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Technological Textiles – what do textiles teachers really think? The findings of a national research pilot project.

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Introduction

The work presented here serves to document the results of a national survey of in excess of one hundred and forty classroom practitioners and middle leaders about the current situation of textiles technology within their place of work. (School, Academy). Areas such as technological content, where textiles is actually delivered within the curriculum, the level to which it is delivered and the duration throughout the curriculum were all covered within this study.

With recent national discussion centred the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (E.Bacc.) and the place of Design and Technology within any ensuing curriculum, textiles technology is facing an uncertain future. The work present here shows that in many secondary education settings textiles is being moved into "Art and Design" and away from "Design and Technology". The research presented here also illustrates that a majority of textiles teachers are passionate about resisting the move from Design and Technology into Art and Design. Further, it is acknowledged by many that there is a place for textiles within Art and Design, particularly in relation to surface embellishment techniques but there is strong opinion of a need to retain its place within Design and Technology to cover technological textiles including garment construction.

Methods and Methodology

Whilst some of the data gathered can be said to be qualitative in nature, some of it is also quantitative giving rise to a methodological approach that is defined as combined – or mixed. The principle method for the initial data collection was that of a questionnaire combining both open and closed questions. The data presented here is in a form so as to facilitate discussion amongst interested stakeholders and present the initial findings.

Already work has begun to analyse and interrogate the data gathered. Follow up face to face and detailed interviews have already been undertaken with a number of respondents and the work from certain aspects of this has been presented previously (Hughes et al.. 2010;2011) particularly in the area of art textiles and its influence and impact on technological textiles.

Results

The geographical location reported by those who partook of the initial survey is shown in Fig. 1. (below) although not evenly split by the predefined areas given as options for the question this can be explained by the non uniformity of the physical areas themselves. Additionally, of those who completed the survey, 73% stated that they were actively involved in the teaching and delivery of textiles, the other 27% tended to be drawn from Heads of Departments and Heads of Faculties in the main.

Fig. 1. Location of Initial Survey Respondents.

	North West	North East	Midlands	South West	South East	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Jersey C. I.	Other
	46.4%	8.5%	13.1%	5.9%	19.6%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%	3.3%

Further Results

There were some respondents who were very concerned at the move away from textiles being taught as part of the Design and Technology curriculum but others who could justify this purely in terms of examination results and staffing. Some of the comments are shown below and these are representative of those received during this study.

"After my discussions with the SLT today about the art v textiles debate I am devastated. They really don't have any understanding of the difference, and after having it pointed out in many ways, still are unwilling to get it."

Respondent 31

"Garment making is kept to a minimum for two reasons 1) my own confidence in garment making is ok but anything too technical and I'm concerned the kids will fail. Textiles is taught under 'DT' at KS3 & 4 but under Art & Design at KS5 - this choice was made as it benefits our students at A-level".

Respondent 63

"I'm considering moving away from DT textiles to art textiles as teaching the AS DT textiles year has been painful - students arriving from GCSE with hugely varied knowledge The AS exam results being poor - resits in January good though. Also I think the AS exam paper is difficult to understand [and workout] exactly what is being asked – my colleague teaching product design also agrees.".

Respondent 122

Data gathered shows a range of issues including; a large variance in the actual length of time textiles is taught at Key Stage 3 (Fig.2) the actual number of teachers involved in delivering garment construction as part of a textiles course (Fig.3) and those who do not deliver textiles teaching in any way beyond the end of Key Stage 3. (Fig 4). But an overwhelming number of respondents also commented on their concerns in relation to the English Baccalaureate. These will likely be presented as a separate piece of work at a later stage.

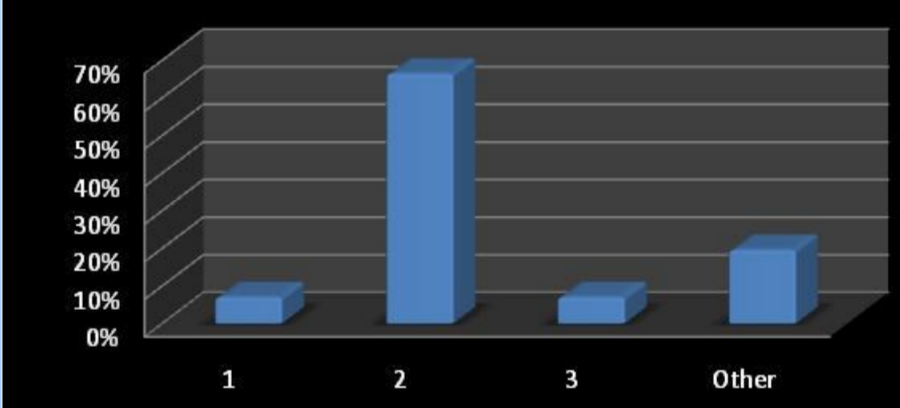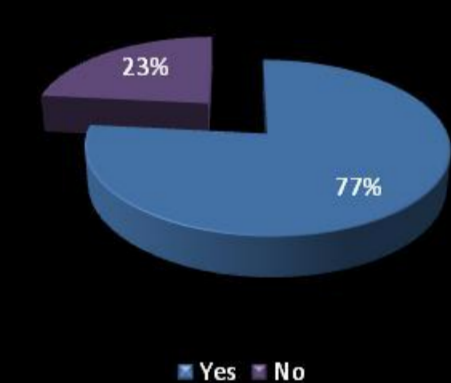

Fig.2 Hours Per Week Design and Technology is Taught.

Fig.3 Those who do some Garment Construction as part of Textiles.

23%
77%

■ Yes ■ No

The Future?

The data presented here and covered by this study has the potential to lead to many further areas of focused research and it opens the door to a number of areas of inquiry that can be considered as essential in defining the essence of Design and Technology but specifically those in relation to Textiles Technology and its future..

Fig.4 Level to which Textiles is taught.

KS3 Only   GCSE Level   AS Level   A2 Level