University of Huddersfield Repository

McCullagh, Joseph Felix, Jones, Carol and Watson, Yvonne

To re-assess the international and cultural aspects of learning in the provision of art and design post-graduate education

Original Citation

McCullagh, Joseph Felix, Jones, Carol and Watson, Yvonne (2006) To re-assess the international and cultural aspects of learning in the provision of art and design post-graduate education. In: Enhancing Curricula: Contributing to the Future, Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century in the Disciplines of Art, Design and Communication: 2006 3rd International Conference. Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design (CLTAD),, London, UK. ISBN 9780954143961

This version is available at http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/7065/

http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/

Workshop: To re-assess the international and cultural aspects of learning in the provision of art and design post-graduate education.

Joseph F McCullagh,
Carol Jones,
Yvonne Watson

Nottingham Trent University
School of Art and Design

Abstract
Over the last ten years we have been acutely aware of the culture of the students and staff and how it affects learning and understanding of international issues. This research aims to re-assess the international and cultural aspects of learning in the provision of art and design specifically from a post-graduate education perspective. Post-graduate education is a natural place to start in addressing the research; it is a microcosm of culture change within global perspectives. The intent of this paper is to explore and focus on some of the major issues, which we have either tackled or are attempting to tackle in developing and understanding this provision alongside global, governmental and institutional strategies. This 'conceptual' research is also informed by cultural identity and globalisation theories synthesizing with pedagogic research.

The workshop structure consisted of a short introductory presentation of the research; two case studies; an active participatory workshop session. Participants responded to two questions in two different groups, 'What do you consider to be the 'personal' challenges you face in the international and cultural aspects of learning in the provision of art and design post-graduate education.' What do you consider to be the 'sector' challenges it faces in the international and cultural aspects of learning in the provision of art and design post-graduate education. The participants subsequently presented their findings. The workshop closed with a conclusion of the research.

Aims for the workshop
 In the workshop and in our research we aim to:
• redraw
Using global issues to break down deeply embedded notions of Imperialism, by helping students re draw their own 'identity map' from an intra-cultural perspective, using the dynamics of mix-culture groups.
• shape
As institutions we have a significant part to play in shaping international cultures/identity domestically and globally. What are the challenges and where will we start?
And
• sustain
Creating strategies for a cross-cultural education—art and design is the material for the fibre of sustaining cultural growth in the creative industries. What does this mean in real terms?

Introduction

The cultural industries, education, and culture is now internationally recognised as 'big business' but 'when culture is put on the table, it often prompts complex discussions on the relationship between the economic and non-economic value of things, that is, the value attributed to those things that do not have an assigned price (such as identity, beauty or the meaning of life.') (UNESCO (a), online) The educational markets we work in are currently being massively internationally developed. We need to be in a position to understand this 'bigger picture' globally, nationally, regionally, locally and institutionally especially with specific relevance to how we 'shape culture and identity' and educational 'sustainability' within a world market. We must therefore tread carefully within the arena of postgraduate education and be responsible educators.

In new educational paradigms of student as customer/consumer, what kind of 'products' are we producing and exchanging? Assessing this from both sides of the shopping counter the student is simultaneously buying a product and is also a 'product' of our educational institutes. When educating our students are we simply supplying the market with products for the latest global trends and styles, further endorsing the cosmopolitanisation of culture. Thus selling the cultural homogenization of education and the increasing 'hollowing out' and 'disembedding' of cultural indigenous identities. Where the 'local' and 'exotic' are torn out of place and time to be repackaged for the world bazaar. (Hall, Held, and McGrew, 1992, p. 318)

What are the effects of working within this market, how sensitive to this are we as educators? We are in danger of perpetuating an international 'cultural supermarket' of education, however, is it a two way process? Subsequently, what is the new cultural commodity we are forming by the objectifying of students? Clearly, there is the danger of the commodification of education at postgrad level and the further cultural homogenization of students. We have real world challenges to deal with and we need to have the vision and imaginative creative strategies and market understanding to imagine our future and its sustainability. We want to address the complex issues of heterogeneity as opposed to the cultural homengisation of students and help us all grow. Successful creative businesses has seen that it can enable itself to become more diverse and innovative through 'their innovative edge to be sharpened by the creative tension of bringing together diverse cultures, skills and mindsets.' (COMMEDIA, online). This raises the question, so what about education?

'As consumption of cultural goods and services spreads all over the world, production itself tends to concentrate. This results in an oligopolisitc market with a highly asymmetric structure. The effects of this market are as yet unknown…we know very little about the impact of this global cultural market on citizens. audiences, businesses and government.' (UNESCO (b), online) As institutes seek the economic rewards/territories and the 'consumption' for new students particularly international ones there are clear dangers of reinforcing the colonisation of the international educational supermarket whereby it could be argued certain targeted countries are being educationally colonised due to the rise of new emerging markets. Institutes have competitive ambitions for further dominance. There are serious financial games at play but most importantly how does this affect culture? As universities we need to be attuned to the job in hand and reassess our vital role to play. Global, international. national, regional, local policy/strategies are being developed; education is now trans national business. Traditional concepts of higher education are altered. 'Globalisation has spurred technological, economic, social and cultural change as well as the greater mobility of capital, technology, information and labor. This phenomenon has created a growing demand for society's capacity to acquire, process, disseminate and apply knowledge.' (UNESCO, (c) online) In meeting this 'growing demand' the movement

and educational 'migration' of students is an area for concern, we have a duty to understand and develop forward thinking inclusive policy attendant to these concerns. Those migrant students are forming a constitution of societies in their global movement and intra-cultural relationships. What is our responsibility in this context and how do we respond within the sector? Anthony Appadurai in 'Disjuncture and Difference' describes 'global cultural flows' and discusses 'ethnoscapes' 'the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live, tourists, immigrants…and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to effect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree. (Benyon & Dunkerley, 2000, pp.94–5) We can add specifically students to his list. From an educational perspective what type of relationships needs nurturing and how do we contribute to the 'knowledge society', and the 'scapes', that are emerging in societies.

Postgraduate in broad terms needs to respond to the changing educational landscape, and assess how we are developing our own responses to real world changes. '…the world is already changing faster than it has ever done before, and the pace of change will continue to accelerate'. 'Our national ability to master the process of change and not to be ground down by it depends critically upon our universities.' (Department for education and skills 2003, p2) So, how do we keep the 'treasure' of indigenous cultures and do not obliterate respective cultures, how do we develop cross-cultural work and not the 're-staging' of one's own culture in a new geographical space which could lead dangerously to the further 'amplification' of cultural identity as promulgated by Western dominant cultures. (Tomlinson in Herman & McChesney, 1997, p. 269) We have to be sensitive to this in our work.

At Nottingham we have been involved with a number of projects that we feel deal with cross-cultural issues in a proactive, and creative way. We recognize that for cross-cultural work to be effective it needs to traverse territories from an international, national, regional, local and institutional way and then traverse 'feedback' through the systems we create enabling a sustainable future for all. As educators we see ourselves as active nodes and collaborators in connecting up the networks. By putting creativity in central position and back on the agenda we are able to in to develop the student with 'open-eyed and open-minded growth seeking out the growing spiritual. Problems of our own days, not closed to his (sic) environment'. (Albers, Arnolfini & Kettle's Yard (a), 2005)

To quote Josef Albers further he also 'believed that the imagination could be cultivated to equip people to contribute humanely in a complex and uncertain world'. (Arnolfini & Kettle's Yard (b) 2005) Students are therefore encouraged to take responsibility for their autonomous learning and place in the world, as echoed by the strategy consultant director Jim Bodoh, at the design consultancy Citigate Lloyd Northover.

'The communication problems facing professional graphic designers are both more complex and increasingly unprecedented. Accordingly, they require designers with highly refined and analytical and creative skills, and critically, an ability to think for themselves' (Bodoh, 2003)

Case studies
We would now like to share with you two case studies of work on our ma programmes that typify the development of cross-cultural work here in the school of art and design.

Firstly, a cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary project the 'Needs must' project…. In this project

students question their own understanding of their role to play in society and their respective needs. The 'Needs must' project looks at the individual and collective needs of a society based on Malsow's hierarchy of needs and Hans Meyer's hierarchy (1930's head of Bauhaus). The students worked collectively in groups to discuss and present their ideas of needs. As a group, students explore 'needs' in relation to graphic design, textile/fashion/design industry, commerce, culture and society. How does design support the pursuit of these needs? How does this impact on their work? Is the primary motivation for design social, global, multi-cultural, cultural, economic etc and why? Students chose to explore this as 'product' or 'people' or 'population' or 'self' related case studies, political or economic system, first and third world comparisons.

The observations of mixed cultural groups when coming together over a common design brief were fascinating. Initially groups sought to ascertain by questioning each other what the commonalities amongst them were, an understanding of difference was clearly identified, but in order to achieve the goals set out they chose to look at ways in which they were similar. Consistent aspects emerged, which were interests in relation to globalisation and cultural identity formation. The groups largely explored their 'commonalities' by identifying basic functional needs of cultures. These were identified as elements such as clothing, food, accommodation transportation, survival and the need to be alive. Cross-cultural appreciation of different cultural identities and modes of expression were explored to varying degrees through their individual group projects. From an international student perspective, the peculiarities of English/British cultural identities was observed and captured by elements such as the Page 3 phenomenon! and socio-cultural differences were regarded as curious, epitomised by statements such as 'My Mum's husband is not my Dad', which was expressed with some element of incredulity. Gravy was used by one group as an expression of British cultural identity, connecting with the OXO adverts and their construction of a 'typical' British family within a domestic situation. Gravy was an expression of comfort and recognition, of roast dinners, and authentic family values.

One group explored the concept of colour and the significance within cultures of how colour is used to signify belonging, and tradition. Cross-cultural colour systems help to define environments, i.e. red predominantly a signifier of danger in many cultures, but strangely green in China signifies that a wife is committing adultery! Colour can then culturally signify survival, but is also an aesthetic, physical and mental means of communication. It is a language without words used across cultures to create a sense of social structure. 'Ambiente' – was a brand identity, expressed as a seedling, defined by a mixed group, which symbolised a sense of future growth and optimism. Common goals, expressed by the group were around international exposure, gaining of additional knowledge and personal growth as part of their MA studies. Again their discussions centralised around commonalties and priorities of people and cultures, i.e. religion, food, environment. Simply put, 'people are people', regardless of geography, or place. Religion was significant as a means of creating social connections, Catholicism in Portugal, Taoism, and Buddhism in Japan, and Hinduism in India, which raised questions around, how are voices established through the observation of differences and similarities?

Discussions also ranged around the cross-cultural influences of signs and symbols, and the traditions of cultural aesthetics, and how these are embedded, integrated and fused together, within cultural spaces and identities. How cultural identities are expressed by modes of dress and fashion styles, and how do cultures connect via dress i.e. the ubiquitous style of youth culture expressed as jeans, trainers, and t-shirts as a global phenomenon, but also the historical elements of traditional dress, and the attendant cultural meaning of clothing.

Our conclusions were that overall commonalities were expressed in relation to family traditions,

family values, socio-cultural traditions, religion, self-esteem and personal values, security, identity, individuality community and well-being. Groups were interested in the notion of how cultures/individuals put their 'mark' down in the world, and how cross-cultural connections are made, territory claimed, and environments created, and how memory and reflections shape an understanding of spaces, in the establishing of interactive meta-narratives.

Our second case study the 'Traversing Territories' Project touched the MA programmes in a number of ways. The project highlights the need for a sustainable cross-cultural working strategy combining local to global initiatives. The project is an art exchange project between Britain and Japan.

'The work represented by the Creative Collaborations project tends to explore and challenge the normal assumptions and categories within which we work in the School of Art and Design. It recognises, through its connection with practitioners working in the regions creative culture, that institutions and subject areas need to develop an increasingly cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural approach. Through digital technology the edges are softening between the teaching institution and the wider creative culture. The project has succeeded in bringing new challenges into the centre of the postgraduate experience'. (Abbot, April 2006)

Abbot highlights three important points for the project:

'Firstly we co-ordinated with four ex-Trent Fine Art MA and Undergraduate students who now work as artists in Japan and were able to use gallery space they negotiated for us in Yokohama for part of the show. They also showed us the artistic scene in Tokyo and attended events and lectures.

Secondly, the undergraduate student, Emma Lewis, who organised the exchange is now working for the Trampoline organisation in Nottingham developing international links for the well-established Trampoline New Media Nights at Broadway Media Centre, Nottingham and has now enrolled on an MA specifically focused around developing international exchange projects. While in Tokyo the students worked with local schools to discuss the notions of space/place, and local identity.

Thirdly, when the Japanese students from Tokyo came to Nottingham we were able to feature a high profile public lecture by their professor Christopher Charles at Broadway Media Centre (part of a series of visual arts lectures we have developed at Broadway since the start of Creative Collaborations) and they could perform to a large audience in a high profile Trampoline multi-media event alongside students and professional artists in the city. This gave the exchange a lot of credibility and made it less 'institutional' and more 'cultural' and meaningful for all involved.

He concludes:

Finally, one of the things it as been useful to observe from this project is how misleading it often is to generalise about one particular culture or approach. As soon as you start to get into formulating strategies around ideas like 'this is the way the British think' or 'the Japanese approach is so and so' you come a cropper when you try and apply it to individual work. Obviously there are different cultural contexts, which both countries have, but one can easily exaggerate the way that these determine the actual production of work. (Abbot, 2005)

Conclusion

We interculturally recognize that boundaries are not fixed thus leading to a more heterogeneous approach in education; we advocate the diversity of culture in art and design education. International students are key nodes where they learn from Western design, however they have the sensitivity and global understanding to enrich/assimilate this into their own 'cultural design' forming their own 'identity maps'. Some argue they are positioning themselves to subvert the established dominant Eurocentric perspectives. Clearly this enriching and assimilating is something, which Western design students and staff could take on board.

The need to work for a sustainable future within this cross culturally is paramount. Our postgraduate education needs to map its pedagogic frameworks from global policies such as derived from the world summit for sustainable development in 2002 to university and departmental policy. Importantly we need to address how we 'traverse' the global to the institutional and local. As educators we are the thread that can bind and interconnect the strands.

The second World Conference in Higher education in 2003 outlined the task ahead. 'Partnerships must be pursued and reinforced synergies developed whenever possible so as to collectively contribute to strengthening the role of higher education in present-day society as a key factor for cultural, social, economic and political development, as an endogenous capacity builder, as a promoter of human rights, sustainable development, democracy, peace and justice. (UNESCO, (d) online)

Or to put it another way in and art and design context quoted from Anni Albers:

'The difficult problems are the fundamental problems; simplicity stands at the end, not at the beginning of a work. If education can lead as to elementary seeing, away from too much and too complex information, to the quietness of vision, and discipline of forming, it again may prepare us for the task ahead, working for today and tomorrow.' (Arnolfini & Kettle's Yard (c), 2005)

References

ABBOT, F., 2006. Email interview, April 2006

ABBOT, F., 2005. Available at http://www.tokyofrank.blogspot.com Thursday 30 June 2005, posted at 2.23pm. [Accessed 1 April 2006]

ARNOLFINI, & KETTLE'S YARD, (a), 2005. Josef Albers sourced from: 'Progressive education publication document' October 1935 'Art as experience', as exhibited in Starting at zero: Black Mountain College 1933–57 Exhibition, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, UK, 28 January – 2 April 2006.

ARNOLFINI, & KETTLE'S YARD, (b), 2005. Sourced from display exhibit in Starting at zero: Black Mountain College 1933–57 Exhibition, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, UK, 28 January – 2 April 2006.

ARNOLFINI, & KETTLE'S YARD, (c), 2005. Sourced from: 'Design' publication Nov 1944, in exhibition Starting at zero: Black Mountain College 1933–57, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, UK, 28 January – 2 April 2006.

BENYON, J., & DUNKERLEY, D., 2000. *Globalisation: the reader*. London: The Athlone Press.

BODOH, J., 2003. email interview, 22 June 2003

COMMEDIA. *The intercultural city, making the most of diversity.* COMMEDIA [online]. Avaiable via: http://www.interculturalcity.com/home.htm [Accessed 08.05.06].

GREAT BRITAIN. *The future of higher education*, white paper 2003. London: Stationery office limited.

HALL, S., HELD, D., & McGREW, T., 1992. *Modernity and its Futures.* Polity Press in Conjunction with the Open University Cambridge.

HERMAN, S., & McCHESNEY, R., 1997. The *global media: The New Missionaries of Corporate Capitalism.* Continuum International Publishing Group - Academi.

UNESCO (a). *Cultural industries, Introduction, 25 questions and answers to explore key concepts and ideas related to culture and trade in the context of development.* UNESCO [online]. Available via: http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=2461&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=-512.html [Accessed 08 May 2006].

UNESCO (b). *Cultural industries, Introduction, 25 questions and answers to explore key concepts and ideas related to culture and trade in the context of development.* UNESCO [online]. Available via: http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=2461&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=-512.html [Accessed 08 May 2006].

UNESCO (c). *Higher education for sustainable developments, 'universities as actors in society' education for sustainable development brief, 10 June 2004.* UNESCO [online]. Available via: http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=34793&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html [Accessed 08 April 2006].

UNESCO (d), *Final report of the Meeting of Higher Education Partners (WCHE+5) (Paris, 2003), Komlavi Seddoh, Director, Division of Higher Education 15 March 2004.* UNESCO [online]. Available via: http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=31171&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html [Accessed 08 April 2006].

Biographical notes
The authors are the post-graduate leaders for a newly developed series of ma programmes that are part of a 'postgraduate framework', which have at its core a commitment to the encouragement of cross-disciplinary, collaborative, and cross-cultural teaching and learning.

Joseph F McCullagh is the programme leader for MA Graphic Design and Photography, Yvonne Watson is the MA programme leader for Applied Design and Carol Jones is the postgraduate leader for the post-graduate framework and ma programmes at Nottingham Trent University in the School of Art and Design.