

National Curriculum Technology is, by its very 'holistic' nature, a complex teaching and learning process. Presenting six subject areas in a cross-curricular manner demands an extraordinary level of support from staff and pupils. I am happy to say that as far as George Dixon School is concerned, this level of support is evident and continually encouraging.

The school is situated in Edgbaston, an inner ring area of Birmingham with a large variety and level of facilities, many types of housing, retail and manufacturing industry and a multicultural community. The school is situated in a pleasant suburb on a green site split into a Lower and Upper School. A large field splits the sites and provides an excellent sports and recreation facility. The school is a community school and upholds an open access facility for the local and industrial community.

#### ■ From the orders to the classroom

Work is at present undertaken in the following subject areas co-ordinated within Technology;

Art and Design (including 2 additional attainment targets)  
Craft, Design and Technology

Business Education  
Home Economics (Food Technology/Textiles)  
Information Technology (Y7 — discrete, Y8 & 9 cross-curricular within Technology)

This synthesis of disciplines should provide a (1) holistic experience for the pupils, whatever their special needs. (2) Should provide equal opportunity and address the cultural diversity of the school.

#### ■ The beginning

I was appointed in July 1990 to develop and lead a team of staff who would deliver National Curriculum Technology and to head the CDT department. After a series of meetings prior to starting the post, a structure for year 7 was implemented, with the view that much of what the team had decided would develop and change. In short the facility of a 'block' on the timetable meant that we had considerable flexibility.

140 pupils : 7 staff : 6 periods per week

We started with an introductory or foundation course allowing all pupils to sample the practical experiences of the participating areas,

## Technology at George Dixon Secondary School, Birmingham

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gaining an insight through one week of experience in each. This process took half a term. Pupils gained an insight and experience on which to base their choice of activity in subsequent half-terms when they completed a number of tasks in various contexts. Our reasoning was two-fold;

Firstly to allow 'new' staff and 'new' pupils to identify personal and team areas of expertise. This would guide the pupils when identifying their personal experience needs during context planning. Secondly to supplement the practical experiences gained during the Primary phase and introduce them to the areas of experience in the secondary phase. (During this early stage of implementation it became clear that the childrens' primary experiences had varied considerably).

We have found that compromise is the order of the day and the course structure mixes three types of experience over the Key Stage;

1. In-depth study of each material area through thematic work, allowing pupil choice within that area.
2. Skills packages delivered in a structured way and also as an extension of a recent theme.
3. Progressively more pupil choice of context and material area as they develop through to Year 9.

This is the present method we use to deliver a massive syllabus while developing the best way of doing it ...(sound familiar?) This suits our school and the constraints, geography of rooms and facilities (disparate — over two sites!), balance of subject area staffing and sanity.

Groups currently meet each area of Technology (through group rotation) at least once during the Key Stage and this is for a particular theme based project covered in that material area. Pupils complete tasks in that area, though limited movement to other materials areas is encouraged. These long projects often contain several tasks and displays are organised at their completion.

Our skills courses are an opportunity, through a variety of delivery methods, to enhance the pupils' level of experience in all subject areas. It is our way of addressing the problem of providing sufficient experience to tackle the design-based contextual work and a means of learning 'how to do Technology'!

Having the spectre of assessment in mind from the beginning has meant that much of the developmental groundwork has been tackled through the structure of the groups. Each group has a 'leader', a member of staff whose ultimate responsibility is to look after the interests of those pupils, checking work and achievement as often as possible. Each pupil has a number of record sheets to keep up to dated. These establish a record of what has been done and the areas covered. One record is a personal diary, which is filled in by the pupil as each part of their task is completed. We find these valuable as a starting point for evaluation, as a discussion point when recording and assessing and as an established discipline which relies on the pupils being responsible for their work. The pupils also maintain a 'self-assessment' sheet, a graphic record of elements attempted during a task. Further sheets map the pupil's progress through the programme of study.

Establishing a pupil's level of attainment has been difficult, but by using our knowledge and experience (including that of GCSE assessment) has meant that we think we may be on the right track ... possibly!

We are also introducing more of the language of National Curriculum to pupils through our new assessment sheets and to the parents at parents' evenings. I plan to produce an information sheet for parents explaining how we reach an opinion on a child's level of ability and what the level means in practice. (!)

As usual in technology, there is always something else to consider and much of the current development work is based on evaluation and consolidation of the courses structure and schemes of work. I am also trying to record information on classroom methodology in order to capitalise on our verbal support in the team.

Many pupils have English as their second language and this is often construed as a 'problem' in a multicultural school. In technology I find that much of the practical activity can support the development of language through sympathetic discussion of how things work or how to use description to resolve a practical task. The conceptualisation of National Curriculum Technology structure is difficult enough for adults, but combined with the level (and often ambiguous nature) of English language required, these pupils undoubtedly have problems! George Dixon School has a number of support units to help pupils with (particularly) language problems and the organisation of technology reflects the needs of it's pupils and the policies of the school:

Special needs staff work in conjunction with Technology staff to provide support for pupils with special educational needs. Curriculum and language support is offered through pupil extraction, staff support through team teaching and phased integration of pupils into mainstream.

The Ethnic Minority Support Service has the MRU (Multicultural Resource Unit) based on the site supporting collaborative teaching and resource development using a variety of media including a local database.

The Afro-Caribbean Development Unit has a member of its teaching staff on site full-time supporting many areas of the curriculum.

Technology coursework is structured in a non-sexist way and actively promotes equal opportunity for boys and girls. Teaching groups of pupils are organised to include, where possible, an equal number of boys and girls. There are no special rules for either sex: all activities in all areas are available to all pupils. Within teaching groups, smaller units for group work are encouraged and staff organising them are actively encouraged to provide a cultural and gender mix where possible. During 'context' planning sessions, staff develop their activities for both a multicultural and anti-racist approach in the classroom. This is particularly evident when the pupils are planning for AT1/AT2 and the research these areas involves.

We consider the multicultural elements of home, school, recreation, business and industry.

As you can see, the school ethos helps us to approach the holistic nature of National Curriculum Technology and probably aids our planning and classroom methodology. When one stands back and views the 'problems' of a multicultural school, one also sees the benefits over those schools which lack this level of cultural stimulation and diversity. On balance I think the benefits to technology have outweighed the disadvantages. Looking back over the last eighteen months staff have often expressed the view that much needs to be done to reach the 'ideal' technology structure and method of delivery and yet many people visiting and hearing about the work so far in technology feel that it is 'successful'. Yes, it runs and much good work is being done, but we all know that much further work will improve the situation for our school, making the courses run smoother, supporting our pupils and making our lives a little easier. As we often say at GD, '...we are getting there!'