Les Tickle
Oldfields Hall Middle School

Observational Drawing: A Middle School-based In-Service Course

Observational drawings by 11 year old pupil

This article results from (a) my own interest and art teaching experience; (b) doubts expressed currently about 'affective' areas of the curriculum in subjects like art and design and which tend to suffer from a degree of verbal inarticulateness; (c) D.E.S. primary and secondary reports, and (d) concern about the use of observational drawing in the education of children. These factors, together with my own continuing concerns for staff development, led directly to the course which is reported here and to a project contribution for the improvement of in-service arrangements among teachers working with children aged 5-13.

The course was conceived with OBSERVATIONAL DRAWING (which need not be seen as synonymous with 'art' and which is now referred to as 'reference art'). The specific content might be different in other circumstances or at other times, but the general principles of organisation and teacher response have significance and relevance to the wider issues of teacher in-service education and training *within* schools.

School-Based In-Service Education and Training: A Background

The notion of school-based in-service education and provision for it are both complex issues. At an informal level senior teachers have sometimes taken on organising or teaching roles in response to requests from colleagues, or 'new blood' has been the valuable catalyst to learning for senior colleagues. More formally the role is associated with the work of L.E.A. Advisers/Inspectors. Recent changes in the curriculum have led to a growth of in-service courses provided outside the school by the Open University, universities, colleges and teachers centres. As a result of 'professional' and economic influences there has been a growing awareness of the need for something between the two levels which brings together the benefits of each.

Britton (1973) suggested that the responsibility for in-service training would be best undertaken by experienced teachers who were themselves involved in recent developments in teaching, by bringing in ideas from beyond the school. He might have given more value to the less experienced but often more aware younger teachers too, who have a vital role in staff development, not necessarily the same as but certainly complementary to their more senior colleagues. Warwick (1975) said that school-based

in-service education holds a central position for teacher development which is not subject to the same difficulties as non-school-based courses. The major advantages of school-based in-service work are said to be 1) the direct relationship between what is offered and the needs of those attending, 2) the relationship between the course and a perceived need within the curriculum of a particular school, 3) relevant examples can be used to illustrate issues providing concrete experience in learning, 4) possibilities and limitations (such as organisational arrangements, resources, staff expertise, etc.) will be more easily identified. So the ideas being introduced are more likely to 'graft' successfully onto existing practices.

Warwick's suggestions followed the James Report (1972) and the White Paper, 'Education: a Framework for Expansion' (D.E.S. 1972) both of which dealt with the issue of professional development as a responsibility of 'middle management' in schools. School-based in-service programmes have been encouraged by Open University courses in management and education (Bolam 1975). These have come in the wake of a growing awareness of the failure of many projects to 'take' in school practice (Kelly 1977, House 1974, MacDonald and Rudduck 1971). The British Journal of In-Service Education suggests a positive and constructive change of emphasis to which teachers might respond.

Whilst Warwick proposed that in-service education should be seen as a regular part of a school's activities, the report on primary schools by H.M.I. (1979) showed a lack of influence of holders of posts of responsibility at a point at which one might have expected some initiative at school level. Within-school courses, where teachers are involved in more than one narrow area of the curriculum, have a particular function and the specialist teacher committed to particular curriculum aspects will keep track of developments in that curriculum area. The role is one of bringing these developments to teachers whose involvement is in wider aspects of teaching in other 'subjects' — a feature of primary and middle schools especially.

Identifying and Providing for a Need
Oldfields Hall is a 9-13 middle school with over 500 pupils and 25 staff. It combines 'specialist' and 'general' facilities, classrooms and teachers. Provision for art education is made for all age groups, with the author acting as head of department and 'specialist' consultant, and numerous teachers teaching aspects of the subject. All teachers use drawing, whatever the subject area or learning task. Indeed it requires some concerted evaluation to judge the *extent* to which drawing is used by or expected of children in learning in various situations and for various purposes. The claim that 'graphicacy' is a central skill together with numeracy, literacy and oracy cannot be doubted. However I was

uneasy that the children often draw 'from memory' or copy images from books.

The teaching progamme I encourage is derived, in part, from the Schools Council Project 'Art and Craft 8-13' (1974). It incorporates observational drawing as a means of seeking and recording information, as well as conveying information visually. There is a commitment to extend what was initially an innovation in my own teaching to other teachers and other areas of the curriculum where drawing is seen as a basic skill in exploratory, creative learning. Chilren are engaged in direct, first-hand experience involving *looking, touching, talking about* and *drawing* from the environment — seeking information and exploring possibilities visually.

Such an idea is not new to 'specialist' teachers, but general subjects teachers often feel inadequate in their own drawing skills. The use of drawing by children is an area of learning theory which has not permeated to many teachers, and in my opinion is an area requiring more research. One consequence is a misunderstanding by teachers (and a consequent misuse in practice) of the nature, purpose and possibilities of drawing in learning. In 1975/76 the North Eastern Region of the Art Advisers Association proposed to the Schools Council a major project for the study of the function of drawing for 8-13 year old children, which was turned down (N.E.A.A.A. 1978). There followed a major public exhibition to stimulate interest in children's drawing and its value in their education. The exhibition represented the range, diversity and function of drawing in the learning process and provided one avenue of revival in the interest of drawing in learning, in a world which is increasingly visually orientated and graphically demanding. The Schools Council (1978) itself lays stress on the importance of drawing, which it identifies as such a vital part of children's education that misconceptions about its use and purpose are seen as potentially leading to a real distortion in the visual education which pupils receive. In particular the report distinguishes between different uses of drawing for children and the need to throw off the 'adult' view of what constitutes 'good drawing'. It also points to the problems which 'non-specialist' teachers face in teaching when they themselves feel inadequate in the skills of drawing.

The Schools Council (1974) suggests involving children in looking, exploring their visual and tactile world at first hand, and using drawing as *one* medium in that process of exploration and communication. Yet little observational work has emanated from pupils. Constraints of lack of time, shortage of materials and perceived pressures for other kinds of learning, together with large classes in small spaces, are often quoted. (Hargreaves 1977, Galton et al 1980). There is also the possibility that teachers' fear engaging their pupils in drawing activities for pupils may ask the teacher to show them how to do it. Such constraints result from lack of training, lack of involvement in teaching

in a visually stimulating environment, and even a lack of expectation on the part of colleagues to engage children in this aspect of creative activities.

Constraints such as these can be reversed to be creatively stimulating with a little encouragement. That is the role of the specialist, as innovator and in-service educator, who can encourage teachers to become more involved.

Setting up the Course

The initial assumption was that the teachers within the school would respond positively. Decisions about the wording of the outline, timing, number of sessions and feelings of the potential respondents to whom the course was offered noted that:

> 'There will be four weekly sessions of one hour each, concerned with OBSERVATIONAL DRAWING. The course will deal with teaching aids and methods and introduce some ideas of a practical nature. My intention is to encourage more observational drawing among younger children'.

Table 1

TEACHER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO ATTEND THE COURSE?												
Need for insight in curriculum development	✓		✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓
Lack of confidence when asked for help		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Looking for ideas and practical hints		✓			✓	✓					✓	
Inadequate training		✓							✓	✓		
Relating to specific demands of syllabus		✓	✓		✓							
Seeking guidance in expectations								✓		✓	✓	✓
NATURE OF FORMAL TRAINING IN ART?												
None (i.e. beyond form 3 secondary school)		✓	✓					✓	✓			✓
School Certificate	✓					✓	✓					
Higher School Certificate						✓						
G.C.E. 'O' Level				✓						✓		
G.C.E. 'A' Level										✓		
'Support' subject, teacher training	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓					
Main subject, teacher training										✓		
Science degree training											✓	
WAS TRAINING ADEQUATE FOR TEACHING?												
Yes	✓			✓	✓							
No		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
WAS LENGTH/TIMING OF COURSE SIGNIFICANT?												
Preference for extension of school day	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓				
Short-term			✓									
Related to immediate syllabus demands				✓	✓							
Less pressured part of school term							✓					
Not a significant factor		✓							✓	✓	✓	✓

Categories are derived from open responses and not pre-determined

Twelve of the twenty four teachers in the school attended the course and this commitment was good since there was no overt pressure brought to bear. The initial course notice revealed my own value judgements that things needed improving, and implicit in it was an indication of initiative and leadership. With that in mind it is interesting to analyse the teaching situations and responsibilities of those who responded. They were:

1. Head of First Year (Scale 3) and first year form teacher of general subjects, with thirty years' primary school teaching experience and five years' middle school experience.
2. First year form teacher of general subjects (Scale 1) with four years' middle school teaching experience.
3. – ditto – with seven years middle school teaching experience.
4. – ditto – probationary teacher.
5. Second year form teacher of general subjects (Scale 1) and teacher of French with six years' teaching experience in secondary and middle schools.
6. Head of Remedial Department (Scale 3) with thirty years' secondary and middle school experience.
7. Head of third year and Head of Maths. Department (Scale 3) with maths. specialist teaching contact, and thirty five years' of teaching experience in primary, secondary and middle schools.
8. Head of Humanities (Scale 2) and third year form teacher/history specialist, with ten years' teaching experience in secondary/middle schools.
9. Third year form teacher and P.E. specialist (Scale 1) with two years' teaching experience in the middle school.
10. Third year form teacher and art specialist, probationary teacher.
11. Second mistress and science specialist, with twenty six years' teaching experience in primary, secondary and middle schools.
12. Head of modern languages (Scale 2) specialist teacher of French with ten years' secondary and middle school experience.

The apparent diversity of interests made the task problematic but challenging. It was possible to guess at the identified needs of each teacher at the planning stage, but clearly the needs of a specialist teacher of French were not likely to be the same as those of a third year art teacher, nor those the same as a first year 'general' teacher. I asked respondents their reasons for attending.

The table on the left gives some insight into their perspectives. The questions asked are given in sequence, with the essential core of responses tabulated to correspond with the teachers' 'identities' above.

The Course Content

The course aimed to provide (1) 'theoretical' understanding, (2) practical experience,

(3) factual information, and (4) teaching strategies.

The outline of the programme was:

Week 1: The drawing process.
Week 2: Media.
Week 3: Purposes and Uses of Drawing.
Week 4: Development of children's perception/ modes of representation.

Week 1 centred on concern for OBSERVATIONAL DRAWING and an understanding of this aspect with regard to the process of drawng and the pupils' understanding. This session was based on an amalgam of ideas from Field (1970), Schools Council (1974) and Schools Council (1978): ideas used with the intention of putting drawing in the context of general learning, not solely in art and with *two* central issues:

1) Drawing — a mode of organising and internalising experience.
2) Observational drawing — an outward looking search process which helps an understanding of the perceptual world.

This key theme was reiterated throughout the course and put into a context of wider educational thinking, with ideas about children exploring through creative problem solving. An analysis of the observation and drawing process (Schools Council 1978, modified for the course) was presented in association with a series of colour slides from the unit 'Drawing Systems' (Hart and Shirley, 1976). The principle is that elements which reveal to us the appearance of the world are few, even though what they reveal is complex, and this is expressed by the Schools Council (1978) as follows:

Observed FORM (SHAPE) is
  revealed by comparative COLOUR and
  TONE influenced by the TEXTURE of
  its surface and the SPACE in which it
  exists or MOVES.
Seeing requires analysis or comparisons of
  relationships of SCALE/PROPORTION
  (relative size)
  POINT/SPACE (relative position)
  MOVEMENT
Representing these in two dimensions we use
  COLOUR as pigment
  TONE — light/dark

Display of Drawing Materials: illustrated mainly by pupils aged 12.
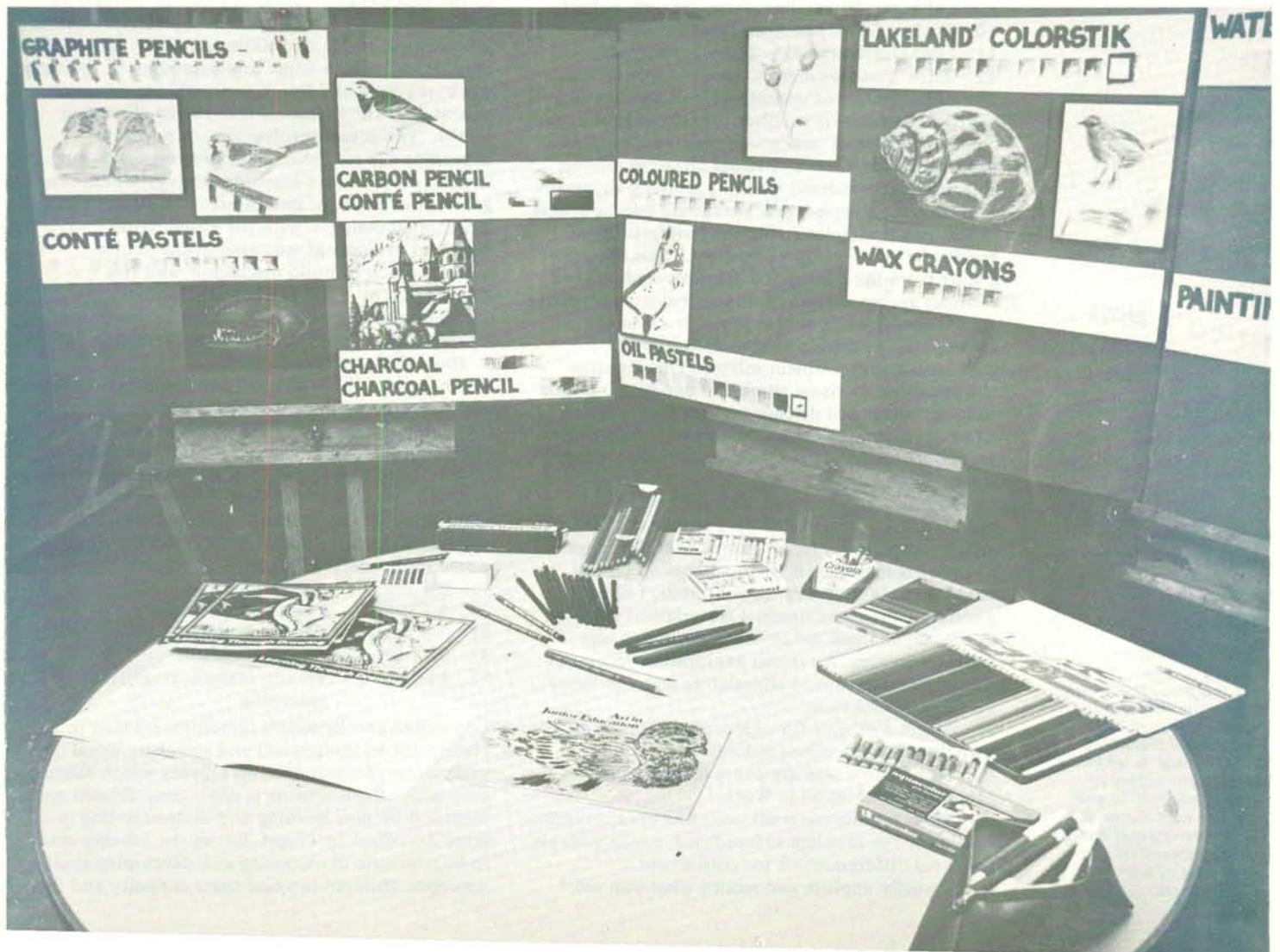
LINE — a convention to represent space, etc.
TEXTURE — to influence colour, tone, line.
A drawing is *not* a copy. It is not the object itself. It is an analogy — representing in one set of materials what exists as a different set of materials.

This model was chosen for its simplicity and related directly to the slides of objects and drawings selected for their emphasis on particular elements, but which also commanded appeal in suggesting readily available and occasionally novel visual stimuli for classroom use:

1.   Drawing from observation — sewing machine — line.
2.   Framing a detail of 1. for development. Contrast drawing tones.
3.   An alternative selection of detail and 'scaling up'.
4.   Orange slice/section — colour tone.
5.   Orange slice/section — line.
6.   Tomato — drawing in colour.
7.   Chain — line relationships/space.
8.   Liquorice Allsorts — form.
9.   Cabbage — form, line, tone, texture, colour.
10.   Skull — form, line, tone, texture, colour.
11.   Lego constructions — form, tone, space.
12.   'Pilot' matches in box — form, tone, space.

The slides generated considerable discussion and a critical analysis of whether the representations of objects were 'right' and group members engaged in *observation, analysis* and *visual problem solving.* The session considered teaching strategy by means of a core analysis, i.e. that we should engage pupils in learning principles rather than attempting to teach what the results 'should be'. This implies a shift from the concept of drawing as an *inward retrieval system* to one of an input system involving an *outward looking search process;* from the concept of expression first to a concept of exploration and problem solving. This requires the provision of visual stimuli to encourage pupils to look, touch and discuss, so that they develop an understanding of the elements observed and an understanding of the process of representing them visually.

Week 2 was concerned with DRAWING MATERIALS, stimulated by a visit to a local artists' colourman. He explained that the range of drawing materials is vast and that no school could provide such a range for pupils. I bought a series of the more unusual materials to display in school, and this led to more discussion and problem solving. An initial exploration session of these materials proved stimulating and was based on these instructions:

a.   Select a subject for observation and set up your own visual problem to explore.

b.   Decide how you are going to apply the principles established in Week 1.

c.   Prepare your materials, selecting the appropriate media for the problem in hand (e.g. media suitable for tonal differences, or for colour, etc.)

d.   Visually explore and record what you see.*

* At this point it is worth mentioning the ideas of Frederick Franck's (1970) inspirational book 'The Zen of Seeing' in which he discusses the nature of total 'immersion' in and empathy with the subject being observed and drawn, and the removal of constraints of self-consciousness.

This approach is not often extended to pupils, and choice of materials and the problem of choosing was novel to the teachers. They were learners engaged in decision making and recognised and commented upon their own 'teacher-dominated' approaches, and also the quality of popular drawing materials which children use.

The 'practical' session proved a meeting point of issues and a time for raising questions, out of which arose discussion about the PURPOSES AND USES OF DRAWING. Importantly, the relationship between drawing and its use in other curricular subjects was discussed. Questions came up regarding the teacher of French (illustration of verbal exercises and pupil perception of illustrations); scientific recording; mathematical uses of drawing; and 'general' subject interests — wide interests served best by establishing key principles and selection of what is most valuable when applied to specific teaching situations.

The final session was concerned with the DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS AND MODES OF REPRESENTATION. This is one of the best explored areas of research though we still rely largely on a few classic works (Lowenfeld and Brittain 1970; and Kellogg 1970). Although most teachers have some understanding of the visual work of young children it is possible to be more educated as the literature is explored (Freeman 1980). The actual involvement of pupils in discussing the nature of their drawings is lacking in schools, yet it is a teaching strategy which can generate excitement and interaction as part of a continual dialogue with the visual world. Again a key concept was used in the course around which to build discussion, and this was summed up by Field (1970). He wrote:

'The subject matter and media do not change, relatively. The child, and his relationship with these things, does change'.

The nature of these changes and ideas about ages and stages in the process of development are invariably illustrated by children's drawings in the literature. A summary of Lowenfeld and Brittain's work (presented in the course by way of O.H.P. slides and the work of pupils in the school) is that these products show changes in children's relationships with the external visual world in *five* defined stages:
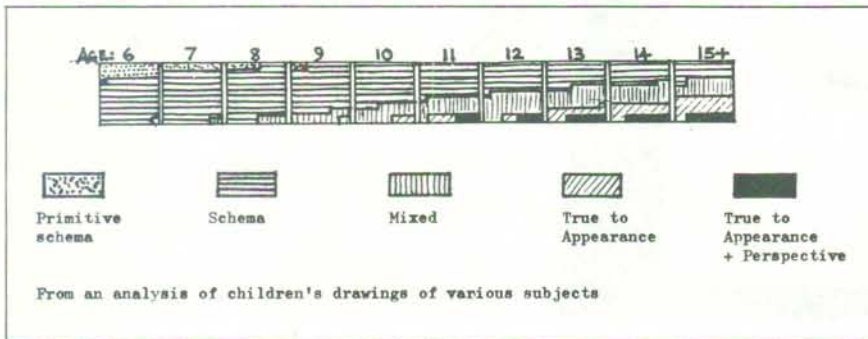
1)   2-4 years   Scribbling stage.
2)   4-7 years   Pre-schematic stage
3)   7-9 years   Schematic stage
4)   9-11 years   Drawing realism
5)   11-13 years   Pseudo-realistic stage/stage of reasoning

Lowenfeld and Brittain's principles are that in attempting to understand and structure visual experience children develop schema which shape their ideas. Each schema is used, consolidated and modified by new learning and understanding in the sense described by Piaget, but as the schema cease to be adequate in exploring and developing spatial concepts, children increase their curiosity and use

of particulars in representation. This kind of leap-frog development varies for each individual and, like all 'models', the age and stages proposals are somewhat arbitrary. Psychological, biological, and environmental factors and stimuli (including teacher provision) affect and effect change.

Lark-Harowitz et al (1967) offers a diagrammatic view of children's use of such characteristics which is well worth noting, and which the teachers on this course found most interesting.

Primitive schema | Schema | Mixed | True to Appearance | True to Appearance + Perspective

From an analysis of children's drawings of various subjects

TEACHER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
WHAT BENEFITS DID YOU GAIN?												
Knowledge of innovations in teaching				✓				✓	✓		✓	✓
Knowledge of materials	✓			✓					✓	✓	✓	
Discernment in choice of subjects	✓	✓		✓					✓			
Re-evaluation of drawing in curricula		✓										
Awareness/expectations of developmental stages	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓				✓
Increased dialogue with children		✓					✓					
Increased confidence		✓					✓	✓				
Awareness of other teachers' ideas										✓	✓	
enjoyment									✓			
No response			✓		✓							
WAS THE LEVEL SATISFACTORY?												
Yes	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Too specialised		✓										
No response			✓		✓							
WILL ANY FACTORS ALTER YOUR TEACHING?												
Choice of media	✓			✓								
Dialogue with pupils re. media and subjects	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓				
Use of drawing in other subjects		✓										
Knowledge of stages of development								✓	✓			
WAS ANY FACTOR ESPECIALLY INFORMATIVE?												
To focus looking on a selected feature	✓											
Stages of development	✓	✓					✓					✓
Use/range of materials		✓		✓		✓	✓		✓			
Techniques for drawing									✓		✓	
No response			✓		✓							

Categories are derived from open responses and not pre-determined.

Whatever the inadequacies of such a simple view and highly selective offering it was included here to stimulate interest, bring about awareness and instigate enquiry. The principle was that the key concept — children's changing relationship with subject matter — should be explored, discussed with pupils, and incorporated into classroom strategies. *In conclusion* a reiteration of the main principles and their application in teaching strategies was used as a summary, with the use of the book 'Learning Through Drawing' (N.E.A.A.A. 1978) and some pupils' drawings as a reference point for discussion on the final session.

Follow Up
Three apects of follow up work were pursued:
1) It was suggested that relevant aspects of pupils' work should be observed and the nature of teaching strategies be reviewed in the light of the course, with the implication that further support, discussion and advice was available. The overt expectation of some change in awareness and strategies was mutually understood from the inception of the course.
2) One week later course notes relating to the initial sessions were distributed as 'revision' and notes relating to perceptual/representational development were distributed one week after that.
3) Feed-back responses were requested, through a series of specific questions, the essential details of which are tabulated on the left.

The wide range of backgrounds, commitments and interests among the teachers represents a particular feature of middle schools which will not be found in other kinds of institutions. It would appear to point to the need for this kind of school based in-service work in middle schools in particular.

From the teachers' responses, the need/demand clearly indicates the importance of providing in-service work which is seen as directly applicable to classroom practices in particular situations. Comments show a concern about lack of confidence or inadequacy in personal and teaching abilities, with the implied need for the in-service organiser to provide support. This may arise more readily from a teaching colleague, who would continue to be on hand, than from adviser, inspector or other outside agent. The comments suggest categories of interest/involvement which can be summarised as:
    To keep up to date with ideas and practices.
    Looking for practical tips.
    Relating to the demands of a school syllabus.
    Personal development.
    Relating to a head of department.
    Supporting a colleague.
It was indicated that the teachers' knowledge of me also played a part in their involvement. In all, these perspectives provide powerful possibilities for the specialist teacher to act as change agent and in-service educator.

Working with colleagues has its problems. It requires some confidence to bare one's soul to
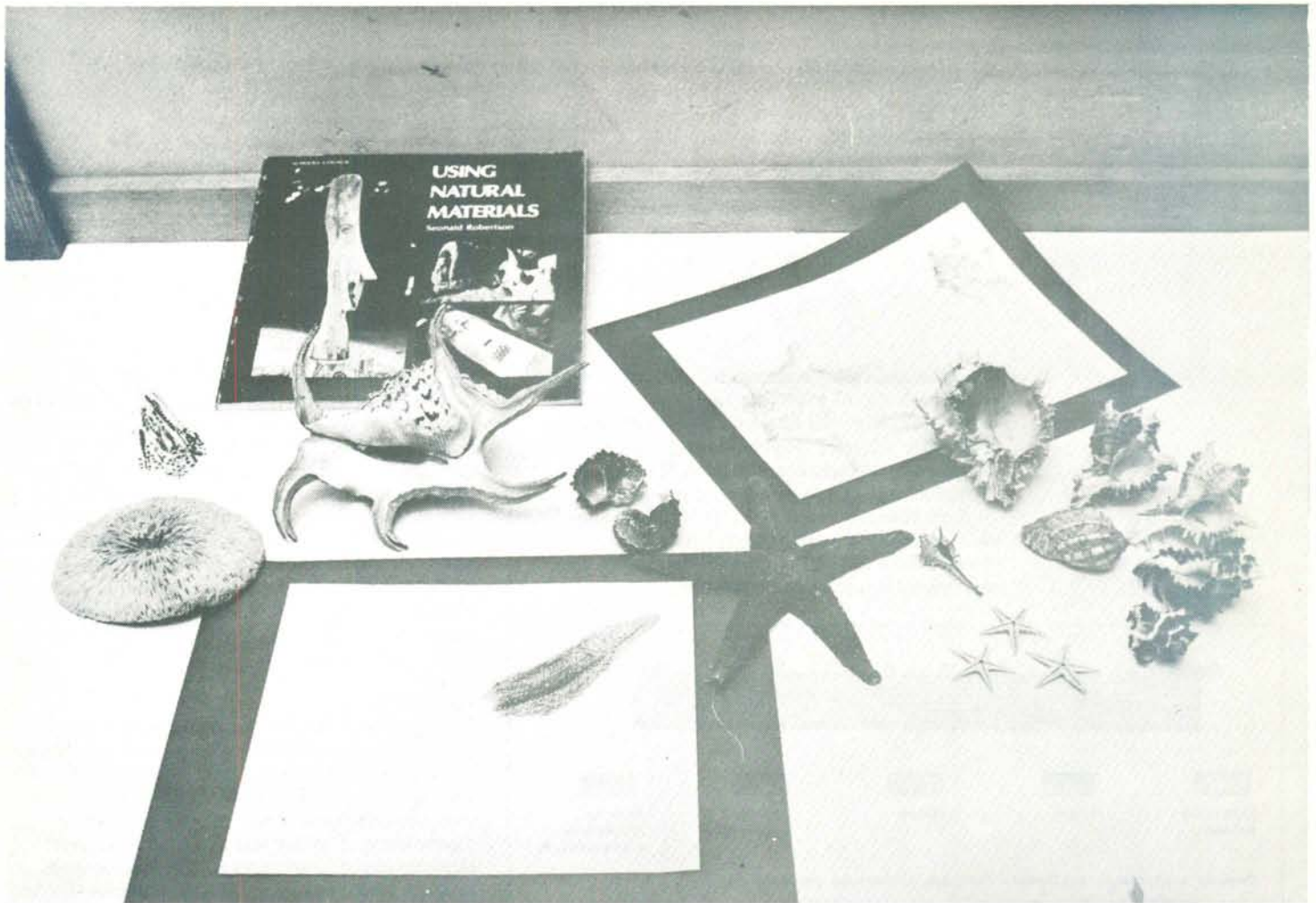
Shells: observational stimulus selected by some teachers.

teacher-colleagues. It is also a venture which breeds confidence and sharing such as teachers often shy away from, as well as professional support and help for others. This can have immeasurable incidental consequences in terms of the atmosphere of a teaching team.

It must be remembered that such activities can only be a small part of the complexities of in-service education. There is a danger of over-saturation in the busy world of day to day school affairs. However, the school based teacher-initiated course may become a more productive avenue which can gain economic and moral support from headteachers, advisers and inspectors — and open up some other avenues of morale building for those concerned. It is also a potentially creative avenue leading to effective innovation in school practice.

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