

# Introduction

## Language learning and art, crafts, and design

Children learn by doing. When they are involved in art, crafts, and design activities, language can play a key part. Although much of what is done in art, crafts, and design is non-verbal, for this book I have chosen activities in which language plays a central role.

The important role of language in art, crafts, and design is evident when children are:

- listening to, and perhaps reading instructions on how to do something. They are associating the new language directly with objects, actions, and experiences, rather than merely with existing experience through translation of the mother tongue.
- making use of their existing language skills (which they employ when reading in their mother tongue), for example, when guessing meaning from context
- receiving and giving praise and encouragement
- describing, evaluating, and expressing feelings and ideas.

This range of purposes and associated language is not found in traditional foreign language teaching at primary level, in which songs, rhymes, and games are the sole diet. However good this traditional ‘food’ of songs and games is, it cannot provide the balanced diet essential for a child’s broad conceptual development.

## The value of art, crafts, and design at the lower proficiency levels

Art, crafts, and design are particularly important at the lower levels because they make a child’s limited range of language part of something bigger—something which is strong, rich, and has material presence. For example, the word ‘me’ on its own is worth little or nothing, but written below a self-portrait of a child it becomes meaningful, and is much more likely to be remembered.

## The educational value of art, crafts, and design

When working with children, we are first of all teachers who are responsible for the overall development of those in our care. Our role is to introduce activities, materials, and values which deepen their awareness and understanding of the world around them, and their relationship with it.

In my opinion, it is not enough for me merely to help the children to name a colour in English. I should also help them to become aware of the wonderful varieties of colour which we can perceive and make, and to deepen their associations with colour.

Art, crafts, and design activities can help children to:

- appreciate the world around them
- be more aware of the five senses, and develop skill in using them
- develop skill in comparing, contrasting, classifying, sequencing, and organizing
- acquire awareness of artistic form (shape, colour, line, texture, length, weight, movement, etc.) and materials, and skill in handling them. They will also become aware of the concepts represented, and their value. (Consider the value of fresh personal vision based on direct and honest response to experience, as opposed to the commonplace, the stereotype, and the cliché. As an example, think of the immense range of colours found in the bark of a tree, and contrast this with the ‘pass-me-down’ colour brown routinely used by children in a million pictures.)
- understand ‘cause and effect’, and develop a skill in discovering them
- develop a skill in problem-solving
- have a positive attitude to exploring, and to making sense of experience
- have a positive attitude to themselves, and to others, and to working with others.

Art is not just a hobby, it is a fundamental aspect of human behaviour which involves intellectual as well as emotional exploration, expression, and communication.

## Who is this book for?

### 1 Children

This book is for use with children aged between four and twelve, and includes activities for the whole of this age range.

Clearly, there is a big difference between four- and twelve-year-olds! Very young children:

- are in the early stages of awareness of texts, whereas older children are usually fluent readers
- tend to respond to individual happenings rather than considering general principles
- are less likely to be interested in adult subject matter and perceptions than older children
- are more likely to need constant adult guidance

- are less able to sustain concentration and a sense of direction than older children
- have less manual dexterity.

Each child (like each adult) is an individual, with their own natural speed and focus of development. Some children of four can use a pair of scissors with great dexterity, for instance, while others can't. I have tended to place the age at which an activity can be done as the age when children are likely to get some satisfaction out of doing the activity, rather than the age at which they can do it easily.

Most of the activities can be adapted for use with children of different ages and at different stages of personal development.

### **Proficiency level**

Most of the activities in this book are possible for beginners and/or elementary learners of English. Children who are more proficient in English will enjoy doing the activities at a richer linguistic level.

I firmly believe that, from the very earliest days of learning a second or foreign language, children should experience the new language through activities which are meaningful and important to them.

## 2 Teachers

This book is for teachers who believe that it is vital for the children to experience the new language as an important tool to be used in meaningful and enjoyable activities.

### **But I'm not an art and crafts teacher!**

Most of the activities require no more skill than is needed to make a cup of coffee, or boil an egg. Clearly, you have to get involved in physical activity, but no previous skill and no unusual artistic talent are expected. It is not so much a personal artistic skill in the teacher which is required, but an openness to what art is and can be (see pages 11–12).

### **But there is already too little time for English!**

Surely it is better to spend time letting the children become familiar with the language than to race them through a language marathon in which *you* finish the course but most of the children are nowhere to be seen!

If the activities engage the children, and if they really *experience* the language, the quality of learning will out-balance the time spent on the art and crafts activities.

Suggestion: Why not try to combine some art and crafts lesson time with English lesson time? It is widely accepted that primary education should be cross-curricular (see page 9).

**But the mess!**

Only some of the activities lead to a mess, and even these are not on the level of a pottery class, or an oil-painting class, in which all the children are working with full tins of paint and brushes in every hand. In any case, the act of cleaning up in art and crafts is very much part of the discipline of the subject, and a wonderful opportunity for ‘language in use’! However, I do understand that a messy classroom could be a problem for some teachers, so I have made reference to this aspect in each of the activities where it is relevant. See also the Appendix (page 136) for suggestions on reducing mess.

**But I haven’t got the materials!**

Few specialist materials are required in these activities.

**It means more preparation time!**

Many of the activities will require you to prepare for them to a certain extent. However, you will be compensated by the motivation of the children!

**But we have the coursebook. Isn’t that enough?**

While it is true that a good coursebook will provide you and the children with a balanced diet of language experience, you might decide that the children need some extra practice in a particular area, or that they might like to embark on a creative project of their own. This is when the activities in this book can help.

## Writing and the written word

Many teachers believe that young learners should learn to listen and speak in English before they experience the written word. Others maintain that encountering written English early on is not harmful, and is even desirable.

For those teachers who are open to the use of written texts in activities, here are a few techniques for introducing writing:

- encourage awareness of print—let the children see you use the written word
- encourage pre-writing activities in which the children may say they are writing, although you may not recognize it as such
- encourage the children to recognize individual letters, particularly to be able to write their name
- encourage the copying of sentences or phrases

- encourage playing with letter shapes, so the children become familiar with the essential character of letters
- write or type out the children's stories, and read them back to them.

Writing can be dropped from, or included in, almost every activity in this book. It's up to you!

## Discrete activities and integrated activities

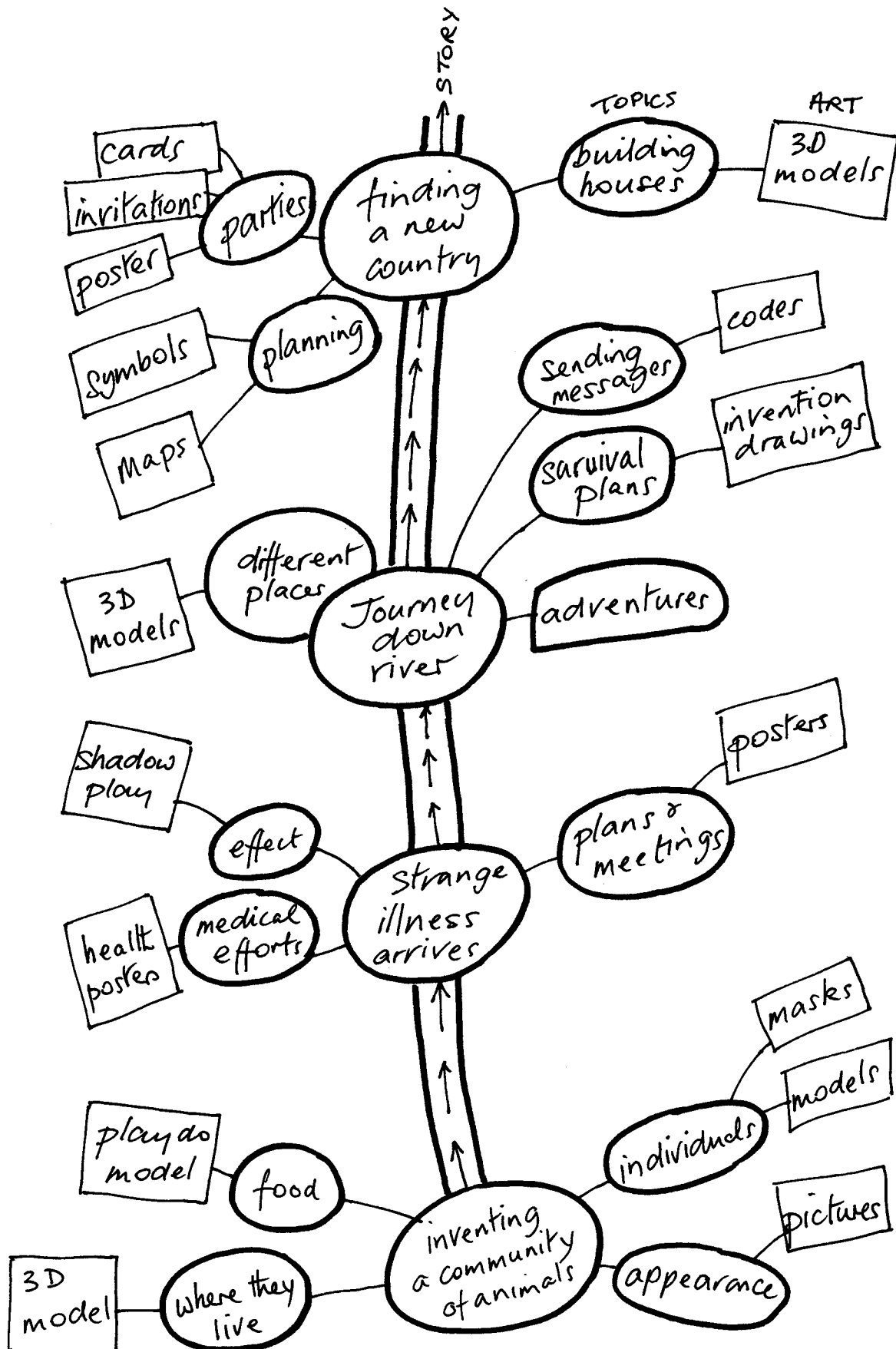
The character of a resource book for teachers is that the activities can be taken in any order, and fitted by the teacher into his or her lesson plans. I am very aware that many teachers like the children to perceive activities as being linked, and part of a more comprehensive experience. It certainly makes sense for the children, since having experiences which overlap, and relate to or reinforce each other will help to build up their understanding. They will also respond more creatively if they feel 'at home' with the topic. For these reasons, I am including here a suggestion of how art, design, and language development might be linked with a wide variety of subjects and activities.

A linking theme can be a story which the children invent themselves. They can focus on subjects the story touches on as they progress, for example, how the animals in the story live. Then you can give them the opportunity to produce drawings, maps, and posters, and even create a small exhibition.

## Cross-curricular responsibilities

I believe passionately in the idea that language development, be it in the mother tongue or a foreign language, should be experienced as part of the child's overall development. Of course, cross-curricular work is the characteristic way in which much teaching of *young* children has been done over many years.

However, as with all powerful notions, this approach has a good side and a bad side. The bad side, in this case, is that as a language teaching specialist I may not be sufficiently informed about, and sensitive to, the concerns of specialists in other aspects of the curriculum I wish to involve. The following paragraphs are addressed in particular to those teachers who want to involve art and design in their language teaching, but feel less than well-informed about the principles of art, crafts, and design education.



CONNECTING TOPICS AND ART THROUGH STORY

## Specialist teachers

The ideal situation is one in which an art specialist is willing to combine their lesson time and resources and, above all, their vision and experience, with yours.

The advantages of cooperation are as follows:

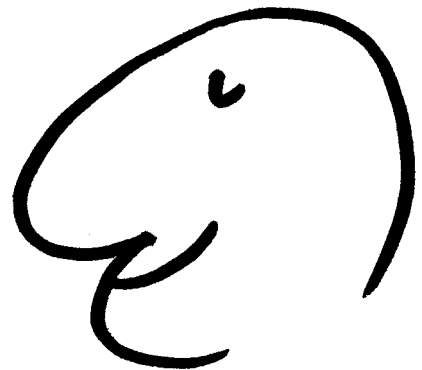
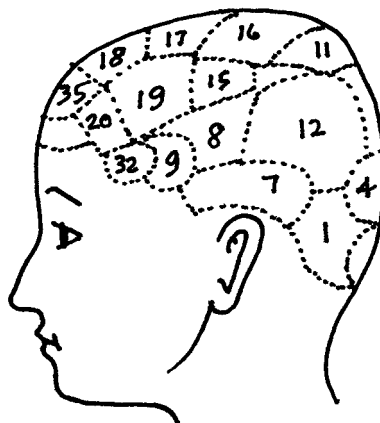
- your lesson time is effectively ‘doubled’
- you can draw on the expertise and interest of the other teacher
- you have access to far more resources, in terms of materials and equipment
- you can provide meaningful activities for the children in which they experience the foreign language as being important in different ways
- the work can be your contribution to the current drive in primary education worldwide to develop cross-curricular work.

Even if you cannot join forces with an art specialist, you can still use the activities in this book, particularly if you follow the suggestions in the instructions for the individual activities.

## Is there right and wrong, good and bad in art?

Art and design are physical manifestations of thinking and feeling. If this premise is accepted, we must understand that when we evaluate art and design, we are evaluating thinking and feeling. So the question becomes ‘What are good thoughts and feelings?’

Doesn’t the answer largely depend on the context? For example, a cheerful remark may be perfect at one moment, but quite inappropriate at another. Rembrandt’s studies, explanatory diagrams, and cartoons can all be ‘right’ in different contexts.



However, there *are* forms of thinking and of drawing which I feel are always undesirable: boastful, deceitful, slick ideas do not help many people. Art, like any other human activity, is full of such things—surely we should not give such attitudes and ideas any encouragement!

Clichés may be regarded as sensitive, and even profound, by the uninformed. However, they actually contribute little, because they are not derived directly from experience. They are passed on as phrases or as images—basically, we all know them and they tell us nothing new. To teach children tricks for drawing horses' heads, for example, prevents them from developing a sense of drawing as a whole. This is rather like only teaching a few fixed phrases in English, and not helping the children to experience how the language works. While a few tricks can be quite useful at times, the main thrust of our work throughout the curriculum must be in helping the children to develop as thinking and feeling people, not merely manipulators of essentially low-level techniques.

There are some suggestions in the activities in this book for helping children to judge the character or shapes of objects. I do not say that 'you must draw a bird by drawing two ovals, one for its head and one for its body'—that would be a trick. What I say is that every animal and object has its shape, and that it is helpful when reproducing a shape to relate it to rectangles, triangles, or circles. There is plenty of opportunity when using this technique for studying, reflecting, and making decisions—a technique is not necessarily a trick. Cézanne found cubes in nature, but he also emphasized the importance of 'going back to nature', i.e. of looking at nature, and indeed all personal experience, and trying to make sense of it. It is this balance which I believe in. Use a map, by all means, but eventually you will have to get off the beaten track and see what you can discover for yourself.

It can be very easy to assume that art and design should *always* be pushing forward the frontiers of experience. There *are* times when we need an easily recognizable picture—for example, on road signs! In some contexts, a well-known and readily recognizable image can turn out to be 'the best picture'.

So, in conclusion, we are left with the same criteria for evaluating art that we would use when evaluating any other human thinking and communication activity. Broadly speaking, people who are familiar with art, and who give it high value in their lives, are likely to judge a picture as 'good' if the shapes, colours, lines, and textures are arranged in a characterful relationship with each other. The same is true if the medium of expression is used with sensitivity and delight—but then, that applies to all communication!

## Copying and colouring-in

Copying is a natural part of development, particularly if it is selective copying rather than an attempt to make a replica. However, constant copying without reflection produces dependence on others, and the regurgitation of existing forms and ideas.

Colouring-in printed line pictures is very common: most children enjoy it. Most children also enjoy eating chocolate and sucking lollipops, but we all know that such things are damaging to their health! Colouring-in, like copying, leads to an extremely narrow concept of art, unless they want to colour-in their own drawings, which is, of course, quite a different matter.

My policy with my own children is to accept a certain amount of chocolate eating, and colouring-in of pictures, but to do my best—not always successfully—to offer enticing alternatives that are more likely to be beneficial for their minds and bodies.

## Responding to the children's work

Talking about pictures in a foreign language is not easy. The most important thing is not to encourage the children to think that the main aims in art are photographic realism, slickness, and neatness. Frequently, asking the question: *What's this?* makes children think that making something naturalistically recognizable is the only purpose in art.

If you want to compliment a child, say:

*What a lovely picture!*  
*What an interesting idea!*  
*That's a frightening robot!*

If you want the child to talk about his or her picture, say:

*Tell me about your picture rather than What is it?*

If you want to respond to the quality of the painting, say:

*I love these colours here! They are so rich!*  
*Are the colours and shapes happy/unhappy angry?*

If the picture has a design purpose:

*Tell me about your picture.*  
*What is this picture for?*  
*What do you want them to think/feel/do?*  
*Can people see it?*  
*Can people understand it?*

If you want to respond to what he/she might do with the picture:

*I think your mum and dad will love this picture.*

*Who do you want to see this picture?  
Where do you want to put it?  
You can put it on the wall in your kitchen/bedroom.  
Can I put your picture on the wall in the classroom?*

If you want the child to get away from clichés and stereotypes, say:

*Look at the houses/trees/clouds/flowers through the window. They are all special.  
Tell me about this part of the picture (rather than What's this?).  
Is that Mary or Jenny? Do Mary and Jenny look the same? What's the difference?*

If you want to respond negatively, I would suggest that you do so through questions which help the child to realize for him or herself what is unsatisfactory:

Teacher: *What do you want to show in your picture?*  
Child: *John.*  
Teacher: *Has John got a fat face or a thin face?*  
Child: *A thin face.*  
Teacher: *Is this face a fat or a thin face?*  
Child: *A fat face.*  
Teacher: *Do you want to make it thinner?*

### She's an artist!

One of the worst things we can do to children is to label them, and it's just as bad to label them a 'good artist' as a 'bad artist'. When a *good artist* becomes the *class artist*, the child is trapped in that role, while calling a child a *poor artist* is enough to make anyone give up altogether!

The best way of acknowledging a child's gifts is to respond with joy to what they produce:

*What a lovely picture! Let's put it on the wall so that other people can see it and enjoy it (enjoy rather than admire).*

### The polished product

It is very tempting to only praise and display work which looks clever and neat, because this can impress some people, and reflect well on the teacher. After all, teachers need praise and acknowledgement, too! However, we must remember that the most important responsibility we have is to ensure that our children develop as rich and responsible individuals: 20 butterflies, neatly drawn by you, and neatly coloured in by the children, represent 20 minds being led one step nearer to accepting the ordinary and the shallow!

## Teach them or let them discover for themselves?

Both are important. Teaching (i.e. telling, explaining, and demonstrating) can be offered at the point where the child has a conscious need for help. For example, if you want the children to draw butterflies, look at a photograph of a butterfly together (or, if you are lucky, the real thing). Talk about the shape and size of its wings compared with its slim little body, and then ask the children to draw it. This is when language has a most important role in guiding and inspiring.

## Art for communication

Drawing is usually thought of as a form of personal expression which other people might or might not understand and enjoy. However, drawing and designing can also be used as a way of communicating a specific idea which is readily understood by other people. Developing communication skills in children must be one of the most important of our tasks in school.

Communication skills require an awareness and understanding of content, audience, and medium/design. Here is an example:

### *Designing and drawing picture symbols*

Content: What are the most obvious visual features of the person or thing to be communicated? From which viewpoint?

Audience: What will they recognize easily? What will they understand and care about?

Medium/design: Colour or black and white? Size? Needs to be visible from a distance, perhaps from a moving vehicle, or from nearby?

## Publishing, performing, and displaying

Traditionally, the only receiver of a child's communication in school was the teacher. I believe it is most important for children to learn how to communicate with a wider variety of people, and in a broader context than the classroom. Art and crafts lend themselves to this wider form of communication. They can be displayed in many places, for example, in the school lobby, the local bank or store, or a community hall. Publishing (making the children's texts and pictures available in book form) can lead to books being put in the school library, and the local bookshop or coffee bar.

Art and crafts can contribute to dramatic performances, too. Make-up, the creation of masks, costumes, and props, and the designing and painting of backdrops, all require creative input.

Through all these activities, the children can have the pleasure of seeing that their work is appreciated. At the same time, they can

experience the responsibility of trying to do a good job in their communication with other people.

## Parents and colleagues

It is important that the parents and your colleagues respect, or, at least accept, what you are doing! Parents often criticize the ‘songs and games’ approach to primary language teaching, claiming that although the children may be having lots of fun, they are not making much progress. You need to make it clear to them that your approach involves integrated, cross-curricular activities. Take every opportunity to demonstrate that the children are developing their language proficiency through these activities (see ‘Publishing, performing, and displaying’, above). You might also produce a ‘rationale’ for doing what you are doing. Here is a draft version which you might like to adapt:

Language is meaningful to children when it is experienced as an important part of an activity which matters to them individually.

Children feel that creative art activities are interesting and enjoyable. They therefore offer a powerful way of integrating language and action.

*The added advantage of creative art activities is that the relatively limited language proficiency of the children is not a drawback!*