

Going Online: A statement from the Design and Technology Association Executive

The decision to make **Design and Technology Education: An International Journal** available online and located within Loughborough University's Institutional Repository is a significant development in the world of design and technology education research.

In 1995 the Association established its new **Design and Technology Education: An International Journal** as it felt that a journal of high standing and one to be found in major libraries would encourage new research and subject development. Since then the Journal has evolved and continues to be a key publication for all those interested in design and technology education research. For many, the Journal has been seen as a valuable benefit of membership of the Association. However publishing the Journal in printed version only and effectively restricting readership to members and those able to access larger libraries arguably limits the potential benefits to the subject community as a whole.

The debate surrounding accessibility to educational research, much of it paid for by public money, goes on in the higher educational world. Use of the internet has meant that opening up access to all those who are interested is simple. Now several leading universities are taking the view that that access should be free. As a charity, the D&T Association represents the subject's interests and interprets its role as one of supporting not just its members but also the D&T community at large by establishing and maintaining a community of practice.

One of the ways the Association can support its members is by providing a platform for them to publish and disseminate the results of their work. This covers a range of material from short descriptions of events in D&T News, articles concerning innovative teaching and learning in D&T Practice to research papers published in the Journal.

Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, recently announced that teaching should become an M-level profession. This further emphasizes the role and the importance of actively engaging in and with research. The potential this journal has for contributing to this development should not be underestimated.

The D&T Association is made up largely of practising D&T teachers whose involvement in the subject spans the teaching of early years through to post graduate CPD courses. The Association believes that it is important to support research, closely linked to teachers and the processes of teaching and learning. It believes strongly in the value of practitioner based research: by teachers for

teachers. Currently it is the contributions from academics working outside of the school environment that make up the majority of papers. Most of these individuals are still engaged with teaching and have themselves come from a background of teaching D&T in schools. However, as more practising school teachers are encouraged to engage in scholarly activity, action research and enquiry to support their personal and professional development, it should be an aim of this Association to develop this culture and enable the wider dissemination of their work through the pages of this journal. The Journal provides an accessible place to publish the results of research emanating from M-level and other accredited CPD activity.

The Journal will now provide open access to the outcomes of scholarly and research activity undertaken to investigate and develop practice largely, but not exclusively, in schools. As such it can become a significant driver in promoting research amongst teachers and helping to grow the D&T education research community as a result. There can be no doubt that we need more active researchers working in the D&T field. This includes D&T education researchers employed in higher education, who want to develop their research profile enabling them to contribute to the Research Assessment Exercise.

Although this is the journal of a members' association, we do not restrict contributions to members, nor do we wish to restrict the readership. The decision to make it available to all reflects the Association's charitable nature. As a charitable body, an aim should be to support the promotion, development and celebration of D&T, reaching out to and benefiting an audience that is inclusive of but not exclusively made up of its members. Opening access contributes to this aim. Restricting access to members and others through libraries is not helpful and is unlikely to attract few if any additional members as a result.

Location of the Journal (including the back catalogue) within the Loughborough Repository directs all those interested in researching aspects of D&T to one source containing a significant resource amassed over the life of the Association. One of the most significant benefits of publishing online is clearly that of enhanced search ability, and now, as highlighted by Eddie Norman in this issue's editorial, even those less experienced researchers (who almost certainly in the first instance make use of Google) are going to be directed to current articles and as they are made available past articles contained within these pages. As well as accessing papers from this journal, from the same keyword search location the scholar can also access a substantial body of previously published materials.

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The Journal, like all other membership publications, has to operate within the context of cost effective membership services. As well as the enhancements identified above and in the editorial, an additional benefit of the move to online publication is clearly a reduction in production costs. Printing costs continue to escalate and not having to absorb these within members' fees is beneficial. However the Association is committed to producing a reduced print run so that both institutions and individuals can be supplied with printed copy on payment of a small supplement. The savings we are making will enable us to allocate a budget to marketing and promoting the Journal and research in other ways. Printing of the Association's other regular membership publications will continue. Preceding publication of each issue of the Journal on line D&T News will in future include a digest of the Journal papers prompting readers to access the full versions.

The use of research to inform practice is paramount. The Association is regularly consulted by government and its agencies and given the opportunity to influence policy and the future direction of the subject. The facility to refer to the outcomes of research strengthens claims it makes and being able to cite research available online has the potential to enhance responses and add authority. To this end it is through the Journal and its annual conference; the Association will also be active in promoting research into developing topical areas. It intends in the next few months to develop a research agenda in response to current trends and educational reform. This will certainly include:

1. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics – D&T's contribution to the STEM agenda, particularly when the recently published Children's Plan included eight references to STEM but only one to design and technology.
2. Primary D&T – the contribution of D&T to a broad and balanced primary curriculum in view of the forthcoming primary curriculum review by Sir Jim Rose.
3. D&T involvement in the new diplomas.
4. Use of Higher Level Teaching Assistants to support teaching.

What about the relationship between the Journal and the annual conference? Recent years have seen the international research and education 'strands' of the annual conference run in parallel with each other. This allows delegates to construct a personalised programme by dipping in and out of both strands as appropriate. It also emphasizes and facilitates the essential link between practice and research, the very link which the Journal aims to develop and promote. At the forthcoming Design and

Technology Association Education & International Research Conference 2-4 July 2008 two events are being planned. The first follows on from previous conference workshops exploring how to use action research aimed specifically at new researchers. The second will be a special meeting designed to contribute to defining the research agenda and invigorate the Journal. We hope that D&T teachers and academics engaged in research will see the Journal as the natural location for making their work accessible to the whole subject and wider research community, and the annual conference as the natural location for stimulating further thoughts about research and practice through engaging in discussion and debate with like minded individuals.

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