

## Schools of Thoughts 3 : March 2007

### Design Education and the Constancy of Change

**Doug Kisor** Chair / Graphic Design Department  
**Alex Braidwood** Adjunct faculty in Media Design  
abraidwood@ccscad.edu

Collaboration is perhaps the most important aspect of an innovative curriculum structure. As my area of expertise is new media, I am generally paired with a more traditional instructor who may have more design and teaching experience, but varying levels of experience with new forms of media and technology.

Where these instructors are stronger in regard to traditional forms of research, process, and the development of language, I am more well-versed in how these ideas can be explored, inspired by, and informed by technology.

By combining these different experiences, we create an environment that merges relevant traditional ideas of design and design education with concepts and approaches developed from evolving forms of media. It allows students to explore the fluctuations, and constancy, of form dependent upon the manner of communication and its environs.

The idea is to reiterate and emphasize fundamentals, instruct and create a certain level of technical familiarity, and then ask students to respond to this change of venue with new and innovative concepts for exchange. Put simply, students have the opportunity to become more well-rounded as they explore the changing realities and manifestations offered by technology. The technology itself prompts them to consider their topic from unseen dimensions, and pushes them to reconsider any assumptions and categorization inherent in the thought pattern.

This collaborative approach to the classroom is not unlike what students will see in the working world. Projects of an interactive, time based, experience or digital nature are commonly team projects, and a team is strongest when each member of the team has a certain expertise in an area, with a strong understanding of the other components. We are continually moving towards the hybridization of skill sets and this approach to projects works to find that space for investigation.

As we work towards building a relationship between traditional methods and changing media, we implement stages of research, exploration, analyzation, sketching, language development, etc. At each of these stages we work together to ensure that the student has an expanded understanding of the potential of each step.

During the research phase of the project, the teamed instructor and I will both be involved but at different capacities. The teamed instructor uses their expertise to guide data collection, audience definition and observational documentation while my focus is to help students realize how media related information fits into the defined areas for research. As the students analyze their findings, we work to guide them in such a way that the information that they focus on is relevant to the stated objectives of the project, as well as inspiring for the exploration phase.

While the students begin exploring, it is important that their ideas are informed and inspired by analyzing their research. The teamed instructor discusses ideas of sketching, form, typography and mark making while I work to expose them to tools and ideas of motion play, prototype creation, and code / development as process.

As the play and exploration continues, we work to give the students an expanded understanding of the idea of "sketching". We reinforce this by having them sketch with things like video, sound, animation, interface play and technical development. This builds an understanding of these elements and the equipment as tools to be utilized during the investigation of the components of language, not just in the creation of a final piece.

A good portion of my roll, from exploration through refinement to the end of the project, is to encourage play and demystify working with technology in such a way that the students get past some of the initial barriers and feel more comfortable within the technology. As the students get farther into their explorations, it can become very frustrating for them if they don't have the right resources available. This is not at all about teaching them the specifics of a given piece of software or hardware. It is, however, about helping them to find their own answers to the questions they have.

The final phase is a synthesis of the student's research, the intent of the communication, and an integration of media possibilities that extend beyond the more narrow scope of a traditional teaching model. The intent is a solution that represents a refinement of the language. The final collaboration works especially well for the students, allowing them to weave together the larger matrix of play, research, experience, knowledge and intent.