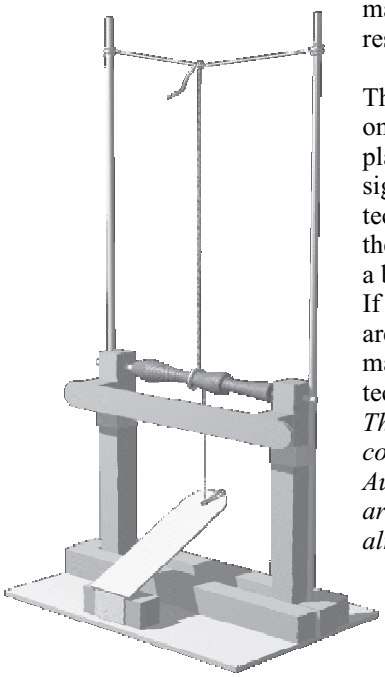
TECHNOLOGY is a new addition to the primary school curriculum - or so it would seem. It has replaced, or perhaps 'absorbed' the traditional practical subjects of handwork, craft, sewing and cooking. In doing so it has substituted a large proportion of the practical elements with what can be described as 'theoretical' activities.
A project such as making a slice of toast, which would have taken half-an- hour in the old days, is expanded to require over seven hours and includes study of the religious significance of bread, an investigation of the tensile strength of the toast and market research on the most satisfactory level of browning.
So where does all the time for this come from?
It has to mean that something else isn't 'made'.
We do not believe this makes the best use of the limited time available. For an infant, the fact that bread turns into toast is enough. It's not appropriate to attempt to explain away the magic - just let them experience it.
One can't help feeling that some people now believe that 'making' is an inadequate activity. It's an 'unintelligent' use of time that was once the prerogative of the working classes and is now better done by machines. We don't want to produce cooks when we can create chefs, or gardeners when we can turn out garden designers, do we?

We should, perhaps, do some crude maths just about now.
Bearing in mind the fact that most schools won't attempt to make extra time for technology let's look at what is available.

- A minimum of 15% of the available class contact time should be allocated to Environmental Studies. That's roughly three quarters of a day per week - let's call it 3½ hours a week.
- Environmental Studies has seven Attainment Outcomes of which Technological Capability is one. One seventh of 3½ hours is half-an-hour. *(I said it would be crude maths, didn't I?)*
- Thirty minutes a week - that's great! That's just about right for practical work, and a teacher could, if she wished, store up the time to have an afternoon each month.

Hang on though! - that half-hour isn't for 'Making' - 'Carrying out tasks' is only one strand, and there are five more strands to be covered! It looks as though you'll only need to spend six minutes a week with messy things like wood and glue. Hardly worth starting is it?

OK, so I've exaggerated somewhat, but that's how the sums will be done in a lot of schools, and it's a tragedy. It is surely accepted that YOUNG CHILDREN NEED TO MAKE THINGS AS PART OF THEIR NORMAL DEVELOPMENT. IT'S AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF PLAY.
At a time when neural pathways are being formed we handicap our children if we focus on 'when, why, how discussions' when they should have their hands on the tools and materials, experience the feel of glue and sawdust on their fingers and the smell of pine resin, (or burnt toast!), up their noses!



This books deals only with mechanical technology and model making skills. We have omitted food and fabric technologies. This is not because we do not think they have a place, but rather because they are beyond our range of relevant experience. This is significant, for if teachers are to resolve the inevitable conflict between the breadth of the technological experience they offer and the development of meaningful skills progression, they may feel that it's the breadth that has to give way. As there is so little time to develop a broad range of skills one may have to consider limiting this 'breadth' to gain any 'depth'. If this is the case then it would be beneficial for teachers to focus more deeply on those areas where they feel confident, areas where they can draw on their own experience, so it may be that food or fabric technology becomes the primary vehicle for the delivery of technological capability to their class.
*There is a possibility that food technology activities in primary schools could be constrained by health and safety considerations. This will vary somewhat between Local Authorities, but it is likely that schools who cannot provide dedicated food preparation areas for the use of children will have to seriously restrict such activity. This is apparently already the case in some LEA regions. It's worth checking out.*