

Open University Invitation for Design Educators

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Design and Craft Educators at the Open University

After dipping into the mysteries of the Open University computer recently, I was surprised to discover that there are some 500 craft and design teachers currently registered for courses which will lead to the award of a degree. Most of these teachers are working in the Faculty of Educational Studies or in the Faculty of Technology. It is hardly surprising then that a new course entitled 'Technology for Teachers' emerged from a realization on the part of the Deans of these two faculties that the Open University system might be a useful tool in helping those teachers who wish to make their curriculum more 'technological' in content. The story goes that this inspired thought came during a discussion over a pint of beer, but the reality of the situation is that the Deans were sensitive to the national concern for the development of technological literacy amongst youngsters.

The new course 'Technology for Teachers', is an attempt on the part of the University to meet a particular in-service training need. With a few notable exceptions, the initial training of teachers has lacked concern for technological understanding and involvement and consequently there is a marked shortage of teachers who might take on a 'technological literacy' role in our schools.

Many of the more enlightened local education authorities and headmasters, with a concern for greater relevancy in the school curriculum, are casting about for teachers who are capable of extending their subject base to make the content more technological in nature. Indeed, in some schools 'technology' appears as a very significant curriculum area.

In craft education, where we have a crisis of identity, some teachers are being asked to undertake technological activities for which

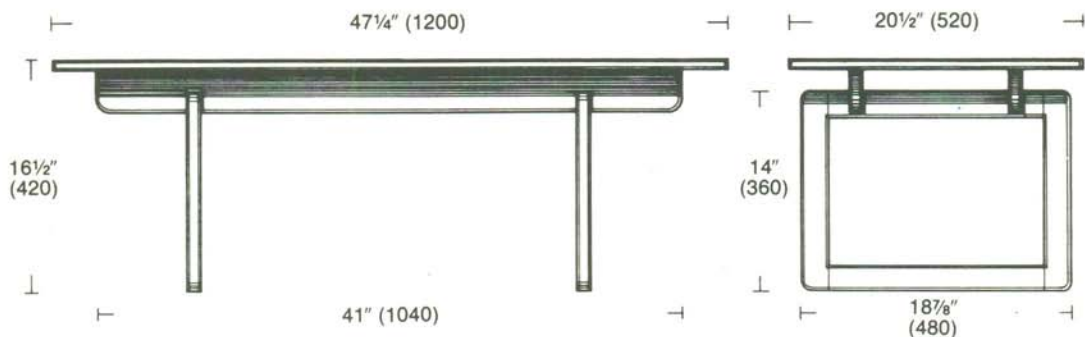
they do not feel properly equipped. The very word 'technology' is frightening, and for many teachers it represents a threat to some of the traditional values of craft education. Personally, I have never seen the reality of this threat, although I appreciate that a threat might be construed. So much of what has passed for technology in the schools implies either a sacrifice of the old ideals of craftsmanship or a level of sophistication which is beyond the reach of most teachers and indeed of most pupils.

With the danger of over-sophistication in mind, the Open University course is pitched at level of teachers working with average pupils. We felt that there was a great deal of existing material which helped those concerned with the higher ability pupil or that minority wishing to move towards technology as a possible career. So the Open University course is *not* for the experienced 'A' level engineering science teacher, it is *not* for the prestige project builders who delight in hardware generated by able pupils over many years of painstaking effort. Rather, it is concerned with teachers who, though subject based in craft, science or the humanities, may be looking for ways of injecting technological studies and technological activities into their existing work with average pupils.

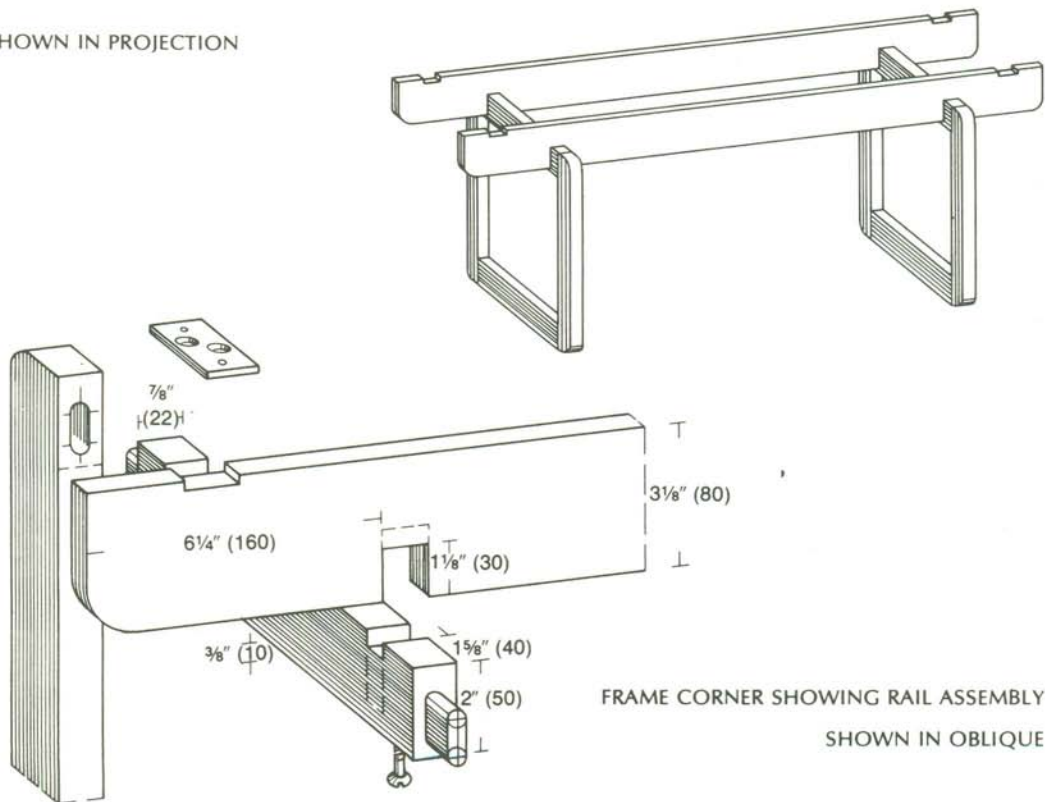
The course looks first at the fundamental concepts with which all technology is associated. Since a consideration of design is absolutely central to technology, we take the bold step of introducing design early in the course in order to provide a central thread for subsequent units. Another persistent set of threads are the Social Effects of technology in our society which are drawn together toward the end of the course. In the middle units of the course we examine selected areas of technological content. But above all we have tried to offer practical help to teachers who are wishing not only to know *about* technology, which can be quickly acquired through books and

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technical college courses, but who are concerned with the practical problems of implementing activities in the classroom. We take a look at Project Method as one strategy for teaching technology and contrast it with more structured forms of learning. We try to look at the possibilities of working in an inter-disciplinary fashion, and we look at the problems of working in isolation when no inter-disciplinary activity is possible. We take a close and critical look at the problem of syllabus building, and assessing technological activities. In short, a substantial portion of the course is concerned with curriculum problems rather than just teaching some technical content.

We are more than conscious of the fact that to teach technology at a distance is difficult, to teach teachers at a distance is pretentious, and to try to combine both these things is bordering on the impossible. On the other hand the Open University teaching tools of television, radio, day school and home experimental kit has shown that the difficult moves into the realm of the possible. We are hoping to reach the teachers who so far have been unreachable; the teachers in remote areas, the teachers who have not yet tried to inject technological activities into their work because they are inhibited by the difficulties, the teachers who have been working without the realization that technological activities in school are in the realm of the feasible rather than the impossible. We would not pretend that this is a substitute for a well organized in-service course of a residential nature. But if you cannot get to such courses, assuming that they exist, if you cannot afford to be out of the school and away from home for long periods it may be that you can afford to put in the ten hours per fortnight study which this course entails. Teachers who take this course will not at the moment be able to use it toward a degree. It just isn't designed for that purpose. This is an in-service train-

ing course designed to meet a specific need. To-date a very large number of local education authorities have expressed interest in the work that is being prepared, and have even gone so far as to say that they will pay the fee of approximately £75 for teachers who are anxious to register. It might be worthwhile asking if your local education authority is one of these enthusiasts, and if not why not?! Registration for the course begins in May 1974, at which time application forms will be available from the Post-Experience Students Office, Open University, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire.