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**A SMALL DROP OF INK, FALLING LIKE DEW: AN INVESTIGATION
INTO THE PROCESS OF INTERPRETING THE WRITTEN WORD INTO
AN ILLUSTRATION**

**A THESIS PRESENTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN EDUCATION**

AT MASSEY UNIVERSITY, NEW ZEALAND.

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2008

ABSTRACT

This investigation's origin is one born of pragmatism. It seeks to improve the teaching and learning of illustration, a visual communication design discipline. The specific focus is text adaptation and the process involved in interpreting the written word into a visual image. Common characteristics of poor interpretation, identified after many years of teaching illustration, are the creation of images which are either based on relatively insignificant details from a text, or so removed from a text's theme, that decoding an image's intended meaning becomes extremely difficult. This study therefore seeks to provide insight into the process of interpreting written text into an illustration and offer some suggestions as to how novice illustration students can improve their skills in this process.

The chosen methodology of this study is action research, and within a constructivist-interpretivist framework, work carried out with three groups of novice students, during three linked cycles of investigation has been analysed. Two separate, but linked learning strategies were developed incrementally. These can be thought of as thinking tools. The first one relates to comprehension of text while the second strategy focuses on analogical reasoning as an idea generation method. The data suggests that these learning strategies were successful, allowing students to develop more awareness of their design process and also create concepts which captured the essence of a text. This suggests that, while designing does involve tacit, intuitive thought, explicit methods of thinking can also assist design creativity.

Much of the literature on design suggests that a paradigm shift is taking place within the field, in education as well as design practice. One of the characteristics of this change is a call for design educators to develop an epistemology of what constitutes design knowledge. This thesis is an addition to that ongoing search for understanding.

Acknowledgments

While PhD study is largely a solitary undertaking, it is not possible without good supervision. I would therefore, first and foremost like to thank Dr Linda Leach for her expert, deft and gentle handling as main supervisor throughout this study. Linda, you have allowed me to take some pride of ownership in this undertaking, but your influence is embedded deeply within this work and it would not have been possible without your expert tutelage. I am so glad you agreed to supervise my study. I am also indebted to Associate Professor, Frank Sligo who I coerced to take on the role of co-supervisor about half way through the study. Frank, you challenged me to think about the significance and value of every single word, sentence and paragraph in this thesis. Whatever clarity and eloquence is evidenced in my writing can be traced to your insightful suggestions. It is also very important for me to thank Geoff Hargreaves, who played a highly significant role as co-supervisor in the first year of this study. I would also like to thank the College of Creative Arts, Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor, Claire Robinson for her wholehearted support during these past five years.

Without a strong drive to succeed, I doubt a PhD is possible. But certainly, to go against expectations, you need some help along the way. As a working class teenager in the 1970s, the world of school was grey, drab and miserable. Except for one solitary location—the art room. That was an alternative world, a world of psychedelic colour and endless possibilities. A world inhabited by a strange breed of individuals—art teachers! Long haired, cravat wearing, purple flair corduroyed, bearded, pipe smokers! They created a world I wanted to be part of. So, it would be remiss of me not to thank my two art teachers from St Ninian's RC High School, Mr Boyle and Mr McKevenney. If not for them, you would not be reading this. Those men inspired me and even though I left school without university entrance qualifications, it was their powerful influence that encouraged me to go to night school three years after leaving school and get the qualifications I needed for art college.

I also need to thank my mother. My mother was an insatiable reader. There were always books lying around the house. It was her that inculcated my sense of curiosity and love of reading. She bought me a set of *'Newnes Pictorial Knowledge'*

encyclopaedias when I was about ten and I was fascinated by them. I still have them today, I brought them all the way from Scotland to New Zealand. I know my mum would be proud and would say “tell them to put that in their pipe and smoke it”, referring to those who would have doubted her only son would complete a PhD. So, mum, in your memory, here’s tae ye!

This thesis is dedicated to my two wonderful sons, Calum and Hugh. Boys, anything is possible.

List of terms

Actor: An active participant in an image from whom a vector departs (see participants and vector)

Brief: a written set of instructions and information about what is required of students

Circumstances: Participants in an image which enhance meaning but are not essential

Connotative: An implied meaning

Denotative: A literal or concrete definition

Experiential: concepts which describe the text's theme by comparison to physical experiences

Fragmentary: concepts based on secondary themes in the text

Goal: A passive participant in an image, that which is being acted upon

Illustration: imagery which encapsulates, supports and enhances a hegemonic reading of a written text

Modality: The extent to which an image represents reality

Participants: Separate elements within a picture which are arranged to create meaning

Salience: The hierarchical significance of elements within a picture whose arrangement affects meaning

Source: That which requires explanation

Signified: That which is meant

Signifier: That which represents what is meant

Situational: Concepts based on literal aspects of the text

Target: That which is used to explain a source

Thumbnail: A small sketch quickly rendered to explore the key conceptual elements and visual features of an idea

Vector: The directional action focus within an image which links participants

Visualised conceptual analogy: An image which is a visualisation of a concept created through analogy

Workbook: An extensive collection of fleeting, captured thoughts, embryonic ideas, gathered images, research material, analysis, experiments with techniques, media and style, iterations and systematic developments of concepts.

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