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THE LECTURE: GOING FOR A WALK WHILST SITTING DOWN

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ABSTRACT
Today, the student experience is important; reading from a lectern has become well worn. As academics, we need to reconsider how we deliver information to students. It is asserted in this submission that it is time to re-visit the most common method of delivery when a lecture is given to students and re-consider how a different approach can challenge preconceptions and produce positive responses. The Lecture: Going for a walk whilst sitting down was delivered at Nottingham Trent University during October 2010 to a group of second year undergraduate students from BSc (honours) and BA (honours) programmes, all were studying Design. The design of the presentation was helical, in that the seminar literally walked the lecture several days later. As part of the process, key observations were re-iterated and others added during the walk. The purpose of this was to walk the path that the students do everyday to mirror familiarity; to empathise with the student in the act of ensuring that the lecture was cognizant in character.
The rationale of the lecture was to arrest preconceptions and patterns of thought and behaviour that are almost automatic, which is something many do when travelling to work. Although, the lectures primary focus was cognitive, the secondary aspect was to present information, objects, buildings and artefacts they see everyday and make them aware that they are looking and not seeing. It was a deconstructive process; by recording these observations the students also began to accrue imagery that interests them that also embodies semiotic reference points and remain copyright free for them to use as a starting points for ideas. A questionnaire was completed by 100 students after the walk and the response to the lecture & seminar was positive and informative concerning a number of areas. The authors of this paper assert that it is time to revisit how a lecture and seminar can be delivered to change and help to develop the student experience in 2011.

Keywords: Experience, lecture, challenging pre conceptions, familiarity

1 INTRODUCTION

There are lecturers today who still read their notes literally from the lectern. Another example of that which is considered poor teaching is the lecturer who speaks for a few minutes at the start of a lecture, plays a DVD and concludes the lecture with 5 minutes of notes at the end; however, well sourced, this is a real negation of responsibility towards the subject, colleagues and the students. This is an example of somebody who does not know what they are doing or the behaviour of an individual who simply cannot be bothered to fulfil a basic function of being employed as a lecturer. In 2011, this is unacceptable in professional terms and difficult to justify to students who are paying increased fees to attend university. How education is delivered to the students from their perspective needs to be revisited to reflect their world and not the domain of the lecturer who reflects how they were taught in the 1960s or 1970s. As academics, it is important to reflect whether the quality and method of delivery that is being used is appropriate for the time, subject and the students. This whole area is becoming increasingly important as it relates to digital delivery, long distance learning and increasing student numbers.

2 CASE STUDY

This paper is a simple case study of an attempt at approaching the design and delivery of a lecture in a different way to the students. The purpose was to focus upon student engagement and the immediate environment. There was a considerable amount of organisation for the lecture, but that was because it was new, the authors would not expect this to be the case if the experience was repeated. The different

approach – in some ways – was because the number of seminars required for the module was increasing due to an increase in student numbers. The problem was how to maintain quality when the format is changed. The atmosphere at the seminars could be described as professionally informal in the sense that there is a focus upon what is important, but it is delivered in a way that could be described as inclusive and friendly in tone. It was important to change to a different environment and maintain the same culture of the traditional sessions.

The design of the session was in two stages: For the first part, the lecture had to be designed to challenge the everyday observations that students make to establish the difference between how they observe and whether they see. For the second part, the lecture was designed to develop the students' ability to make connection to their own observations and the domain of producing ideas as designers.

The authors assert that – depending on location – it is possible to deliver a lecture about and within the immediate environment of the university. An example of this at Nottingham Trent University is from the entrance of the Maudslay building, which backs on to the Barnes Wallace unit, which is 100 metres for the Newton building, adjacent to the Arkwright building. A Masonic hall is across the street which leads to a Scottish Presbyterian church next to Chaucer Street and the Jessie boot library. All of these reference points can be seen simply by standing at an entrance. The number of reference points increases dramatically for the students by walking another 100 metres by the inclusion of one of the first Art Schools designed and built in the UK and a Victorian arboretum that was a gift for the people of Nottingham by a philanthropist. Whether within the sciences or the arts, the names and the legacies of these people cannot fail to be anything other than inspirational.

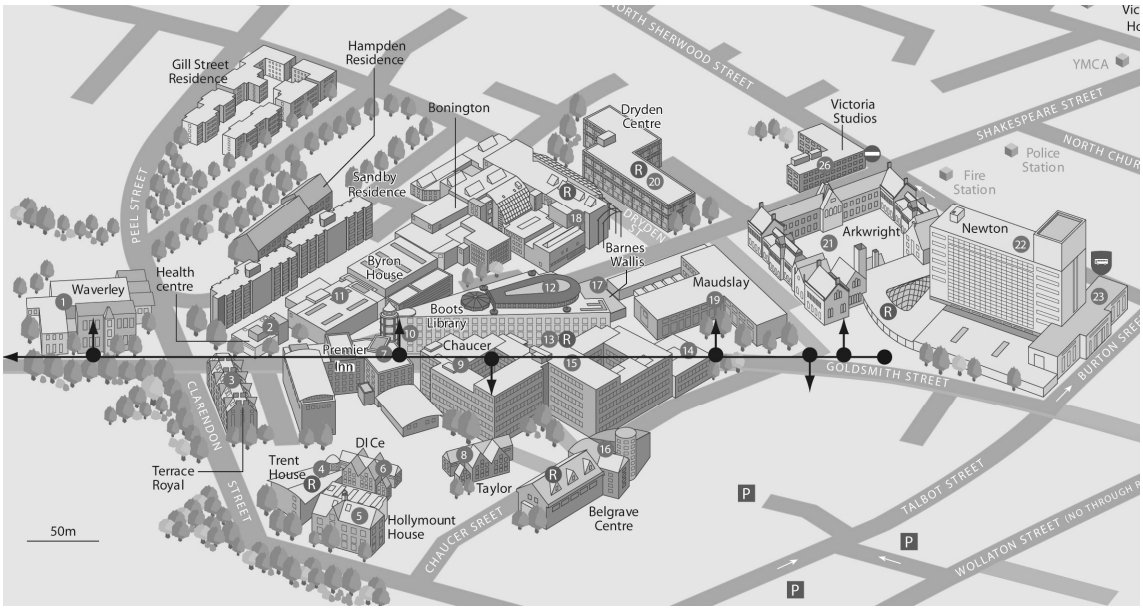

Figure 1. Map of NTU City campus with walk route and reference points illustrated

By removing the student from the usual and predictable surrounding environment, it is possible to literally point out the significance of the individual we represented within the architecture. The lecture was delivered in two parts; firstly, the students were taken for a 30-minute walk which entailed a descriptive analysis of the key buildings and individuals depicted and the second stage was in a lecture theatre explaining in more detail the relevance of the people represented and some of architecture to the BSc and the BA students.

In many respects, the lecture represents what education is supposed to do; namely nurture a hermeneutic approach to understanding an image, object or formulae [1] by complimenting and demonstrating a phenomenological approach in deconstructing our own observations [2] which encourages the student to see rather than just look.

The science and engineering content of the lecture referencing Newton, Arkwright, Boots and Barns Wallis; is supplemented by artistic examples Chaucer, the detailed analysis of the stone heads that adorn the Waverley building; a Victorian Art school. The mouldings range from Albrecht Durer to

Ruskin. These arts based reference points support the importance of values and negate the concept of the throw away culture [3].The content and academic validity of the sciences and arts based names referred to in the lecture validate themselves by the own contributions to their disciplines. However, all of this information also needs to be conveyed to students.

Experience is important to students and to staff; it is one way in which we as people remember things. It was with this in mind that the lecture was designed for the current under graduates on the BA BSc students studying Product and Furniture Design at Nottingham Trent University. It is interesting to note the importance in terms of generating information to ultimately resolve design problems described by IDEO, the book The Art of Innovation possesses more references to experience than any other subject within the text [4].

In contemporary Product Design, whether it is of engineering focus or aesthetic design, the ability to observe, to look and deeply understand is of the upmost importance in any design project. An awareness of an environment, both physically and contextually drives companies like Ideo. These practices advocate such activity in a range of publications, be it by packaging their empathic and experiential methods as method cards [5] or advocating roaming an environment to identify and inform our intuition [6]. Moreover the ability for a designer to de-familiarise themselves from their usual routine to experience new events through empathy is becoming more and more conventional in research carried out to deliver product designs. Methods that were in the past seen as Art practices and discussed through visual culture frameworks, for example the Situational psycho-geographical method of Dérive [7], are being integrated into design activity. This is developing a design culture that places more emphasis on observing the everyday and its practices, by fostering awareness and sensitivity to our context as designers, be it cultural, social, and technical or perhaps ideally all of the above. An example of such activity is carried out by Julian Bleecker a designer, technologist and researcher at the Design Strategic Projects studio at Nokia Design whose drift deck offers a set of instructions that enable programmed wanderings around a city to encourage the user to perform in ways unfamiliar to them whilst developing a deeper understanding of the environment. [8]

The walk outlined in this case study reinforces this observational skill set and the lecture emphasises the importance of reflection and analysis of the objects in our built environment that we often pass by because they are lost in the familiarity of the everyday. Such mechanisms and experiences inspire and allow us to identify design opportunities. The authors assert it important to encourage such experiential activities in student designers. The importance of experience in design is also referred to by the historian Catherine Mc Dermott who states, ‘people link the concept to consumers and traditional services’ [9]. So, some of the leading commercial companies in design state that experience is of real value, one of the most respected historians within design echoes similar sentiments; and converting experience into memory in cognitive terms [10] for the student so that at a later date he or she is able to use the right perceptual cue to produce ideas that are based upon reference points aligned to positive experienced events to enrich the process of designing.

3 RESULTS

After the lecture, the students were questioned about the walk to elicit feedback regarding their experience and inquire into how they had engaged with the teaching method. Of the 100 students questioned, the feedback illustrates how the experience was notably different from what they were familiar and found the structure of the lecture thought provoking whilst being informed about design. The students were asked to rate the lecture on a Likert scale indicating how they rated the experience. 1 being negative and 10 being positive, 26 rated it at 7, 33 of the 100 rated the experience as 8 and 21 at 9. The students were also asked to rate how they felt they benefited from the lecture. In this case 23 rated it at 7 28 at 8 and 24 at 9. The students were also questioned about the pace of the lecture, the use of textual and visual material and if the lecture reinforced the students awareness of the subjects discussed. The answers fed back were overall positive.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Although the quantitative analysis of the data does not present a definitive account of student perceptions; the responses do illustrate that the students felt that they engaged in ways that they had not done before. The material is useful for the staff to reflect on the method and develop the ‘walk lecture’ in the future. The results with the Product Design students at Nottingham Trent indicate that there is scope for this type of teaching practice in both creative and scientific orientated contexts.

Moreover, as the climate in product design changes, to produce 'T' shaped designers that can function as a part of a multidisciplinary team or teams [11]; these processes of shared experience and ideation across specialisms might become common practice in the satisfaction and realisation of design briefs. However, future work must include analysis of the assessment results from the assignment and brief set after the 'walk'. Much has been written, particularly in relation to the learning experience of engineering students on this matter, not so much on product design students, in particular the data to be collected and the framework to be used. It is suggested by many authors that both quantitative and qualitative data on learning and teaching is required to be collected and analysed together to obtain meaningful results in terms of pedagogic research

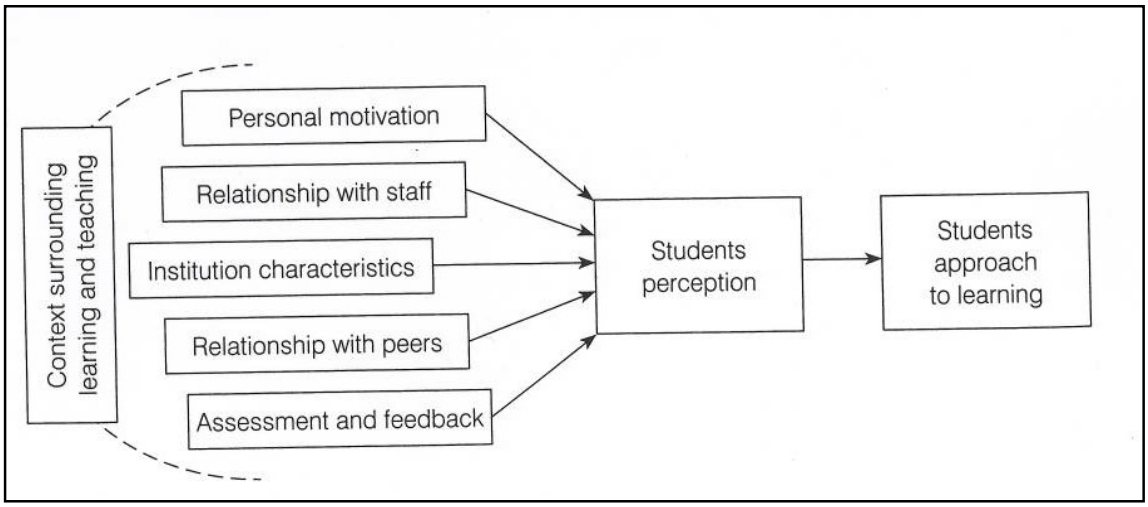

Figure 2. Theoretical framework for considering students' perceptions and approaches to learning [12]

Bailie and Bernhard [13] suggest 'in educational research it is necessary to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data and use both tactics'. It is suggested that analysis and evaluation of the 'walk' will be done using a methodology designed and used by Tudor, McDowell and Penlington, as described by figure 2 and detailed in their paper 'Perceptions and Influences on approaches to learning' [12].

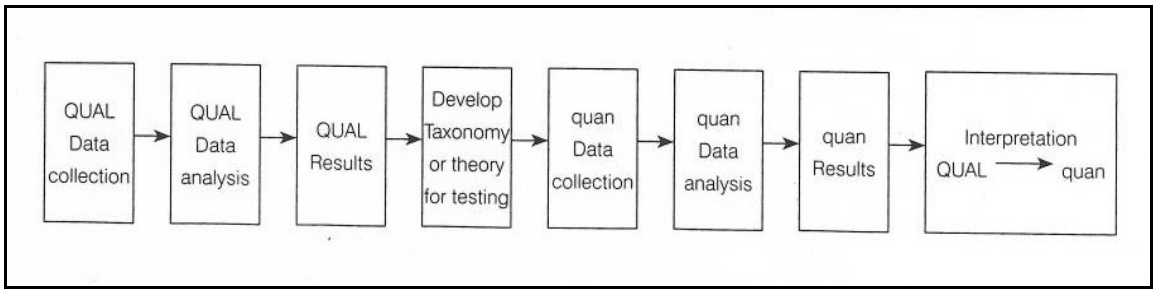

Figure 3. Exploratory sequential design [14]

This methodology will be used in conjunction with one described by figure 3, which is based on work by Creswell and Plano-Clark relative to which tactic to use first i.e. collect qualitative or quantitative first? Common sense suggests since little is known of under-graduate perceptions, and they know little about the institutional characteristics, then this data has to be transmitted and received between staff and students before quantitative data can be collected. This can be followed after assignment time by collection of qualitative data and evaluation and analysis of both. Clearly this cannot be done until the end of the third term i.e. June 2011. It is suggested that an important feature of this style of learning is the relationship with the tutor and the students' confidence in their delivery style, academic knowledge and professionalism. Although only partially analysed, the 'walk' is seen as a success, relative to the received comments and interpreted perceptions of students and that which they believe to be learning and teaching. It will be interesting to finalise the analysis and measure whether or not the average

mark or standard deviation for this module shows marked difference from what in the past has been a consistent datum. It is also intended to question the students again to attempt to gauge whether or not they have increased their deep understanding of the subject matter and whether they are able to challenge the preconceptions of the staff as to their learning abilities particularly autonomous learning.

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