



Disseminating Good Practice in Design Technology



It was a major achievement for Newtown C.E. Primary School to be invited to the Technology with ICT show at the NEC Birmingham in November 2004. Over the last two years our school has been recognised as a lead school in the Design and Technology field with DATA. Newtown is a small rural primary school with one hundred and twenty on roll plus a twelve place rural nursery. Children at our school enjoy DT.



Staff embarked upon the planning and preparation for the show with enthusiasm and excitement. Children would work on three projects; a different aspect of DT was to be the focus for each day of the show. These were textile technology, mechanically controlled toys and fairground rides incorporating computer control.



For Design Technology to be taught well enthusiasm for the subject is a vital element and at Newtown we have that in abundance from the head, deputy head (who is also subject leader) and the staff. We know the value of D&T as a key subject for developing higher order thinking skills. It provides opportunities for children to synthesise by creating, designing, inventing, planning and modifying. Evaluation skills of decision-making, testing, selecting and drawing conclusions are all important D&T skills.

We believe that by ensuring that children are regularly engaged in open-ended problem solving activities that require them to respond at a higher level of thinking they are making connections between right and left-brain more frequently.



However enthusiastic the subject leader and staff may be about the subject it is vital that commitment for the subject comes from the Headteacher and senior managers for success in the subject to be assured. It has to be recognised that budget allocation for DT will not be the same as that for other foundation subjects. By the very nature of the subject success will not be forthcoming if the annual budget for consumables and materials is insufficient.



This will prevent children from learning skills using quality materials and resources and will only result in frustration and failure. The felt fabric used by year 5 and 6 guaranteed success, it was bright, colourful and does not fray.

Creative Planning



At the heart of good teaching is good planning, planning that is achievable and that ensures differentiation so all children are working to a standard appropriate to them. The QCA have produced some excellent schemes of work and this has been supplemented by DATA's superb Lesson Plan pack. Both of these provide solid foundations for excellent planning, that all teachers, but particularly those who lack confidence delivering the more challenging units, can use to teach successful units of work.

One essential element to providing meaningful, quality, design and technology experiences making links between subjects and encouraging teachers to tailor existing units of work to meet their needs. As a subject leader it is important to support teachers at the planning stage by thinking in a creative way and encouraging original ideas. Use of additional schemes of work such as the Nuffield primary design and technology units, which are free to download, can be very useful, providing additional ideas and starting points.

Within this initial planning stage, it is sometimes a very worthwhile experience for subject leaders to spend some time with teachers practising making an example of the product children will be producing. Not only does this help to develop confidence in teachers, but it highlights possible difficulties children in their class may experience during their own designing and making and teachers can be prepared for this.

Very often teachers find the thought of a whole class engaged in design and make activities quite daunting, so providing achievable tips for class organisation through different design and make assignments (DMAs) during the planning stage will contribute to successful and safe delivery of activities.



Ways which have worked particularly well in our school are to assign children with specific jobs during a DMA such as a measurer, equipment controller, and to have one designated area for activities such as sawing, or finishing techniques.

Flexible timetabling is also a reason why DT succeeds at our school. In the initial stages of a unit of work children can disassemble, learn focused practical tasks, plan and design their products. But when it comes to making there are advantages and timesavings to be made by rearranging the timetable to have a DT morning or day. Children are able to make more rapid progress, develop concentration over a longer period and persevere and only have to clear up once!



When ensuring good practice is disseminated throughout the school it is very important to ensure that communication between subject leader and colleagues is regular and, most importantly, relevant. Teachers need to be aware of the range of resources that are available to them and how they can be used within the assignment.



The use of ICT within design and technology has been a challenging but exciting area for development. As a subject leader, it is important to source useful applications, programmes and web sites that teachers can use, but then most importantly find time to share these “finds” with teachers, with practical suggestions as to how to embed their use within units of work so they enhance teaching and learning.

A high expectation for the quality of products is also important to our school. Children's self-esteem flourishes when they have a finished product to be proud of.



A positive and supportive culture within the staff is vital to inspire and motivate. The subject leader needs to take an active interest and invest time and effort into the D&T work carried out in all classes by supporting coaching and motivation but also by celebrating good practice with both staff and children.

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