The RCA Study 'Design in General Education'

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The Department of Design Research at the Royal College of Art has been asked by the Department of Education and Science to carry out a study aimed at increasing public awareness of design by means of encouraging design activities in secondary schools. The results of the study are required by the end of 1975.

The basic hypothesis upon which the study is based is that design awareness represents an important area for educational development. This is the key argument. In a paper given to the DES Horncastle Conference in 1973, Professor L Bruce Archer, who is leading the study, presented a three stage analysis to show that, in fact, 'a massive broadening and deepening of design education in secondary schools today is overwhelmingly the most important urgent need for the survival as well as the happiness of mankind'.

The project team, which includes Richard Langdon, Ken Baynes and Cecil Burt, is aware of the fact that over the last few years a great deal of work on this theme has been done by schools, colleges, and local authorities. The situation exists where there is in existence a large reservoir of experience. It is the intention of those engaged in the study to make maximum use of this knowledge: it will be allowed to have a direct influence on the formulation of plans for the future. A set of discussion papers will shortly be distributed through local authorities, the National Association for Design Education and other local and national bodies. Samples now in draft illustrated in examples 1-4, Papers such as these will be the basis of the information gathering process and anyone interested in taking part is invited to get in touch with Ken Baynes at the Royal College of Art.

The team will also carry out field studies and will evaluate existing work in a variety of selected schools throughout the country. Two local authorities, London and Cheshire, are co-operating very closely and will, in effect, become real-life models within which proposals can be tested in terms of organisation, effectiveness and cost.

The team's findings will take the form of a report to the DES setting out alternative strategies for development over the next ten years. This will include an identification of the major outstanding problem areas, proposals for a programme of curriculum development and a 'job profile' for the design teacher of the future. It will also comment on problems of career structure, in service training and inter-subject rivalries.

In addition to the formal submission the team will produce materials for use in schools. These will probably consist of case studies of design developments in schools, check lists on innovation and organisation and models for courses and content. It is intended that, from this material, there will emerge a clear picture of what is meant by the term 'design awareness' and therefore a coherent programme for the future of design education in schools.

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Example 1:

Discussion Area 1

There is an area of human experience, knowledge and action, centred on man's ability to mould the physical environment through the use of tools, which is as important to his existence as such well-recognised areas of learning as numeracy and literacy.

Discussion points:

1. How far can the hypothesis above be supported by reference to history, the nature of human cultures, and events in the contemporary world ?

2. In his book *Art and Society,* Herbert Reed speaks of art as being a 'mode of knowledge' distinct from mathematics, science or literature. How does the hypothesis above similarly refer to a distinct and identifiable mode of knowledge, and how far does it overlap or contain such traditional categories as art, architecture, movement and dress, husbandry and craftmanship ?
3. What in the broadest terms, constitutes the 'area of human experience knowledge and action' referred to in the hypothesis ? Does articulacy in this area depend on the specific development of abilities and skills identifiable in the make up of human beings ? In short, is it possible to educate for a better performance and higher level of awareness in this sphere ?
4. Is it possible to make a clear statement about what characteristics might be displayed by 'an educated man or woman' in this field ?

Example 2:

Discussion Area 4

There seem to be two basic strategies open to those who wish to raise the level of design awareness and to make fuller use of the educational potential of design studies. The first is to introduce a subject called 'design' into the timetable, and to treat it as traditional subjects are treated with specialist teachers, courses and facilities. The second is to attempt to make sure that the design aspects of other activities are emphasised and made coherent throughout the school timetable.

Discussion points:

1. Which of the above strategies offers the greatest potential for educational advance? Which is the most likely to be easiest to put into effect? In each case, what steps could be taken to foster desirable changes?
2. Is it possible to envisage a national system which would encourage the development of both these strategies, with each school choosing its own approach ? Would this entail complicated differences in staffing, facilities, teacher-training and examinations ? Would any kind of national pattern or standard then be possible or desirable ? Is it possible to envisage both approaches working within a single school as complementary rather than divergent alternatives ?
3. Integrated departments involving art, handicraft and sometimes applied science and home economics are one example of a strategy for design education. What advantages are offered by this kind of integration? What are its problems? Do the advantages outweigh the problems and would this be a good model for further development?

Example 3:

Discussion Area 8

Schools have considerable experience in 'product' based design activities centred on the school workshop. Much less has been achieved in terms of architecture and planning. This is an area where home economics, with its focus on the family, its needs and its environment, has a central role to play. However, it appears to require a close link with the developing pattern of 'environmental studies'.

Discussion points:

1. How might architectural studies best be developed in schools ? How could home economics most effectively make a con-

tribution ? What are the best ways of linking the 'domestic' scale of home economics with the 'ecological' scale of environmental studies ?

2. What would be the best way of introducing this aspect of design into the training of home economics teachers ?

Example 4:

Discussion Area 11

There exist specific conditions and attitudes in schools which may help or hinder the achievement of design awareness. It is important to make an accurate identification of what these are and to assess their importance. On such a basis a practical plan for improvement could be devised.

The following factors are suggested as important:

The educational policy and character of the local authority.

The catchment area, the school and their inter-relationship.

The children at the school.

The parents of the children at school.

The educational policy and character of the school as a whole and the relationship between this and individual areas of study.

The organisation of the school.

The curriculum of the school, examinations and their inter-relationship.

The staffing structure of the school.

The financial resources of the school as a whole and their availability to individual areas of study.

The physical facilities of the school.

The experience and attitude of the staff of the school.

The staff/pupil ratio.

Other resources of the school as a whole (e.g. secretarial and library) and their availability to individual areas of study.

Awareness of local and national developments and resources.