

## Review

### Design Pedagogy Research: Leeds 2007

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This book is an outcome of a conference led by Kate Hatton in 2007 and is made up of a collection of ten papers that were given at the conference. The overarching theme of the conference and the book is design pedagogy research, but within this theme the conference had three strands: Design Practice and Pedagogy; Design History and Pedagogy; and Perspectives on Design Pedagogy. The range of aspects dealt with through the chapters included reflects the nuances in the three conference strands.

Although the contributors to the conference were largely from the higher education art and design sector, there are some very useful and interesting debates presented that I consider to be of interest to those involved in schools D&T Education. In light of this, in reviewing the book I have given greater attention to those that I think have greater relevance.

In different ways the chapters are a mixed bag. This is indicated in the forward to the book, but we are told that “they all referenced the context of contemporary design pedagogy” (Forward, p. viii). The way and extent to which this is done varies considerably and this could be seen as a weakness of the collection, certainly from the viewpoint of choosing to read the book to gain a range of insights into issues in contemporary design pedagogy. However, it could also be argued that the variation also demonstrates that this is a fledgling area for research – and the papers present a cross section of the professional community giving thought to the area. It is interesting to note a certain split in the papers – some presenting the canon, developed through the art school tradition, as the pedagogy that should be central, others raising questions about this canon and seeing the need for it to be fractured or at least re-considered in the light of changes in both the nature of design culture and in the changes in the student body engaging with art and design courses.

This latter position is presented in the opening chapter, *Practising Design Culture: Notes on the alignment of complexity and pedagogy*, by Guy Julier and is based on the keynote presented at the conference. As an opening chapter (and I imagine as a keynote) it presents an immensely clear and useful analysis of the changes in design culture, including the ways and contexts in which designers currently operate and the impact this is having on design education.

Making the case that design has changed considerably in recent years he characterises this change in the shift in projects focusing on the function and aesthetics of a product to projects that engage with real or imaginary publics as their key focus. He illustrates this shift with a comparison of student projects from, e.g. the post Alessi book shelves of the 1990s to the more conceptual, critical, client centered nature of current student projects. He relates this shift to the more general conceptual, strategic and interdisciplinary contribution design and designers are making in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. He raises the question as to how design pedagogy should respond to what he sees as a ‘Janus-like quandary’ of addressing itself to the technical/aesthetic or to the conceptual/strategic. What he proposes is that the focus should be on the ‘scholarly development’ of individual students in a way that ...demands of them that they rigorously define what their position is. I *want* them to be both reflective and reflexive practitioners. And that in turn means that they understand the worthwhile contributions they can make in terms of the creation of value. This might be commercial value, but may also be social, cultural, environmental, political and symbolic value.

(Julier, 2008, p. 7)

The way in which he portrays both the shift in design culture and the necessary need to consequently re-think

## Review

### Design Pedagogy Research: Leeds 2007

design education and design pedagogy is as relevant for mainstream teaching of D&T as it is for undergraduate and postgraduate design students. His analysis of the move in design culture from products to concepts and strategies is an important one for mainstream schooling to take account of – and in many ways could provide a liberating force, allowing teachers to see the legitimacy of working with young learners in D&T activities that are not product/object focused.

For me, this chapter lays the ground for the reasons why research into design pedagogy is such a pressing issue and at the same time provides a framework of issues and questions for consideration.

The following chapter, *Lets All Go Shoplifting: Culture, consumerism and education* by Gen Doy, focuses on the way in which education has become consumerist and links this to an analogy of shopping. In doing this she pinpoints both the negative views of consumerism but also to views of consumerism as positive agency, through the skill and control of choosing. She then develops the analogy further by turning to shoplifting – requiring in some ways greater skill and creating more control. In using the analogy to reflect on students as consumers, she likens shopping to staying within your discipline, whereas shoplifting is seen as more akin to students ‘stealing’ ideas, concepts and theories etc. from other disciplines – and for this reason suggests that the shoplifting analogy is better in supporting students to become articulate, critical analysts who can draw on interdisciplinary thinking. But, in considering the broader constraints on learning, teaching and assessment that have come with the consumerist and linked capitalist perspective on education, she moves to a further analogy – of giving rather than buying – and looks towards a model of educating as a vocation where giving – of tutors to students and students to each other is a more rewarding way of teaching and learning.

The third chapter, *Praxeological Subjectification: The hidden powers of practical activities* by Peter Oakley, deals more directly with pedagogical issues linked to the practical nature of design education. He provides a fascinating exploration of the extent to which the physical and manipulative processes that practitioners engage in are developed and become embedded as much at an emotional level as a technical one. The chapter identifies how this happens and then explores the pedagogic implications through a discussion of examples of students learning new skills; student teachers teaching skills they have already deeply assimilated into their own practice; and skills teaching by experienced practitioner/academics. He concludes that when introducing students to new

practical skills it is important to first reflect explicitly on how the teacher developed and practices that skill themselves and second on the positive and negative emotions potentially linked to the acquisition of the skill by the novice. He also raises the question of the extent to and ways in which new skills in a digital age fit into this scenario of ‘praxeological subjectification’ and suggests a research agenda to explore this question further. While not explicitly dealing with it, the chapter makes a valuable contribution to understanding the metacognitive aspects of learning in and through practice and I found it particularly valuable in the emphasis placed on (and consequently the need for me to think about) the emotional aspects of skill development.

The next chapter, *Developing Research-based education: A case study in teaching Interactive Digital Media Design* by Tara Winters, sits amongst those papers that question traditional teaching of art and design and introduce new pedagogical approaches – in this instance to frame design projects for students quite explicitly into a practitioner researcher model. She begins by discussing the nature of Art and Design practitioner research and makes the case that taking a parallel approach with Art and Design students provides a transformative learning experience. This is illustrated through a case study of an undergraduate project that was conceptualised and presented to the students such that they engaged in the project at a conceptual and critical level, undertaking exploratory research directly in relation to and through the medium in question – digital media. The author highlights the value of presenting students with ‘wicked’ problems and presenting the initial challenge in a way that is open, conceptual and explicitly invites a challenging and exploratory approach. Student work is presented to illustrate the power of this approach over a more conventional didactic method.

The next three chapters present views of pedagogy that link more to the traditional ‘canonical’ view of Art and Design education. The first, *Design Codes and Design Language* by Eleni Tracada, provides a historical account of the author’s own education as an architect through studying leading edge architects and movements from the 1970s onwards, sometimes by studying with these leaders. While stressing the value and opportunity this presents, there is no detailed discussion of the pedagogical issues such an approach raises. This is followed by Janine Sykes presenting *A History of Design Pedagogy at Burslem School of Art*, which provides an historical account of the pedagogy employed in the Burslem school of Art in Stoke on Trent that, from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, promoted ‘executed design’ – an approach that encouraged designing directly through the material that

## Review

### Design Pedagogy Research: Leeds 2007

was being used. She makes a case for the success of this approach in preparing designers for the industries in their regions in such a way that they also became more broadly influential (e.g. Clarice Cliff and Susie Cooper and their impact of ceramics). She indicates how this aim fits now with the vocational aims of the National Arts Learning Network (NALN). She also draws some comparisons with Transformational Design promoted in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century by the Design Council, although it isn't clear how the broader, more holistic aspects of this more recent model fit with the earlier one. The third chapter promoting the traditional pedagogic model of art and design education presents a case study of the challenges of using such a model with school-age learners. In *The Construction of Design Knowledge in Art Colleges and Schools: A case study of the GCSE Applied Art and Design*, Samantha Broadhead describes the experience of preparing disaffected school students for a GCSE in Applied Art and Design in an art college context, where the pedagogic approach is perceived as distinctly different from the way the learners had been taught at school. Whilst recognising the constraints and challenges of school teaching, for me the chapter takes an unfortunate 'us and them' approach that, drawing on research from elsewhere, stereotypes both pedagogies and takes no account of broader related issues of, for example, learning, teaching and cognitive styles. There seems to me to have been a missed opportunity in the episode, in that there appears to have been no dialogue between the school and college teachers that might have resulted in a more grounded and fruitful analysis of what appear to be pedagogic discontinuities.

The following chapter by Kate Hatton and Sherelene Cuffe, *Design pedagogy and diversity: What are the issues?*, returns to a more critical stance on pedagogy, exploring how design pedagogy should develop in relation to cultural diversity. Building on Dennis Atkinson's concept of 'pedagogised identities' (Atkinson, 2002), the authors present a case study of an undergraduate elective module on Multicultural Studies that encouraged students critique stereotypical views of art and design practice and explore a broad field of cultural theory, including postcolonial studies, as a way of reflecting on art and design practices from diverse perspectives. The chapter presents both a challenge and an inspiration through questioning much of what is sometimes presented as unproblematic in traditional art and design education. They raise the issue of cultural values in learning, teaching and assessing and identify the possibilities for design pedagogy to be structured to enable students to explore different ways in which designers work in different social and community settings and, as with Tara Winter, promoting a more research centered approach, for example using

ethnographic approaches. In discussing pedagogic issues they are also suggesting at a curriculum that enables students from diverse cultural backgrounds to understand their own and others' contribution as practitioners. The final two chapters present personal reflections of two practitioner/academics on their own practice and how this impacts and interacts with their teaching and pedagogic approaches. In *Sustainable Design and Development: A personal journey*, Karen Dennis presents an interesting and enjoyable account of her personal story as a design practitioner engaged with issues of design ethics and sustainability. She discusses how this developed, the challenges she has faced in squaring her excitement and being part of the fashion industry with her concern for sustainability and production issues and the ways in which she has addressed this through community and fairtrade activities within the UK and overseas. She rightly suggests that working as both a practitioner and teacher in the context of sustainable fashion is challenging and hints at an increase in pedagogic developments through targeted briefs, collaborative activity etc, but a detailed of this is not entered into. The final chapter by David Collins – *The socially-engaged/interventionist artist as educator: some thoughts and dilemmas*, also provides an interesting and very readable account of his own practice and also gives a more detailed account of how he draws on his own work in the pedagogic approaches he takes with undergraduate students. Through this he provides extremely useful insights into the value of a practitioner/educator exploring where the two roles intersect/interact. He examines this further in a community rather than educational context through his account of working with two young black men – initially in a collaborative project as socially engaged art, but through which he also found himself stepping in and out of the educator role.

For me, the chapters in the book that take a more critical stance provide valuable perspectives on design pedagogy and give much food for thought. As a D&T educator this is useful both in the contribution to ideas about design pedagogy that span educational phases and also into the insights into those practices within a higher education context that D&T learners may well progress on to. The aim behind the initial conference was an important one and I entirely endorse the views of Kate Hatton when she calls for the continuation of research and reflection in this important area. My own addition here would be to encourage opportunities for increased dialogue between those concerned with design pedagogy at all levels of education.

## Review

### Design Pedagogy Research: Leeds 2007

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