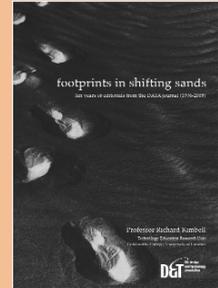


Review: Footprints in shifting sands

Ten years of editorials from the DATA journal (1996-2005)

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| Title: | Footprints in shifting sands Ten years of editorials from the DATA journal (1996-2005) |
| Author/Editor: | Professor Richard Kimbell |
| Publisher: | The Design and Technology Association |
| Publication Date: | 2006 |
| ISBN: | 1-898788-79-0 |
| Reviewed by: | Dr Stephanie Atkinson, University of Sunderland |



Richard Kimbell and I first met as examiners for the Oxford A-level Design examination, way back in the early 1970's. At that time the examiners, only six of us in those early days, used to interview every candidate for twenty minutes to discuss their major project and the process they had used to achieve their solution. We were each allocated areas of the UK to visit; I visited the North East of England and Scotland whilst Richard visited schools across the South and West of England. The examiner meetings in Oxford were a time for us to meet back together for moderation and lively discussion about the marvellous, inspiring projects we had seen at all corners of the UK. The other exciting side of these meetings was the inevitable curriculum and assessment development that occurred and the useful thoughts and ideas that we shared. Richard's enthusiasm and wish to be centrally involved in the evolution of design and technology was very much in evidence then, as it has been ever since.

When in 1996 Richard was asked to write the editorials for the new look DATA journal I knew that whatever he wrote would be thought provoking and provocative whilst at the same time highly accessible for all who read it, whether the reader was, a practitioner, educationalist or researcher. If Richard had chosen to write his editorials in the form of a discursive summary of the contents of each edition then this book would never have been published as the combined editorials would not have worked in isolation from the journal itself.

Instead he chose to comment on a different topical issue each time. As he stated in Vol. 1 No 2 his editorials were to be "... partly a reflection of informed opinion – and partly an attempt to shape and influence public opinion on the matter in question". I applaud the Design and Technology Association's (DATA) decision to bring these editorials together in a single publication, as they provide a collection of polemic pieces, which reflect many of the issues that our curriculum area struggled with in the decade following the adoption of design and technology into the national curriculum, and they still remain highly relevant to today's readers.

I found Andy Breckon's introduction 'The Journal in context: design and technology in an area of growth' interesting as it examined the important relationship between John Eggleston's journals during the emergence of the design and technology curriculum, DATA's development of its journal, plus some of the other milestone events promoted by the association in its endeavour to support developments within design and technology.

However it was once I started to read the editorials themselves that the book sprung to life. This section of the book is presented in chronological order and provides thirty-three stand alone pieces that each make one stop and think. They are written in accessible language that includes humour, popular culture, everyday events and personal experiences whilst explaining the details of

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pertinent developments and their consequences in a crisp, well-informed manner. If read one after the other, as I did, each piece certainly bounces from one 'hot' issue to another reminding me of the uneven, twisting path that those of us involved in design and technology throughout this period of time, have followed, and/or helped to build.

In his first editorial (Vol1 No1) Richard sets the scene defining the changing format of the journal and the need for a single professional journal that will reflect and debate important issues central to design and technology. In Vol1 No 2 he deals with the service his editorials will perform and moves onto his first contentious issue, the role of the State in the classroom. He uses the German and USA systems as examples at the opposite ends of a spectrum with our system sitting in the middle. He ends the editorial by posing a question concerning investment and whether the UK will follow the American trend with its model of benchmarking and testing, the German system where developing teachers' expertise is high priority or a compromise between the two.

In Vol1 No3 we can read the first of five insightful editorials concerning assessment. In the first Richard tackles the conundrum of examination results, norms and criteria, and standards over time; his critique provides the reader with a very useful insight into what remains a relevant issue today. He returns to the assessment theme in Vol7 No3 in a very clearly presented discussion on assessment standards and the interpretation of data, whilst in Vol8 No1 Richard continues to discuss controversial issues concerning assessment providing his personal views on the whole being greater (and more important) than the parts. In Vol8 No2 he returns to international examples to give us his view of what design and technology is and should be. The editorial begins by focusing on technology literacy and progresses to a discussion on the importance of project work performance in the assessment of pupils' capability. In Vol8 No3 we are presented with an interesting and heartfelt debate about values and targets. Whilst in

Richard's final editorial (Vol10 No 3) he returns to the points made in his first assessment editorial, leading into a most interesting debate on the relationship between indigenous knowledge, real knowledge, know-how and tacit knowledge in the context of design and technology.

In Vol2 No1 a theme regarding new technologies is first raised. Richard uses three interesting examples from his own personal experience to examine his belief that in our rush to embrace digital technology we are in danger of losing the benefits of analogue. In Vol10 No2 Richard returns to the new technologies theme with an interesting debate concerning D&T portfolios and the use of digitally captured material. He once again uses an observation from his personal experience to provide a useful cautionary tale. In Vol6 no 3 through a discussion on the CAD/CAM initiative Richard focuses on innovation in design and technology referring to Andy Breckon's keynote paper presenting a radical new paradigm for design and technology. Richard indicates his general agreement with Andy's ambition to innovate although he argues coherently against the implied separation of knowledge from action indicating his belief that the design and technology curriculum is unique in terms of integration which he rightfully insists must be protected.

This theme of curriculum change and development can be found in several other editorials spaced over the nine year period. In Vol2 No3 Richard introduces us briefly to the book and film of Jurassic Park. He uses an appropriate quote from the book to cleverly link the title of the editorial 'At the edge of chaos', to his cautionary message suggesting that lessons, projects, students, teachers and the curriculum need to exist at the edge of chaos if they are not to become extinct like the dinosaur. In Vol4 No1 Richard discusses the positive features of an early Curriculum2000 meeting at QCA and his belief that the discussion indicated that design and technology had come of age and moved beyond the faction-fighting of the 1980s.

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In Vol5 No2 through a reflection on the Design and Technology International Millennium Conference Richard discusses the role of the State and the place of charitable bodies in determining the future shape of the design and technology curriculum.

In three different editorials (Vol2 No2, Vol7 No2 and Vol9 No2) Richard turns to the tensions between academic and vocational education and the 14-19 Curriculum. In the first of these pieces Richard usefully focuses on the GNVQ / A level debate turning to international examples in Taiwan and the USA to explain his thoughts and ideas concerning the tensions between the two parallel systems here in the UK. In the second written five years later he reflects on his previous GNVQ debate and discusses the new '14-19: Extending Opportunities' green paper. In the third, written a further two years on, he continues with a useful discussion regarding the 14-19 Curriculum in terms of his views of the Tomlinson's interim report.

Two editorials that discuss the role of outside agencies in the context of design and technology can be found in Vol6 No2 and Vol13 No1. In the first Richard discusses what he sees as the valuable role that the Engineering Council has played in the context of the design and technology curriculum, whilst in the second he refers to the launch of the Design Museum and makes no apology for turning the editorial into an advertisement for the newly established Design Museum with its potential to provide excellent resources for all design educators.

In terms of discussing his beliefs associated with the activity of designing there are five editorials devoted specifically to this topic, although it can be found as threads through many others. These are Vol3 No2, Vol3 No3, Vol5 No3, Vol9 No1 and Vol10 No1. In the first of these pieces Richard focuses on consumer products and the interplay between the public, designers and advertisers thinking processes. In the second Vol3 No3 we have a fascinating historical account of the development of a

product to tell mariners their longitudinal position during the 18th century and its relationship to qualities needed when designing today. In Vol5 No3 Richard provides an absorbing discussion about the user and the designer and who is in control, whilst in Vol9 No1 we are able to read a thought provoking discussion about the differences between bargain and luxury goods amply illustrated with examples that lead us to question the cost of various consumer products. In Vol10 No1 we can read an inspiring editorial concerning the importance of emotional ergonomics and the excitement that incorporating this into design and technology activities could bring.

In two editorials Richard chooses to focus his attention on key individuals who have had a major impact upon the development of design and technology. The first of these can be found in Vol6 No1 and concerns David Hargreaves, written at the time he was appointed as head of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. This piece discusses the new knowledge economy and design and technology's potentially important position in being able to deal with a constantly shifting knowledge base. The second editorial (Vol7 No1) is a personal appreciation of Professor John Eggleston written just after his death in December 2001. This is a sensitive, well worded piece that encapsulates all that John Eggleston stood for and contributed to design and technology throughout his life.

The final theme that I wish to highlight from the editorials is that of creativity, which Richard targets on three separate occasions. As this area has been a major aspect of Richard's research over a number of years then it can also be found as strands in many of the other editorials too. The content of Vol2 No3 'At the edge of chaos' I have already discussed in terms of curriculum development, however his references to creativity within this piece provide a valuable perspective in the creativity debate. In Vol5 No1 he elaborates on the tension between the assessment and audit culture and the need for supportive risk-taking

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environments to sustain creativity, whilst in Vol9No3 Richard returns to creativity in a constructive discussion regarding research findings on ideas and ideation.

Having reached the end of the editorials I came to a section entitled 'Reflection from the barricades'. This section contains separate short reflections on Richard's editorials written by five people working in different sectors of design and technology: Martin Chandler; Ruth Wright; Mike Ives; Ian Punter; and Kay Stables who each voice a different but complimentary view of the editorials. I found each of these perceptive and a good précis of aspects of the editorials that they individually chose to highlight. Certainly for those new to the subject area, or researching a specific aspect of design and technology I would recommend reading these reflections before reading the editorials themselves for although the title of each editorial is catchy and inviting and appropriate for editorials they do not often inform the reader of this book about their content.