# www.dater.org.uk: Our heritage and opportunity

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In July this year I was fortunate to see one of my long-held ambitions beginning to emerge as a reality. www.dater.org.uk…an online hub with open-access research archives, together with an online conference and journal. The search facility allows the *IDATER* and *Design & Technology Association International Research Conference* and *NADE* journal archives, as well as this journal, and the *Orange Series* to be searched simultaneously. Further resources are being added, including all the back issues of the *Journal of Design and Technology Education* (1995-2004) and *Design & Technology Teaching* (1990-1995) in the near future. Permission has recently been granted by Trentham Books Ltd to eventually add all of the back issues of *Studies in Design Education, Craft and Technology* in its various guises back to 1968.

www.dater.org.uk was established by a partnership of the Library and Department of Design and Technology at Loughborough University and the Design and Technology Association. We are particularly indebted to the Library staff, who manage Loughborough's Institutional Repository and Information Systems for its existence. But why did we call on their expertise to this extent? And what is the point of research archives?

Of course, some of the reasons are self-evident and amongst which are: supporting the work of researchers; making resources available to the tutors and students of courses related to design and technology; ensuring access to the contributions made by past and present researchers; striving to achieve greater visibility for the journal and conference; providing resources and opportunities in the format which emerging researchers have come to expect; and expanding the potential for international collaboration. As research becomes an increasing requirement of M-level teacher training (in England at least) and action research begins to reassert itself within the teaching profession, the demand for such open access resources and opportunities is also set to rise. Clearly these will have been contributing factors to my motivation to support this work, but, for me, notions of heritage and progress are at least as important. It is not so much a timeline which interests me, as a 'conceptual history' of educational developments in this curriculum area. The following passage was written by the late Professor John Eggleston in 1973 in his introduction to the *International Perspectives of Design Education Conference* that was held in that year.

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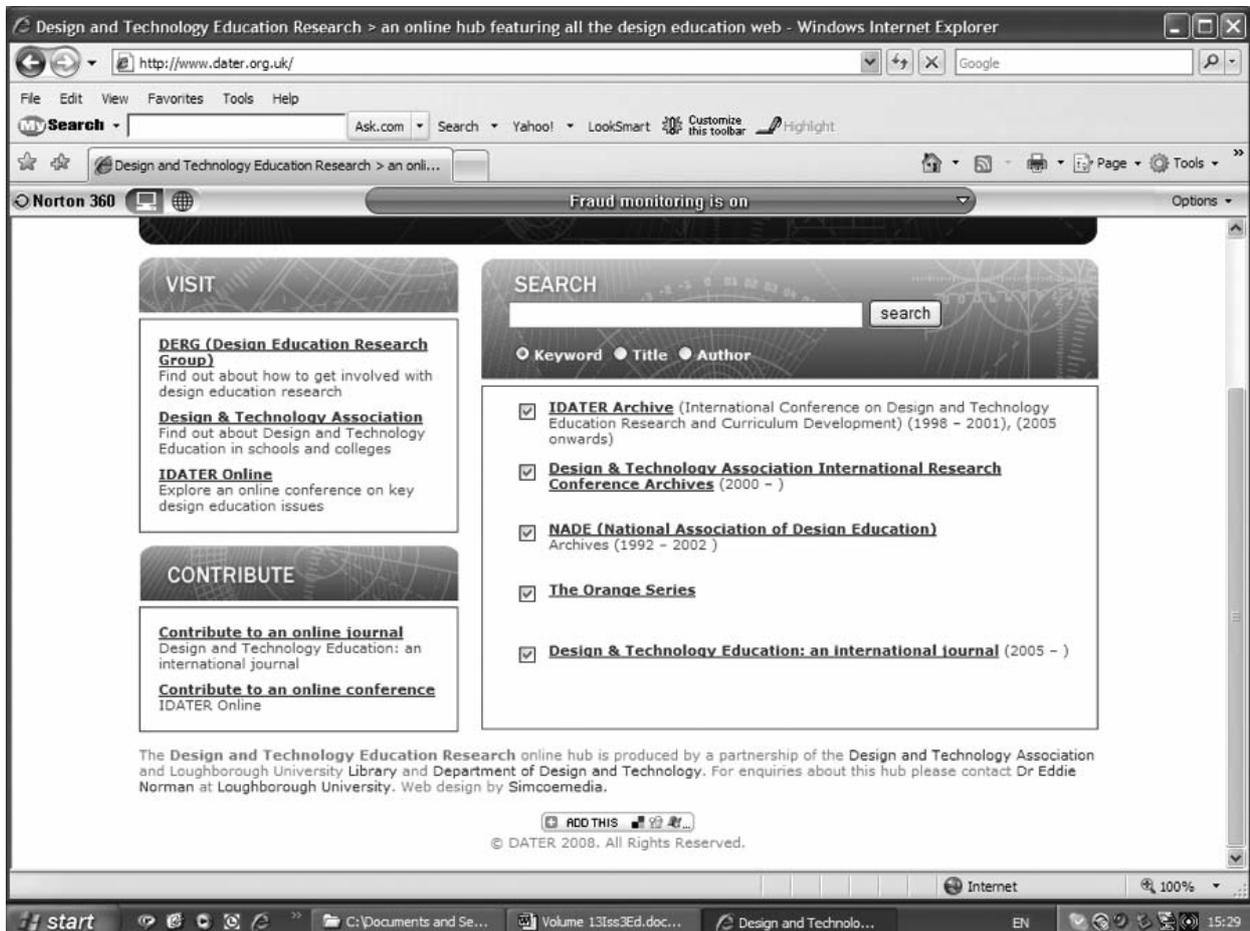
After centuries of emphasis on the acceptance of knowledge and values the curriculum has in many areas now focused on creative and open-ended 'discovery' approaches. In no aspect of the curriculum has this been more in evidence than in the field of design, craft and applied science where the emphasis on discovery approaches, creativity, inventiveness and the development of new solutions has been given its widest rein. Although these papers are particularly concerned with this area of the curriculum, however, it is important to recognise that it is only a part of the total movement that, for instance, in Britain, has been concerned with the development of precisely those approaches in science, in the humanities, in language and communication and indeed in every other sector of the spectrum of knowledge.

Why has this come about? There are many reasons of which two are paramount. One is the new realisation that the environment, both public and private, is a matter in which the myriad of individual decisions is the key determinant. For many years we believed that decisions in this area were best left to the experts. Accordingly, we trained small numbers of highly selected designers, town planners, town and country planning officers, landscape artists and the like. We believed that with training the specialists would be able to make wise decisions and all that remained for us was to persuade, through education, the majority to respond to their wisdom. In the design subjects in particular we endeavoured to introduce the experts' decisions to our children and encourage them to accept them. We took them to the Design Centre and allowed them to see the approved products which they may use in their homes. We took them to see the exhibition of the planning consultants for their city and taught them to respect the wise decisions made for the development of their civic environment. In doing this we overlooked that the environment is not wholly determined by the decisions of planners or consultants, even though their suggestions may sometimes be adopted. Far more it is determined by the way in which ordinary men and women use the environment. It is what they plant and construct in their gardens. It is how they decorate and where they put their caravans; it is how they use the public facilities, it is how they decide to spend their money and their leisure. A consultant on urban planning recently conceded, after many years of successful and well regarded public practice, that he had now found it necessary to take account of the fact that, regardless of almost every known control, ordinary people found ways of constructing sheds or outhouses in their back gardens. He announced that henceforth he would take cognisance of this in the preparation of his schemes.

In such ways we become aware that we are more likely to achieve 'good design' in our environment if we recognise the participatory nature of the process. Simon Nicholson of the Open University has recently gone so far as to suggest in his 'Theory of Loose Parts' (*Studies in Design Education*, Vol.4, 2) that the more successfully designers create a 'non-participant environment' the more successfully will people attempt to participate in it, even to the extent of taking part in behaviour that is labeled a vandalism. The 'structural modifications' that take place in airport lounges and public conveniences help to make Nicholson's point. Slowly we realise that an education designed to inculcate respect, to put young people on the receiving end of decisions is gradually giving way to an education in which young people may contract into decision making processes and in doing so exercise responsibility in a participative society.

All this has led to a new kind of education in the design subjects; an education that is related to the environmental context of a technological society and which also helps the individual to relate positively and actively to it. It is an education that, above all else, sees a path to participation through the use of materials. By using them as a vehicle of expression the individual is able to communicate, to stake a claim and to participate in the decision making processes of his society and community. In design and craft education these considerations lead us almost directly to the problem strategy in which the student identifies a problem, explores its requirements, executes possible solutions, evaluates them and eventually reaches an acceptable well verified answer to the problem with which he began. Essentially this is the underlying strategy of the new design and craft curricula from Canada, Australia, Scandinavia, United States and Britain that are to be discussed at this International Design Education Conference. They characterise the Schools Council Design and Craft Education Project that is based at Keele University.

(Eggleston, 1973:5-7)

At the time this was written I was just completing my undergraduate degree and contemplating a teaching career. I didn't read these words then, but I certainly recognise their ethos. Education in this curriculum area was to be radical, an agent for change towards participation in a democratic society. This is our heritage from those who were the pioneers of design education across the world. How much progress they made towards such goals, and whether we are continuing to make progress towards them are the fundamental matters to consider. Such analysis probably needs to await the passage of time, as it is difficult to

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achieve the required academic detachment whilst we remain in the midst of the action. However we can at least frame our actions in the context of our heritage, and this is a process that the online hub should help to support. Searching the research archives provides a route to exploring our heritage, and the online conference and journal opportunities to participate and contribute to the on-going conversations that are the building blocks of the ideas culture in which design education continues to develop.

Kay Stables's paper in this issue of the Journal is the written version of the 2008 John Eggleston Memorial Lecture, which was given at the recent Design and Technology Association International Research Conference held at Loughborough University. It addresses many key issues and perhaps foremost amongst them is the nurturing of the designerly aspects of being human. It is rightly noted that the idea of being designerly as an innate human potential is well-supported in the literature, and, crucially, demonstrates the progress that has been made in developing such potential through design and technology education. Understanding the meaning of designing (or the designerly) as a fundamental human capability is central to the development of the conceptual foundations of design education. There is a sense in which this paper is both demonstrating the evolving ideas culture and indicating some measures of progress, and, consequently, a well-judged and fitting tribute to the contributions made by John Eggleston.

Similarly, Paul Black's paper is the written version of the Research Keynote presentation, which he gave at the same conference. This provides an authoritative account of the key role that formative assessment can play in design and technology education and the key strategies for its successful implementation. He discusses the key roles that rich questions, open discussion, appropriate feedback and self and peer-assessment can play, and the formative use of summative assessment. The selection of tasks and the nature of their assessment remain as key issues in the nurturing of the designerly and this paper makes a significant contribution towards improved understanding in these vital areas.

Richard Kimbell's Reflection concerns another of the perennially problematic areas of design education's ideas culture; the relationship of the outcome and the processes of designing. As becomes apparent in reading this piece, designing processes are complex and can be understood at many levels. What people see and remember are the designed objects without necessarily fully appreciating how they came into being.

In their paper Richard Moalosi and Olefile Molwane discuss the challenges facing teachers in the teaching of design and technology education in Botswana's primary schools. These challenges have parallels in many other countries around the world, and there is something to learn from each of these different experiences. In Botswana, design and technology has become part of the wide-ranging Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA), which also comprises of elements from Art and Craft, Home Economics, Business Studies, Physical Education, Music, Drama and Dance. With the requirement that CAPA is taught through an integrated strategy and the limited national support, this is both a rich and challenging context.

In recent times it has almost seemed to be assumed that once a website has been provided to deal with an issue that it has then been satisfactorily resolved. Certainly for sustainable design, this is not the case. Numerous websites have been developed at considerable cost, and yet instances of credible sustainable designing remain in the minority. Peter Simmons reports here some of his findings concerning sustainable design and website use amongst AS/A2 level design and technology students' projects. The outcomes are not encouraging for those of us who advocate sustainability as being a key aspect of designing. For the majority of students, there seemed to be a clear indication that they would (only) follow the Awarding Bodies guidelines, and the importance of their role in defining the context for the students' designing is evident.

This issue also contains a review by David Spendlove of *Research Design Learning: Issues and findings from two decades of research and development* by Richard Kimbell and Kay Stables; a review by Stephanie Atkinson of *Analysing Best Practices in Technology Education* which was edited by Marc de Vries, Rod Custer, John Dakers and Gene Martin; and a review by Andy Mitchell of *A Practical Guide to Teaching Design and Technology in the Secondary School* by Gwyneth Owen-Jackson.

References:
Eggleston S J (1973) 'An International Perspective on Design Education'. In A R Pemberton and S J Eggleston (Eds) *International Perspectives of Design Education*, University of Keele, Studies in Education, Driffield, Yorkshire.

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