

Spark: UAL Creative Teaching and Learning Journal

Editorial

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A few days after receiving the papers for this *Spark* issue, I visited *A Slice through the World: Contemporary Artists' Drawing* at Modern Art Oxford. The introduction to the show read 'A Slice through the World demonstrates the power of drawing as an incisive art form that compels us to reconsider how we perceive the world around us. In the words of artist Nidhal Chamekh drawing is 'not a means to explain the world, but to understand it.' (*A Slice through the World: Contemporary Artists' Drawing*, 2018).

Many artists and designers would echo this stance when talking about *their* practice and the ways in which they teach practice. This notion also resonates with Michelle Salamon's motivation behind setting up a Drawing Laboratory at Central Saint Martins: to focus upon drawing as a means of discovery and 'learning tool' (Salamon, 2018, p.131). In her paper 'Drawing laboratory: Research workshops and outcomes', she reflects on a pilot scheme that provided a co-curricular space where drawing extended beyond traditional expectations and was used as a research tool for developing thinking, improving concentration and enhancing memory. The purpose of Salamon's research was to construct a case for recognition of the value of drawing as a learning tool, whilst ensuring the learner's experience fostered critical reflectivity.

The theme of critical reflectivity in one's creative practice is at the core of Giorgio Salani's contribution, 'The use of video as an analytical and reflective tool in ceramic training'. As part of his doctoral research into British pottery practices, he observed that 'an integrated studio practice that uses video to record procedures and track progress will benefit pottery making as well as learning in this field' (Salani, 2018, p.173). Furthermore, he suggests that 'video comparisons facilitate the learning and continued development of pottery skills, and could be used as part of a structured learning path for students as well as more experienced practising potters' (ibid). Salamon and Salani are both revisiting the process over product debate – one that is not new in arts education, and often focuses on early childhood learning as supposed to higher level studies. Their attempts at seeking new ways to embed this type of learning in disciplinary-sensitive ways in higher education and beyond remain a valid undertaking.

This issue of *Spark* brings together a collection of stimulating and thought-provoking articles that highlight the ever-expanding range of teaching methods, as well as the increased use of emerging technologies to support students' learning across taught programmes in the arts, communication and design. Student profiles have changed; their diverse histories, cultural backgrounds, racial identities and personalities have informed the design of a more inclusive curriculum, and continue to do so. Challenging exclusivity in teaching is one of the catalysts for UAL initiatives such as [Decolonising the Arts Curriculum](#), [Changing Mindsets](#), the [Inclusive Learning and Teaching in Higher Education](#) staff development unit and the [UAL Attainment Programme: Learning for All](#).

Chris Lloyd and Alexandra Lumley's provocation piece focuses predominantly on the latter, specifically on the relationship between writing in creative arts curricula and student degree attainment. Their exploratory enquiry, 'Writing and attainment in creative arts curricula: Establishing

and interpreting a new evidence base' reveals the complexity of writing as a factor in attainment in creative arts education. It aims to deepen understanding of evident inequities in student achievement and address them. With wide-ranging scope, criss-crossing inclusivity, theory/practice in course design, academic literacy/support, assessment and awarding systems, to graduate futures, their article asks us to consider the 'perceived inequalities/injustices in educational provision experienced by different groups of students, for example through white western dominated curriculum content' (Lloyd and Lumley, 2018, p.117).

Aleksander Szram and Dario van Gammeren have evidently considered such inequalities when designing the curriculum for the *Certificate in the Practice of Music Making* at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. Their research paper 'Embracing diversity: The role of asynchronous online learning in building musical communities', outlines the motivation behind such a module, and presents a convincing case study that arts 'education can make a direct contribution to resolving the social and cultural challenges facing the world today' (European Music Council, 2011, as cited in Szram and van Gammeren, 2018, p.143). Whilst focusing on challenging traditional conservatoire curricula, their distance-learning module in practical musicianship, 'encourages students to examine their musical identity in relation to the world around them. By reflecting on how their music making contributes to their local community, students are encouraged to embrace issues of ethics and wellbeing and to develop a future-facing, reflective and sustainable outlook on their work' (ibid).

Equally sensitive to students' contexts, and not imposing canonised art forms and practices, Talitha Balan embraces the traditional Bhutanese painting practice of thangka before introducing us to her pedagogic approach to promote cross-cultural learning in 'Between inner and outward vision: Developing teaching methods to adapt established Bhutanese painting techniques to new technologies and audiences'. Balan's use of the photo essay format complements the story told, and enhances the readers comprehension of the effects of combining traditional with non-traditional practices.

Moving from a fascinating educational intervention near the Himalayan mountain range to the Arctic via an online portal, we learn of a student's transformative journey from 'being a novice in both his understanding of maker tools and pedagogies, to a maker equipped with the knowledge and skills to develop an innovative programme connected to critical making in his specific context' (Hughes and Morrison, 2018, p.158). In their text 'Works of heart: Revisiting creativity and innovation through maker pedagogies', Janette Hughes and Laura Morrison ask us to create learning environments that nurture creativity, collaboration, inquiry and peer-to-peer learning and to 'shift education' in a way that 'help[s] students develop transferable competencies such as innovation and creativity' (ibid). They have drawn from several sources to develop their own reflective framework to support life-wide development, illustrated here in use, in an online learning environment.

Whilst Rohini Contractor, Adrian Janus and Yusef Patel do not explicitly spell out competencies or skills as outcomes of their learning experience during 'Beyond design, detail, print: The Tech Futures Lab design-build studio', their reflections on the modern architecture studio, within which students actively participate in pedagogic design highlights elements of collaborative learning, teamwork and communication, as seen from a student perspective. Having been invited by Patel (their tutor) to present their case study to an international audience during the Digitally Engaged Learning conference (2017) themed 'Teaching Making / Making Teaching', Contractor and Janus's learning as teaching assistants was further enhanced by this authentic learning experience and provided inspiration for framing future opportunities for their own students.

With his research paper 'Rupturing the contract: Performative pedagogy, power relations and interruption' Lee Campbell opens an experimental space that invites us to think of 'performance as

pedagogy' and to consider 'how performative interruption may be used as an effective tool for making exchanges of power visible in pedagogic settings' (Campbell, 2018, p.104). I would have loved to be a fly on the wall during the incident that happened in his seminar 'Performance and Collaboration' from which he recalls: 'One of the interruption-makers stripped off to his underpants whilst another picked up her bag, put on her coat and left the room without explanation, returning twenty minutes later.' As Campbell cites 'coping with the unexpected is an important part of successful teaching' (Chapman and Race, 2009, p.20, cited in Campbell, 2018, p.112) – certainly pertinent for his own experience during that incident.

In aid of embracing the unexpected, Campbell carefully considers the learning environment he creates, 'my pedagogic strategy for the seminar positioned it as a space of liminality (part-laboratory/part-discussion arena)' (2018, p.108). This 'space of liminality' resonates with Salamon's aspiration of the drawing laboratory: 'drawing as a learning tool' (2018, p.131). In other words, deliberately designing openness into the learning experiences to allow for unexpected connections to be made and unforeseen possibilities to be discovered, ultimately enabling new knowledge to emerge.

This issue of *Spark*, as it offers a slice through current pedagogic practices and attempts to challenge conventions and traditions, provides a space for new knowledge to emerge too. Contributors have provided insights into the most pressing issues across art and design education – access, diversity, inclusivity, inequity, place, technology – all of which are also being discussed beyond the academy (Jamieson, 2018). As guest editor of this issue and editorial board member I remain confident that collectively we can continue to contribute to these important debates, consider some of the ideas proposed and develop them further for each of our contexts, identifying new ways forward to meet the challenges.

References

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Biography

[Dr Silke Lange](#) is an educator, researcher and artist. She is Associate Dean of Learning, Teaching and Enhancement at Central Saint Martins. She is an advocate for staff and students to co-create curricula and develop educational models that provide fora for students to explore collaborative working practices across disciplines within the arts, the creative industries, and beyond. This form of co-creation is one of her research interests, along with the creative process, collective learning, interdisciplinarity and learning environments. In recent years Silke has also been involved in projects crossing European borders, including the [European Academy of Participation](#). Twitter: @ComoSilke