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AN EXAMINATION OF CERAMICS AS AN INTERDISCIPLINARY SUBJECT  
WITHIN THE TRANSITION YEAR PROGRAMME.

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## INTRODUCTION

In terms of the crafts industry, it is not sufficient for craft workers to be brilliantly creative, they must also be marketers, business managers, public relations officers, financial wizards and sales agents.

Lesley Reid,  
Chief executive of the Crafts  
Council of Ireland. (1)

The interdisciplinary nature of the Transition Year reflects the kind of world we live in and the way in which several activities connect and interact. This is especially true of the crafts area, including ceramics. In reference to cross-curricular integration, Professor Iseult McCarthy suggests that ....

.....Teachers of Art, craft and design should appreciate the potential of such linkages and be enabled to foster them as circumstances allow. (2).

This study arose from my interest in the ceramic craft and how it can be taught in terms of an interdisciplinary project in the Transition Year Programme. The aims of the project were to develop an appreciation of ceramics through acquiring skills, and an awareness of the interaction between ceramic, business and other curricular subjects.

Skills learned in transition year are ones that should relate to real life situations, and the world which the student will enter. Today's employers seek self motivated dedicated employees with an ability to perform well as part of a team. The transition year programme is aimed at developing theses skills within the student, through projects such as developing a mini company.

Chapter one outlines the Transition Year Programme and its aims in terms of student development and curriculum content. It also looks at the overall benefits of the programme referring to both the community and the school.

Art and design must always be...evaluated first and foremost in its own right if it is it also to have validity in the context of cross-curricular work.(3) Norman Manners. (3)

The second chapter defines ceramics, and its relevance to our lives and economy. It gives an indication of the position of ceramics in the Irish Crafts Industry., and an outlook for its future. It then asks the question of why ceramics is taught in the TYP.



Chapter Three presents a profile of the model school, describing its approach to teaching in general and more specifically towards the Transition Year programme. It outlines the structure of the TYP and how it is assessed.

Chapter four outlines the ceramic mini-company project, its aims and objectives, and how it was organised and implemented.

Finally the conclusion lists some of the general findings and problems encountered in teaching the TYP, and then focuses on the results and difficulties faced during the mini-company ceramics module.

.I will be transition year option in relation to student development and interdisciplinary connections with other subjects. Suggestions for improvement of a ceramics module within transition year. assessing student attitudes through class discussion and questionnaires.

#### FOOTNOTES INTRODUCTION.

1. Iseult McCarthy. "An External Perspective" in The Changing Curriculum, Perspectives on the Junior Certificate, ed. Tony Crooks, (Dublin: O'Brian Educational Ltd., 1990) p. 40.
3. Norman Manners, Three Dimensional Experience (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995) p.25.



## CHAPTER 1

### AN OUTLINE OF THE TRANSITION YEAR PROGRAMME;

#### The Programme And Its Aims.

The Transition year option was introduced in 1974 by the Minister for Education at that time; Richard Burke, T.D. It was introduced on a pilot basis with three participating schools, and designed to meet the needs of both pupils who intended to end their formal full-time schooling, and those who would continue to the senior cycle. Twenty-three years later seventy three percent of Irish schools are now participating in the Transition Year Programme (TYP). It is a one year course immediately following the Junior Certificate before proceeding to further study or vocational preparation. The TYP aims

to promote the personal social, educational and vocational development of pupils and to prepare them for their role as autonomous, participative and responsible members of society.(1)

The Transition year Programme is quite different to the prescribed Junior and Leaving certificate in that it allows students to develop and mature through taking responsibility for their own learning without the pressure of state examinations.

By freeing students to take responsibility for their own learning, the programme helps them to learn skills and to evaluate life in ways and in situations which arise outside the boundaries of the certificate programmes. (2)



The emphasis is on the personal development of the student with the intention of increasing their social competence and awareness. This is provided through students gaining experience of adult and working life as a basis for personal development and maturity. It helps them to learn new ways and methods of solving problems as part of a team in different environments, and to learn essential life skills for personal, civic, social and political use and for more informed leaving certificate choices.

The Department of Education describes the programme as a year which is both interdisciplinary and student centred:

.....offering pupils a broad educational experience with a view to the attainment of increased maturity, before proceeding to further study and /or vocational preparation. It provides a bridge to help pupils make the transition from a highly structured environment to one where they will take greater responsibility for their own learning..... (3)

The curriculum content is a matter for selection and adaptation by the individual school, with regard to guidelines set by the department of education, the requirements of pupils, the views of parents and employment possibilities and the wider interests of the local area. Since the transition year course is set by the individual schools and is not a mainstream exam course, the curriculum is tailor made to suit (as much as possible) the needs of the pupils within each school, leaving plenty of scope for exploration of educational paths which would not be possible within a prescribed mainstream courses. Thus every programme is individual in its structure and content.



The Department of Education has recognised that schools may need assistance with the development of Transition Year Programmes, and by way of addressing this need, the In Career Development Unit have set up the Transition Year Support Team. It comprises of a four person core team, based in Dublin, and ten regional team members which are spread throughout the country.

#### Who Benefits From The Transition Year Programme?

According to the department of education in their senior cycle guide for parents and pupils, transition year has major benefits not only for the pupils involved but also for the partners in education: parents, teachers, local community and the world of work. (4) Through allowing parents and members of the locality opportunities to become actively involved with transition year activities, communities are encouraged to develop closer partnerships with schools in support of the Transition Year Programme. The programme should reinforce the point that working in partnership with schools is essential in addressing the challenge of future change. This can be implemented through a number of ways, one of which would be the pupils gaining work experience in the local community, through a variety of methods: work placement, work shadowing, community service, case studies, e.t.c.

The T.Y.P in theory should benefit both the school, because it is enriching the range of learning methods within the school. Teachers have the opportunity to realise their own creative potential, and have increased potential to take



responsibility for their own professional development through pushing the boundaries of learning within a school. In many cases teachers who have previously position of responsibility within Transition Year, have been offered positions of high responsibility such as vice-principal.

#### FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 1

1. The Department of Education, Transition Year Programme, Guidelines for Schools 1995/96, (Dublin: Stationary Office, 19896). p. 4.
2. Idem, Charting our Education Future: White Paper on Education, ( Dublin: Stationary office , 1995) p. 51.
3. Idem. Transtion year Programmes: Guidelines for Schools p. 3.
- 4 An Roinn Oideachais, The Right Track, The New Senior Cycle Guide for Parents And Pupils (Dublin Stationary Office, 1995) p.3.



## CHAPTER 2.

THE ROLE OF CERAMICS WITHIN OUR LIVES, OUR ECONOMY AND THE  
TRANSITION YEAR PROGRAMME, AND ITS INTERDISCIPLINARY  
CONNECTIONS.What is ceramics.

The term ceramics is a general term used to describe anything made with clay, this would cover many techniques such as hand, slab or coil building, throwing (using a potters wheel) or using moulds.

The possibilities of what can be made with clay are only limited by the boundaries of the users imagination. Clay has been used for thousands of years as a medium from which to make functional and decorative objects. The main attractions of using clay are the ease with which the material can be manipulated into a desired shape, and the satisfaction and therapeutic value one can derive from working with it.

Ceramic items form part of our daily lives; from morning till night we use ceramic objects whether it be the mug that we drink from, or the wash basins we wash in, ceramics surrounds us. Most of the ceramics in use are factory produced, but these industries still need to employ a ceramic designer who has a knowledge of the material. Transition year should be a time when students who are interested in ceramic design are given an opportunity to develop a familiarity with clay and its many uses. Whether it be



for industrial mass-production for a more personal hand crafted item, it is equally important that they cultivate an awareness of ceramic design, and the process of developing an idea through clay.

#### Ceramics as part of the Irish economy.

The crafts sector of the Irish market has enjoyed a huge increase in sales in the design area over the past ten years or so. This is especially true for the area of ceramic production, which is evident from the growing numbers of ceramic exhibitors at craft trade fairs such as the annual 'Showcase' in the RD.'S. This renewed interest in ceramic could be due to a higher standard of living which means that people can now afford to purchase hand crafted items, and the fact that the increased availability of grant aid has allowed more people to set up craft businesses, so a wider range of ceramic items are available.

Ceramic design accounts for a large portion of the craft market in Ireland today, with the types of clay work being produced diversifying from interior design commissions to intricate jewellery pieces. The current position of the Irish crafts market has been shaped by fluctuating economic trends over the past two decades; the turbulent years of the early eighties with its high inflation and VAT rates had a crippling effect on crafts



businesses, but fortunately this period was followed by a decade of relatively steady economic expansion and increased employment. (1)

There are many indications to suggest that the ceramics craft market is steadily improving. Statistics provided by the Irish trade Board in 1994 showed that that hand crafted tableware segment of the ceramics trade was estimated to have grown substantially since 1988 and, at the time of publishing, was estimated to grow by approximately 8-10% in 1995, making it the fastest growing segment within the giftware market. (2).

According to Leslie Reid, the present chief executive of the crafts council, 'if trends into the new millennium continue along present lines, the future looks good for the Irish crafts industry,- provided the industry is sensitive to the changes in marketing these trends also indicate.'(3) News letter Dec1996. A reflection of these upward trends can be seen in reports from retail outlets such as the Kilkenny shops who are experiencing a huge upsurge in sales of pottery and other hand crafted items.

There is a growing interest from the corporate market in the commissioning of individual crafts people to produce innovative gifts, exclusive accessories and art works to order. Many ceramic businesses such as 'Carton Ceramics' have received



commissions for specialised work like for example the installations for the bar interior of 'The Turks Head' on Parliament St. Dublin.

The Irish ceramics range has come a long way from the traditional shamrock covered gift ware, there is a new generation of talented and innovative craft ceramists emerging, who posses a keen eye for quality and product standards. On the 'indirect export' side of the Irish craft market, in general retailers agree that at present it is fashionable to buy Irish. Tourists are eschewing traditional 'souvenir' products for more unique, upmarket, hand made products. As Ireland develops in line with the rest of the European community, so do the opportunities for crafts people, both traditional and modern.(4)

#### Why Teach Ceramics as an Interdisciplinary Subject in The Transition Year Programme?

The Transition year guidelines give outline six reasons for teaching Art Craft and Design in the TYP, which are discussed below in terms of teaching ceramics within the programme:

- To develop career and hobby options.

The above information would suggest that a career in ceramic design could be a rewarding occupation, providing an opportunity for both artistic expression and fulfilment, as well as financial reward. For those students who choose to pursue an area



of ceramics as a career, it is important they gain as broad an understanding of the craft and the areas it links into at this stage of their education. A knowledge of the basic skills and techniques of working with clay is a useful skill which can lead to many varied areas of employment, like for example community development programmes, rehabilitation work, working with established potters in this country or abroad, fine art ceramic sculpture or more business related connections such as ceramic supplies distribution.

Ceramic activities on a non-commercial level are chosen by many as a part-time endeavour or a hobby. If one can gain access to a kiln, the rest of the required materials are relatively inexpensive. A common misconception about working with clay is that it is an expensive craft. Clay is actually relatively cheap material, the type most commonly used by schools is a red earthenware which may be purchased in 25kg bags for under £5. The beauty of the material is that, once it hasn't been fired, clay pieces may be recycled again and again so that there is no waste. Tools and equipment required are simple items, most of which could actually be home-made. The only difficulty is gaining access to a kiln, but most ceramists are willing to rent kiln space in return for a small fee.

- To facilitate the students development and self expression by interacting with the Arts.

Everybody has a desire to express creative talent in some way or another. Clay is one of the most versatile and malleable materials which makes it particularly attractive for



beginners. Its immediacy in response to fingers, and its capacity for change at great speed, enables the user to enjoy a rich three-dimensional experience, and without having to have had much previous experience. Handling a responsive material can, in itself, provide stimulation to mental creativity (5). Clay has long been recognised and used in situations which seek to promote the self development of the user, especially in schools, and rehabilitation centres.

Modelling in clay forms the foundation for many types of sculpture, and as is a commonly used material from which to make the original model for a piece to be cast in metal, like bronze for example. A ceramics module can therefore become a basis on which to expand the students knowledge of the visual arts, and their understanding of the process of creating such forms. (6)

- Development of non verbal languages.

Art and design, including ceramics, have their own special functions in our lives and in education. They are a means of communicating responses, ideas, opinions, emotions, a reflection of our culture and an opening to creative thinking and action. As a result they link with other areas of activity or curriculum subjects, so that in essence art and design, and three dimensional work in particular, can be used as a vehicle for learning across the board.(7) Clay is a medium which lends itself easily to the expression of any theme,



emotion or statement. Because it doesn't require the use of machinery or application of heat to make the material workable, clay is a very direct medium. The most commonly used tools when working with clay are the hands and fingers. This direct method of working makes it easier to transfer thoughts and messages from a mental to a visual and tactile state in the form of a three dimensional object.

- To provide a basis for improving standards at leaving certificate level.

Many students choose pottery as their craft option for the Leaving Certificate exam. Transition year provides an opportunity for students to gain some experience with clay and to get involved with projects which the Leaving Certificate curriculum could not allow time for, such as working with a ceramic artist. If the student has gained a basic understanding of using the material in Transition Year, it enables them to make an informed decision about which craft to choose for the Leaving Certificate exam, or when making choices within Vocational Preparation courses.

It is important that students are given a chance to at least try out such crafts and realise the employment potential of ceramics later in life. Transition year is about exploring, and provides a perfect opportunity to allow students to explore the possibilities of working with clay; they can test their ability with using the material, decide whether or not they like using the material, try setting up their own ceramics



company or go on work experience to see how a real ceramic workshop operates. For many it might be the only opportunity they will get to work with clay in such depth, and even if they decide that they do not want to work with it again, at least they will have developed an understanding of the craft and what it entails.

- Developing an awareness and appreciation of Art, Craft and Design

The Transition Year Art group of students (many studying art for the first time) were questioned about the meaning of the word ceramics and what relevance it holds for them. This was carried out through the form of a questionnaire which was distributed before the ceramics module commenced. The answers reflected a poor understanding of the craft, and very little knowledge of the role of ceramics as an Irish craft.

It is important that students be made aware of the significance of ceramic design as part of the Irish Crafts Industry, which in turn forms a vital part of the countries economy. These students are perspective consumers of ceramic design, that is why it is important to create an awareness of craft design within a school. Susan Zelouf, marketing manager with Michael Bell Design Furniture Makers made an interesting observation on this point, 'We must make it a priority to educate the consumer as to the differences between mass production and craft design - our services and the quality associated with this exclusive design business'.<sup>(8)</sup> If students develop an understanding of the process involved when creating ceramic pieces, and the importance of good



design at a secondary school level, then it follows that as future customers they will appreciate the difference between hand crafted items, and mass produced products.

- Ceramics as an interdependent activity and it's cross curricular links.

.As ceramics is one of the world's oldest art forms it should play an important part in the both the Transition Year Art and History classes. Because of the fact that vitrified ceramics preserves so well, there are examples of pottery found all over the world through which we can document the history of many races of people throughout the ages. The ancient Greeks, for example recorded the major events in the life of a person on their burial pottery. The Greek custom of recording life and death in ceramic has provided us with a rich source of cultural information about the race. (9)



## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER 2.

1. The Crafts Council of Ireland. News Letter. September 1996. Issue no 25. (Kilkenny, Crescent Workshop. 1996).
2. The Irish Trade Board, Market Opportunities in Ireland (Dublin, 1994) P23.
3. The Crafts Council of Ireland, News Letter December 1996.
4. Ibid.
5. Norman Manners, Three Dimensional Experience (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1995) p. 46.
6. Theo Luns, The Beginners Book of Clay Modelling (London: Blanford Press, 1968) p25.
7. Manners, Three Dimensional Experience. p. 25.
8. Crafts Council. News Letter Dec. 1996.
9. Clodagh Holahan and Maureen Roche, Art Craft Design. (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1993) p 322.



## CHAPTER 3

PROFILE OF GREENDALE COMMUNITY SCHOOL;  
AN OUTLINE OF THE SCHOOLS APPROACH TO THE TRANSITION YEAR, AND  
A DESCRIPTION THE ART DEPARTMENT.

The Sample School; Grenndale Community School.

Greendale community school is situated in Kilbarrack, North county Dublin, where a strong community spirit prevails. There are now five hundred students attending Greendale, which is a substantial decline in numbers from almost two thousand in 1985. The reasons for this are both demographic, and because of the abundance of other secondary schools in the area; The Donahies, Dela Salle and Bayside community School which are all within a five mile radius. The team of staff comprises of approximately forty members, all of whom are encouraged to work together in a spirit of comradeship, in all aspects of school planning and management.(1)

Discipline is high on the list of priorities at Greendale, there is a strict code of conduct and regulations and procedures are kept under active review through regular staff meetings. All teachers are expected to give generous commitment to the maintenance of high standards of discipline not only within the classroom but throughout the school. The



school recognises that education in its fullest sense should cater for the moral, social, physical and intellectual development of its students in a positive caring environment. Examination success is held in equal importance to the fostering of a sense of responsibility, the development of a set of values and good conduct which should enhance the student lives both now and in the future. In this way the general approach to teaching within the school is in keeping with the concept of Transition Year, which, as described by Chris Conolly, supports the philosophy of 'whole-school staff working in consultation with students, parents, school management and the local community, to tailor learning to the specific needs of students.'(2)

According to the school handbook, students at Greendale are encouraged and given every opportunity to develop their aptitudes fully in a positive atmosphere, with the full co-operation of the counsellors and the pastoral care team. The term "pastoral care" describes a philosophy of caring for the overall welfare of the student and ideally it should permeate all interaction between students, staff and the teaching of all subjects. It encompasses the academic and examination success of the student, the improvement of their self image and the development of a set of values. It looks at the development of sensitivity of the student towards the needs of others, and of respect for themselves, others and property. It addresses the issue of developing social ease, self esteem and skills which will equip the student to deal with the crises and responsibilities of adolescence and



adulthood. This includes the growth of mature autonomy and self discipline which will enrich their life and facilitate the students development to their full potential.

These are all areas of personal growth which are described in the Transition Year Guidelines, which recommend that the Transition Year should help facilitate personal growth and social development as a central concern of the school through active participation in a programme where the approach is as important as the process. Eileen Doyle reinforces this point by stating that

An effective Transition Year Option -like an effective school- must enable personal development to take place.(3)

She mentions the inclusion of personal development within the programme through Pastoral care, and through more specific activities such as an orientation day at the beginning of the school year; group decision making on projects or a leadership training course.

### Positive Teaching Policy

As is reflected by their pastoral care system, Greendale has long acknowledged the value of rewarding positive behaviour. A positive discipline programme was introduced in the school as a response to a widely recognised view that maintaining discipline in the classroom has become an increasingly difficult task. A list of rules, sanctions and rewards



which emphasise the positive rather than the negative was devised and the new system was implemented in Sept. 1996. Again the focus is on building the pupils self esteem. The way they see themselves is crucial in how they interact and develop within a team. Pupils with a low self esteem are unable to interact constructively with others. Since the aim of transition year is to encourage team work and pupil interaction, positive teaching methods and pastoral care form an integral base for the success of such schemes.

The Transition Year Programme is now in its third year of running at Greendale. The course co-ordinator and year-head with the assistance of the Transition Year Support Team member appointed to the school, are the main organisers for the TYP. However because of the interdisciplinary nature of the programme, planning evolves from meetings between the core team of teachers who submit their plans for the forthcoming academic year in the previous June. These ideas are then discussed and a frame work built around them. Meetings held between the co-ordinators and any staff involved with the following year of the TYP are held in June. This gives people a chance to contribute their ideas and intentions for the forthcoming year,

#### The Structure of the Transition Year Programme.

Transition year is compulsory for all seventy fourth year students at Greendale. The curriculum consists of both core and modular subjects. Core subjects consist of



English, Irish, Maths, Religion, Physical Education, Computers, Biology/Biotechnology, Geography and Personal Health Education. All fourth year students study the aforementioned subjects for a fixed number of periods per week throughout the academic year. Modular subjects are studied for a number of periods per week over six weeks. These include Business Studies, Chemistry, Classical Studies, Craft Design, Elementary Electronics, Film Studies, Food Appreciation, History, Music Appreciation, and Relaxation Skills.

Students choose two optional subjects which are studied for four classes per week throughout the academic year. Their choices are as follows; An Introduction to Architecture and Construction, Art Portfolio, Computer graphics, Engineering, French/German and Geography.

In the final category of subjects, entitled 'Special Interest Area', students choose one of the following subjects and study it for one afternoon per week throughout the academic year; Drama, Music, School Magazine / Debating / Public Speaking, Engineering Technology or Fine Woodwork Design.

#### Assessment.

Eileen Doyle reflects that from the beginning of the Transition Year Option in the 1970s, that rather than developing a formal or standardised system of assessment, the emphasis has been on each individual school devising their own system according to its educational



ethos. (4) The Transition Year Guidelines recommend that assessment procedures should be,

...**diagnostic**, so as to provide accurate information with regard to pupil strengths and weaknesses, and **formative**, so as to facilitate improved pupil performance through effective programme planning and implementation.  
(5)

In Greendale, assessment is viewed as an integral part of the teaching and learning process in the Transition Year. Parents are furnished with regular reports throughout the year which outline the strengths and weaknesses which students are displaying in response to the different elements of the programme. In accordance with their pastoral care and positive teaching policy it is hoped that through the various modes of assessment that students will be led towards a greater self awareness and encouraged to take responsibility for personal learning and performance. These modes of assessment may include any or all of the following:

- (i) An overall evaluation of pupil performance by the teachers.
- (ii) Written, practical, oral and aural assessments.
- (iii) Report of work experience.
- (iv) Projects, portfolios and an exhibition of work.
- (v) Pupil diary with record of personal progress.
- (vi) Rating scales., record of skills and competencies attained.



The outcome of the assessment process should be a 'Pupil Profile', which would include a statement of achievement in all the areas of studying and learning activities engaged in during the year. A certificate will be awarded to each student on completion of the year.

### FOOTNOTES; CHAPTER 3.

1. Greendale Community School, Handbook, 1996/97. (Dublin , 1996) p. 5.
2. Chris Conolly, "Introduction", Transition Year Programme Resource Material 1994/95 eds. Eileen Doyle, Mary Ann Halton, Gerry Jeffers, Mary Keane, Dermot Quish. (Dublin: Action Team 1994)
3. Eileen Doyle, "The Transition Year" in Achievement and Aspiration; Curricular Initiatives in Irish Post Primary Education in the 1980's. eds. Kevin Williams, Gerry McNamara, and Don Heron, (Dublin: Drumcondra Teacher Training Centre, 1990. p. 25-26.
4. Ibid. p. 28.



5. The Department of Education, Transition Year Programmes: Guidelines for Schools 1996/97, (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1996) p. 9.



## CHAPTER 4.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE CERAMIC MODULE DEvised IN TERMS OF A MINI  
COMPANY:Aims and Objectives of the Module.

The overall aim of a project like this is not only to develop specific skills, but to demonstrate to students how subjects like businesses studies and craft interlink, and to develop a more holistic approach to education. The project was also aimed at the self development of the student which, for example could happen through developing a sense of achievement through producing good work. Team work can also provide the student with an opportunity to foster a sense of self-worth through allowing them to demonstrate their individual strengths and abilities in different areas of the business. In terms of preparing the student for life in general, the setting up of a business on a small scale and creating a product, encourages students to think about interfacing with the economy in which they will seek a place.

The aim of the project from the context of ceramics is to allow students to enjoy the tactile aspects of clay, to explore its visual qualities, and to develop an understanding and familiarity with the material and the process of developing a product



The skills to be learned were design (product and graphic), using plaster, mould making skills, and the techniques of using a press mould. All equipment and tools were available, though the students had to cost the materials and devise a capital outlay, as they would have to do if setting up their own business. .

The type of project covered is categorised under the "Practical Studies" heading of the Transition Year Guidelines, where it suggests a wide variety of activities with pottery being one of them. The guidelines also emphasise the cross-curricular value of such activities in the statement:

....appreciation of simple design and the wider everyday aspects of technology, applied science and art studies such as engineering, construction studies, technical graphics, home economics, agricultural science, art and music are invaluable in interdisciplinary activities such as mini-companies and other project related activities.(1)

The Guidelines also suggests that this could be seen as an opportunity for students to sample subjects, which they did not have access to in the junior cycle, with a view to the development of a broader perspective on senior cycle options.

#### How The Project Was Organised And Accomplished.

The ceramics module was devised in terms of a mini-company project, which involved interdisciplinary connections between Art, Business Studies, Computer Applications and English, Horticultural studies, Home economics and Chemistry. The



most difficult part of planning the module was organising the company groups so that they consisted of students from the required subject areas necessary to make up the group. For instance in a five person group making ceramic plant containers, at least one of the five must have selected horticulture as a modular subject, one business studies, and one craft design. The two remaining required subjects are English and Computer Applications which are core subjects and studied by all students.

An added incentive for the students was that a selection of the best products would be entered into the Forbairt sponsored 'Young Entrepreneur Scheme'(YES). This competition is designed for second level students, aiming to prepare them for a changing and increasingly difficult employment situation, by helping them to develop entrepreneurial skills through the experience of setting up and running a real business. (2) Its aims in terms of student development and learning content directly reflect those of the TYP. The underlying purpose of the scheme is to encourage students to become more resourceful and enterprising and to use their imagination and initiative in planning and operating a business. In the guidelines, the organisers point out that the most important objective of the competition is not the winning of prizes but rather the learning experience of participating. The competitions are there to provide a structure, to create specific goals and incentives and to reward outstanding achievements. (3) We found the YES guidelines were of tremendous value to us in terms of organising an



interdisciplinary module, especially since this is Greendales first year to participate in the YES.

The assignment that the group was given for their ceramics mini-company was to design, make and package a ceramic product that may be sold for £8 or less, using a mould making or slab building technique. There were specific reasons for choosing these techniques. Slab building is a versatile technique which can be easily be grasped by the student in a short space of time, as it doesn't require as much skill as other building techniques such as throwing or coil building. In order to use a press mould, the student needs to first know how to make a slab, so initially all students will begin by learning the latter technique. Because the class comprises of students with varying degrees of ability, it required a brief which gave the option of a simple or a more technically advanced project.

As an introduction to the project, and in order to gain an understanding of the type of shapes possible through using mould making or slab building techniques, all students participating in the project were shown slides of a variety of mould made and slab built ceramics by selected artists including Maxine Mearns, Elizabeth Fritsch, Graham Flight, Neil Reid (See plates. 2, 3, and 4). Then as a group of mixed students they brain stormed ideas for possible products, and in doing so, were encouraged to



think of ways in which they could incorporate other subject areas. The type of products they came up with were, plant holders which would link with horticultural studies, small dishes to hold cosmetic products which they were working on in chemistry class, a presentation container for confectionery items would be made in home economics and finally a board game. The class were then divided into teams ensuring that each team had at least one representative from each of the necessary subject areas. This meant that there might be some students in a team who hadn't chosen Art for this module, but each team included at least two Art students. The teams then voted and appointed their manager, accountant ,etc.

The people who would be doing art as one of their options were given a general ceramics question sheet (See appendix 1), the purpose of which was for them to start thinking about ceramics and for me as a teacher to get an idea of how these students regarded ceramics and what relevance it held for them. They would receive another questionnaire at the end of the project (appendix 2), which would review their attitude towards ceramic after having completed the module.

In collaboration with their business studies teacher, each team was given a market research homework assignment (see appendix 3). This involved each team visiting craft retailers and gift shops in an assigned area of Dublin city, interviewing the



sales manager and recording details of similar hand made products, in terms of price, packaging, design, decoration and sales statistics . In the meantime the teachers of subjects with which the ceramics project would interlink were informed of the students ideas, so as students could begin necessary research in these classes such as pricing the cost of materials, etc.

In the following class, the information from the students research was shared and we discussed what ideas were or were not feasible, so that each group could then select a product from their list of remaining possibilities. The products that were chosen were trinket boxes, Christmas tree decorations and hanging flower planters to be made using slab building techniques, and the mould made products that were chosen were a board game called 'solitaire', shallow dishes and a deeper plant pot. The next step was to develop prototypes which began with each Art student drawing their ideas on a 'design sheet'. They then collaborated, and one product was designed from a combination of the ideas. In their own time the proposed design was then to the remaining members of the team to get their seal of approval and any suggestions they had to make. This was a testing exercise in developing their interpersonal skills, and by now individuals strengths and weaknesses were beginning to emerge.

In the following class the students were introduced to clay through a demonstration of how to prepare it by kneading, which was followed by them carrying



out the same task with the piece of clay they had been given. Then they were shown the necessary skills for all the projects; how to roll out a slab of clay, how to make a template of a shape from cardboard, how and when to cut the shape from the slab of clay, and how to join two pieces of clay together by scoring the clay and applying slip.

At this point the class was divided into two; the groups who would be using plaster and those who were slab building. The slab builders needed to work on their templates for their products, so while they were working on that the mould makers were shown how to take a cast of an object, and how to make a drape mould. For the following three weeks each group worked on their individual prototypes. Because of the split in the class, we decided the fairest way to allot teaching time to each group was arrange it so that the mould users would receive attention for one half of the double period, and the slab builders the second. In order to use their teaching time them most effectively, the groups within each section worked at the same pace where possible. For example the plaster workers took their casts simultaneously so that they could all be shown how to use the moulds the following week. (Plate. 5) This was not always possible considering the variation of making techniques, but there was always something to be done such as rolling out more slabs, or decorating and packaging design to be worked on. This system required the students to use their own initiative, and to take responsibility for their time by using it constructively. Homework for these weeks



consisted of following up their reports and diaries which documented the progress of the project, and recorded information such as the amount of time each required for each task. This data was necessary for the student who was devising a costing sheet in business studies class.

As soon as every group had produced a prototype, we put them all together and each group gave brief report about their product, describing how it was progressing and what problems they had run into, if any. Some of the designs had been too ambitious, such as the initial lid design for the trinket boxes, which was changed to a much simpler and more time efficient plan, (Plate 28, and 30) This product evaluation time gave the other groups a chance to make any additional comments about the. The most constructive comments were made in relation to the standard of finish, which they all agreed needed to be higher for each product in order to bring them up to a saleable standard.

The whole class was shown different methods of applying coloured slip as a decorative medium.(Plates 29 and 30) Each group reviewed their decoration designs and decided whether or not the application of slip would suit their design. As there were only two weeks left in which to finish the project and most groups, especially the mould users, decided that pouring coloured slip onto their pieces was the most time efficient option. They proceeded to carry out this task, learned how to load the kiln and biscuit fire their proto-type. During the biscuit firing the earthenware pots are brought to a



temperature of approximately one thousand degrees centigrade, so that the clay vitrifies and is ready for the application of glaze.

In the following lesson, the whole class was shown how to apply glaze and make glaze tests. (Plate 25) The group who were making the solitaire game decided that glazing would be an unnecessary expense. Their product already looked attractive with the contrasting glass marbles and the matt surface of the terracotta. The Christmas tree decoration group also decided to leave some of their products unglazed, so as they would have two price ranges - the glazed items being more expensive.

The conclusion of the project was to make the leaflet which would accompany the product, and the packaging or labelling which at this stage had been designed by the designated member of the group during previous classes. With the help of the English teacher, one member of each group composed their information leaflet, or an instruction and rules sheet in the case of the game. It was proposed that these leaflets be translated into French and German for the benefit of foreign customers, but there wasn't enough time. The layout of these leaflets was designed through the collaboration of the art and computer applications classes.

One member of each group was assigned the task of designing and the packaging, in their Computer Applications class, and the actual package was made in



One member of each group was assigned the task of designing and the packaging, in their Computer Applications class, and the actual package was made in the Art class. The 'solitaire group' chose a Celtic theme for their hexagonal box which was based on the design for a pizza box! (Plates 15 - 17)



## FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 4.

1. Department of Education, Transition Year Programmes: Guidelines for Schools , (Dublin: Stationary Office,1996) p. 30.
2. Young Entrepreneurs Association, Young Entrepreneurs Schemes 1996/97: Introduction and Guidelines. (Dublin; 1995) p. 1.
3. Idem, Young Entrepreneurs scheme Guidelines 1996/97. p. 6.



## CONCLUSION

The success of the whole transition Year Programme depends on the contribution and commitment of all teachers involved. In order to interact successfully the Transition Year Core Team must hold regular meetings, and make themselves aware of what is happening with the inter-disciplinary subjects they are involved with.

Teachers agree that it is difficult to make a rigid plan for the year as there are always disruptions to be planned around and accommodated for. However, some would say that the beauty of the TYP is the fact that it is so flexible, and allows for a certain degree of spontaneity, which would be lost if the programme were confined to a rigidly constructed time plan.

While it is necessary to maintain certain degree of flexibility, it does make it difficult to get projects completed if the students are not available to do the work. This became a problem this year with the school play which involves all the transition year students. Because the play had to be organised subject to the availability of the director, we did not know at the beginning of the school year when the project would take place. It meant that some projects were interrupted and consequently the work was not



completed by the stated deadlines. This was especially inconvenient in terms of competition work. However this was an exception rather than the norm, and the same problem should not reoccur next year.

#### Observations in Relation to the Ceramics Mini-Company Module and Suggestions for Improvement.

Some major stumbling blocks encountered when teaching the ceramics module were pupils attendance and attitude towards homework. There were specific tasks which were necessary for TY students to complete such as market research, which students did not complete properly. They seemed to have developed a poor attitude towards homework in Transition Year, and found it difficult to initiate work themselves, and meet deadlines.

I found that the areas of attendance, homework, punctuality in completion of work assignments, and effective use of time, all called for carefull reviewing. It was necessary to devise more effective ways of implementing these matters. Correspondence with parents helped in dealing with the problem of attendance, as well as serious discussion with the pupil(s) regarding their responsibility to the rest of their team. In accordance with the positive teaching policy of the school, rather than reprimanding the student(s), the problem was approached in an positive manner. Improvements in attendance were rewarded with positive comments in the pupil's achievement record.



All the teachers found that completion of homework by Transition Year students was a problem. There seems to be an unconcerned attitude among the students regarding this issue, which seems to relate to the fact that they are not required to do a state examination. This indicates that the area of assessment also needs careful reviewing in order to increase motivation among students. However a large time plan, which displayed the deadlines of each stage of the project, went some way towards solving this problem. By viewing the whole project outlined in stages, students realised that in order to get the project completed it was necessary to follow this time plan. This led to an understanding of the consequences of not having their homework assignments completed, i.e falling behind on deadlines would lead to incompleteness of the project, and poor marks in their assessment/progress report sheet. Admittedly this did not work for everyone, and there were some students who did not fully complete the project, and as a result could not enter the YES competition. One hopes that they have learned from their mistakes.

The most difficult aspect of the planning the project was organising the interdisciplinary links so that the other teachers could accommodate the needs of students involved with the mini-companies, and so that each mini-company had a representative from each of the necessary linking subjects. It was also quite difficult to ensure that each mini-company held regular meetings, as there was no assigned class



time, other than their lunch break for them to meet. Ideally the project should be timetabled in such a way that the teachers and students from the other subject areas could meet with the art class at regular intervals throughout the project. A project like this demands a great amount of forward planning and flexibility on the part of all teaching staff involved.

The findings of the second questionnaire (see appendix 2) which was issued to the Art Students on completion of the module, were very encouraging. Most students agreed that they found the project more difficult than they first imagined, but enjoyed it none the less. They stated that they had learned from the experience in terms of developing both ceramic and personal skills. Ninety percent agreed that the project gave them a realistic idea of setting up a ceramics business, and interestingly only fifteen percent said they would like to work with ceramics as an occupation. The results of the questionnaire showed that, even though not all students produced work of a saleable standard, the project had achieved its aims in terms of developing the pupils awareness of ceramics and its links with other subjects in the TYP.



### LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

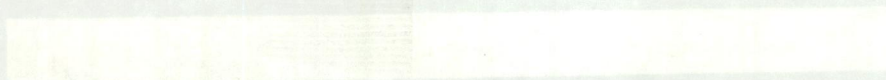
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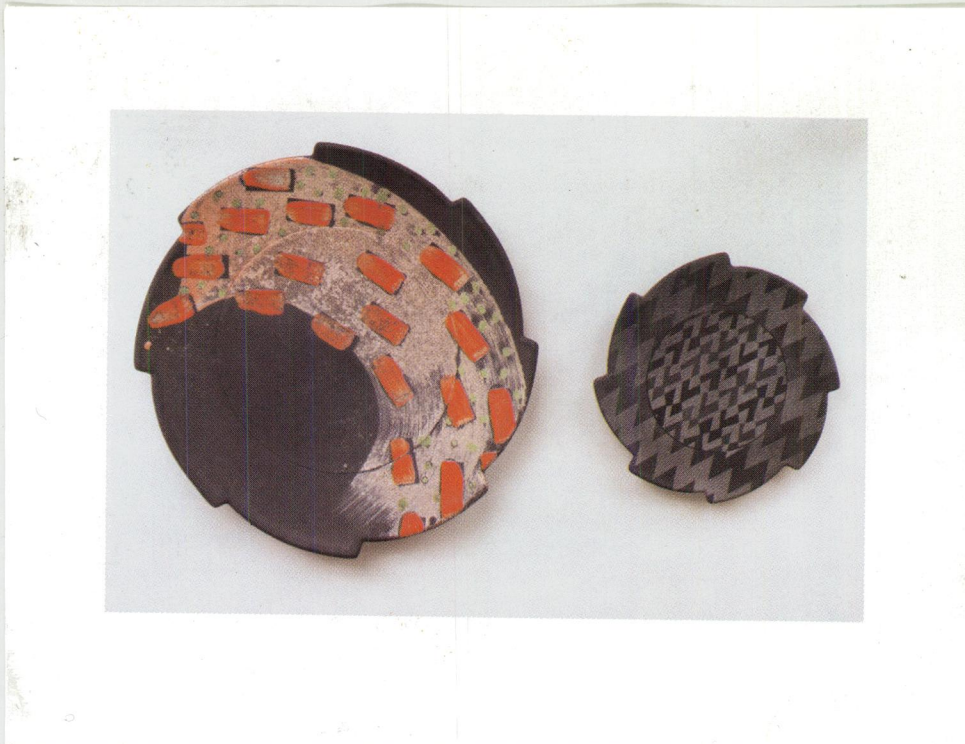


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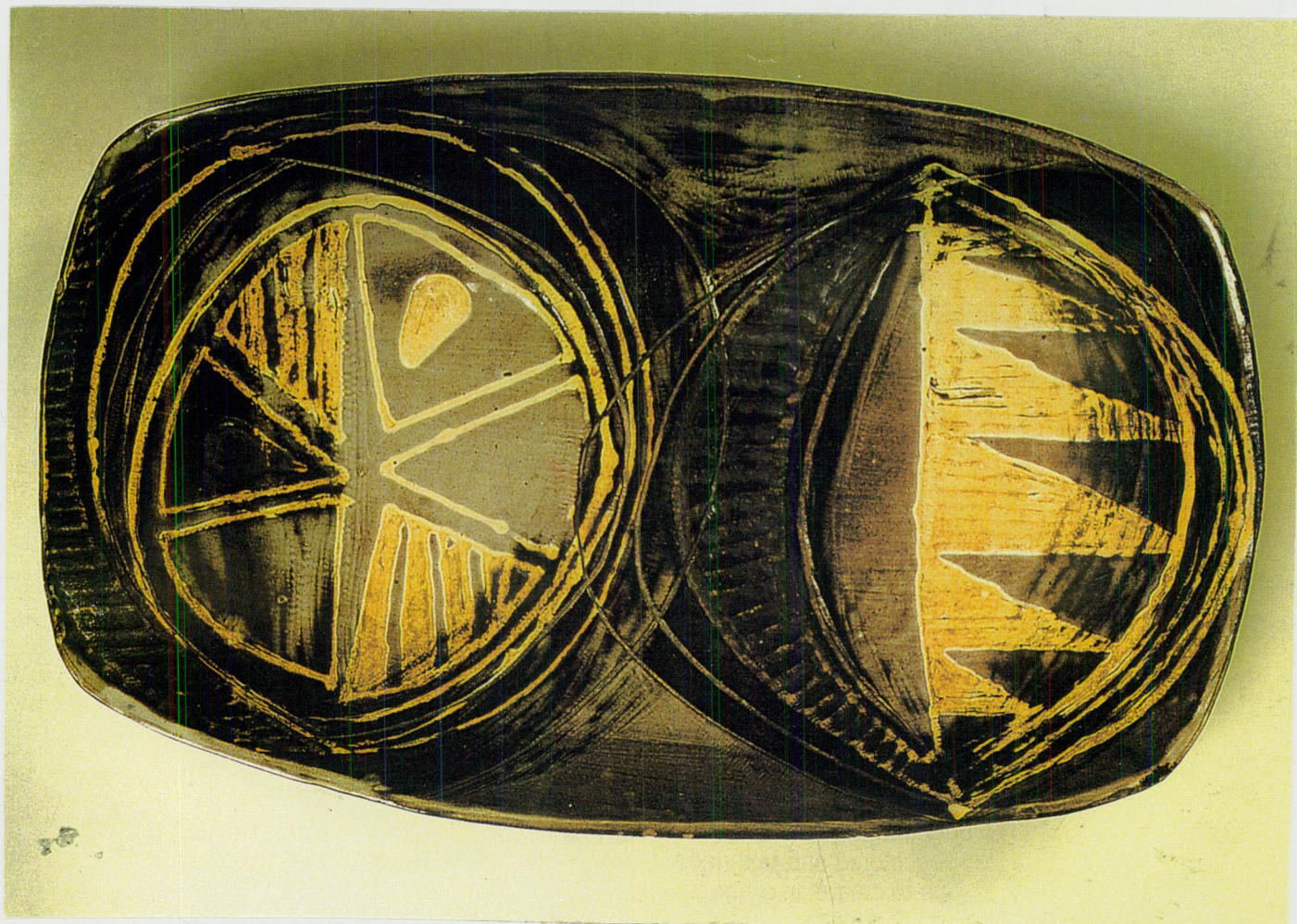


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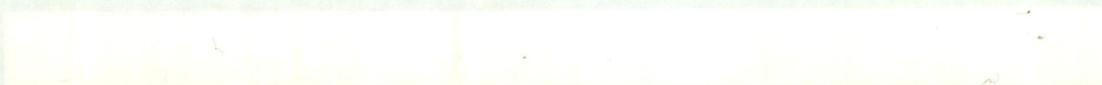


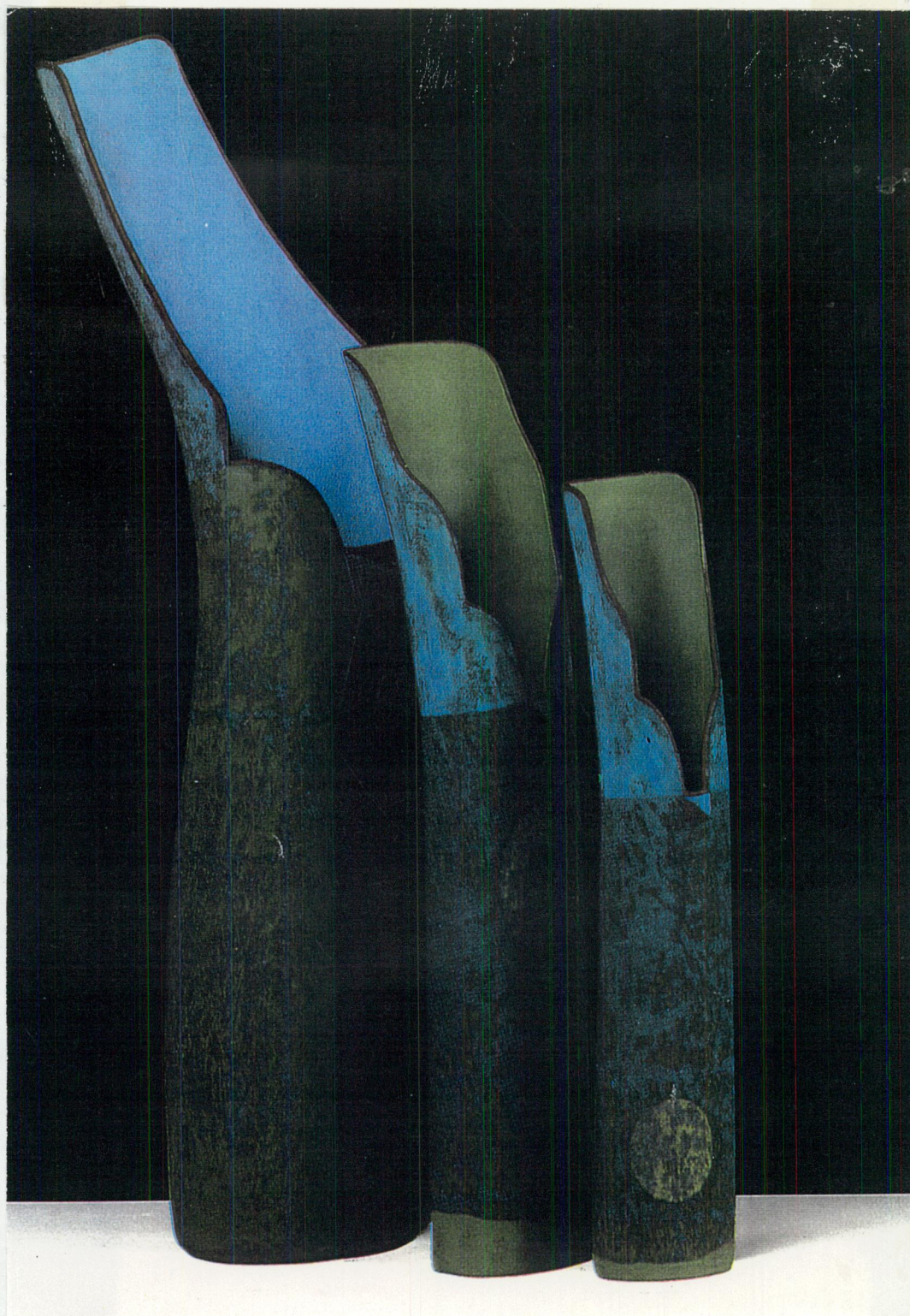


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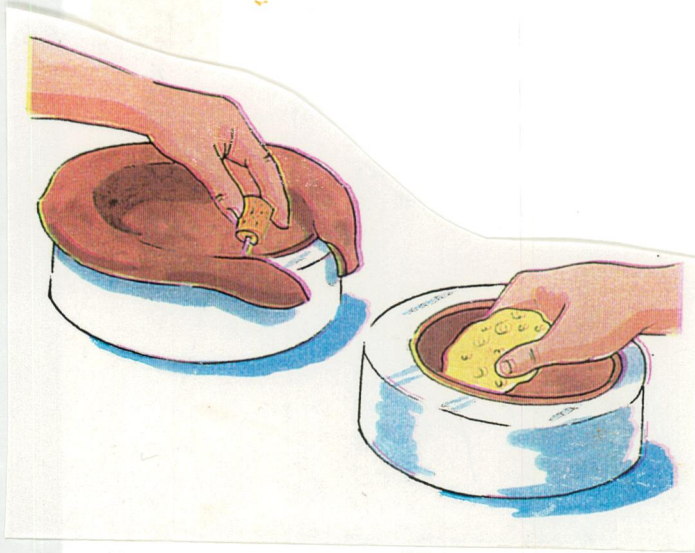
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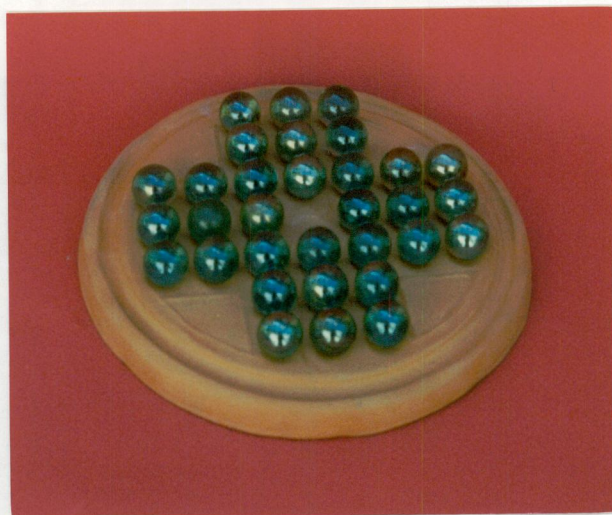
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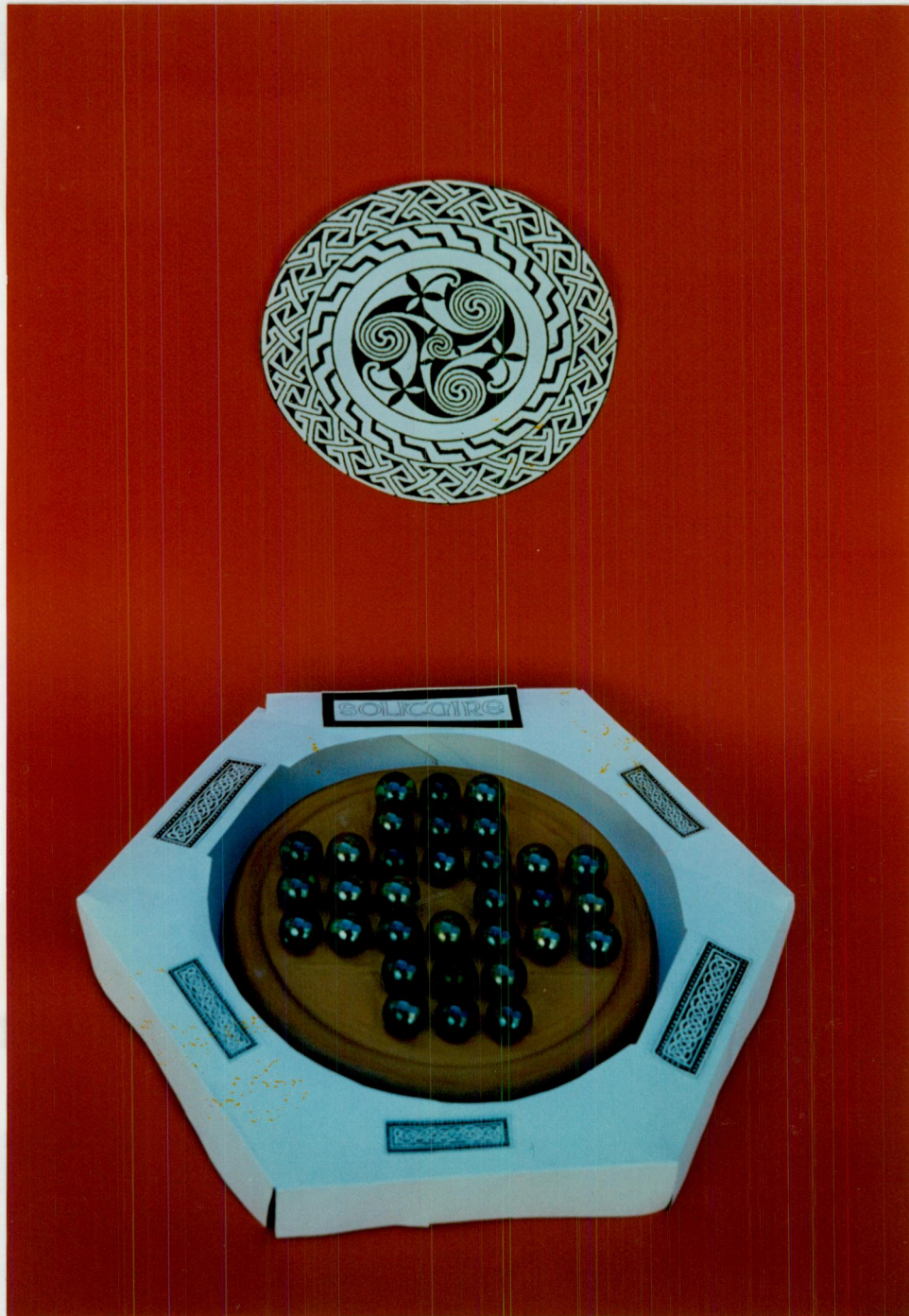
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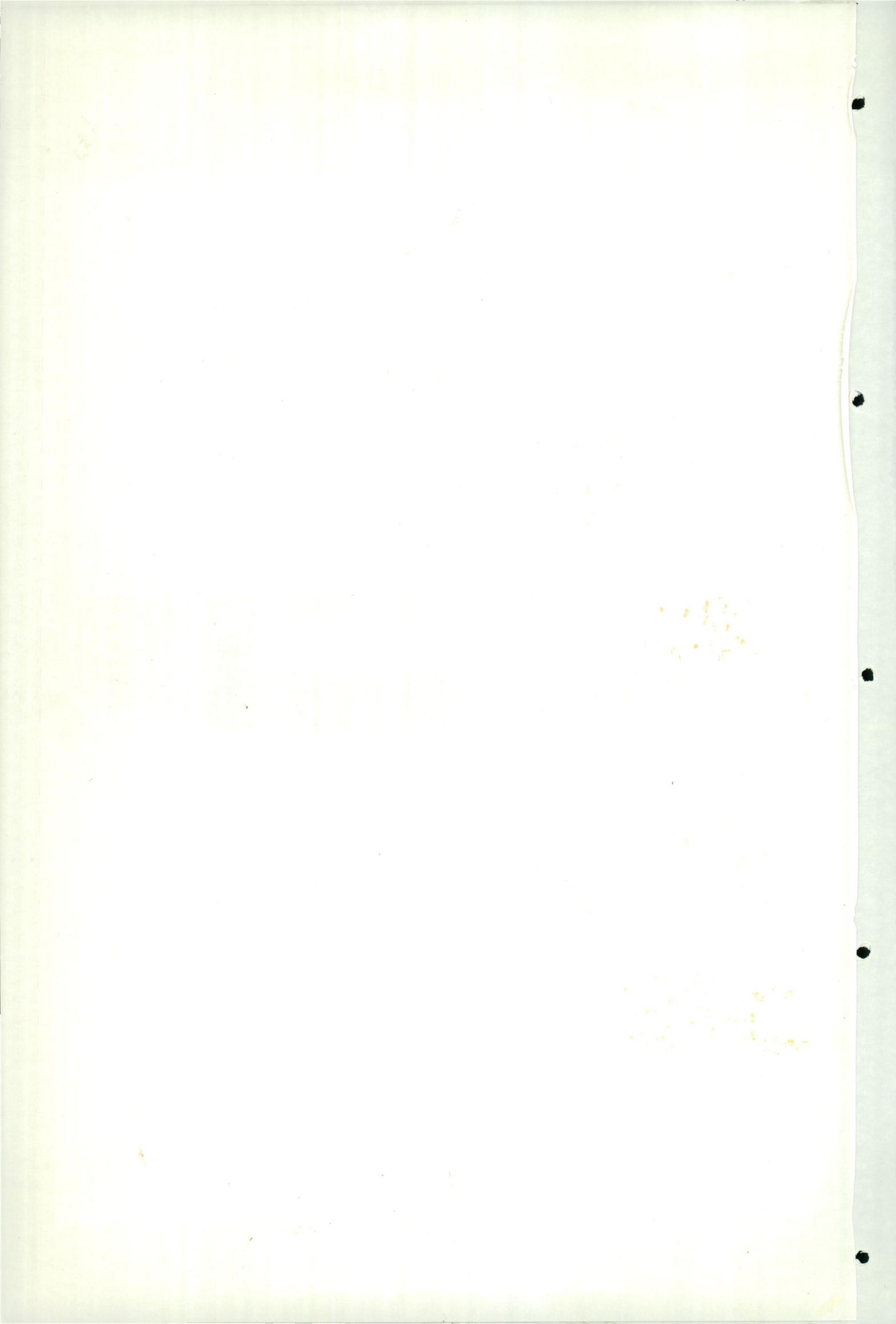
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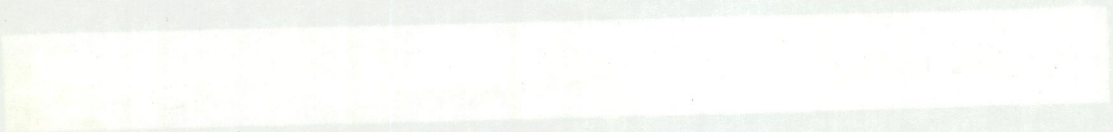


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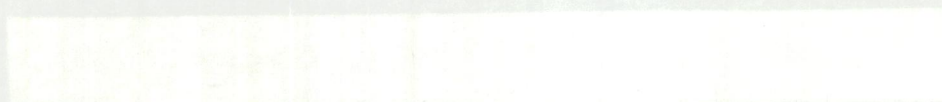


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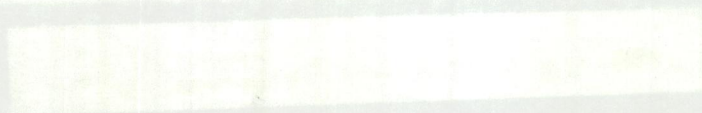
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29. STUDENT APPLYING SLIP DECORATION TO TRINKET BOX



30. NEW LID DESIGN, AND SLIP DECORATION TESTS



**APPENDIX ONE.****General ceramics questionnaire.** November 1996.

1. What does the term ceramics mean?
2. List 10 ceramic objects used in your daily environment, and state where each of these were made eg. hand made or factory made, in Ireland or abroad.
4. Name 10 ceramic artists/potters or ceramic industries who are established in Ireland and/or in England, and describe the kind of work they are making.
5. Do you think Irish ceramic work is well known abroad?
6. Would you consider ceramics as a possible job opportunity for you when you leave school?
7. What other career areas other than craft production do you think ceramics could be linked with?
8. What would like to learn about ceramics during your transition year programme?

**APPENDIX TWO.****Second Transition questionnaire.** February 1997.

1. Having Completed your eight week ceramics mini company course, how has it changed your attitude towards the craft?

...Please circle the relevant answer below; yes or no.

...Did you enjoy it; Yes/ No.

Did you find it easy to master the techniques shown? Yes/No.

...Did you find it was more difficult than you first thought it would be?

Have you any additional comments to make.

2. Would you consider working with ceramics when you leave school ?

3. Do you think that what you learned from the experience of producing a product for the mini company gave you a realistic idea of what it would be like to set up a real business?

4. Of all the subjects which you were involved with in the setting up of your mini-company, which one did you enjoy doing most?

5. Do you think the mini-company project allowed each person to contribute their strengths to the group, and in which area did your strengths lie?

6. Do you think this project helped you in terms of relating to other students, and working as a team?

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7. Did you think the experience has helped to mature as a person, and gain a sense of responsibility?
8. Is there anything you would change about how the project was carried out?
9. Are you happy with the end result?
10. Do you think you will continue to pursue ceramics in the future?

### **APPENDIX THREE.**

#### **TRANSITION YEAR MARKET RESEARCH**

Before you visit your assigned craft retail outlets, arrange within your group who is going to carry out the following tasks.

Contact the shop manager to arrange at suitable time for you to interview them, and your team to visit the shop. Always be polite and respectful of the fact that these people are very busy, and are doing you a huge favour. Write out the questions which you will need to ask them prior to your visit, such as; what percentage markup does the shop place on goods in their stock? What items within the £8 range sell best? What section of hand made ceramic items within this price bracket has the highest turnover? e.g. small novelty gift items like decorative mirrors/trinket boxes, functional table ware such as mugs, bowls etc. What type of item would they advise a small business to start making? Are there any items (ceramic) which customers have requested that aren't being produced? What are the most successful and innovative packaging ideas?

- List at least 20 items which are priced within the £8 range, especially ones which could be made using a mould. Note the type of packaging, or label attachments used, the product information (if any) and draw a quick sketch of the object recording the shape and colour scheme. With the manager's permission, collect brochures, leaflets and any other relevant literature or photographs. You could sub-divide this part of the assignment into domestic/functional and decorative or novelty items, and split the team accordingly.
- Hold a team meeting to discuss information found and choose the most suitable type of item for your company to produce? Now with the help of your art teacher estimate price of materials, labour, and firing costs, so as to find out if it is possible to make it for under £8 and allow for a retail mark-up.



**APPENDIX FOUR.**

Senior questionnaire.. February 1997.

**THE TRANSITION YEAR PROGRAMME.**

1. Having completed the transition year programme in 4th yr., do you think it provided you with an opportunity to explore new subjects, and to develop skills in areas which would not have been possible in the junior and leaving cert courses? Yes/No  
If yes, state specific subjects and skills ?

2,(a). What work experience did you do, where and for how long?

(b). Did you enjoy it? Yes/No. Why?

(c). Would this experience encourage you pursue a career in this area when you leave school?. Yes/No. Why.

3,(a). What modules/ projects did you cover in T.Y.?

(b). What was the project you enjoyed most in T.Y., and why?

(c). If you did an Art/Craft option, state what your project brief was, and how you felt about your achievements?

How did this project link in with other subjects like business studies e.t.c.?

4. Did your experiences in T.Y. help you (a) decide what subjects to take for the leaving cert, and (b) what career area you wish to pursue after school? (a) Yes/No.  
(b). Yes/No.

5. Did you find it difficult to readjust to a mainstream course in 5th yr? Yes /No.

6. As a senior student looking back on transition year, (a) has your attitude towards transition year changed, and (b) do you appreciate its benefits more now than you did at the time? (a) Yes/No. (b). Yes/No.

(c) Do you think T.Y. gave you a broader look at learning in general, and how subjects link in with each other?. Yes/No.

7. If you were in third year again, and had the choice, would you still choose to do transition year? Yes/No. Why?

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8. Do you think the experience of completing the transition year programme helped to develop your personal skills such as (a) personal organisation, (b) ability to work in a team situation, and relate well to others?

9. If you were to write the T.Y. programme, what improvements would you make?

10. How would you assess the programme ?



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