actually confronting racism? As the children in the past and the present have been subjected largely to a Eurocentric education where cultural values, beliefs of the Europeans deemed superior (hence justification for colonisation in the 19th Century), the colonised people were seen as 'primitive' and 'backward'. Many of the first generation Black people in this country are from the ex-colonies who brought their values, language, religion, music, dance etc with them. That racism is rife in this country (in the form of verbal and physical abuse, arson and murders) may go to show the impact of Eurocentric education.

Racism is not a recent phenomena of the last 20/30 years, but goes well back into the 18th and 19th Centuries where the colonised countries were looted of their cultural heritage, i.e. art, painting, jewellery etc. These works now still remain in the mother countries such as Britain (works from Africa, India), Spain (works from South and Central American countries), France (works from Algeria and other Francophone countries). So if we are looking at Jewellery from Non-European cultures, not only do we have to go back to the past and explain the presence of these 'primitive' artefacts in for e.g. places such as the basement that houses works of art, The British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, or even the funding for places such as the Tate Gallery constructed from profits made through the Slave Trade by the company Tate and Lyle or Jewels kept in the Tower of London, but also explain the impact/influence of Non-European jewellery or European jewellery in present times. One only has to visit Convent Garden stalls and other 'ethnic' stalls and shops where designs from Non-European cultures have been adapted for western consumption — and in the process making them 'trendy' and acceptable! A definite example of this was the adoption of 'Chuni' or nose-stud/ring which became very fasionable in the early eighties among the young Europeans, as did the wearing of ankle chains! My point here is that what was deemed 'primitive' art, design, paintings in the last century is now acceptable and sought after — only on your (European) terms!

Antonouris's second topic on 'racial similarities' is a sensitive topic emphasizing on similarities but fails to address differences. By this I mean that people of different groups are more likely to have different life experiences which are to be valued and not merely glossed over! (Certainly the different groups of people, be they women, homosexuals, blacks, have stories to tell of their experiences.) A major difference in terms of experience, is that of racism, faced almost daily by many black British citizens. The 'physical', 'biological' and 'cultural' differences between the black and white people have been used to promulgate racism. Though I understand Antonouris's eagerness to express similarities perhaps because of the way the 'differences' have been used to oppress black people, one has to turn around these differences and the experiences that they create to acknowledge and value them! By failing to do so, the implication is that everyone is the same 'underneath', which completely misses the aim that he sets out to achieve, i.e. combatting prejudice and stereotyping. Is there also not an element of exoticism with the decoration of the technological device with rangoli patterns and Asante and Hausa decorative motives — appearing to be totally out of context!

Though I applaud Antonouris's aims, one constantly has to be vigilant on the dangers of only partially addressing the issues!

References

G. Antonouris (1988). *Multicultural/Anti-Racist CDT.* Studies in Design Education, Craft & Technology, Vol. 20, No. 2, Spring.

M. Grant (1982). *Starting Points.* Studies in Design Education Craft & Technology, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp.6-9, Winter.

M. Grant (1989). *Presenting Design & Technology to Girls.* GATE.