

THE POLITICS OF CHANGE, CRAFT AND THE BAUHAUS REBORN: NEW RELATIONSHIPS IN DESIGN EDUCATION

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Abstract

South African education systems straddle the developed/developing world schism, an old-school-style Eurocentric view has long tussled with an Africanist dialectic. Educators struggle with access and upliftment issues whilst implementing outcomes-based learning programmes and simultaneously maintaining academic standards. At Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU), conscious of the need to build future capacity, innovation in teaching and learning is paramount and the issues identified above are constantly under debate. Experimentation is an ongoing aspect of teaching methodology.

This innovation is especially necessary in teaching the design disciplines. The secondary school system makes little or no provision for the visual arts and even less for design. Students enter university with essentially no contextual reference point for design. So begins the complex process of creating literate, informed, socially conscious designers.

This paper will contextualise the situation facing design education in South Africa by citing examples where attempts are underway to bridge the gaps between the disciplines of Fashion Design, Graphic Design, Textile Design and Photography; by arguing the case for Trans-disciplinary Design as a possible solution to building design capacity in South Africa; and lastly to emphasise the importance, in a developing economy of the artisanal, the notion of crafting, and the sense of pride and achievement that results from mastery of hand skills as the keystone to the creative process – the place where design and art meet.

It attempts to present and clarify the context faced by many design educators in South Africa and highlights some of the innovative practice educators have to apply to encourage learning, grow African content and broaden design sensibility.

Key Words: *Craft, Innovative Methodology, Trans-disciplinary Design.*

South African education systems straddle the developed/developing world schism, an old-school-style Eurocentric view tussles with an Africanist approach, educators struggle with access and upliftment issues whilst implementing outcomes-based learning programmes and simultaneously maintaining academic standards. At Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU), conscious of the need to build future capacity in design, innovation in teaching and learning is paramount. The issues identified above are constantly under debate and experimentation is an ongoing aspect of teaching methodology.

This paper reports research that attempts to clarify the context of design education in South Africa (SA), from the perspective of government policy and private interest (the "politics of change" in my title) and the realities of tertiary education and will then argue the need for placing more emphasis on the artisanal as a crucial outcome of the design education skill set. It will then present the case at NMMU's Department of Applied Design (for which the Bauhaus stands as allegory), where we are exploring alternate approaches to design education, especially with regard to trans-disciplinary design studies.

Up until 2005 design education in SA was restricted primarily to tertiary education (universities and colleges). With the exception of a handful of private schools the visual arts, and design in particular, was barely represented at secondary education level. With the presentation of a revised national curriculum for schools in 2002 (known as General Education and Training – GET) this was set to change, especially as it would affect the preparedness of school-leavers intending to study visual arts and design at tertiary level after finishing their schooling (South Africa. Department of Education,

2002). This revised policy was named Curriculum 2005, presented by the Department of Education (DoE) in 2002 to cover all school grades up to 9. This policy has its roots in the adoption of outcomes-based education (OBE), superseding the "traditional aims-and-objectives approach" in South African schools in 1997¹ and the subsequent phasing in of new curricula over the next ten years (South Africa. Department of Education, September 1997). Finally, in the Government Gazette of 27 July 2005, the new National Senior Certificate (NSC) for school-leavers was promulgated, making, yet again, provision for design education at a secondary school level, with the first cohort of graduates in 2008 (South Africa. Department of Education 2005:23). These policies were encouraging for design education and for the country as a whole. Design and the visual arts had tacitly been acknowledged as making an equivalent educational and economic contribution as the fields of agriculture, business, engineering, law, health sciences, mathematics and computers, for example. The previous political dispensation had never considered the creative arts as critical to cultural and economic development, with few schools offering these fields of learning and fewer tertiary institutions accepting them as entrance qualifications – a consequence of the DoE not giving design 'matric exemption' (university entrance) status.

At the same time the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) was created to represent all issues concerning language, heritage, craft, arts and culture "to develop and preserve South African culture to ensure social cohesion and nation-building" (South Africa. Department of Arts and Culture 2004:3)². Supporting the vision and mission was the implementation of a cultural industries growth strategy that: "...capitalises on the economic potential of the craft, music, film, publishing, and design industries. The department gives support, in the form of financing, management capacity, advocacy, and networking, to developing Public Privet (sic) Partnerships (PPPs) and other initiatives that use culture as a tool for urban regeneration" (South Africa. Department of Arts and Culture 2005. 8:para.1).

This was positive as the value, contribution and potential of the "design industries" was recognised. The strategic plan for 2005 made reference to "design" again:

"The Department continues to support industry initiatives that are consistent with the objective of job-creation and economic development. To this end, it is also focussing on the design, craft, book and publishing sectors" (South Africa. Department of Arts and Culture 2005. 8: para.2).

The intention to 'focus' on certain sectors supports the growing consensus that design is a powerful vehicle for social change and economic development, a view underscored by Grefé (2007:para. 5) as he expressed AIGA's role "...to stimulate thinking about design; to demonstrate the value of design..." and more recently, "...to advance designing as a professional craft, strategic tool and vital cultural force". The imperative for this is echoed by Ravi Naidoo, South Africa's 'design evangelist', because he believes that the creative industries (read design) have the potential to contribute towards building the South African economy. In 2004 he was proposing the formation of a Creative Coalition, to drive the policy makers into creating a cogent and coherent strategy for the creative industry.

"Our country does not have a plan for the creative industries... and we need one, pronto. We need an over-arching, all-encompassing route map for the growth of the creative industries" (Naidoo 2004).

Included in his "route map" is "education in secondary schools and tertiary institutions". The revised school curriculum has fortunately been updated to incorporate this view (coincidentally one may assume) and subsequently universities have enrolled the first group of NSC graduates in 2009. As a further endorsement in support of design as a key player in social and economic transformation the DAC, has established meaningful partnerships with the private sector and other strategic partners such as Marketing, (sic – should read "Media") Advertising, Publishing, Printing and Packaging [Sector Education and Training Authority] MAPPP-SETA to support existing strategies. The accredited training in the sector has been achieved through partnership with MAPPP-SETA on Learnerships and Skills Programmes. These programmes is (sic) an effort to ensure an increase in the skills base of the beneficiaries thus increasing their employability potential and also as a sustainable basis of an exit strategy in the near future (South Africa. Department of Arts and Culture 2008. 10:para. 2).

¹ This policy document from 12 years ago, already set out the specific outcomes for eight proposed learning areas, of which Arts and Culture is one and it has eight pre-defined outcomes.

² Since 2004 the vision and mission statement for the DAC has been consistent and first appears in its current form in the 2nd 3-year strategic plan.

Seemingly the vision to 'grow' the viability of design and by inference design education, and build on its transformative potential comes from a variety of sources. Impumelelo, South Africa's foremost business-to-business, Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) publication included a special feature in their 2008 edition. Bryant (2008:37) advances the opinion that "South African creative industries and design can help overcome some of the development challenges facing the continent, as well as boosting the economy through generating wealth, creating jobs and growing exports". National retailer Woolworths has established a programme called "Making the difference through design" that targets schoolteachers and learners in grades 10-12 and introduces them to the many fascinating aspects of design through a resource that helps achieve the requisite OBE objectives. Woolworths is cognisant of design's role in building social cohesion and life skills.

In addition to providing role models, Making the Difference Through Design is also fostering a sense of pride and recognition for South African designs and designers and the contribution design makes to quality of life. Design education teaches valuable life skills such as problem solving and innovation, as well as entrepreneurial skills which learners will be able to apply in all aspects of their lives, no matter what career path they follow (Making the difference through design, 2006:para. 5).

The South African Bureau of Standards' CEO also adds his voice to the design debate, agreeing that the contribution design makes to the national economy and its socio-cultural contribution to development "should be quantified in order to add to the stature of the profession and to place a real value on its contribution" (Kuscus 2008: 2). It is apparent that policies are in place to support design and the creative industries at GET and FET level through the DoE, that the DAC is supporting and funding the promotion of design as a force for social and economic change; that business, industry, professional and cultural organisations are committed to building design's capacity to influence the future track of South Africa and that therefore, collectively, design should be a national priority.

This could not be further from the truth. Unfortunately policy documents and strategic plans serve little value if there is no concerted call to action and a real, implementable rollout of ideals. Without total support from government to make design a national priority and the recognition that design, in all of its guises, can be a massive instrument for social change and economic development, it is unlikely that the private sector will be able to achieve that on their own. For example, the DAC budget for the Arts and Culture in Society programme for 2008 was R334 000 000. None of that money has been allocated to design. Previous strategic plans made specific mention of design as an important objective but the latest 3-year plan's oblique reference in the Arts, Social Development and Youth programme is the "Promotion of Arts Education and Training (AET)" by introducing an arts and culture curriculum and placing arts practitioners/educators in selected schools. To this end the strategy seems to be to establish a "framework of (sic) collaboration with [the] Department of Education..." (South Africa. Department of Education 2008: 32-35).³

It is important to consider the realities of the school education system. Large numbers of teachers are not adequately qualified or sufficiently experienced to teach arts and culture subjects. The decision to close teacher's training colleges in the 1990s has resulted in a desperate shortage of teachers. Although the budget for education⁴ has grown from R39 billion in 1997 to R140 billion in 2009 in real terms, as a percentage of the national budget it has gone from 21 percent to 17 percent, and still there are schools without electricity, running water and the infrastructure necessary to run an efficient and fair (to the teachers and learners) OBE system. These are all constraints that diminish the roll-out of the arts and culture learning field in particular, as traditionally this was not seen as a core element of

³ See the spreadsheet outlining the key departmental objectives in the *Strategic Plan 1 April 2008 – 31 March 2011*, pp. 32-35. The stated purpose here is to "Develop and promote arts and culture in South Africa and mainstream its role in social development". The intended objectives are encouraging and benefit broader arts and culture development by highlighting areas of critical need. Design is not one of them! The document further elucidates on the role of Cultural Development and International Co-operation, pp. 40-47 with the purpose being to "Improve economic and other development opportunities for South African arts and culture, nationally and globally, through mutually beneficial partnerships, thereby ensuring the sustainability of the sector." Puzzlingly there is no mention of design here either, especially considering that economic and developmental sustainability figure quite strongly in the statement.

⁴ Comprehensive documentation, from 1997 to the present is available from the South African National Treasury website at <http://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/national%20budget/default.aspx>. Accessed 29 April 2009.

the old 'aims-and-objectives' teaching approach. Most importantly the teachers who are expected to implement the new system are products of the old.

An expectation that the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) might have better foresight in their strategic planning is not apparent. According to Shakung (2009) of the DTI, at present there is no policy regarding design or the creative industries, nor any strategy to develop trade, investment or infrastructure regarding design, except where it has a direct effect on poverty alleviation. As this affects mostly co-operatives in rural areas, the emphasis here is on craft, the craft industry and small and micro enterprise development that can result in export opportunities. The National Industrial Policy Framework (NIPF) published by the DTI in August 2007 stated that: " 'During 2007/08 more comprehensive strategies will be developed in the following sectors: ... (amongst others) - Creative Industries.' No detail (sic) project plan, project or KAP [key action plan] could be found in the document relating to the creative industries" (IDA World Design Survey Pilot Project: South African findings 2008: 31)⁵. The most damning views are expressed in the IDA World Design Survey Pilot Project by Smith (2008: 73) of IdeaSA "...South Africa has a weak institutional support system in government for design – South Africa does not have a design policy". Van Heerden (2008: 69), lead researcher for the project, points out that design and designers in South Africa are doing well at the present time, but that future concerns include "educational output, the lack of concern for intellectual property rights, the lack of coordination and the absence of a 'champion' from the side of government". Design could become a major vehicle for social and economic change, affecting the lives of millions of South Africans in a positive way, or it could remain a secondary player in the global creative industries boom that has seen the trade in design grow from \$120 billion in 1996 to \$220 billion in 2005 (Sanderson 2008: 97)⁶.

Despite this complicating environment, the long-term prognosis if government responds positively is very good, enhancing the future capacity of the creative industries. Regardless, tertiary education, in a variety of design disciplines, continues to supply the industry with qualified graduates from 43 public and private institutions. The School of Music, Art and Design at NMMU graduates about 70 – 80 students per year from 3-year diploma and 4-year degree programmes in fashion, graphic design, photography and textile design. Cardinal to the success of the various programmes is the 'quality' of the students and the effectiveness of the teaching and learning.

The former is dictated by the FET schooling system and the latter by the adaptability of a programme to changing needs within the marketplace. Considering the issues to do with schooling suggests that levels of exposure to design and the creative industries varies significantly from school to school, and that actual hands-on experience, knowledge and craft skills are dependent on available resources like art materials, computers with graphic arts programs, teachers who are adequately trained in the visual arts, and studio-type infrastructure. Headmasters also need to be sufficiently informed about the creative economy to give arts and culture learning areas equivalent priority in the subject mix at their schools. For example, of the 337⁷ schools in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality, where NMMU is located, many indicate that they offer arts and culture to grade 9, but only 12 offer it in the critical grade 10-12 band, as a subject leading towards the NSC, and thus a valuable indicator of preparedness for university entrance.

This preparedness should focus on the importance of the artisanal as a vehicle for students to build skills and validate their design output. This is particularly significant in the light of the inequitable scenario in schools' art and design education that results in poor hand skills proficiency and crafting ability. For this reason, and because of the resurgence of interest in craft around the world, we at NMMU have identified craft as a critical component of the creative process and its resultant output. The theme for this year's Design Indaba Conference in Cape Town clearly echoes this sentiment. Botha (2009), Design Indaba magazine editor, writes: "Craft is not an ethnic oddity, sentimental lesser

⁵ The complete document outlining the DTI's National Industry Policy Framework is available as a PDF from <http://www.thedti.gov.za/nipf/nipf.htm>.

⁶ The data is retrieved from a presentation by the Icograda (International Council of Graphic Design Associations) MD to the Seoul Forum 2008, concerning the World Design Survey and appears as Appendix E in *IDA World Design Survey Pilot Project: South African findings*.

⁷ Statistics according to the Eastern Cape Department of Education website. Available from <http://www.ecdoe.gov.za/schools/1/all/7/all/School%20name>. Accessed 30 April 2009. The data on schools offering arts and culture in grade 10-12 is confirmed by Jennifer Fabbri, art education officer at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum.

to art and design, nor the naïve worship of the once-off and handmade. Craft is excellence, conviction, empowerment and raw innovation".

How does this relate to the university art school context and the symbiotic relationship between art, craft and design? The essential difference from our perspective resides in the change in focus from thinking, playing and experimenting whilst at art school to creating, crafting and selling when one leaves. In both instances 'stuff' is made but the significance of what is made and how it is crafted once the protective environment of the art school gives way to the real world is what makes the difference. No matter how great an idea or a concept may be in the beginning stages of the creative process, it will ultimately stand or fall based on the strength of its production, on the craft of its making. The quality of the creativity central to an artefact is equal to the quality of the creative output itself. This is where crafting has the power to affect how an artefact is received by its audience and how it is validated as a result. Of extreme importance is the growing numbers of entry level students⁸ who display a lack of hand-skill dexterity and as a result require significant practice performing simple tasks which one would assume would be natural to someone wishing to study within the visual arts. For example, fashion students struggle to cut along a line with a pair of scissors or to sew in a straight line; many graphic design students are confounded by measuring systems and their application to drawing defined formats or constructing three-dimensional objects; accurate folding, manipulating of various drawing, painting and modelling media, crudeness of mark-making are further challenges. These underscore a growing deficit in crafting skills and experience.

The FET educational background presented at the start of this paper should contextualise why this phenomenon exists, but at NMMU we believe that there are other factors that contribute to the problem. Which digits of the hand are favoured in eye-hand co-ordination training seems to be the question. One may speculate that thumbs are the digits of choice, used to operate gaming consoles and mobile phones, favouring the power or primitive grip over the precision grip (Shim 2004).⁹ Psychomotor skills that develop over a number of years as children progress through school, playing sport, drawing, practicing two- and three-dimensional perception exercises through conscious engagement in art practice, physics and mathematics, for example, and unconsciously through performing chores in the home etc. are not refined. Rather, the new generation at NMMU have a fearless sense of technology, a confidence and curiosity built from the new schooling system where group activities are commonplace and social integration is important. Media exposure drives opinion, and a keen interest in adrenalin-generating adventure activities is standard. Unfortunately none of these factors develops the refined and purposeful hand skills so critical to the art and design-making activity.

'Real' learning happens most effectively where psycho-motor skills, or hand-eye-co-ordination (Atherton 2005), and cognitive processes are balanced, allowing the idea or concept to be crafted and 'finished' in a way that enhances the perception of it. The inability to craft or finish an artefact well detracts from the resultant artefact, design or work, and effectively diminishes its intrinsic value. The fact that so few aspirant designers come to art school with sufficient experience of basic hand-skills is an indictment on a school learning system that has avoided psycho-motor development in favour of psycho-social and conceptual development. The art of craft needs to be resurrected in our art schools.

By reflecting on the history of the Bauhaus school it is possible to envisage a way forward. Established by the architect and theoretician Walter Gropius in Weimar, Germany, in 1919 it embodied the principle of 'construction', implicit in its name, by being the first comprehensive art and design school.

By 1926 the mantra of the Bauhaus was "art and technology: a new unity" (Meggs & Purvis 2006: 312), and the result of that ideology was the development of a refined and more sophisticated understanding of craft as a significant aspect of 'making'. Krukowski (1992:198-199) clarifies this by pointing out that the "dissolution of certain 'artificial barriers' ", imposed by tradition, allowed for art, craft and design to become more integrated. The Bauhaus artists became designers who used

⁸ This observation results from views expressed by colleagues when we panel mark student work. Using pre-determined criteria for the assessment like 'concept', 'process', 'design' and 'technique' (which includes use of medium, construction and mounting; all hand-skill outcomes) the latter often features as problematic. We have had to institute specific workshops to train students in these skills, which have become increasingly absent over the last several years.

⁹ Various examples of human hand prehension are shown by Shim in support of his doctoral research at Ball State University.

technology to craft artefacts for machine production. Intrinsic to their premise was the knowledge that art, craft and design could co-exist, that it was virtually impossible to separate them without losing the values that they individually fed into the process.

Craft, as an essential component of the art and design-making process, is important. Lees-Maffei (2004: 208) refers to the editorial in the March/April 2003 edition of *Crafts* magazine:

In March 1973, in issue 1, an article called *The Concept of Craft* asked – among others – two questions: "What is Craft?" and "How does it differ on the one hand from industry and on the other hand from art?" 30 years on, a third question follows up on the second: "Does it matter?" Certainly today few makers consider the barriers between art, craft and design of such significance. Craft and industry are routinely partners, and many designers happily combine the making of one-offs with the production-line process...[and] the term craft is now simply "inadequate" to summarise the collaborative, interdisciplinary diversity of current practice.

Botha (2009) underlines how craft and technology co-exist:

"Contributors [to the Design Indaba Conference 2009] were contacted by email, interviews conducted on Skype, photos taken with megapixels, words sculpted in Microsoft Office and layout on (sic) InDesign...speakers, exhibitors and media partners...seem to indicate that craft has achieved a new status, appealing to 21st century economics of scarcity, [and] product innovation..."

This is the backdrop upon which universities have to metaphorically paint, in their role as Higher Education and Training (HET) institutions for design and the visual arts. In South Africa we have to educate students who come from diverse cultural, language and socio-economic backgrounds, who have been schooled in a system that is equivalent but not equal, who decide to study disciplines which they have little or no prior experience of, and then 'transform' them into capable, savvy, informed, proficient and employable designers. Equally important in this task is to develop, within these young people, who frequently come from disadvantaged backgrounds, the understanding and practice of socially enlightened and responsible design and an awareness of their power, as designers, to influence change – to be leaders and innovators, rather than just followers and adopters.

To be able to achieve this goal at NMMU required that a review of the existing teaching and learning practice would need to be conducted. Aware of the trend towards a more integrative approach to design teaching in a number of universities and colleges¹⁰ around the world and of the uptake of design thinking as a model for other disciplines such as management and marketing (West 2007)¹¹, for example, we, in the Department of Applied Design, explored the available options and introduced some significant changes to our outcomes and our methodology. Two events provoked the idea of trans-disciplinary design teaching. Firstly, by an edict of parliament in 2005, the HET environment was upturned with the rationalisation of universities, which saw the creation of NMMU through the merging of the former University of Port Elizabeth and the vocationally oriented former P E Technikon. Although the merger was initially met with some resistance from the respective constituencies, by 2009 there exists a vital and newfound sense of possibility and opportunity within the schools and departments comprising the Faculty of Arts, where all the design disciplines are based. Especially significant is the fact that university-style programmes, with their freer range of subject choices, co-exist with structured vocational-style programmes, allowing for a diversity of study directions. All the design programmes are of the vocational type, being structured "to contain the locus of design knowledge within an individual field...a natural instinct given the traditionally accepted methods of establishing professionalism" (Mendoza, Bernasconi, & MacDonald 2007: 309).

¹⁰ The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Rhode Island School of Design are two of the more well known institutions that have diverse, cross-disciplinary programmes, inclusive of broader liberal arts content and even options for subjects in the natural sciences and social sciences. Curriculum guides are available from <http://www.saic.edu/> and <http://www.risd.edu/>.

¹¹ Harry West is vice-president for strategy and innovation at Continuum, a design and innovation consultancy in Boston. The video supporting the article presents the case for why the Rotman School of Management in Toronto has decided to place more emphasis on the growing importance of design thinking in business and further advocating how design education needs to evolve to encompass a balance between creative-right-brain and analytical-left-brain thinking. According to West, "the current education system is good at training people with narrowly defined skill sets". The time has come rather to integrate them.

Secondly, we recognised the problems inherent in this traditional-style structure that were no longer directed at creating a design graduate who would better serve the needs of 21st century society. Designers need to be able to adapt to changing environments and adopt whatever skills and processes are required to accommodate that change. Mendoza, Bernasconi and MacDonald (2007: 312) support this principle: "Creating these broader conceptualisations of design within the existing curriculum creates an environment which...will graduate a better prepared student". To be able to achieve the transformation of South African society and for design to become the 'vehicle for social and economic change' discussed previously one has to understand that design "is a process; its content is created when the context for the process is chosen". Thus, "delimiters such as 'interior', 'fashion', 'graphic'..."(Ibid) suggest the nature of the design process that needs to be applied to a particular design problem. The need to rearticulate the various design programmes for the near future has presented the opportunity to plot a trans-disciplinary path within the new structure.

'Trans-disciplinary' defines how our approach to this desired cross-pollination is applied as opposed to the term 'interdisciplinary'. Mostly the term 'interdisciplinary' is used to describe the process whereby there is some form of sharing or collaboration between disciplines but that they continue to remain distinct, existing within the predefined paradigm created by their delimitation. So graphic design, for example, may work with fashion design but may not work within fashion design. Or, more often, graphic design may work for fashion design but not with fashion design. Our intent with trans-disciplinary design is to break through these restrictive conventions and present design as a universal concept that permeates discipline delimiters to solve problems and depends upon different craft skills, techniques and processes for their execution. Using the same example would therefore show graphic designers and fashion designers using their conceptual ability, based on a universal or generic understanding of design, to solve either a fashion- or graphic design problem, and then pooling their resources of crafting, process experience and technique to execute the solution. Thus graphic design is within fashion design, fashion design is within graphic design, and both reside within the design environment. Obviously the product of fashion design is different to that of graphic design but we attempt, through an integrative teaching and learning environment, to dispense with the notion that design is a series of distinct and separate compartments, but is rather a set of parallel processes that allow students to intersect with the broader design community. We are not suggesting that we are attempting to create a 'universal' designer. The bodies of knowledge lodged within individual disciplines are too great and the skill sets required to implement them too specific for students to gain the necessary expertise in more than one discipline at a time. More important is the increased awareness of and sensitivity to other creative disciplines that is generated by the trans-disciplinary experience.

The first steps towards achieving this began with collapsing four departments and their related disciplines into two: Graphic Design and Photography became Visual Communication; Fashion Design and Textile Design and Technology became Fashion. To validate this structure academic post descriptors were adjusted to accommodate the change. There are now visual communication lecturers who teach within photography or graphic design. A lecturer in 'applied design' has the brief to teach fashion, graphic design and photography¹². The notion of elitism within the delimitations of design is in the throes of being demolished and students and staff are accepting the refreshing dynamic this is adding to the teaching and learning environment. To maintain this energy required considerable encouragement, persuasion and substantiation to staff as to why this was a healthy and achievable practice. Many were trapped in the discipline-specific, behaviourist, teacher-centred paradigm that excluded any possibility of integration with other areas of design or of considering any other methodology. Through this process of merging departments and blurring roles something new and exciting is emerging. A few examples should illustrate the evolving way forward:

- Project briefings occur in a 'round table' (often with smaller groups) environment that encourages open discussion, questioning and thinking and allows students the opportunity to contextualise. Jackson (2008: 67) refers to this as a gestalt approach to learning where problem solving happens through a "learning by thinking" process.
- Projects are devised to include outputs that require involvement from other disciplines. So a visual communication brief could include a design component (print advertising, corporate identity

¹² This portfolio comprises experience and qualification in graphic design and photography at theoretical and practical level, with the obvious aesthetic sensibility associated with the disciplines. The fashion component is add-on and required that the incumbent gain additional knowledge concerning contemporary culture, costume development and fashion discourse, which are all theory-based.

or publication, for example) an imaging component (staged location photography, formal portraiture, photo-journalism) a marketing component (brand strategy development, CI manual, marketing roll-out) and possibly interior design (shop front, office environment, event staging). The implications of this sort of brief are that students from different disciplines are 'forced' to work together towards an end that has a direct influence on not only their own assessment, but also that of the others in the group to which they have been allocated as co-workers – they all depend on the integrity of each other for their personal success.

- Criticism sessions are guided by lecturers but are largely student-driven and each project incorporates a number of process criticisms before submission. Importantly, the sessions allow for further experience and learning within disciplines which are not necessarily the students' primary learning field and this facilitates the uptake of process and technical knowledge within those other fields.
- As the students progress to higher academic levels, their acquisition of knowledge and experience leads them to more complex, real-world, collaborative projects. Although "sequential and mechanical" (Jackson 2008: 66) learning is essential to building a foundation for cognitive processes, the lower levels tend to a more behaviourist style due to the unequal nature of the skill-sets they bring to their studies. As their crafting skills improve so the learning paradigm shifts to conceptual development and a less teacher-centred approach.
- Visual communication and fashion come together in an annual 'megaproject', which is the culmination of various intersections throughout the year. A fashion and media extravaganza is staged towards the end of the academic year that merges all the experience and knowledge gained by the students in an event that involves graphic-, fashion-, textile-, interior design and photography. Conceptualised in its entirety by the students, and incorporating everything that they have learned over the course of three or four years, this is the measure of how much they understand about trans-disciplinary design and the critical professional, social, technical and craft skills that they have gained working in a cognitive environment that encouraged free and critical thinking.

In this environment the students are able to experience what we believe is a more immersive design encounter, allowing them to share their learning and perception experiences with their peers and their lecturers. Because the projects are context-driven, within this trans-disciplinary space the opportunity to engage in narrative discourse frequently presents itself, and storytelling is a natural outgrowth. "[Today,] the act of designing goes well beyond the creation of mere art[e]fact to embody individual and collective values, engage senses and emotions, support processes, and shape our world view" (Danko, Meneely & Portillo 2006: 10).

What we are attempting to achieve at NMMU is not unique. We are not pioneering a new way of being or inventing a new teaching methodology – it is a timely recognition of the need to change the existing status quo and to align the teaching and learning environment with the realities of the world in which we now operate. The methodologies need to be adapted accordingly. It also suggests that innovation can come from an evolutionary process and need not be catastrophic. A lot of what we used to do is appropriate, effective and still relevant. The trans-disciplinary design experiment is ongoing and we are discovering new ways of aligning our design programmes with perceptions and reality, to build better designers for the future. Craft and 'crafting' will continue to grow in importance as excellence of production is emphasised. Innovation, flexibility and accessibility have to be the forces that build a design curriculum that 'fits' the needs of a society in transformation. Despite the politics of obfuscation, craft will remain the cornerstone of design education and the trans-disciplinary experiment at NMMU will continue to inform the future track of our applied design programmes.

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Short Biography

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