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Improving Student Learning Through Theme Based Curriculum Design and Team Teaching: An Action Research Study

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Improving student learning through theme based curriculum design and team teaching

An Action Research study

A thesis submitted to the Dublin Institute of Technology in part fulfillment of the requirements for award of Masters (MA) in Third Level Learning and Teaching

By

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July 2004

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Declaration

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards the award of the Masters (MA) in Third Level Learning and Teaching is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part fulfillment of the award named above.

Signature of candidate

[Signature]

Date

16 July 2004
Abstract

This study is concerned with improving the design and delivery of the curriculum on a four year BA in Design Visual Communication programme in the Dublin Institute of Technology. The study examines how aspects of curriculum design and delivery affect some of the key stakeholders — the students and academic staff — involved in the programme. It looks at how the design and delivery of the curriculum can be improved with a view to achieving two main aims. The first aim is to promote a deep approach to learning among visual communication students. The second aim is to foster greater collaboration, communication and effective team teaching among the lecturers on the programme. The question was examined through designing and monitoring a theme-based integrated Visual Communication project with a third year group of students. The project was delivered through team teaching over an eight-week period. There were seven staff members on the teaching team and I assumed the role of project coordinator.

The relevant literature is reviewed with a view to establishing the possible approaches to design education. This focuses in particular on approaches to learning; interdisciplinarity, theme-based curricula and team teaching.

The research is grounded in a critical theoretical framework. The research consisted of an action research cycle conducted with the collaboration of teaching colleagues and students. The data consisted of student evaluation questionnaires and focus group interviews with the teaching team. It also includes field notes by means of a research diary. The main findings show that team teaching lead to an improvement in team work and communication among the participating lecturers. The theme-based approach to curriculum design supported by team teaching fostered a deeper approach to learning among students and resulted in students adopting a more integrated understanding of the subjects on the Visual Communication programme.

The study concludes with a series of recommendations including a proposal from participating students and staff that the theme-based approach and team teaching be adopted across the four years of the programme. It also proposed that it is necessary to conduct a further investigation into how modularization will affect the implementation of the proposed learning and teaching strategies.
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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Introduction

This research is principally concerned with the design and delivery of the curriculum on a four year BA in Design Visual Communication programme. The programme is run by The Dublin Institute of Technology which currently one the largest Higher Education providers in the Republic of Ireland. The study will examine how aspects of curriculum design and delivery affect the key stakeholders – the students and academic staff – involved in the programme. The Irish Design Industry would also be a key stakeholder in the programme however the scope and timescale of this research project precludes the generation of new data in this area. Relevant data has been drawn from the Opportunities in Design Report (1999) and I have included this under ‘The Views of the Design Industry’ in section 1.1. The study examines how we can improve the design and delivery of our curriculum with a view achieving two main aims. The first aim is to promote a deep approach to learning in the context of third level, design education. The second aim is to foster greater collaboration, communication and effective team teaching among the academic staff on the programme. I set about examining this question by designing implementing and evaluating a theme based project which was delivered through team teaching.
Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research is to test a theme-based project within the BA Design Visual Communication programme which is implemented through team teaching. The motivation for this study is to investigate whether this approach would foster the following outcomes:

- Greater collaboration, communication and effective team teaching among the academic staff on the course.
- A ‘real world’ curriculum structure where subjects are encountered in relation to each other and in context.
- An in-depth, strategic approach to student design projects which focuses more on the design process than clever one off solutions.
- Greater independent learning among students.

It is intended to use a student design project as the vehicle for piloting a theme-based approach. The project is based around the area of Information Design. See Appendix A for details of the project brief and examples of other teaching materials generated by the academic staff involved with this project. In order to clarify the implementation of the structure I will explain the project content and requirements in Section 2.3 on Research Design.

Chapter one looks at the approach that has been adopted in the Dublin Institute of Technology, in particular the factors that have impinged on this in a contemporary context. The changing situation currently and consequent need for a change in approach.

Chapter two reviews the relevant literature with a view to establishing the possible approaches to design education. It focuses in particular on approaches to learning; interdisciplinarity, theme based curricula and team teaching.

Chapter three briefly outlines the research paradigm underlying this study. It describes the action research methodology adopted in this study, the reasons why the living theory approach chosen and the issues that were encountered in the course of the research. It describes the design of the project at the center of the study and looks at the data collection methods pertinent to the study.

Chapter four is a presentation of an analysis of the findings from the collected data. Section one is a mix of qualitative and quantitative data and focuses on data gathered from student participants. The second section is an analysis of the data gathered from teacher participants. The findings are qualitative and have been grouped in terms of the emergent themes. These are:
design and structure of the curriculum, approaches to learning, team teaching, the structure and scope of the project and modularization.

Chapter five interweaves the findings from students and teachers and presents the principles, relationships, and generalizations that can be made from the results of the study.

Chapter six outlines the conclusions drawn from the study. The objectives of the study are related to the general findings. The benefits of the study from a personal point of view are discussed. The potential benefits to the teachers and students on the programme along with design education in general are also outlined. A number of recommendations arising from the study are outlined. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the study.

Approaches to learning and teaching

Sometimes a course is completely revised because enough individuals who share a particular philosophy of education want to shape it to fit with their beliefs and values.

(Toohey, 1999: 25)

This research project has its origins in a module on ‘curriculum design’, which I completed as part of a DIT Post Graduate Certificate programme in third level Learning and Teaching in 2002. Two of my colleagues and I were participants on the course and over a period of three years it greatly enhanced our knowledge and understanding of how learning takes place. It has also presented numerous possibilities as to how we might improve the programme on which we teach.

I began lecturing in DIT in 1997. The programme I teach on – BA Design Visual Communication – was awarded degree status in 1999 and since that time, although it is generally a well run course – there have been no problems identified with the course from the annual quality assurance evaluations from students and staff – I have had two concerns about the way it has operated. I am approaching these concerns primarily as a lecturer on the programme and secondarily in my role as the course coordinator. Firstly, in my opinion, the course structure has not been designed to foster a deep approach to learning. The structure is similar to that of a secondary school curriculum with subjects split into three-hour blocks and students timetabled for almost thirty hours per week. Secondly, as I have observed from tutoring and assessing project work, the majority of students on the programme engage with the course content at a
relatively superficial level with little or no transfer between subject areas. My observations concur with the findings of the 1999 Enterprise Ireland report on the Irish design sector ‘Opportunities in Design’. The report states that:

*Design projects in college are considered to be too one-dimensional rarely conveying the complexity of high quality design....*

*(Opportunities in Design, 1999: 37)*

The findings also showed that college projects tend to be ‘solution driven’ with the emphasis being placed upon a ‘clever idea to the detriment of in-depth, strategic solutions.’ *(Opportunities in Design: 1999: 37)*

In my research and reading about curriculum design, I came across the idea of theme-based curricula *(Toohey, 1998)* which I will discuss in detail in Section 1.1.

It is my belief that the theme-based approach to course design has the potential to provide an appropriate model for art and design programmes in general. I also believe that the integrated approach propounded by the theme-based structure would go a long way towards addressing the issues outlined above.

**Opportunity for change**

In September 2002, I assumed the role of programme Chair for the BA Design – Visual Communication programme. Since then, I have been charged with leading the process of preparing the programme documentation for the DIT’s quinquennial Quality Assurance review.

The academic year 2002/2003 was a difficult year to drive this process as there was great upheaval within the School of Art, Design and Printing. Fifteen part time staff members lost their jobs due to financial cutbacks. The teaching union responded with a work-to-rule and our students were out on the streets of Dublin protesting about the effect of government cutbacks on their education. In the midst of this, with the support of the Learning and Teaching Centre, I had managed to organise a number of curriculum design workshops for my colleagues on the Visual Communication programme. The timing was not ideal, however, I floated the idea of theme-based curricula and team teaching. My colleagues agreed in principle that, as an approach, it had the potential to enhance learning and teaching on our programme.

Since then additional factors have come into play. The Institute has adopted modularization across all of its programmes. As a result of this we have to adapt the Visual Communication
programme to fit this model by September 2005. In order to complete the additional work required to write our curriculum in a modular format our Head of Department has negotiated additional time for us to prepare the programme for review. This extension of the deadline has presented us with the opportunity to test the theme-based approach before we rewrite our course. The theme based project, conducted with the cooperation of students and staff on the BA Visual Communication, is the focus of this research.

Background and Context

This section discusses the issues affecting student learning on the course, which relate to curriculum design under the following headings: Course structure; Timetabling; Independent learning; Requirements of industry and Real-world approach.

Course structure

As previously stated, the impending Quality Assurance Review has provided the course team with an opportunity to review our curriculum. This is with a view to designing a more integrated course structure than is presently offered, enabling us to meet the requirements outlined in the introduction.

The current visual communication curriculum consists of a number of discreet syllabi developed by individuals working in isolation. Subject elements run in parallel through years one to four without any consideration for how they might be absorbed and integrated by learners. There are no learning outcomes specified in the document. Syllabi are described using extensive lists of subject matter with no emphasis on the intended student learning.

It is my belief that the existing programme is too fragmented to allow students to engage with subjects or topics in any great depth. This view is supported by Toohey who states:

Where higher education curricula have been created in a piecemeal fashion, with individual academics adding or remaking units in response to their own interests, the ensuing differences in approach among staff members may result in students having to meet a confusing array of expectations.
(Toohey, 1999: 68)
Toohey (1999) defines one response to curriculum design as ‘forms of expression’ in a Fine Art context. In the context of Visual Communication this could be more appropriately defined as forms (or mediums) of ‘communication’ e.g. typography, multimedia, image-making, design for print and so on. This is the approach that has been adopted in Visual Communication at DIT.

My reservation about this type of structure is that it has had the effect of creating artificial boundaries within the discipline of visual communication design. For example, we often encounter students who make decisions about their design solutions based on media they like or are most comfortable using rather than the choosing the medium most appropriate to solving the communication problem.

In contrast to this situation, Davis (1997) argues that it is the responsibility of the teachers or ‘experts’ to wrestle with and resolve the differences in methodological and disciplinary perspectives and make meaningful connections between subjects. This task should not be left to the learners – the ‘novice(s)’ in this scenario – ‘...who in running from course to course are expected to “integrate their learning.”’. (Davis, 1997: 51)

Davis (1997) posits that theme-based curriculum design supported by team teaching as a way of presenting students with a holistic view of a programme. According to Davis academic staff on a team-taught course will meet the challenge of making connections between subject areas within a discipline or aspects of the course. The student is given the opportunity to see relationships that might not be apparent in other types of structure. As Davis states:

\[ \text{In the ideal interdisciplinary course, the power struggles over the relative importance of ideas and the epistemological differences among perspectives have been sufficiently addressed—if not necessarily resolved—to give the faculty team enough comfort with these differences to make them explicit and convey them to students.} \]

(Davis, 1997: 50)

The model implemented in this study is based on the integrated programme map described by Toohey (1999). In Toohey’s model a theme-based, integrated studies programme would be represented as shown in fig 1.1 below.
Timetabling

Research has shown that a heavy workload and a high number of contact hours are factors which contribute to students adopting either a superficial or a strategic approach to their learning (Jackson, 1999, Gibbs, 1992, Davies, 2002). Visual Communication students are very heavily timetabled – years one and two are timetabled for twenty seven hours per week, year three for almost thirty hours per week and year four for nineteen hours per week. Subjects are delivered in three-hour blocks which means that a student is likely to be expected to work on between five and eight separate projects for different lecturers during the course of one week. Staff have noted that students will often strategically miss one lecturer’s class in order to complete work to meet a deadline for another subject.

Independent learning

The educational value of independent learning is not explicit in the course philosophy nor is it visible in the timetable. Another issue, which I have observed since I began teaching on the programme, is that students progressing from their third or penultimate year find it difficult to make the transition to the way of working in fourth year. In third year, because different subjects operate in parallel, students are accustomed to working in a prescribed way for individual tutors or discipline-based teams of tutors. e.g., they do a typography project for one tutor and a multimedia project for another and so on.
When students reach fourth year they are given a suite of interdisciplinary or integrated projects to choose from and the relationships with their tutors change. Academic staff act more as consultants to the students. Students are expected to make choices about which lecturers they work with on each of their projects. For example a student might consult with the image-making lecturers while working on one of their projects only if the design solution requires that they use images in the final piece.

Taking an integrated approach in the earlier years of the course would facilitate this transition towards greater independence in their project work. It would also be useful for academic staff as a way of encouraging staff teams to rotate so that we do not become too used to working with one set of colleagues, thereby forming cliques, and becoming entrenched in a particular dynamic.

Institutional change

The third factor relates to pressure from within the DIT to re-examine what we do and to modify existing structures. The DIT Strategic Plan 2001 – 2015 calls for all programmes to rethink and redefine their purpose, philosophies and, processes. The emphasis within the Institute is shifting to the promotion of the capacity to learn and reason. The Strategic Plan highlights learning skills as being of greater importance than the changing nature of learning content. (DIT Strategic plan 2001) The document also states, as one of its objectives, the delivery of programmes geared towards the needs of industry at all required levels. The other major change also included in the Strategic Plan is that the Institute as a whole is moving towards modularization.

In addition, there is pressure from directorate level within the institute to increase student numbers. There is also considerable competition for students within the sector as there are three third level institutes in Dublin providing visual communication programmes and an additional five located in Athlone, Cork, Letterkenny, Limerick and Waterford.

The Views of the Design Industry

*Buyers of design seek (i) quality and creativity of design, and (ii) quality and professionalism in the ‘process’ of delivering design solutions. The sector struggles to deliver on both fronts.*

*(Opportunities in Design, 1999: 29)*
One of the inherent qualities of design education is that students are involved in ‘activity’ in almost all of their learning. This is one of the features associated with deep learning. (Jackson in Gibbs, 1995) This activity is generally project-based which has the potential to ‘engender higher levels of learning’. (Race & Brown, 1998) However according to the Opportunities in Design report,

Design projects in college are considered to be too one-dimensional rarely conveying the complexity of high quality design.... Similarly projects fail to reflect the quality of real design jobs, where designers rarely work in isolation, generally creating concepts in conjunction with copywriters, marketing specialists and other designers from related disciplines.

(Opportunities in Design, 1999: 37)

The findings show that college projects tend to be ‘solution driven’ with the emphasis being placed upon a ‘clever idea to the detriment of in-depth strategic solutions.’ (Opportunities in Design, 1999) The experience of teaching on this particular Design programme leads me to concur with this statement. The fragmented nature of the course means that students are struggling to manage a diverse workload. There is no structure in place to facilitate students in making connections between the various elements of the syllabus. Students might be better able to make sense of the subject and engage with the discipline of design if elements were delivered in a more integrated way. (Jackson in Gibbs, 1995)

There is reluctance among some lecturing staff to deal with essential subject matter, which they fear might be considered too challenging or dull by the students. There is also a tendency to shy away from projects which may have value in terms of the development of knowledge and skills of the learner but which are not guaranteed to result in an attractive outcome.

Summary

This chapter has described the approach to curriculum design in DIT and in particular to the BA Visual Communication Programme. It has also considered the factors that have brought to bear on the course as catalysts for change. It has outlined the pedagogic issues that need to be addressed. Briefly these relate to the structure and delivery of the programme as a fragmented rather than holistic entity; the over-timetabling of students; the one-dimensional nature of college design projects particularly in the context of the requirements from industry; and a lack of collaboration and communication amongst teaching staff.
This study aims to investigate an alternative approach to curriculum design at DIT. It will do so by designing, implementing and evaluating a project with Third Year Visual Communication students and staff. The following chapter considers how the issues discussed in this chapter might be addressed by looking at the literature in the field.
CHAPTER 2
THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction
As outlined in the introduction, the central questions in this study relate both to the structure of
the knowledge base and the teaching and delivery methods used to implement the curriculum.
Specifically it deals with the concepts of deep and surface learning; interdisciplinarity; theme
based curricula; and team teaching. This section seeks to provide a review of the literature that
surrounds these issues with a view to creating a framework in which the empirical data at the
center of this study can be understood.

2.1 Approaches to learning
Since the 1970s, much research has been carried out into approaches to learning. (Toohey, 2000,
Biggs, 1999). Marton and Säljö (1976) paved the way with their research into qualitative
differences in learning. The study identified different levels in the processing of information
among Swedish university students, which in turn lead to significantly different learning
outcomes. The two approaches identified were described as 'deep-level processing' and 'surface-
level processing'.

Learners who adopted a deep approach seek to gain understanding and make sense of new
knowledge in relation to existing knowledge. They may or may not be interested in achieving
high grades. Retention of information over longer periods of time is shown to be higher among
those adopting a deep approach. Learners who adopt a surface approach focus primarily on
‘learning by rote’ and doing just enough to meet the demands that the system places on them. They believe that higher grades will be achieved by reproducing more information rather than developing an understanding and making sense of a subject or topic. Evidence has shown that most students are capable of adopting both approaches. (Marton and Säljö 1976, Gibbs, 1992, Biggs and Collis, 1982, Toohey, 1999). Having discussed the issues relating to the BA Visual Communication Programme at DIT, this model would be an appropriate one to adapt.

2.2 Approaches to curriculum design in art and design

Graham Gibbs (1992) has identified factors relating to curriculum design and delivery that foster deep and surface approaches among learners. Factors which promote a surface approach are identified as follows:
- A heavy workload
- Relatively high class contact hours
- An excessive amount of course material
- A lack of opportunity to pursue subjects in depth
- A lack of choice over subjects and methods of study
- An anxiety provoking assessment system

The art and design sector has traditionally prided itself on being at the forefront of educational innovation (Davies 1997). Most art and design curricula embody the characteristics shown in numerous studies to promote a deep approach to learning among students. (Davies, 1997, Biggs, 1995, Gibbs, 1992). It is my opinion, for the reasons outlined in chapter one, that the structure of the programme at DIT unintentionally encourages a predominantly surface approach to learning. Gibbs (1992) summarises the characteristics that promote deep learning as follows:
- Motivational context
- Learner activity
- Interaction with others
- Well structured knowledge base
Both on my own experience of design education and as a design educator lead me to share the view of Alan Davies who posits that it would be unusual to find an art and design curriculum that did not embody at least some or all of these characteristics (Davies, 1997). Let us look briefly at these factors.

**Motivational context**

Gibbs (1992) states that this is best in a learning environment when motivation is intrinsic, that is, when the student experiences a need to know something. The motivational context is also high when the students have an involvement in selecting what is to be learned and planning how the learning should take place. Approximately 80% of all learning and assessment in Art and design is carried out through project work. As a learning and teaching method, project work has the potential to be highly motivating for students. The level of engagement is increased because of the active involvement of the student. Learners usually work more independently on projects than other aspects of courses. The level of motivation can also be increased when the learner has greater responsibility for choosing and managing the project and is involved in negotiating the assessment of the work produced. (Gibbs, 1992, Jackson, 1997)

**Learner activity**

In contrast to courses which are predominantly structured around lectures and other more passive forms of learning, students on art and design courses are involved in activity in almost all of their learning. Learning is carried out through projects, written assignments, group work, workshops, presentations, discussions and field trips all of which form a part of most Art and Design curricula. (Jackson, 1997)

**Interaction with others**

This relates to the concept of negotiating meaning and making sense of ideas being easier to do with others than alone. This approach aims to facilitate students’ engagement in purposeful and productive interactions with their peers and lecturers. Methods would include self and peer assessment, problem-based learning, team projects and group work.
Currently within the Visual Communication Programme, the first three factors are already in place. This study looks at the fourth factor and how it might be addressed through curriculum design.

**A well structured knowledge base**

In defining this, Gibbs refers to the constructivist model of learning where students' new knowledge is introduced in the context of existing knowledge and experience. This constructivist approach is promoted through project work, which usually involves the application of prior knowledge to problems. (Gibbs, 1992) Gibbs goes on to state that the subject matter being learned must be well structured and integrated:

> The structure of knowledge is more visible and more useful to students where content is taught in integrated wholes rather than in small separate pieces, and where knowledge is required to be related to other knowledge rather than learned in isolation.
> Interdisciplinary approaches also contribute to a well structured knowledge base.

(Gibbs, 1992: 11)

As discussed in the previous chapter the structure of to the design of the BA Visual Communication curriculum could be looked at in terms of as forms (or mediums) of 'communication' e.g., multimedia, imagemaking and so on. In this context 'interdisciplinary' refers to the five major areas within the Visual Communication curriculum: Graphic Design; Multimedia; Imagemaking; Design History and Theory and Professional Practice. Given its importance, this area will be addressed in more depth later in this chapter.

When making decisions about course structure we constantly have to ask ourselves: 'Will this structure support the kinds of learning that we want on this course? Does the structure help to achieve the course goals? If not how can it be modified?' (Toohey, 1998: 92) Toohey states that structure can be looked at under three headings: the structure of ideas and knowledge; the way in which the course is structured; and the way in which the events of the course are structured. This study looks at how the content and events might be structured.

Hugues Boekraad in Gruson & Staal (2000) refers to the ‘unteachability’ of design Boekraad notes that current practices in visual communication are very diverse and cannot in themselves provide didactic model or a coherent curriculum. He identifies a core problem which is that there is still the need for an elementary consensus concerning the nature of communicative design.
under new cultural and technological conditions. From there a consensus should directly follow on the methods by which a future designer achieves competence.

Firstly, since to focus on the process of design or ‘design methods’. Boekraad states design methods and acquiring the capacity to vary these methods and allow them to evolve is at the heart of design education. Therefore education in design must liberate itself from specific objects, styles and media. He proposes three strategies to address this. Firstly to open the academy doors wide and encourage influence from current professional practice. He notes however that current practices are very diverse and cannot in themselves provide didactic model or a coherent curriculum. Secondly, to foster independent learning among students by following the ‘learning to learn’ model; and thirdly, to create the time and space to reflect on the profession, this includes looking at theory and history of graphic design, philosophy, and communication theory which have all become part of the graphic design curriculum since the 1980s. Boekraad states that:

> Learning design methods and acquiring the capacity to vary these methods and allow them to evolve is at the heart of design education. Education in design must therefore liberate itself from specific objects, styles and media. In their place the focus should be on the design method itself, which ... consists of the design and creation of models. (Boekraad in Gruson & Staal, 2000)

**Interdisciplinarity**

In this section I will look at some of the literature about interdisciplinarity with a view to defining it in the context of this study.

The term ‘interdisciplinary’ emerged in the twentieth century and is rooted in modern educational reforms although the origins of the concept can be traced back to early philosophers. (Thompson Klein, 1990)

The modern connotation of ‘disciplinarity’ is a product of the nineteenth century and is linked with several forces: the evolution of the modern natural sciences, the general ‘scientification’ of knowledge, the industrial revolution, technological advancements, and agrarian agitation. As the modern university took shape disciplinarity was reinforced in two major ways; industries demanded and received specialists, and disciplines recruited students to their ranks. The trend towards specialization was further propelled by increasingly more expensive and sophisticated instrumentation within individual fields. (Thompson Klein, 1990) The idea of the ‘Renaissance
Man' remained as an ideal but it was not the model for the new professional specialized research scholar that emerged in the late nineteenth century. (Thompson Klein, 1990)

According to Missions of the College Curriculum, a publication of the Carnegie Foundation for the advancement of teaching a discipline can be defined as follows:

A discrete subject and its characteristic regimen of investigation and analysis – geography, political science, psychology and English are examples. In most American colleges and universities, such realms are structurally accommodated in departments, which administer the teaching and research in the individual disciplines.

(Davis, 2002: 3)

At the beginning of the nineteenth century attempts were made to deal with the problem of 'fragmented knowledge' with the founding of university of Berlin. However the problems encountered in applying Wilhem von Humboldt's concept of 'universal education' were similar to the problems that confront interdisciplinary programmes today: the structural organization of universities, the politics of individual disciplines, the question of whether connections can be made between individual disciplines, and the question of whether any one concept could be so great as to include all the disciplines. (Thompson Klein, 1990)

More recently concern for the unity of knowledge has most often been expressed in curricular efforts to establish general education programmes. Klein also refers to the rise in the Matrix structure (Thompson Klein, 1996: 23), which has become the norm in business under titles such as 'project' and 'venture', 'team' and 'working group', 'ad hoc committee' and 'task force'. This has relevance for institutions where learners are educated to enter this business environment.

Davis (2002) defines the term interdisciplinary as 'combining or involving two or more academic disciplines or fields of study'. Interdisciplinary connections assume a disciplinary structure to begin with, which Davis defines as prior arrangement of knowledge that have evolved to become the 'academic disciplines' usually referring to a subject specialization in the arts and sciences. Davis adds specialisations within professional fields. Thus interdisciplinary courses are those involving the subject matter and faculty expertise of two or usually more disciplines or professional specialisations.

Klein further defines the term interdisciplinary as 'usually implying higher levels of integration and greater amounts of teamwork. Therefore integration or what Piaget refers to as 'reciprocal assimilation among participating disciplines' is an important feature of interdisciplinarity. (Thompson Klein, 1990)
If there is a key characteristic of interdisciplinary courses it is 'integration'. Scholars working together to pool their interests, insights and methods, usually with the hope of gaining and presenting new understandings that could not be derived from working alone. (Davis, 2002: 6)

The disciplines that concern this study are the subject areas within Visual Communication. These include: graphic design, multimedia, image-making, design history and theory and professional practice.

**Characteristics of interdisciplinary, theme-based curricula**

Interdisciplinary courses require two or more teachers to plan and deliver the course as a team. This breaks from the norm where one teacher delivers one subject independently for the duration of a semester or academic year. Curricula designed around an interdisciplinary approach involve what Davis refers to as 'inventing the subject'. David Hailburton (Davis, 2002) suggests that this occurs by focusing on a topic and employing the disciplines in a new way to explore this topic. He defines a topic as 'broadly meaning' an issue theme, problem, region, time period, institution, figure, work or idea. Toohey (1999) and Davis (2002) define the main characteristics of curricula that follow this model as: the adoption of a cognitive structure based on key (overarching) concepts, themes or intellectual abilities rather than the internal logic of the subject (Toohey, 1999); focusing on a topic - theme, issue, problem, region, time period, institution, figure, work, competency or idea (Davis, 2002) rather than a discipline or skill; adopting a real world approach where subjects are contextualised as opposed to courses where artificial barriers created by skill-based structure / timetable; requiring a shift in delivery of a course towards team-teaching; and finally using group work so that all students are encouraged to participate and stretch their understanding (Toohey, 1999).

Biggs and Collis (1982) developed the 'Structure of the Observed Learning Outcomes' or SOLO Taxonomy which is a system for categorizing student work according to its quality. See below:

**Prestructural:** No knowledge is apparent.

**Unistructural:** The student shows some understanding of one aspect of the topic.
**Multistructural:** The student had grasped a number of ideas about the topic but does not relate them to each other or to the central question; the information is presented as a list or description.

**Relational:** All of the significant aspects of the topic are related to each other and are brought together to form a coherent point of view; the work stands as a whole.

**Extended Abstract:** As with the relational category, all of the aspects have been brought together. But here the student goes further and is able to reason about applications beyond the scope of the immediate question, theorize about related issues or reflect on his or her own actions and understanding.

The structure of the theme-based course reflects the 'relational level' of the SOLO taxonomy. Rather than being an unconnected list, described in the 'multistructural' level, subjects are related to each other and brought together under a common theme or idea. Learners are given a more coherent picture of the discipline through the structure and delivery of the curriculum. Deep learning is fostered by this structure.

In the context of Visual Communication, a theme might be Editorial Design. This would mean that for an agreed timeframe within the course of an academic year the delivery of subject areas within the curriculum would be in the context of editorial design. For example Graphic Design as a subject might require that students design a magazine, In Multimedia they might be required to look at magazine design in the context of the world wide web. Students might be asked to produce illustrations or a photo essay in their Image making class which they could integrate into their magazine design project. In professional Practice they would look at production, financial, commissioning, contractual and legal issues surrounding the work they are carrying out in their studio practice. Design History and theory would provide a historical context and theoretical framework for their own practice in this area. Fig 2.1 shows a diagram of how an integrated studies programme is represented in Toohey (2002:107) In the context of the BA Design Visual Communication Programme a theme could be represented as shown in Fig 2.2 below.
The role of the teaching team is key to the success of this approach. As Davis outlines, on an interdisciplinary programme it is incumbent upon the teaching team (experts) to take on the task of integrating their various methodological and disciplinary perspectives and resolving differences. This task is not left to students (novices), who, running from course to course, are expected to 'integrate their learning.' The advantage of this is that in the ideal team-taught course, the teachers have successfully met the challenges of "connecting learning" and the students have a chance to see the relationships that they might not necessarily see in other courses. (Davis, 2002).

Briefly the advantages of such an approach are that: the most powerful ideas of the discipline, or important modes of thinking are practiced and established; students have many opportunities to explore key concepts and to use them to predict and analyse; fundamental misconceptions or weaknesses in thinking are more likely to be exposed in this kind of course design than in more traditional ones; there is a real world approach; students are exposed to the views of different teachers. (Toohey, 2002, Davis, 2002) There are also some disadvantages attached to this model: students are not presented with the same map of knowledge as is presented in a discipline-based course therefore key ideas or themes may be presented out of the context in which they were developed and students may not understand how they came into being; students can be challenged by exposure to the views of different teachers – this can also be an advantage of the theme-based approach.
In the ideal interdisciplinary course, the power struggles over the relative importance of ideas and the epistemological differences among perspectives have been sufficiently addressed—if not necessarily resolved—to give the teaching team enough comfort with these differences to make them explicit and to convey them to students. The teachers may even have discovered some continuities and compatibilities in their fields as they invent a new subject. One of the great strengths of interdisciplinary courses, at their best, is that the teachers, who are the experts in this scenario, have already wrestled with, and to some extent resolved, the differences in their methodological and disciplinary perspectives. (Toohey, 2002, Davis, 2002)

Team teaching

For the purpose of this study, a number of definitions of team teaching have been considered. Davis (2002) states that the concept of team teaching refers most often to the teaching on interdisciplinary courses where “scholars work together to pool their interests, insights, and methods, usually with the hope of gaining and presenting new understandings that could not be derived from working alone. The Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching at City University of Hong Kong (1998) define team teaching as: A group of teachers working together to plan, conduct, assess and evaluate the learning activities for a group of students. Davies (2002) suggests that the arrangements vary considerably among teams, and it is not always easy to agree on what constitutes the ‘team’ part of teaching.

The advantages of team teaching as an approach can be summarised as follows: The process provides support for staff from colleagues. Team teaching can revitalise individual teaching through dialogue / interaction with colleagues. Team members bring different skills and expertise. It can offer an opportunity to integrate part time staff. The enhanced communication required can aid the professional and interpersonal dynamics of departments. It leads to closer integration of staff and can build a real as opposed to a nominal team. Students are exposed to different viewpoints from a variety of teachers. (Quin and Kanter, 1984)

The disadvantages of this approach can be summarised as follows. It involves considerable extra work on the part of teachers in ‘inventing the subject’. (Davis 2002) There is some compromise on coverage required. Because learning outcomes in an interdisciplinary setting can get complicated and require much of students, decisions will need to be made about which outcomes are most important, given the idea underlying the course and definition of the subject. There is additional time required for collaborative planning, delivery and assessment.
An important criterion for membership of a teaching team is expertise. Whether potential participants have the personal and professional qualities required to work as an effective team member is an important consideration. These include being: open to diverse ways of thinking, wary of absolutism, good at listening, unconventional, flexible willing to take risks, self reflective and comfortable with ambiguity, themes competencies or problems. (Davis, 2002)

In planning the ideal interdisciplinary course the, teaching team needs to make conscious and justifiable decisions about the scope of the course, the sequence of topics, and reach an appropriate balance of breadth and depth. (Quin and Kanter, 1984)

**Building the organizational structure**

One of the great advantages of teaching with a team is that roles can be differentiated. Traditionally teaching has required that each teacher operates independently without support. The assumption is that every teacher is good at everything and needs to be good at everything. Traditional teaching at the postsecondary level is one of the few work areas left where differentiation of function has not taken place. Team-taught courses offer an opportunity to share out the tasks and bring different talents into play for different functions and varying pedagogic approaches. Students have the advantage of dealing with experts in these various roles. (Davis, 2002, Quin and Kanter, 1984)

The day-to-day functioning of the team is crucial to the success of this pedagogic approach. Larson and LeFasto (1989) list eight characteristics exhibited in teams which perform to a high level. These characteristics are as follows: a clear, elevating goal; results-driven structure; competent members; unified commitment; collaborative climate; standards of excellence; external support and recognition and principled leadership.

**Summary**

This chapter has examined the responses in academic literature to the core issues of this study. It outlined the possible approaches to learning and the ways in which these are fostered through curriculum design and teaching methods. Having discussed the current design/implementation of the curriculum in DIT, I argued here that the concept of deep learning is an appropriate
model to follow. The following section discussed how this might be achieved through curriculum design and delivery. Briefly, deep learning is fostered through: motivational context; learner activity; interaction with others and a well structured knowledge base. It is this last factor that is of particular interest in this study. Specifically, the concepts of theme based curriculum design, interdisciplinarity and team teaching are important in this context.
CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE,
 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction

The previous chapters described the key issues pertinent to a study of curriculum design in the context of Visual Communication Design and how these have been approached theoretically. This chapter is concerned with how these issues might be investigated empirically in the context of this study. Both the epistemological stance and the questions relevant to this study have shaped the development of the research design and methods selected to carry out this research.

This chapter has been divided into two sections. The first section will identify the theoretical perspective in which the research is ground and will go on to identify an appropriate methodology for use in this study. The second section will give a more specific outline of how this has been applied to the research design.

3.1 Theoretical perspective

Cohen & Manion (2001) describe the theoretical frameworks which relate to three distinct research paradigms. The first, that of empirical research, is based on the 'scientific' paradigm and rests upon the creation of theoretical frameworks that can be tested by experimentation, replication and refinement. The second approach, the interpretive paradigm, seeks to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors, thus, it may be described as interpretive and
subjective. The third approach, that of critical research, takes account of the political and ideological contexts of much educational research. Cohen & Manion (2001) state that the purpose of critical theory is not merely to understand situations and phenomena but to change them. Researchers operating within this paradigm seek to uncover the **interests** at work in particular situations and to interrogate the legitimacy of those interests – identifying the extent to which they are legitimate in their service of equality and democracy. The intention of the critical theory researcher is therefore transformative. The aim is to transform society and individuals to social democracy. In this respect the purpose of critical education research is focused on the practical aspects – to bring about a more egalitarian society. In the view of critical theorists, researchers can no longer claim neutrality and ideological or political innocence. Critical theorists would argue that the positivist and interpretive paradigms are essentially technicist in that they seek to understand and render more efficient an existing situation whereas the critical theoretic approach would seek to question or transform it. For this reason this study falls within the critical theoretic paradigm. The purpose of the study is to gain insight into participants’ experience of a situation by implementing change, gathering data from participants about the impact of this change and acting on this new information to transform existing practice.

The critical theoretic paradigm has been largely responsible for generating action research as a form of enquiry. (Cohen et al, 2001; McNiff, 2002) McNiff (2002) states that Action research developed as a systematic approach to enable people to understand how their experience is shaped by cultural and historical forces and thus find ways to recreate their personal and social realities. It regards knowledge as an agent of social transformation, thereby constituting a powerful critique of those views of knowledge as somehow separate from practice. (McNiff, 2002). Action researchers view knowledge as ‘a living process’ where learning is rooted in experience. Action research involves the researcher reflecting on the experience of practice, deciding whether the practice is in line with the values base of the researcher, and then deciding on future action as a result of reflection. (McNiff, 2002) Zuber-Skerritt (1999) states that there are no fixed answers as answers become obsolete in a continually evolving future. Answers become the basis for new questions.

Coghlan and Brannick (2001) state that action research rejects the separation between thought and action that has traditionally characterized social research. Action research views the purpose of research as forging a more direct link between intellectual knowledge and action so that the enquiry contributes to growth and development of people and their communities. Data used in the action research is systematically collected and emanates from the experience of the research participants. (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001)
McNiff (2002) states that three different approaches to action research have developed in recent years; an interpretive approach, a critical theoretic approach and a living theory approach. The 'interpretive' approach involves practitioners undertaking enquiries into their workplace practices with the support of researchers. There are degrees of involvement by the external researcher whose role is to observe, describe and explain the roles of those who they are supporting or monitoring. (McNiff et al 2000) The 'critical theoretic' approach focuses on emancipatory issues. It encourages participants to become aware of and to work to overcome the forces of domination that control and potentially distort their work practices. (McNiff et al 2000) It is similar to the interpretive approach in that the relationship between the external researcher and the other research participants is negotiated. The third approach, which is the 'living educational theories' approach encourages individuals to clarify the base values of their work and to try to live their values in their practice. In this model of action research 'all researchers are in the same research plane all are researching their practice regardless of their positions in relation to one another'. (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000)

This third approach is the one which most closely ties in with the aims and approach of this study which is, as McNiff and Whitehead (2000) state, 'built on a collaborative and participatory ethos' and 'democratic'. This study is being carried out by a practitioner investigating her own practice in collaboration with students and a team of colleagues. As Whitehead (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000) states, the researcher is at the center of the research not the 'abstracted third person of traditional disciplines.'

**Section 3.2 Methodology**

For the purpose of the structuring and implementation of this study, a research framework was required that would provide a forum for me to interrogate my own practice and that of my colleagues. It would also need to take account of the experiences of my students. The characteristics of the study as it unfolded all seemed point towards action research. As outlined in chapter one a number of issues relating to the design and delivery of the Visual Communication programme have been identified. In line with action research combines diagnosis with reflection, focusing on practical issues that have been identified by participants and which are somehow both problematic and yet capable of being changed. (McNiff, 2002) As Allen Davies (2002) states:
Research into design education need not be profound in order to bring successful rewards. There is more than enough generic research into student learning for teachers to begin to use it to interrogate their own practice. Small-scale action research projects in relation to individual practice can often provide significant insight into specific learning and teaching contexts and help teachers design curricula, learning and teaching and assessment tasks which promote the kind of learning that genuinely do transform student understanding of the subject of study.

(Allen Davies, 2002: 12)

The nature and purpose of this research led me to believe that it is most suited to the action research model of enquiry. If we look at the characteristic features of action research we find that this methodology is appropriate to the scope and aims of the research. Cohen and Manion (2000) state that:

**Action research may be used in almost any setting where a problem involving people, tasks and procedures cries out for solution or where some change of feature results in a more desirable outcome.**

(Cohen & Manion 2000: 226)

In order to address the issues identified in chapter one and incorporate the criteria required to promote deep learning in outlined in chapter two it was necessary to test the theme based approach with the cooperation and support of a team of colleagues. Kleiman states that enhancing the utility of any curriculum has to be considered in relation to all those who interact with it – students, teaching staff, administrators. (Kleiman, 2002) It would be futile to try to implement new strategies without the participation of students and lecturers directly affected by the change in approach. Wisher (2001) states:

One does not undertake action research alone. It is collaborative and involves testing your ideas and results against others and against several tests.

(Wisker, 2001:161)

Therefore the best way to test theme based learning supported by team teaching was to involve the major stakeholders of the programme in the study and collect feedback based on the experiences and responses of colleagues and students to the new approach. If either of the two groups of participants found that it did not enhance their experience as a participant of the programme it would be necessary to modify and retest the design of the model used in the next phase of the action research cycle.
It was important to allow sufficient time for students and staff to work on the project. The project brief given to students was challenging. It would require a minimum of seven weeks to enable students to carry out the required research and development work and to allow them sufficient time to engage with the design process which was one of the main aims of the project. Coupled with this, the structure and delivery of the project quite different to the way staff and students were used to working. Kemmis & McTaggart (1992) argue that action research is concerned equally with changing both individuals and the culture of the groups, institutions and societies to which they belong. If this change was to take place it was important not to hurry the process and risk alienating student or colleagues. For one thing, the new approach was more time consuming. For example the staff planning and debriefing meetings took an average of three hours each. It was necessary to allow colleagues time to reflect on the process and discuss it fully before the team committed to embarking on a second attempt at team teaching. I could not know going into the first cycle whether colleagues would agree that this was a viable approach. It was not possible to build a second action research cycle of team teaching into the semester. Therefore this study consists of one action research cycle. The conclusions and recommendations from this cycle will form the basis of the second cycle which will take place in October 2004.

It is argued that action research should contribute not only to practice but to a theory of education and teaching which is accessible to other teachers, making educational practice more reflective. (Cohen & Manion, 2000; Elliot, 1991)

Designing a new curriculum structure is a central aspect of this study. Cal Swann observed that the cyclical approach of the design process bears a strong resemblance to that of an action research enquiry. He outlines the stages in the design process as follows: problem/research – analysis – synthesis – execution – production – evaluation and points out that both require 'several cycles to review, amend, adapt and refine'. (Swann, 2002: 53) Here the problem, as outlined in the rationale, is that the course is fragmented and discourages students from taking a deep approach to their learning. My research into curriculum design leads me to believe that adopting a theme-based approach would be appropriate for the Visual Communication curriculum. The aim of this project is to execute a theme-based project and test how well it works. This will be followed by an evaluation of the process with a view to refining and adapting it for use in the future. Thus the action research process will, I believe, support and enhance the curriculum design process.
3.3 The Design Project

The theme of the seven week project was Information Design. The subject areas included were: Image-making, Graphic Design, Multimedia, Professional Practice and Design Theory.

At a planning meeting on 19 December 2003 with five members of the teaching team present, the following broad structure for the project was agreed. The pilot programme cannot be called a 'module', as clearly it would not be possible to change the titles of exam subjects nor could we alter the content or structure of the exam spread sheets. However it was agreed to run an integrated student 'project' over the course of eight weeks. This was the length of time the team felt would appropriate to the scope of the project and was equivalent to the amount of time required to run it as an interdisciplinary module or a number of co requisite / parallel modules. A detailed schedule for the eight weeks of the project was also drawn up. (Appendix B)

The brief

The project centred around producing an information design strategy for the heritage town of Trim, County Meath. The project was chosen because it demanded that students draw upon skills and knowledge from five of the subjects currently taught on the Visual Communication programme which are also key areas within the discipline of design. Students were expected to produce a multi-faceted approach to their design solution. A copy of the brief is included in Appendix A.

Graphic Design

The graphic design component ran for the duration of the project. The brief required that students produce a minimum of four pieces of information design. It was proposed that this could include a signage system, a map, a brochure or small publication, any other media which students could justify as appropriate in the context of the brief. The students were required to research and generate the content for these elements.

Multimedia

This component ran for the duration of the project. The brief required that students produce a minimum of one screen based component as part of their design solution. The brief proposed a
GPS interface or a website as two possible alternatives. The project required that students research the role of screen-based formats in the context of information design and how digital formats would function in tandem with more traditional formats which could include printed literature and signage and so on.

**Image-Making**

In the context of this subject students were required to visually document the site. They were asked to choose six locations within the site and make photographs/drawings of these. The two lecturers who teach this aspect of the third year programme spent a total of four days on location with the students completing this part of the project. This comprised a three day block in week two of the project and a one day block which had been scheduled to take place in week four of the project but was moved to week five at the request of students. The block teaching built in to this aspect of the project enabled us to schedule independent learning days in weeks three, four and six of the project.

**Professional Practice**

A project linked to the main studio project was assigned in this subject. It ran concurrently for the duration of the studio project. A copy of the assignment is included in Appendix C.

**Design Theory**

The Design Theory lecturer agreed to use the one remaining class session to deliver a lecture on information design. The lecture focused on signage systems, transport maps and the principles of using design to reduce uncertainty in the context of a user navigating three dimensional space.

A visiting professional was brought in to deliver a presentation on the visitor experience of information design in the context of Irish heritage centers. This lecture was timed to coincide with the point at which students were required to rewrite the project brief and define their aims and objectives for their approach to the project. The lecture looked at the design process in relation to visitor information at Wicklow Gaol. Examples of design and development documents were shown. The various stages of the design process, from initial research through to the final design solution, were presented and discussed in detail by the speaker.
**Input from the design industry**

Efforts were made, unsuccessfully, to include a presentation by an information design practitioner to show some examples of professional design projects. There is just a small pool of practitioners in the Dublin area who specialize in information design of this nature. Hopefully through more advance planning it will be possible to secure one of these practitioners for the next cycle of the project. This would have provided a valuable learning resource for students engaging with practical design and project management issues. It would have brought the reality of working on a professional project of this nature into the educational environment. The students could have gained an insight into how professional designers would handle the types of problems and challenges posed by the project brief. This type of input would have greatly enhanced the feedback and discussion that took place between students and lecturers throughout the project. This is something I would hope to implement in the next cycle in October 2004.

**Formative assessment**

A process of formative assessment took place where two work-in-progress critiques were facilitated by the multimedia and graphic design lecturers. A final critique was held at the end of the project. The aspiration was for students to produce a solution which comprises a seamless integration between the two subject areas of graphic design and multimedia. Students could also include aspects of imagemaking in their design. For example if images were produced it would be in the context of graphic design across print-based and digital applications.

**Summative assessment**

The Graphic Design, Multimedia and Image-making components were assessed by the academic team who teach in these areas. The Design Theory lecturer was invited to participate. However circumstances intervened and this was not possible to arrange on this occasion. Hopefully this more collaborative, integrated approach to summative assessment can be incorporated into the next cycle.
3.4 Research participants

Two groups of participants contributed to this study. These were a team of seven of my teaching colleagues on the BA Design Visual Communication programme and a cohort of students from the same programme.

The student participants were a class of Visual Communication students in their third year of a four year BA programme with whom I do almost half of my teaching. I also work with the fourth year students but decided not to pilot the project with this group for reasons outlined below.

The project was scheduled to take place at the beginning of semester two and run for seven weeks. I decided that it was more appropriate to work with the third year group for two reasons. Firstly, in the second semester of third year the class works on prescribed projects with set deadlines whereas in the second semester of fourth year, each student chooses three projects from a pool of ten and works to their own schedule. The latter would not be appropriate to the structure I wanted to analyse. Secondly, I did not want to add to the pressure that final year students experience by asking them to participate in the study.

The third year class consisted of a cohort of thirty students. There were twenty female and ten male students in the group. There is only one class of students in each year of the programme so twenty seven of the group had been together since first year. Three students had joined the class at the beginning of the academic year 2003/04.

The project incorporated weekly classes in four subjects, Multimedia, Graphic Design, Image Making and Professional Practice. Although originally I had planned to involve the Design History and Theory aspect of the programme for the full seven weeks the lecturers for this subject finish at the end of semester one, while in semester two all class time is dedicated to Thesis Preparation. This focuses on preparing a proposal for the Final Year Written Dissertation and is individually tailored to meet the requirements of each student.

The subjects included in the study were represented on the timetable as shown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Hours per week over 7 weeks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multimedia</td>
<td>5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Design</td>
<td>5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image Making</td>
<td>5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Practice</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I

Design History 1 hour for 1 week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Hours per Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elective</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Theory</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional classes on the timetable not included in the study:

The academic colleagues who participated in the study were all lecturers who taught in the third year of the programme.

### 3.5 Data collection methods

*Rigour is different in qualitative research from that found in quantitative research – but it is still immensely important.*

*(Wisker, 2001:161)*

To collect the data for this study and meet the requirements of triangulation a combination of methods, including focus groups, questionnaires and reflective journaling, was employed. Denzin (1998) in Robson (1993) describes triangulation as use of multiple sources to enhance the rigour of the research. Denzin describes ‘data triangulation’ as ‘the use of more than one method of data collection. As I have described three methods of data collection will be used in this research. They will include reflective journaling, questionnaire and focus group.

**Data from colleagues**

Having reviewed the various data collection methods appropriate to action research, focus group interviews appeared to be the most appropriate method for collecting data from academic staff participating in the project. Lofland Summarized the objective of this format as being:

*... to elicit rich detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis. Its object is to find out what kinds of things are happening rather than to determine the frequency of*
This ties in with the aim of this research which is to attempt to document and analyse the experience, and opinions of participants in relation to the project.

Fielding states that group discussions have a special value for those who want to assess how several people work out a common view, or the range of views, about some topic. (Fielding in Gilbert, 1993: 137) In this instance the topics in question are team teaching and theme-based learning.

The first session was an audio-taped interim focus group which was held in week 3 of the project. This format had several functions. Firstly, it was important for the teaching team to meet and review how the project was progressing and to deal with any issues, pedagogic or logistical, which might have arisen. Secondly, it enabled me as coordinator of the research and the project, along with the other participants, to experience the ‘focus group’ format for the first time. It established some themes for the final focus group. Lastly, it provided an opportunity for participants to experience being tape-recorded before the final feedback session. The questions drawn up for this focus group were concerned mainly with the logistics of the project to date and any staff or student issues which had arisen. (Appendix D)

The third and final session with colleagues was an audio-taped focus group discussion which was held three weeks after the project had ended. This allowed time for colleagues to review the project assignments submitted by students. It also gave me time to reflect on feedback from student participants with a view to designing themes and questions for this focus group.

As I was so close to the project and because of the logistics involved in facilitating a group of eight participants, I asked a colleague who had not been involved in the project, but who had an interest in the subject matter, to act as an assistant moderator for the final focus group. The texts on conducting focus groups, advise this where possible. (Fielding in Gilbert, 1993; Krueger, 1998). According to Krueger the moderator is concerned primarily with directing the discussion and keeping the conversation flowing and focused on the topic. They should also identify key themes or questions that emerge. The assistant moderator takes comprehensive notes, in case of equipment failure. They should also note the participants’ body language, where necessary probe the response of a participant in more depth and finally, assist with post-meeting analysis of the session. (Krueger, 1998, Fielding in Gilbert, 1993) Assistant moderators also help with the logistical aspects of the session such as equipment, refreshments, paperwork and the arrangement of the room.
The data emerging from these sessions will be reviewed in chapter five in terms of the implications for the future development of the programme.

**Data from Students**

Data was collected from student participants using a small-scale survey. Although I had initially hoped to conduct focus groups with the student participants it was clear that the numbers involved (there were thirty students in the class) would be too unwieldy to conduct a focus group. It would have been possible to break the class into three smaller groups. However, the volume of work involved in conducting, transcribing and analysing three focus groups would be prohibitive considering the time and resources available. I considered taking a smaller sample from the group but ruled this out as I might have missed out on valuable data if all students were not given the opportunity to contribute. I also decided against focus groups as students might be concerned about whether their responses might affect their marks for the project. As a lecturer who teaches these students in third year and will become their year tutor in fourth year my relationship with the group is not neutral. Therefore I also ruled out conducting individual interviews with student participants.

The use of anonymous questionnaires seemed to be the most appropriate method of data collection from students in this study. In order to allow the student participants adequate time to reflect on and complete the questionnaire I divided the class in two and allocated two hours of class time for each group to complete their evaluation of the project. These sessions took place in a seminar room which had been booked for that purpose. The survey was also a means of defining topics or themes for use in the focus group interviews with academic staff.

It is advisable to pilot and where necessary refine a questionnaire. (Wisker, 2001) However given the seven-week time frame of the project and the fact that the research is based on the responses of a specific student cohort, it was decided that it would be neither possible nor appropriate to pilot the questionnaire among the student participants. Furthermore pre-testing of the questionnaire might have contaminated the sample as the prior knowledge of the content of the questionnaire might have unduly influenced student's approach to the project.

**Kirkpatrick model of evaluation**

The design of the evaluation instruments for this study uses the structure developed for the Kirkpatrick model of Training Evaluation. (Kirkpatrick, 1998) Donald Kirkpatrick developed an
evaluation model which has been in use since the late 1950s by the training community. (Burke Johnson, 2004) The focus of this model is on measuring four kinds of outcomes that should result from an effective training program. These are can be listed as follows: Level 1 Evaluation – Reaction; Level 2 Evaluation – Learning; Level 3 Evaluation – Behavior; Level 4 Evaluation – Results. (Burke Johnson, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 1998)

**Level One** evaluation provides information about overall participant reaction to the programme as well as participant feedback and evaluation of specific aspects. Detailed level one evaluation can provide formative evaluation information that can be used to improve future versions of the educational program. Closed questions such as attitudinal scales are important to this aspect of evaluation. (Burke Johnson, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 1998)

**Level Two** outcomes focus on what has been learned in terms of the participants’ skills, knowledge and attitudes. Knowledge of level two evaluation can help in interpreting the results of level three evaluation for example if level three results do not occur, it may due to workplace factors and not attributable to any flaw in the program. (Burke Johnston, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 1998)

**Level Three** The aim of level three outcomes is to establish whether participants change their ‘on-the-job-behavior’ as a result of their having attended and participated in the training program. In relation to this study this would refer to the students’ approach to studio project work and related written assignments. In terms of the academic staff it would mean changes to the planning, delivery and assessment of the curriculum. If the behavioral change does not occur, it would generally be necessary find out why this was the case. (Burke Johnston, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 1998)

**Level Four** In a business training context level four outcomes can include, but are not limited to, financial return on training investment. They can also include other major results that contribute positively to the functioning of an organisation or any outcome that is would benefit the organization as a whole. Burke Johnston (2004) describes possible level four learning outcomes as follows: improved quality of work, higher productivity; fewer wasted resources; improved quality of work life and improved human relations. All of these are factors I hoped to promote through the integrated approach. (Burke Johnston, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 1998)

The student questionnaire (Appendix E) has been divided into sections which are based on the first three levels of the Kirkpatrick model of evaluation. ‘Section 1: The Project’ and ‘Section 2: The Role of the Tutors’ relate to level one of the Kirkpatrick model. These sections look for students’ responses to the project. They sections ask for feedback about the learning and
teaching resources put in place for the project and the structure of the project. ‘Section 3: Your Learning’ relates to level two of the Kirkpatrick model. It focuses on what has been learned by students. ‘Section 4: The impact on Practice’ relates to level three of the Kirkpatrick model, it asks how participation in the project affected the students’ way of working. It also asked how students thought the integrated approach might impact on their future practice as designers. At the time of the evaluation I felt it was not possible to question students about level four outcomes. These would come about over time as the integrated approach evolved within the Visual Programme. The questions for the second lecturer focus group were also based on this model. (Appendix D)

Reflective journal

In order to triangulate the data I made use of reflective journaling at key points throughout the study. This enabled me to use my own experiences and responses as research data. It enabled me to track the build-up of my own knowledge and understanding throughout the course of the year in the context of the project (Wisker, 2001; McNiff, 2002)

3.6 Time frame for collection of data

The study took place over the time frame shown below. The preparation took place in semester one and the project was implemented in semester two.

| November 03 | Brief head of department and head of school obtain permission to proceed. Begin reflective journaling |
| December 03 | Design and plan delivery of project with colleagues. |
| January 04 | Introduce project to student cohort and obtain agreement and permission from them to proceed. Begin project |
| February 04 | Interim focus group with colleagues |
| March 04 | Conduct student questionnaire |
| April 04 | Final focus group with colleagues |
3.7 Preparation for research

I met with my Head of Department and Head of School separately to discuss the project and request permission to proceed with it. Both of them were encouraging and offered to assist in any way that they could.

The preparation stages of this study were quite encouraging. I approached my teaching colleagues on the programme and they were all quite willing to participate. In particular, I note from my reflection on the initial planning meeting that some members of the team were very interested in the idea of teaching in blocks. An aspect of that is part of the structure but not my main focus of interest. However, my notes from that time state that I was pleased that others had an interest in the study beyond cooperating with my research as it lessened some of the responsibility that I felt as the project or research leader. I prepared an ethical statement and consent form, which I distributed to my colleagues. (Appendix F) They too were supportive and agreed to participate.

In January 2004 I gave a short presentation to the students about theme-based learning and deep and surface learning. I explained to them that the research was a means of testing a possible approach to the structure of the course and that this was an opportunity for them, as stakeholders, (McNiff, 2000, Cohen and Manion, 2001) to have input into the direction the programme might take in the future. The students seemed interested in the project and although they did not ask any questions they did not raise any objections.

I distributed an ethical statement and consent form. I also explained that students had the right not to participate in the study and did not have to take part in the evaluation process. All of the students returned the signed form and no one raised any issues.

I noted in my reflection on this session that I was somewhat concerned that the students had no questions about the project or the approach and I think with hindsight that this may have been because I did not give them enough information in the presentation. I delivered this introduction to the project in the design studio which is an open plan space that houses two student groups. I made the decision to book a seminar room for the later phases of data collection from students. I also decided that it would be of benefit to the students if I went into more detail about approaches to learning. I have noted at that time that I was unsure whether I might influence or contaminate the outcomes of the research if I explained too much to the students about approaches to learning at the start of the project. I included more detail on approaches to
learning in the student debriefing session at the end of the project and explained again the aims of the research. I also included information and how I anticipated that a theme-based learning supports a deep approach to learning.

I think that in the next cycle of research the students would learn more if they were briefed in more detail about approaches to learning and the theme based approach. At the beginning of the project. This would also place students on a more equal footing as participants in the research. It would also benefit them in terms of their learning and self development throughout the process.

One aspect of theme-based learning that I had hoped to include as part of the study was student teamwork. Toohey (2000) states that teamwork is usually a feature of theme-based learning. However my reflection on the planning meeting in December reveals that two of the lecturers present were unhappy to proceed with the project if it involved student teamwork. After much discussion of the issue, the teaching team involved in the project took the decision not to proceed with student teamwork. This was because this particular group of students had completed two team projects which ran consecutively in semester one for approximately five weeks each. The students had indicated to these lecturers at their reviews at the end of the semester that they although they recognised the value of and the necessity for teamwork they would be happier to work independently for the rest of that academic year.

I felt it was important to respect the wishes of the student body and the teaching staff who had reservations about this aspect of the project. It would be against the principles of the Action Research methodology and my own values to try to impose a process with which participants were not entirely comfortable. It might have also jeopardised the project as a whole. McNiff (2003) states that it is important to be able to accommodate change in order to achieve your initial goal:

*Be flexible and stay focused. Aim to adapt to circumstances as they arise both in terms of peoples needs and wishes and in terms of situational changes. If you cannot adapt to changing circumstances you will probably go under.*

(McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead, 2003)
3.7 Ethical considerations

McNiff (2000) states that;

Research is a human practice that aims to generate knowledge which will have use value in the lives of others.
(McNiff and Whitehead, 2000: 136)

McNiff goes on to argue that research is therefore an ethico-political process, because knowledge and its use are contested issues. In terms of ethics action research should be transparent, participative and democratic. (Cohen and Manion 2001) It must be integrative ethical research. The ethical framework for this study is in line with the ethics expressed in the DIT research guidelines. Permission was sought from the Head of School and Head of Department to proceed with this study. An ethics statement and informed letter of consent were presented to colleagues and students participating in this research. (Appendix F) The letter briefly outlined the nature, scope and purpose of the project. It also indicated that all data gathered would be treated confidentially and students and colleagues were under no obligation to participate.

Summary

This chapter has situated this study in the context of critical theory due to its focus on the design and implementation of change in order to improve an existing situation. Therefore the methods associated with Action Research as a field of enquiry have been adopted to carry out the empirical research in this study. Specifically this involved the design and implementation of a pilot project and the collection of data about both the experiences of staff and student participants. The design of the project stemmed from the concerns raised in chapter one, and also in ‘approaches to learning’ and ‘curriculum design’ as discussed in the literature review in chapter two. The methods used to collect the evaluative data were a small-scale survey questionnaire, focus group interviews and reflective journaling.
CHAPTER 4

THE PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

In this section, the findings from the analysis of the data gathered as part of the study are presented. This has been a qualitative, action research study designed to explore the experiences of students and staff participating in a theme-based, team taught Visual Communication Design student project. The data is a mix of qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative data is based on frequency of response to questions. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first consists of the presentation of an analysis of the data from the student questionnaires. The second section details an analysis of the findings from the staff focus groups. The data in this section is drawn primarily from the second of the two focus groups.

4.1 Data from student participants

The qualitative and quantitative data from student participants is based on analysis of questionnaires, which the students completed four days after the conclusion of the project and the submission of their assignments. Class time was allocated to facilitate the evaluation process. For logistical reasons students were asked to attend in two separate groups, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. A colleague who had participated in the project co-facilitated this session. The questionnaires were distributed and completed during these two class sessions. The sessions took place in a seminar room which had been booked for that purpose. The students were allowed approximately one hour to complete the questionnaire, which consisted of 16
questions, although the amount of time available was flexible and some took longer. There were 23 respondents out of a possible 29 which is a response rate of 79%. A copy of the questionnaire and a full transcript of the responses are available in Appendix E.

This analysis will focus on the two sections of the questionnaire which are most relevant to the context of this study. Section 2, ‘The Role of the Tutors’ and Section 4, which looks at the ‘Impact on Practice’, will be covered in detail. The student feedback from sections One and Three provide a useful formative evaluation of the project and will be consulted in order to implement developmental changes to the content and structure of the project in the future.

Section 2 – The Role of the tutors

This section contains two questions. The first question asked student participants for feedback on how effective the teaching team were in implementing and delivering the project. The second question asked students to comment on how they felt tutors could have been more effective in delivering this project.

Question 8

In what ways were the course tutors effective for this project?

Fig 4.1 Student responses on tutor effectiveness throughout the project

Sixteen respondents (70%) stated that the lecturers gave helpful and constructive feedback about their project work:
Their professional opinions are always effective. After looking at our individual projects they gave us ideas on how to expand on what we had already done, without telling us exactly what to do. They gave us ideas on different approaches we could take. They gave us the freedom to be as creative as we liked, there were very few restrictions.

Three respondents (13%) stated that the hearing a range of viewpoints from different lecturers helped advance their thinking about the project:

*It was good to hear different viewpoints, even if they did disagree sometimes, it wasn’t confusing like I thought it would be. Instead, it actually helped me decide on appropriate design and media.*

Five respondents (22%) stated that lecturers were helpful in providing technical help, computer workshops etc.:

*Multimedia workshops were geared to help as project progressed. Print-based lecturers were available as you needed help.*

Four respondents (17%) commented that that lecturers had ‘worked well together to come up with the project’ and that lecturers ‘ran the project smoothly’.

**Question 9**

In what ways could tutors have been more effective in running this project?

![Fig 4.2](image)

*Fig 4.2 Student responses to question 9 on ways tutors could have been more effective throughout the project*

In answer to this question, nine respondents (39%) stated that they would have liked more individual contact time with one, or a number of, lecturers. Five students (22%) stated that
receiving contradictory feedback from lecturers confused them. Students believed that this happened due to a lack of communication between lecturers:

_The only thing that was at fault was that each tutor would contradict the other on opinions of the same thing. Perhaps this was a lack of discussion between the tutors. But this fault sometimes made things confusing._ (Student L)

_Although it's the student's choice as it is their design, they want to please to get a good mark._ (Student S)

Four respondents (17%) stated that it would be useful for students if all lecturers met students more frequently as a group or if all lecturers had been present at class critiques. Three students (13%) stated that tutors should be more constructive and less destructive in their criticism of student work:

_Need not just criticize work but explain why and be more positive. 'It's not working but...'_

Two students (9%) requested that more computer workshops be put in place to support the technical aspects of the project work.

**Section 4 The Impact on Practice**

There are four questions in this section. Question 12, the first of these, has five sub sections A – E. Each subsection will be analysed individually. Since the focus of this study is on the qualitative aspects of students' responses, the decision was made to simplify the qualitative data in question 12 into three divisions instead of five. This three point scale uses the same categories as the five point scale on the questionnaire. These categories are: _improved, the same and more difficult_. The results for question 12 have also been visualized using a series of pie charts. The Questions 13, 14 and 15 are open questions with just one section in each. These questions will be analysed by extracting the emergent themes and trends.

Question 12 asked students how the experience of working on projects where all subjects are integrated differed from working on a number of smaller projects for each individual subject. There were five sections to this question. Each section looked at a different aspect of the student learning experience. This included: A) Managing your college workload; B) managing college deadlines; C) making connections between subjects; D) having time to engage with the design process; and E) making use of independent learning days to work on assignments. The results for this question are shown below.
Question 12A

Managing your college workload

SAMPLE 23 STUDENTS

- IMPROVED 48% [11 STUDENTS]
- THE SAME 22% [5 STUDENTS]
- MORE DIFFICULT 30% [7 STUDENTS]

Fig 4.3 Managing your college workload

Eleven of the twenty three respondents (48%) found that their ability to manage their college workload had improved. Seven of these (64%) of these said that this was because they were able to focus more and were not ‘constantly thinking of different projects’. Two students said that the weekly schedule, distributed at the outset of the project, helped them with managing their workload.

*I was more focused and so got more into what I was doing. Didn’t seem like working somehow.* (Student A)

*I felt more relaxed because I wasn’t constantly thinking of different projects. I knew what was to be done throughout the whole thing.*

(Student P)

Of the seven respondents who found it more difficult to manage their college workload two stated that this was because the workload was too heavy or they were not used to working on one large project. Two students said they had difficulty with time management and a further two said that this was because the project was ‘so intense’ and that they had ‘no other subjects to distract’ them when they were ‘stuck in a rut.’ The remaining student said this was due to the need for more contact with lecturers.

*I felt by the end of it I had no time for other projects, life or laughter. It was very intense.*

(Student K)
Of the five respondents who experienced no change in managing their workload, one student made no comment. The other four said that this was due to difficulty with time management issues.

*It was easier at the start of project but I had a lot of sleepless nights and long days in the second half so overall the same but more intense.*

(Student I)

**Question 12B**

Managing college deadlines

![Pie chart showing the distribution of student responses to managing college deadlines]

**SAMPLE 23 STUDENTS**

- **IMPROVED** 52% [12 STUDENTS]
- **THE SAME** 26% [6 STUDENTS]
- **MORE DIFFICULT** 17% [4 STUDENTS]
- **UNDECIDED** 4% [1 STUDENT]

Fig 4.4 Managing college deadlines

Twelve of the twenty three respondents stated that working on one large integrated project rather than a number of smaller ones made managing the deadlines easier.

*I made the deadline as a result of process. It definitely helped me.*

(Student M)

Students also found the printed schedule and the interim critiques and deadlines useful in this regard:

*The deadlines actually helped structure project rather than helping to disrupt another like would happen in semester 1.* (Student E)
One student stated that the stress of trying to manage too many deadlines in the previous semester impacted negatively on the development of key visual communication skills such as creativity:

*With many deadlines you forget what project has to be in first and it's a bit stressful trying to juggle four different working ideas, trying to be creative and original at the same time.* (Student V)

Of the four respondents (17%) who said they found it more difficult to manage deadlines one student said they were 'daunted' by the heavy workload. Another student found it stressful because although they found having one large project beneficial they experienced a lot of pressure to achieve a pass:

*Good to have only one deadline and stay focused on it but then even more stressful knowing that if you fail you fail three subjects' projects.* (Student U)

One respondent was undecided but did refer to pressure experienced due to the heavy workload:

*This is difficult to answer due to the fact that other project lecturers have given us extensions because we told them we had too much on.* (Student K)

**Question 12C**

Making connections between the subjects

![Sample 23 Students](image)

- **Improved 91%** [21 Students]
- **The Same 9%** [2 Students]
- **More Difficult 0%**

Fig. 4.5 Making connections between the subjects

Twenty one of the twenty three respondents (91%) stated that working on one large integrated project improved their understanding of how the different subject areas related to each other:

*This was a fantastic (in my opinion) project for this particular reason. The link between projects, 'Now I know why I'm studying that!' came to mind a few times.* (Student L)
Seven respondents (30%) stated that the experience of working seamlessly across subjects helped contextualise the different areas and promote a deeper approach:

They helped explain the needs of the project. i.e. to design information we had to understand the theory behind it and multimedia and print became more closely linked in terms of capacity to organise info and image making was put in context First time really using image and type in a print setting. (Student E)

This integration was supported by the structure of the curriculum:

You had to use all of the classes so it just happened. (Student S)

Of the two respondents who stated that there was no change in this area one did not state why this was so. The other respondent said that they already had an integrated view of the subjects:

I already thought that way but I'm sure it helped many others. (Student D)

Question 12D

Having time to engage with the design process

SAMPLE 23 STUDENTS

- IMPROVED 65% [15 STUDENTS]
- THE SAME 22% [5 STUDENTS]
- MORE DIFFICULT 13% [3 STUDENTS]

Fig 4.6 Having time to engage with the design process

Fifteen of the twenty three respondents states that working on one large integrated project allowed them time to focus more on engaging with the design process

Lots of time was given to organising briefs and crits which really helped to solidify the process. (Student E)

It was improved because all my time went on one project instead of a number so I could concentrate more on the design process. (Student B)

There is evidence from some of the feedback that students adopted a deeper approach than in previous projects:
This was a more official project so I did think more about the design process than I would have with other projects. Also I did my research before I started designing. (Student Q)

Of the five respondents who reported no change in this area two gave no reason why this was so. One felt that they were still too ‘limited in time’. And another referred to the heavy workload. Respondents who gave a negative response stated that they had difficulty with scheduling their time.

Again found scheduling time for each thing difficult. Some pieces were more developed than others. (Student U)

Question 12E

Did you make use of the scheduled ‘independent learning’ days to work on the project?

SAMPLE 23 STUDENTS

- YES 96% [22 STUDENTS]
- NO 0%
- NO ANSWER 4% [1 STUDENT]

All twenty two respondents who answered this question stated that they did make use of the scheduled independent learning days to work on the project.

I always spent my project work days working on the project they were very helpful the project would have been much weaker without them.

In spite of the intention at the heart of the study which was to alleviate stress and enable students to adopt a deeper approach to their learning, Four percent of students still experienced pressure:

I spent hours in college, after college, at night non stop trying to push myself on for the project, even with the independent learning days.

(Student K)

The scheduled independent learning time created space for students to direct their own approach:
At one point I was totally bogged down and only for the time off college I was able to go down to the national library and around town researching the project. This opened up the whole project again. (Student T)

It also made explicit the fact that it was in students' own interest to take control of their learning:

As said before we have to be able to make certain decisions ourselves. They may not be the right ones but eventually you learn. (Student W)

I could have used them better, but, I did use them. I think this project for me was all about change. I've taken a step, a very long one. I've learned a lot which I can bring forward with me. (Student M)

One respondent (4%) stated that they preferred structured class time:

But I much prefer having structured class because you can wander a little as self discipline at this age can be easily distracted. (Student S)

Question 13

This question asked respondents to comment on what they felt were the benefits of working across subjects in an integrated way. They were asked to base their response on their experience of participating in the project. The responses to this question can be grouped into four main areas: integration of knowledge; The real world approach; The element of choice; clearer focus.

Ten of the twentythree respondents (44%) referred to the integration and contextualising of subjects as being an advantage of this approach. They stated that this enabled them to see how subjects ‘worked together’ and also ‘how to make an idea work over different media’. One student made the following comment about the different subjects:

You get to see how they connect and see less of a crevice between them. (Student J)

Eight respondents (35%) stated that the benefit of the integrated approach is that it ‘helps the student see how “real” projects work’:

If all of these (subjects) are being discussed within the confinement of one brief I find them more interesting as they are being aimed at more real life experiences. (Student P)
Instead of being separate classes as they used to be, they became one class and you can start dealing with managing them together like you will in a company.

(Student S)

Five respondents (22%) stated that the element of choice was an advantage of the integrated approach. This was because it enabled them to use the areas they were good at to support areas where they felt less competent:

Seeing how things work together. Using the things you are strong in to help something else. How to make an idea work over different media.

(Student M)

The process brings you closer to industry and allows you (yourself) to choose what areas you are good at and those you are not. It’s a vastly superior way of learning.

(Student D)

Three students (13%) stated that having one theme enabled them to ‘focus more’. One student (4%) stated that ‘hearing advice and getting opinions’ from a range of lecturers was a positive learning experience.

Question 14

What changes to this way of working would you recommend?

![Sample Recommendations](image)

Fig. 4.8 Recommendations from students

Seven out of the twenty three respondents (30%) said that they would not recommend any changes to the approach. Two respondents (9%) left this question unanswered and one student
(4%) said they did not know. The remaining fourteen students gave a range of answers. The most frequently occurring answers are summarized below:

Four respondents (17%) stated that they would have liked more contact time with lecturers. One respondent (4%) was not comfortable with the independence and choice afforded to them by the brief.

*If the lecturers gave us individual brief in what they want designed for Trim. This would reduce a little of the workload and maybe steer us in a clearer direction. It was very much 'do it yourself' for Trim. (Student K)*

Four students (17%) commented that the workload was too heavy. Their criticisms are summed up by the following responses:

*More time or else less work load. Quality more than quantity should be thought about from time to time. (Student L)*

*I'm not sure but maybe two projects of integrated classes with a smaller workload may help so you have something to swap to and from - not getting bored of the same project. (Student S)*

One student suggested that, ‘contextual studies (design history and theory) should be dealt with in the studio, alongside specific problems or tasks.’ This is interesting because programmes within the school have been hoping to achieve this for a number of years. This is the closest the programme team has come to finding a structure which would enable this to happen. It was heartening to hear that at least one of the students thought it was a good idea.

*Maybe the contextual studies should be dealt with in the studio? Alongside specific problems/tasks. (student E)*

**Question 15**

Question fifteen attempted to look at the implications for future practice. It asked whether an understanding of the connections between different areas/subjects is important in terms of the respondent’s future practice within visual communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Twenty two of the twenty three respondents (96%) gave a positive response to this question. One student gave no answer. A sample of the responses to this question are reproduced below:

As I've said this project has enlightened me big time. I'm beginning to look at my career more positively and as a whole. The course is now more of a whole and I see the importance of the different subjects. (Student M)

Because it gives you more scope as a designer, and you realise the benefits of certain media over others, where you would not otherwise, as the integration shows up the distinctions and shortfalls of each of the media. (Student E)

I definitely think it's important. I think everything should be taken into account, for example, without even realizing it, we could take inspiration from historical design and the only way of learning these is through design history. (Student P)

**Question 16**

Question 16 provided an opportunity for respondents to make any additional comments they wished to include. Eleven students responded to this section. One stated that while recognizing the value inherent in this approach it would not be their preferred modus operandi:

Although integrated projects are important to show how subjects are relevant across a wide range of design, one would be enough in any year. (Student H)

Six respondents (26%) stated that they had enjoyed the project. Two respondents (9%) said that the flexibility to choose what you wanted to design within the brief was a positive aspect of this approach.

I think it was a really good idea and really helpful that the brief was so open – it gave room for adjustment and helped you to come to grips with why you use certain media for certain purposes. I just think it was a bit long. (Student E)

All in all I think this was the most enjoyable project I have done so far. Choosing the media ourselves meant that we could focus on the stuff that we like. We learned more also. (Student A)
4.2 Data from teacher participants

The qualitative data from participating lecturers is drawn from an analysis of the content from two semi-structured, focus group interviews. The focus groups comprised the lecturers involved in the planning, delivery and assessment of the Trim Information Design project. I acted as moderator and a colleague from the programme, who had not participated in the project, acted as assistant moderator. The first meeting was an interim focus group which took place during the third week of the project. The second meeting took the form of a debriefing session, held four weeks subsequent to the end of the project. Audio recordings from both focus groups and a transcript of excerpts from the second focus group are included in Appendix D.

Having studied the data and considered possible approaches to analysis, the decision was made not to follow the structure devised for the questionnaire. It was decided instead that it would make more sense in the context of the study to organise the data in terms of the major themes that emerged during the interview. This would help to highlight key issues and facilitate the making of decisions or recommendations based on the findings. Based on a study of the data these themes have been grouped under the following headings: design and structure of the curriculum; approaches to learning; team teaching; scope and structure of the project; and modularisation.

Design and structure of the curriculum

The first question asked participants for responses to the Trim Information Design Project. It asked participants to state the strengths and weaknesses of the project and where possible to propose appropriate developmental changes. It also looked at how team teaching and the theme based approach impacted on the delivery of individual subjects in terms of depth of coverage and quality of learning. All participants were in agreement that the formalizing and planning of this integrated structure by the lecturers involved was an important and positive step in the development of the Visual Communication Programme and should be made an integral part of the curriculum:

*I think that there are aspects of second year that work on a localized and informal basis ... but only at our agreement, unofficial. And maybe the students can make some sort of*
crossover. But this was a much better formalized thing where we were all serious about using all their skills in one project... But I think that the idea that it was formalized, that we were all involved in it as well as they were, and they could see that, that was a big thing and that was the new thing, that I thought was interesting, wasn't it?

(Lecturer 2)

As evidenced above, it is clear that informal collaborations on the delivery of projects happen on occasion between pairs of lecturers. Extracts from this focus group provide evidence that occurrences of this are becoming more frequent as staff investigate ways of enhancing programme delivery and support for student learning.

On a localized level, ... because I get along with Lecturer X and there are some overlaps from my area into his ... certain things are achieved and the students can make the connections and they will come to me and, say, I'll take an interest in their prints because they'll take drawings that I've done with them and Lecturer X, like you, loves to take raw materials and turn them into another media and that's good and they can see the advantages.

(Lecturer 2)

I know Lecturer C is doing the same I know Lecturer C has been working with Lecturer D and Lecturer E has been working with Lecturer D as well in first year, so on an informal basis people are starting to integrate.

(Moderator)

The above excerpts demonstrate that this has a tendency to happen on an ad hoc basis and is dependent on whether the lecturers involved 'get along' with each other at a social level. The point was also made that, under the current structure, team teaching operates purely because of the good will of those involved:

Going back to a point we might have made earlier we're fortunate here round the table and this may have come up before at our first session. Most of the people on the course at the moment, that's the staff, are able to get on with each other. The danger will be that that can't be achieved. You only need one person who doesn't agree with this and then you're in trouble.

(Lecturer 3)
This concern was voiced again at a later stage in the discussion by the same participant as can be seen below. The debate which ensued will be looked at in greater detail in the section on ‘team teaching’.

But I still think that one of the major difficulties with it will be that everybody will have to be able to run along with it.... And you can’t force any of us to do any of this. Once our timetable is issued everything after that is by agreement.

(Lecturer 3)

There was a definite sense that in order to address this issue and to move the programme forward it was important to participants that the adoption of an interdisciplinary approach should be formalized within the curriculum. This would include embedding methods of delivery such as team teaching and collaborative projects. Once this happens it would be possible to implement the approach using advance planning.

I think you take that project and from us all sitting around the table ... the next time we do, structure it more. I think the problem a lot with design education that it is based on our own knowledge and it is very tacit and the more that we actually formalize stuff like that the more that we are looking seriously at design processes and the importance of integration or team teaching or team work of students. I think it has to be written into the curriculum, I think it can’t be dependent on, you know, me wanting to work on this project. For instance if you disappeared off the course maybe this project wouldn’t work.

You might leave next year, but I don’t think curriculum should depend on us just all cooperating.

(Lecturer 1)

In relation to the curriculum in the earlier years of the programme there was some discussion about the question of integration versus fragmentation in first and second year.

when it comes to designing the course we need to really seriously look at that because I’m not sure whether that works.

(Lecturer2)

What?

(Moderator)

The fragmentation, you do a bit of this, it’s like taking pills, if you take that one and that one and that one you’ll suddenly be better. It doesn’t quite work like that.

(Lecturer 2)
The same lecturer came back to this point later in the interview:

Maybe we’re lacking in ideas or initiatives for first year. The way first year is done now is completely alien to my education where you got a team of people who worked on common projects, and as a student, you knew exactly what was expected of you. And you learned things as you went along rather than a wee bit of this, which I still think is weird. (Lecturer 2)

With regard to the fourth and final year of the programme there was intense discussion around integration of course content versus specialization. The question was raised about how much choice should be given to students over the subjects they wished to pursue. The question over whether they should be allowed specialize in one subject, illustration say, and leave out major aspects of the programme such as graphic design and multimedia was also discussed but not resolved. Two opposing views were expressed. One party believed that students should be allowed specialize and drop areas that were not of primary interest to them:

Well we don't have a structure ... for ... what we called a major before. We used to have photography, illustration and design and it seems to me as if that's rising again.... people would decide to major in an area... and we dealt with it and it was good. That's something we need to look at and I think it may be healthy to start looking at it now. Because these type of projects (theme-based) definitely focus on it as it comes to a conclusion.... We've got to start looking at the idea that some of them don't want to do graphic design some of them don't want to do multimedia. They just want to do illustration.

(Lecturer 3)

The opposing view expressed was that students could not afford the 'luxury' of specialization at a time when the design industry is moving increasingly towards an interdisciplinary approach:

In terms of fourth year, I don't think fourth years can decide I'm going to leave multimedia out or make the decision 'I can not go near that'. It's too much of a luxury in this day and age to decide to leave out a part of a repertoire of visual communication and that's what's happening in fourth year, where students are not doing any digital media and it's not that digital media is a subject, and that's the way they see it. I'm not doing any of that, I can become a graphic designer without doing digital media. Digital media just mediates information. It can be illustration.... And I think we really need to think about integration in fourth year.... If they want to become an illustrator if they can't put their work on a CD and do a really nice piece and send it off to America or do...
a website and they've made that decision, and that is such pity.
(Lecturer 1)

In fourth year we realise that they have every subject seen as different and they decide to specialize.
(Lecturer 9)

Where in industry there is now more integration if you look at Imagination it’s all interdisciplinary and I think Design Consultant A would be a good person to ask all about that as well.
(Lecturer 1)

The point was made by lecturers that some students adopt a 'strategic' approach to their learning by avoiding subjects that they are challenged by and choosing subjects which they ‘like doing’ instead. The following extract from the dialogue relates to the ‘a la carte’ approach some students adopt towards the programme as opposed to the preferred holistic approach, where subjects are viewed as an interlinked suite of communication media. If we look at an aspect such as multimedia, students have demonstrated in third year that they are capable of reaching the required standard in this area but opt not to do it in their final year because they are challenged by it. The quotation marks below indicate the student voice as expressed by lecturers it looks at how they think students make decisions about their subject choices.

Some of them just can’t do it and don’t want to...
(Lecturer 3)

We are making it a requirement in third year for them to do that and they are doing it...
So they are being strategic, ‘well I’ll do illustration for print’.
(Lecturer 1)

‘I like doing that bit.’
(Lecturer 2)

The view was expressed by lecturers that adopting a more integrated curriculum structure and using themes to bring the subjects together, or to possibly even replace the existing subject titles, might address this fragmented approach which some students adopt:

I think it goes back to how we present the course to the students in the early stages. We at one point talked about not actually using the term multimedia. But just actually using themes or talking about design or talking about visual process and actually bringing all
of these things under one heading.

(Moderator)

I have one more strength. I think, just to reiterate what Lecturer 3 said earlier, that integration between us in parallel to integration of the project is really important that there’s more integration of thinking on a subject and that’s in say fourth year I have problems with students thinking of the technology as opposed to what they’re actually dealing with. And that’s hopefully going to feed into fourth year where they’re not thinking ‘Oh, I don’t, I’m not going to do multimedia this year.’ Whereas multimedia is just mediating information and communication. So I hope that that will hopefully begin to solve that problem where they’re thinking, multimedia, illustration, photography, as opposed to thinking ‘information design’ I’m using multimedia, photography, illustration and typography or whatever. So we can’t expect them to integrate those subjects if we don’t integrate them ourselves. So that is a strength.

(Lecturer 1)

Approaches to learning

This part of the analysis focuses on the approach to learning of the student. It sought to establish whether an integrated approach to learning would improve the learning of Visual Communication students, whether or not it is important that subjects are presented to students through the curriculum in an integrated way, That is, whether the structure of the curriculum has an impact on how students approach their learning.

It was stated that because students had one large project assignment instead of three or four smaller ones this meant that they could adopt a deeper approach to their engagement with the project. The fact that the time was structured so they could devote a block of three days each week to focusing on one assignment supported this deeper approach.

The main strength was that students weren’t going from one project to the next... the next day so that they could actually, em, get deeper... into the subject, I think that worked well. Whereas the opposite is happening in second year where you... have students for a certain amount of time and then they mightn’t come in that day because they have an essay for somebody else, you know... They’re juggling a lot of projects. So with this I think they were within it for longer so they could actually get in depth and they knew then if I saw them on Monday and you saw them the next day that they were...
still thinking about the same content. So I thought that worked very well.

(Lecturer 1)

The block teaching over the three-day field trip to Trim in week two was also viewed as a positive development. Partly because it reflected the reality of a professional design job and partly because it provided time for students to engage on a deeper level with the process of researching a location and visually recording it.

From our side being able to spend a full day three days in a row really focused on what a location is really about excellent. Way to go as far as I'm concerned.

(Lecturer 3)

... you could really focus. The first day was wandering around the second day it was getting much more focused and so on and so on. And the fact that the time was really valuable when we were away somewhere. That was really good. Rather than just leaving it say for three or four weeks and find they did it in the last afternoon.

(Lecturer 2)

But the fact that they had to arrive to a location that suddenly kicked off for us anyway. And our initial talk to them was on the basis, rightly or wrongly, that this was very effectively, would have to be seen as a professional job. So when on location use your time to record. So that was the first learning barrier for them because a lot of them did not know... we tried to explain to them you're located here for three days, spend the first day just taking it all in, that's a luxury, and then from there on hope for the best. They found that very, very tough.

(Lecturer 3)

They did it was a matter of not knowing quite how to approach it.

(Lecturer 2)

Four weeks after the project ended two of the lecturers involved asked the students about the experience of the project and the field trip. They reported to the focus group that long term learning became evident from the students' responses:

'We asked nearly every one (of the students) we spoke on the tutorial aspect yesterday 'did you enjoy it?' Just on verbally most of them got an awful lot from it. And I think the more distance they create to it and the more they start applying what they learned the better they're going to realise what they got from it... a lot of them picked up a lot from it. I mean even talking to people, introducing themselves to people, finding that the location could deliver information. Some of them on the third day were only breaking
that ground, and ok, they didn't quite make it within the time but they learned that, yeah its here, I just didn't find it over three days.

(Lecturer 3)

They also spoke of the learning that was made possible because of the project structure especially in relation to documenting a site as part of design research:

These are things we would never have discussed before because you wouldn't have had them on site to do it. So that aspect of it was useful.

(Lecturer 3)

One lecturer who would normally cover subject topics in weekly, hour long seminars or lectures made the comment that linking the professional practice assignment – which would normally be an essay question – with the studio area and making it a practical assignment which directly related to the problem students were solving in the studio reflected a real life approach and enhanced the student’s understanding of aspects of their own professional practice. A copy of the assignment is included in Appendix C.

I found it very positive in that, ah, if you’re doing something with them and it’s a one off kind of thing you do it with them and then it’s finished like and it’s gone. But with this it went on for several weeks so it enabled them to see how something that might have been previously covered in an hour or two, which now went on for several weeks enabled them to see how it would work in reality.

(Lecturer 5)

The lecturer was also ‘impressed’ by what he described as the ‘reality’ of the project. He expressed the view that because the project reflected the ‘reality’ of working as a designer it promoted deep learning and a greater understanding of how the design profession operates.

The reality of the situation was the real thing that impressed me about it. I think quite a few of them were quite surprised when they actually sat down and they found the amount of time that they were spending on each individual area, which they had to break down for me on each subject, you know, the amount of time that they were spending on the project. And they were actually quite surprised that it took so long, you know. And I think they... because I would go through all of this with them after Easter and point out to them that in reality that in the real world they mightn’t get this amount of time to do it, and that this is the amount of time it took them during college, eh the reality would be different and eh, looking at value for money for their time and that kind of thing would
be an interesting exercise we should run through again, you know. Now that they've recorded their time they'd be able to go through that again. So I found it really interesting and some of the feedback I got was terrific. You know the detail I got from them was terrific.

(Lecturer 5)

That echoes what I found.

(Lecturer 4)

One problem that was noted was that some students do not fully engage with the initial 'concept development' stage of the design process. As part of this stage of the process students – in line with best professional practice – would be required to generate a range of possible approaches and ideas to solve the communication design problem. This promotes creativity and problem solving skills and hopefully leads to a stronger more rounded design solution as expressed in the Opportunities in Design Report (1999). However many students do not place enough emphasis on this aspect of the design process:

Well I think what happens is they fall into really bad habits. And they often come up with ... they're often satisfied with the very first thing that they come up with.

(Lecturer 2)

There is no lateral thinking.

(Lecturer 7)

This superficial approach is not adopted by all students:

... Student A had acres of ideas and some people struggle to find one. And that’s where you’re always trying to help them out. But I think that Student A, his mindset was that he had to produce loads of alternatives.

(Lecturer 2)

Part of the success of this project was that it allowed time for students to engage with the design process and adopt a deeper approach. Some students focused on improving this aspect of their work. This was in at least one instance a response to formative feedback from tutors:

But I think one of the strengths of this project was that some people ... like Student B, really developed working on his notebook and working on his process. You know it was noticeable. That was partly because after the last project we gave feedback and said look your ... development ... you’re really weak there but you’re ok in the other bits and he took that and really focused on that part of the project. So I think this would allow that.
Aspects of responses to the student evaluation questionnaires were read out during the focus group. Below is one response to the complaint from some students that they were not getting consensus from lecturers in terms of the formative feedback on their work in progress:

There are two words if I could reflect on them for a second there's a preoccupation with trying to please a group of tutors. There's a concern that there isn't a consensus from the tutors. There's a comment about the real world. The real world is a damn lot more awkward than the real people in here. And they're never going to get a consensus from a board of marketing bods or whatever. But without that agitation or irritation which there may have been in the tutorial that grain of sand is not going to work in the oyster. And I'm delighted that they're pestered by it because if you get a group of tutors sitting around saying oh lovely, lovely, lovely where are they going to go from there.

(Lecturer 4)

Teaching team members were aware of the potential for confusion to arise among students and some took steps to ensure that there was as little conflict as possible:

I actually on occasions did not comment on stuff... purposely because I thought it's going to interfere with what some one else is saying.

(Lecturer 3)

Lecturers also noted that integration of subject areas did successfully take place as a result of the theme-based approach and team teaching:

Yes for me definitely I was seeing illustration in multimedia projects. Whereas normally they would think I'm doing illustration. I'm not going to put it into a digital media piece. ' So that was great because Lecturer 9 and myself are always saying we are always looking for content but they don't contextualise the content very well. So that was really good, they were using that content in a much better way.

(Lecturer 1)

It was also noted that the integration of subjects into one themed project placed a new focus on some subjects. For example in photography and imagemaking the emphasis shifted in line with the nature of the task. The requirement was to visually document a site therefore students were not focusing on producing finished illustrations. Instead imagemaking took on a central supporting role in the design process in the form of design research.
The output of illustration and photography was not going to be solution driven. That it was actually design research and that's quite a new departure that they weren't thinking that this actually has to go, you know, in a brochure, that this is actually design research. That's quite interesting.

(Lecturer 1)

Team teaching

In the analysis of this aspect of the data the literature on teamwork was consulted with a focus on the characteristics of effective teams. As discussed in Chapter 2 – The Review of literature, Larson and LeFasto (1989) list eight characteristics exhibited in teams which perform to a high level. These characteristics are as follows: a clear, elevating goal; results-driven structure; competent members; unified commitment; collaborative climate; standards of excellence; external support and recognition and principled leadership. To help structure the findings for this section the responses from participants are grouped where, applicable, using these headings. Instances where participants felt that the team may not have functioned effectively were also examined using these categories. Issues addressed by participants also include team roles, planning and structure and the potential for conflict among team members. The statement below is an example of a participant who experienced the positive potential of team teaching because the team had as its focus an agreed 'clear, elevating goal'. Clear because the objectives were clearly stated and understood by the team; and elevating in the sense that the outcomes had the potential to have a positive impact on student learning. There was also the potential to improve the teaching and delivery of the programme.

I felt for the first time that we did something right. The meeting that we had, the very first meeting, was incredibly useful, and it was really refreshing that everybody had the same intentions and we could see that this would only be a good thing. So I felt that this was really really valuable. And when we were involved in it I really felt as though this was a really positive step....

(Lecturer 2)

There is also evidence of a unified commitment or 'team spirit' which in this instance manifests itself as a belief in the value of the agreed goal and the willingness to do what needs to be done in order for the team to succeed. (Davis, 2002)
I think that that was a really interesting development and the intentions of it were truly good and everybody was wholeheartedly in agreement that this would be a good development. And that’s really a positive strength of what we were trying to achieve.

(Lecturer 2)

The planning meeting, which was held a month before the commencement of the project, was viewed as key to the success of the approach:

One of the other major strengths I think was the fact that before the project started there was a very successful meeting of the staff to lay it out.

(Lecturer 3)

I thought that was quite good too.

(Lecturer 1)

Yeah that was very helpful.

(Lecturer 2)

The agreement negotiated at this early stage of the planning process had a positive impact on the cohesion of the team and it enabled members to define and maintain their roles within the project and the team:

I think that was probably one of the most positive, from our side, aspects of it that we knew what was going to be happening and we were clear about it. Everybody was here, and it came up in conversation this morning... The fact that we all had this plan.

(Lecturer 3)

It didn’t overlap and if it did it was planned. And that was what went well. I mean any of us could go to the timetable and look at it on the wall.

(Lecturer 3)

The positive and negative aspects of team teaching were discussed and debated in considerable detail by the group. This discussion centered around the fact that two members of the group believed that it was down to chance that team teaching had worked in this instance. They believed that it was due to the combination of people who happen to teach in third year. They argued that the success of team teaching is dependent on a certain chemistry between team members and would be impossible to implement without it.

Going back to a point we might have made earlier we’re fortunate here round the table and this may have come up before at our first session. Most of the people on the course
at the moment, that's the staff, are able to get on with each other. The danger will be that that can't be achieved. You only need one person who doesn't agree with this and then you're in trouble.

(Lecturer 3)

... for instance if I was very negative about it my input could be very very damaging. And the students will latch onto this, the ones who feel they can't make a go of it. They'll see well not everyone's in agreement. And I think the success can be based on the fact that were not shouting at each other.

(Lecturer 3)

This point was re enforced by a second participant, who felt the success of the initiative was again down to good fortune:

Yeah but it is kind of lucky in a way. Lecturer 3 has kind of hit on it. It's not just a question of getting along. I think that what's kind of good about our wee cozy team here is that there is kind of a professional respect in the areas that we do in it and out contributions towards that. And I think that that's one of the strengths. And again I think that that's just fortunate.

(Lecturer 2)

The opposing view was expressed that colleagues should be able to act in a professional manner as would be expected of members of the private sector, in particular the design industry. It was stated that team members should be sufficiently professional in their approach, as not to allow interpersonal relationships to impede the development of learning and teaching on the programme:

... in industry ... if we didn't all get on we do have to sit down and have a meeting together about a certain project that we are working on.

(Lecturer 1)

But it's not industry...

(Lecturer 3)

I know but I think we should be professional enough ... that we don't necessarily have to. I think that's a problem in design education that it is dependent on personalities as opposed to the professional aspects of the course that need to be formalized.

(Lecturer 1)
This view was supported by another participant:

Yeah I think you’re quite right it should be formalized to some extent... Because if you are working in industry there will be people in a group who might not agree at all with what is going on but they have got to have their input they have got to take part. There will be conflict at work. There is always conflict there at any rate.

(Lecturer 5)

Another strategy proposed to deal with the issue of discrepancies among the team was that it might be appropriate or necessary to 'circumvent' the involvement of people who might not fully support the initiative.

How you address that Lecturer 3. I’m not sure. It comes in many shapes forms you can just decide by not doing very much. You can actually sabotage something. But how you address that I don’t know, other than trying to circumvent their involvement.

(Lecturer 2)

There is evidence that the team was composed of 'competent members' This is defined by Larson and LeFasto (1989) as the right balance of skills and technical abilities and the personal qualifications for working with others. The team recognised the value of the mix of skills that members brought to bear on the project

Yes, yes well I think as well as using their (the students’) talents that was the first time, or one of the first times that the project used the accumulated talents of the staff as well. Which is ah, I think that’s quite innovative...

(Lecturer 3)

and that the principled leadership was an important aspect of the team:

Well what’s helpful in this is that Lecturer 8 was very much the project manager in that last one and if you were the project manager for second year. Because there’s always this feeling that you’re doing your own thing. Its handy if someone is steering it, I think everybody would like to contribute to that.

(Lecturer 2)

Clarification of roles was an important aspect:

It’s really about clearly defining our roles, isn’t it? And just sticking to those at the same time allowing for flexibility. I mean we’re all quite willing to step in or out if there has to
a quick change.

(Moderator)

I think the project was set up so that we could step back... to an extent, and probably that aspect of it worked.

(Lecturer 3)

The structure and scope of the project

The issues raised about the structure and scope of the project, both positive and negative, go to make up a useful formative evaluation of the strengths and weakness of the design and delivery of the project. These issues can be summarised as; level and scope of the brief; structure and delivery of the project; and formative and summative assessment.

In terms of implementation the project schedule produced at the planning meeting prior to the beginning of the project was seen as key to its success:

The schedule that was on the wall set them (the students) up. It focused on the reality of the project, a beginning a middle and an end. And there it was staring them in the face not just something woolly.

(Lecturer 4)

This was also viewed as an approach which it would be useful to adopt in other years of the programme.

What you said earlier about meeting Have a plan from at start. I should have a second year meeting and have everybody come to the table with what they actually do and look at integration.

(Lecturer 1)

Well I think what that does is it throws up the importance of us sitting down to plan the year ahead. Which we’re probably not in the habit of doing... I think we need to be sitting down, maybe in June maybe in September, and saying ‘right for seven weeks we’re doing this, you’re doing this. For the next seven weeks we’ll all do this together’.

(Moderator)

Well I think your course will be very successful if you can do that. And again it’s because in order to establish what you might want it will only come from a group like this
deciding to make it work now. And that you have a group who will agree that.

(Lecturer 3)

Some lecturers expressed concern that the brief was 'really difficult' for some of the students and that some students may have been somewhat overwhelmed by the scale of the project. This was in part perceived to be because it involved so many subjects and therefore was larger in scale than briefs involving a single subject:

*I think what Lecturer 2 started mentioning earlier about a lot of students... because it could have been the first time that they did a project that was very integrated, found it quite difficult. And maybe they got a little bit 'Oh my God! I'm not sure what I'm doing here'. And it's really important because there's six lecturers working on this as opposed to you know 'I'm just seeing Lecturer 2 on a Monday'. So ... some of them were a little bit intimidated.*

(Lecturer 1)

It was also was partly attributed to the fact that the brief was so open:

*I think that next time we do this, and I hope that we do, that we are really specific about what we want. It was just too wide open, it was difficult I'd find that difficult. To take Trim from any angle. A lot of them sort of perished on that rock.*

(Lecturer 2)

However participants agreed that it was important to move learners out of their comfort zone while they were on the programme rather than leaving them to experience this for the first time when they graduate and begin meeting clients:

*Surely better to be intimidated in third year than to be intimidated walking out the door in fourth year. It's a good start... I think the whole thing was very good.*

(Lecturer 4)

More effective communication among lecturers was noted a requirement.

Two interim critiques of student work-in-progress were held in weeks five and seven of the project. These critiques were facilitated by two or in some cases three tutors however at these critiques the focus was on peer review and group-based student led feedback. As evidenced in the student feedback section these critiques were perceived to have been a positive aspect of the project. However lecturers felt that more a specific or prescriptive schedule of interim deadlines would be useful to facilitate students in managing their workload. Students would have to 'pass
various hurdles and tick them off as they progressed through the project. It was also suggested that there could be 'continuous assessment ... at a certain point within the project'.

The amount of time it took to for a team of people to assess the projects was highlighted by one member of the team who was used to assessing independently.

Well another weakness was assessment. I think there's a difficulty if you do have integrated projects about ... like we sat down, the three of us, and we were assessing and I found that quite time consuming. And quite a waste of resources for three people to sit down to go through all the projects. (Lecturer 1)

However this had to be reconciled with the volume of work that the students were asked to produce and the fact that it carries a weighting of approximately 25% of their studio marks for the academic year.

But on the other hand, it's a pretty complicated project with four pieces of work. (Lecturer 7)

Being more specific about what was to be assessed, and by which members of staff, was also raised.

They all wanted to know ... what input we would have at the end of it. (Lecturer 3)

'Who's marking what?' (Lecturer 2)

And we didn't really decide that probably as much as we could have. (Lecturer 1)

Yes I felt that was something that was left a little bit hazy. (Moderator)

The opportunity to reflect and evaluate the project and the process was seen as a positive new development:

I think this tying up is brilliant as well because you know were also being reflective on our practice and looking at plusses and minuses of actually working this way. So I think this is very very useful. Because there are things we learn from for the next time we do this project in terms of deliverables or how we felt about it. (Lecturer 1)
One member of the team found the support of meeting with colleagues to be of benefit and proposed that the team should meet more regularly:

> While this overview is exceptionally useful the ongoing short meeting, like the very last day of each month because its too long between ... It's my first time sitting together with all these people.

(Lecturer 4)

The team decided instead that a debriefing meeting should be built into the end of each semester specifically to discuss, plan and evaluate pedagogic as opposed to housekeeping issues:

> Well what I find about this meeting is that its really constructive and as you say were talking about the students and we have autonomy. A lot of meetings in DIT have nothing to do with our teaching and em, it's really positive and nice to be sitting around talking about how we can make our curriculum better.... there aren't many meetings like this. which is not about the housework to do with DIT it's actually about the students.

(Lecturer 1)

One of the questions asked focused on the impact of the integrated approach on teaching practice. It looked at the participants' views on whether teaching was more or less effective in comparison to semester one where people taught in isolation. It also asked how we could be more effective as team teachers, what the potential benefits and disadvantages are of team teaching. Finally, it asked whether participants saw this approach as a valid way forward for the BA Design Visual Communication Programme. While there was a recognition that the amount of content cover may in some cases be reduced, the response to this question was unanimously positive:

> Oh very very effective, less content but more effective for the amount of content that could be done in the time period available.

(Lecturer 5)

The main reservations related to the potential unwillingness of members of staff who had not participated in this study to adopt the new approach:

> Older members of staff may not necessarily agree because it is totally different to the whole other learning issues. There is two different age profiles sitting around the table and that can't be ignored ether and it's a sort of a passing over and agreeing. And that needs to be raised and if it's not raised sooner it will definitely be later and if it's later it will be trouble. That's another issue because it a whole new way of looking at a whole
new discipline for people who have done it one way. And not everyone is going to see it that way. And I think younger people will be much easier to motivate into this than older because their skills become under question.

(Lecturer 3)

Lots of places don’t have the freedom that we have to sit down and make our own decisions. A lot of disharmony is brought in from external sources and putting pressure on to deliver this or that.

(Lecturer 2)

Modularisation

The final question of the focus group asked about the wider institutional policies that might have a bearing on the learning and teaching strategies tested in the study. The main factor currently impacting on all courses in DIT is modularisation. Participants were asked for their views on how a theme based, team taught model might be implemented within the modular system. The responses indicate that people were unsure about modularisation as a pedagogic approach:

I feel were trying to put a square peg into a round hole with modularisation. I think were trying to fit a model which isn’t necessarily the best pedagogic way of actually going. As were sitting around here we have autonomy were looking at it from a student centred point of view. And now were looking at building in chunks of credit-based deliverable kind of subjects. In terms of modularization we could take the course as is and just modularize it because we have the separated subjects...We could modularize in the morning but were moving into looking at contextualising our subjects into themes.

(Lecturer 1)

They felt that an amount of autonomy would be lost with the structure imposed by the modular system:

We might look back on this as being a fantastically liberating time in our teaching and that now your tied back. Your going back to you do this and you do that and you get so many credits.

(Lecturer 2)

I think maybe, they would all have to tie together... If they tie together there is no problem, well there is problems but you could make it very possible, if you link them
across. But modules are supposed to be free floating. There would have to be a metal bar chaining them together.

(Lecturer 5)

However some felt that the opportunities and potential presented by team teaching might not necessarily be frustrated by the requirement to modularise:

*I think there’s a lot of potential you know and I think we’re trying to build in that flexibility into the new stuff we’re doing for modularization. We kind of raised that issue that there needs to be room to tie in with what studio are doing.*

(Lecturer 6)

Finally, time was allowed for any additional comments people wishes to make:

*I appreciate this particular session. That’s very positive on this particular day to have this much of an opportunity to share and to be aware of what’s out there in the minefield. So, I appreciate this meeting for a start and I hope it’s the start of a few more.*

(Lecturer 4)

### 4.3 Reflective journal

As stated in the previous chapter, I used reflective journaling at key points throughout the project to enable me to use my own experiences and responses as research data. The intention was to track the build-up of my own knowledge and understanding over the course of the project (Wisker, 2001) As I began to review the reflective pieces I had written at key points throughout this study I found that they were a good reminder of my own, responses and those of my colleagues and students to critical incidents throughout the duration of the project. However I note that I found it very difficult to make time for the reflection and journaling process as well as teaching, acting as programme chair and coordinating the research project. Where appropriate I have woven my observations into the text, examples of this can be seen in particular in chapter three. This aspect of data collection will also be discussed in chapter six which contains the conclusions and recommendations from this study.
In this chapter I have presented the findings from my research to date. The findings are based on one action research cycle which took place over an eight week period. The findings presented represent analysis of the data which was gathered using a range of sources including; questionnaires, focus group interviews and research diary entries. The data from student participants was limited to the two sections of the questionnaire which were deemed to be most relevant to this study. These were Section 2: The role of the tutors and Section 4: The impact on practice. The data from teacher participants was sourced from the final focus group interview which took place subsequent to the end of the project and was two hours in length. In order to manage the volume of data gathered from this session the information was organized under the main themes which emerged during the discussion. These are as follows: the design and structure of the curriculum; approaches to learning; team teaching; the structure and scope of the project; and modularisation. In the next chapter these findings will be discussed with a view to showing the principles, relationships and generalizations that can be made from the findings. Notes from my research diary have been entered into the text where relevant.
CHAPTER 5

THE DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter four consisted of a presentation of the qualitative and quantitative findings from the student evaluation questionnaires and the teacher focus groups conducted as part of this study. In this chapter these findings will be discussed in relation to each other with the aim of establishing the relationships, generalisations and principles which can be drawn from the data. These will be looked at in the context of the initial objective of the research, which was to improve the design and delivery of the BA Design Visual Communication curriculum with a view achieving two main aims. The first aim was to promote a deep approach to learning among students. The second aim was to foster greater collaboration, communication and effective team teaching among the academic staff on the programme. The question was examined through the design, implementation and evaluation of a student project, which focused on theme based learning delivered through team teaching. The motivation for this study was to investigate whether this approach would foster the following outcomes:

1. A ‘real world’ curriculum structure where subjects are encountered in relation to each other and in context
2. An in-depth, strategic approach to student design projects which focuses more on the design process as opposed to a superficial approach to producing design solutions.
3. Greater independent learning among students
4. Greater collaboration, communication and effective team teaching among the academic staff on the course
For the sake of consistency and clarity, the structure used to discuss the findings from the data is adapted from the themes that emerged from the lecturer focus group and the analysis of the student questionnaires. These are as follows: curriculum design; approaches to learning; team teaching; structure and scope of the project; and modularisation.

5.1 Curriculum design

Lecturers believed that an integrated, theme based approach to curriculum design supported by team teaching was a positive development, which should be formalised within the first three years of the curriculum. There was a recognition that changes need to be made to the curriculum across the whole programme. It was noted that lecturers in years one and two were practicing team teaching and integration on a smaller, informal scale and that it would be appropriate to formalize an integrated approach in year one and two if the programme team were agreeable to this.

Concern was expressed by lecturers about integration versus specialization in the final year of the programme. The group of lecturers at the focus group was divided in its opinion of how this should be resolved. One participant expressed the view that students should be allowed specialize in one subject in their final year. Others thought it was crucial to maintain a multifaceted approach in the final year, in line with the requirements of the design industry. This matter remained unresolved.

91% of Students stated that the integrated approach enabled them to make connections between subjects and adopt a more holistic view of the visual communication programme. In the words of one student:

_This was a fantastic project for that particular reason... ‘Now I know why I’m studying that!’ came to mind a few times._

_(Students L)_

Lecturers believed that linking subjects such as the Professional Practice assignments with the studio project enhanced students’ understanding of the role of the subject within the programme and reflected the reality of the design profession. 61% of students concurred that this was a
useful approach, and that it provided an understanding of how theory and practice subjects connect in the ‘real world’:

This in a way was a good learning experience class... in reflection it taught me a lot of what I would have to do in the ‘real world’ and that’s good.

(Student L)

The view was expressed by lecturers that we must continue to work together to achieve further understanding and agreement over how subjects should integrate if lecturers are to facilitate students in making the connections between the various aspects of the course.

Summary of findings on curriculum design

1. The findings from teacher and student data concurred in stating that the integrated approach is a positive development in the Visual Communication Curriculum which has enhanced the experience of learning and teaching on the programme.

2. Lecturers proposed formalizing team teaching and theme based learning within the curriculum in years one to three of the programme. A decision could not be reached regarding year four of the programme as two opposing approaches - integration and specialization - were proposed.

3. 91% of students stated that this integrated approach facilitated them in developing a more holistic view of the programme. It was agreed by students and lecturers that linking assignments between the studio and theory areas supported this integration.

4. Lecturers agreed that it was important for the teaching team to work together to agree how subject areas should overlap if they were to facilitate students in making these connections.
5.2 Approaches to learning

The findings from the focus group show that lecturers believed that the structure of larger integrated projects promoted a deep approach to learning among students. This is attributable to the fact that students were not struggling to manage or 'juggle' a heavy, diverse workload. This fact is confirmed by the data from student participants. 52% of students who stated that the structure of project and interim critiques and schedule of deadlines actually 'helped structure the project rather than helping to disrupt like would happen in semester one'. As already stated in the previous section, 91% of student respondents stated that the experience of working seamlessly across subjects helped to contextualise different subjects.

My interpretation of the extract above is that it is evidence of a student who is experiencing learning in the context of a 'well structured knowledge base' where the 'content is taught in an integrated whole and knowledge is related to other knowledge rather than learned in isolation'. (Gibbs, 1992) This is one of the four factors identified as promoting a deep approach to learning among students. (Gibbs, 1992; Jackson, 1997) Another student gave an example of how they began to adopt a more integrated view of the programme and how it related to the world beyond third level education:

... this project has enlightened me big time. I'm beginning to look at my career more positively and as a whole. The course is now more of a whole and I see the importance of the different subjects.

(Student M)

Both students and lecturers viewed the 'real life' approach of the project as a positive attribute. For many of the students, learning with all of the subjects placed in context and in relation to each other provided 'a feeling of unity' to what was being learned and brought them closer to understanding how they might be expected to operate in the workplace.
Instead of being separate classes as they used to be, they became one class and you can start dealing with managing them together like you will in a company.

(Student S)

Lecturers reported being ‘impressed’ with the reality of the project. Students and lecturers both stated that the integrated approach reflected the reality working in the of the design industry and gave students an insight into how they might be expected to work when they graduate.

This outcome was also promoted by the block teaching implemented on the three day field trip. This viewed as a positive development for the following reasons: It reflected the reality of the design profession in terms of the timescale and the engagement with the location as an environment to be researched. ‘It enabled students to focus on what working on a location was all about’ Tutors believed there was evidence of deep learning as a result of this. A ‘design research’ focus was placed on imagemaking on the field trip which was seen by lecturers as a positive new development.

96% of students stated that they made use of the independent learning days to work on their project. Many students stated that they completed most of their project work outside the class time. I would have interpreted this result as a positive step towards fostering independent learning among students. However 39% of students stated that they would like more contact time with lecturers than they received on the project. A paradox exists where almost 40% of students still feel they need a lot of feedback and direction from lecturers although they state that they would like more independent learning time build into the curriculum.

Lecturers felt that some students adopted a superficial approach to the initial stages of the design process such as concept development and analysis of research. However it was recognized that the structure of the project and formative feedback from tutors promoted a deep approach among a majority of learners. Lecturers believed that integration between subjects had taken place as a direct result of the theme-based approach.
Summary of the findings on approaches to learning

1. The view was expressed by lecturers that working on a single large integrated project rather than a number of smaller projects promoted a deep approach to learning among students. Lecturers believed that some students adopted a surface approach to the project in the initial stages but that the structure of the project and formative feedback from tutors promoted a deep approach among the majority of learners.

2. The findings from the student data show that learning was taking place in the context of a well-structured knowledge base which is one of the factors proven to promote deep learning. (Gibbs, 1992)

3. The 'real life' approach embedded in the project was seen as a positive development by students and lecturers.

4. Lecturers and students believed that integration of subjects had taken place as a direct result of the theme-based structure.

5.3 Team Teaching

Lecturers found experience of team teaching to be very positive for a number of reasons which I will now discuss. Firstly, a clear elevating goal was established by the team from the outset of the project. (Larson & LeFasto 1989) It was clear, in that the objectives had been discussed and agreed by the team in advance of the project and elevating, in that the goal had the potential to improve learning and teaching on the programme thereby enhancing the experience of students and teachers. Another positive factor was that the project had been thoroughly planned in advance by the team members. Lecturers also believed that team roles were clearly defined and adhered to which enhanced the performance of the team. It was noted that the project schedule, agreed by the team, supported the approach as it clarified the structure of the project and the roles and responsibilities of students and staff. The variety of skills lecturers contributed to the team and the project was also viewed as a positive aspect of team teaching.

The view of the students on the effectiveness of the teaching for the project concurs with some of these findings. 70% of students stated that the lecturers were effective in providing feedback on student work:
Their professional opinions are always effective... After looking at our individual projects they gave us ideas on how to expand on what we had already done, without telling us exactly what to do. They gave us ideas on different approaches we could take. They gave us the freedom to be as creative as we liked, there were very few restrictions.

(Student)

13% of students found the different viewpoints expressed by lecturers to be a positive learning experience. They stated that it was good to hear different viewpoints about their work, even if lecturers did contradict each other on occasion. In some cases students said that hearing a range of opinions actually helped with the decision making process. However 22% of students stated that hearing conflicting opinions from lecturers about their work confused them. Students felt that this happened due to a lack of communication between lecturers. It is clear from the feedback from some students this was symptomatic of the fact that they had not taken ownership of their work and they have instead adopted a surface approach which is more concerned with final grades than their own approach to resolving the design problem.

One may say they liked an approach while the others did not. And although it’s the student’s choice as it is their design they want to please to get a good mark.

(Student S)

In response to criticism from 17% of students that conflicting feedback from different tutors confused them lecturers were in agreement that this was not necessarily a negative aspect of team teaching. The point was made that students needed to develop independent learning and decision-making abilities. Some lecturers stated that they had tried to avoid the potential for conflict by not commenting on student work outside their own subject area as they felt it might contradict input from a colleague. This issue needs to be investigated further with input from students and staff to establish ways to address it.

The concern was expressed by lecturers that team teaching could not be implemented if individual team members opposed this change in pedagogic approach. The issue was raised that lecturers who had been teaching in a particular way for a long period of time might not agree to implement the new approach. Lecturers who did not teach in year three of the programme did not take part in the study, therefore it not possible to include a wider range of views on this issue. The notes from my research diary show that I found it curious that all of the teaching participants were positive about the benefits of team teaching and contributed well to the process yet they still expressed the concern that colleagues might not see the inherent benefits of the approach and refuse to cooperate.
Larson et al (1989) outlines some of the reasons a team may malfunction. The primary reason is a lack of 'unified commitment', this is when one or a number of team members put their own interest above the team goal. This factor has the potential to prevent the team from achieving the required level of cohesion which can lead to conflict or malfunction. Another factor which can impact negatively on the performance of a team is be a lack of external support and recognition. This can manifest itself as a feeling of not having the resources required to carry out the task. (Larson et al, 1989) Davies (2002) states that sometimes the only way to resolve conflict or address malfunction within a teaching team is for one of the members to leave the team.

The findings from this study show that some lecturers believe that formalizing theme-based learning and team teaching in the curriculum and course document should be sufficient to address these issues. It was also stated that professionalism of colleagues should preclude conflict or malfunction from occurring. One additional solution was proposed by a member of the focus group as a means of managing conflict which was to circumvent the involvement of colleagues who might oppose the approach. It is my opinion that if we proceed with team teaching on the programme it will be necessary to invest time in exploring the issues surrounding teamwork and to investigate more positive strategies for dealing with conflict should it arise.

Participants viewed the role of the project coordinator as key to the success of the team. Larson et al (1989) found that leaders of effective teams see themselves as being involved in transformation. This view is supported by Davis (2002) who states that team taught courses need effective 'principled' leadership. He describes a principled leader as one who is fair and impartial, open to new ideas and information and willing to confront and resolve issues. He also notes that:

"Because academics have a long tradition of operating as independent professionals and are often suspicious of any behaviour that looks like 'administration' they will often ignore the issue of leadership."

(Davis, 2002: 97)

Similarly, for the reason outlined above, many academics are circumspect about becoming part of a teaching team. (Davis, 2002; Quin & Kanter, 2002) However this study found that in spite of the extra time commitment required, lecturers valued the opportunity, afforded to them by the team teaching process, to meet as a group and evaluate the teaching and learning processes and outcomes for the project. It was agreed by the group that planning and debriefing meetings
similar to those conducted as part of the study should take place each semester for each year group.

Findings on Team teaching

1. The findings show that lecturers found team teaching to be a positive initiative which should be embedded in the curriculum. This was because the planning and functional aspects of the team were addressed in advance of the project, and because the team were unified in pursuit of a clear elevating goal.

2. Seventy percent of students found the teaching on the programme to be effective however 22% of students stated that receiving conflicting feedback from different lecturers was a negative aspect of team teaching. Students attributed the discrepancies to insufficient communication between lecturers.

3. Lecturers expressed the concern that team teaching could not be implemented if some lecturers did not support the initiative. It was proposed that this could be addressed by formalising team teaching within the curriculum and that levels of professionalism should preclude conflict among members or malfunctioning of teaching teams. It will be necessary to invest time in developing strategies for effective teamworking if we are to proceed with this approach.

5.4 Structure and scope of the project

The finding show that the production of a schedule for the project was viewed by students and lecturers as something that it would be useful to adopt in other years of the programme. Lecturers expressed the view that the level of difficulty of the brief was believed to be too great for some students. It was agreed that this would be addressed and the project would be made less demanding in the next cycle of the research. Only one student referred to the difficulty level of the project:
Tough project, very beneficial. I learned a lot.
(Student J)

The view was expressed by lecturers that too much work was required from students and that this might impede the promotion of a deep approach to learning. The figures from the student data would seem to support this view. In question 12A 30% of students stated that they found it more difficult to manage their workload than in the previous semester, 22% stated that there was no change and 48% said that this had improved. Therefore 52% of students still found managing the workload to be a challenge.

In response to question 14 which asked students what changes to this way of working they would recommend 17% of students said that the workload should be reduced and that the emphasis should be on quality rather than quantity:

More time or else less work load. Quality more than quantity should be thought about from time to time.
(Student L)

This raises an interesting point about whether we are over assessing our students. (Brown, 2004) The responses from students and colleagues who participated in the study would seem to point to the fact that we are. As stated in chapter two Gibbs (1992) and Biggs (1999) identify a heavy workload as one of the factors that fosters a surface approach to learning. A reduction in the student workload would also address the concern raised by one lecturer about the amount of time it takes to assess student work. They felt it took too long. While others agreed that it took a lot of time they felt it was appropriate when one considered the scale of the project and the large volume of work required from students. If the teaching team was to reduce the volume of work required and focus, as the student quoted above suggests, on ‘quality’ rather than ‘quantity’ this would help to promote deep learning among students (Biggs, 1999; Gibbs, 1992) and reduce the demands on staff time.

One lecturer expressed the view that the brief was too open and that students would not be able to cope with the amount of choice available to them in the project. In response to question 14 which asked for developmental changes to this approach 4% of respondents stated that they would have preferred if lecturers had been more directive about students’ approaches to the project. In contrast with this 22% of students stated that the element of choice afforded to them was a benefit of the theme-based project. It was agreed by lecturers that enabling students to choose what they wanted to work on facilitated them in taking ownership of their work. This
view is supported by Gibbs (1992) who states that a lack of choice over subjects and methods of study is a factor that can lead to adopting a surface approach.

Lecturers and teaching staff were in agreement that the interim critiques had contributed positively to structuring the project. Another issue that surfaced in relation to assessment was that not all lecturers had clarified the assessment requirement from students from the outset of the project. This lead to confusion among students and a lack of clarification among staff over what exactly was to be assessed and by whom. It was suggested that an building in an interim assessment of visual research from the field trip would address this issue. This could take the form of continuous assessment. It was also proposed that students should submit some of the design solutions for assessment at an interim stage. This would help clarify the assessment process for students and staff which had not been completely resolved in this instance.

It was agreed that including interim deadlines and continuous assessment within the project would act as a catalyst for the decision-making process and assist students in managing their learning.

The debriefing session was viewed as a valuable opportunity to review the project and reflect on our own practice as teachers. This was a welcome initiative particularly since so few meetings at DIT focus on pedagogic issues.

Findings on the structure and scope of the project

1. The findings show that lecturers and students were in agreement that the workload required by the project was too heavy. The emphasis should be placed instead on producing less work to a higher standard. It was felt the heavy workload would have a negative impact on students’ approach to learning.

2. It was decided that the element of choice was a positive aspect of the brief however lecturers proposed that including interim deadlines and continuous assessment within the project would act as a catalyst for the decision-making process and assist students in managing their learning.

3. The findings show that it is especially important in team teaching to achieve clear and explicit agreement over what is to be assessed and by whom at the outset of the project.
4. The planning and debriefing sessions held during this study were welcomed as a positive initiative. It was proposed that similar meetings should be included in the academic calendar for each year group.

5.5 The impact of modularisation

Lecturers expressed concern that the fragmented nature of the modular system was in conflict with the integrated direction the visual communication team was moving towards. Kleiman (2002) states that in the context of innovative curriculum design it can be problematic to operate principles of good design and best practice when faced with prescriptive institutional and regulatory frameworks. I note from my research diary that there was a sense of 'uncertainty' and 'gloom' within the group when this issue was raised at the focus group. 'Is it too late to say no we're not doing it?' one of my colleagues enquired ruefully. Concern was also expressed that modularization would lead to a loss of autonomy within the programme because of the rigid structure it imposed. The suggestion was made that 'tying' core modules together, perhaps in the form co-requisite modules, could be one way of implementing team teaching and theme based learning.

Findings on the impact of Modularisation

The conclusion that can be drawn from the findings on this aspect of the data is that it is necessary to investigate this issue further. Specifically, we need to find examples of design programmes where modularisation has been successfully implemented. We need to explore learning and teaching strategies that have been successfully employed within the modular system. This should be done at national and international level. It is also necessary to consider the structural options available, such as so called 'fat' modules and co-requisite modules. I believe that it is still possible for team teaching and theme based learning to be implemented within the modular system.
Summary

In this chapter the findings which were presented in chapter four have been discussed in detail. The discussion has attempted to interweave the findings from student and teacher participants in order to express the relationships and generalization that can be drawn from the two sets of data. This has been supported by field notes from my research diary. For reasons of consistency and clarity the themes that emerged from the teacher focus groups were used to structure this chapter. Chapter six will discuss the conclusions and recommendations that can be drawn from the findings of the study.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the conclusions of the study in the context of the original aims and objectives of the research. It looks at the benefits of the study under the following headings: personal benefits of the study, benefits for my workplace, benefits for students, benefits for design education. The recommendations arising from the research findings are introduced and discussed. There is a brief overview of the purpose of the research and the main findings are summarised. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of whether the objectives of the study have been achieved.

Personal benefits of the study

One of the objectives at the outset of this study was to change my approach to teaching in order to foster a collaborative environment among lecturers on the BA Visual Communication programme through team teaching. As a result of carrying out this study I believe that I have developed the confidence to work with colleagues in a more open and collaborative way. Fifty percent of the colleagues who participated in this project are creative practitioners. That is, they are practicing illustrators, designers, photographers and so on. These people had difficulty in
understanding why I had embarked on a three-year academic programme in learning and teaching when, as they saw it, my non-teaching time could be spent more effectively working on my own graphic design projects. Possibly the greatest benefit of this study for me personally is that colleagues who did not quite understand why I would devote so much time to engaging with a course about learning and teaching were interested in the theory behind the change of approach and willing to act on implementing change in order to develop the programme. The study brought to light the fact that colleagues valued the time spent discussing pedagogic issues and planning learning and teaching activities as a group.

My colleagues also expressed an interest in understanding in the pedagogic theories and issues at the heart of the study, a commitment to seeing the project through to conclusion and they supported me in my role as team leader. These factors greatly reduced the weight of responsibility I experienced at the outset of the project in trying to implement change and the associated risk of failure this brings. For me the collaborative nature of the study was a much more positive experience than trying to work alone.

Reading the literature on teamwork and the functioning of teams has made me realise the importance of my own role as project coordinator. This has also informed my attitude towards my role as programme chair. The importance of communication, sharing information the briefing session with colleagues and students at the end of the project has been emphasized. It has also highlighted the importance of having a clear, unifying goal that has been agreed by team members if the team is to be effective. (Larson et al, 1989)

As stated in the previous chapter, reflective journaling was used at key points throughout the project to enable me to use my own experiences and responses as research data. The intention was to track the build-up of my own knowledge and understanding over the course of the project (Wisker, 2001). As I began, at the outset of writing this report, to review the reflective pieces I had written at key points throughout this study I found that they were a good reminder of my own, responses and those of my colleagues and students to critical incidents over the duration of the project. However, I also note that I had found it very difficult to make time for reflection in the chaos of teaching, acting as programme chair and coordinating this research project. It has been difficult for me on occasion to adopt a deep approach to my own learning! (Gibbs, 1992) In writing this report and weaving together the data gathered over the year I realise that I am only beginning to understand fully what is meant by reflective journaling and what should be involved in the journaling process. As I reflect on this, I am reminded of my students who, on
the evening of third day of the field trip to Trim, were beginning to realise what documenting a location was about:

*Some of them on the third day were only breaking that ground, and ok, they didn’t quite make it within the time but they learned that, ‘yeah its here, I just didn’t find it over three days.*

(Lecturer 3)

Although the reflective journaling has possibly not been as detailed or as regular as anticipated at the outset, I have a clearer idea of how I will proceed with it in the next action research cycle. I now see the importance of making time for reflection at the end of every teaching session as well as other critical points throughout the project. Looking at the reflective pieces I wrote there is evidence of ‘descriptive reflection’ and ‘dialogic reflection’. (Donnelly, 2003) However there is a need for me to move this on to critical reflection where I begin to look at actions and events in different context with a multiplicity of possible associations related to these contexts. (Donnelly 2003) Reviewing this reflective material at regular intervals would also be important. However, the fact that I became aware that it was necessary to change aspects of my teaching practice, along with the aspects of the organizational structure within which my teaching takes place, is evidence of a reflective process which has been ongoing for three years. My studies in learning and teaching have provided me with the understanding and knowledge to implement an alternative strategy. I hope that this record of the process of implementation is evidence that ‘reflection on action’ has occurred. (Schon: 1978)

**Benefits for the workplace**

To date my experience of implementing this study in my workplace is aptly described by Wisker who states that action research ‘enhances morale (individual and collective) because it encourages practitioners to recollect and use their strengths.’ (Wisker, 2001: 157) I have found this project the most positive teambuilding experience that I have encountered in my career to date. As a result of this study I am communicating more frequently with my colleagues. As shown in the findings, the lecturing team felt, for the first time, that the people involved were working collaboratively towards a common goal.
I felt for the first time that we did something right. The meeting that we had, the very first meeting, was incredibly useful, and it was really refreshing that everybody had the same intentions and we could see that this would only be a good thing. So I felt that this was really really valuable. And when we were involved in it I really felt as though this was a really positive step.

(Lecturer 2)

Working with a team of colleagues to test new approaches to teaching and curriculum design democratized the process and gave ownership of the change process to those involved. The confirmation from colleagues of my belief that team teaching and the theme based approach are a good way forward for the course is a stronger validation of the success of the project than I could have hoped to achieve if I had worked alone. We have also made a more informed decision because of the collaborative nature of the study and the rigour with which data was gathered from student participants and the teaching team.

It is also possible to detect in the findings, a shift in mindset, where colleagues are no longer competing with each other in terms of subjects and students but looking at ways that will facilitate the teaching team in working together. The atmosphere among those involved in this project is positive and affirming. The feedback given at the final focus group support these observations.

Kleiman (2002) states that a curriculum that provides a potentially wonderful learning experience for the student yet is highly problematical to administer or assess is only partially useful. Thus it is important to give careful consideration to learning, teaching and assessment strategies in order to optimise both the features of the curriculum and the process of using them. (Kleiman, 2002) The findings show that the collaboration was successful because of the detailed advance planning. The team of participants have proposed that this type of planning take place in all four years of the programme. Colleagues also spoke of the positive experience of discussing learning and teaching issues rather than ‘housekeeping’ issues which are the predominant content of meetings in the School of Art Design and Printing at DIT. The team has proposed to build planning and de briefing meetings into the annual academic calendar.

Where aspects of the team teaching were less successful, for example the confusion over assessment of the imagemaking component of the project, this was due to a lack of clarification between teaching staff and a breakdown in communication of information to students. This highlights the importance of planning and agreeing a structure among team members. It also
highlights the importance of the role of coordinator in terms of making sure that all aspects of the project are clearly thought through, documented and available for all participants to access.

**Benefit for students**

The findings demonstrate that explaining to students why we teach the way we do empowers them and facilitates them in taking control of their learning and personal development. This process is reinforced through delivering formative feedback at key stages throughout the learning process. The findings also show that many of the student participants have, as a result of the project, begun to view the Visual Communication programme as an integrated whole. Students are developing a clearer understanding of how the subjects in the curriculum interconnect. They have also begun to make links between their current practice as students and their future practice in the design industry. Relating what students are doing in the studio to their future practice as designers focuses them more on their own personal development.

The findings highlighted one issue in particular that needs to be addressed by staff. Three student respondents stated that lecturers should be more constructive and less destructive when critiquing student project work. It is important that we address the negativity experienced by some of the students on the project and foster an ethos of respect and dignity for all in the education process. (McNiff, 2002)
Benefits for design education

In chapter one, I outlined some criticisms of design education made by the Irish Design industry. These were that design projects in colleges were too one dimensional often focusing on a one off clever solution rather than an in depth strategic approach. (Opportunities in Design, 1999) College projects were criticized because they rarely conveyed the complexity of high quality design. The criticism was made of the design sector in Ireland that it struggled to deliver quality and creativity of design, and (ii) quality and professionalism in the ‘process’ of delivering design solutions. (Opportunities in Design, 1999) The move away from the fragmented course structure has meant that students had more time to engage more deeply with the design process and handle more complex and multifaceted design problems. The structure also facilitated students in making connections between the various elements of the syllabus. Students were better able to make sense of the subject and engage with the discipline of design because the various elements were delivered in a more integrated way. Linking subject areas, such as professional practice and design history and theory, to the studio practice areas, such as graphic design and multimedia, focuses on the complexity of the design process and the multiplicity of issues that come into play in approaching any one design project or problem. The study also shows that there is value in making approaches to learning and teaching explicit to students as this in turn makes them more aware of their own learning and development.

Recommendations

As outlined in chapter one The BA visual Communication Programme document is currently being rewritten in order to accommodate the change over to modularization within DIT and in preparation for the DIT internal quinquennial Quality Assurance Review. The recommendations relate to the development of the programme in this context and are as follows:

1 Team teaching should be formally adopted across all four years of the Visual Communication Programme. This should be supported by the dissemination of
information about the theory and processes that inform team teaching. This can be achieved by delivering presentations to colleagues and disseminating articles and research findings. In order to support this it will be necessary to develop internal systems for supporting team work and managing the potential for conflict. The approach to team teaching should be flexible and should not preclude some projects or subject components being delivered by an individual lecture where the programme team deems this to be appropriate.

Since the completion of the study the work of rewriting the Visual Communication Programme document has begun. The programme team made the decision to embed theme based learning and team teaching in all years of the programme document. Arrangements have also been made by the Head of School for an in-house learning and teaching seminar where the team who participated in this study will be presenting it to colleagues in the school.

2 The planning and debriefing processes implemented during this study should be adopted across all years and written into the annual academic calendar.

3 There is a requirement to make contact with colleagues in design programmes in other institutes, nationally and internationally, to find out how they have managed the process of modularization. It would be useful to the Department of Design and the Institute as a whole to gather information about learning and teaching strategies adopted by institutes where modularization has been successfully implemented.

4 The learning process should be democratized by making approaches to learning and teaching explicit to students. The aim of this recommendation is to empower students to take greater control of their own learning and self development.

5 The final recommendation would be to continue with the work initiated in this study to design integrated student projects that foster a deep approach to learning and cultivate a more integrated view of Visual Communication among learners.
Summary of the main findings

This section will summarise the main findings and will then go on to look at whether the objectives of the study have been met. The findings from of the study show that:

1. Theme based learning supported by team teaching fostered a deep approach to learning in third year students on the BA Design Visual Communication.

2. This pedagogic approach also fostered greater communication and collaboration among the lecturers who participated in the study.

3. Effective teamwork was seen by lecturers to be a major contributing factor to the success of the project. It is also necessary to implement strategies for managing conflict within teams should this arise in the future.

4. The 'real life' approach where subjects are delivered in context and in relation to each other was viewed as a positive learning experience by students and lecturers on the programme. This 'well structured knowledge base' (Gibbs, 2002) provided students with a more integrated understanding of the Visual Communication programme and fostered a deep approach to learning among students.

5. There is a requirement to look at reducing the student workload and thus the assessment load. (Gibbs, 2002) an overly heavy workload is one of the factors which can promote a surface approach to learning.

6. A separate investigation needs to be carried out into design programmes, at national and international level, to gather information about pedagogic approaches which have been used to support the successful implementation of modularization.

The initial objective of this study was to improve the design and delivery of the BA Design Visual Communication curriculum with a view achieving two main aims. The first aim was to promote a deep approach to learning among students. The second aim was to foster greater collaboration, communication and effective team teaching among the academic staff on the programme. The question was examined through the design implementation and evaluation of a student design project, which focused on theme based learning delivered through team teaching. At this point of the report I will look at whether the objectives of the study have been achieved.
The first objective which was to develop a ‘real world’ curriculum structure where subjects are encountered in relation to each other and in context has been achieved as evidenced by the feedback from lecturers and students.

The findings from lecturers and students also point to the fact that the second objective was achieved. This was to foster an in-depth, strategic approach to student design projects which focuses more on the design process as opposed to a superficial approach to producing design solutions.

The third objective, to foster greater independent learning among students, is a more difficult outcome to pin down. If we look at the feedback from students we can see that there is a greater awareness among students that they should be taking control of their learning and decision making. Students referred to the ‘choice’ afforded to them in the project as a positive aspect. They all agreed that scheduled independent learning days were a positive development and used them to work on the project. The student-centred structure of the critiques also fostered independent learning. However in response to the question of tutor effectiveness, 39% of students stated that they would like more individual contact with lecturers. It would seem, therefore, that the learning and teaching approaches implemented in this study have the potential to promote independent learning among students but there is still work to be done in educating students about the value of this aspect of independent learning.

Finally, it is clear from the findings that one of the benefits of the study was that it fostered greater collaboration, communication and effective team teaching among the academic staff on the course.

I have recorded in my research diary from the preparatory phase of this study that one of my colleagues remarked to me that it would not be sufficient to test this pedagogic approach just once, that it might take several attempts for us to get it right. I was encouraged by this comment as it is central to the action research philosophy which does not aim for closure in which ‘notionally unsatisfactory situations transform into satisfactory ones.’ (McNiff, 2002: 90) Instead, action researchers start from where they are with a sense that something needs to be done. This often leads to some improvement but not perfection. Kemmis & McTaggart (McNiff, 1988) state that the process of change is slow, that it is not possible to sweep away the world which currently exists in your classroom or organization. I believe that the advantage of this slow pace is that it allows people time to absorb change and more importantly to develop a sense of ownership over the change process. As McNiff states:
Social change is not an abstract concept; it is a lived process of people interacting and doing things differently from before, an everyday process of real life.

(McNiff, 2002: 143)

I feel that I have learned a great deal on both a personal and professional level from the experience of working on this study. I hope it is apparent from this report that my colleagues and students have also gained from the collaboration, and that the advantages of the pedagogic approaches explored in this study have potential benefits which would be applicable beyond the confines of the programme on which I teach.
References


Burke Johnston, R. University of South Alabama, Mobile, Alabama, College of Education, Department of Behavioral Studies and Educational Technology (BSET)  
http://www.southalabama.edu/coe/bset/johnson/660lectures/lect5.htm  


http://www.lgu.ac.uk/deliberations/osc


http://www.lgu.ac.uk/deliberations/oscd


The Focus Group Kit 3: Developing questions for focus groups, The Focus Group Kit 4: Moderating focus groups, London, Sage.


Bibliography


Appendix A
Information Design

Class Visual Communication Year 3
Lecturers Brenda Dermody, Brenda Duggan, Tom Kelly, John Short & Jacques Teljeur
Subject(s) Graphic Design, Image Making, Multimedia
Date 12 January 2004

Print, electronic and alternative media project

Based on a project from the ISTD student assessment scheme 2003

Introduction

More and more people are visiting sites of historic/archaeological interest. While most have some form of information for visitors, the quality and effectiveness this is often quite poor. This project aims to explore the use of new technology combined with an intelligent use of design in order to improve the quality of visitor information and navigation of a site.

The Brief

The focus of this project is the heritage town of Trim County Meath. As part of your research and development for this project you will need to undertake a comprehensive visual analysis of all aspects of the site. Part of this appraisal will address the design and efficacy of existing visual information in terms of signs, information panels, maps and leaflets.

Your brief is to develop a new approach to information access for visitors to Trim. A critical part of this will be the navigation of the site. Environmental sensitivity is a key factor in this brief. The integrity of the site must be retained and, if possible, improved. You should also carefully consider use of materials. Your solution should also take into account visual navigation for foreign visitors and people with disabilities.

As a part of your research you should investigate the use of GPS (Global Positioning System) as part of the design solution. GPS is a world-wide radio-navigation system formed from a constellation of 24 satellites and their ground stations. GPS is currently in use in cars, boats, planes, construction equipment, farm machinery, even lap-top computers and other hand-held devices. It is thought that GPS will soon become almost as universally used as the telephone. The use of GPS could be an appropriate method of navigation and conveying information around a large site. It could also act as a link to an appropriate web site, it would also combine with printed information material and location (orientation) panels etc.

A key aspect of this project is the application of a coherent visual approach across a range of different media. The final design proposals should reflect the character of the site, maintain its integrity and help the visitor navigate it easily.
A key aspect of this project is research into the site as outlined above. Submission details for this aspect of the project will be outlined in class on Thursday 15 January 2004. You will also need to research the area of information design. You must fully cite your bibliographic sources, and where relevant, credit images, and any moving footage.

Analysis & development - 30%

Redefining the brief

Once you have carried out your research and field work you will need to write a brief which details your information design strategy for Trim. While a client often gives a verbal or written brief to the designer, it is good practice for you, the designer, to formally write a statement of intent. The purpose of this is to clarify the design objectives and the overall approach. For example: which aspects of the town you have selected as key areas of interest for visitors; the media you think would be most appropriate to implement your design strategy; choice of typeface and style of imagery etc..

Your submission should show evidence of creative and imaginative thinking. Evidence of exploration and development of ideas and alternatives are to be presented through roughs and preliminary layouts. The total amount of this material should not exceed the equivalent of one A3 layout pad.

Design Document

Using the 'information architecture' process, you will present a design document outlining the strategy and direction taken. This is a formal document highlighting process which is added to throughout the project. If the project time frame happens over a longer period this type of document will enable you to have aspects of the project 'signed off' by the client. (You should consider appropriate headings from the process used for the imagination project in semester 1.)

Realisation - 35%

Design requirements

You the designer will determine the content of your solution. You will need to research existing material in this area and consider the nature and amount of information that will be effective. As you are developing visual information in the context of contemporary technologies, ensure that you relate their use to the levels of information being offered.

- This project primarily involves the design of information.
- Your proposals need to identify the site and incorporate sufficient site-specific material to reflect its individuality.
- While not specifying the number of elements in your proposal, you should provide
at least four items. Consideration should be given to the relationship between different media.

- You, the designer, will determine the size, layout and choice of media and materials but you must include at least 1 screen-based application in your submission.
- You should carefully consider appropriate use of typography and/or imagery and their effectiveness as a means for communication in the context of your solution. Clarity and legibility must be considered.
- Should your proposals present scaled-down examples of larger items, you should provide details that illustrate testing of use at actual size.
- Submissions should be visually stimulating.

Reflection/Design Report

- A 250 - 500 word report detailing your thoughts about the final piece of design, and the issues posed by the brief should be submitted. You should use/adapt the headings from the DIT design report template.

Presentation - 15%

We are looking for a coherent, professional presentation which shows care and attention to detail. You are required to submit full typographic and production specifications, including grids, as part of your submission. Details of specific technology or equipment should be included.

Penalty for late submission

Projects received within one week after the deadline date will incur a penalty of 20% reduction in marks awarded. Projects received more than one week after the stated deadline will not be eligible for assessment except in exceptional circumstances.
VC3 Information Design Project schedule - Draft 13 January 2003

**week 1 January 2004**

<table>
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<td>Studio</td>
<td>B Duggan, B Dermody</td>
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<td>Tue 13</td>
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<td>J Teljeur, B Dermody</td>
<td>10am research</td>
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<td>Wed 14</td>
<td>Studio</td>
<td>T O'Dowd, B Beirne, C Bates</td>
<td>Professional Practice, Design History</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tue 20</td>
<td>Site visit</td>
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<td>Wed 21</td>
<td>Site visit</td>
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<td>B Dermody, J Teljeur</td>
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**week 3**

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<td>Mon 26</td>
<td>Studio</td>
<td>B Duggan - Deadline for Submission of individual brief. Finalise text (max 1,500 words). Begin work on design solution.</td>
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<td>10am studio J Teljeur, B Dermody</td>
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**week 4 February 2004**

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<td>Site visit</td>
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<td>Tue 03</td>
<td>Studio</td>
<td>J Teljeur, B Dermody - visuals for screen and print-based design</td>
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<td>Thur 05</td>
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<td>Tue 10</td>
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<td>Group A 10am / Group B 2pm - interim presentation of visuals</td>
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**week 7**

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<td>VC 3 Studio</td>
<td>T Kelly, J Short</td>
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Assignment

Assuming your client is Meath Tourism you are required to complete the following tasks in relation to the Trim Information Design project you are currently working on:

A) Establish the budget your client has for the project and prepare a costing schedule for all items used in the project.

B) Complete a timesheet itemizing on a day by day basis how time was utilized with an appropriate charge out rate (be realistic!). Individual timesheets must be aggregated into one overall timesheet for the job.
Appendix D
Information Design Pilot Integrated Project

Lecturer focus group questionnaire

Date: Friday 2 April 2004 Room G19
1 Reactions to the Trim project

a. Based on your involvement with the Trim project what were its strengths?

b. What were the weaknesses of the project / what developmental changes would you recommend?

c. Did the integrated approach to teaching have an impact on the delivery of your subject?
   Could please state yes or no and why or how this was the case...
   in what way?
   Depth, coverage, quality of learning?

2 Integrated approach to learning

a. Do you think an integrated approach would improve the learning of Visual Communication students?
   Yes or no - please expand on your answer?

b. Do you think it's important for subjects areas with in visual communication to be presented to students in an integrated way?
   If you could please state yes or no and why this is the case?

c. Strengths and weaknesses of this approach?

3 Impact on teaching practice

a. Did you find team teaching more or less effective in comparison to semester one where you worked independently of other lecturer on the Visual Communication course?
   Communication among lecturers / Expectation of students?

b. In your opinion how could we be more effective as team teachers?
   Time / communication / meetings / writing projects / assessment

c. In your opinion what are the potential benefits of team teaching both in and out of the studio/classroom?
   support / collaboration / dialogue / getting to know colleagues / social / morale

d. What are the disadvantages of team teaching?

e. Do you see this integrated approach as a valid way forward for the Visual Communication course?
   Yes / no - why?

4 Wider institutional implications

5 In the light of the requirement to modularise courses in the Institute do you think we can implement an integrated approach? Yes / no Please elaborate on your answer...

6 Any additional comments you wish to make / anything I omitted from the questionnaire?
INTRODUCTION MODERATOR

...Maybe consider theme-based, team teaching as a way to move forward, or rule it out as a way of moving forward with the development of the course...I'm hoping that it could contribute to us building more of a team in terms of our teaching, you know, and what we spend most of our time doing when we are in here. I think it could possibly provide that...It's been quite difficult to have time to talk about the whole project over the last seven or eight weeks, so it's important I think that we all get to air our views on how it went.

The following overheads were shown:
Quotes from Opportunities in Design
Theme wheel diagram
Factors which promote Deep and surface learning from Gibbs, 1992

Question 1A What were the strengths of the Trim project?

LECTURER 1
The main strength was that students weren't going from one project to the next I thought. em. the next day so that they could actually. em. get deeper within ... into the subject, I think that worked well. Whereas the opposite is happening in second year where you do have students for a certain amount of time and then they mightn't come in that day because they have an essay for somebody else, you know, which happens or they might have to have something else in. They're juggling a lot of projects. So with this I think they were within it for longer so they could actually get in depth and they knew then if I saw them on Monday and you saw them the next day that they were still thinking about the same content. So I thought that worked very well.

LECTURER 2
I think that there are aspects of second year that work on a localized and informal basis like say between Peter and I in drawing and in illustration which kind of functions but only at our agreement unofficial. And maybe the students can make some sort of crossover. But this was a much better formalized thing where we were all serious about using all their skills in one project. I may have problems with how difficult the project was and a lot of them found it extremely difficult but I think that's a brief thing and I think we need to go back and look at it. But I think that the idea that it was formalized, that we were all involved in it as well as they were, and they could see that, that was a big thing and that was the new thing that I thought was interesting, wasn't it?

LECTURER 3
Yes, yes well I think as well as using their talents that was the first time or one of the first times that the project used the accumulated talents of the staff as well. Which is ah, I think that's quite innovative that they could see it coming and if aspects of it broke down I think it related to that more than to the students work.
LECTURER 4
If I may add on that point I’ve been delighted to see that they’ve been able to give a personal overview on their own involvement as an individual designer, apart from the brief well the project which was comprehensively stated on the wall from beginning to end. But I got them to approach it then toward the end on the Wednesday session, give me your response to this as though you only were dealing with one client, the coordinator of tourism in the midlands, give me a letter to that client, and give me your critical path chart, which they did. And I’ll report back to you on that there’s some very strong ones on that.

MODERATOR
Do you mean the schedule that was on the wall?

LECTURER 4
The schedule that was on the wall set them up. It focused on the reality of the project, a beginning a middle and an end. And there it was staring them in the face not just something woolly. And then the reality of them as an individual. I mean forget about being in a team, give me an individual report as though you’re a design house in DunLaoghaire or Howth write a personal letter to the coordinator of the tourism this was probably taking it a step from your brief and I’ve got some very interesting pieces to share with you after Easter on that.

LECTURER 5
I found it very positive in that, ah, if you’re doing something with them and it’s a one off kind of thing you do it with them and then it’s finished like and it’s gone. But with this it went on for several weeks so it enabled them to see how something that might have been previously covered in an hour or two, which now went on for several weeks enabled them to see how it would work in reality. The reality of the situation was the real thing that impressed me about it. I think quite a few of them were quite surprised when they actually sat down and they found the amount of time that they were spending on each individual area, which they had to break down for me on each subject, you know, the amount of time that they were spending on the project. And they were actually quite surprised that it took so long, you know. And I think they... because I would go through all of this with them after Easter and point out to them that in reality that in the real world they mightn’t get this amount of time to do it, and that this is the amount of time it took them during college, eh the reality would be different and eh, looking at value for money for their time and that kind of thing would be an interesting exercise we should run through again, you know. Now that they’ve recorded their time they’d be able to go through that again. So I found it really interesting and some of the feedback I got was terrific. You know the detail I got from them was terrific. You know.

LECTURER 4
That echoes what I found.

LECTURER 2
And did they get involved in costing and so on?

LECTURER 4
Yes
LECTURER 5
Yes they did yeah

LECTURER 2
Because that's always the thing they ask. And it's always the thing that's sometimes the most imaginative. (Laughter)

13:07
LECTURER 6
I think from the point of view of critical theory that ideally a project like this would be timetabled before the second semester in third year because at that stage they're into thesis preparation and there isn't a lot of flexibility. Ah I mean it's fine for first and second year because we're working through the year but once they hit the first semester really they're straight into thesis preparation. So... did I say the first I meant the second...? Em but that's just something that would have to be taken into consideration. I think I probably had the least input of anybody around the table but I think there's a lot of potential you know and I think we're trying to build in that flexibility into the new stuff we're doing for modularization. We, kind of, raised that issue that there needs to be room to tie in with what studio are doing.

MODERATOR
The class did give very positive feedback and one of the students actually suggested that we should bring critical theory into the studio, which was nice to hear it coming from that side of the fence, so that was good.

14:05
LECTURER 7
Well, so far we have assessed about half of the Trim work and I think the result was rather disappointing. Eh, except for two students and that I find interesting. You know the two I mean, the two who came in to the course this year. And they did everything right. Their back-up their research, everything. Yeah. The outcome is not really all that important but it's the way that they... yeah? Some of the others did so little, in those seven weeks, they did probably a tenth of what those two people did. And I would like to know why those two are so ahead of the others? Yeah. We are doing something wrong in the first two years. Yeah? Yeah? Those people are not outstanding designers but they know how to approach it and the others don't.

LECTURER 4
Could they have had three years?

LECTURER 7
And the other problem is that the attendance is a bit wishy washy. They have a tendency not to turn up if they don't know what to do. Yeah? When they haven't got an idea is when they actually should come in but they are staying away. Because if you don't have an idea then you come in and talk about it.

MODERATOR
Well we're doing the strengths at the moment...I'm about to move onto weaknesses.
LECTURER 2
Well I have a few problems with the way it's structured as well.

Moderator
Are we finished with ...?

LECTURER 1
I have one more strength. I think, just to reiterate what Lecturer 3 said earlier, that integration between us in parallel to integration of the project is really important that it’s more subject-based so there's more integration of thinking on a subject and that’s in say fourth year I have problems with students thinking of the technology as opposed to what they’re actually dealing with. And that's hopefully going to feed into fourth year where they’re not thinking ‘Oh, I don't. I'm not going to do multimedia this year.’ Whereas multimedia is just mediating information and communication. So I hope that that will hopefully begin to solve that problem where they’re thinking, multimedia, illustration, photography, as opposed to thinking 'information design’ I’m using multimedia, photography, illustration and typography or whatever. So we can’t expect them to integrate those subjects if we don’t integrate them ourselves. So that is a strength.

LECTURER 1
OK are we all done on strengths? Ok.

LECTURER 3
Well just before... one of the other major strengths I think was the fact that before the project started there was a very successful meeting of the staff to lay it out.

LECTURER 1
I thought that was quite good too.

LECTURER 2
Yeah that was very helpful.

LECTURER 3
I think that was probably one of the most positive, from our side, aspects of it that we knew what was going to be happening and we were clear about it. Everybody was here, and it came up in conversation this morning. Lecturer 2 mentioned it there as well and I think that he’s dead right. The fact that we all had this plan ...

LECTURER 4
The plans were well laid.

LECTURER 3
It didn’t overlap and if it did it was planned. And that was what went well. I mean any of us could go to the timetable and look at it on the wall.
LECTURER 2

I think that that was a really interesting development and the intentions of it were truly good and everybody was wholeheartedly in agreement that this would be a good development. And that's really a positive strength of what we were trying to achieve.

MODERATOR

Question 1B OK. Great. So then obviously what were the weaknesses of the project? Or what developmental changes would you recommend to the project?

17:40

LECTURER 1

I think what Lecturer 2 started mentioning earlier about a lot of students, I think because it could have been the first time that they did a project that was very integrated, found it quite difficult. And maybe they got a little bit 'Oh my God! I'm not sure what I'm doing here'. And it's really important because there's six lecturers working on this as opposed to you know 'I'm just seeing Lecturer 1 on a Monday'. So they got a little bit 'I don't have the best idea, I don't...' you know, and some of them were a little bit intimidated.

LECTURER 5

The stress levels began to show about half way through and that could be just plucked out I think possibly ... It might be better if they don't have that kind of stress.

LECTURER 4

Surely better to be intimidated in third year than to be intimidated walking out the door in fourth year. It's a good start. It shakes their concentration and it's the same brief for everyone. So I'm not getting any negative comments I think the whole thing was very good.

LECTURER 2

Just one last we strength I felt was for the first time it was great to work with students all day. That was really helpful.

Moderator

A lot of them liked that actually.

19:00

LECTURER 2

And you could really focus. The first day was wandering around the second day it was getting much more focused and so on and so on. And the fact that the time was really valuable when we were away somewhere. That was really good. Rather than just leaving it say for three or four weeks and they did it in the last afternoon.

But I found that one of the major weaknesses over all, it was really difficult.

Moderator

Yes, it was

LECTURER 2
And that became really apparent much later on. When they were stressed and freaked, later on. And they hadn’t really resolved, I think, through a series of formalized critiques, I think, where, and presentations. They were too keen, because they all have their laptops and their printers and stuff and it’s a matter of money really. They’re printing out stuff that they think is finished and they’re not going to go back to it rather than making much more outline presentations. I still think that that’s a weakness. And that’s a weakness on their part but it’s something that’s difficult to stop unless you’re incredibly structured about you know ‘this week’ and then making another presentation ‘next week’ and so on and so on. I found that that was a problem. And I found that there was one day that we were back with them looking at things, and it was relatively close I think to the end that a lot of them had several solutions and they needed to be a lot more focused.

20:20

ASSISTANT MODERATOR

Sorry. Not being involved I found it interesting when you were talking about how they found it so difficult and they were sort of intimidated. Is that going back to your point that it is sort of the reality of a project or why do you think they found it so hard?

LECTURER 2

I don’t mind if they’re stressed. I mean I’m quite happy if they’re stressed (group laughter). But I think that it was the actual decision-making that they found difficult. The work they could do.

ASSISTANT MODERATOR

So they were getting very precious about their decisions

LECTURER 2

They were getting ... well they, I’m getting confused now because I keep thinking of, there were all sorts of different examples of people who didn’t quite know. Like Student 2 and Student 1 are incredibly focused and they’re incredibly professional and so on, about it. Where they picked it up and so on, I don’t know and I don’t think it’s really relevant. But I think that...

LECTURER 4

Well it may be because they came through the DIT one of them.

21:10

LECTURER 2

One of them did yes but eh. For instance I spoke to Student 1 on the bus one day and he said ‘look at this notebook that I have’, and he was proud to show me, and he had acres and acres of stuff. And he said, ‘do you know something,’ he said ’you should make the other students do the same’ (Group laughter) He said ‘some of them are really good you know’ and I was wondering what exactly does he mean by that? But it’s true in a way.

LECTURER 7

Yes but you can’t make them do it.
LECTURER 2
Yes you can! You see

Moderator
You can! You can! you can!
But were not talking about Kelvin Fraine, were talking about student's who are in the middle
A tea trolley with refreshments is wheeled into the room.

LECTURER 2
And I think that Student 1 is really right there. Its that thing about ... The tea is just coming in... He is right. We should have asked the whole of the class to come up with exactly the same sort of thing. That they should go through that procedure. (noise of tea setting up.)

LECTURER 5
Is that because they don't do this maybe in first and second year? Get them used to it. So when it does come to later in third year they then know that they are going to have to make a decision sooner ... you know.
They then know that they are going to have to make the decision sooner.

22:40
LECTURER 2
Well I think what happens is they fall into really bad habits. And they often come up with ... they're often satisfied with the very first thing that they come up with.

LECTURER 7
There is no lateral thinking.

LECTURER 2
And Student 1 had acres of ideas and some people struggle to find one. And that's where you're always trying to help them out. But I think that Student 1, his mind set was that he had to produce loads of alternatives and isn't that right.

23:20
Moderator
But I think one of the strengths of this project was that some people did, like Student 3 really developed working on his notebook and working on his process. You know it was noticeable That was partly because after the last project we gave feedback and said look your ... development ... you're really weak there but you're ok in the other bits and he took that and really focused on that part of the project. So I think this would allow that and it did allow a few people. I don't agree with you entirely Lecturer 7, a few people that we looked at really did start focusing more on the development.

LECTURER 7
Well as usual I'm a little exaggerating but you know full well that you have a couple of students who do precisely what we hope they will do, irrespective of the outcome. Because I'm not really all that interested in the outcome. I'm
interested in the whole process. But most of them... We failed one because she didn’t do anything... seven weeks a couple of things that’s it. What were they doing?

LECTURER 2  
Well that’s not necessarily her fault that’s the fault of the system. That should have been stopped in week two.

LECTURER 1  
Yes

LECTURER 2  
We should be heading towards that

LECTURER 1  

In terms of continuous assessment maybe there should be an assessment at a certain point. And also just in terms of difficulty it could be seen as a strength because it does jolt them out of their comfort zone. You know that they actually go ‘Oh my God’ you know ‘I actually have to cost this project’. I have to...

LECTURER 2  
Everyone else is past this stage and I’m not

LECTURER 1  
Yes and there were along assessments where people could see the difference hugely between those people who didn’t do the work and people who did and who were developing process.

LECTURER 7  
The one who has failed is not by any means a bad student just lazy.

Lecturer 1  
We’re not talking about individual students.

LECTURER 7  
No no but we have to come up with some reasons as to why they are not doing it. It’s not our fault not always. Some students are just lazy, you know that.

LECTURER 4  
Could I put three words in there? Modus operandi, the way of doing things and the awareness. And the last word is potential. You can have a way of doing things, half of us are aware of it and half of those have the potential to do it. I think it’s a very very strange mix to have to deal with. But if you haven’t the modus operandi in their head and if that awareness is not fixed in there. I’m not saying why anybody has it but it just seems to be that.
LECTURER 2
Well let me suggest something that has worked for us. We have a sheet with boxes in it week one week two right down to week seven and they have to pass various hurdles and tick them off as they supply that information.

LECTURER 4
Fair Enough

LECTURER 1
I thought as well that one of the things we should have done that was everybody had a deadline to produce a map. And so there's a focus for the first part on them developing this and we could have done inputs on that. And it might have made it a bit easier for them as third years just to break it down in that way, and then you move on however I suppose that's what we learned.

LECTURER 2
If we learned something from it I think it's to look at it like that. And it would improve communication between us which I thought was another problem.

LECTURER 1
Yes Go on

LECTURER 2
Well we did our bit and then it was handed over to the next bit and there was one day where we were agreeing to come back and I would have liked to have seen their drawings and so on developed from their photographs had developed we kind of lost control over that in a way. And again I think that's the fault of the brief it could have been a lot more structured where they were to come up with finished roughs and finished illustrations and that could have left us then and gone on.

26:55
ASSISTANT MODERATOR
It might be a good time now to actually just look at some of the feedback because Brenda got some interesting feedback from the students. To see how they felt it went. They were quite honest.

Break for coffee...

28:40
Moderator
I think when we were looking at marking it we really looked a lot at process and their thinking and in some cases the finished piece was great and in some cases it didn't quite come together but we kind of factored in that it was a difficult project.
LECTURER 1
Well another weakness was assessment. I think there's a difficulty if you do have integrated projects about ... like we sat down the three of us and we were assessing and I found that quite time consuming. And quite a waste of resources for three people to sit down to go through all the projects. Because there was three of us and we've only gone through fifteen and it's taken us over a day and you know I think that's a lot of time like I've seen all the process I've seen them doing the final projects. It shouldn't take that long to mark the work for me anyway. So I think there needs to be autonomy in terms of marking.

Moderator
Well I agree with you, it has been difficult, but on the other hand we've had two very fragmented half days. We haven't sat down for a straight day and got into a stride with it. So, because we've just all been running and because of the time of year... The other thing is that ... in fine art for example they take a week off, they cancel classes for a week and they assess for that whole week.

LECTURER 1
I still think it takes too long for third year undergraduate work. Like I spent longer on each student than I have with Elaine who is a postgraduate student. And you know I just to spent 20 minutes on a project that is one fourth of a third year course we have to be very pragmatic about marking as well.

LECTURER 7
Well we are a little bit slow the three of us in assessing as opposed to Lecturer 2 and Lecturer 3 who are very fast.

LECTURER 1
Well maybe I should go with them then (laughs)

LECTURER 7
But on the other hand it's a pretty complicated project with four pieces of work.

LECTURER 1
I know but for three lecturers to sit down for..., in terms of resources I think that is something we do have to watch how long it is taking us to assess. I don't agree with the fine Art way of sitting down for a whole week to assess.

Moderator
OK. It does rule out having different projects coming in at different times of the year, because you are leaving it all till the end of the year which goes against continuous assessment.

LECTURER 2
Well that's where have a problem Lecturer 7 had given back some of the project work to students without telling anyone. We agreed that we had to get the project back from the students.

MODERATOR
Read out comments form the feedback sheets. Began with last question — any other comments.
Independent learning days were a good idea.

LECTURER 4
There are two words if I could reflect on them for a second there's a preoccupation with trying to please a group of tutors. There's a concern that there isn't a consensus from the tutors. There's a comment about the real world. The real world is a damn lot more awkward than the real people in here. And they're never going to get a consensus from a board of marketing bods or whatever. But without that agitation or irritation which there may have been in the tutorial that grain of sand is not going to work in the oyster. And I'm delighted that they're pestered by it because if you get a group of tutors sitting around saying oh lovely, lovely, lovely where are they going to go from there.

ASSISTANT MODERATOR
I think possibly we should move on.

Question 1 If you could change one thing about the project what would that be.

LECTURER 2
The structure of the brief

LECTURER 1
Or maybe from my point of view because I'm quite interested in PBL that they (the students) state what the deliverables would be at the beginning and what they will have done at some stage and maybe then we can match that up

LECTURER 2
That might just be a bit difficult to administer if you're dealing with its a big group it's about thirty people

LECTURER 1
Yeah... but deliverables definitely along the line

LECTURER 2
Absolutely
They do tend to over emphasise in their own minds how long they have for the idea at the expense of actually technically drawing things up. You would think you work out your idea on the bus out to Trim and you have that worked out. You don't spend two days. We were very careful about one day gather information, look around, walk around and the next day you had to come in with your idea.

ASSISTANT MODERATOR
Is there anything else that people think?
LECTURER 5
Yeah I think spacing would be a thing that I would look at. Getting them to submit things as it goes along rather than letting it pile up towards the end. That’s one thing I’d be keen to do.

Moderator
Is that in the studio area where it might be affecting other subjects, or in your own area, or both?

LECTURER 5
Well in my area making them terminate it and bring it in so I can see what they are doing as it goes along. Without schooling them too much about it.

LECTURER 4
It might have helped to have put a little bit of production focus on it and it wouldn’t have been cutting across their graphic area but giving them the production side. If they have something to produce and it’s something that will need a specification at the end of the line alert them to it as we go. So it’s not an a la carte menu for them. There is an essential number of elements there and then some will give you the icing on the cake as well.

LECTURER 2
I think they need to be alerted as well is that this thing could change any moment. The fact that they have to redo something is not a problem.

LECTURER 4
It’s reality

LECTURER 1
Yes

LECTURER 2
That’s where most of them get most upset, almost in tears. They had gone so far and then they were told that they had to change it. From their point of view it was a question that they had invested all this time and money and they had to go back and it was deeply frustrating.

ASSISTANT MODERATOR
So it sounds like the frustrating part seemed to be the reality of the project, it seemed to really get people. Which is very interesting.

LECTURER 3
And from the students’ perspective if you like, they hit the wall on day one because they had to hand out money to begin with. They knew they were into three days and so there’s a cost factor.
Which there always is.

LECTOR 3
Which there always is it doesn’t matter. But the fact that they had to arrive to a location that suddenly kicked off for us anyway. And our initial talk to them was on the basis, rightly or wrongly, that this was very effectively, would have to be seen as a professional job. So when on location use your time to record. So that was the first learning barrier for them because a lot of them did not know. As Lecturer 2 said we tried to explain to them you’re located there for three days, spend the first day just taking it all in, that’s a luxury, and then from there on hope for the best. They found that very, very tough.

46:47
LECTOR 2
They did it was a matter of not knowing quite how to approach it.

LECTOR 1
It was a very big project. And it would have been great to do as a team project because then the negotiation part of it too. I know they were fed up with team projects at that stage but in terms of individual deliverables and then having to negotiate what they were going to do as a team probably would have been more real life in a way. And probably would have been better.

47:17
LECTOR 3
We asked nearly everyone we spoke on the tutorial aspect yesterday ‘did you enjoy it?’ Just on verbally most of them got an awful lot from it. And I think the more distance they create to it and the more they start applying what they learned the better they’re going to realise what they got from it. I mean an early assessment from it would be probably almost too good from their side or maybe not as honest. But yesterday a lot of them picked up a lot from it. I mean even talking to people, introducing themselves to people, finding that the location could deliver information. Some of them on the third day were only breaking that ground, and ok, they didn’t quite make it within the time but they learned that, yeah its here, just didn’t find it over three days.

LECTOR 1
And they went back.

48:05
LECTOR 3
Some of them, quite a number of them went back. Those who wanted to access finer weather but we said that on day one. A lot of them did mention to me, that’s on our patrols, how they were impressed with the fact that two other lecturers turned up. And I thought ‘that’s significant’. Because on the early stages of the project it showed that there was an agreement among the staff it wasn’t just two of us. Because we stayed for very long days then it was mentioned by quite a few of them that they had seen you.
LECTURER 1
Oh right. We could have stayed a bit longer then.

LECTURER 3
Well even that, the fact that you did that quick walk around meant there would be the best visibility there could be. Which I did say at the time that if you’re seen it is important and it was amazing how many of them mentioned that.

Moderator
Well it was very important for us to go, in terms of working with them on the project.

LECTURER 4
Would Howth or Bray have been less expensive. LECTURER 3: This seemed to suit the brief. Take a DART less expensive.

Question 1C One last question.
Did the integrated approach to learning have an impact on the delivery of your subject in terms of depth or coverage.

50:14
LECTURER 1
Yes for me definitely I was seeing illustration in multimedia projects. Whereas normally they would think ‘I’m doing illustration. I’m not going to put it into a digital media piece.’ So that was great because Anita and myself are always saying we are always looking for content but they don’t contextualise the content very well. So that was really good, they were using that content in a much better way.

LECTURER 3
I think the project was set up so that we could step back, but that’s Lecturer 2 and myself to an extent, and probably that aspect of it worked. Like for instance Student 1’s idea was given to him, when we were there as the same idea was given to quite a few others, but he picked up on it. Whereas ‘Grim Trim’ was given to the other guy. It was by saying to him that there isn’t just one way. That’s a huge learning gap whether he will tell us that... Yeah its good.

LECTURER 2
I think that I agree with you Lecturer 1. I think that next time we do this, and I hope that we do. That we are really specific about what we want. It was just too wide open was difficult I’d find that difficult. To take Trim from any angle. A lot of them sort of perished on that rock.

LECTURER 3
They all wanted to know ... what input we would have at the end of it.

LECTURER 2
‘Who’s marking what?’
LECTURER 1
And we didn’t really decide that probably as much as we could have.

Moderator
Yes I felt that was something that was left a little bit hazy.

52:14
LECTURER 3
Well we sort of did. If we recall, we sort of did. What we had sort of thought might be was that we did see the difficulty that we would have to back out.

LECTURER 2
That’s right.

Moderator
Yeah and just look at the research work.

LECTURER 3
Now they didn’t get that impression but that’s in my recollection what we had said. That Lecturer 2 and myself because of the nature of the project whatever became of it as it moved into the other areas would have to be assessed at the end not by us. Because the potential of the material we might have seen could be amazing but it just didn’t develop. But the next time Lecturer 2’s idea could be implemented where there is a break off stage that actual body of work is looked at a mark is given and then they move on to the next part.

Moderator
That’s how I kind of hoped it would happen this time.

LECTURER 1
I think you did have to bail out at some stage because it was information design otherwise you were just going to get illustration ...

LECTURER 3
No we couldn’t be stuck in there because then you would have them rightly able to argue well we didn’t know what Lecturer 3 would think we didn’t know what Lecturer 2 would think. And in truth we were the best men for the job on site because that’s the aspect had to be done first.

LECTURER 1, LECTURER 2, Moderator
Yes
They would work with someone else's material, someone else's photos or illustrations. I think that's something we should consider as a development for the next stage. Because there are people who are interested in pure Graphic Design and typography and I think that they should be encouraged to work with image people.

Moderator
Lecturer 7 tried to do that at the beginning of the project with them but they were having none of it.

LECTURER 2
Yes because they had unfortunate experience with the group thing which they were still kind of reeling from. They wanted to do their own thing but they do have this inbuilt thing about 'I want to do everything myself' and again that's quite a second year mentality.

LECTURER 7
It's a pity because this project was more suited as a group project than the previous one.

Moderator
yes

LECTURER 7
But it's true what Lecturer 2 is saying and I remember that from my days in art college. You want to do everything yourself and you don't want somebody else blowing in and you know sticking illustrations in.

55:12
ASSISTANT MODERATOR
I think we need to move on.

MODERATOR
Move away from Trim and just talk generally about this as a way forward.

Question 2A: Do you think an integrated approach would improve the learning of VC students and why?

55:58
LECTURER 3
I think it would. Going back to a point we might have made earlier we're fortunate here round the table and this may have come up before at our first session. Most of the people on the course at the moment, that's the staff, are able to get on with each other. The danger will be that that can't be achieved. You only need one person who doesn't agree with this and then you're in trouble.

LECTURER 1
I think it is important to formalize it. ... I think whether people get on or not if we do have a certain amount I think it needs to be into the curriculum. There is one person leading a project. There is a certain amount of autonomy as well that people have. That they are still having their own classes but they are working on one project. The more we formalize it then the more it doesn't matter if people get on or not.

It shouldn't be that way.

132
LECTURER 3
I know it shouldn’t ideally. But we’re working in an area like were working and if somebody is very negative about for instance if I was very negative about it my input could be very very damaging. And the students will latch onto this, the ones who feel they can’t make a go of it. They’ll see well not everyone’s in agreement. And I think the success can be based on the fact that were not shouting at each other.

Moderator
Question: Would there be ways that we could address that. If we thought as a course team that it was important how would we get around that, personal differences.

LECTURER 2
I don’t understand the question.

LECTURER 1
I think you take that project and from us all sitting around the table … the next time we do, structure it more. I think the problem a lot with design education that it is based on our own knowledge and it is very tacit and the more that we actually formalize stuff like that the more that we are looking seriously at design processes and the importance of integration or team teaching or team work of students. I think it has to be written into the curriculum. I think it can’t be dependent on, you know, me wanting to work on this project. For instance if you disappeared off the course maybe this project wouldn’t work. You might leave next year, but I don’t think curriculum should depend on us just all cooperating.

LECTURER 2
Yeah but it is kind of lucky in a way. Lecturer 3 has kind of hit it on. It’s not just a question of getting along. I think that what’s kind of good about our wee cosy team here is that there is kind of a professional respect in the areas that we do in it and out contributions towards that. And I think that that’s one of the strengths. And again I think that that’s just fortunate.

LECTURER 1
But how can we then?

LECTURER 3
The truth is that this would never have got off the ground at all if we couldn’t have sat down as a group and decided that we would do three days in a row and so on….
Because that's major change, I know, but it's not written anywhere yet. That's now by agreement. That in order to facilitate this and to see if the if the students will benefit from it and that's got to be our key focus. But I think even at this stage we need to be looking down at what may go wrong as to what we hope will go right. Because when it does go wrong that's when the escaping will start.

LECTURER 1
But that's my question because in industry it's not dependent on like if we didn't all get on we do have to sit down and have a meeting together about a certain project that we are working on.

LECTURER 3
But it's not industry.

LECTURER 1
I know but I think we should be professional enough to have. That we don't necessarily have to. I think that's a problem in design education that it is dependent on personalities as opposed to the professional aspects of the course that need to be formalized.

LECTURER 5
Yeah I think you're quite right it should be formalized to some extent... Because if you are working in industry there will be people in a group who might not agree at all with what is going on but they have got to have their input they have got to take part. There will be conflict at work. There is always conflict there at any rate.

LECTURER 2
How you address that Lecturer 3 I'm not sure. It comes in many shapes forms you can just decide by not doing very much. You can actually sabotage something. But how you address that I don't know, other than trying to circumvent their involvement.

LECTURER 3
What we have to be very careful of is that by over regularizing at this stage, that we don't turn into a sausage factory as well. I mean one of the best credits we've often been able to say to a student at the end of four years that their work is extremely creative and its still very student based. It's still exploring it's still learning its very fresh. There can be a within this if there's a rush to the professional aspect of it too quick.

LECTURER 2
What are they called? Oven-ready students.

LECTURER 3
Oven ready students.
MODERATOR
I think it’s to strike a balance. I think we are all possibly agreed that our students hit on one solution too quickly and they run with that instead of really exploring or doing a lot of lateral or wide ranging investigation work at the beginning.

LECTURER 2
Yes

MODERATOR
They don’t do it. We have to find an approach or find a way of fostering that. They also have to become a bit more professional, take more responsibility for themselves. But without ruling out the creative, experimental thing you’re talking about.

LECTURER 3
It is being demonstrated that there are other whackier ways of doing it. That can’t be lost. But once they then decide on the whacky way then they can professionally carry that through. That’s the success of it. And if we follow our own theory on that, we assess that at the end because of how they treated that whacky idea and whether as Lecturer 7 said at the beginning the work is suited or not. It’s how far they carry it. But I still think that one of the major difficulties with it will be that everybody will have to be able to run along with it. You see, even simple things like somebody saying I’ve to collect the kids on Tuesday, I’m sorry I can’t be in Trim. Or I can’t be wherever it is. I can’t do three days in a row because my wife does this that and the other. And you can’t force any of us to do any of this. Once our timetable is issued everything after that is by agreement.

MODERATOR
Well I think what that does is it throws up the importance of us sitting down to plan the year ahead. Which we’re probably not in the habit of doing. We do it a little bit but even in terms of producing the schedule for that project. I think we need to be sitting down, although I don’t know how were going to do it this year. maybe in June maybe in September, and saying right for seven weeks we’re doing this you’re doing this. For the next seven weeks we’ll all do this together.

LECTURER 3
Well I think your course will be very successful if you can do that. And again it’s because in order to establish what you might want it will only come from a group like this deciding to make it work now. And that you have a group who will agree that

LECTURER 1
I think that’s a way of doing it I think we do need to plan more ahead. I think third year is in a really good state at the moment in terms of doing the team project doing information design. I think you could actually organise that in June or whatever and they’re running with all those projects. Because I think the students got an awful lot out of all the different projects. You know bringing them to London, that setup you know.
LECTURER 2

Well I think that the prospects for next year unleashed onto something like this would be good too.

Moderator:
The current second years?

01:05:10
LECTURER 4

The overview would be that the creativity still has to be encouraged. Combined with the feasibility of production in a cost effective method - a time-cost effective method. And also a structured assessment. If anyone of us get the plague - someone can sit in and structure do that stage one, stage two, stage three as it goes.

LECTURER 2

I think that we could be a lot harder on the development times that they waste an awful time.... They have an unrealistic view of how long they can spend dithering, and vacillating between ideas. And that's where I think again the structure will help.

LECTURER 1

... you put up that quote. The output of illustration and photography was not going to be solution driven. That it was actually design research and that's quite a new departure that they weren't thinking that this actually has to go, you know, in a brochure, that this is actually design research. That's quite interesting.

LECTURER 3

Given this sort of note taking and agreement

Not necessarily the final picture that they may place it there. I tried to professional

These are things we would never have discussed before because you wouldn't have had them on site to do it. So that aspect of it was useful. But it's also the isolation of the photographer from the general design group and what happens next and so on, but most of it was positive, But it's also the reason we have to back out of the final assessment.

01:07:27
MODERATOR

It's really about clearly defining our roles, isn't it? And just sticking to those at the same time allowing for flexibility. I mean we're all quite willing to step in or out if there has to a quick change.

LECTURER 3

I actually on occasions did not comment on stuff... purposely because I thought it's going to interfere with what some one else is saying.

LECTURER 1

I think that's really good. For them to make...sometimes students want you to finish off the circle for them. Or fill the gap. What'll I do next?
Question 2b: Do you think it’s important for subject areas in VC to be presented in an integrated way. Do we separate multimedia form design from illustration. Do you think the way we structure the course sends them a message about how they should work.

01:09:06
LECTURER 2
I think that project came in at the right place. It might have been quite difficult but it came in at the right place. In the course you’re trying to turn them into professionals looking at a job like that. A complicated job like that professionally and they’re looking at time management and they start to produce costing. I think that’s the right place to do it. I think the debate still goes on about first and second year. and I think that that’s something that we haven’t really talked about. And when it comes to designing the course we need to really seriously look at that because I’m not sure whether that works.

MODERATOR
What?

01:09:40
LECTURER 2
The fragmentation you do a bit of this, it’s like taking pills, if you take that one and that one and that one you’ll suddenly be better. It doesn’t quite work like that. On a localized level, ... because I get along with Peter and there are some overlaps from my area into his that certain things are achieved and the students can make the connections and they will come to me and say I’ll take an interest in their prints because they’ll take drawings that I’ve done with them and Peter, like you, loves to take raw materials and turn them into another media and that’s good and they can see the advantages.

MODERATOR
I know Lecturer X is doing the same. I know Lecturer X has been working with Lecturer Y and Lecturer 7 has been working with Lecturer 7 as well in first year, so on an informal basis people are starting to integrate.

LECTURER 1
I think first and second year it needs the smaller bits that have to be chewed off but still in an integrated way. I think it is good that they’re observant but they still need to know, say digital media probably more than say in third year, as a subject so that they make the jump into integrating it more in third year. So that they make the decisions about what media in terms of how they’re going to communicate. But we do need to make them jump through more hoops in first and second year so they can actually look at technical aspects of how do I do storyboards, how do I make a prototype.

Question about curriculum design: Do people think it’s too early in second year to start designing the course more so than

01:12:20
LECTURER 1
I think we should integrate it yes but be more prescriptive (in terms of the projects and deliverables).

01:13:04
ASSISTANT MODERATOR
Just one tutor backing up two other areas... Teaching technical knowledge which is feeding into... No forward and back.

01:13:51
LECTURER 3
My final project is problem based... Just go and do it... I think it's going to be a tragedy if we have to spend our time pushing the cursor round the screen saying this is how you do this and this is how you do that: But if they're motivated enough they may want to go and do it. There is another thing there are students who for instance at the end of this project have decided in their head they would not want to do certain areas. That they have come up against walls with this last project which has determined for them, 'I don't ever want to do that.' Or 'I would rather not work in that area.'

LECTURER 4
That's a scary thing for them

LECTURER 3
Well no we've had this before. We've got to start looking at the idea that some of them don't want to do graphic design some of them don't want to do multimedia. They just want to do illustration.

LECTURER 1
In where?

LECTURER 4
As a result of that one experience?

LECTURER 3
No as an accumulation of the... but this begins to focus on them that this is where I'm making and this is where I'm enjoying it most.

LECTURER 4
Isn't that a positive outcome?

LECTURER 3
Well we don't have a structure... for what use, and if were rushing towards group
And that would be where a major... what we called a major before. We used to have photography, illustration and design and it seems to me as if that's rising again. Now what was dealt with then was that six of four or five people would decide too major in an area and then the others would sneak through or slide through with full input. And we dealt with it and it was good. That's something we need to look at and I think it may be healthy to start looking at it now. Because these type of projects definitely focus on it as it comes to a conclusion.
In terms of fourth year I don’t think fourth years can decide I’m going to leave multimedia out or make the decision “I can not go near that”. It’s too much of a luxury in this day and age to decide to leave out a part of a repertoire of visual communication and that’s what’s happening in 4th year. Where students are not doing any digital media and it’s not that digital media is a subject and that’s the way they see it. I’m not doing any of that I can become a graphic designer without doing digital media. Digital media just mediates information. It can be illustration... And I think we really need to think about integration in 4th year. Of projects where they’re actually showing a range of technology, because print is a technology as much as mm is. They don’t see print as a technology, they’ve learned to read from the age of 4 its completely opaque to them that that’s a technology but they can’t leave dmt out in terms of how they look at information and that’s a huge problem at the moment.

If they want to become an illustrator if they can’t put their work on a CD and do a really nice piece and send it off to America or do a website and they’ve made that decision and that is such pity.

Some of them just can’t do it and don’t want to.

We are making it a requirement in third year for them to do that and they are doing it.

So they are being strategic well I’ll do illustration for print

Because I like doing that bit.

We can’t let them away with that

I think it goes back to how we present the course to the students in the early stages. We at one point talked about not actually using the term multimedia. But just actually using themes or talking about design or talking about visual process and actually bringing all of these things under one heading

Exactly

I think sometimes we don’t give students credit enough for their ability to deal with things earlier on. We think they couldn’t cope with things whereas I think...

Yes you are right there.
MODERATOR
They can cope with more than we give them credit for. There's a point at which, they are not taught design in secondary school, so you have to bring them in and there's a certain base level, but at the same time there is an argument for starting as you mean to go on.

LECTURER 1
In second year they know how to do that. The computers are putting them off

Moderator
That's somewhat off the point. Can we please stick to the brief?

Question 3A Did you find team teaching more or less effective in comparison to semester 1 where we worked independently.

LECTURER 1
Well more because I didn't have to start at the very beginning looking at content,... So it was brilliant to be able to come in at a certain stage and say how are you going to use that information? That was excellent

LECTURER 3
From our side being able to spend a full day three days in a row really on focused on what a location is really about excellent. Way to go as far as I'm concerned.

LECTURER 2
I felt for the first time that we did something right. The meeting that we had, the very first meeting, was incredibly useful, and it was really refreshing that everybody had the same intentions and we could see that this would only be a good thing. So I felt that this was really really valuable. And when we were involved in it I really felt as though this was a really positive step. We were able to manipulate the timetable in the way that we wanted,and not necessarily always to our advantage. There were various sections that professionally it was all going to make sense. And from tutorials that we've had with them that they felt that this was way better than the team projects that they’ve had.

LECTURER 5
Oh very very effective, less content but more effective for the amount of content that could be done in the time period available.
MODERATOR
Us to encourage flag PP assignments in our classes

LECTURER 5
One thing that I would do next year. I would do more project management with them earlier on so they could see exactly what they would have to do and where they have to go you know. I think that would be very effective.

LECTURER 7
No it was pretty good but we have been teaching as a team for years. So I can only see the advantages of it. Its very tiresome if one person isn’t in. It works like a treat but it depends very much on the team members and how much they agree with one another.

Question 3B How could we make it better ourselves working as a team?

LECTURER 1
What you said earlier about meeting Have a plan from at start. I should have a second year meeting and have everybody come to the table with what they actually do and look at integration. In terms of having autonomy in their classes but look at integration so were kind of singing off the same hymn sheet. We are doing that in third year.

LECTURER 2
Well what’s helpful in this is that Brenda’s very much the project manager in that last on and if you were the project manager for second year Because there’s always this feeling that you’re doing your own thing. Its handy if someone is steering it, I think everybody would like to contribute to that.

LECTURER 4
There’s no substitute for sitting around the table for a half an hour a week at a set time

LECTURER 2
We desperately needed an interim meeting

MODERATOR
Well we did have one

LECTURER 1
I think this tying up is brilliant as well because you know were also being reflective on our practice and looking at plusses and minuses of actually working this way. So I think this is very very useful. Because there are things we learn from for the next time we do this project in terms of deliverables or how we felt about it.
LECTURER 2
I think we should build this into the semester calendar. Especially on the last day of each term.

LECTURER 1
Also if we build it into the semester calendar people know when those meetings are.

01:29:18
LECTURER 4
While this overview is exceptionally useful the ongoing short meeting, like the very last day of each month because it's too long between like ... It's my first time sitting together with all these people.

LECTURER 5
If it is going to be definite from next year you'd know what we can do in the first semester to build up to it. Which would be very important.

01:30:00
LECTURER 3
Hit them with it in the first semester. Weather.

LECTURER 5
Wouldn't have prior knowledge

LECTURER 3
The other suggestion would be that we would pencil in wouldn't say too many meetings I would think one meeting halfway through the project. A meeting every week we'd find it heavy going.

01:36:14
LECTURER 1
Well what I find about this meeting is that it's really constructive and as you say were talking about the students and we have autonomy. A lot of meetings in DIT have nothing to do with our teaching and em, it's really positive and nice to be sitting around talking about how we can make our curriculum better. And that's what I think gets a lot of people down I think is going to meetings about other stuff and it is in DIT a given that were all fabulous teachers and that everything's going well and yet there aren't many meetings like this which is not about the housework to do with DIT it's actually about the students. And that's why were here. And I think that gets lost

LECTURER 2
Discuss with externals. Invest some of our budget in sending somebody to look at the whole of course development and project development. It would be valuable for this team if someone could go and have a look at other institutes even if 'were miles ahead'... we need to contextualise what were doing, ...
Lots of places don't have the freedom that we have to sit down and make our own decisions. A lot of disharmony is brought in from external sources and putting pressure on to deliver this or that.
LECTURER 1
And it’s a real positive being able to sit around we have our own autonomy and there’s an awful lot of meetings that are quite negative but this is great.

ASSISTANT MODERATOR: Would it work for the whole of visual communication? 1-4

01:38:39 Yes, but there has to be different ways of working. I would like to see PBL project put in and individual project so they could see the difference. I think a very integrated project like this

01:39:
LECTURER 2:
But it would be really valuable for us to get feedback form the external assessors. Is this a good model? There are other places that are working similarly to how we are.
Maybe we’re lacking in ideas or initiatives for first year. Where it was the same it was a team of people working on common projects. The way first year is done now is completely alien to my education where you got a team of people who worked on common projects, and as a student you knew exactly what was expected of you. And you learned things as you went along rather than a wee bit of this which I still think is weird.

ASSISTANT MODERATOR
In fourth year we realize that they have every subject seen as different and they decide to specialize. Maybe

LECTURER 1
Where in industry there is now more integration if you look at imagination it’s all interdisciplinary and I think Damien would be a good person to ask all about that as well

LECTURER 3
Well for years I think the success of the students here was the fact that they had the very broad sweep that they could and had experience from all the different areas. But there still was room for just peaking one of those and maybe if that could be included in it somewhere, great. I think they must be able to handle all the areas … but also if somewhere within it they can stand higher in one area should they like. The real good thing about this is that it’s focused on the student but not the staff. As I say we’ve been doing it but it’s now becoming more formal.

01:40:52
LECTURER 2

Question 3D. What would be the disadvantages of team teaching broadly not the Trim project?

01:43:19
LECTURER 3
One of the reasons I think that’s can stay a success is that you don’t find any member of the team isolated. While there are groups of 2, 2 and 2, and that might be something to really watch for. Well it has got to be positive because there’s always two people’s input rather than just one and at least you maintain a support.

Older members of staff may not necessarily agree because it is totally different to the whole other learning issues. There is two different age profiles sitting around the table and that can’t be ignored either and it’s a sort of a passing over and agreeing. And that needs to be raised and if it’s not raised sooner it will definitely be later and if it’s later it will be trouble. That’s another issue because it a whole new way of looking at a whole new discipline for people who have done it one way. And not everyone is going to see it that way. And I think younger people will be much easier to motivate into this than older because their skills become under question.

01:44:13
Has support to offer. Will be a gradual positive change that we might now have the opportunity to implement

01:45:10
Just in terms of making sure that we are quite formal about what everybody is assessing and looking at the timing.

Question 3D Do we see this approach as a valid way forward for VC? Does any body disagree?

01:45:30
General agreement no disagreement people nodded

Question 4 A In the light of the requirement to modularize courses in the institute do you think we can implement an integrated approach?

LECTURER 2
Is it too late just to say no were not doing it?

01:46:16
LECTURER 1
I feel were trying to put a square peg into a round hole with modularization. I think were trying to fit a model which isn’t necessarily the best pedagogic way of actually going. As were sitting around here we have autonomy were looking at it from a student centred point of view. And now were looking at building in chunks of credit-based deliverable kind of subjects. In terms of modularization we could take the course as is and just modularize it because we have the separated subjects... We could modularize in the morning but were moving into looking at contextualising our subjects into themes.

LECTURER 2
We might look back on this as being a fantastically liberating time in our teaching and that now your tied back. Your going back to you do this and you do that and you get so many credits.

Moderator
What about the notion of co requisite modules?

LECTURER 7
It's very difficult to answer that question. I would say leave it as open as possible.

LECTURER 4
Two skis, a foot in each. That sounds good.

Moderator
That was what we just did as a fat module or three co requisite modules.

Would we say yes that we think we can implement an integrated approach when we modularize?

01:51:00
LECTURER 5
I think maybe. They would all have to tie together... If they tie together there is no problem, well there is problems but you could make it very possible, if you link them across. But modules are supposed to be free floating. There would have to be a metal bar chaining them together.

LECTURER 1
I can see modularization easier to do in 2nd year. You could compartmentalize it more.

Any other comments?

LECTURER 4
I appreciate this particular session. That's very positive on this particular day to have this much of an opportunity to share and to be aware of what's out there in the minefield. So appreciate this meeting for a start and I hope it's the start of a few more.
Section 1 - The Project

1. How useful/relevant were the following resources or aspects of the project? Did they have an impact on your approach to the project? Please explain:
   
a. Photocopied handouts circulated at the beginning of the project: please tick if you did not read.

   b. Lecture by Teresa Breathnach on Interpretation Display and Visitor response at Wicklow’s Historic Gaol: please tick if you did not attend.

   c. Class by Catherine Bates on Information Design: please tick if you did not attend.

   d. Professional practice input and assignment from Tom O'Dowd.

   e. Library resources.

2. What additional resources/inputs for the project would you have found useful?
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4 What aspects of the field trip to Trim did you find useful?

5 What changes would you recommend to the field trip?

6 What aspects of this project as a whole should be kept the same?
Please explain:

7 What changes to the project as a whole would you recommend?
Please explain:
Section 2 - The role of the tutors

8. In what ways were the course tutors effective for this project?
   Please expand:

9. In what way could tutors have been more effective on this project?
   Please expand:
Section 3 - Your learning

10 To what extent did the project

a. develop your skills as a designer?

b. increase your knowledge about information design

c. increase your understanding of the design process?

11 Name three things you have learned as a result of working on this integrated project:
Section 4 - The impact on practice

12 How did working on one large integrated project affect your experience of the following areas in comparison to semester 1 where you worked on a number of different projects at the one time?

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<td>a. managing your college workload</td>
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<td>b. managing college deadlines</td>
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<td>c. making connections between subjects</td>
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<td>(graphic design, design history and theory, image-making, multimedia, professional practice)</td>
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<td>d. having time to engage with the design process</td>
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12. Did you make use of the scheduled ‘Independent learning’ days to work on the project? 
   yes ( ) no ( ) please tick
   
   Please expand:
13 Based on your experience, what are the benefits of working across subjects in an integrated way? (graphic design, design history and theory, image-making, multimedia, professional practice)

14 What changes to this way of working would you recommend?

15 Do you think understanding the connections between different areas/subjects is important in terms of your future practice within visual communication?
   yes ( ) no ( ) please tick. Please expand:
Any additional comments you wish to make
Information Design Pilot Integrated Project

Student Evaluation Results: Questions 1 – 11

Class: Visual Communication Year 3

Date: Monday 8 March 2004

Tutors: Brenda Dermody & Brenda Duggan
Section 1 - The Project

1. How useful/relevant were the following resources or aspects of the project?
   Did they have an impact your approach to the project? Please explain:

   a. photocopied handouts circulated at beginning of project: please tick if you did not read ( )

   A. Info on GPS V useful... didn’t end up using it but needed to find out about it anyway. Project brief a little vague, but it didn’t really matter as we wrote our own briefs anyway.

   B. The handouts were useful for getting the project started and helped me understand exactly what information architecture was.

   C. Not really because there was too much irrelevant information to read.

   D. I found them quite good for the images of interesting pieces of information design.

   E. NA

   F. Skimmed through them when we first got them, but didn’t find myself referring back to them throughout the project.

   G. I found these very useful, they gave me an explanation of information design which was of benefit to me during the whole project. They generated ideas for my approach to the project.

   H. Helped as an overview did not read all in depth.

   I. Did not read.

   J. Very helpful—because they had visual examples of info design.

   K. They were very useful, it was a great opportunity to learn where to find information on ‘Information graphics’ in different countries. The success of the simple approach found on some of the handouts was very influential.

   L. Overall these where interesting handouts that where a good start to generating ideas for the project.

   M. I found the photocopied handout on information design very useful. I only skimmed over the information on Trim itself. The handouts on information design however were enlightening and I have them filed away.

   N. I found the photocopies on design display both relevant and useful although I’m not sure if they had an impact on my final pieces. They helped in getting started though.

   O. Useful to give a basis from which to expand our research rather than just starting cold.

   P. I read through a few of them on Information architecture and found them helpful in terms of how to approach the project and what to bear in mind.

   Q. Did not read in great detail. Mainly just the first couple of pages of each article and maybe when flicking through it I saw something that caught my eye.

   R. They were useful at the beginning of the project as an introduction to information design.

   S. There was a huge chunk of info given — a little off-putting. But useful in that we all had access to it and didn’t have to put books on a waiting list in the library.

   T. I found the signage ones of the most benefit even though I did not pursue this medium.

   U. Yes... I was much more aware of information design & needs of potential audience.

   V. They were sort of useful—I used the information about GPS to decide that I didn’t want to use GPS in my project feeling it wasn’t necessary.

   W. They were useful for background information but a lot of reading.
b  lecture by Teresa Breathnach 'Interpretation Display and Visitor response at Wicklow’s Historic Gaol':
please tick if you did not attend ( )
A Really good. She was informative and it was useful to see how info design is carried out in the real world. She made some points about visitor attention spans that were useful.
B NA (I was sick)
C NA
D I found it good when she talked about visitor’s interest levels, what they will tolerate and what they won’t.
E NA
F Really enjoyed this lecture. Found it very interesting and useful.
G Yes Teresa’s lecture helped me generate ideas for Trim. She showed that information design need not just be purely signage, information design can be interactive (without the use of screens).
H NA
I It was an interesting and informative lecture which I was very glad I attended.
J Did not attend but read transcript. Interesting read though.
K This was relevant because we had the opportunity to see a design team’s approach, development and solution regards a project similar to our own.
L I took many notes from this lecture and yes it helped when I went to Trim.
M I actually found this lecture very useful. It surprised me how much information I got from her lecture. She raised some interesting points which I considered a number of times throughout the project.
N –
O Good to see the type and extent of research necessary.
P – did not attend
Q Did not attend
R It was useful, but parts of it were difficult to relate to the Trim project.
S – did not attend: valid excuse
T Puzzled me a bit.
U I didn’t think it was very relevant although it was interesting and made me think about how to make a visit to a historic site more interesting.
V I didn’t attend the lecture however I read a description of her project which was directly related to the approach I took.
W –
class by Catherine Bates on information design: please tick if you did not attend ( )

A NA
B Catherine Bates class further helped in understanding what information design was
C Quite good it helped us learn about information in design
D It didn't really help me about Trim but it was interesting in itself.
E Good - got you thinking about the generalities and practicalities of information design, got you enthusiastic.
F Attended the class but didn't feel it was of any use to me. Would have been better if the fundamental aspects of info design had been discussed rather than talking about something which I felt was irrelevant.
G This I found less relevant because we looked at train timetables and their development. Looking at other aspects of information design may have been more relevant.
H Relevant to information architecture.
I Not very informative no need.
J Did not know it was part of this project so it did not come into my thinking during the project - a pity now when I think of it.
K Yes it was helpful to get a few more points on how to go about things in our own project.
L Did not attend.
M The class with Catherine Bates while not as successful as the former, again raised some interesting questions about the navigation through information.
N This was an interesting class. In studying train timetables it helped to identify what works well and what does not.
O Very relevant and helpful giving a practical and rounded introduction to the ideas and methodologies of information design.
P I found this class helpful as she showed us how important it is to be clear and precise in one design solution. She showed us examples of train time tables and the layouts, which made me think how important layout really is.
Q -
R It had a small impact as we only looked at one area of information design - train timetables. Maps would have been more relevant to look at.
S - did not attend: valid excuse
T Can't remember.
U It was relevant but only one class was on the topic - not enough time. We looked at train time tables etc. not very useful.
V Very useful as it pointed out the importance of designing information well and how difficult a good solution is.
W Interesting and informative. It was good to see how information design has progressed in years and level of it now. We did a bit of group work and analysed a few design pieces I liked the involvement of that.
professional practice input and assignment from Tom O’Dowd

A This was OK. Maybe because it’s less interesting to me that I didn’t pay attention. Some useful info sank in though.

B I thought the assignment was useful but was difficult to do because of the large work load with the information design project.

C Learning about contract law didn’t really tie in with the project but assignment did.

D More of a hindrance than a help (extra work you forgot about until the end).

E Not particularly helpful – didn’t really have a major impact on the project.

F Didn’t feel it was of any benefit. Discussed some interesting topics however once again I didn’t find myself referring back to any of it.

G Very beneficial we completed time charts of our activities each week/day – this is something we will probably have to do in industry. He also got us to discuss points that we may need to talk about with client such as ownership and copyright, learned a lot by this activity.

H Not as relevant. This was not pushed enough as an important part of the project. Possibly got neglected by all.

I Not useful in relation to Trim but perhaps a practical way of seeing how to charge a client etc.

J Very practical and encouraging to have some solid pro. practice – eg if concepts etc. weren’t going to well at least something else would.

K Yes Tom’s class is brilliant. This project gears one towards the real world. It brought the idea to life because we had to calculate and contract the brief on a business level.

L This in a way was a good learning experience class. However it did not impact very much on the overall project. Yet in reflection it taught me a lot of what I would have to do in the ‘real world’. And that’s good.

M I could not see the relevance of this. However it was difficult to manage this assignment along with the main project.

N The assignment from Tom O’Dowd is relevant it is hard to create a timetable of hours spent on the project and there were so many and you would often forget to keep note.

O Less relevant, once off, well presented but not entirely helpful in the project.

P I found this somewhat helpful, taking into consideration the funding and legal side of the project.

Q Useful in some ways, made me notice how much or little time I spent on the project each week. And the cost.

R Extremely useful. Professional practice assignments forced us to consider our timescale and plan in advance exactly what we are going to do and how much it will cost.

S Useful – it shows you what happens out in the real world.

T Dodgey

U Very good as in the real world. We need to think about this stuff as well as the design work. But didn’t impact on the design work.

V Not really relevant. The assignment seemed too disconnected and a hassle to complete in addition to the main project.

W Didn’t find it very useful.
library resources

A Great for finding out about Trim. Also about information design but only on internet. Not enough books!
B The library helped for ideas (i.e. looking through design books etc.)
C Navigation in the library was harder than I expected, wasn’t sure where to look.
D Pretty good, just not enough on information design.
E Not great with respect to maps and iconography it didn’t have a whole lot – or at least I couldn’t find it.
F Great help, spent most of my time in the library for this project.
G The Library resources for this projects were quite poor, without the handouts I would have been really lost at the start of the project.
H Not very relevant perhaps used more so for style approach / mood boards etc. Trim was the main resource.
I Did not use much.
J OK – handouts more or less covered info design.
K The library resources have 100% improved. But it is up to the student to dig deep into what is there.
L Books that lecturers recommended were good. But trying to look for books on your own that may be relevant was difficult and time-consuming (wasting).
M I personally couldn’t keep out of the library during this project. I learned more during this project than any other. I even discovered sections of the library I never knew existed.
N I did not use a lot of material from the library I just glimpsed through various books on layouts.
O Helpful for visual stimulation, for ideas. More relevant for the image-making side (visual styles), although the books around information design and typography were also helpful.
P I didn’t find the library resources great I looked up a book on brochure design and there was only one, which was on loan. Also there were no books on map design or heritage trails.
Q Took out books on In Design as I haven’t used it 1st/2nd year. Also looked up books on maps etc. Also used the internet a lot.
R The library was useful at the beginning, but had little impact later on.
S Always very helpful – images - text - past design - maps, brochures etc. My main resource.
T Helpful
U Didn’t find a lot of relevant information in the library - would have helped if we had the books the photocopies came from.
V Internet was useful. Didn’t use books in library.
W Good for ideas. To look through books to know what the designers are doing.
2. What additional resources / inputs for the project would you have found useful?

A -

B. Maybe looking at more examples of what information design was might have helped.

C. Examples of contemporary brochures from historical sites.

D -

E. Maybe a little more time for development. Seemed to be research > development with no real time for development.

F. More lectures similar to the one given by Teresa Breathnach. I think it’s always good to see how design works in real life situations rather than just in the boundaries of college.

G. May be visiting a location in Dublin with good information design.

H. A lecture from an outside body from a heritage / tourism board. Make the brief appear as if it had come from this client.

I. Internet. To be shown past projects done by students at the beginning.

J. More encouragement on process and experimentation and less on end product and/or assessment / result.

K. The internet, Tourist board in Dublin. Researching what is on the market heritage towns. But I think this aspect of research is up to the student.

L. A presentation skills lecture in the first week not three days before we hand in the project.

M. Maybe more outside input like Teresa Breathnach lecture. Outside case studies would be particularly useful.

N. It would have been useful to see an example of a heritage site in Ireland which has the elements we needed to create for Trim. (A working example)

O -

P. I found the internet very useful, and also my own collection of books at home - I found these especially useful and gave me most of my inspiration. I borrowed a book from a friend called ‘Der Grosse Kaim Atlas’ which I found brilliant as inspiration for my map.

Q -

R. I would have liked to have the resources for book binding etc.

S. Other tours of ruins - so you can compare information technics (can also be done in our spare time!)

T. Free photocopying, extra trips to Trim (free)

U. Local libraries had more books on information design.

V. Information of tours given by other castles and a trip to Wicklow gaol would have been particularly useful.

W -
What aspects of the field trip to Trim did you find useful?

A. Everything. Talking to locals, taking photos, strolling around all gave a good insight as to what the town was like. It was good to have Tom and John there too.

B. Going on the heritage trail set out for tourists was useful and also the tourist office was useful for information.

C. The library, tourist office.

D. I found the fact you were allowed to roam free and choose your own direction useful. I like the fact that there were lecturers in the background too.

E. The early start.

F. Being able to wander about Trim town. The fact that there was no restrictions as to what road we could take with this project.

G. The existing booklets were very useful for research. Tom and John really pushed us to come up with an original concept...they were open to anything.

H. Ability to do first hand research got us much more in touch with the project. Photography / illustration was an essential part.

I. Personal contact with project. Feeling of reality. Getting photographs and information first hand. Collecting brochures and seeing the sites.

J. Exercise. Practical nature. Getting comfortable with working in the public eye.

K. I found almost all aspects of the trip to Trim useful. It was great for photographs, first hand information from the locals. It gave us a real feel of what had to be redesigned.

L. All aspects

M. The brief itself was very good. The time provided was very generous. The fact that it was the only thing we had to do was good because there was no outside pressure. It was a short distance to travel.

N. Just the opportunity to take the photos and get an impression of the town.

O. Seeing what we were trying to promote was helpful. Working on our photographs and drawings later re-enforced this as we tried to design.

P. All aspects were useful. We were able to research the town by visiting all aspects of the sites and photographing them in detail, and also meeting the locals and listening to their opinions.

Q. I liked the way we were free to do what we wanted and it wasn't like a guided tour. Tom and John were always around for advice or directions. Everyone was taking a different angle so not everyone were taking the same photos or at the same sites so that was good.

R. The fact that we didn't have to stay together all of the time was good, so we were free to explore whatever aspect of Trim we liked the most. It was useful visiting Trim on three consecutive days. By the last day, I had been everywhere and taken lots of photographs and drawings, so just had a small amount of info to gather.

S. Seeing the surroundings really helped you get an idea of what would and wouldn't work. Also to get the look and feel of the town and people that lived there and visited.

T. Interaction with the town seeing first hand what was going on.

U. Walking round Trim first as of all as a visitor/tourist, get their perspective.

V. Being able to explore the site fully to take in what you wanted.

W. To get the feel of the place. To walk around the town and be on the site was good in terms of knowing what exactly was in Trim.
What changes would you recommend to the field trip?

A. None really. However the castle wasn't open on the field trip days, so I had to go again on the weekend. I did this three times because of good weather etc. so not really a problem.

B. An organised visit to the castle as I thought this would have been useful and also interesting.

C. Maybe a guided tour to show us every site we need to know about. Specifications about type of photos, sketches we are supposed to do.

D. Maybe a time everyday that people could meet if they chose with lecturers to discuss ideas.

E. Maybe longer there i.e. week dedicated to research. Results were expected too soon. Spent too long getting accustomed to idea of integrated approach. Should have had more time in Trim.

F. The fact that we went three days in a row didn't work too well I felt. It would have been good if there were a few days in between in which we could think and decide on what direction we wanted to go on this project. I didn't know what I was looking for and as a result spent a lot of time just wandering about. – pretty confused. :

G. We may have benefited from a trip to the castle.

H. A trip to the castle was a major need it should have been scheduled appropriately into the timetable.

I. Three days was too much. We really only needed to do one or two. Perhaps it would have been better to go once a week for three weeks. That would have been much more beneficial.

J. Maybe a closer watch in the early stages from tutors to see that you do what you like and not what they like (even though they may well be the same thing).

K. Sunshine - none

L. We should have visited on a day when the castle was open. A tour of the castle could and should have been arranged by tutors.

M. None really

N. Just to pick a better field really. Many sites in Ireland have badly designed tourist info. I don't understand why we were assigned Trim.

O. More input from the design side.

P. I would recommend that we book a tour of the castle if it was done again.

Q. To spread it out a bit more. Maybe just a two-day visit for the first time, and spread the other two out over the few weeks left.

R. I would definitely arrange to visit Trim when the castle is open and a tour available. I would monitor the weather forecast and arrange to go to Trim on a bright, sunny day. This would result in much brighter photographs that give a better impression of Trim.

S. Organise a tour of the sites to make it a little more interesting and then you could go around on your own with a better knowledge.

T.

U. The field trips were fine - up to us to get on and do the research.

V. Maybe a trip at the weekend as the castle was closed during the week. And it being the main attraction, it would have been nice to have had the tour.

W. That they be a lot more spread out rather than three days in a row.
What aspects of this project as a whole should be kept the same?

Please explain:

A I thought that all in all the project was great. Merging the different classes was really useful and it was good to keep thinking about the one brief for a few weeks. I found I got more done that I would normally.

B Using Trim as the focus town for the project was interesting. The timetable and its layout were both useful and helpful.

C The two or three day trips.

D The multimedia classes. The field trips. The crits.

E The structure was helpful with two days in studio two days not, and the crits.

F The fact that we could be as innovative as we wanted to be it was great.

G I think Trim was an excellent location for this project. Full of historical info and demonstrated very poor information design.

H Ability to visit Trim to create own research. Independent study days.

I In combining image-making, typography and maybe multimedia.

J Site visit.

K Field trip, guest lecturer, general concept for the project was good.

L It was great how tutors where in on the same project.

M The time is correct. 8 weeks was the proper time. The integration of different disciplines was also a great way of working.

N I'm not sure I thought anything was different from other projects we were given. I don't think that working under five lecturers worked. It was impossible trying to please them all and it was pointless trying to fight for your own design.

O The integration with image-making was very successful, good not to be making images in isolation while allowing them some input into the design side.

P The timing and the visit to Trim. I found these helped a lot throughout the project. If the time was any shorter I couldn't have given the same attention to the project.

Q The idea of information design and the choice we had about what we were going to design. It would have been terrible if we had been given four things specifically to design. It was interesting that everyone's was so different even though we were all handed the same brief.

R The field trip should remain taking place on three days in a row. Independent days for working were really important. It was great doing an integrated project as it was easier only having to focus on one project at a time. I would leave everything the same except the changes listed below.

S Working with something real - like Trim, was exciting, because you could associate working in a company on a project like that.

T The pressure.

U Field trip, final crit, professional practice. different tutors advising.

V The freedom to choose your media. The freedom to chose you theme. Having the finished project over four areas was good.

W To go to the site - very useful. The information classes - GPS, information architecture etc.
What changes to the project as a whole would you recommend?

Please explain:

A –

B Showing more examples of what information design is and also if possible past projects by students on information design or relevant projects.

C A clearer explanation about what’s required as regards type of sketches, photos etc.

D More time with lecturers! The opportunity to discuss work more than once a week if desired.

E Maybe have more integration between the studio work and the research ie have it so that the teachers on site in Trim had an input in the studio work going on.

F The project was probably a bit too broad. It was difficult to decide on a target audience and what approach you wanted to take.

G I think too much time was spent during the research stage.

H Perhaps hand-up project in stages to help keep students on track. A workshop (intense overview of main packages) in the first week or two.

I Don’t involve theory subjects. Get the project moving faster at the start. Have more contact with lecturers. Monday and Tuesday didn’t feel like enough.

J When I think of it now, maybe a quicker timescale, with less focus on a finished piece and then maybe time for a couple of these.

K As a whole, by the end I didn’t like all our subjects integrated. There was no break from Trim, it was constant ending and beginning.

L The whole idea of all classes dealing with one project was a great idea and I looked forward to that. But the project was so big it was hard to enjoy this luxury. Plus it got to the stages where you could get four different opinions from four different tutors about the one thing. More communication between tutors may help next time.

M I felt my delivery was a bit stretched to try encompass all four media. Maybe that was my own fault, but maybe restricting it to three types would have been better. Have three really good ones the 4 ‘okay’ ones. Also maybe keeping a couple of subjects free from the project – like professional practice – maybe break the project up a bit.

N I prefer projects that are for one particular class.

O –

P Maybe we could be allocated times to talk to each of the lecturers. I found I was coming in and sitting around for hours and not getting enough time to talk about my work or get advice.

Q I don’t really know. Maybe

R It would be good to see all of the tutors at regular intervals. (i.e. we did not see Tom and John much after the field trip). The independent project work day could be rotated so that we were not always missing out on the same tutor. It would be more helpful if we could get more work done during class time. All my spare time was spent on the project. This became tiring. The impact of professional practice assignments was good, but it would have been useful for Brendan and Tom to actually see our projects and give their opinion on them.

S Maybe shorten the length with three pieces of media.

T Get the macs fixed and a kettle in the studio to eliminate precious time lost in canteen.

U More time to work on it by ourselves. A lot of time was wasted waiting to talk to tutors and travelling.

V –

W –
Section 2 - The role of the tutors

8 In what ways were the course tutors effective for this project?

Please expand:

A It was good to hear different viewpoints, even if they did disagree sometimes, it wasn't confusing like I thought it would be. Instead it actually helped to decide on approaches to design and media.

B I felt Brenda Duggan helped a lot with the digital aspect of the project because we reviewed relevant software which helped. Brenda and Jacques also helped with individual consultation.

C They all tied in with project.

D They were helpful when we saw them. They gave honest opinions (in so far as I can tell) They ran the project smoothly.

E Multimedia workshops were geared to help as project progressed. Print-based lecturers were available when you needed help.

F Going through Dreamweaver etc. was helpful. Giving you ideas if you were completely stuck.

G They were available everyday for guidance if needed. But not for long because there is so many of us. All questions in relation to programming the multimedia screens were addressed.

H Useful for their overall help with finalising design and executing them adequately in the way we wanted to. Helped us improve standards for presentation very well.

I Giving advice about colour etc.

J That they know their job.

K They were very critical. This can be effective or not effective. Some were encouraging and guided us in the right direction. They showed us new resource material.

L It was very easy to get somebody to talk to about the project because all the tutors were in on the same one. The input of the tutors was impressive and really helped and made a big difference.

M The lecturers were very helpful along the duration of the project. Many questions were brought up when I showed my work and this definitely helped me along the process.

N Going through programmes like Dreamweaver was helpful but most of the work was done alone so contact was brief.

O Design tutors were helpful for suggesting the visual look and typographic feel of the project. Brenda Duggan was effective in reinforcing the planning content management and structuring side of things. John was helpful in encouraging more madcap approaches that could apply and relate to our own native style of illustration.

P I did find the workshops on Flash helpful, and I found they were helpful through the crit. The tutors were also helpful in Trim when they explained about the GPS and told us what we should be researching and photographing.

Q They worked well together to come up with the project but often their opinions clashed but you just have to convince them that you're right or come to a compromise. They were always around to help even on days we weren't scheduled for. They always picked out things (faults) in your work that you hadn't noticed which was good.

R Their professional opinions are always effective. They provided us with useful notes. After looking at our individual projects they gave us ideas on how to expand on what we had already done, without telling us exactly what to do. They gave us ideas on different approaches we could take. They gave us the freedom to be as creative as we liked, there were very few restrictions.

S They always had constructive criticism which helped guide you in your designs. They acted a little like the client which was helpful.

T I liked Tom and John on site that was good. They were the proper men for the job. Brenda and Jacques gave a lot of good tips too and I also re-learned a lot of Flash and Dreamweaver I had forgotten during Brenda's class.

U Different views from diff angles - Imagemaking etc helped final solution be more balanced.

V Great for feedback and testing ideas.

W you get different views. As everyone has opinions and different ones also encouraging.
In what way could tutors have been more effective on this project? Please expand:

A. Maybe if all tutors had been present at the final crit.
B. Critical reviews helped so maybe more critical reviews individually from tutors.
C. They could have seen us all equally for the same length of time.
D. They could offer consultation more regularly.
E. Maybe the on site tutors could be included in crits so that they could help better on site. Ie you wouldn’t have to explain your whole approach and how it looks in Trim.
F. The tutors could have worked together more. It was very difficult when 1 tutor liked the way you did something but then another tutor wasn’t satisfied with it and asking you to change something about it. Also it would have been great if John Short and Tom Kelly had more input than they did for this project. Didn’t feel there was enough consultation throughout this project.
G. More time available to spend with each student.
H. Organised extra workshops for digital media.
I. Been more involved. I didn’t feel the tutors were involved in the individual projects as they have been in others. Multimedia in a computer room. Been more clear about brief and what we’re to do. I found it a bit hazy.
J. More encouraging and less domineering or hierarchical or something to that effect.
K. Sometimes if they were less critical. Some students work on being torn down to make them work, other students need encouragement to get the best out of them. Lecturers need to know their students better. For me this would have made the project more effective. Maybe some of their own examples of good navigation and GPS.
L. The only thing that was at fault was that each tutor would contradict the other on opinions of the same thing. Perhaps this was lack of discussion between the tutors. But this fault sometimes made things confusing.
M. Although it didn’t happen to me, the danger of the project like this, I believe, is the threat of many different opinions stifling the student. Instead to combat this one idea may be to have the student meet all the lecturers at one time. This would free up the time of the student then for the rest of the week to continue working then report back a week later. The beauty of this is that students could have appointments at different days each week. This would work a bit better than one interim crit. With more time for work students could then have group crits at a set time during the week as well.
N. It wouldn’t have been such a pain if they were a little more flexible and to see them more than the once-a-week time given. Because of the week gap you could have a lot of work done just to have to do it all over again.
O. If there were more coordination between them. It would have been nice to be able to approach 2 different tutors with the same material and not receive polar contradictions in their response.
P. I feel more individual attention could be given to the students, if possible.
Q. Maybe if they had been together more because it was still all separate classes with particular tutors so there was never really an overall opinion along the way.
R. It would have been better to see all of the tutors on a regular basis, rather than some more than others.
S. They need to meet more as a group with the students. Some tutors had a lot more influence that others which led to a one sided view on a design. One may say they liked an approach while the others did not. And although it’s the students choice as it is their design they want to please to get a good mark.
T. Dunno maybe give students more freedom and forget rules of layout you never know you might just turn out ok.
U. Need not just criticise work but explain why and be more positive. ‘It’s not working but’
V. More attention on how to use programmes trial and error method can be time consuming.
W. -
Section 3 - Your learning

10 To what extent did the project
devolve your skills as a designer?

A learned a lot about computer programmes
B I felt because we were designing alone without any specifications and were free to do what we wanting (sic) was
daunting at first but helped develop a lot of skills.
C The brochure and website did develop skills as a designer. However, if one was more interested in illustration or
photography, these came second fiddle to structured ‘design’.
D It allowed me to research elements of information design.
E Gave a better idea of how design media work together.
F Became more confident on the computer
G Improved research and development skills. Improved presentation skills. Developed my time management skills. I
did feel at the end of the project that my solution was not as experimental as it could have been. I felt that I had
spent a long time on researching but not as long developing an innovative solution.
H Helped execute a major design area from idea to presentation. Helped run an idea across a broad run of final
pieces from web to storybooks.
I I learned a lot about photoshop and the colour printer in the library. I learned the importance and difference a
subtle change in colour can make.
J learned more about what I like.
K I have a better understanding of the computer programmes, as I was constantly learning. My editing and decision-
making has definitely improved. I am more aware of good design. My Art eye has learned to see more.
L Quite a lot
M I can say without a shadow of a doubt that this has been one of the most important projects I have done. I have
learned more about proper design methodology and more importantly have developed and adapted for
myself. I’m not saying I have all the answers but I have definitely advanced.
N I think my skills have developed a little. I learned how to turn something boring into something interesting.
O Since coordinating different aspects of a project is such a major part of what being a designer is about it was very
useful.
P I felt because the project was quite broad I learned to narrow down the information and discovered different ways
of working with different media.
Q It improved my computer skills. Working mainly in Illustrator, InDesign and Flash it was easy to get confused
jumping from one to another so it made me work a little harder to learn more about each package.
R Quite a lot. It was good to learn about the professional requirements such as a design proposal etc.
S Balancing (blancing) out your work – not getting stuck on one design. Integrating all skills into a design.
T Immensely - pressure, organisation + planning.
U I learned about balancing a number of different design problems on one project. I learned how to go about
getting a consistent look across different types of media. I able to bring all that I know together.
V Forced to apply your ideas and solutions across different media - very enjoyable. Learned more about typography
grids layouts book binding, colour and type and time management.
W In some aspects to finish the pieces to a higher standard of quality.
b increase your knowledge about information design
A A lot. Interesting and informative to research different methods. Also Teresa Breathnach lecture V. useful.
B We had to read about information design and fully understand it to do the project correctly so it increased my knowledge very much so.
C It did increase my knowledge of information design.
D It increased them quite a lot. I had never really come into contact with the area properly before.
E It made me more aware of it – although it would be interesting to know more detail about exactly how people read information design, like the psychology behind it.
F It did to a certain extent. Would have been good to have a few classes dedicated solely to information design.
G Previous to this project I had little or no knowledge about information design. After this project I feel much more informed about this area of design.
H Hierarchy of information and information design was an important part of this project. More emphasis should have been put on it:
I I learned what information design is. Good and bad information design. Learned about designing a series that appeals to a certain audience.
J Yes – couldn’t not. Also note: found seeing other students attempts at info design very helpful in its clarification.
K Yes I suppose the more you practice the better you get. As with information design, my system of project approach has improved in many ways.
L immensely
M I have taken great steps into learning the correct implementation of information design. I also have a much greater spectrum of the variety of information consumption.
N In my particular project I used a very small amount of written text. This was after studying the present info available and I noticed how tourists tend not to read the giant columns of text that are laid out for them.
O Greatly
P It definitely increased my knowledge on this because we had to design a broad range of solutions for a broad audience and make it easy for them to understand.
Q It increased my knowledge information design is all around us all the time and we don’t even notice, or I never knew it was information design. It is an area of design I would never have thought of before but now my eyes are open I notice a lot more.
R A lot I didn’t know much about it before.
S Very! Made me open my eyes to signs and maps and different layouts all around me.
T well put it this way its the first time I heard the words together.
U A lot - didn’t know much before.
V before this project I had never heard or thought about information design I now appreciate maps.
W Overall I learned how it should work, maybe not so much in the project but maybe now I’ve completed one project I feel the next one it should be more useful. Now I know how it works in relation to a project.
A. Because it was the same brief for the few weeks it felt more like what would happen in industry.

B. Yes because it was the longest project to date and was a more realistic professional project it greatly increased my understanding of the process.

C. A lot.

D. Marginally. I didn’t really discover anything new in this area.

E. Definitely improved it, the stages or at least steps were more distinct when you saw them across a range of media.

F. Gave me a clearer insight into understanding the design process.

G. It was good to work on a project for so long because you develop a feel for how it might be to work for a long time on a job in industry.

H. Better than many projects before this one

I. I developed this a lot. I worked in my notebook all along, which helped develop ideas. The information architecture helped to define my audience and what I was doing.

J. Lots of ways. On a professional: timetable, presentation, critique. On a personal: what I like, what I don’t like

K. I have learned that the design process is difficult challenging, exhausting but it makes me tick. To I have probably learned that the design approach needs patience, confidence (sic) and passion

L. Immensely

M. I can really appreciate the importance of planning. I started just wanting to design and get to finished product. Through this project re-learned the importance of process. I put this down as the most important thing I have learned about (?) re-learned.

N. It increased my understanding that your design will not be liked by everyone and so compromise.

O. Somewhat. Some of the working methods and practices proposed conflicted and detracted from the methods that I would be more comfortable with and that prove more effective for me. Nonetheless, it has helped reform some of my worst habits.

P. Because we were to design 4 solutions for this project, it taught me to work step by step and definitely increased my research.

Q. Not too much. I’m still not too sure on the design document and report, or what you are looking for from it. The last time we did it we were in a group so it was easy to over look it or work it out between us.

R. Quite a lot.

S. Indeed! It showed me to take each step at a time and don’t be afraid to go back a step and look at all your work and their connection.

T. -

U. Yeah a bit but found juggling the different pieces hard.

V. The project helped clarify a number of questions I had form the last project especially in the areas of using Flash and book layout.

W. Definitely helped understand how it should work and you must structure time and getting things done for certain times.
11 Name three things you have learned as a result of working on this integrated project:

A That timetabling is very important. Lots about information design. About GPS.

B How to manage my time correctly. How to properly present my work. Understanding and dealing with a long project professionally.

C Emphasis is placed on design of something rather than anything else. Keeping track of time is important. All subjects can be used simultaneously on a project.

D The level of people attention spans. The history of Trim. How to produce a site in imageready.

E How to organise my approach ie give it steps. That print and screen based design differ in terms of the way they convey information and that they offer separate possibilities which can be made use of to a better overall effect.

F To manage my time better. To not always rely on and go with what others think would work well. To have faith in my own judgement of things.

G How to apply a coherent design approach to my work, follow my design solution through print, screen, signage etc.. Improved my time management skills. learned to push myself and work over the eight weeks.

H Grouped ideas. Presentation skills. Categories of age groups and needs. Focus

I How to bring imagery and type together. Photography skills. Photoshop skills. Different formats for designing leaflets etc.

J How to make a PDF presentation. That to use as much hand drawn illustration from now on as possible. A general improvement of skills.

K Decision-making. Better design approach to my projects. How to make better grids.

L The amount of work that has to be done in a short time. You must be focussed at all times.

M Implementing my different strengths into one process. Time and project management. The importance of process and research as well utilising my notebooks to generate ideas. Sacrificing ideas I liked but ones which did not work.

N - patience - how to compromise - how to work with stress.

O -

P How to design for a wide audience - I learned a lot about macromedia Flash - how to work in steps.

Q That it is very important to manage my time well. Give equal time to research and development as to actually designing. Be more aware of what is needed and practical rather than what I think looks good or is a good idea.

R Timing is very important. It is important not to forget who your target audience is – always keep them in mind. Don't spend too long on one aspect of the project, as the other areas will be neglected.

S Working on your own needs a lot of discipline. You need to focus on all areas don't forget one. i.e. images type media, layout etc. Research for a big project needs time you can't rush it. I was late starting and caught up quick but ended in not research enough had to go back later and look at books carefully.

T It's hard to please everyone. Follow your own instincts dropping my idea to work further on different ones.

U Learned how to make use of different media for design solution. 2 what it would be like to work for a client who wants several pieces of media designed. 3 How to get a consistent look across different media.

V How to create buttons and connect scenes in Flash, how to layout pages for printing, how to bind a book.

W To be structured in your time. To have a main theme running through all pieces. not to design separately, to work independently.
Information Design Pilot Integrated Project

Student Evaluation Responses: Questions 12 – 16

Class: Visual Communication Year 3

Date: Monday 8 March 2004
Section 4 - The impact on practice

12 How did working on one large integrated project affect your experience of the following areas in comparison to semester 1 where you worked on a number of different projects at the one time?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>more difficult</th>
<th>same</th>
<th>improved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>managing your college workload</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>please expand:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A 5) I was more focused and so got more into what I was doing. Didn’t seem like working somehow.
B 1) It was difficult because I was not used to working on one large project
C 3) -
D 3) I worked the same as I always do
E 4) Slightly improved because there were no clashing deadlines but there was more to deal with and more to learn
F 3) I didn’t feel that I handled my time any better than usual
G 5) Previous to this project it was very hard to manage the work load. There was too much going on in each subject
H 2) more difficult towards the end. There seemed to be much more work even if we had attempted areas individually.
I 3) Same. It was easier at the start of project but I had a lot of sleepless nights and long days in the second half so overall the same but more intense.
J 5) Easier because you only really have to think of one thing
K 2) I felt by the end I had no time for other projects, life or laughter. It was very intense.
L 4) To an extent it improved as you didn’t have to worry about what you were working on each different day. But it still a hard work load to keep on top of.
M 5) Something I definitely appreciate now. Its not something I have perfected. But through this project I am learning how to perfect it.
N 1) with some lecturers it was fine to see them just once a week but in other cases it would have been more helpful to see them more often.
O 2) When I was stuck in a rut on a particular aspect of the project there was no release (other subjects to distract) to allow me to refocus.
P 5) I felt more relaxed because I wasn’t constantly thinking of different projects. I knew what was to be done throughout the whole thing.
Q 3) I think everyone still felt they had to have something done for a certain day/tutor. Well I did.
R 5) The weekly timetable meant I always managed my workload.
S 4) - 5) You only had one project so you were never behind, but then you could easily slip cos you can get very bored of the same notebook.
T 4) -
U 1) Because a particular part wasn’t due in separately, neglected certain parts of project. More time spent on other things not spread evenly.
V 5) Being able to focus on one project at a time is far better than having a collection of deadlines – you get far more work done.
W 2) Was difficult in the fact that every piece wasn’t necessarily worked on, on certain days. Trying to get work done on all pieces equally didn’t work with me.
A (4) This was OK normally I panic a bit coming up to a crit, but I was confident that my research and development were sufficient for a presentation.

B 2) It was difficult because I felt there was so much work to do and it was daunting.

C 1)

D 3) It was pretty much the same. the clear cut timetable was helpful though.

E 4) The deadlines actually helped structure project rather than helping to disrupt another like would happen in semester 1

F 3) I seem to work better under stress maybe not a good thing. Made deadlines ok though.

G 5) It was much easier just to work to one deadline instead of 3.

H 3) Less deadlines to work towards didn't make it easier.

I 2) The deadline popped up very suddenly.

J 5) Easier, one timetable.

K 4) This is difficult to answer due to the fact that other project lecturers have given us extensions because we told them we had too much on.

L 4)

M 4) I made the deadline as a result of process. It definitely helped me.

N 3)

O 4) With one major submission it allowed me to focus on getting everything done to as high a standard as possible without worrying and detracting from other subjects.

P 5) Because of the crit and presentations, this helped me to be more organised and not to be rushing at the last minute.

Q 4) It was one deadline so it was easier to concentrate on one thing.

R 4) It was a lot easier than semester 1 but still a bit difficult.

S 3) I usually always make the deadline.

T 4)

U 1) Good to have only one deadline and stay focused on it but then even more stressful knowing that if you fail you fail three subjects' projects.

V 5) With many deadlines you forget what project has to be in first and it's a bit stressful trying to juggle 4 different working ideas, trying to be creative and original at the same time.

W 3) Fine, though I felt I put more work in to some areas than others, which I didn't like as I would have liked them all to be of an equal standard.
more difficult  |  same  |  improved  
---|---|---
c making connections between subjects  | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5

(creative design, design history and theory, image-making, multimedia, professional practice)

please expand:

A 5) this was great, hearing opinions from tutors about elements from another subject was really good
B 5) I felt this was greatly improved because never before had all subjects been integrated and I learned a lot from this process
C 5) 
D 3) I already thought that way but I'm sure it helped many others
E They helped explain the needs of the project i.e. to design information we had to understand the theory behind it and multimedia and print became more closely linked in terms of capacity to organise info and image making was put in context. First time really using image and type in a print setting.
F This project allowed more for making connections bet subjects.
G It was great to have produced something in the end which had an aspect of each discipline in. Previous to this project I had never done this. i.e. my typography never had imagery in it.
H 5) this is where the integrated projects became essential
I 4) It was easier having one subject throughout but also head-wrecking cos all I could think of was Trim. It was hard not getting a break from it.
J 4) Better because you have to do all of them at the one time.
K 4) Connections were made because the project overlapped. This happened automatically.
L 5) This was a fantastic (in my opinion) project for this particular reason. The link between projects. "Now I know why I'm studying that!" came to mind a few times.
M 4) I could see the connections. Sometimes it was difficult to make the connections but it was good practice.
N 3) 
O 5) Very useful the theory tie in gave a good grounding for the project. The connection with image making was long overdue and integration with multimedia allowed a more universal visual style.
P 5) Because we were working on the one project, all areas of it could be explored deeper and I found it more interesting because we were constantly talking about one subject.
Q 5) This was the main area that was good. I liked the way I had to think about one designed piece in relation to the other, and whether they complemented each other or not.
R 5) The only subjects I didn't make connections with were design history and theory.
S 4) You had to use all of the classes so it just happened.
T 5) –
U 5) each subject was more relevant and helped so we focus more
V 5) Our project connected with all of the above although it was difficult in the area of professional practice – was not quite sure how to schedule it.
W 4) It was really a learning curve as before we had never done something like this. To be working on the same project in each area gave overall view how to work in each discipline.
more difficult  same  improved

d having time to engage with the design process  1  2  3  4  5

please expand:

A  4) Found a lot more through professional practice classes, and could relate them to the project.
B  4) It was improved because all my time went on one project instead of a number and so I could concentrate more on the design process.
C  3)
D  4) I enjoyed it more because it wasn't as stressful as before.
E  3) Lots of time was given to organising briefs and crits which really helped to solidify the process.
F  4) Because this was such a large project it was easier to engage with the design process.
G  3) I didn't feel that this project (considering the amount of time spent researching) gave enough time to design development and exploration, but this is often a problem in college because we are so limited in time.
H  2) -
I  4) We had more time for research doing information architecture etc.
J  4) Better because you can by now work more independently and its more immersive.
K  3) For Trim the engagement with the design process could not have been avoided as it was everywhere.
L  3) I still feel as a result of the workload this remained the same.
M  4) There was plenty of time to engage in the design practice and the process was something I very much enjoyed.
N  3) -
O  4) Great.
P  5) Again, working step by step definitely helped. Thinking of four solutions that were all different expanded my knowledge of the design process as well.
Q  4) This was a more official project so I did think more about the design process than I would have with other projects. And I did my research first before I started designing.
R  5) It's a lot easier to do this with only one project to focus on.
S  3) Just the workload or notebook was a lot fatter than usual.
T  4) -
U  2) Again found scheduling time for each thing difficult. Some pieces were more developed than others.
V  5) I was able to develop and expand my ideas and themes with time for feedback and development.
W  2) Not so much because I was just trying to get ideas concepts together and then working on them.
12 Did you make use of the scheduled 'independent learning' days to work on the project?

Yes ( ) No ( ) Please tick

Please expand:

A  Yes - Used them to go to Trim again, work at home on computer, get stuff printed.
B  Yes - It was very useful to have independent working days to get the work done and not to have to go to class
C  Yes - I always divided these days up as I chose. They were very helpful.
D  Yes - Normally stayed at home to work on the projects
E  Yes - I could have used them better, but, I did use them. I think this project for me was all about change. I've taken a step, a very long one. I've learned a lot which I can bring forward with me.
F  Yes - Some days I did work and thought about the project but some days I became fed up with the project. oops!!
G  Yes - I always spent my project work days working on the project. They were very helpful. The project would have been much weaker without them.
H  Yes - Most of the time
I  Yes - I worked 5 days a week on project from start
J  Yes - Just worked whenever we had a chance so a special day off or not meant work
K  Yes - I spent hours on college. After college, at night non stop trying to push myself on for the project, even with the independent learning days.
L  Yes - Yes towards the end (of course!) but a great idea for the future.
M  Yes - I could have used them better, but, I did use them. I think this project for me was all about change. I've taken a step, a very long one. I've learned a lot which I can bring forward with me.
N  Yes - Most work was done outside class hours
O  Yes - They were useful for library time and research, but occasionally were subsumed into elective preparation.
P  Yes - I found these very helpful as I had more time to work independently without having to travel in and out again. I could get up in the mornings and set my mind on what I had to achieve for a particular day.
Q  Yes - Because we were meant to be in college anyway, I mostly did work on those days.
R  Yes - All of my spare time was spent doing this project. I think it's easier to work at home.
S  Yes - But I much prefer having structured class because you can wander a little as self discipline at this age can be easily distracted.
T  Yes - At one point I was totally bogged down and only for the time off college I was able to go down to the national library and around town researching the project. This opened up the whole project again.
U  Yes - These days were the days I got most work done. I could focus more and use the whole day on the project. No wasting time waiting. travelling.
V  Yes - There's only so much you can do in college, the rest of it, in fact, the bulk of it is finished at home.
W  Yes - As said before we have to be able to make certain decisions ourselves. They may not be the right ones but eventually you learn.
13 Based on your experience what are the benefits of working across subjects in an integrated way? (graphic design, design history and theory, image-making, multimedia, professional practice)

A Hearing opinions and getting advice from a broad number of tutors. Having one theme enabled you to focus more.

B Working across subjects in an integrated way helps to create an overall greater knowledge of the subjects being used together and widens your knowledge and skills.

C The process brings you closer to industry and allows you (yourself) to choose what areas you are good at and those you are not. It is a vastly superior way of learning.

D You can create a more overall message and you learn more about each subject even just in terms of how they correlate.

E It allows you to see what your strong points are in design and where you feel more confident with regards to being a designer.

F This is how we will probably work in the future, so it's a good learning experience.

G Gaps between the subjects closed down to a certain degree. Subjects overlapped. It's good practice for the real world. I loved combining my photographs with my other subjects.

H Benefits are that there is a constant link in the work flow. One theme one concept, a flow of fonts or font, colour and images. So this did help improve the design as one only had one focus.

I This gives a feeling of unity to what we are studying.

J Seeing how things work together. Using things that you are strong in to help something else. How to make an idea work over different media.

K This is probably a more realistic approach.

L Manifold see above

M If all of these are discussed within the confines of one project like this one, I find them more interesting as they are being aimed at real life experiences.

N Mind on one thing at all times. No confusion between different projects and deadlines. But on the other hand I was going to bed dreaming of Trim that never happened with other projects.

O Only one project to think about leads to more ideas.

P Instead of being separate classes as they used to be, they became one class and you can start dealing with managing them together like you will in a company.

Q You know exactly where you are in each class.

R Helps the student see how 'real' projects would work. Clients would want different things designed. More realistic. Everything learnt is relevant to one particular topic therefore more deeper learning. Helps students develop ability to handle these different aspects of design together.

S You get to see how you use information differently in all the subjects.
What changes to this way of working would you recommend?

A. Not much. It's up to the individual as to how they work, and you learn a lot to improve on for your next project. Personally, I found that I have to improve on my time keeping and on my documentation, but everyone is going to be different.

B. At the beginning of the project it would have been useful to have been shown more examples of information design and also good ways of presenting work to a client would have been useful (maybe seeing student portfolios at the beginning).

C.

D. More consultation if required by the student.

E. Maybe the contextual studies should be dealt with in the studio? Alongside specific design problems/tasks.

F. Focusing more on what you feel you are stronger at doing. If you're better at illustration, then focus on that rather than just half heartedly working on something that doesn't interest you.

G. I would have liked each lecturer at the group tutorials... everyone's input would have been beneficial.

H. Less intense - better timetable workout.

I. More time. More individual contact with tutors (I felt very distanced throughout).

J. None.

K. If the lecturers gave us individual brief on what they want designed for Trim. This would reduce a little of the workload and maybe steer us in a clearer direction. It was very much 'do it yourself' for most of the Trim project.

L. More time or else less workload so you can get all the benefits. Quality not quantity should be thought about from time to time.

M. None that I can think of.

N. I think this broad way of working is fine as it is. It worked well for me to decide what media to use.

O. Some subject to distract occasionally more group crits. Input and crits from image-making folk.

P. I wouldn't recommend any.

Q. There's not much to change. If there's going to be an integrated project it is going to be all you think about and I think it's an individual opinion whether you like it.

R. None, except I would have liked to have had the resources for book binding or instructions on how to get it done professionally.

S. I'm not sure but maybe two projects of integrated classes with a smaller workload may help so you have something to swap to and from – not getting bored of the same project.

T. Dunno.

U. More time to work on own. Less class time. Short and relevant lectures.

V. Better explanation of how professional practice comes into it.

W.
Do you think understanding the connections between different areas/subjects is important in terms of your future practice within visual communication?

yes ( ) no ( ) please tick Please expand:

A Definitely its more professional to understand different areas of design, even if you specialise at one thing.
B Yes understanding the connections between different areas/subjects is essential.
C
D yes - If you work in any area of visual communication you will need to have at least a basic knowledge of the other areas. Nothing ever happen in isolation. If your and (sic) illustrator you may have to work with a graphic designer and so on. Combining them allows you to do what you enjoy most.
E yes - Because it gives you more scope as a designer, and you realise the benefits of certain media over others where you would not otherwise as the integration also shows up the distinctions between and shortfalls of each of the media.
F yes - of course it's important to understand the connections. You need to be flexible and open minded in this business.
G yes - Its important to have an understanding into each area related to graphic design, even if you are not particularly good at it.
H yes - It is important to fit these subjects together, especially typography, which comes into play in all other subjects.
I yes - Definitely.
J So you can construct a project from all the elements
K It is important to see the connection. It prevents you being limited to one area, the more skills you have the better a designer you will be.
L This was just great, I thought!
M As I've said this project has enlightened me big time. I'm beginning to look at my career more positively and as a whole. The course is now more of a whole and I see the importance of the different subjects.
N yes - in a design job the chances are, we will be in charge of more than one area of the design. This project was good in the process of linking images, text, illustration etc. to one another.
O
P yes - I definitely think it's important - I think everything should be taken into account, for example, without even realising it, we could take inspiration from historical design and the only way of learning these is through design history.
Q yes - definitely, in a working environment I think a lot of projects are integrated, and I think this was a valuable experience for us in college.
R yes - we don't know what kind of brief we could be presented with so it's important to be prepared for anything.
S yes - It's what we'll be expected to do.
T yes - Well I think I'm a lot better now than before I learned the rules of each of them.
U yes - Clients want good quality work done in different media – website, brochure, business cards etc. Need to be able to balance time on each different area within project because in future company, one will need to be able to do this.
V yes
16 Any additional comments you wish to make

A All in all this was the most enjoyable project I have done so far. Choosing the media ourselves meant we could focus on the stuff we like. I felt that I learnt more also.

B More examples of information design including past student designs at the beginning of the project might have been useful. Showing different ways of presenting work to the client would also have been useful. Seeing past student portfolios at the beginning for ideas for presenting work.

C -

D Great Brief. Three Cheers.

E I think it was a good idea and really helpful that the brief was so open - it gave room for adjustment and helped you to come to grips with why you use certain media for certain purposes. I just think it was a bit long.

F Glad it’s finished. Good project overall. It had its ups and downs as with most projects.

G -

H Although integrated projects are important to show how subjects are relevant across a wide range of design, one would be enough in any year.

I Tough project, very beneficial. I learnt a lot.

J Tutors did contradict each other in what they said sometimes but I suppose that is understandable as they’re only human.

K -

L -

M Maybe consider what I mentioned about students meeting all their lecturers once weekly. As a final comment I don’t think I learned a fantastic amount about Trim, But for me that wasn’t the point. The real things I learned revolved around the process and the management of my project. Again I re-affirm I haven’t perfected everything but thanks to this project I am a heck of a lot closer to perfecting it.

N I would’ve liked a shorter project on a different site. Because of its length, the stress only kicked in at the end at which stage a lot of work was done. But when I was told to redo everything last week I thought it was unrealistic. At least I got it done, but I think that had it been a shorter project the work would have gotten done soon and there would have ended up being time to redo the design.

O -

P I really enjoyed this project and would love if we could have a class to discuss everyone’s final designs and the opinions and criticisms of the tutors. I would find this very beneficial.

Q Maybe pick a more interesting place! I enjoyed the project for most of it, but towards the end I was dying for it to be over, but that’s the same for every project I suppose.

R -

S -

T no

U -

V -

W
Appendix F
As an academic I realise that I am in a position of responsibility and trust. I wanted to have a clear ethics statement for my own reference over the course of the project and to distribute to staff and students participating in the project.

Whilst carrying out this research, I will observe the highest ethical standards. I will maintain integrity at all times regarding data gathering. I will only report information that is in the public domain and within the law. I will avoid plagiarism and fully acknowledge the work of others to which I have referred in this research. I will report my findings honestly. I consider the research project worthwhile and of benefit to the academic staff and students with whom I work.

The permission of my Head of School, Head of Department and my colleagues has been obtained prior to the research being carried out.

I recognise the importance of all participants in the research understanding the process in which they are to be engaging, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and to whom it will be reported. I also intend to debrief participants at the conclusion of the research.
8 January 2004

I am currently undertaking an MA in Education within DIT. My area of research is curriculum design. As part of my MA I am carrying out an action research project which aims to explore team teaching and the possibility of developing a theme-based curriculum. The aim of the project is to improve student learning through a more integrated approach to curriculum design.

The research will be carried out over the next ten weeks and I will be collecting data in the form of focus groups and written feedback.

Your contribution to this project would be extremely valuable in informing the future development of the Visual Communication programme.

I have attached a copy of my ethical statement in relation to this project. I can assure you that all of the information gathered will be treated confidentially and that anonymity is guaranteed.

I would be grateful if you would agree to participate in the research activity associated with this project. However if you do not wish to take part please let me know. I would ask that you return a signed copy of this sheet to me by Friday 16 January 2003.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation

Brenda Dermody

Name

Signature

Date
8 January 2004

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 Student name

Signature

Date