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**Access All Areas:**  
**What are the design skills level three students  
on a diagnostic course need to study  
and does the Access programme deliver them?**

## Abstract – Accessing Design

The Access to HE Art and Design programme serves students who go onto Fine Art and Design degrees (Broadhead and Garland, 2012). Access students are post nineteen, post compulsory. They are parents, second chance learners and employees. They are purposeful and there is a determination through adversity to succeed. Design is art with a reason; it grapples with projects that are of practical use in the real world. Craft and Design is about being creative with Conclin's (2005) 'wicked problems', creating Wenger's (2002) Communities of Practice, it is innovative communication and Access students have definitely got something to say.

The diagnostic nature of the course encourages creativity and experimentation. Feedback from alumni suggests that specialist design skills are not fully delivered. Are the Access lecturers giving the students the right skills to complete their imperative, to learn, to be creative, and to succeed at HE? This project aims to investigate whether specific design skills are necessary in order for students to progress into an HE design course. Or will skill specificity be one more of Taleb's (2010) 'Black Swans'?

The report will make recommendations linking the findings from the author's interviews HE staff to current educational philosophy from such respected authors as Christopher Frayling of the Royal College of Art, Matt Ward from Goldsmith Art College and Richard Sennett.

One of the recommendations the paper will suggest is that greater collegiality between HE and FE staff and a more integrated teaching culture could work to break down institutional boundaries. And that teaching and learning on the Access course could be improved by building on the cross college links made by the author and her JPD partner who have forged professional friendships and an institution increase in understanding of the Access cohort and the aims of the course, to progress our students to HE.



James Turrell: Deer Shelter Skyspace 2007 at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

## Introduction

**In choosing to work within the constructs and disciplines of craft-based practices, artists and designers align themselves not only with the rich narrative of human history, but also with the language of invention and technological exploration. (Bell, 2006)**

In this report the author asks what competencies are needed by design students on the Access course in order to graduate to HE. It investigates the depth and breadth of design education at Milltown College of Art through interviews based on a devised discussion paper with FE and HE teaching staff.



1950 Student Rag Day. (College website)

Milltown College of Art has been an art and design institution for 160 years, and as it says in *'The Student's Story'* it has, 'contributed significantly to the development of art education in Britain' ( Conlan and Plant, 2004). From the 1950's there was a shift in education practice and an adoption of the German Bauhaus curriculum, the 'Basic Design Course' was introduced to the college's foundation programme and sealed the college's reputation as a pioneer in art and design education.

The author and JPD partner set about interviewing their colleagues at Milltown College to investigate how we could best improve the Access curriculum to benefit student progression. We asked a range of design lecturers to debate the state of contemporary design in terms of; pedagogy, design philosophy, and current design companies. Also enquiring what kinds of art, craft and design skills a student needed. Analysis of the replies and recommendations for educational strategies to add to the current Access design curriculum will be put forward in the findings and recommendations.

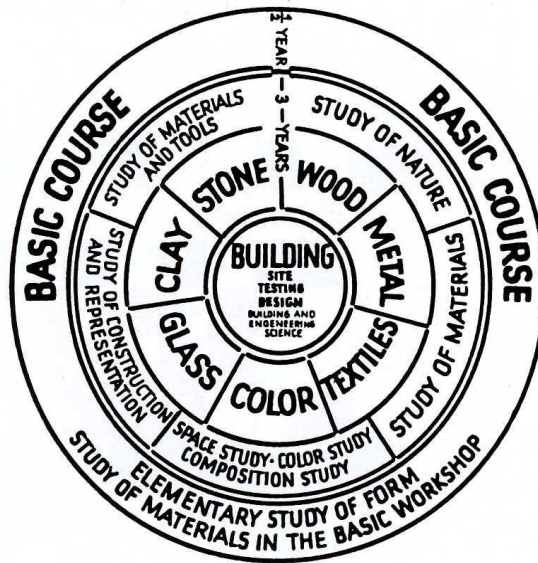


Access to HE Art and Design students in the studio 2012 (Author's own photograph)

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) in partnership with the Institute for Learning (IfL) funded this project which aims to investigate whether specific art and design skills are necessary in order for students from the post compulsory Access art and design course to progress into an HE design course. SMT and the Head of Research at Milltown College of Art fully support the research and the researchers.

A small number of lecturers (three men and four women) from Milltown College of Art were interviewed. The lecturers were chosen from a range of design specialist courses in FE and HE.

The dedication to subject, art practice, research and students shows in the replies given by all respondents. These are wonderful, intelligent, thoughtful, and dedicated staff. When the transcripts were analysed the teaching staff at Milltown have proved themselves exceptionally reflective, hardworking, and current in their thinking. As a cohort they are committed to life-long learning, widening participation, and have a vocation to pass on this knowledge to their students.



Bauhaus 'Basic Course' curriculum wheel.

Does the teaching and learning of the past hundred years (Ward, 2012), referencing the Bauhaus 'Basic Course' (as the inspiration of many art and design curriculums in the post-war era) have relevance when looking at the current Milltown Access Design curriculum? This study inquires whether art and design subject areas should be divided into separate 'silos' as commented on by Ward (2012) as an alternative curriculum and philosophy to that of the Bauhaus and how could these divisions effect design education. If there were less separation in craft, design and art then they could become part of the proliferation of possibilities rather than inhibitors of inclusivity and variation, as Frayling (2011) puts it.

The conclusions of this report could be of use to Access lecturers and could also be constructive for the FE art, craft and design sector as a whole and especially other Access to Art and Design courses if they are thinking about redesigning curriculum content for design.

## Literature Search and Review – what is out there?

Milltown is a specialist Art College and as such has an exemplary library whose extensive collection covers historic and contemporary art and design in both theory and practice. The main topics of research were curriculum design, pedagogical theory and design education. Sennett *The Craftsman* (2007) was very readable; pedagogy was wonderfully explained by Coffield's free and informative pamphlets *All you ever wanted to know about learning and*

*teaching but were too cool to ask* (2009) and *Just suppose teaching and learning became the first priority* (2008).

Ward's blog *SB129* (2012) set the discussion questions around the direction and future of design and design pedagogy. Ward is perfectly placed to comment as the Head of BA Design at Goldsmiths College of Art in London.

Christopher Frayling's (2011) book *On Craftsmanship; towards a new Bauhaus* was insightful and said so elegantly concepts that were coming to light from research and interviews done with teaching staff. He pushed some of the author's small ideas and globalised them, his teaching experience at the Royal College of Art and the courses he has designed and run were a fantastic example of practitioner led research. What he knows he has seen and done first and then reflected and added a large sprinkling of time and hindsight as well as an educated guess, a vision of tomorrow's art education.

The author's question - what craft and design skills do the Access students really need in order to progress successfully? The paper wanted to find out this burning question. Somewhere along the research line the question became blurred. Blurring of boundaries, of the names and divisions art courses that universities impose upon the practice of making and reflecting – this blurring became a recurrent theme JS, Wolfman, Frayling (2011).

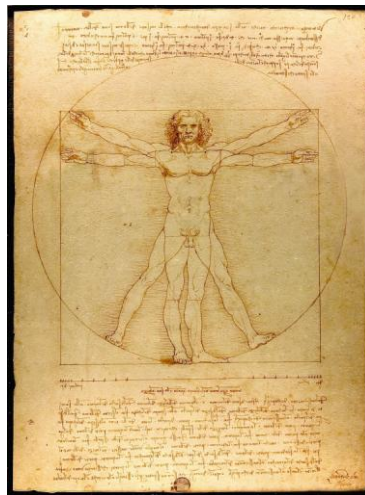
At first the author thought division of the disciplines was an absolute. Graphics - a large wall - textiles - another large wall, and so on. Division, separateness, and that this separation engendered specific and teachable skill sets which students absolutely needed. It soon became clear that this was not the case. The report will show the findings and on to the recommendations towards the end of the paper.

Another theme that interested the author was concerning the teaching and learning with in the current Access curriculum. Linking together with Ward's blog again which provokes debate by baldly stating that the craft and design manufacturing skills and teaching methods of the past 100 years will not do for the knowledge economy of today. This is a massive challenge – Bauhaus 'Basic Course' is essentially still taught at Milltown, is it wrong? Are the students suffering rejection at HE interview because of outdated methods and philosophies? Again the blurring and blended solutions come to the rescue. Of course Milltown staff and students can't be stuck in a Bauhaus utopian past where students as of old wandered Weimar of the 1920's in 'medieval tunics, with shaven heads' looking for vegetarian shops. (Frayling 2011).

The 'Basic Course' offers still something vital, needed and mentioned by many of the interviewees; a laboratory of experimentation, invention, testing, of play. A turning through the wheel of materials and processes, clay, glass, metal, wood; carving, painting, casting, fusing, welding. This kind of intense testing eternally allied to thinking, practice led researching, reflecting, retesting, thinking through making.

Some of the thinking taking place virtually and so blending teaching of the last century with new skills of the twenty first century. Using and harnessing technologies for practical use – not to think for the student but to interact with and collaborate through social media with other students and teachers, to make prototypes quickly (Frayling 2011) through laser cutter technologies and 3D printers to show sculptural ideas straight off the page and into 3D space.

So the themes are; what art craft and design skills do Access need? If the subjects are separated and divided are there very different skill sets students require? Are the craft and design skills taught in the art schools of the last century still relevant? The limitations were the small scale of the study – seven tutors and eight students and that their opinions and theories coloured the study considerably. Other limitations were the short time of the research and fitting reflective thinking time into a busy teaching schedule and family life.



Leonardo Da Vinci; Vitruvian Man 1490

## Research Methodology and Plan

### 1. Questionnaire to staff

A small sample of lecturers from Milltown College of Art was selected. In FE; “Wolfman” - the deputy head of the Foundation Diploma in Art and Design who also heads up Moving image, animation, graphics, illustration (MAGPi); “Doris” - a design lecturer from Object and Spatial Design (OSD) who also teaches dissertation supervision for BA Graphics; “Margaret Burton” a graphics pathway tutor on Extended Diploma Art and Design (EDG); “Lukas Blowfealt” a PGCE FE lecturer in three dimensional design (3DD). From HE; “JnS” a year tutor on BA Creative Media and Advertising (CMA); “MC”, a year tutor on BA Digital Media and Gaming (DMG), and “Claribel Lovelace”, year tutor on BA Textiles and Surface Pattern (TSPD).

The questionnaire ascertained current design competencies through discussion and scholarly research. This was explicated and analysed forming the main thrust of this study. Each interviewee was given a set of questions by email in the first instance, allowing them time to begin the reflective process. Following on from this face to face discussions were arranged.

A considerable difficulty was encountered here as the timetables and work commitments of all staff involved caused many scheduling problems. In order to facilitate a sufficiently wide sweep of on this important qualitative data it was decided that when face-to-face interviewing proved too problematic then an email or telephone interview should be supplemented. The interviews were undertaken by either the author or JPD partner. They asked what design skills were necessary in order for students to progress from Access successfully and asked for responses to two discussion statements from a blog written by Matt Ward, Programme Leader in Design at Goldsmiths Art College, London.



Access to HE student at Crosby Beach with an Anthony Gormley sculpture 2012 (photograph author's own)

## 2. Questionnaire to students

All student volunteers were from the Access to HE Art and Design course and chose their own pen names. (Five women and three men) Stephanie, ceramics (Cer), Lady Chanco, fashion (Fshn), Betty, Textiles and Surface Pattern Design (TSPD), Regina Falange, illustration (Ill), Maerp Face, Decorative Arts (DA), Thomas – Interdisciplinary Art and Design (IAD), Bob, fashion (Fshn) and Clive, 3D Design (3DD). They were all given the same questionnaire. Questions included asking what design skills, ideally should they have on graduation from Access. It then went on to ask whether Access had in fact delivered them and whether what they had actually learned through the design curriculum was fit for purpose, the purpose being acceptance onto an HE design course.



### **3. Joint Practice Development (JPD)**

The authors of this study have in the process of creating this study embarked on JPD with the explicit intention of implementing their findings in the context of Milltown's Access courses. Through cluster meetings JPD can be extended to HE staff. A finding of previous research was that Access tutors need to keep up to date with current HE design practices. The best way of doing this is developing and maintaining good relationships with HE staff. (Broadhead and Garland, 2012).

### **4. Skills Matrix**

Draw up a skills matrix based on results from interviews;

### **5. Benchmarking skills**

This study considers the themes of what benchmarking is available to set standards for design education; what does the current Access curriculum offer to those students with ambitions to become a designer; what kind of portfolios will an Access design student have and do they exhibit design skills which will be recognised and accepted by an HE interview tutor or an employer; is there a consensus among art and design lecturers as to what essential design skill or skills are required for a level three student; and lastly, what does the Access course offer in way of testing students verbal and visual skills before the UCAS interviews? An interview is a compulsory element for an art student who is wishing to continue into HE, unlike academic programmes that look at exam grades and references.

Methodologies that were thought of but there was not time for:

At the April 2013 Access team meeting ask colleagues to read and evaluate the skills matrix at course team meeting, and feed back to the researchers. (There hasn't been a course team meeting). Analyse the curriculum for opportunities to implement changes. Writing a review of design student portfolios prepared for 2013 UCAS and employment applications. Carrying out a small quantitative study that measures successful student applications to design courses. )



Students on a trip to Leeds Art Gallery 2010

## The Problem.

Access to HE (daytime) and Access to HE (Evenings) are the two courses at Milltown that the researchers both teach on. The Access programme serves adult, post 19 students who go onto a range of outcomes including fine art and design degrees (Broadhead and Garland, 2012). The diagnostic nature of the course provides visual studies and studio research skills through open briefs that encourage experimentation and creativity. Feedback from alumni suggests that specialist design skills are not fully delivered on the Access course.

Because Access students have not come via a traditional route through education the Access team have to be sure their teaching will be of benefit so their primary educational experience, post compulsory education, will be a good one, one which is a step up to the next level – HE.

However alumni who successfully attained a place on design based BA courses were not happy with the amount of design skills taught on Access. Current students when questioned reflected an anxiety about the amount of design taught, that it was insufficient. Are these concerns well founded? What aspect of design is really needed for progression onto a HE design course? The problem is at once pedagogical and one of curriculum design. Yet to answer these questions it is also necessary to consider; what is design; who is it for; why do we do it; what – if anything - makes design different from other kinds of art?

## Ethical Considerations

Under the guidance of LSIS the following ethical considerations were developed – **Being right with the world** - 'Do no harm', Frank Coffield, LSIS residential, February 2013.

- The researcher's ethical framework as shown by the LSIS team advocated anonymising the interviewee's real names in order to protect their identities and anonymising the name and location of the college. This was done.
- Ensuring that participants know why the research is being done and how it will be disseminated, in addition checking back with volunteers once the interview is written up, and asking for feedback. This was done.

- Giving participants an opportunity to approve how their contributions have been represented.
- Not misusing the data and using it only for stated purpose.
- No individual/group/ institution to be harmed by the research.
- Consultation with all Access course staff to review the recommendations of the research and see if any changes need to be made to timetables and curriculum. The college and the lecturers have been anonymised throughout the report to protect identities and keep it safe for people to say what they wanted without fear. The volunteer interviewees have chosen their own pen names, as well as reviewing and editing transcripts of their interviews and offering the authors helpful and valuable extra insights into the subject of art and design education thereby beginning a Design Community of Practice (Wenger, 2002).

## **The Authors' expectations**

My presumptions about design were coloured by being educated during the 80's. This can be perceived as a time of aggressive commercialisation of design; the graphic arts seemed to become all about money making, domineered by an entrepreneurial spirit, bequeathed to it by Thatcherism, and a rise in corporate power, epitomised by shoulder pads and other such brash "design statements". Frayling (2011) concurs when he says , If 'design for profit' was the catch phrase of the early 80's - it was a title of a famous seminar at 10 Downing street in 1984, hosted by the late Mrs Thatcher – the new catchphrase is 'design for the people' , which can of course be very profitable indeed.' Meanwhile I specialised in ceramics and therefore received an increasingly narrow focus in contextual studies.

The skills and knowledge we learned in 1989 was a canonical history of the British Arts & Crafts Movement and, more specifically, the history of ceramics. There was a real encouragement at BA and MA level to contextualise our making within the craft and design discipline from the potters' canon. My assumption was that design was still like that.

In short, I expected the 'silos' to be in evidence.

## **The Data and Analysis**

### **The Staff questionnaire**

#### **Theme 1**

**Boundaries and borders are drawn to distinguish where one type of design starts and another one finishes. Walls are built to defend territories, markets**

**and practices. Design is increasingly chopped into decreasing small bits. It is in these silos where the discipline gets stuck, frozen in a battle of nomenclature and method, (Ward, 2012)**

Ward goes on to qualify this statement somewhat saying, *...this becomes truly destructive when it moves into education. Seeing design beyond its disciplinary boundaries and beyond its definition as a 'problem solving activity' opens up new opportunities for it as a practice and profession.* (Ward, 2012)

When this theme was introduced to one respondent, MC (DMG) responded by asking: why can't it be in silos? He contextualised this within his own discipline: In the world of gaming and animation specialists and a division of labour are what is necessary. MC goes on to qualify this by adding that situation exist if a designer is working in a large firm of animators, comparing it to being in a pipeline with each of the designers pushing forward the project by adding their expertise to the drawing before it goes to the next expert. This he believes is partly to do with technological advancements which increase the quality of the animation but focuses the specificity into a smaller 'silo'. In addition he believes that the designer although they have a specifically 'siloed' job still must have a working knowledge of the other design processes, especially what comes before their part and what comes directly after. MC compares the animation designer to a craftsman (in this report *craftsman* denotes a person, woman or man who is an expert at their craft), highly skilled with 1000's of hours of mind and hand practise. (Sennett. 2009.) MC adds that a sole trader or small production company with few employers will need to be much more multi skilled.

JnS (CMA) agrees with the remark however adds that the 'silos' can engender negative implications for the creative process. She thinks design in general is wider than a single discipline and specialism. New media and sharing practice through 'the cloud' is against the idea of the 'silo' however, conversely, she argues that the 'design process' is not the same across different design areas. She can see that it is the lecturers who need taking out of the silo – and encouraging their students to work 'creatively across disciplines'

Doris (OSD) believes that like JnS (CMA) the design process has different ways of 'operating' in different design disciplines. She adds that designers are in some ways obsessive and if allowed free reign – like a sole trader - the designer maker on their own may spend so much time obsessively on one project they risk becoming 'navel gazers'!



Constructed textile design work, (authors photograph 2012)

For the researchers' a question now arose about the sheer range of design skills. How could a relatively short course such as Access accommodate inductions into the many diverse forms? This was a matter that had to be fed into their JPD. Nonetheless, a pattern emerged from the research which was not anticipated. Brought out during the course of the report, it is seen that the anxiety about specific skills can be largely subsumed to a creative design process which the data suggests is more fundamental than any one "hand" skill.

Margaret Burton (EDG) thinks that educators ourselves are partly to blame for this 'tilting' towards silo-isation. She believes this is especially true at HE level with university business revenue a deciding factor. She speculates that to create more and more specialisms is to generate more income as it marks out the university as a 'specialist institute'. She believes this could stunt student's creativity by driving them toward narrower choices too early in their creative development. She believes that our "triple dip economy" should lead educators out of silos to a more interdisciplinary approach providing transferable skills.

This ties in with thinking from Wolfman (MAGPi) about not needing skills specificity but a highly developed "thinking through play". He gives the example of the design firm Bibliothèque Design (<http://www.bibliothequedesign.com>) who encourages its employers to make things or initiate creativity through a combination of visual research and reflection.

Margaret Burton (EDG) also believes that collaboration should be fostered to break down barriers to create a learning environment and a spirit of sharing. Importantly, this should be 'enjoyable!'

Lukas Blowfealt (3DD) is sure that boundaries are in the minds of the designers - he believes the new designers by breaking out of the silos can change commercial attitudes - all it needs is imagination.

Wolfman (MAGPi) refutes the idea of silos as does Claribel Lovelace (TSPD). He thinks there is a movement of opening up boundaries, breaking down boundaries and/or crossing boundaries – designers working across discipline; this is the same thinking as Margaret Burton (EDG) and Lukas Blowfealt (3DD) who boldly states “boundaries – what boundaries?”

JnS (CMA) goes further saying it is the duty of the tutors to encourage and lead this interdisciplinary, cross-discipline approach, Lukas Blowfealt (3DD) agrees. Wolfman (MAGPi) identifies the ‘silos’ of protected expertise as a ‘defensive attitude towards skills’. He sees collaboration between designers as a way of breaking down the protected ‘silos’ as does Margaret Burton (EDG). He thinks that educators should also be problem solvers. Design problems with a real and practical purpose and thinking globally. Margaret Burton (EDG) also thinks designers should be globally motivated seeing new technologies as a way to connect and collaborate, as does JnS (CMA). She says, “Design has to be about solving a problem.”

Claribel Lovelace (TSPD) says: I think the divisions between the design areas are beginning to disappear, starting to break down and there are now lots of crossover. This could be a product of the digital age. Surface Pattern could be anywhere. Thomas Heatherwick (<http://www.heatherwick.com>) is cited as an example of an artist/designer making concepts for where they are best applied. “The walls are breaking down,” she concludes.

#### Summary of theme 1

In summary there seems to be a general aversion to the silos, they are seen as a construct of a capitalist system encouraged by the current government educational strategies enforced by the college senior management team. In opposition to this is the positive action arising from new educational thinking where as Frayling (2011) says: ‘the watchword of the new creative industries are ‘challenging the boundaries’ and ‘multi-disciplinary’ and ‘why not?’ transferable skills, interdisciplinary, multi skilled, agreeing with Wolfman and JnS that designers are moving between disciplines, using skills in a holistic way, breaking down barriers and generally side stepping the concept of silos.

## Theme 2

**The craft and manufacturing skills of the last century have little to do with the knowledge economy of this century. The social, environmental and political problems of today will not be solved by the tools and approaches educators have been teaching designers over the last 100 years. (Ward, 2012)**

Lukas Blowfealt (3DD) believes the government is hindering rather than helping the FE education sector and that colleges should have more

autonomy to be able to break free of “faddy short sighted policies”. He is extremely positive about the quality of design talent in the UK and believes it should be celebrated and that government should be prepared to fund and encourage ambitious design projects rather than “trample on creativity” as, in his opinion, current restrictive and cost cutting policies are doing. He also believes there should be a fast track feeding designers’ innovative work in education through to business and the production line, which he calls a “worthwhile investment”. Through these ideas we can help UK economy. He adds that environmental design issues can lead thinking and products to make a “stable planet”. He believes innovative designers are seeking work abroad as they are not being supported here in the UK.



Access students working on a 3D design project 2013 (Access course photograph)

Wolfman (MAGPi) has seen with student interest and research that the skills of the past hundred years are being rediscovered through what he calls a backlash against technology in favour of “old skills” like letterpress processes, traditional handwriting skills being used in typography and graphics instead of computer fonts, and traditional hand sign writing skills instead of laser-cut computerised lettering. Like Lukas Blowfealt (3DD) he has seen that students are deeply interested in sustainability as inspiration for design and in a more holistic approach to their lives and artistic careers, cleaner, ethical, sustainable, ecological. He says that early Modernism and the Bauhaus are very popular. These design schools and styles are seen by the students as examples of a cleaner and less economically driven time that they want to emulate.

Margaret Burton (EDG) mourns the fact that the UK has lost its reputation as a “nation of craftsmen” and believes the teaching tools of the last hundred years are exactly what is needed to put the country back at the top of the design world. Added to the traditional skills and tools taught by art colleges there should be, as Lukas Blowfealt (3DD) and Wolfman (MAGPi) both agree, the need to keep an eye to global movements and requirements. The young design professional must be checking the current zeitgeist and adapting accordingly.

Global and transferable skills teamed with traditional craftsmanship appear to be a theme which is emerging from the answers garnered from these discussions. Margaret Burton (EDG) and Wolfman (MAGPi) both advocate, in

addition, that students keep in mind PEST analysis, (political, economic, social, and technological analysis) to aid design students when thinking of an audience or practical use of the artwork they are producing.

Doris (OSD) like Sennett (2009) believes that it is a physical understanding of the world through making that produces a good designer. This physical connection leads to problem identification, problem solving and innovation, which has everything to do with the creative thinking solutions taught by art educators over the last century. Like Claribel Lovelace (TSPD), Doris (OSD) has experienced through their own design education and through their experience as design educators that “tacit experience”, using craftsmanship and the skills of “the last century” (as Ward (2012) dismissively puts it) is vital if designers are to make sense of the physical world, how it works and produce creative designs. Physical knowledge informs conceptual thinking and innovative design.



3D modular paper sculpture 2013 (Access course photograph)

Doris (ODS) made me aware of a new phrase; ‘Wicked Problem,’ meaning a problem that is difficult or impossible to solve because of changing, incomplete or contradictory requirements that are difficult to recognise (Briggs, 2007). This fits extremely well with Doris’s (ODS) ideas about responding to the present and using design as a means to social change and ethical living. This in turn ties in with the holistic ideal of design for an environmental, sustainable life which links responses from interviewees Lukas Blowfealt (3DD), Margaret Burton (EDG), Wolfman (MAGPi) and Doris (ODS). It shows an emerging theme; craft skills of the last century linked to a social conscience making a contemporary creative designer. JnS (CMA) calls this a blurring of traditional skills in a contemporary knowledge economy.

JnS (CMA) believes new media and technologies have called for a blended approach to skills, a blurring of traditional and contemporary skills. She suggests that collaboration now happens online, it is dialogical, and this is a different context in which design occurs. Ethical considerations are very important and a partnership with government, co-creating a bill, would solve many issues. It is much more complex than in the past. Design can be seen multi-platform, multimedia, and designers have to be aware of these



developments and add these constraints or freedoms to what they are designing be it product, program or philosophies.

Claribel Lovelace (TSPD) does not agree with the second quotation while adding that she does agree that educators have to move on. Nonetheless there must be a historical context. That craft/manufacturing skills from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century have gone is not all together true. We still need the tactile nature, hands are part of the brain, and it's not just the brain and the eye. Haptic touch stimulates the brain. Slow crafting, thinking as you are making, thought and design developing as the work goes on is crucial to the creative process.



Access to HE student constructed textile design work 2012  
(Author's own photograph)

### Summary of Theme 2

Once again Ward (2012) in his statement at the beginning of theme 2 is being provocative and this makes an excellent discussion point. Many of the teacher practitioners had strong feelings about the necessity of tacit skills and how students will be expected to utilise their skills in design business. Added to those 'hand skills' as Sennett (2008) puts it, a blending with new technologies making craft and design absolutely of today, a true expression of contemporary design and creative thinking, ward continues;

*There is a need to provide an interdisciplinary or 'trans-disciplinary' education to equip students with the tools to participate in social and environmental change... 'Big business' has begun to understand the value of design in the generation of new ideas and the role of designers as the instigators of invention. (Ward, 2012)*

## Theme 3

**What design skills should students have by the time they have graduated from their course on FE and start a Design BA on an HE course?**

### Sills Matrix

'Design Process' made into a Skills Matrix based on the Hastings and Phillips findings and referencing Geoff Petty's idea about producing a matrix to break down the steps of learning and teaching found this to be a readable way of organising data.

<b>Phrases About Creativity, Clarified Learning Objective, General</b>	<b>Specific Design subject pathways</b>	<b>Subject Specific, Media and Materials</b>	<b>Practical Skills, Context of Learning, Particular</b>
<b>Observation</b> AKA: Discovery, Define, Research, Immersion, Understand, Observe	OSD – Object, Spatial Design; TFC- textiles, fashion, costume; MAGPi - moving image, animation, graphics, photography, illustration	OSD-Clay, plaster, wood, metal, glass, plastics, concrete, silicone TFC- fabrics, haberdashery, leather, rubber, PVC MAGPi- Computers, the internet, 3D modelling programmes, illustrator, Photoshop, cameras, film cameras, projectors	Research Project/Company History Competitors Collection Text Visuals Related Materials Interviews Project Participants Audience
<b>Brainstorming</b> AKA: Ideate, Visualize	OSD – Object, Spatial Design; TFC- textiles, fashion, costume; MAGPi - moving image, animation, graphics, photography,	OSD-Clay, plaster, wood, metal, glass, plastics, concrete, silicone TFC- fabrics, haberdashery, leather, rubber, PVC	Mind Mapping Tools Sketching Thumbnails Rough Comps Storyboards Narrative Interaction

	<b>illustration</b>	<b>MAGPi- Computers, the internet, 3D modelling programmes, illustrator, Photoshop, cameras, film cameras, projectors</b>	
<b>Prototyping AKA: Create, Build</b>	<b>OSD – Object, Spatial Design; TFC- textiles, fashion, costume; MAGPi - moving image, animation, graphics, photography, illustration</b>	<b>OSD-Clay, plaster, wood, metal, glass, plastics, concrete, silicone TFC- fabrics, haberdashery, leather, rubber, PVC MAGPi- Computers, the internet, 3D modelling programmes, illustrator, Photoshop, cameras, film cameras, projectors</b>	<b>Comprehensives Prototypes Product Interface Dummies Tight Comps Design Brief Writing Images</b>
<b>Implementation AKA: Test, Produce, Launch</b>	<b>OSD – Object, Spatial Design; TFC- textiles, fashion, costume; MAGPi - moving image, animation, graphics, photography, illustration</b>	<b>OSD-Clay, plaster, wood, metal, glass, plastics, concrete, silicone TFC- fabrics, haberdashery, leather, rubber, PVC MAGPi- Computers, the internet, 3D modelling programmes, illustrator, Photoshop, cameras, film cameras, projectors</b>	<b>Production Website Constr. Printing Manufacturing Animation Photography Videography</b>

### Summary of Theme 3

The skills matrix developed over the weeks of writing, at first the author wanted to include the UCAS and QAA benchmarking criteria for design students, but there was simply too much information to crush into a matrix, it then went to the verbatim answers from all the different tutors, again this was unwieldy and over long. After reading the answers from all the lecturers interviewed and analysing and synthesising the data it could be logically condensed into the 'Design Process' a set of processes and action that designers naturally go through when completing a project. The design process is certainly one that the Access team will be looking at when redesigning the curriculum and after initial discussions has been decided to implement in the next academic year.

## Student questionnaire

Q1. What Design skills do you think you should have by the time you finish Access?



To ideate – that is 'getting ideas from head to paper' as Bob (Fshn) puts it, idea development.

Regina Falange (III) thinks that experimentation with different media and processes. Thomas (IAD) simply states – 'a wide range'. Stephanie (Cer) thinks around the concept of skills and has devised a set of thought process which include planning, looking at the planning and deciding what skills the student needs to acquire, (so very self-motivated and driven).

A soft skill is confidence mentioned by Regina Falange (III). Adult students often lack the confidence in themselves perhaps because of previous setbacks and negative life experiences. She continues that the skill she most wants is discernment, being able to see a 'clear path' pointing the way to the future. Some students like Betty (TSPD), Clive (3DD) and Lady Chanco (Fshn) know where they are going and would have liked subject specific skills such as fabric printing, ceramics skills and Batik.

The researchers however wonder about how to balance the teaching of such specific skills in a class of students looking at such diverse design courses as typography for information communication and special effects model making for horror movies?



Evening Access ceramic work 2011

### Q2. How did Access do in teaching you design skills?

Confidence, Bob (fshn); very good, Thomas (IAD); very well, Stephanie (Cer), freedom to learn what I needed, Maerp Face (DA); the briefs helped, freedom of self-direction, Regina Falange (III) and Betty (TSPD).

In response to this research extra design workshops were facilitated by Access and Betty (TSPD), Clive (3DD) and Lady Chanco (Fshn) used the opportunity to acquire extra skills.

### Q3. What could we improve?

More subject specific skills, Bob (fshn), Lady Chanco (Fshn); help initiating research/ the project, the most difficult part of design, finding a problem to solve, a question to answer, Thomas (IAD); Stephanie (Cer) thinks that design could be isolated as a 'specific topic' with more focus on it as part of professional practice. Maerp Face (DA) knows her own limitations and thinks she needs more of a 'push' encouragement and cajoling, as does Regina Falange (III) who thinks students need more of a 'challenge'.

The design world is one of clients, deadlines and hard work however Access has to cater for fine art students too who set their own pace and work to their own timetables negotiated individually. Designers want quick briefs, tight deadlines – the students have to impose this on themselves but it is difficult to have an atmosphere of a busy design office in a diverse Access studio. Betty (TSPD) suggests collaboration with other more specific courses which is a good idea and one we could take forward in team meetings.

### Q3. What has surprised you about Access?

Betty (TSPD), Lady Chanco (Fshn), and Thomas (IAD) were surprised by the self-directed nature of the course. Regina Falange (III) liked the variety of workshops and the trips. Bob (Fshn) and Clive (3DD) are appreciative of the helpfulness of staff and students. Stephanie (Cer) is looking at the world 'differently' but moderates this by saying 'you can't learn it all on Access'.

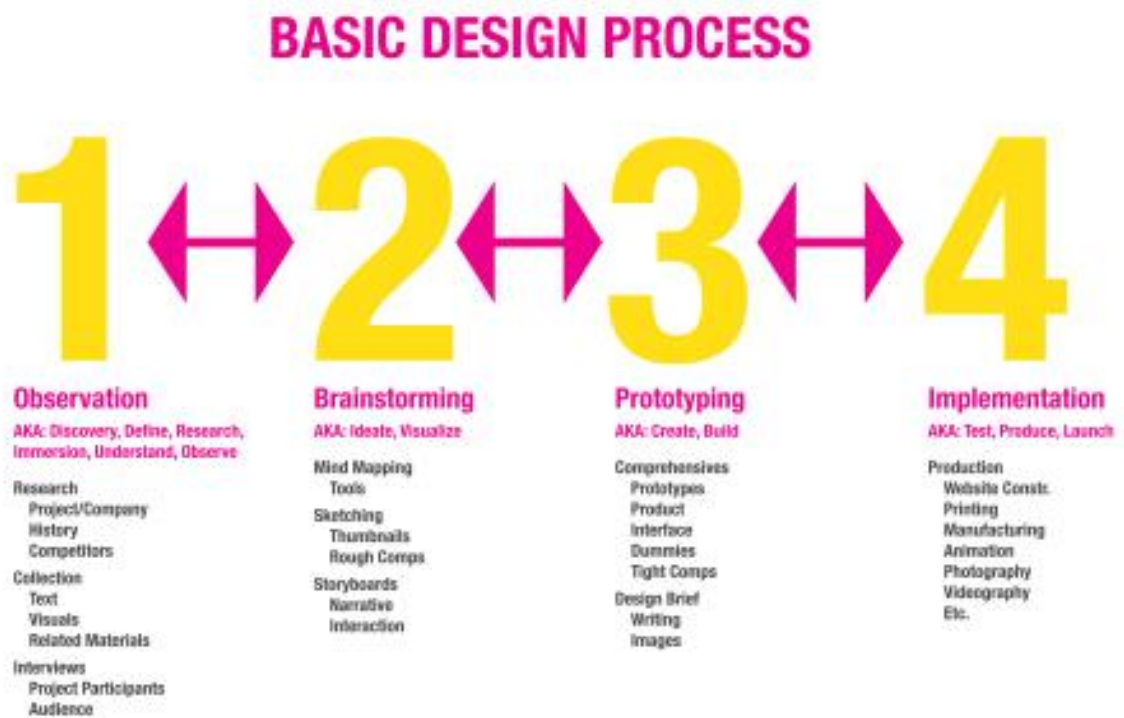
### Summary of the student questionnaire

What is not apparent in the replies but which nonetheless is extremely significant is the ages of the students which tended to influence their replies. The younger students in their feedback said they needed a push, a challenge, more structure, where as the older more mature students noted that what they needed most out of the course was the freedom to learn, to make, to experiment. This is a significant finding and a practical one. The Access team can discuss the findings and adjust the curriculum accordingly creating more differentiated and person centred briefs for the different maturity of students.

## Findings: Accessing Creativity Creatively– Access All Areas

**‘In a world connected less by geographic destination than by technology, ideology and invention – artists and designers, theorists, technologists and commentators work in fluid dialogues across cultures.’ Bell (2006)**

After synthesising the lists of skills each one gave it could be seen that they were all talking about **The Design Process**. As mentioned earlier in the ‘summary of theme 3’ and the skills matrix created from Hasting and Phillips example below.



The basic design process written by: Prof. Pattie Belle Hastings (Pattie.Hastings@quinnipiac.edu) and Prof. Courtney Phillips (Courtney.Phillips@quinnipiac.edu).

The first finding is that my assumption was that skills were lacking in our Access students and that this was not due to the experience they were bringing but because of the teaching. This lack in the curriculum, it was further assumed, was because of the perceived fine art bias or emphasis, with the leadership and lecturers being from a predominately fine art background. Supporting this thesis were interviews from alumni (Broadhead and Garland, 2012) describing how they felt unprepared at degree level for some of the more design oriented courses.

When our interviews were conducted however it appeared that it was not art and design skills they needed but creative thinking skills, problem solving skills, creative thinking *through* making, which connects back in with the Bauhaus ideal. That is – thinking through making –the makers hand (Sennett, 2007).

In fact it is not an either or situation not thinking versus making but making and thinking with the one flowing into the other.

The whole project is turned upside down and turned upside down again.



Black swan by Annie wighton

‘Although the foundation course still exists in UK, in recent years there has been an erosion of the original aims of the course as universities have started demanding that applicants have an increasing amount of knowledge that is specific to the art and design practice they want to specialise in.’ Wikipedia (2010)

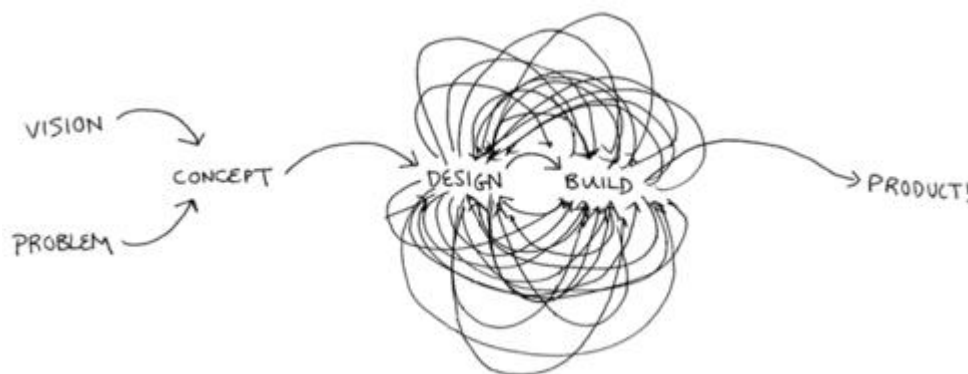
This bears out my findings that tutors and students want the ‘basic course’ but are being forced down a more subject specific route by the entrance demands of the design courses. Interestingly it is not the actual tutors who are demanding these recommendations be fulfilled, but beurocrats at the universities, writing the admissions documents. Administrators not teaching staff writing requirements for admission, recommendation – admissions and teaching staff to work collaboratively to create a better fit for entrance.

'This has meant that FE colleges that used to offer the foundation course have now switched to subject specific preparation courses abandoning the generalist foundation course model.' Wikki 2010

This goes back to my initial comment about whether a generic art and design model is still the right fit for access? It appears that because of the admissions requirements that the generalist programme is no longer what is needed for student portfolios.

## Recommendations - A Teacher's To Do List

If I know what skills HE admissions and interview tutors want I can better prepare students better to enter their course and succeed at interview?  
If students know about that course (they know because I have interviewed their potential course leader and tutor) they can make better decisions about what courses to apply for and be better prepared for interview.  
If HE design courses want creative thinking first and foremost, not skills, then how can the Access curriculum be framed so that this creative process is understood as an essential part of design?



tacolab.com

(The design process: first the brief or the problem, to the idea or the concept, then to designing, drawing, making and building, finally to the end product. The messy bit in the middle is where all the creativity happens.)

designing sessions around 'The Design Process', and using the Bauhaus model of carousel learning, inducting the students into all the different workshops at the beginning of term (this is already done, do we need to think about how we facilitate this? looking at the design process 'observation - Brainstorming- Prototyping – implementation') working on tacit skills in a contextualised setting using the design process. Although the 'design process' is one solution its not a panacea for all design problems. Its one solution born of the LSIS research

Creativity is key to contemporary design but skills too, and there is a tension between the two. A tension that is perhaps felt as an anxiety by Access students who by their later arrival at this stage of education feel, perhaps with good reason, that they must as it were *catch up* on design skills. The successful resolving of this would be an enabling of the students to hold the



tension between these two aspects of design thinking while their confidence is grown in these vital aspects of creativity and higher order thinking.

Our starting premise was to focus on the skills alone. After research it was realised that the most desirable aspect of design pedagogy, which would successfully orientate a practitioner toward global and sustainable concerns, was a design process founded in creative thinking, the hand and mind simultaneously engaged to bring out intellectual capital *and* practical skills. Design skills are needed but not in isolation.

The project is full of the tensions that exist between contemporary art theory and education theory. Successful teaching and learning strategies exist in this tension, making and thinking with them rather than proclaiming for one against the other.

Designers now see the bigger picture – as Wolfman spoke about in his interview and was also mentioned by Matt Ward (2012) there is a genuine global concern for a greener, more ethical and fair future. A of collaborative communality of research and practice is seen to be developing, working both with “old skills” *and* in the “multi-platform” context of contemporary media. Is it all good?

We have mentioned the tensions of developing the skill and the creative thinking process. A definite effort is required to work consistently in a collaborative context – this pull into being a new way of going forward not in “either or” language but “both and”, a thinking through making and a skills specific base.

This is not a new idea. Both the tensions and the successful design process were exemplified in the Bauhaus whose ideal and philosophy had to be applied in testing social conditions. For the Bauhaus design ethos – everyone was a polymath, one worked across platforms as the concept or brief demanded in the testing and investigation stage of the design process. How do we as educators, as the Access team, encourage this *laboratory of ideas* as the Bauhaus put it, this thinking through making, higher order thinking? The design process, opening out onto appropriate skills, can be integrated into the Access curriculum, a practice that is intellectual plus skilful.

More communication between access staff and foundation staff as our aims are common and our cohort are heading in the same direction and so need to achieve the same goal – a place on degree. Arguably they need the same skills but taught in a slightly different way as the backgrounds and issues they have are in most cases a world apart.

Collaboration between admissions staff and degree tutors – so that students right at the beginning of the process, looking in a prospectus or on the website get a very clear idea of the creative journey ahead.

The Access course needs to look again at the Bauhaus ‘Basic Course’ and think about our design students in a new way. We can create a curriculum

taking tacit skills and adding a new cognitive element. We can do this through collaboration and collegiality among the Access teaching and learning support staff.



Evening Access 3D ceramics work 2011 (Access course photographs)

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## Appendix

### Student Questionnaire

Name:

Nickname (a made-up name to make you anonymous in my research paper):

1. What design skills do you think you should have by the time you finish Access to HE (in an ideal world)?

2. How did Access do in teaching you design skills?
3. What could we improve?
4. Do you feel prepared for HE and a design degree in terms of the right skills?
5. What has surprised you about Access?

## **Question and Discussion sheet for FE and HE teaching staff at Milltown College of art for the LSIS research Paper**

- A. 'what design skills should students have when they leave your course to do a degree? (respond in any way you feel appropriate).
- B. Please would you read these comments, what are your responses to the points he makes.
  - 1) Boundaries and borders are drawn to distinguish where one type of design starts and another one finishes. Walls are built to defend territories, markets and practices. Design is increasingly chopped into decreasing small bits. It is in these silos where the discipline gets stuck, frozen in a battle of nomenclature and method.
  - 2) The craft and manufacturing skills of the last century have little to do with the knowledge economy of this century. The social, environmental and political problems of today will not be solved by the tools and approaches educators have been teaching designers over the last 100 years.

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