

# DESIGN PROCESS: DESIGN AS AN INDIVIDUALLY NEGOTIATED PROCESS OF REFLEXIVE PRACTICE

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## ABSTRACT

Creativity within the design process is assumed to follow a prescheduled pathway.

This research explores the design processes of four New Zealand designers to identify the key elements and methodologies that they employed to answer the research question *How do designers design?*

The focus of designer's reflective practice was referenced in terms of their surrounding and remembered environment.

Three case studies were developed through interview and collection of digital images and were compared to the researcher's experiences to construct a composite case study where the researcher identified the key elements and methodologies within her creative process.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The prepared power point and oral presentation originate from a Masters of Art and Design thesis completed in 2006. The presentation opens with the research question supported by commentaries selected from discourse around the nature of design or creative processing. An observation follows to position the researcher and an outline of the methodological approach employed in the research. The commentary consists of four recounted creative stories, with a concluding section where the findings are identified, with recommendations offered to educators.

## 2. DISCUSSION

My experiences as a designer, teacher, lecturer, critic and curriculum designer, and my work as a national assessor and moderator in graphics and design technology have provided a relevant starting point to this project, because they have caused me to further question accepted pedagogical approaches to creative process.

The variety of approaches to designing identified in my own practice, and through an observation of the way design students work, brings me to question many accepted, linear notions of 'the design process'. These suggest a singular and chronological approach to designing. These linear models direct and hold decision-making in a given order and posit a number of steps. While this approach may have its place in some scientific or engineering applications, the design process taught as a blanket approach to all design opportunities, is limiting and I suggest may close down and exclude much creative processing.

Furthermore a formulaic approach to designing may be seen as discouraging innovation and the ability to effectively engage with unpredictable and unexpected outcomes.

Scrivener (2000, p.21) suggests that in design,

“some students’ interests, intentions and ways of working, although concerned with the creation of artefacts, cannot be moulded into a problem-solving project and that to do so would somehow be a failure of imagination.”

Therefore, the purpose and direction of this study is to explore ways of designing so that a variety of approaches may be recognised and an overall, more accepting view to designing encouraged. In this project, I record and reflect on the work of three New Zealand designers whose thinking processes are reflective and non-linear.

The findings of this research have implications for the education of design students. Emphasis needs to be made on the building of observational and communication skills that underpin questioning and decision-making. My belief is that creative designers have a way of being, a philosophy that requires them to challenge, to embrace discomfort and to consider thinking as something far richer, subjective, reflective and interconnected than a linear process. Research into the personal philosophical make-up of designers’ would provide valuable insight into ways of design thinking. This information as snapshots of designers and their thinking processes would inform and enrich the education of young designers.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

Therefore, the purpose and direction of this study is to explore ways of designing so that a variety of approaches may be recognised and an overall, more accepting view to designing encouraged. In this project, I have recorded and reflected on the work of three New Zealand designers whose thinking processes are reflective and non-linear.

My thesis posits the notion that design is an individually negotiated process of reflexive practice. It argues that designing cannot be described as a generically ordered process. However the evidence provided by this research establishes recognisable events across the practice of all participants. Features appear in the practice of each designer that often inform or elevate the process to another level.

Through these observations I am able to readdress an approach to design thinking and resolution to extend beyond the systemised and formulaic. Findings have provided areas of focus for further investigation to eventually to enliven learning in design. Allowing time to encourage The total engagement by the designer with the theme of a project. To become at one with the nature or detail of a task. This stage of a design process observed by Mawson (2001) a time of immersion is consistently emphasised by this research as being an essential means to connect with the essence of the work. Findings concur that to allow a sense of play at this time encourages creativity. Further recommendations include exploring the set of conditions that encourage total immersion in learners who are embarking on a creative process. Cross-curricular links are being trialed to explore and identify the most effective drama-based strategies for teachers to enhance motivational and conceptual stages at the onset and during classroom technological practice.