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'Trading with textiles' - how to plan, make your designs at home and abroad

(An example of Curriculum Development to meet the requirements of National Curriculum Design & Technology Key Stages 3 & 4)

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Abstract

During 1988/9, Banking Information Service (BIS) commissioned post-graduate research 'To identify the educational and business perspectives of economic awareness and to suggest an effective programme of involvement with respect to BIS.'

Part of the methodology was to conduct standardised interviews with representatives from Education & Training, Industry & Commerce and Other Agencies. An executive from the British Knitting & Clothing Export Council (BKCEC) spoke convincingly of the burgeoning design talent amongst young Britons on the one hand, and their deficiency in financial planning and management on the other. 'Trading with Textiles' was one specific outcome of the BKCEC interview.

This resource has been produced to assist Home Economics teachers meet the 4 Attainment Targets by encouraging students to:

- * *evaluate an existing garment*
- * *identify needs and opportunities for a garment of their own*
- * *generate a design*
- * *plan and make the garment*
- * *evaluate their garment*

Production took eighteen months and involved a team of professionals from business and education. The paper addresses this process.

A Partnership between Business and Education

Banking Information Service (BIS) is a specialist education unit, neither recruiting staff nor carrying out direct banking transactions. The Unit's role is developmental in establishing partnerships between education and the banking industry to their mutual benefit. Its principal function is to support activity in the classroom through the provision of relevant teaching material on the one hand and practising bankers on the other.

There was a clear dual-purpose in the origination of this particular piece of curriculum development. The first criterion was to produce case-study material which would accurately reflect the realities of business life. The second was to design a resource which could be used effectively and flexibly by teachers and which might encourage them to invite representatives from business to participate in the classroom.

'Trading with Textiles'

The aim of this teacher resource is to use the design, planning, making and marketing of a chosen garment as a vehicle to raise the level of economic and industrial understanding amongst students. It is particularly appropriate for students in years 7-9 and 10-11, who are working in National Curriculum Design & Technology at Key Stage 3 and 4.

The pack has been designed specifically to assist teachers of Home Economics, who use textiles and fabrics in the classroom and of Business Studies, to meet the 4 Attainment Targets for Design & Technology competence:

AT1: Identifying Needs and Opportunities

AT2: Generating a Design

AT3: Planning and Making

AT4: Evaluating

The 4 stages of the Design Process are separated only for ease of communication and understanding. They continually overlap and merge into each other, so that the process can be described as genuinely holistic. A financial dimension permeates the whole of the design process, as many professional designers and manufacturers have discovered to their cost. It takes more than innovative ideas and creative talent to produce a garment which is commercially viable. four out of five businesses fail within the first 2 years of operation – often despite full order books – because of lack of adequate financial planning and management.

Content

The eight resource cards within the pack provide not only factual information about the textile industry but also advice based on personal experience from successful business people operating within the industry.

The pack's basic subject matter is the Design Process. Rather than deal with this in the abstract, the resource uses a 'Rohan' SHAMAL jacket as an introductory case-study. 'Rohan' was chosen as an example of a young, thrusting British manufacturing company, which is also making considerable inroads into the export market. The SHAMAL jacket is an actual garment, marketed by 'Rohan'. It was felt that this particular product would be universally acceptable as case-study material to a student audience (price-tag notwithstanding) because it was a uni-sex item of leisure-wear, representative of a sector of the clothing industry with which young people identify. The jacket itself has many distinguishing features which helps to stimulate discussion about 'good' design.

Having introduced a garment, and through it, a vehicle for explaining the Design Process, the remaining resource cards examine issues pertinent to exporting as a business activity and to Germany as a potential export market. Germany was selected because of its position within the clothing industry as

Britain's number one export market amongst trading partners in continental Europe.

The topic headings contained on the resource cards include:

IDENTIFYING NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- * Targeting Germany: identifying your market and range
- * Targeting Germany: making the prospect attractive
- * The German Market: league table statistics
- * World Trade: clothing import statistics

GENERATING A DESIGN

- * Deciding on your garment
- * The importance of economic awareness
- * Protecting your designs
- * Some textile terms and definitions
- * Labelling

PLANNING AND MAKING

- * The importance of being business-like
- * Exporting to Germany: ways to do business
- * Investigating marketing opportunities
- * Appointing an agent
- * Contracts
- * Methods of payment

EVALUATING

- * How to approach a buyer
- * What makes a good salesperson
- * What makes a good garment
- * Glossary of financial terms
- * Design Process wallchart
- * National Curriculum notes

Technology as the Focus for the BIS Educational Resource

There are three main reasons for focusing on National Curriculum Technology as a target for BIS resources. Firstly, Technology potentially offers the most scope for developing economic awareness as an integral thread. The dynamics within this subject are similar to those for a cross-curricular theme. Secondly, within the published Programmes of Study, elements of economic awareness feature explicitly, particularly under the heading of 'satisfying human need'. Thirdly, and finally, there is a direct call within the Orders for industry and commerce to become close partners with education in the delivery of Technology.

'Trading with Textiles' is one practical outcome of academic research in the degree of Master of Philosophy in Social Policy 'to identify the educational and

business perspectives of economic awareness and to suggest an effective programme of involvement with respect to Banking Information Service.' This research was carried out by Brenda Gleave, Manager (Resources) BIS. The recommendations addressed to BIS included suggestions for increasing the relevance of resources by way of content, format and usage in different curriculum models.

The research study undertaken by BIS deliberately sought the views of representatives from Education and Training, Business and Other Agencies for their perceptions of Design & Technology. The precise question posed them in a standardised interview schedule was as follows:

'What relationship exists between economic awareness and the area of activity which could best be described as Design & Technology?'

A cross section of responses are given below:

- EMPLOYEE * 'how to market design effectively and economically, both as employees and, if they so wished, in a business of their own.'
- EMPLOYER * 'A design company has to be concerned with its cost-effectiveness and not just design for its own sake.'

The 'financial dimension' related to the costing element of Design & Technology. What emerged was an insistence on the part of interviewees that the financial considerations were integral to the whole design process and not simply an optional extra.

- FINANCIAL * 'The balance between design and cost is an area that
DIMENSION * traditionally has been left out of planning projects.'

However, it was the interview conducted with a representative from the British Knitting & Clothing Export Council (BKCEC), which was the genesis of the specific title, 'Trading with Textiles'.

The comment which was central to the idea for 'Trading with Textiles' was:

'In my experience, economic awareness and creativity are poles apart. Economic awareness is generally not a part of a designer's mentality. Many creative people aren't, for instance, very good at communicating on an everyday level, can be somewhat inadequate as far as business procedures are concerned.

One well-known designer attended an international trade fair and came without business cards, stationary and other essential supplies!'

According to the BKCEC, the major pitfall for British exporters is their attitude towards export as a business activity. The majority of textile/garment manufacturers regard export as a hobby or sideline: they turn to export only

when the home market is depressed. This approach is doomed to failure.

Detailed Research for the Resource

Researching the textile industry led, inevitably, down many different avenues. The major constraints were labour and time. The research task fell to the BIS Manager (Resources) and the time-scale to which she was working (six months) within a crowded work schedule was clearly limiting.

In order to render the task containable, the researcher chose 'Labels and Labelling' as a start point. Legal requirements led directly to the Department of Trade & Industry (DTI) and it was here that she obtained a wealth of information and names of further contacts.

Coincidentally, the Patent Office, in collaboration with the DTI, were mounting an exhibition at the Design Council entitled, 'Fit for the Queen'. Attendance at the launch of the Exhibition led to a personal contact with the Design Registry, with responsibility for textile patents.

As a trade association, the BKCEC was invaluable in providing facts about the industry nationwide and the status quo as regards export potential. They were the source for statistics, both national and international, and also alerted the researcher to individual companies which might be helpful in the presentation of case-study material. Although not represented in the resource pack itself, the International Wool Secretariat provided material which was stimulating and fostered ideas. Companies profiled with the pack include: 'Rohan', 'Cockney Rebel' and 'Andrew Wilkie'.

On the banking side, factual help and advice was provided by a number of the banks investing in BIS. The Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD) also supplied helpful information about export finance.

Linking 'Trading with Textiles' to the 4 ATs

Having collated and sorted the volume of source material into different topic areas, it was edited into manageable 'digestible' pieces of information. At this stage in the production process Graham West, County Adviser for Design & Technology, Oxfordshire and his erstwhile colleague, Richard Speed of 'Technology Associates', were commissioned to help in the organisation of material to target teachers who were teaching students at Key Stages 3 and 4 of the National Curriculum.

Graham West and Richard Speed brought to the resource design process a considerable amount of INSET experience in the training of students, teachers and college students in National Curriculum Technology. They had trialled the AT4-AT1-AT2-AT3-AT4 approach in more than 20 Design & Technology INSET sessions and were convinced of its value in assisting individuals' delivery of the design process.

'Trading with Textiles' INSET

At the time of writing, two separate INSET days have been run successfully at Leasowes High School, Dudley LEA and the County INSET Centre, Norfolk LEA. The sessions were fronted by Richard Speed, with support from tutors from the host centre. Approximately 30 people attended the Dudley session and 40 the Norwich one. The make-up of the groups differed significantly, in that the Dudley group included six practising bankers who acted as industrial advisers within the small group work. The participants from education were mainly teachers of Home Economics and Technology Advisers. The Norwich group was heavily-weighted towards TVEI and involved teachers from a range of disciplines.

The outcome of the INSET was not only the teachers' familiarisation with the resource pack but also the drawing-up of extension ideas to provide, in many instances, a term's work in Technology. Teachers require National Curriculum Technology support NOW. As with any educational resource, 'Trading with Textiles' has its limitations. However, its major advantage is that it is CURRENTLY available and provides an impetus for further imaginative work within the field of education/business partnerships.