

SIDE 2

BAND 11 - "HOW POPULAR BOOKS ARE DESIGNED"

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This is side 2 of the third cassette for the Open Education".

Band 11, "How Popular Books are Designed", is introduced by Rob Waller. Rob will refer to the illustrations in the Study Guide to Block 7, so make sure you have these to hand before you continue with the tape. Rob Waller.

In this part of the cassette we'll be looking at graphic design. How important is it to publishers? How do designers themselves see their role? Is design just a matter of decoration or does it contribute to the meaning of a book? Some books are hardly designed at all, except for the cover, most paperbacks are printed to a standard format. It may only take the designer a few minutes. Some books get quite a lot of design input. The designer only becomes closely involved after the text has been finalised. Open University courses are in this category. In contrast to this traditional approach other publishers involve designers right from the start, making such elaborate use of graphic design that it's really impossible to separate the text from its arrangement on the page. The book is created as much by the designer as by the author. Figures

1, 2 and 3 in your notes illustrate some typical double page spreads from this kind of book. To find out how and why these books are produced I visited the firm of Dorling Kindersley, one of the leaders in this field. They specialise in popular subjects, such as health, child care, cookery, sports, home computing and hobbies. I spoke to Dorling and Kindersley's editorial director, Christopher Davis.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIS

The role of the graphic design plays in the way that we produce those books is that we are presenting information in a very highly structured but also visually attractive form. The second main reason is that we are creating books that are going to sell in as many markets in the world as we can possibly achieve, sometimes as many as twenty. And if you're producing a text book on practical or home reference subjects you don't necessarily have much chance of selling that anywhere else in the world because a German publisher or French publisher will produce their own practical home reference book, but if you're producing a practical book that contains a very attractive but also thoroughly well thought out use of illustration then they in each of those markets have a book that is of a higher quality

than they could have produced themselves, something that has immediate appeal to a book buying public.

ROB WALLER

So, Dorling Kindersley are book packagers as well as publishers in their own right. This means that they create books and sell them to other publishers as complete packages using the economy of scale to invest heavily in illustration, photography and colour printing. Instead of simply selling a manuscript which would be designed and edited by the foreign publisher, most of these books are conceived, planned, written, edited, illustrated and designed by Dorling Kindersley, they even arrange for the printing so that most of the different language editions are printed from the same colour plates, with only the text changed. The international scope of Dorling Kindersley's operation is well illustrated by figures 4 and 5 in your notes. They show the British and Japanese editions of a book called *Baby and Child*. You'll notice straight away that the Japanese edition runs from right to left. So while catering for the international market provides a stimulus to good design, it can also impose its own constraints.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIS

We have to have very strict house rules about how we illustrate different subject areas. We have to insure that the none of the photographs have backgrounds that are immediately identify them as being British, we want each of the publishers who take these books particularly in the United States and in the large european countries, to believe that when they produce the book the public will think that they have originated it themselves.

ROB WALLER

What does this mean in practive? Stop your cassette for a moment and note down some of the things which illustrators might have to consider when they illustrate for an international audience. (PAUSE) I asked Christopher Davis the same question.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIS

There are a lot of obvious examples which we have to be aware of like cars but there are things that one wouldn't have thought of necessarily before taking the photograph like plugs, wall sockets, window frames even down to like baby's feeding bowls, high chairs, we did a best selling book called "Baby and Child" by Penelope Leach and we could have gone around photographing children in their cots or play pens or in the street with their mothers with shopping baskets but we

realised that that would have been impossible to use in any of the other markets, so we had to photograph each of them with a white sheet behind them or photograph in a completely neutral setting. For example if there had been stripped pine in the background it might have been identifiable as a Twickenham household for example, if there had been a 73 bus going down the road it wouldn't have been any good in any of the European markets and it wouldn't have been any good in America. If there had been street signs there are things you would get on London postcards, it just will not work in a practical book that's going to be published you know for the people in Milan, in Munich, in Paris in Cincinnati.

ROB WALLER

Because they have to invest so much, Dorling Kindersley sell their books to publishers even before they're written. They have to plan the book in some detail and prepare sample pages to show what the book'll be like. The cover design seems to be especially important at this stage, but I wondered if they weren't getting their priorities a bit wrong. After all, the cover's the last thing most authors think about when they start a new book. So I asked Stuart Jackman, the

art director on a new project entitled, The Indoor Garden, why the cover gets so much attention.

STUART JACKMAN

Well first of all the cover which one originates for presentation does a slightly different job to a cover which one would end up using on the book. Initially the cover has to explain and sell the idea of the book to a potential buyer and that buyer would not be the man in the street, a member of the public but would be probably a foreign publisher, so the cover therefore has to work much harder probably than it eventually will and so in the cover design one is trying to get over as many of the areas and aspects of the book covers as is possible. So in the choice of typography and illustration or photographic image on the front, one is trying to make them work very, very hard.

ROB WALLER

Have a look now at figures 6 to 9 in your notes. they show successive versions of the same cover design. Notice that not only does the overall design change, but so does the title, the typeface, and the illustration. Even the colour schemes are different.

Look first at Figure 6, their first cover idea.

Most of us think of houseplants as optional extras, added to a room when we happen to have them. But the idea of this book is to present them as an integral part of interior decorating, to be considered at the outset just as we might consider the wallpaper, or the furniture and carpet. The picture therefore shows plants and cut flowers in a stylish room setting, and the sub-title emphasises the theme of 'decorating with plants'. In practice, though, this cover didn't have the intended effect, and potential customers didn't see the book as particularly different from other houseplant books. The next version, shown in figure 7, tried to correct this by emphasising the decorative approach to houseplants; the title is now Plant Style, and the illustration plays on the shapes, colours and patterns of flowers and foliage. Notice the leaves of different shapes and colours, and the scattered loose petals. The curling capital P adds to the decorative effect.

The next cover, shown in Figure 8, reverts to the first idea. The title is back to The House Plants Book and the plants are again shown in an architectural setting, although a highly artificial one. The use of geometric shapes with the natural plant forms is supposed to communicate

the main idea of the book. The decorative typography of the second version remains in the form of the swashes on the words 'book' and 'Brookes'. I don't know if it was a conscious decision, but the separation of the word 'houseplants' into two lines seems to me to emphasise the word 'house' and so reinforce the interior decorating angle.

This version was criticised as being too sterile, and the fourth (and current version) is shown in Figure 9. Stuart Jackman explains the thinking behind this one.

STUART JACKMAN

We've tried to warm the whole thing up make it look much more friendly still showing flowers, dried flowers and plants growing but in a much warmer friendlier setting and by showing things such as little soil and petals, actually laying on the background, we've tried to introduce the idea of the practical side of the book which probably the first three covers didn't show at all. We're quite hopeful about the fourth cover and its one that seems to be going down quite well with our purchasers.

ROB WALLER

The cover seems to have acted as a discussion

point for the various people working on the project, as well as something that the marketing people could discuss with publishers. By focussing their comments on something concrete, they were able to develop a shared understanding about the aims of the book, without getting bogged down too early on in detailed matters of what should and should not be included. It also seems to establish a visual style for the book which everyone can then follow. I suggested this to Stuart Jackman.

STUART JACKMAN

Yes that's right although we don't like to impose on ourselves too many restrictions, we don't like to say this is the presentation we've prepared, this is the jacket, this is how it's going to be come what may, we all down the line right up to the very end of the book we prepared to change things and change aspects of it so it's not in any way a straight jacket but its good for everybody to have something to work to, an idea that has been worked out and sold and everybody knows what they're aiming at.

ROB WALLER

Given the early attention to the cover design, it seems that designers get involved with Dorling Kindersley books right from the start. And you'll

see that the various pages shown in your cassette notes integrate pictures and diagrams closely with the written text. Again, this implies that designers must be involved all the way along. Now, at the Open University, we're used to writing a unit, handing it over to an editor for advice on clarity and for tidying up, and then on to a designer. I asked Alan Buckingham, an editor, whether Dorling Kindersley approach things in the same way.

ALAN BUCKINGHAM

At Dorling Kindersley the author is very much more a part of a team and its a team of people that produce the books that we make this is particularly true of the practical instructional books um in those cases the author is really seen as the provider of the information and we work with him or her in finding what we think is the best way of conveying that information. When a book begins its production a team of staff is allocated to it and largely speaking half of them are editors and half of them are designers. The editors are responsible for the words and the designers are responsible for the photographs and the drawings but of course there is a great deal of overlap um the drawings and photographs and the way in which the spreads are put together always

come out of the editors and the designers working with the author together on coming up with the best solution for each problem. It means that we see an awful lot of the author. Authors at Dorling Kindersley tend not to sign a contract with us and go away for a year and write a manuscript and then deliver it they in fact come into the office a great deal and work very closely with us. I think the other thing that's interesting about the way we work is that unlike a lot of publishers, we do not have an editorial department and a design department um when a book goes into production everybody working on it is in the same room together. We find this really important. It's the key way in which decisions are made, in which ideas can be pooled, and in which the people working on the book communicate with one another. The editor and the designer actually need to sit next to each other really, they work very very closely together.

ROB WALLER

I can imagine that some authors might find this rather a hard system to work with because they are used to going away and writing the book but that others that are not used to writing might actually find it easier to get all this help from the professionals?

ALAN BUCKINGHAM

That's true, yes, I mean some authors, particularly the ones who are used to turning in a manuscript and then not having not very much done to it do find it a bit of a surprise that we manipulate their materials so much but I think in general they come round to the point of view that its a good thing and that what we produce at the end is the result of a pool of ideas. Ah we also deal with alot of authors who perhaps don't have a lot experience of writing but who we've approached because they're particularly knowledgeable about their subject or specialised in an area of information that we want to find out about and in that case we can help them a great deal. We find a way of extracting from them the information they have and getting it onto the page in the most effective way that we can.

ROB WALLER

Let's look now in a more detailed way at how the team develop the content of a book. Alan Buckingham again;

ALAN BUCKINGHAM

Every book we do begins with an awful lot of conversation, and in those conversations we try to establish what the books going to contain, how we going to structure the information in terms of

conventional chapters and sections but also at a more detailed level as well, we begin to plan out on flow charts where each subjects is going to appear in the book, how the chapters are organised, how much space we're going to devote to each topic and from that we produce a kind of blue-print and that's something that takes quite a long time and the subject to changes of mind, but by the time we're finished it we will have a plan for the book which has a suggestion of what each spread will contain on it.

ROB WALLER

Alan mentioned the use of flowcharts to plan the content of a book. A flowchart for the Indoor Garden project is shown in Figure 10 in your notes. It's really a sort of floor plan for the whole book, identifying the topic covered by each page. Notice that the extent of each topic is measured in whole pages or double page spreads. The length of a topic is decided even before it is written, reflecting its priority within the subject as a whole.

Figure 10 is a very simple editorial flowchart, but the next step is to prepare a much more detailed design flowchart such as the one shown in figure 11. Here the content of each page has been

thought out in a bit more detail. There's a rough indication of the sort of illustration that'll be needed, and an idea of the proportion of words to pictures. Each page has been costed, too. The chart is covered with colour-coded dots which show photographs, diagrams and pictures which can be bought in more cheaply from an agency.

From the design flowchart we now come to look at the development of a particular double page spread. The team - that is, the author, the editor and the designer - work out a rough layout such as the one shown in Figure 12. This really acts as a guide for the photo session, which for many spreads is the next important stage. There is often a photo session even when no actual photos are to be used, since most diagrams start off as photographs to make sure that they're accurate.

In *The Indoor Garden*, a typical photo session will involve an actual task - here it's a flower arrangement. There's often what Dorling Kindersley call an 'ingredients photo', where the tools and materials are photographed as a sort of pictorial list - the designer plans to put this at the foot of the left-hand page on this spread. Other photos will cover the task step-by-step, and perhaps show the final product as a sort of summary - and as an inspiration to try the ideas out ourselves.

The photo session is a vital stage. It not only ensures that the book is well illustrated but that it's accurate and

realistic - the process of assembling equipment or ingredients and photographing a task means that the editors and designers are working from personal experience. Once the photos have been taken, an accurate layout can be drawn to instruct the printer.

We'll come back to illustration in a little while but in the meantime, what's happened to the words? So far the whole process seems to have been dominated by graphic design. I asked Alan where the words come from and when.

ALAN BUCKINGHAM:

Well, the words either come from the author and he will supply us with notes or what often happens is that the editor goes to the photo session as well and can be sitting in the background scribbling away as the thing's being done. So that by the time we get back to the office, we have a lot of information about exactly how the thing was put together. When the photographs come back to the office too, the layout is finalised which means we make our final decisions about how many steps to include, about how big to make them, about where to put things on the page and the designer will then present the editor with a layout which the editor will try and make his text fit to. The chances are that this doesn't happen the first time and that by a process of negotiation and horse-trading, the layout has to be changed several times. In the end we come up with a solution which hopefully gives enough space for the editor to get his text in, to explain exactly what's happening and enough space for the pictures, for the designer to make an attractive and informative layout.

ROB WALLER:

Some subjects, of course, are more technical than others. A gardening book is a relatively simple matter, but what about, say, a home computer manual or a book on the more technical aspects of photography or even some sports? I asked Alan whether authors are particular about the exact words that go out in their name - even though they've often been finalised by someone else.

ALAN BUCKINGHAM:

Yes, the authors usually are and in the end it's always the author that we have to go back to for final approval. If space is tight then it is the editor's job really to distill the author's message into the space available. Sometimes that's possible, sometimes it isn't. If it really isn't then the editor and designer will have to look at the whole thing again and possibly re-work the spreads so that it does fit.

ROB WALLER:

So in a book like The Indoor Garden, which are most important, the words or the pictures? I put the question to Alan Buckingham, who you'll remember is an editor, and Anne-Marie Bulat, a designer.

ALAN BUCKINGHAM:

Neither. The editors will say the words are most important and the designers will say the pictures. In the end, hopefully, we come up with a balance, through a process of bargaining, which makes the spread work.

ANNE-MARIE BULAT:

I have to agree with Alan because the words and pictures work together in conjunction to get a message across and you can't afford to be too precious about the design. You've got, the editorial content whether it's the words or the visual look of it have got to be equal.

ROB WALLER:

Let's look in detail at another spread. Figure 13 is from the American edition of a book on ski-ing. The reader is taken step-by-step through the snowplough turn. Alan explains how the page was developed.

ALAN BUCKINGHAM:

Well, we felt that the only way to get a complex diagram of someone performing a ski move absolutely right was to take photographs of an expert doing it. So we sent a photographic team over to Switzerland, arranged a series of demonstrators to do all the moves we need, and took 6,000 photographs, in fact, in the two days we were there. When we got back to London, we gave all the photographs to the designer and by using a series of cut and pastes and tracings and transfers, we began to work out the complex sequence that we finally ended up with.

ROB WALLER:

Using a drawing like this instead of just photographs allows the designer to edit the picture just as an editor might edit words. She can cut out unimportant details and shadows which might otherwise confuse, and she can underline important points which need emphasis - look at the skier's feet and notice how shading has been used to indicate where he is placing his weight. And a vertical dotted line has been added to remind us of the direction of the slope.

Just like verbal sentences, a single diagram rarely manages to convey a complete argument. So a second diagram has been added to show a beginner how to practice the new move, and a third explains the position of the skis throughout the turn. Lastly, we are given a series of photographs of an expert skier. This adds authenticity to the explanation.

It's fairly obvious that the snowplough turn couldn't be explained anything like adequately using words alone. So the use of diagrams and photographs is hard to argue with in the example we've just looked at. But what about Figure 14. This spread on the fibre content of food is expensive, not just in terms of photographs but also in terms of the space it takes up. Some publishers would simply print the information as a table or list.

So how does Anne-Marie justify the use of such an elaborate spread.

ANNE-MARIE BULAT:

Well, it's a much more immediate way of presenting the information, more exciting we felt and it also includes some items which you wouldn't expect to, for instance, contain fibre, so somebody might be skimming through those pages and be drawn to the fact that something that's shown in that photograph you wouldn't expect to find there. In a chart that kind of information might stand out less.

ROB WALLER;

Yes I found myself going straight to raspberries which surprised me as being a source of fibre and if it had just been a table I might never have got that far down the table.

ANNE-MARIE BULAT:

Yes, exactly, yes. You could also use it for identification. Some of the charts have slightly more unusual vegetables or fruits in and perhaps somebody might not know what they looked like.

ROB WALLER:

What a plantain looks like, in this case.

ANNE-MARIE BULAT:

Yes.

ROB WALLER:

I had to agree with Anne-Marie. I was induced to read the information in some detail, whereas I don't think I would have bothered with a table. I learned something too. Apparently, there is more fibre in 100 grammes of blackcurrants than the equivalent amount of oatmeal! Somehow I don't think I would have really taken in that fact had it just been in a table.

Another point about this page, they've actually weighed each of the exhibits and told us how much fibre each contains. So we can use this spread as a visual reference chart to estimate how much fibre there might be in a sample we have in front of us.

Turn now to the page shown in Figure 15, which includes a cut-away drawing of an engine which appears in a book on sailing. I suggest you stop the tape now and consider whether what we've just heard about the double page spread on fibre applies to this illustration. What's its function? What's it trying to achieve? (PAUSE)

I asked Alan Buckingham to defend the engine illustration. On the face of it, there doesn't seem to be a lot of point to it. It doesn't show how the engine works, you couldn't use it to repair an engine, and it isn't even a specific make.

ALAN BUCKINGHAM:

Well, it's from part of the book which identifies the major types of engines used in boats, so there's a diesel engine, a gasoline engine and a fuel-injection type as well. The purpose of the illustration really is to show a typical machine and also to serve as a way of identifying some of the parts. So although it shows you where the throttle control or the choke or the oil filter are likely to be, it's true

that you wouldn't necessarily be able to mend them if they went wrong but it gives the sense of what the machine looks like and whereabouts on it in general most of the major components are. It also brings alive, I think, some of the technical terms, like the cooling water pump or the air-intake. Just simply knowing more or less what they look like and more or less where they are helps people. People find it interesting. They also, I believe, like illustrations of that kind as well. The alternative would have been to have had a complete page of just only text about gasoline engines and the chances of people reading through that perhaps are less than if we show an attractive picture which invites them into the information.

ROB WALLER:

So we've seen now how one publisher uses graphic design. Although some illustrated books can be rather superficial, they're generally at the cheap end of the market. Books like the one we've discussed are quite expensive, so they have to be good if people are going to buy them in the numbers needed to pay for such elaborate production methods. And that may leave those of us in the world of education with something of a problem. If readers come to expect the standard of production set by firms like Dorling Kindersley, how are textbook writers and publishers to keep up? Most Dorling Kindersley books are about relatively uncontroversial practical subjects. Should we be attempting to present more abstract academic ideas in this way?

And given that an important aim of education is to stimulate a critical approach, in the rest of the unit I'll be exploring how far we can adapt techniques of argumentation and criticism developed for verbal argument to visual ones.

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