

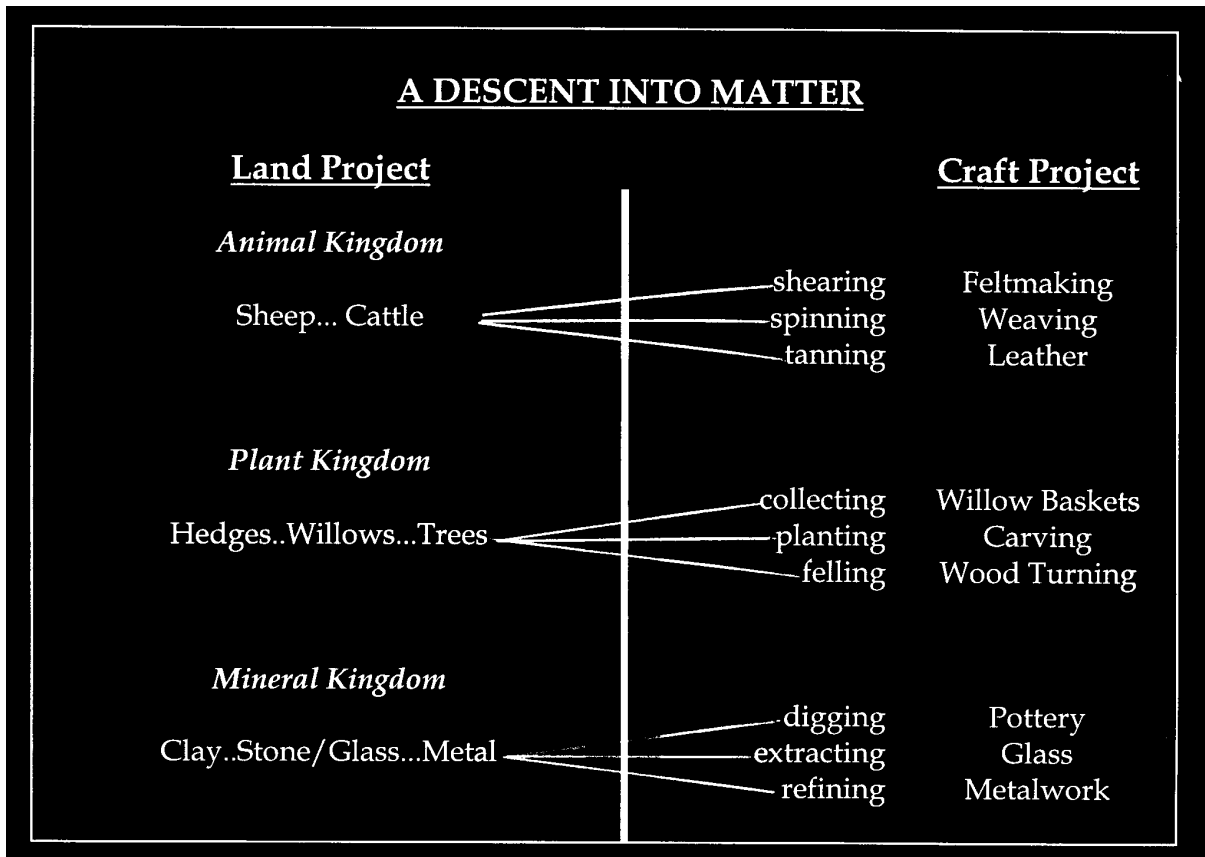
Descent into Matter (Some Thoughts on the Renewal of Craft Curriculum for Waldorf Schools through the Work of the Hiram Trust) - Aonghus Gordon

In 1993 contact made with the Hiram Foundation in Holland led to the foundation of the Hiram Trust here in the UK. During the last two years the Trust has attempted to bring a new orientation to craft and environmental science activity in British Rudolf Steiner schools. This work has been supported by Ruskin Mill and inspired by the Life Science Trust. The work of the Hiram Trust lies at the heart of Waldorf education, where thinking, feeling and willing are brought into a coherent experiential context through an age appropriate craft activity. In addition to being inspired by the work of Rudolf Steiner the Trust has researched the nature of the genius loci manifested through the English folk soul, articulated largely in the life and work of William Morris.

During the last twenty years it is evident that Waldorf pupils have found themselves in a growing dilemma. Embedded within their consciousness is a potential capacity to resolve considerable practical and environmental problems through the interdisciplinary approach to their learning, but their ability to manifest this increasingly requires an as yet undeveloped context. Practical and environmental issues must be given greater credence, for they offer the pupil the chance to unite thinking, feeling and willing creatively. The solving of current problems lifts the will towards a deeper social, ethical morality. Environmental problems are moral problems, requiring people to offer solutions out of creative, practical experience.

A craft curriculum accessing the primary processes and substances of the environment can engender a quality of integrity, particularly for the adolescent. This orientation is entirely dependent on a new awareness of the school grounds and the landscape at large. Biodynamic principles could play a key role in supporting the educational process and help to make the 'outdoor Classroom' visible. Creating educational intimacy within the outdoor Classroom and perceiving the learning process is the challenge. This challenge is ignored at our peril, as the intellect of the adolescent increasingly searches for evidence of an imprint on or mastery of the practical world. If the will is not lifted up through creative practical activity and training it works as an instinctual drive. Creative problem solving through practical work servicing human needs is also the first step towards discovering 'social empathy'. Brought up into consciousness through contemporary ideas of sustainability it potentially allows the adolescent to encounter a new social ethic.

The following diagram offers a coherent approach to the integration of craft project work related to the environment and landscape. Its age appropriateness is dependent on a comprehensive and flexible understanding of child development. The child's descent into matter starts with the tactile experience of wool at the kindergarten stage, continuing through to the fashioning of utilities in clay and metal, that are transformed through the control of fire. Engaging in a craft activity appropriate to the stage of development reached by the child and adolescent facilitates the descent into, and subsequent transformation of, matter.



The three realms of nature, animal, plant and mineral, have corresponding crafts: the Nine ancient crafts of mankind (see diagram). Incorporating one of the crafts from each of the realms into the school curriculum and garden landscape acknowledges a primary educational need. In doing so, the school develops its garden and grounds from an educational standpoint. The grounds have the potential to become educationally transparent, offering a concise new form of visual literacy which incorporates thinking, feeling and willing. The Waldorf curriculum can therefore manifest itself 3-dimensionally throughout the environment of the school.

This orientation is offered to schools who request an environmental survey, often carried out by Class 10 pupils. Several schools are currently undertaking such a project. In addition the Trust runs workshops and hosts an annual summer conference for Waldorf school teachers. The work of the Trust is being developed in collaboration with several teacher training courses.

For further information on the Hiram Trust please contact the Secretary, The Hiram Trust, Upper Grange, Lovedays Mead, Stroud, Gloucestershire GL5 1XB. Telephone/Fax 01453 764065

Aonghus Gordon is Director of Ruskin Mill Further Education Trust and Trustee of The Hiram Trust.

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