



Crafts Council

Make First Pedagogy

The Make First is the Crafts Council's craft education pedagogy. As an approach, it empowers learners to make their ideas instead of sketching them, encouraging them to use malleable materials to test and develop their thinking.

Make First allows learners to develop their voices as makers and shape outcomes by exploring ideas through craft materials and processes. Often without explicit instruction or discussion, learners are allowed to experiment and explore the potentials of craft materials, developing dexterity and understanding of the physical world.

Craft thinking, with its iterative and haptic methodologies, is accessible and beneficial to our very young, our learners for whom English is not their native tongue, and those with special educational needs. A Make First approach acknowledges multiple non-verbal modes of demonstrating understanding and knowledge. By embedding hands-on learning into classrooms, we provide a counterbalance to the increased use of screens by children and young people, as well as an opportunity for our younger learners to develop key fine-motor skills that will aid dexterous activity throughout their lives.

We want to encourage a non-linear craft thinking approach that is rooted in play with materials. Craft thinking encourages learners to develop ideas and outcomes that are driven through creativity, experimentation, reflection and connection to craft practice. Learners gain the ability to self-direct the flow of their work, driven by experiences with materials and other external factors, like local and global cultural heritages and histories or inspiration from other makers and designers.

A learner-driven approach means outcomes are a borne of each learner's unique background and relationship to the world. We can facilitate this through simple approaches like asking learners to select their own materials, or utilising more in-depth project-based learning pedagogies to allow learners to direct their own work.

What are the key elements of our Make First approach?

Risk taking and innovation

Taking creative risks and learning through failure, experimentation and self-reflection are key craft learning skills. Students of craft are encouraged to build resilience and explore the potentials of their ideas by dreaming big and failing often.

Experimentation in craft making drives learners' outcomes forward. Craft is often a safe space to allow for failure and encourage learners to grow from it. Developing 'learn to learn' proficiencies within craft will naturally feed into other areas of learning. Make First is therefore a pedagogy that can be used across the curriculum, as part of metacognition or 'learn to learn' classroom practices.



Reflective making practice

Craft is a place that allows for creative exploration and personal connection to materials, making and the environment. It can help foster the development of reflective making practices for learners, encouraging them to explore themselves as makers, and reflect on personal, local and global experiences in their work.

Developing learner's voices as makers, artists and designers requires the learner to adopt a flexible practice that is influenced by their personal environment and histories. This can be achieved by encouraging and providing space for learners to identify themselves, their communities and their histories in their craft outputs, and using these as touchstones for inspiration and evaluations.

Social justice

Craft and social justice are closely entwined, and we seek to bring this relationship into the classroom. Making is central to the human experience; craft therefore provides an important vehicle for decolonising the curriculum and engaging learners with artists, makers and designers from a range of global communities. Learners should be given the opportunity to explore through research, interaction with craft objects and through their personal heritage and that of their community/communities.

Historically, craft has often been a form of protest; it can also provide learners with an opportunity to discuss, question and find their own perspective on historical and contemporary social issues. Craft provides a means of self-expression for learners who struggle to communicate in other ways, helping to build confidence and self-esteem.

Environmental Sustainability

When we begin our work with an understanding of materials—those found in nature and their scarcity or renewability; manmade resources that can be reused and repurposed; and the new materials being invented to lessen our impact on the environment—an understanding of sustainability follows. Materials exploration offers the opportunity to make tangible the sometimes abstract issues that we must understand in order to tackle the global climate crisis. Embodied learning and haptic engagement connects us to the physical world, balancing an over-engagement with screen-based learning.

Joy

Make First centres playfulness, joy and the sense of achievement that comes from creation. Perhaps one of the most important elements of making is the impact it has on our health and wellbeing – a growing concern for schools. That 'magic' that happens when one is absorbed in making (alone or in a group) is down to the gentle mechanism of action, 'the effort involved in 'making something', the multi-sensory engagement, repetitive actions and anticipation of satisfaction from the rewarding final product are related to release of neurotransmitters, like serotonin and dopamine, that promote joy and well-being, while also reducing stress hormones like cortisol¹.

¹ Dr. Girija Kaimal, Drexel University.