

## **Developing a Cross-Cultural Design Methodology: A study of UK-South Korean Collaboration in Higher-Education Design**

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### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on development of a Cross-Cultural Design methodology that promotes culturally literate students and designers in higher education courses.

Firstly, it charts the development of a conceptual framework, 'Categories of the Interaction of Cultures', through an extensive review of the literature. This framework was then tested over a four-year period through a series of specially designed practice-based collaborative Design Education workshops, conducted in collaboration with Goldsmiths, University of London (UK) and Kyung Hee University (South Korea). Sample size over three workshops was: Student N=80 and Academic Staff N= 8. Observations of practice and semi-structured interviews were carried out during the workshops with both students and academic staff. Qualitative data from the workshops was then analysed and findings from this are discussed. These are then applied to refine the initial conceptual framework into a final Cross-Cultural Design methodology.

The Cross-Cultural Design methodology is focused on making a contribution to Higher Education Design in that it can support both academics and students in planning and experiencing learning opportunities that develop understanding of the nuances of varying cultures, keep students motivated, and enhance their contextual understanding. The methodology seeks to suggest ways to signpost academics and students to a new way of understanding and interpreting different cultures, supporting development of new design possibilities through making explicit the benefits of Cross-Cultural Design.

**Key words:** Cross-Cultural Design, Higher-education, cultural literacy

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### **Introduction**

Design is a holistic process that embraces various aspects of life; so understanding context is an increasingly critical ingredient of design practice. Therefore, although a function can be universal, its design varies depending on its context. The underlying question here is 'cultural difference', which is arguably one of the most important issues in contemporary critical, social, and cultural theory. Although, as a result of globalisation, considerable efforts are being made to explore and understand cross-cultural relationships, there has been limited discussion about cross-cultural concerns in a design practice context. It examines cross-cultural concerns in a design practice context in order to

develop a Cross-Cultural Design learning methodology that promotes culturally literate students and designers in higher education courses.

The paper draws on data collected during phase 1 of a longer research project. Firstly, it summarises how development of a conceptual framework, 'Categories of the Interaction of Cultures', was informed through by a review of the literature. This was focused in three broad areas:

- Understanding of culture and cross-culture
- Understanding Cross-culture in Design Practice
- Understanding Cross-cultural Design Education

The paper then goes on to reveal how the conceptual framework was used to plan a series of specially designed practice-based collaborative Design Education workshops, conducted collaboratively between Goldsmiths, University of London (UK) and Kyung Hee University (South Korea). Findings from the workshops are then discussed and applied to refine the initial conceptual framework into a final Cross-Cultural Design methodology.

### **Understanding of Culture and Cross Culture**

Culture has always been a vital ingredient in the design of products. Cultural influence varies between different products - some are culturally specific whereas others show a diversity of influences. However, as a result of advances in technology including global travel movement, communication, information, and particularly the recent rapid development of the internet and proliferation of smart phones, and as a result the world has become much more integrated. In that regard, the term 'globalisation' is used everywhere. Globalisation is the process of integrating various aspects of our everyday lives such as economics and culture, from all parts of the world (Bordo, 2002; Mussa, 2003). Some researchers such as Richard Jenkins (2014), author of *Social Identity*, argue that globalisation has brought diversity to our everyday lives, whereas others try to warn against cultural homogeneity, which merges each region or area's unique local trait with global traits and, more importantly, is often dominated by a few minor groups. Jenkins explains the cultural homogeneity with an example of the concept 'McDonaldisation' by George Ritzer (in Jenkins, 2014).

Diversity in this context means that people from different cultures use a variety of products to perform similar functions, but in nuanced ways. Such a global market environment is built on a very complex relationship between the various cultural contexts, and these markets have developed a standardised design approach in order to create efficient appeal for their global consumers. Ritzer in his book *The Globalization of Nothing* (2007) argued that globalization refers to the rapidly increasing worldwide integration and interdependence of societies and cultures. For Ritzer, "Nothing" refers to things that are standardized and homogenous such as 'McDonald's, Wal-Mart, Starbucks, credit cards, and the Internet (Mann, 2007, p.398)' whereas "something" means things that are personal or local flavour such as 'local sandwich shops, local hardware stores, family arts and crafts places, or a local breakfast café (Mann, 2007, p.398)'.

Theorist Theodore Levitt (1983), in his Harvard Business Review article, *The Globalization of the Markets*, paid particular attention to the phenomenon of 'standardised products and brands'. He observed that (Levitt, 1983 IN Douglas & Wind, 1987, p. 419);

1. Customers in the global markets needs and interests are becoming increasingly homogenous worldwide; and
2. People around the world are willing to sacrifice preferences in product features, functions, design, and the like for lower prices at high quality;
3. Substantial economies of scale in production and marketing can be achieved through supplying global markets

For mass-produced industrial products, the overall uniformity in product design is actually an advantage. As suggested by point 1 above, global segments with homogenous customer interests and response pattern may be identified in some product markets (Czinkota and Ronkainen, 2004), where differences, due to cultural diversity, are almost absent (Diehl & Christianns, 2006).

Therefore, the complexity of contemporary cultural context based on globalisation has led to many studies which try to guide corporations and organisations in how to strategically approach the issue of being global and local (Kluyver, 2010) which is often referred to as glocalisation (Globalisation + Localisation) and in an element of the CCD.

### **Understanding Cross-culture in Design Practice**

This part of the paper explores case-study examples of Cross-Cultural Design found in our everyday life, such as food, clothing, decoration, houses, and living environments in order to collate in-depth information based on actual practice and experience. It will assess current examples that demonstrate the concept of the 'Cross-Cultural Design'. Currently, many people use cultural interaction design methods in products, tools, objects, and even visual information practice. Yet there are still many obstacles to overcome due to a lack of multi-cultural understanding in design. Therefore, it is important to explore how a Cross-Cultural Design approach and Cross-Cultural Design processes can effectively represent and impact our everyday lives. Furthermore, the importance of the Cross-Cultural Design education will be highlighted so as to encourage students to learn other cultures, which can further contribute and be applied into the design process.

Use of cutlery and chopsticks in everyday life in both Eastern and Western cultures and 'Natural' is one of those interesting fusion concept that brings the two cultures together. Spanish designers Clara Del Portillo and Alejandro Selma stated that, "Silver cutlery is a symbol of elegance and it has been used in banquets and important tables for several years. Although the sense of fashion and aesthetics has changed, most of these cutleries still remain". Their cutlery concept, Natural, gives a new air to silver cutlery, making it current and modern without giving up on elegance. The product features a combination of two materials; traditional Western silver combined with Japanese wood (Figure 1). This product also takes into account new global mergers in the design of kitchen products by joining utensils from different cultures.



Figure 1. Designing a fusion between two cultures

Women's wear designer Yeashin Kim, launched her brand 'YEASHIN' in 2011, another example that is rather structured and controlled, with a particular cross-cultural intention. The brand's basic concept is derived from a combination of the retro designs found in British fashion of the 1960's with the influence of traditional Korean folk design (Figure 2). The playfully quirky designs and garments in Yeashin's SS13 design collection show her Eastern roots, with a focus on concertina pleats, blossom, and tassels. She acquired her inspiration by looking to her own heritage, particularly at old South Korean oriental landscape paintings, saying "The varieties of materials, controlled colours and textured details are typical of luxurious traditional Korean dress" (2013). In fact, over the past few years Koreans have become increasingly interested in fashion design and with many people choosing to research 'Korean street style', it is fast becoming recognised around the world.



Figure 2. Yeashin's SS13 design line

Recently, Android launched a commercial slogan 'Be together, not the same' (Figure 3) which summarises the underlying philosophy of Cross-Cultural Design. There is a need for a design that responds to the local environment and culture. Cross-Cultural Design opens the possibility for peoples and cultures to be entirely intertwined in the products and services they use, whilst retaining their own identity and characters.

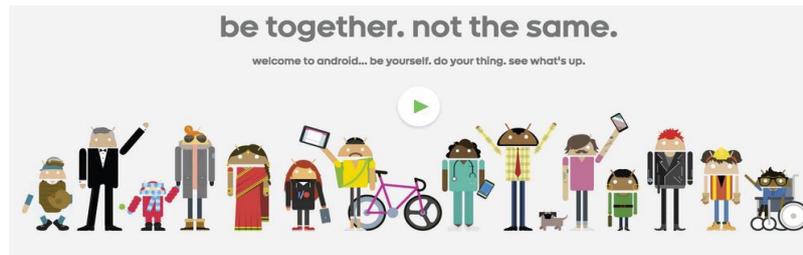


Figure 3. Android's slogan "Be together, not the same" (2015)

As seen above, a great deal of cultural elements such as the environment, materials, social status, ergonomics, and social issues are reflected in our daily life. Through studying the various examples found in different cultures, we can get a much better understanding of how people are influenced by different cultures.

### Understanding Cross-cultural education

Cross-cultural education has traditionally been associated with the study of anthropology, sociology and, more recently, business and communication. Theorists and cross-cultural researchers such as Hofstede (1984) and Hall (1989), have focused on the sociological exploration of cross-culture, but hardly touched on any specific area of design. However, the issue of globalisation, and within this, concepts of 'Cultural Interaction (CI)' have been considered in the design of products for international markets. The impact of this is that the design profession and the education of designers has begun to take more notice of the cultural context for design, in order to design something that can appeal to a wider spectrum of consumers from all over the world. Diehl and Christianns (2006) asserted that;

While research on cultural aspects has traditionally been associated with areas of anthropology and sociology, the focus on the interaction with the material world has woken up the interest of the design disciplines to take part in these studies. (p. 503)

Here, what needs to be emphasised is that despite the concerns about standardisation and uniformity, academics including some like Guy Julier (2008) argue that globalisation still offers an optimistic vision for the design industry as an opportunity for renewed creativity with enhanced quality and flexibility. While cross-cultural research has been mainly used to help the understanding of multinational culture and improve international communication and marketing, CCD as an approach could now be used to enhance not just communication but also the quality of design of products and services. Many already argue that the importance of cross-cultural design in the future continues to grow (Leong & Clark, 2003; Lin, 2007; Sohoni, 2009). As a result, design education as well as design professionals have to consider the cultural context of the users in order for goods and services to fully satisfy the consumer.

Ethnic-cultural variation is, among other things, reflected in the different products with different and similar functionality that people use, and in the different ways people use these products. The amount to which cultural diversity is reflected in differences between products and product forms depend, of course, on the types of products we have in mind. Television sets and ballpoints pens are typical examples of products where differences, due to cultural diversity, are almost absent, but in some cases, however, ethnic-cultural variation conflicts with the uniformity principle of mass-production.

The process of globalisation has resulted in a situation in which industrial designers from one culture or context often have to develop their designs for use in a wider cultural environment, and there has been emerging interest in the impact of cultural dimensions on the experience and interaction between people and products. Consequently, it has become integral for the industrial design profession to carefully take into account the context and culture of the end-users.

Each culture has unavoidably been exposed to other cultures, to 'otherness' throughout human evolution; thus, combining and reforming, hybridising and borrowing form the basis of the constant regeneration of society and culture throughout history. On these blurred boundaries between cultures and societies (Figure 4), many conflicts and misunderstandings can, and have, occurred.

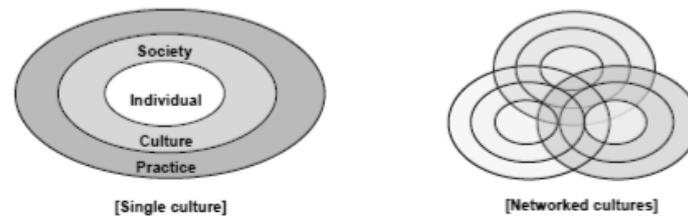


Figure 4. Networked culture diagram

The interaction of cultures through design helps to effectively provide communication to overcome the cultural differences that may arise when two different cultures meet each other. Its purpose is to minimise the negative impact of these differences by establishing common frameworks which cultures can then interact within. Even though the world has become increasingly globalised over the last 50 - 60 years, cultural differences still continue to exist and should be respected and understood. In her article, "Cross cultural design = Living on the edge", Erin Moore (2010), a designer and ethnographer, stated that:

...Connections are a result of technology, economy, transportation, education, politics or one of a million other things and probably do not matter as much as the fact that these connections, large and small, are happening constantly. Living on these borders ('on the edge') is easy to see how people of one place have integrated the customs and languages of another into their daily lives. When one lives on the border, cultural exchange or collision is inevitable. Products, services and communications more often than not, cater to people of both or many backgrounds.

Moore, however, wonders about the availability of this type of fluid exchange between people who live miles, countries or continents away from the cultures that they need or want to interact with. It poses an interesting question and unique challenge for designers, as these types of connections continue with increasing frequency across all industries. Engagement within this social process creates a forum for new cultural design concepts. Therefore, it is argued, that in order to achieve solid decision-making and successful product outcomes, Cross-Cultural Design research and cultural interaction design processes are essential.

Cross-cultural considerations affect how designs are received, especially if these aspects are not properly examined and taken into account. It is also important to ensure usability and user experience across cultural boundaries. Cross-Cultural Design education and research requires understanding of cultural differences and application of user-centred design methods, learning via their cultural identities and meanings, in target cultures.

### **Defining Cross-Cross Cultural Design (CCD) and Introducing CCD methodology**

Through case-study examples of Cross-Cultural Design, as outlined above, we have been able to observe and explore in greater depth how tools and elements of design and culture interact, and what designers are capable of producing and expressing in their designs. The interaction and use of such cultural interactions is not one-dimensional but is, in fact, very complex. Through materials and design, nature, environmental and societal structures and lifestyle or religious factors, we were able to explore the Interaction of Cultures in design. We have discovered how many channels feed into the concept of cultural interaction in design, and how such designs can actually lead to more comfortable and ergonomic designs for the end users. Further to this, we have seen various examples of humour and gentle cultural tensions as different cultures interact in design, bringing a smile to the face of those using and observing the designs.

On the basis of the research performed throughout these case studies, we have categorised the various areas where we see the uses and interactions of cultures in design. These have been developed into a conceptual framework 'Categories of the Interaction of Cultures', see table 1 below. The case studies reflect either one or a blend of these categories and have helped to ascertain how such interactions can influence and shape the various designs and uses. A definition of each CCD category helps the reader (teacher or learner) understand the category and subsequent sub-sections clarify CCD considerations and qualities. These cross-cultural qualities have arisen from the analysis of intercultural and Cross-Cultural Designs assessed in this paper.

From the analysis of the various case studies, we have been able to observe how different cultures can interact and come together to enhance the benefits from each design to form positive synergistic relationships. The harmonisation of these benefits has been enhanced whilst potential weaknesses and faults of each design is reduced. Furthermore, we have not only seen the interaction of designs across cultures, but also over time; we have been able to observe -as in the daybeds -how designs have evolved and interacted cross-culturally over time. The ultimate end results across the various regions and cultures have shed light on the potential benefits of bringing together cultural designs concepts intra-nationally and temporally.

Table 1. *A Conceptual Framework: Categories of the Interaction of Cultures*

CCD Categories	CCD Considerations	CCD Qualities
Things	Materials	Provide the basis for making and creating things and they are influential in the production and manufacturing process.
	Technologies	Cutting edge technology can often bring about completely new design, sometimes resulting in the upgrade of designs.
	Production processes	The final product can vary depending on the local culture, method and production process.
Places	Environments	Environmental and social elements are important and can often impact the designs aimed for everyday use.
People	Signs	Designs can come about to advance communication or they can come about from enhanced communication –it can work both ways
	Subcultural	Lifestyles often portray their inherent cultural roots and are often important in expressing the identity and concept behind a particular cultural design.
	Needs	Needs and essentials often drive the motives behind the designs and are often a great point of initiation for designs.
	Improvement	Makes one's life more comfortable and enriches the user's life.
	Linguistics and signals	Important with regards to communication and are crucial for the making and keeping of promises often leading to potential disputes or cooperation.
	'Now' culture	What is happening 'time based'
Ethics	Conceptual	One's design sense and design concepts are very important and are often connected to cultures.
	Religious	Beliefs and religion are often portrayed in designs and so religious lives and faith are often influential in designs.
	Political	The design of an artefact is always also a political decision about how people should live, communicate, or behave. Design is often influenced by the political incidents or decisions, and, furthermore, design can be used as a political instrument in the form of activism, or as a medium to discuss and dream about possible or better futures.

### CCD Short Programmes: Data Analysis and Findings

The conceptual framework as outlined above was tested over a four-year period through a series of specially designed practice-based collaborative Design Education short programmes, consisting of workshops and seminars. These were conducted in collaboration with Goldsmiths, University of London (UK) and Kyung Hee University (South Korea). Sample size over three workshops was: Student N=99 and Academic Staff N= 8. Observations of practice and semi-structured interviews were carried out during the workshops with both students and academic staff. See table 2 below for details of each workshop. Qualitative data from the workshops was then analysed and key findings are summarised below. Findings were then applied to refine the initial conceptual framework into a final Cross-Cultural Design methodology.

Table 2. *Summary of Cross-Cultural Design Short Programmes*

Programme	1	2	3	4
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Title	Borders, Boundaries and Thresholds	Inside Out, Outside In	Ritual & Routine	Tourism of the Ordinary
Date	18. 01. 2010 - 12. 02. 2010	26. 07. 2010 - 17. 08. 2010	11. 07. 2011 - 29. 07. 2011	22. 07. 2013 - 09. 08. 2013
Length	4 weeks	3 weeks	3 weeks	3 weeks
Participants	30 BA Design students	20 BA Design students	24 BA Design students	25 BA Design students
Design Outcomes	6 projects	5 projects	6 projects	6 projects

### CCD Short Programmes Key Findings

Through the four years' experience of running Cross-Cultural Design short programmes, the most exciting finding is that cultural understanding - particularly juxtaposing two different cultures and finding the hidden connection between them - allowed the students to come up with ideas and design approaches that are 'unexpected,' and based on individual students' own reinterpretation. In depth exploration of the culture permits the students much greater possibility of developing their own intentions and design languages.

According to Professor Meekyung Jang from Kyung Hee University, who organises the Cross-Cultural Design programmes, there are two main factors that have made a positive impact; the first is the new teaching methodologies, which are different from those employed in the Korean education system; it engages the students in more active enquiries, including field research, meta-design, and ideation drawing. The second is a working environment that brings together students from different backgrounds and provides them with a wider context to work on.

Moreover, the outcomes of the Cross-Cultural Design programme provided opportunities to see what are good or bad Cross-Cultural Design examples. As discussed at the beginning, Cross-Cultural Design has not yet been clearly defined; therefore there is a need to clarify what a good Cross-Cultural Design approach is. On the reflection of the outcomes of the early CCD programmes, and in discussion with academic tutors on these projects, it was noted that students commonly make mistakes by basing their ideas on preconceived notions and cultural stereotypes, rather than understanding culture through actually carrying out observation design research. As an example of this stereotyping, Korean students who had never visited England simply assumed that it is a country of 'rain'. They then went on to designing an umbrella. Clearly, English weather is not continuous rain and more importantly, local people do not carry umbrellas all of the time because it rarely rains heavily in UK. Tutors highlighted that another misunderstanding that students often make is that Cross-Cultural Design is about combining two different cultures as a simple sum of 1+1, for example, the Korean traditional hat or 'got' plus the British Fedora.

What emerged from the workshops and seminars is that "whatever definition is ascribed of the word, it can be argued that globalisation is changing the face and shape of education" (Ness & Lin, 2015, p.63). There is also an emergent trend in design, which considers people far beyond the object, or the market. Designers should understand users, their experiences, needs and problems to enable the creation of informed design for the reality of people's lives, who are the potential users (Curedale, 2012). Throughout the design process, and within any design discipline, understanding the outlook of the end user should be carefully considered. In order to apply a greater understanding of design, creative thinking methods can be implemented. By employing a learning framework that stresses the need and importance of cross-cultural consideration in the design process, students, and designers can develop their approach with more informed approaches, particularly when it comes to the message which designers feel is being communicated, and, equally as important, from the user perspective, in regards to how the end product might be received by users. With a coherent understanding of the user's needs, based on learning their cultural background at the initial stages of the design research, building a clear set of project or product objectives, including user needs and desires, and considering the product journey and lifecycle would allow potential constraints and misunderstandings to surface early (Curedale, 2012).

Introducing modules which encourage a change in the way we view the world as a whole, and not

solely in terms of design, can encourage a more positive accepting outlook for all life actions, and thus implementing this approach to design enhances the practices. Students must be able to recognise the necessity and importance of each module of their design education programmes in order to fully engage within the educational projects and workshops to obtain the understanding and apply their learning into future design problems. Biggs (2003) claims that cultivation only by acquisition of knowledge is not enough; therefore, students must work through practice of actual projects, and the assessment should be a formative element of the learning through the 'feedback and feed-forward' process; students should choose to develop their own motivation to include and adapt the learning into their own design processes.

### **Conclusion: Developing a Cross-Cultural Design Methodology**

The main outcome of this research is the coherent development of a Cross-Cultural Design learning methodology, based on findings above. The concepts underpinning the CCD methodology are

- design education is essential for the expanded visual environment and visual literacy education. As we are living in a hugely 'expanded' visual cultural environment aided by the advance of technologies, the main sign of communication and production is no longer letters (Hall, 1997). Images, sound, space, objects, and gestures are treated equally or even transcend written language. Therefore, the ability to use a non-letter language, which is visual literacy, is required. The education of visual literacy, unlike art education where 'perception' is more important than 'interpretation', is based on consideration of the contexts. Referring to Haanstra (1994), the aim of the visual literacy is a "communications' approach" and "to reduce visual images to unequivocal messages and avoid ambiguity" (p.61), which is interpretation, whereas the ultimate goal of art education is to build the unique meaning of the world for a student through "cultivation of perception (p.61). It is designed to train people's interpretation of the visual experiences in daily life, and the ability to create such visual experience. In other words, it is education for design's consumption and production.
- the need for a combined education. At this point, 'combined' means using knowledge, skills, and methods from more than one culture in order to investigate core topics, issues, problems, or experiences so that it can develop abilities and foster students. This is the most ideal form of education, where solving problems is taught via the connection of different culture based on mutual functions. Essentially, design as an academic activity is related to a variety of social, economic, cultural, cognitive, physical, ethical, political, and technical dimensions, and it is also regarded as being very useful for exploring combinations of these elements, because it is through the complex interplay of these elements that possible design solutions can be found.
- the world does not exist as a divided knowledge system. It can be 'explained' with division, but it does not 'exist' in that way. In this sense, CCD education is an education about the 'actual world'. Often there are limits, and the students may feel suppressed when taught to receive knowledge based on understanding other cultures through theoretical text because it may force them to only learn knowledge via texts, rather than to gain an opportunity to experience various cultures. However, in advanced education systems teachers and students create models through CCD projects, in which they all participate directly. This can nurture visual literacy and conceptualizes CCD education as a combination of culture and design education, leading to an innovative Cross-Cultural Design learning methodology as conceptualized in figure 5 below.

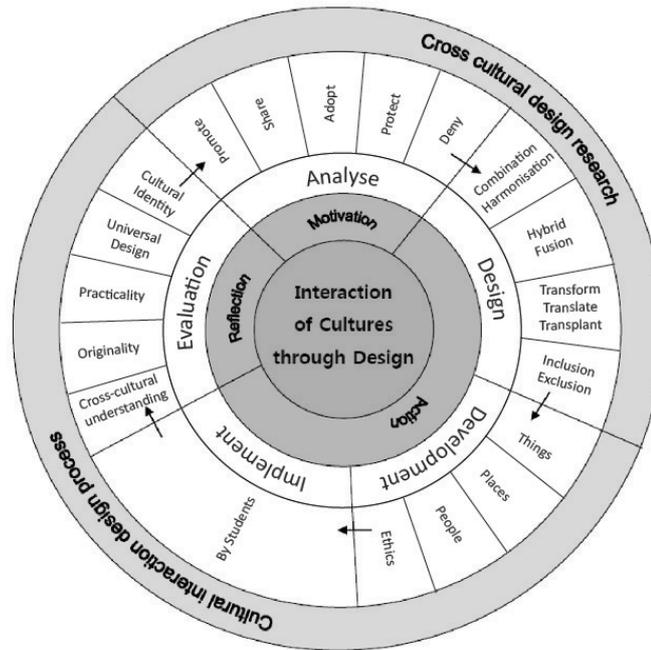


Figure 5. Cross-Cultural Design learning methodology

It is intended that this methodology, developed, tested and refined over a longitudinal period, is focused on making a contribution to Higher Education Design in that it can support both academic staff and students in planning and experiencing learning opportunities that develop understanding of the nuances of varying cultures, keep students interested and motivated as well as enhancing their contextual understanding.

From the four years of experience of running CCD education programmes, a great deal of potential has been revealed; however, key findings from this research emphasise the need for the CCD learning practice rooted in the methodology to evolve and develop in response to changing cultural and global trends and across design disciplines. Another of the key findings is that design practice that considers cultural influences and experience cannot be developed within a short period of time, and this has implications for further research to explore impact across different phases of education.

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