
Editorial

Since its inception 18 years ago, the most prominent event on the agenda of the Design Education Forum of Southern Africa (DEFSA) has been an annual conference. A selection of six edited papers from the Forum's recent conference held in November 2009, entitled *Opening gates between and beyond design disciplines*, is featured in this edition of *Image & Text*. The selected papers are also available on the Forum's website where they are published as part of the complete set of conference proceedings. Although the conference theme covered a fairly broad terrain, the six selected papers specifically demonstrate how tertiary design education in South Africa has responded, and is responding, to changes brought about by revised national education policies, social imperatives and new opportunities. These responses are positioned within the characteristics and constraints of specific educational environments.

Amanda Breytenbach, in her article *Reflecting on the past, present and future role of the Design Education Forum of Southern Africa*, provides a descriptive outline of the history of the Forum and suggests possible ways in which it can re-establish itself. Although DEFSA has been one of the few national platforms in the country that has afforded design educators the opportunity to present their research and teaching practices, the Forum's performance and activities have attracted little documented attention and very little archival material is available to a researcher. The article by Breytenbach thus makes a valuable contribution to attempts that

seek to compile a history of South African design and design education. Breytenbach tracks DEFSA's role and contributions to tertiary education since its inception in 1991, pointing out that the Forum has received both praise and criticism from the design education fraternity. The article describes the Forum's achievements taking two periods into account. The author terms these the technikon phase, from 1991 to 2001, and the higher education merger and restructuring phase, from 2002 to the present. She details a number of proposals that she suggests the Forum should adopt if it is to address the criticism leveled against it and successfully meet the challenges inherent in the contemporary environment and answer to the expressed needs of the membership body.

Mary Duker tackles pertinent issues in contemporary education, specifically transformation, curriculum relevance and teaching and learning approaches which must take into account aspects such as dominant world-views, inclusiveness and diversity. In the article, *Making space for identity, diversity and voice in a transcultural visual arts community of practice*, Duker urges educators to interrogate, reflect on and theorise their practices. By way of example she considers an entrance level collective teaching practice implemented in her own institution in order to identify approaches to teaching and learning that meet the needs of a diverse body of students and to suggest where adaptation and change are called for. She maintains that the challenges involved in connecting with diverse groups

of students from different cultural frames of reference can only be successfully met if art and design educators move beyond the confines of their disciplinary knowledge and establish transdisciplinary partnerships. She stresses the importance of educators engaging with transformative educational theory and acquiring the literacies of diversity.

The articles by Piers Carey and Rowan Gatfield from the Durban University of Technology (DUT) and Inge Economou and Nina Joubert from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) each describe specific initiatives within their teaching programmes that move students out of lecture halls and teaching studios into environments that enable a direct confrontation with the constraints of practice and the realities of less privileged communities respectively.

Carey and Gatfield report on a project undertaken in collaboration with the University of East London that aims to improve the chances of employment and career options for learners in both countries. Their article, *Creative industries, creative solutions: developments in a work integrated learning project in Durban*, compares the individual contexts of the University of East London located in the Thames Gateway region and that of the DUT. The paper outlines work in progress on a demonstrator project that takes the form of a studio/work laboratory that will directly service paying clients and offer work integrated learning (WIL) experiences to students within the Department of Visual Communication Design. The authors examine the value of work integrated learning in contributing to employability as well as the signposting, information advice and guidance that is necessary for

learners who may not have considered careers in the creative industries.

Economou and Joubert report on the development of a project framework and set of criteria appropriate to the enhancement of social, environmental and ethical consciousness in students in their article. The proposed framework is informed by a concern that a conventional teaching and learning approach in design education tends to emphasise the creative end-product over social and environmental sensitivity and neglects to make explicit the importance of ethics as integral to a personal and enduring value system. The authors contextualise social and environmental ethics within the visual communication teaching programme at NMMU and systematically describe the implementation of the framework through four stages of activities, namely, briefing, building social and environmental awareness, designing an artefact, and final assessment and feedback. Their thinking is underpinned by the belief that visual communication has a significant role to play in influencing change and that it is incumbent on design education to shape the attitudes and actions of future visual communication designers so that they may fulfill this role responsibly.

The final two articles engage interdisciplinary ideas. Nadia Viljoen and Ria van Zyl explore the potential of employing design thinking in the seemingly disparate discipline of Operations Research/Management Science (OR/MS) and outline the implications of such an interdisciplinary development for design education. Karen von Veh and Landi Raubenheimer, in their article *Interdisciplinary theory teaching: can one size really fit all?* detail some of the dilemmas

involved in developing an interdisciplinary course in the history and theory of art and design to meet the requirements of diploma programmes in six different departments in the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Johannesburg.

Von Veh and Raubenheimer explain that the Faculty is in the process of consolidating and rationalising its teaching programmes and one area of rationalisation has been modules in the history and theory of art and design, which have been reworked to provide a single offering to which most departments could subscribe. Previously each department concentrated on a policy of vocational teaching with specific practical outcomes reflecting the nature of design or art practitioners. History and theory was taught by individual departments with discipline specific content and outcomes. Taking its cue from cultural studies, the new offering adopts an approach that is interdisciplinary and thematic and that seeks to emphasise critical thinking, analysis and argument. According to the authors, the consolidated offering thus addresses an entrenched system of teaching based on the old *technikon* emphasis on practicality and linear history, rather than the more theoretical and thematic approach favoured by university systems.

Viljoen and van Zyl propose that design thinking could present operational and conceptual solutions to some of the problems currently experienced in Operations Research/Management Science in the article *Design thinking – crossing disciplinary borders*. They highlight the problems as being, amongst others, the increasingly complex management environment in which OR/MS has to perform and the dichotomy between

theory and practice encountered within the discipline. They argue that the characteristics and application of design thinking methods and approaches, particularly as defined by theorist Charles Owen, are well suited to addressing many areas in contemporary OR/MS. They suggest that the barrier between viewing OR/MS options as management tools rather than solutions to management realities can be overcome by the integrative and iterative process exemplified by design thinking. According to Viljoen and van Zyl, the opportunities that disciplinary border crossing offer to design and design education are obvious. In their view, relevant research and the development of practical education approaches are needed in order to leverage these opportunities.