

Five go to Mozambique: a film of how design students develop intercultural competencies for professional practice and global citizenship. (0035)

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1999 the 'First Things First 2000' manifesto re-booted the Humanist and socially conscious perspective to graphic design that was originally set out by Ken Garland's 'First Things First' manifesto (1964), which was a reaction to the increasingly affluent and commercialized society of 1960s Britain. It tried to re-radicalise designers by arguing that Design was not a neutral or value-free process, but one that should be more critical and challenging of consumerism. It is an approach that provides inspiration to many contemporary designers and educators who seek to challenge global corporate homogenization and the exploitation of developing countries (Rawsthorn 2013; Poynor 1999; McCoy 1994).

Within the field of design education Mendoza and Matyók (2013) argue that design is a transformative and socially engaged practice offering an important platform for student internationalisation. In an increasingly global economy students must develop an intercultural awareness of themselves and other cultures, a key attribute of global citizenship (Brooks and Waters 2011; Waters, Brooks and Pimlott-Wilson 2011). Alongside the entrepreneurial strategies of governments and education institutions to develop internationalisation, many students are motivated by second chances, fun and excitement as well as the accumulation of cultural capital. Although there is a growing body of academic literature on the internationalisation of higher education, there is still a lack of research on the students' perspective (Brooks and Waters 2011).

The aim of this project was to develop student global citizenship and mobility through a cultural learning experience in a very different environment with challenging resources and social conditions. Using student interviews and evidence from their reflective journals this paper analyses how UK design students participated and negotiated the implementation of live projects in an African context, specifically Mozambique. It also examines the wider impact on the cohort of students and friends who did not travel to Africa but followed the experience online. In the analysis their

understanding of Mozambican nationalism as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) and post-colonial identity (Said 1994; Chomsky 2000) is questioned, which might otherwise inhibit a culturally informed encounter between European and African students.

During the four weeks in rural Mozambique the students from Edinburgh Napier University worked alongside local students and in the process developed shared working practices to create branding materials and publicity for the SHINE soap cooperative and the LIFE Film Festival (see figs 1,2,3). Garland (1964) provides an approach that can culturally inform the European and African students in this study as they actively shape the world around them.

## **CONTEXT**

Many UK universities are following the Higher Education Academy (HEA) with strategic plans to make themselves international 'to enhance the student learning experience' (HEA 2008: 6). As economies become globally connected there is pressure for higher education to develop student intercultural awareness and global citizenship (Brooks and Waters 2011; Waters, Brooks and Pimlott-Wilson 2011). Design education can be a transformative and socially engaged practice offering an important platform for student internationalisation (Mendoza and Matyók 2013).

Rather than an exposure to other cultures, design students need deep immersion in order to 'transform the study abroad tour into a layer of embedded experience rather than an artificial veneer' (Mendoza and Matyók 2013: 215).

Many academics (Root and Ngampornchai 2013; Goode 2008; Deardorff 2008) are critical of the impact that such studies abroad claim to have on the student. There is an assumption that immersion in a different culture will automatically lead to intercultural competency (Root and Ngampornchai 2013). Instead students must first reflect on their own culture and behaviour (Chomsky 2000).

These competencies are essential if graduates, and especially those in design, are to be prepared for global citizenship and design without borders. 'Education plays a vital role in preparing design students to move beyond a purely reactive state to one in which they are actively engaged in shaping the world around them' (Mendoza and Matyók 2013: 215). International study abroad provides a potentially richer holistic

approach to education at a time when higher education has moved towards discipline specific training and job preparation (Mendoza and Matyók 2013).

This research examined design student experiences working abroad in Mozambique and the perspective of those that remained in the UK who followed their peers via social media. It supports the arguments set out by Mendoza and Matyók and provides an approach that can culturally inform European and African students as they actively shape the world around them.



Figure 1. Children watch the mural painting.



Figure 2. Painting murals.



Figure 3. Learning Photoshop.

## METHODOLOGY

There were two phases to the research. Following university ethical procedures the five students involved in the Mozambique project were asked in advance to give their informed consent to participate in the study. Qualitative data was generated through reflective logs, a project online blog, and in-depth interviews, which were undertaken

longitudinally in parallel with the students' study in Mozambique between May and June 2014.

In-depth interviews using a structured questionnaire, taking between 20 to 30 minutes, were conducted on video with the students immediately before their departure from the UK, and a week after their return from Mozambique. During their time abroad the students kept reflective learning logs, and all were encouraged to post on the project's online blog.

## **CONCLUSION**

While the focus of this study was on graphic design students there are lessons that can be extrapolated to other design subjects and beyond. Indeed, students from other European countries would gain similar intercultural competencies not only in the African continent, but Asia and other post-colonial regions of the world.

This project shows that design education can develop intercultural competencies through creative practice that engages live briefs for international charities and organisations working in the third sector. In a post-colonial context cultural naiveties can be challenged and an appreciation of the historical and economic impact of global consumerism can be engendered. Global citizenship can be fostered through live projects that offer highly motivated learning and sharing of ideas and practices with people from different cultures.

The wider impact is also positive on those students remaining in the home country, as they can see the value of design in a different context where it is not purely corporately driven or trivialised, but radicalised to provide economic, ecological or cultural empowerment on a local and global stage. Students and teaching staff across all disciplines can begin to open their eyes to wider opportunities for social change and global citizenship. Design can make a difference.

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