

Design Education at Secondary Level

Design Education at Secondary Level is a consultative document from a committee set up by the Design Council and chaired by Professor David Keith-Lucas. It represents a further important step in the commitment of the Design Council to design education in schools.

The Council, although until recently protesting that its remit is to deal with industry, has for many years been interested in developments in schools. In 1966 the then editor of 'Design', John Blake, commissioned Ken and Kate Baynes to write two articles about what they saw in schools. These articles, which appeared in January and March 1967 were one of the very first times when design education in schools was mentioned in the public press. The whole exercise led on to many things and had some influence on the proposal for an A-level Design examination on the formation of ADE which later became NADE, the Schools Council Project on Design and Craft Education at Keele and, of course *Studies in Design Education Craft and Technology* itself.

More recently the Moulton Report and then the Carter Report, although not primarily concerned with design education in schools, recognised that in considering the education of designers they could not ignore the experience in schools that influenced future designers – and their clients. The Carter Report went so far as to point out the value of design experience for all children.

The present consultative document takes on from that point and looks specifically at design in general education. Although the composition of the committee still represents, in the main, industry and the universities there were also members who could inform it on the realities of school life.

The document naturally reveals its origins. The Design Council is chiefly concerned with product design and although mention is made of the breadth of educational experience relevant to design education as a whole much of the report appears to be written under the assumption that it is only concerned with designing and making artifacts. We see no harm in interested parties emphasising their own particular view: documents that try to satisfy all and offend none become, like supermarket food, too bland to be interesting. It would be good to see in the final document recognition that a particular interest in and understanding of design education is intentional. If it does and the reader can accept a measure of partiality then the report will be a valuable step in the right direction.

What is said in this draft may not be very remarkable to those of us who have been involved in design education for many years but this should not blind us to its importance. It is one thing for enthusiasts to make claims for the value of what they are doing: it is quite another thing when influential people on a committee sponsored by the Design Council point out the importance of their contribution to education.

It is worth quoting in full the Chairman's Foreword.

'This report deals with design education in secondary schools, but it has a message for a much wider public.

'If education is concerned with trying to fit children to take a full part in the adult life of tomorrow, there can be few more important educational experiences for the children than to grapple with the sort of problems they will meet as adults – problems of the environment, of man-made things and how they can be improved, of the quality of living, or, in other words, 'design' in all its forms.

'Education in design can also be justified on the grounds that good design is crucial to the national economy.

'In this country the tradition in education has been to accord much higher priority to the pure sciences and mathematics than to the applied or practical arts. This is neither the way to attract the most intelligent pupils into design nor does it provide the average pupil with the sort of skills which they will need to practise as adults.

'It is not a situation that can be put right inside the schools alone. Society as a whole must decide what it wants from education and fix its priorities accordingly'.

We particularly welcome the last paragraph. The document does not tell the schools what they ought to do (what a refreshing change!) but alerts the whole of society to the need to consider how schools can best help children to cope with life as it is. This has always been our aim in developing design education in schools. We must not forget that during the years of struggle we have had valuable support from many enlightened employers, educators and government bodies. Now there is an attempt to formulate an official statement supporting what we have striven for and helping us to achieve further recognition of the subject at all levels – for university entrance requirements, for career education and for the general education of all children at all levels of aspiration.

Accordingly we receive the report with respect and gratitude. The Design Council has circulated the document very widely and is asking for comment before the final draft is prepared. Experience regarding the Moulton and Carter reports shows that comments are considered very seriously and, if necessary, changes made in the final draft. All who are concerned with design education in schools should take this opportunity to make whatever comment seems appropriate so that the final report will be both realistic and powerful.

Reader's Letter

It is impossible to regard the issue of this document without looking at the state of play. Not all schools have managed to establish good design courses and there is still considerable confusion as to what constitutes a good design course. We can now feel that there is influential support for good work that is being done and this should help all schools along the right path. There are, at least, signs that the good work is slowly gaining validity with the 'consumers' of secondary education.

It is in this last area that much remains to be done. Do all the captains of industry who speak convincingly of the importance of this experience ask for this to be part of the background of all their recruits? Do universities, some of which admit the value of design activities as a means of revealing qualities, give priority to candidates who, as well as having the knowledge to sustain their chosen course, have in fact had this valuable experience? Until this happens – as a matter of course – teachers will continue to have difficulty in persuading Heads and parents that their children should have an experience that is now admitted to be important.

We now look to the Design Council for continued support in making their vision of what education for to-day should be a reality. The task is not easy at a time of economic crisis. Design Education is costly, requiring reasonably generous staffing resources and equipment. Yet unless we can provide it fully we are hazarding the future – not only in the production of our next generation of designers but also the essential general education of all our future adults.

Design Team – Graphic Designer/Photographer

I am in the process of researching and compiling material and information for 'The Need for a Design Team' to service the requirements of teachers and lecturers in the production of resources, transparencies, handouts, charts, photographs, slides, etc.

At the moment the research appears to be one sided, that is the Educators point of view, and therefore I would welcome and appreciate any points of view from the 'world of the graphic designer/photographer' with regard to the following:–

1. Job description of the Graphic Designer/Photographer.
2. The expected salaries of qualified designers.
3. Facilities which should be made available to fulfil the above production skills.
4. The titles of any published papers or books describing the services which can be offered by a designer.
5. How do they see the role of a Graphic Designer/Photographer in the fast changing state of technology?
6. The possible loan of 'finished artwork' which has completely changed the 'house style' for any of their clients (loaned under the strictest confidence).
7. Criticism of the Educators' lack of presentation.
8. Suggestions on how 'Education' can sell itself through a corporate identity. School or College based.
9. Any other points of view or criticism.

Thanking your readers in anticipation of their replies.

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