

EMBRACING A CULTURE OF ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN INTERIOR DESIGN EDUCATION

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Abstract

Citizenship implies association and involvement in a community. Even though the conditions of involvement can be specified by government laws, citizenship is in fact not only a matter of politics, but actually an issue of culture and experience. It can therefore be described as a status and as a set of attitudes, associations and expectations that go beyond territorial boundaries. Active citizenship is the viewpoint that citizens should work for the improvement of their community. The notion requires active participation through economic contribution and volunteer work to improve life for all citizens.

In 2011, the University of Johannesburg introduced a program in Active, Critical Citizenship. The purpose of the program was to develop, through active engagement with issues, the basic understanding of every South African's rights and responsibility of citizenship. The program in Active Citizenship was to enable students to understand their status of citizenship and to encourage them to exercise the rights and responsibilities which are associated with their citizenship. In addition, it also had to encourage students to work towards the improvement of their community through economic participation and service to others.

The Department of Interior Design chose to integrate the Active Citizenship program into the curriculum as developmental outcomes. This option was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, the Interior Design curriculum is tightly structured and presented little flexibility to include additional modules. Secondly, the majority of the topics in the Active Citizenship program were already integrated in the curriculum that was offered to students at that time. Aspects such as critical thinking, social accountability and environmental responsibility were already embedded in the majority of the modules presented in the Interior Design program.

In order to address the needs of the Active Citizenship Program of the University, the content of the topics that had to be included in the curriculum were categorised as the political exercise of citizenship, the rights and responsibilities of citizens, personal and professional citizenship, the social exercise of citizenship by way of understanding social divisions, and critical knowledge citizenship.

This paper will reflect on the manner in which the Interior Design Department implemented the developmental outcomes to address the Active Citizenship program needs. This paper will describe how the content was addressed in the curriculum of the Interior Design Department of the University of Johannesburg and show how this approach assisted in creating a culture of Active Citizenship in Interior Design education.

Keywords: *Interior Design, Interior Design education, Interior Design culture*

Introduction

The University of Johannesburg introduced a program in Active Critical Citizenship in 2011 with the intention to develop the basic understanding of every citizen's rights and responsibilities. Through active engagement with issues, the program was to enable students to understand their status of citizenship and to encourage them to exercise those rights and responsibilities by working towards the improvement of their community

through economic participation and service to others. In the implementation of this program, the Department of Interior Design at the University of Johannesburg chose to integrate the Active Critical Citizenship program into the curriculum as developmental outcomes.

The role of higher education in promoting citizenship is formally recognised by the National Planning Commission of South Africa. The recent National Planning Commission report declared the need for South Africa to have a higher education sector that will contribute to higher incomes, higher productivity and a shift towards a more “knowledge-intensive economy” (The Presidency 2012, p. 17). The report highlights the important role that education plays in achieving these goals and in doing so, develop good quality citizenship. In response, the Council on Higher Education confirmed that Higher Education should develop “citizens with knowledge, critical thinking skills and values” (Institutional Audits Directorate 2013, p. 19) that can attend to the challenges faced at all levels of society in South Africa. These challenges include the consequence of globalization, the economic uncertainty that currently exists and the growing unemployment of the youth.

Citizenship education is internationally recognised. The United Kingdom introduced active learning for active citizenship (ALAC) in 2004 as a community education program to promote participation in citizenship. Even though this program was sponsored by the government, it was positioned within communities who worked in partnership with universities and Workers Education Associations. The latter is a voluntary association that provides workplace and community-based learning. Similar government sponsored programs also exist in the United States of America, France, Finland, Indonesia and Brazil, to mention a few.

The intention of this paper is threefold:

- to explain the framework within which the Active Citizenship program was implemented in the Department of Interior Design at the University of Johannesburg ;
- to elaborate on some of the projects that were developed to encourage a culture of active citizenship;
- to discuss the lessons learnt through these projects and their implications on the development of active citizenship within interior design education at the University of Johannesburg .

Underlying each of these objectives is the considerable potential that exists to develop and encourage a culture of *active* citizenship through the involvement with issues that are relevant to interior designers today, which will shape the world in the future.

Active Citizenship

Citizenship relates to the membership in a community and can be considered in two different ways, namely as a status or as an existence (Falk 1994). As a status, citizenship is understood as a formal recognition of belonging by virtue of a person’s political affiliation or geographical position. Existentially, citizenship is understood as an approach to thinking, association and expectations that does not necessarily relate to any specific boundaries. In the case of this exploration, the interior design students at the University of Johannesburg are geographically positioned in Johannesburg, South Africa while they also share the association through their approach to thinking and outlook as interior designers. In educating citizenship, it is therefore important that students are made aware of their roles as citizens in both these contexts.

A culture of *active* citizenship, however, refers to more than the membership of a community; it also suggests the value of participation within the communities. Although active citizenship is a contested notion, instilled with different meanings and associations, it is generally described as being both an active practice and a status linked with civil rights (ggIn 2012, p. 12). Active citizenship implies that citizens should work for the improvement of their community. The notion requires active participation through economic contribution and volunteer work to improve life for all citizens.

Heater (2004), in his discussion on the teaching of citizenship defines a citizen as a person who is “furnished with knowledge of public affairs, instilled with attitudes of civic virtue and equipped with skills to participate in the political area” (Heater 2004, p. 343). If this is the case, it goes to reason that students can be expected to critically reflect on their attitudes and conduct as citizens. For this reason they are expected to acquire knowledge in theory components, consider and reflect this knowledge in practical modules and deliberate on both through active participation in debate.

Research Methodology

The paper reflects on existing practice that is relevant to teaching and learning practice at the University of Johannesburg. It is the initial research phase for the development of a debate on the integration of active citizenship into interior design curricula both nationally and internationally.

Framework: Integrating Active Critical Citizenship

With the introduction of the Active Critical Citizenship program, the University of Johannesburg identified specific themes that had to be addressed in the curriculum. These themes included the political exercise of citizenship, the rights and responsibilities of citizens, personal and professional citizenship, the social exercise of citizenship by way of understanding social divisions, and critical knowledge citizenship (Table 1).

The Department of Interior Design at the University of Johannesburg decided to integrate the Active Citizenship Program that was initiated by senate, into the existing curriculum as developmental outcomes. The reasoning for this decision was two-fold. Firstly, the Interior Design curriculum in its current state is tightly structured and this allowed for little flexibility to include additional modules. Secondly, the majority of the topics in the Active Citizenship Program were already included, at varying degrees, in the curriculum that was offered to students at that time. Aspects such as critical thinking, social accountability and environmental responsibility were already embedded in many of the modules presented in the Interior Design curriculum.

Themes for Active Critical Citizenship Education

Political exercise of citizenship: Learning about the institutions, political problems and democratic practices. Being an effective citizen locally, regionally, nationally and globally by developing skills, values and knowledge.

Rights and responsibilities of citizens: Learning about the political rights and responsibilities of citizens.

Social exercise of citizenship by understanding social divisions: Learning about becoming positively involved in the life and concerns of their own community.

Personal and Professional citizenship: Learning self confidence and the appropriate social and moral behaviour in and beyond their communities.

Critical knowledge citizenship: Discussions / forum on current issues.

Table 1: Themes for Active Critical Citizenship Education

Aligned with Heater’s (2004) discussion, the Department of Interior Design focused on the transfer of the Active Critical Citizenship by integrating developmental outcomes in the current curriculum. The education of public affairs is delivered by means of literacy in theory and practical modules, the skills to participate actively in matters by way of developing the ability to argue a case using the literary knowledge and the encouragement to approach citizenship with integrity, honesty and with moral values through debate and discussion.

In addition, the development of critical thinking and exploration of active critical citizenship is amplified as the student progress through the Interior Design course. This is clearly visible in the outcomes that are presented

in the learning guides of modules. At a first year level, the curriculum provides learning opportunities in the form of knowledge transfer on economic, environmental and ethical business practices in the Professional Interior Design Practice 1 and Theory of Materials and Finishes 1 modules. It must be noted that the Professional Interior Design Practice 1 module is not presented by the Interior Design department, but facilitated by the University's business school. It therefore has a strong business focus rather than an interior design perspective. It is only in the third and fourth years of study that the modules address professional practice with a specific interior design viewpoint. Further understanding on design, empire, colonialism and commerce is dealt with in the History of Art and Design 1 module.

During the second year of study, the curriculum addresses the engagement and application of skills that were developed in the first year of study. The modules Interior Design 2 and Theory of Materials and Finishes 2 attend to matters of critical knowledgeable citizenship by expecting students to formulate and present argument, critique and opinions as responsible and participatory citizens. In addition, the module Professional Interior Design Practice 2 addresses the values and ethics in personal and professional conduct by promoting honesty, integrity, respect and tolerance.

The third year students are generally expected to apply their knowledge and skills to address matters identified through discussion and forum. The social exercise of citizenship theme is dealt with in Professional Interior Design Practice 3 through discussion of matters like law, especially contract law and intellectual property law and how it impacts on interior designers. In Design Theory 3 and History of Art and Design 3, the critical Knowledgeable Citizenship is dealt with through analysis, reflection and comment on topical matters while conducting research to attain knowledge that relate to world views. Matters such as gender in visual culture and architecture, feminism and such are also covered in these modules to encourage an understanding of social divisions and interests in race, class and gender. Science, technology and society, the impact of global warming and, environment responsibility is handled with sustainability and green design in Design Theory 3 and by way of discussion and forum during the annual Green Week held by the Faculty of Art Design and Architecture at the University of Johannesburg. This event is discussed in more detail later. In the module, Interior Design 3, students are expected to identify problems within a given context and are required to apply their literary knowledge and practical skills to develop solutions that relate to the matter. They are required to present argument, critique and opinion as a responsible participatory citizen.

| Incorporation of themes for Active Critical Citizenship into the Interior Design Curriculum | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|---|
| | First Year modules | Second Year modules | Third Year modules | Fourth Year modules |
| Political exercise of citizenship | | | Professional Interior Design Practice 3; History of Art and design 3 | |
| Rights and responsibilities of citizens | Theory of Materials and finishes 1 | Theory of Materials and finishes 2 | Professional Interior Design Practice 3 | |
| Social exercise of citizenship by understanding social divisions | History of Art and design 1; Professional Interior Design Practice 1 | History of Art and design 2; Design Theory 2; Graphic interpretation 2 | History of Art and design 3; Design Theory 3 | Interior Design 4; Professional Interior Design Practice 4 |
| Personal and Professional | | Professional Interior Design | Interior Design 3; Professional | Interior Design 4; Professional |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| citizenship | | Practice 2 | Interior Design Practice 3 | Interior Design Practice 4 |
| Critical knowledge citizenship | | Interior Design 2; Design Theory 2; Graphic interpretation 2 | Interior Design 3; Design Theory 3; History of Art and design 3 | Interior Design 4; Professional Interior Design Practice 4 |

Table 2: Integration of themes for Active Critical Citizenship Education in the Interior Design Curriculum

During the fourth year of study the students take the knowledge and skills of citizenship outside the University. They identify a problem within the geographical constraints of Johannesburg. Using critical knowledge, they formulate and present the problem or issue, develop an opinion and solution through discussion with external stakeholders. For example, students will identify a need or problem within a community, find a suitable space that can assist with the resolution and then engages in discussions to find solutions to their identified problem.

Implementing Active Critical Citizenship

In implementing Active Critical Citizenship into the existing modules, the Department of Interior Design made a decision that the focus had to be on activating the participation of citizenship rather than the pure transfer of knowledge. The challenge therefore for each lecturer was to address their teaching and learning practice in such a way that the existing student culture is challenged to move outside of higher education and into the communities outside of the University.

This activation of citizenship is particularly evident in the Interior Design modules, since this module is the major component of the curriculum across all years of teaching and learning, where all knowledge and skills are demonstrated. However, the success of a recycling project with the third year students in 2012 proved thus far probably the most successful in activating critical citizenship in a student culture that extend beyond the classroom. Breytenbach (2013) elaborates on the process and results of this project that addressed environmental responsibility.

Some projects within the Interior Design curriculum of the University of Johannesburg stand out as working examples where students engaged with social, economic and environmental issues. These projects show how students applied their knowledge of some complex issues and their effects on communities to develop opinions, arguments and proposed solutions to the identified problems. In addition, they utilised their skills to communicate a solution to identified problems and in some cases engaged in active discussions and participated in dialogue on these issues.

Green Design Week

The Green Design Week is a Faculty initiative that engages senior students from all departments within the Faculty of Johannesburg to engage in a design problem that relates to environmental and sustainable issues. Students are divided into mutli-disciplinary work groups that work together for one week to find a design solution for an identified problem. Students are expected to contribute to the debate about the issues within the group. During this week, external experts are invited to provide additional information.

Neighborhood Market Design

In 2012, the third year students were requested to address the reuse of an existing building, to aid community engagement and involvement at a local level. The identified building had to provide an environment where the local people could trade with produce grown in the community gardens.

The students had the opportunity to engage in debate of food production and world population. During this debate, one of the solutions identified was the development of municipal parks for food production for local communities. Since a similar concept is already used in Melville in Johannesburg, a building was identified that had to be re-designed to accommodate the needs for this neighborhood market. This gave the students an opportunity to investigate the reuse of derelict buildings in an urban setting. The results, as shown in the examples in figure 1 and figure 2, was a contemporary environment created in an existing building within a community. This intention of the proposed environment is that the community can produce and sell foods grown within the neighborhood boundary.



Figure 1: Image of Interior Design solution for a Neighborhood Market by Sarah-Ann White





Figure 2: Image of Interior Design solution for a Neighborhood Market by Whitney Richardson

Poster design

For the module Graphic Interpretation 2, the second year students of 2013 were required to engage with the issue of homeless people. The students were encouraged to take a closer look at the problem of people who do not have the luxury of living in a home. Once they recognised the existence and other social problems associated with homelessness, they were asked to design a poster that will draw attention to this social problem (figure 3).



Figure 3: Poster to create awareness of the plight of the homeless by Clarice Brink, Carla Osiecki and Mlungu Mhlungu respectively
HIV / AIDS project

The Institutional office for HIV and AIDS (IOHA) at the University aims to reduce the rate of HIV and AIDS infections in young people. This institution targets people below the age of 15 by encouraging them to stay HIV negative as well as the youth over 15 years old to create awareness of the lifestyle that can keep them free of the virus.

The third year students take part in this initiative by designing an exhibition stand the will create an awareness of the effects of the HIV virus. The students are required to engage with the subject matter so that they can communicate the information to other students through graphic applications on an exhibition stand.

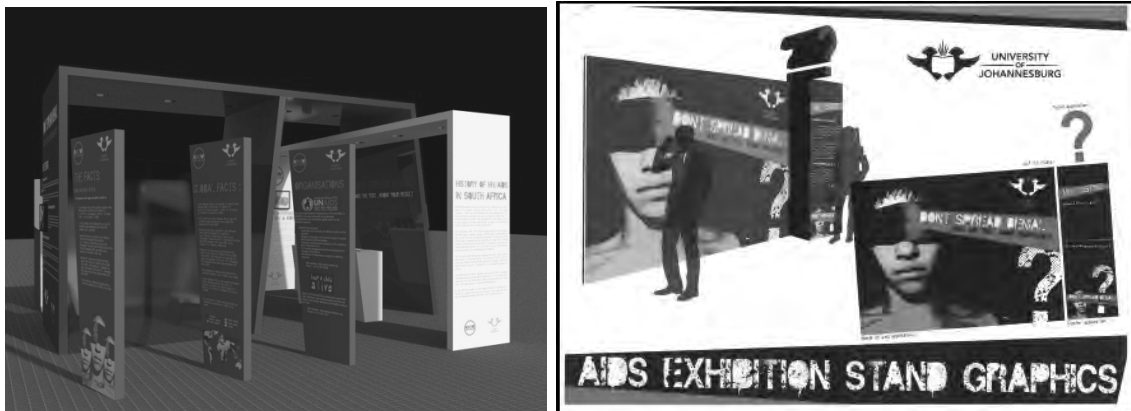


Figure 4: An exhibition stand design for HIV / AIDS awareness designed by Bruno Calha

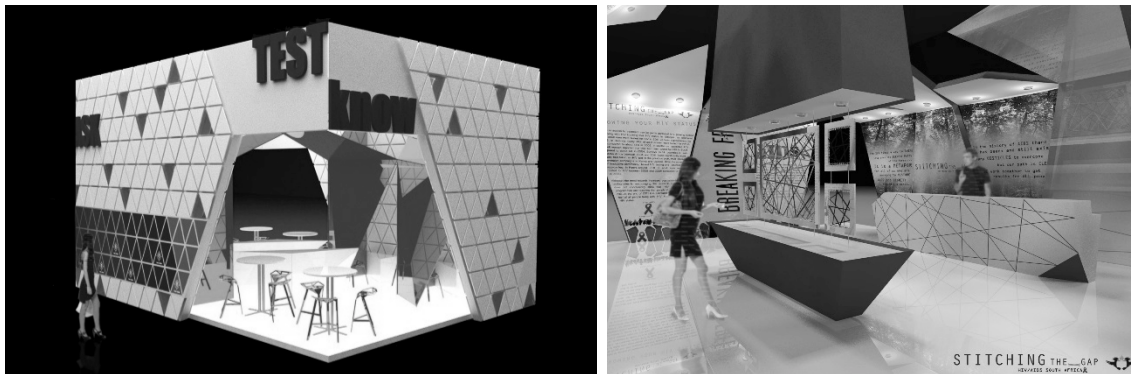


Figure 5: An exhibition stand design for HIV / AIDS awareness designed respectively by Renè Eitzen and Jessica Self

Conclusion

South African universities have an enormously challenging task. They must engage students intellectually while helping them to develop as citizens of our beautiful country who will be personally enriched and able to contribute to society. Stanford University, in its recent review of undergraduate education indicated that “maintaining a climate of intellectual engagement involves more than just admissions. It also requires sustained institutional effort, the continuous application of imagination and resources to provide our students with the opportunities they need to grow into the productive and responsible citizens we hope they will become” (Golbetz 2012, p. 76). Citizens with knowledge, critical thinking skills and values who can contribute to addressing challenges are vitally important at all levels of society, from individual families to society at large.

At the University of Johannesburg, the Department of Interior Design is committed to engage in teaching and learning activities that will embrace a culture of active citizenship in the education of interior designers of the future. The expectation is that these young adults will not only be aware of their responsibilities as citizens, but that they will actively participate in ensuring a better future for all.

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