

# Design for Learning - A New Degree Course

It is fairly common practice for subject experts, with or without teaching experience, to be responsible for the planning of teaching methods, the selection of media, the role of the media, and the actual writing of the materials. Such work requires knowledge and creative ability with communication, teaching methods and media; none of which may be part of the subject expert's qualifications.

It is equally common for the designer working in education to be unfamiliar with the various educational considerations inherent in the work they are doing.

In the field of education, interpretation, and training there is a need for people who can combine analytical abilities and knowledge of educational concepts with imagination and vision in design. Such people could make very effective contributions, both to the planning and writing of teaching materials and to the physical designing of them.

There are very few designers like this. A national survey (Wright 1973) showed considerable need for people able to combine creative ability in design with a sensitive awareness of the conditions which lead to learning. The 'Design for Learning' course at Manchester Polytechnic was developed to educate such people.

## The Course

'Design for Learning' was validated by the CNA in 1979. It is a three year honours course and is a full-time Area within the 'Design for Communication Media' degree at Manchester Polytechnic. This means that students study 'Design for Learning' for the full duration of their course and upon completion can be awarded the degree of BA (Hons) Design for Communication Media (Design for Learning).

The main aim of the course is to prepare people to work in the field of education, interpretation, and training, and who will have design ability in audio-visual media and plan and develop materials to facilitate learning. Such skills must necessarily be founded on a high level of intellectual and creative ability.

By the end of the course we expect students to have developed:

- the ability to analyse educational design problems and present appropriate strategies;
- a widely ranging creative awareness and ability in the use of visual and verbal media;
- the ability to perform professionally as a general designer, visualiser or specialist.

The course is not about advertising or publicity and is not concerned simply with representing information. We leave bus timetables, forms and phone books to others.

The course is about helping people understand something about a subject in the easiest, most efficient and interesting way.

## Student Experience of the Course

During the first eighteen months of the course all students undertake a series of tutor-set tasks. The intention is to introduce students to range of media, a range of learners and a range of learning contexts. It is very important to point out the range of learners; too many people think Design for Learning is about schooling. It is not! In fact the course does very little work connected with schools. There are many situations in life where people experience a formal intent to help them learn. People visit zoos, museums and interpretive centres; they listen to radio and watch television; they learn as part of their jobs and in their hobbies.

During the first half of the course students experience illustration, graphics, photography, tape-slide, video, exhibition design, computers and writing. Thus at first it is a very widely based design course.

The second half of the course is very much student based. Each student is responsible for identifying educational problems and developing materials appropriate to that problem. Usually by that time in the course students have decided whether they wish to continue as a generalist or whether they wish to develop a specialisation which may be in a particular medium, or based on a particular type of learner or learning context.

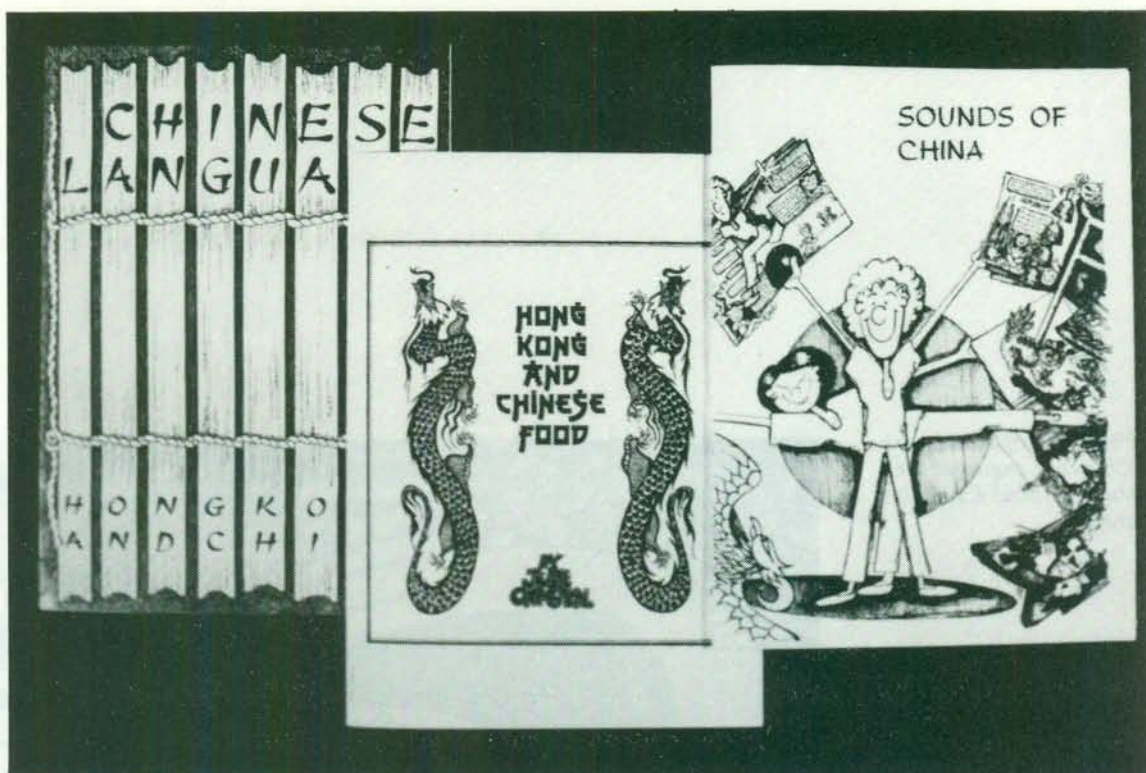
The third year of the course includes an 'association period'. During this time students have to work in conjunction with an actual client; the final part of the third year is a six month elective task.

The early part of the course is very varied but it does nevertheless allow a student with a particular interest to develop that interest. A student devoted to illustration can introduce it, in varying degrees, into many tasks even though those tasks may be based around a different medium.

Designers for learning are communicators and the development of personal communication skills is built in at all levels of the course. All students are expected to be able to talk about their work, and the finale to every task involves each student presenting their work to an assembled audience of other students, visitors and tutors. This is nerve-racking for many but we have found that the confidence developed as a result of such experience is of lasting benefit to all students.

All students develop research skills and writing skills. The idea is not to produce researchers and writers (although students may





*Booklets produced by  
First Year Students,  
for Multi-cultural education  
project, Manchester  
Polytechnic*

go that way if they wish) but to give students insights into the processes involved. If educational designers are going to be able to communicate with subject specialists then they must have some regard for the special skills of those people. Educational designers will have to work in many subject areas. They are unlikely to be specialists in any of those subject areas. They must however be able, in a short space of time, to become familiar with a subject in order that real dialogue and understanding can be achieved between designer and content specialist.

The basic mechanism by which the skills in Designing for Learning are achieved is through tasks.

#### **The Nature of Tasks**

A typical task involves the student in dealing with four aspects of developing educational design strategies.

##### *a. How the problem is dealt with at present.*

This section requires the student to identify, locate and survey existing materials, schemes and ideas relating to the area defined by the brief. It necessitates the student examining the organisation, methodology and design of those materials, analysing them as material for learning and making a judgement of their merits and defects.

##### *b. The nature of the problem.*

Having surveyed and examined the existing materials the student is in a position to look more closely at the principal issues and options that seem to be important and about which some form of resolution must be achieved before an actual strategy can be developed. It represents an opportunity to explore issues that have arisen out of the earlier survey. Through this section the student designer will more tightly define the boundary to the problem and identify those features critical to making an appropriate response.

##### *c. The production of materials.*

This section involves the appraisal of possible solutions within the identified aim, the formulation

of particular objectives, the mapping out of teaching/learning sequences to fulfil the objectives, the exploration of media, and the development of actual materials. The student is expected to justify the strategy adopted and demonstrate some understanding of how the materials might be evaluated.

##### *d. Reflection on performance.*

The students are expected to reflect on, and appraise, their own performance both as learners and educational designers.

It will be clear that considerable emphasis is placed on sound and justifiable design decisions. The belief of all course tutors is that designers should know what they are doing when they make marks on paper. However the somewhat equal spacing given to the above categories when written down does somewhat obscure the fact that Section 'c' is inevitably, in terms of time, the longest section. What ever else the students are able to do they must, in the end, be able to demonstrate a high level of skill competence.

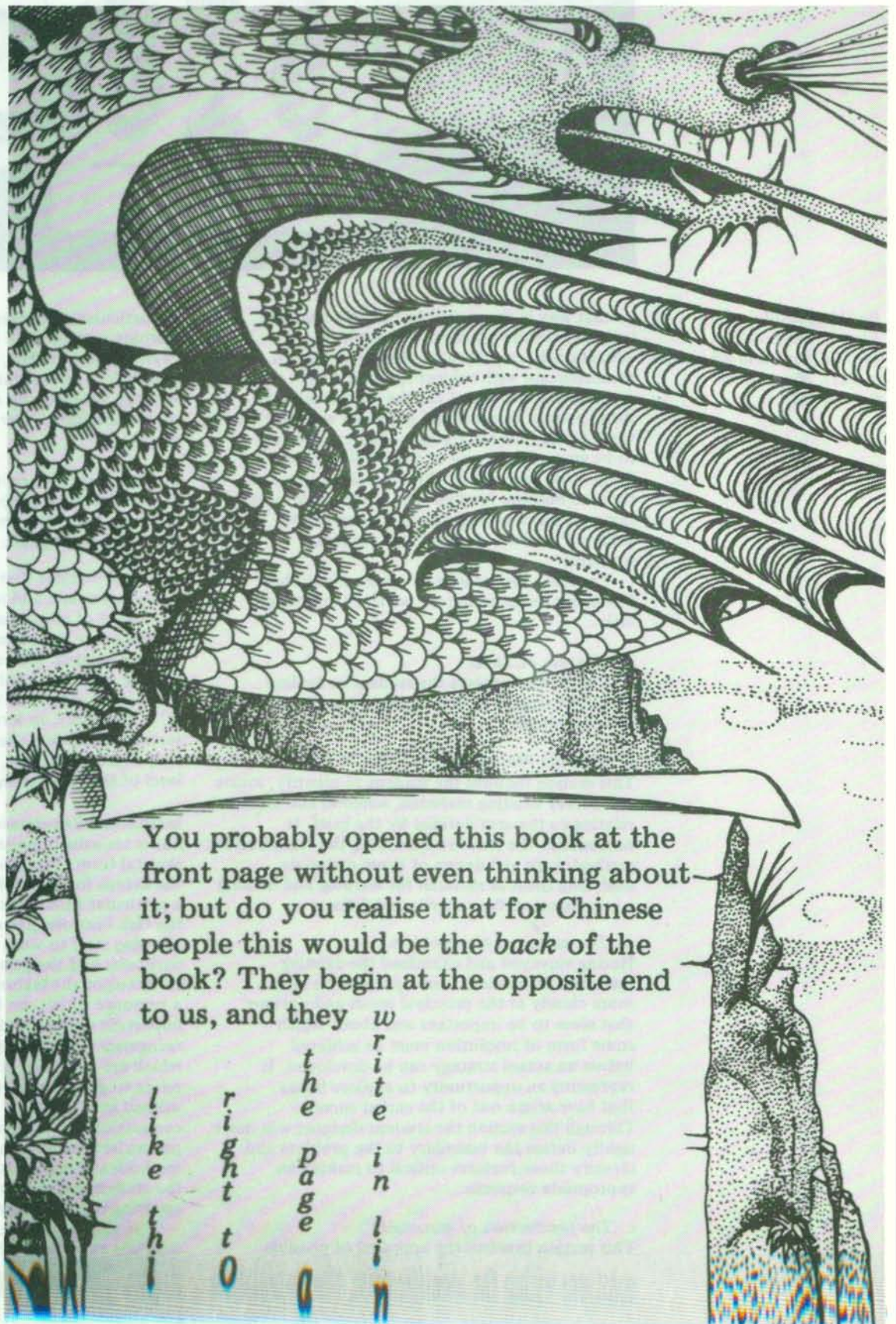
#### **Intellectual Experience**

Tasks are usually presented to the students in skeletal form. The students are expected to specify the details for themselves according to their views of a particular situation and their own interests. Thus the task becomes personal to the student while allowing staff to work with students at both the particular and the general level. Each student has to reflect upon the features of the task in order to organise a response which can be effective and justified. An important objective of a task is that the student recognises that although each task has features which are particular to it there will be others which relate to general principles which may be utilised in a variety of situation. In trying to see the connection between general principles and particular situations, and in trying to plan teaching methods and materials which reflect this connection, the student experiences the inevitable tension of applying theory to practice.

The above intellectual elements are part of the students experience from the beginning of their studies. The students actively engage in integrating



First page of booklet on  
'Chinese Language' for  
Multi-cultural Education  
project





elements from various areas of knowledge and experience in a way which constantly relates theory to practice. As their studies develop the student's attention is focused upon the relationships of these elements and not upon their existence as discreet areas of experience.

#### **Actual Work**

To write in general terms, as in the previous sections, somewhat obscures the nature of the actual tasks that students undertake. The easiest way to resolve this dilemma is to indicate some of the tasks that students have worked on since the course started. Great emphasis is placed on working with 'real' problems and generating strategies appropriate to the 'real' world. Thus all our tasks derive from the world of actual educational design problems. This section will restrict itself to indicating tasks completed in association with an outside organisation.

Videos have been produced for Pilkingtons, The Home Office Forensic Science Department, Greater Manchester Police and in conjunction with Leeds University. The first three programmes were all what could loosely be called industrial training. A mass of twin-projector tape slides have been produced for many organisations. These programmes cover industrial safety, commercial training, formal education, and countryside and historical interpretation. Small exhibitions have been undertaken for UMIST and the Wild Fowl Trust. A considerable amount of graphic material has been

produced, mostly in the museum and interpretative areas. Some of the illustrations accompanying this article highlight this work.

The course is constantly being approached by organisations who would like our students to work with them. We are always interested in hearing from people but there are limits to the amount of outside work we can undertake. Students have to be allowed to experiment and if necessary experience things that go wrong. Such experiences are usually not compatible with the needs of clients.

#### **Futures**

It is too early to be specific about the job opportunities for Design for Learning students. It is particularly difficult in view of the problems which are affecting all design students in the current general employment situation. However we are pleased that of our first output of graduates not a single one is on the dole. Several went straight into design or design related jobs. Several others went on to further education courses, two on to Master's degree courses and two into teacher education. Clearly the future cannot be predicted but we are confident that the abilities developed in our students will enable them to compete effectively and efficiently in the world beyond the Polytechnic.

#### **Recruitment**

Design for Learning is able to take only fifteen students a year. Most of these will come from foundation courses in Art and Design. However

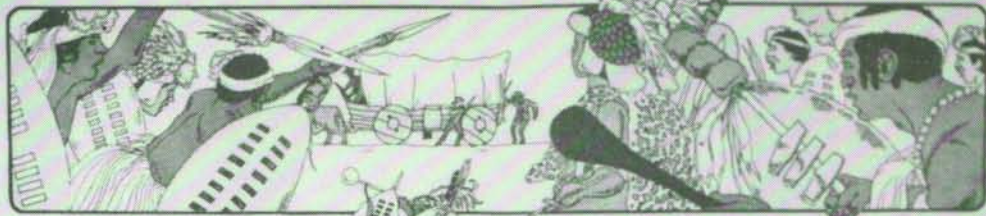
*First Year Students working on sound track for tape-slide*





# Zulus

# South Africa



The Zulus were very powerful warriors as well as being horsemen. They had a very large and well trained army that could reach fifty miles in a day!

## Zulu Spears

Can you find the six spears on the wall of the cave, and draw the blades of a big and small spear? Draw the handle as well.



## Zulu Ikwas

Zulus fought with a trapper spear called an 'ikwa'. This is the Zulu word for the wooden stick when they pulled it out of their antlion's nest!



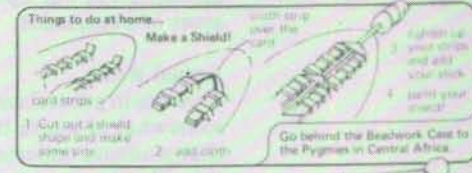
## Zulu Shields

In the cave there are three Zulu shields made from ox-hide. War shields have a pole held in the back of the shield to keep the shields stiff and in shape. When the warriors march they take out the pole and roll up their shields and carry them under their armpits. Sometimes the shields bent so they straighten them they soaked them and fast them on a flat rock to dry. But they had to be careful as ants would come and try to eat their shields!

Shields are used for dancing and for fighting. Draw a dancing shield.



Why do you think it is so small?



some are recruited either direct from school or as mature students. Like most courses we like to see people who are creative, have flair and possess good 'art and design' ability. We also look for people who wish to be problem solvers, people who are prepared to engage in research and reading, people with wide interests, and, perhaps most of all, people who have an interest in people.

## Conclusion

Design for Learning is a tough course. It makes high demands of skill and intellect. However, for those who can face up to a challenge it is an immensely rewarding course. Designers for Learning may sometimes be hard worked but they are never bored. Each task brings with it a new subject area, a new type of learner, new media demand and a new set of problems. It takes flair and intellect, skill and courage to meet and match these demands. Designers for Learning are special people — they have to be!

Second Year students having education seminar in course resources room

