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A small-scale evaluation of the Design and Technology Framework in England

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Problem Statement: Since the beginning of Design and Technology (D&T) in the English secondary school curriculum, the teaching of design has been identified as less effective than that of making.

Research Questions: What are the experiences of pupils between the ages of 12 and 14 of design learning?

Purpose of Study: In 2004 as part of the National Strategies, the D&T framework was launched, aiming to support the teaching of design skills. This is a small-scale study, which begins to explore the experiences of pupils and teachers in four schools in the Northwest of England.

Research Methods: The study used a mixed methods approach, gathering quantitative and qualitative data in a questionnaire with a convenience sample of school pupils. The questionnaire responses are analysed alongside qualitative interviews with D&T teachers from the schools.

Findings: The findings indicate that many pupils had a clear understanding of the role of designing. However, some common assumptions of the nature of design activity centering on the act of sketching or drawing were evident. The majority of pupils were unable to accurately identify the names of many of the design activities introduced as part of the framework.

Conclusions: Whilst some progress has been made in the teaching of design, through the use of design activities introduced in the D&T Framework, the support experienced by teachers was limited and were not sustained beyond the initial training. There are implications for initial teacher educators in supporting beginning teachers and balancing the tensions trainees experience whilst on placements in school.

Key Words: Design, designing, pedagogy, teacher education