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In March this year, the main statement by the Project Team was published in book form*. This is almost eighteen months after the official end of the Project's work. There are three other books and twelve tape/slide sets to be published in time for four regional conferences in the Autumn.

As a result of having done this work, a number of ideas remain with me which stand out in importance and I am grateful for the opportunity to share some of these with you through the good offices of *Studies in Design Education and Craft*.

The Value of Observation

Far from being convinced that we should set out our programme by stating clear and unbridled aims, it was more realistic for us to go out into schools with the immediate and simple objective of looking at children.

The observation of children in schools became the main focus of our approach; how they set about work and what they did; why they did certain things in particular ways; how they responded to different materials, to other children and teachers, and so on.

I am now convinced that observation, which is carefully focused and later discussed between two or more individuals, should be a central element in teacher education, as well as a continual resource of practising teachers, particularly those handling the creative aspects of children's learning.

It is not just a matter of stepping aside to look at children working but aiming to get as many viewpoints as possible of their activity,

*Childrens' Growth through Creative Experience. Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Using Natural Materials. Seonaid Robertson.
Using Constructional Materials. Michael Laxton,
Using Objects. Renee Marconse.

Discussions Materials. Art in Transfer. Imagining with Clay. Metropolis Personal Adornment. From Pleasure they Create. Resistant Materials. What have we learnt? Waste Materials. Whose Objectives? Fantasy. Messing about or achieving Control.

from conversations with their teachers; chance remarks and acts with other children to conversations about what they have done. It is important to observe over a period of time, so that any continuity, changes of direction, new impulses and fluctuations in their rhythm and approach to creative work can become evident.

It is from such observational work by the Project Team that many key ideas grew.

The Central Aim of the Project

The period of time in a child's life between eight and thirteen is as significant as it is often overlooked. The more assiduously researched and formative years before eight, and the more dynamic and volatile period of adolescence afterwards, tend to eclipse the quieter adjustments and patterns of development taking place between eight and thirteen. Yet, when one compares an eight year old with most thirteen year olds, it is abundantly clear that enormous changes have taken place.

It is the very quietness and apparent ease of transition which should alert us to the need to know more about children at this time in their lives. On transition to the secondary or middle school they are so malleable, so easily absorbed and so ready to respond, that it is only lately that many secondary schools have begun to adjust their programmes and give much greater consideration to the particular learning patterns of children of this age. Most middle schools have experimented with many kinds of curricula, after primary/secondary dichotomy became evident when they first came into being.

Because of the advent of middle schools in the mid '60s, much greater attention has been given to the ways in which children develop between 8 and 13, both in their play and their schooling. There are many significant changes which take place during this time, physically and socially as well as intellectually and emotionally. The Project

aimed to relate these changes to the particular field of Art and Craft education.

It was not our concern to examine Art and Craft as an area of learning, nor to look at the training and practice of teachers, nor to consider the place of Art and Craft in the developing middle school curriculum, although each of these important areas impinged on our work.

Thus, much of what is written in the book is built around this prime aim, to study the growth and development through creative experience of children between eight and thirteen.

Children between 8 and 13

There is an obligation to know more about children between 8 and 13 because many changes which occur during these years have a marked effect on *what* they can achieve and the ideas which *motivate* their learning.

They grow in physical strength and co-ordination and as a group become aware of the new freedom this brings. They begin to act and think independently of adults and the opinions and strengths of their friends become increasingly influential.

Linked with this, the satisfaction of mastering, to whatever degree, physical and manipulative skills seems to fulfil them as much as the expression of fantasy in their play.

It had been important to observe how these aspects of children's creative experience balance each other, particularly where other values enter the ideas they are expressing. Whereas in the play of a pre-eight year old, the immediate and ready-made will amply satisfy imaginative needs, after this age there is an increasing desire for such values as permanence, scale, function and some degree of realness.

I believe that the way in which we understand how children achieve their own measure of success in striving for these values, is of key importance in our approach to teaching them.

For example, such understanding will show us how to set up a good environment, for their learning to take place, and how they might use such an environment; for the right environment matters very much.

Because of their increased knowingness about the world of real objects, and the aspirations and expectations of their friends, many of the things which they create must be capable of being shared in the way in which they play with them. This puts a premium on *invention* or approximating to real objects and functions for the duration and purpose of the play and for possible future play. This is rather different from creating something which is intrinsically satisfying and rewarding, just for that moment in time.

A great deal of time and energy goes into inventive work of this kind, which can satisfy the imagination, and trigger off creative ideas and therefore is emotionally as well as intellectually rewarding. A good example of this is the way in which Michael (10.9 yrs) plays with his action men. The objects he has made for his action men have to be sufficiently real so that the imaginative play with them can be extended and shared. Every detail of their living is there, in its correct scale and able to perform in relation to the figures, from the drawer full of pencils and a felt wallet, to a sleeping bag and wooden aeroplane. The motivation to spend hours of time in finding out about and making these things springs from his imaginative ideas.

"It wouldn't be my art if it wasn't my Idea"
boy 12 years.

Children's own imaginative and inventive ideas matter to them a great deal. Even if they are impractical, ridiculous, too difficult and complex or beyond their capacity to achieve. Their own ideas act as a catalyst between the real world of organised materials and functioning objects and their inner world of images and feelings.

Respecting the ideas which children have,

does not mean accepting them without question. The fact that a child is encouraged to see any problems arising from his ideas will help him to look ahead and relate what he already understands to each new problem. In this way his security in his own pattern of learning will be strengthened and he can become more aware of the demands this will make on him and what is required to overcome these.

Because such learning stems from his own ideas, he will be more ready to find ways to simplify and circumvent a problem rather than abandon it in frustration.

The most significant way in which children learn at this time is through their own ideas and interpretations, because the inner life is still sufficiently pliable and resilient to absorb new experience imaginatively and free enough to experiment and make random connections with other experience without losing confidence or wanting to be directed.

Of course there is great variation in the quality and direction of their ideas, as there is in all other aspects of their development. Nevertheless, I believe it is important to encourage the discussion of their ideas and to support them all the way to find some expression of these in image or form.

The Opportunity for Learning Skills

Such support will inevitably encourage divergence in the work being undertaken, both in the way materials are being handled and the ideas produced. But it is in the nature of a personally, imaginative response for such divergence from a main stimulus idea to occur. It is very important for the teacher to believe in why this should be allowed, rather than just tolerating it. It is the child's ideas which give sense and meaning to what he does.

This applies particularly to the acquisition of skills. It is in the context of his own ideas that his motivation to acquire skills

and knowledge will be at its highest and most personal.

The Use of Time

Time is a very precious commodity, especially when children become imaginatively involved in what they are doing. Usually, in contrast to this, when they reach the middle years of their schooling time is rigorously organised for them into equal and unvarying amounts. The majority of children learn to adapt to this use of time, but for many, I believe, that it seriously affects their rhythm and pattern of learning, and particularly their imaginative and creative experience.

For example, we noticed that children needed to approach creative work in their own particular way, some spending time preparing materials, others moving immediately into some kind of handling of material, and others quietly mulling over ideas and preparing themselves emotionally for the task in hand. The same can be noticed in adults and is reported by many practising artists and craftsmen.

The amounts of time required by different individuals and at different stages of a piece of work vary considerably, and whenever possible, allowance should be made for this in the way sessions are planned.

The Implications for Teaching

Teaching in an area of the curriculum which is concerned with the imagination and learning through creative or inventive response should not be dull, routine or predictable. It is much likely to be full of variety, uncertainty and tension, for there will be times when a child's own imaginative ideas will modify or even oppose the teacher's plan and a child's personal way of working can contradict the methods the teacher wishes him to adopt.

In fact, when this happens, it is very often a guide to the success of his teaching and he should try to find ways to cope with

it rather than avoid it. The difficulty arises when thirty or more children begin to respond in this way and make diverse and exacting demands on the teacher and the resources he has at his disposal.

But, if a teacher sees the value in children working imaginatively from their own ideas, then the problem of organisation and increasing resources is a subsequent problem and should not deny the belief the teacher has in his approach.

Those things he considers worth sharing will be in evidence. Ideas and directions can be stimulated, new experience and information can be there for the individual to notice. The environment created within his own room can be the sounding board for everything that goes on there. It can encourage harmony and order, in the way the work is approached, because the tools and materials they want are easily found and returned and it can promote sensitivity and awareness in the way all kinds of things are displayed to look at and enjoy.

Art rooms should not be dumps for scrap material and old work, nor craft areas temples for polished machines and commercial charts. Where children's ideas and images are valued they are closely reflected in the environment of the rooms and the school in which they work.

In practise, once the teacher has had the confidence to accept individual diversity, a different pattern of teaching and learning begins to emerge in which new kinds of control and order have to be established.

For example, it could be that group sharing, in exchanging ideas and later discussing work, becomes the main vehicle for teaching; or children forming their own working groups and influencing each others ideas could become a significant stimulus through which the teacher works. For there will be occasions when the teachers way of seeing and understanding does not recognise nor allow for the child's personal interpretations.

The teaching of specific skills could be-

come part of the children's natural pattern of work, rather than the main concern of the teacher — however he veils this. For the teacher can feel that future progress is dependent on learning a skill but children haven't the foresight to see this. It is the fulfilment of their ideas that matters and is the strongest motivation for learning.

All this suggests that Art and Craft teaching should encourage diversity more than uniformity, questioning more than acceptance, and independence more than dependence. Therefore, the values and convictions of the teacher which inspire his aims, are of great importance. Those things which can be carefully structured and well organised, should be. However, it seems to me that teachers working in the field of Art & Craft have to view their work as a constantly self-generating and re-creating activity which places a high premium on their inventiveness and imagination and carries with it the tensions and uncertainties inherent in any truly creative work.

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