The Design and Technology Project (DTP) is one of the three Nuffield projects which aim to support the teaching and learning of secondary design and technology in the United Kingdom. The Technology Enhancement Programme, reviewed in this journal by Banks and McCormick (1995), and the Royal College of Art Schools Technology Project are the other two.

To help improve the teaching of the subject at Key Stage 3 (11–14 years) and Key Stage 4 (14–16 years), DTP materials have been produced to facilitate ‘teaching through sequences of tasks designed for specific learning purposes’. Materials for use at Key Stage 3 have already been reviewed here (McCormick, 1996). These present materials cover two of the five topics which make up the series at Key Stage 4:

- Product Design
- Food Technology
- Textiles
- Graphics
- Electronics

For each of the five topics, one has a book for individual students, a book of resource tasks containing 30 photocopiable practical tasks, and a teacher’s guide. These facilitate the teaching and learning of the topic through three principal activities:

- short, practical resource tasks which will make students think and help them to acquire the knowledge and skills to design and make products.
- case studies, describing how real businesses design, manufacture, market and sell their products. Through the interaction of people and products, the students will learn more than from their own design-and-make tasks by fitting those tasks into the wider context of real scenarios.
- more demanding capability tasks which require the students to design and make a product that works. The teacher will need to sequence the work carefully so that all the requisite knowledge and skills acquired from the resource tasks and case studies can be built into the capability tasks.

The books follow the content and general purpose of the National Curriculum in England and Wales, as one might expect, and reflect adequately the changes brought about by the revised Order of 1995. This Order
represented something of a return to the past and McCormick (1996) has rightly drawn attention to the National Curriculum’s ‘lack of vision with respect to the context of technological activity’. Although these materials go some way beyond the demands of the National Curriculum, they lack the broad Science, Technology and Society dimension of, say, the Science and Technology in Society (SATIS) materials. The DTP materials refer to technical, economic, aesthetic, moral, social and environmental values, yet in the textiles module, for instance, the emphasis appears to be much more on the aesthetic (fashion and ‘street cred’ – their words, not mine) than on the other values. This emphasis is likely to be increased in the classroom. Many teachers pay little attention to these wider social values at the moment, regarding them as unimportant because they are not overly assessed in examination questions, and they are unlikely to be persuaded otherwise by the evidence offered here.

The students’ books contain much interesting and useful information and the teachers’ guides are highly structured and helpful, especially to those teaching topics within the Design and Technology syllabus unfamiliar to them from their own undergraduate courses. There is strong mention of assessment and useful cross-referencing to the requirements of the various examination boards. There is considerable merit in the comprehensive nature of these materials, but this very quality runs the risk of encouraging an over-dependence on them. Experience teaches us that many of the innovative teaching curriculum materials devised over the years have failed simply because teachers did not implement them in the spirit in which they were intended. Simply to employ them in ‘cook book’ fashion negates the most important and fundamental role of the teacher, that of interpreter. There is also a very real danger of this happening. Curriculum transfer is not merely a case of implementation, but one of assimilation and adaptation. The teacher’s role in cultural accommodation is fundamentally important. Similarly, without adequate training in the suggested pedagogy, there will be a failure to understand the integrated nature of the programme. In this worst case, the materials will simply exacerbate the problems of poor teaching.

From the point of view of design, a spirit these materials ought fundamentally to embody, the materials leave something to be desired. The language of the student resource materials and capability tasks is not suitably differentiated to cater for the needs of all students. The illustrations in the student’s book on textiles show a measure of inconsistency which a colleague described as ‘bordering on the schizophrenic’. Although about half of the illustrations are in colour, the use of colour is poor. Illustrations of embroidery, batiks and other fabrics appear in dull black and white, but tables whose information is self-evident are in colour! Why could colour have not been used throughout? Some of the human figures illustrated in this book are poor, ever bizarre, and there is a slightly passé look about the rather zealous use of comic strip captions. The text ‘bubbles’ on some of the illustrations might create difficulties for poor readers because of