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## **Art and Design: Critical pedagogies and innovative curriculum design**

### **Edition 20.2 Published October 2021**

During the autumn lockdown in 2020 I left the University of the Arts London to take up the role of Pro Vice Chancellor Learning and Teaching at York St John University. Over recent months working online and face to face with colleagues and students at my new university I have been developing a shared vision for teaching and learning. Through a process of consultation and collaborative authoring we have established four coordinates to help us map our vision for teaching excellence. These four coordinates (referred to as the 4Cs) are:

1. Curiosity
2. Compassion
3. Collaboration
4. Communities

These '4Cs' have been developed to help us articulate a vision for Learning and Teaching at York St John but it is my belief that the '4Cs' have wider relevance and applicability. As staff and students continue to face educational challenges associated with Covid which are impacting in differential ways across the globe a focus on compassion is vital. Compassionate pedagogy (Hao 2011) is underpinned by a commitment to wellbeing, kindness and the importance of belonging. This is as important for lecturers and creative practitioners as it is for students.

At York St John our students tell us how important it is for them to feel that they are part of the university community –but they also remind us that we are all part of a range of intersecting and networked communities. Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education represents an international community. Art and design higher education is global and connected and there is much we can learn by bringing international voices together in one volume. The articles in this edition have been submitted separately from different parts of the world but rereading them to write this editorial I am struck by the themes that cut across the articles.

### **Critical pedagogies in art and design education**

First I want to introduce articles by Justine Nabaggala and Beth Pickard who both- from difference angles -introduce a critical pedagogy lens to discuss diverse ways of knowing and being. Both of these authors point to the importance of challenging hegemonic structures of learning. The overarching message in both of these articles is the importance of understanding standpoint to support progressive and emancipatory arts education. Nabaggala discusses critical indigenous pedagogy and Pickard explores critical disability studies.

In '**A Personal Perspective on Pedagogical Structures and Strategies that Uphold Indigenous Ways of Knowing**' Justine Nabaggala describes her teaching practice drawing on experience in Africa and North America as embracing both 'western' and 'indigenous' ways of knowing. This experience offers a platform for Nabaggala to explore a series of questions as an art educator. She looks at the relationship between students' context and their formal education and asserts the importance of educators acknowledging their standpoint drawing on standpoint epistemology (hooks 1984). Nabaggala points to the benefits of drawing on the 'values, beliefs and ways of knowing within diverse local

communities' as a central foundation for arts education explaining how this underpins her approach to critical indigenous pedagogy.

In **'Undergraduate Creative Arts Students' Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Disability: Advancing a Critical Disability Studies Informed Curriculum'** Beth Pickard reminds us how important it is to stay curious and open to unexpected outcomes in our research. Pickard reports on the unanticipated findings of a small-scale, evaluative research project. Sometimes it is the asides in the research that could be missed by a less attentive researcher that shore up the most engaging and – in this case- confronting findings. In this research a group of art students were offered the opportunity to engage with an immersive arts curriculum that was informed by Critical Disability Studies. Students were interviewed at the start and end of this pedagogic project. The results reported on a shift from individual to social understandings of disability but the surprise came when the researcher noted the strength of the 'medicalised gaze and internalised ableism' that was prevalent. This offered the researcher a key starting point for building an inclusive pedagogy that incorporates disability awareness as a core element in art education

### **First year curriculum design**

The following two articles explore theories of curriculum and the structure of learning for students in their first year of undergraduate study. Slevin's paper **'Block Teaching in Art and Design: Pedagogy and the Student Experience'** discusses the introduction of an alternative Block approach to first year curriculum design. The first year curriculum was structured into a series of six week intensive blocks. Slevin's comprehensive literature review offers the reader a really useful primer in art and design curriculum structures that can be quite different to curriculum design in other disciplines. This research was guided by student feedback and aimed to support transition from school to university. The paper underlines the importance of ensuring that students' well-being and academic needs are aligned in one curriculum structure. Slevin takes the idea of maps and way finding (metaphors I use in my own work see Orr 2020) and develops this further. He writes 'Whilst we can conceive of a student's learning journey in terms of maps and wayfinding, so we also must conceive of course pedagogy as fluxive map, requiring continuous adjustments in dynamic relation with its users, their starting points and destinations.'

Jenny Holt, author of **'Designing Filmmaking: shaping first year curriculum for transition, progression and effective collaboration'** takes first year curriculum design as her starting point and the disciplinary focus shifts to film making. Holt identifies similar challenges to those identified by Slevin so these are useful articles to read together. Like Slevin, Holt's research started with a recognition of the challenges students were experiencing that could be addressed by careful curriculum redesign. This led to the development of an action research approach which focused on improving retention. Holt connects issues of mental health and students' confidence to the need for alternative curriculum design models. Holt stresses the importance of a well designed transition curriculum and enquiry led pedagogy that focuses on students' first six weeks of study. This article offers an example of an action research intervention that is attentive to local students' experience whilst drawing on high quality sector research which includes the 'What works' research reported on by Thomas et al (2017).

### **Pedagogies for the future**

The next paper in this edition, authored by Sachdev Geetanjali is entitled **'Developing Pedagogy for Plant Study in Art and Design'**. This article introduces the idea of 'plant

blindness' which is the 'inability to see or notice plants in the environment' which 'limits people's understanding of the critical significance of plants to human life and the planet'. Geetanjali's practice based research sets out to develop plant awareness through art and design enquiry. The relationship between plants and art and design pedagogy is carefully set out and the author concludes by pointing to the need to recognise artistic and botanical approaches to plant pedagogy in art and design. This is the first time a focus on plants has been referenced in this journal and this fresh perspective is welcomed as an important and original contribution to scholarship.

Buthayna Eilouti brings us '**Conceptual Design Management: Concept Generation, Transformation and Development Methods**' This paper offers a framework for concept generation and development in architectural design. The authors present a range of graphic templates and models to support the development of concepts in architectural education. The models have been tested over a number of years and aim to support the development of creativity. The authors deployed a *research-through-design* methodology for framework development eliciting feedback from students at all stages. The framework was shown to have efficacy with some methods in the framework being used more often than others. The authors conclude by pointing out that one challenge associated with the use of this framework is that students may develop so many concepts that they find it hard to select the concept for the next stage of the design process.

Finally I turn to Pelin Efiltili and Koray Gelmeza who authored '**Celebrating the variety, fighting the confusion: An integrative review of the design teacher's pedagogical roles**'. This is a literature review that brings together research on the pedagogic role of the designer/educator. The aim of this paper is to 'contribute both to nurture the practice of design teachers and to inform design education literature'. This article offers the sector a useful literature review but it is also of benefit to individual design educators who want reflect on and develop their educational craft.

To conclude I return to the 4Cs referred to at the start of this editorial. All of the authors whose work is published in this volume had a driving curiosity to enquire, research and advance the field of art and design scholarship. Without curiosity there is no learning, no research and no published outcome. Curiosity creates the conditions to drive the research agenda. By valuing curiosity, we question, think more deeply and creatively, and learn from uncertainty (Katan and Baarts, 2021). This journal edition celebrates curiosity.

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## CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Professor Susan Orr is the editor of this journal (*Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education*). She is the pro vice chancellor for learning and teaching at York St John University and is also a visiting professor at Bournemouth University. Before coming to York St John, Professor Orr was dean of learning and teaching enhancement at the University of the Arts in London (UAL), a post she held since 2013. In this role she led the UAL Teaching, Learning and Employability Exchange. Professor Orr chairs the European League of Institutes of the Arts' Teachers Academy. She is a principal fellow of the HEA and a national teaching fellow whose well-cited research focuses on creative education. Susan co-authored with Alison Shreeve the Routledge book *Art and Design Pedagogy in Higher Education: Knowledge, Values and Ambiguity in the Creative Curriculum* in 2018.

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