

Report on Teaching and Professional Fellowship 2002-03: Colour and Computing

The fellowship has been a pleasant and valuable experience, that has enabled me to pursue specialist teaching and research for a whole term. It has given me the chance to reflect on my professional practice and to compare it to my customary teaching role.

My aim was to feed my research: Colour and Computing into the curriculum and to explore different types of teaching 'delivery' within a whole college framework. I achieved each of my targets to an extent, but most importantly I have established contacts and working relationships that will be easier to develop in the future.

I planned to work with three formats: lecture, project and workshop.

1. I gave Colour presentations to Central St Martins students from Fine Art, Textiles and Jewellery, and to Camberwell students who were taking a colour elective. I was able to offer different art and design students a full and animated introduction to colour.

2 A colour project with Product Design students that comprised a series of presentations of Colour, with Computing, followed by a research brief that the students pursued for the second half of the spring term. The results have been very good and quite unlike any approach I have taken previously.

Their perspective was 'colour as information', students were able to demonstrate an awareness of social, cultural and professional uses of colour and express this in a design format. The approaches were quite varied but a recurring idea was that the innovative use of colour or the adoption of positive colour design was often a taboo breaking step, where serious products [computers, cars etc] were influenced by the more fashion and child centred end of the market. This indicated to me that there is further scope for practical, aesthetic and creative colour use in product design

In my presentations I used a range of teaching materials: art work, illustrated notes, slides and software that enabled a group of eighty product design students to receive colour information, an experience of the perceptual logic of colour [software] and lectures that contextualised the subject to the extent that they were able to pursue their research in an informed and independent way.

For the most part they used books, the internet and Photoshop to produce their presentation boards [illustrations]. The project had to fit into an already full program as an add on, the student work load meant the completion date, review and assessment of work was extended into the summer term.

The actual project was worked out with the first year tutor and then I taught it independently. The format and time table proved an effective way of introducing a new subject to a large group of students who were 'notoriously' unaware of colour; to have some real benefit the next step would have to be workshop access and practical studio teaching.

3. The part of my proposal that I could not fulfil satisfactorily even with my own students was a taught workshop where set numbers of students could use the software with some level of instruction and where the results and reactions could be monitored. I discovered computing facilities to support this are extremely limited within the courses, and Central Computing cannot handle the numbers and complexity of the timetable involved in the learning experience. While Blackboard is being introduced as a management and communication facility its use to access and deliver learning experiences is obviously very limited. Students did not take up the offer to be signed onto Blackboard to use the colour course. The all round novelty of the new subject and a new learning format was too much. However, I had a number of inquiries from students about possible workshops outside of the main course structure.

My aim with the Fellowship was to introduce a new subject and a new form of learning .. The first practical steps have been taken, but the resolved learning and teaching experience that was envisaged has only been partly achieved.

The Fellowship project raised two issues:

a. How best to teach Colour and Computing in the studio and workshop .

b. Reflect on the viability of this form of teaching and learning within the whole college framework.

a. To develop the workshop approach, I will take the Dali Route and I have proposed a short Colour course, to be taught next year. If it runs it will have reasonable numbers of students, a clear mission and a chance of achieving a settled working environment to use the learning materials. Dali Courses have a transparent teaching structure with respect to content and organisation, and are distinct from the Degree course culture. It will give me a chance to try out an introductory studio and workshop course that could eventually help degree students.

I will continue to develop the subject within the BA Textile Design course, where it has a better chance of becoming an integrated part of a students creative process. When significant student work using the new software, emerges in a design project or degree exhibition, a role model/exemplar is established that can then encourage others to get involved. In the new academic year the course will have its own computing workshop for up to fifteen students at a time.

I am also developing the Virtual Colour Course as a publishing project, this will tackle the issues of independent study and distance learning and ultimately be the easiest way to disseminate the information and experience .

b. The second set of issues, the viability of cross-specialism teaching and the integration of technology into the studio environment are more problematic .

Colour as a core or transferable skill working across specialisms while a rational idea, is unlikely in practice. With existing priorities, art and design languages: drawing, colour and visual studies are not the universally used and understood practices one would expect in an institution of this kind. The acknowledged core skills, are those understood in mainstream education: numeracy, literacy and computing skills. It would be difficult I believe to assert that drawing is a core language for the majority of art and design degree students, despite this being the ability or skill that possibly first demonstrated the students visual talent. I feel the Institute planners need to acknowledge and

support the distinctive areas of learning and practice that art and design education has customarily provided. Our students are possibly a better informed generation, but more often they are allowed to do less than they know.

The idea of relating studio practice to computers, founded on the limitations of time and facilities. Studio teaching and direct staff/student interaction have significantly diminished, and that appears to be so across the courses. As studio contact shrinks, so do the associated teaching methods and knowledge, and the less chance art and design education has to provide a research base that can feed and support technology. Valuable educational experiences could be lost and the opportunities for using technology to develop them and address issues like distance learning and teaching large numbers will be limited. Imaging programs, graphic tools, computer based visual expression will in time become more intuitive and have a more symbiotic relationship with 'traditional' forms of creativity and craft. Technology will be cheaper, lighter, simpler to use and more flexible, every incentive is there for this to happen; if in the meantime art and design education adapts to a predominantly verbal and text based discourse then it will have less to offer the development of new software and hardware that will provide the creative, sensory learning environments of the future.

Returning to teaching after the Fellowship, I am aware how the emphasis has shifted back from the pedagogical to the managerial, with respect to running the education program and in the timing and style of teaching. From this position I am less able to deal with students 'teaching needs', that I believe will become even more evident with widening student access and higher fees. The most common student request in course monitoring is for teaching and facilities; higher fees will increase the student demand for both and for greater transparency with respect to the resourcing and 'values' of their education. Widening access whether for new, home based students or overseas applicants will require more relevant types of teaching, some that have previously been commonplace in art and design education.

My experience of working across courses or between departments is that although very necessary it is actually quite difficult and needs to be studied, because a lot of the Institutes future planning is based on it happening successfully. There are aspects of the present system that actively hinder the delivery of new ideas or new ways of communicating

a subject. The twentieth century was awash with art pedagogy, that enabled colleges like ours to be what they are now, in their most constructive and respected form. While our present system may be well audited, it is in danger of losing its dynamic, forward reaching potential to provide a creative educational environment.

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