Designing Your Writing/Writing Your Design: Art and Design Students Talk About the Process of Writing and the Process of Design

Susan Orr, Margo Blythman, and Joan Mullin, Saint John College (UK), University of the Arts London, and University of Texas at Austin

Abstract: How to write, and the relationship between images and writing, has been changing within the academy. Some indication of this can be seen in the new composition texts that emphasize reading visuals or teaching students in our largely visual culture (e.g. Faigley, George, Selfe, & Palchik , 2004; Alfano & O'Brien, 2005; Ruszkiewicz, Anderson, & Friend, 2006). However, little account has been taken of students' perceptions of the visual and the written. In order to determine whether such perceptions might alter our understandings of the relationship between the image and the word, as well as revise our pedagogy, we conducted joint research with art and design students in the UK and US. We address here four of the areas of interest that emerged from our data: students' personal relationship with writing/art and design, the role of peers and audience, engagement with process, and conceptions of time. The research supported some common assumptions about teaching writing to students with visual preferences, and challenged others. As a result of these student voices, we offer some reflections that reinforce current pedagogies and suggest changes of our classroom methods.

How to write, and the relationship between images and writing, has been changing within the academy. Some indication of this can be seen in the new composition texts that emphasize reading visuals or teaching students in our largely visual culture (e.g. Faigley, George, Selfe, & Palchik , 2004; Alfano & O'Brien, 2005; Ruszkiewicz, Anderson, & Friend, 2006). However, while many of these texts analyze the media that surrounds our students, point to the need for observation and analysis of those images, or compare the processes of writing to that of visual design (Mullin, 1998), little account has been taken of students' perceptions of the visual and the written. In order to determine whether such perceptions might alter our understandings of the relationship between the image and the word, as well as revise our pedagogy, we conducted joint research with art and design students in the UK and US.

In the whole university, of which art and design is only part, writing was/is still privileged as a means to analyse and explicate (Orr, Blythman, & Mullin, 2004). As the articles in this journal indicate, the reverse is beginning to also be true: students who have been taught to write are being asked to analyze and explicate visual documents in order to create them. While it seems to many of us that the

parallel between the written and visual might well be direct, Orr and Blythman (2002), reporting on their research into fashion students' approaches to writing and their approaches to design, found that students adopted different approaches to these two areas. Orr and Blythman looked at their results in order to find ways to encourage students to harness the positive learning strategies to written texts that they adopted when designing. They found several key issues emerged for further exploration: the role of peers and audience; 2D vs. 3D (page versus object); the students' personal relationship with writing and with art and design; students' understanding of the process within each area; teacher intervention in promoting effective writing/design processes/products. The need for further study into the relationship between these areas and pedagogic strategies prompted our work here.

We chose to further the research by directly listening to students through interviews and questionnaires; we also were interested in seeing whether there would be any differences between the responses of UK students and those of the US. Orr and Blythman continued conducting interviews in the UK adding students of graphic design to the dataset from undergraduate students of fashion. We compared these results to interviews and questionnaires completed by American design and graphic and studio art students (see appendices).[1] We will address here four of the areas of interest that emerged from our data: students' personal relationship with writing/art and design, the role of peers and audience, engagement with process, and conceptions of time. The research supported some common assumptions about teaching writing to students with visual preferences and challenged others. In addition, we offer some reflections that reinforce current pedagogies and suggest changes of our classroom methods. These are pertinent not only to teachers within the arts, but to those of us who teach writing in this visual culture, and who teach writing in disciplines that are increasingly relying on images and visual literacy.

Personal relationship with Art and Design (A&D) and Writing

Not surprisingly, students are more personally involved in the A&D side of their work than the writing side. This first shows up in the all important area of idea generation. Writing is associated with a shortage of ideas whereas in A&D, students are "overwhelmed" by ideas that had a life of their own:

> I will then record and collect different ephemera, relating to these notions that I've had over the, what you might call the instructive nature of the brief. And I think I allow that collection, representation, to sort itself out on the papers of my sketchbook.

When A&D students write, they often look to the teacher, assignment, or books for ideas (91%), with a few reporting that they go to the writing center or friends (less than 4%), and others (2%) reporting that they have "no idea" where they get ideas. Only a little over two percent cite their own experience or "personal interests" as a source of inspiration for their writing. In addition, A&D students often respond to the question of where they get ideas for writing by listing only one source: their teacher, or the assignment, a friend, or a book. When it comes to their art, though, these students not only cite multiple sources in response to the same question, but on their own, indicate a connection absent from their words about writing: most of these students understand that they use the outside world to connect to and feed their inner world. Just over 64% indicate that they receive inspiration from art related media and visuals (museums, exhibitions, artists' presentations); nearly 80% percent, though, also speak of these as tools for self reflection and visualization, and they also name their own experiences as a source for ideas. Friends or family are potential sources of ideas in less than two percent and only one person mentions class as a source of inspiration for their art.

What is interesting is not only the lack of reliance on teachers for artistic ideas, but that students, at least in art, *willingly* seek stimuli for their production; furthermore, they intentionally mine these sources for their own purposes. This mindfulness and resourcefulness are not as large a part of their vocabularies about writing as they are in art and design: "What do I like about designing? Finding things inside yourself that you didn't know were there." These "things" - both visual and plastic—are precursors to their art, and once they have a shred of an idea, they speak of letting the art flow out of them; A& D students believe they have the tools to commence creating, but not the ones that allow their ideas to flow onto a page. Students recognize their lack of connection to writing when they describe it:

> Writing: it doesn't feel so nice. It is not tactile or personal.

> Anybody could have typed it up...it doesn't feel as though it is mine.

> I feel like design is part of me and writing is totally separate from me.

> Design is like cooking; writing is like cooking, but without the taste and the colour.

A&D, though, is "like the birth of a life form," like

> Life, Sometimes it is easy and sometimes you struggle. Sometimes you don't want to go anymore, but keep doing it because there is no other option.

> Raising a child

> Exposing yourself

Can we help students connect to their writing in the same, personal way they are connected to art or the visual world? Merely telling them to connect, that ideas are important, that language is powerful, may not be effective because of the experiences they bring to the table (Lillis, 2001). To art students - and probably many others—words in school belong to someone else. While, as with their art, students may have ideas for writing, they don't seem to have, as they do with art, the will to find the tools that shape those ideas. Whereas their concepts for art seem to take shape from the materials that are themselves plastic, to them words seem static, flat, unable to be shaped. Students in A&D own their art, whereas they believe writing is a guessing game, shaping others' words to fulfil others' ends

If students could see their own visual processes (reading or creating) they might be able to "draw" from them for their writing processes. If they could understand the plasticity of language, they might be able to see words, punctuation, syntax, as *tools* for their "creations" not barriers. For them to do that, however, we need to revise our own reliance on words to explain words. We suggest mindfully shaping visual metaphors for our students so that the visuality and plasticity of language becomes apparent to them. We need to rethink not only how we speak about language, but how our assignments and feedback might reinforce the static image of language that students hold - the image that reinforces, for them, that words are "not tactile, not personal."

Audience and informal peer support

The data from both the UK and US generally confirm extensive audience and feedback roles for peers, friends and family in A&D. Students report that during their design processes:

> I usually talk to my friends about my work.

> I'll ask people like Ben, Jose, just friends of mine in college...I respect their opinions more than (the teachers) ...I'll just call them over and then sort of show them things and ask them what they think works, what doesn't and then in the canteen or the bar just talk about your ideas.

> I'll] definitely get support from friends.

However, when UK A&D students ask friends for help with their writing they reflect their understanding that their primary challenge is to get the surface correct: "You'd be sitting in the library and someone would come up behind you and say 'how many rows have you done?'" Students commonly reply that

> I have friends who proof read my work.

> I'm not shy about asking people to edit my work.

> My mum and friends correct my grammar and spelling

The difference between the role of others' feedback on students' art as opposed to feedback on their writing can be found in the sense of audience attached to each medium. While A&D students do not discuss either the re-vision of their written ideas or appealing to an audience with their words, when it comes to their art, they declare

> I have a real interest in how the intended transmitted message may be received and I accept the notion that it's very difficult for one individual to have a notion of how another might receive an intended message... I'll rework it (the project) with the collection of responses that I have had during the project.

> You just need someone to sort of say "why don't you twist this around and do this there and put that there"....alternative suggestions.

> I sit down in the class with other students and ask them for their feedback, see what they suggest.

> They make you look at your design in a different way.

The only exceptions to this UK attitude about the role of audience response occurs when students have some cultural capital to draw on to help them through the pain of writing production:

> My family's kind of supportive... .I've got quite an artistic family and pretty much all of them have been through art college... So I often refer to them for bits of information that I am not entirely sure of, like periods of art history and stuff like that, random bits of knowledge....I mean often I'll phone up my mother or my aunt who's a graphic designer— to ask them... It's often at the actual stage of writing I'll suddenly realise there's something I didn't quite research thoroughly enough, or I need a date or a name that I wasn't sure of, and I'll ring them for assistance.

Nonetheless, we might argue that even this comment is referring to content, facts, not to re-vision. Within the UK, students' ideas of writing support continues to be mainly restricted to surface features while support for A&D is more generatively collaborative, with students drawing on outside resources to help them reflect on their work.

The use of resources in both art and writing draws responses from U.S. students that are markedly different from their UK counterparts. Some students (10%) report using resources for their art in order to reflect on a process, but not for their writing ("I just use the teacher's guidelines."). Others (8%) claim that "my pride makes me do it [art] myself" and consult no one about their work; on the other hand, this same group consult family or books to help with their work. Another 10% consult no one for either art or writing: "I am my own island." However, 70% of the students indicate that they use the same or similar resources for both writing and design. In these cases, it is not unusual for students to cite multiple sources: friends, images, family, museums, books, classmates, films, and teachers.

We believe that this significant difference has much to do with the place of writing instruction in the U.S. higher education curriculum and its general absence in the UK (see Gnobscik, 2006). While both the UK and the US develop students' writing in high school, for historical reasons in the UK this does not continue into higher education as explicit instruction. For its own historical reasons, the US has seen a rise of writing centers, and peer tutoring has also made common, if not natural, student exchanges about writing. While no one in the US would say that writing instruction has solved students' problems, it seems US students understand that there is an audience besides themselves when it comes to their art or their writing; at least, the majority do not think of themselves as an island.

Students in UK universities feel (mainly correctly) that the only audience for their writing is the teacher and the game is to guess "what combination of things the teacher wants." They do not perceive they are writing for a real audience since their assignments ask that they tell the teacher what the teacher already knows just to show that the student knows; this is not something they would do with a real audience - it is not what they do with their art. If the curriculum included at least WAC, students could "rehearse" writing ideas with peers before submitting their work for grading, but there is usually no formal part of a course in the UK that gives them the opportunity to do this. They therefore have to work informally with peers on their own time, and with pressures such as the need to earn money, students have less time for independent collaboration. The US students are under the same strictures about the nature of the final audience as the UK students and have similar social pressure, but they get an opportunity to try out ideas with peers first in class or on-line, and this seems to play a part in their seeking and acceptance of feedback for writing.

All A&D students have an overwhelming willingness to seek feedback for their art, a sense that their tools and the product they produce are malleable and can be changed as a result of audience response; they realize their work can be interpreted differently and "have a real interest in how the intended message may be received." If the UK students can't translate that understanding to writing because they can't see beyond writing-as-rules, then it is not surprising that they have difficulty conceptualizing audience. Further study in other countries of the relation between attitudes toward audience and understandings of writing might provide support for stressing the collaborative nature of writing and challenge those in other disciplines to teach writing not as static, nor as an isolated, individual activity, but as a social practice that is as malleable and contextual as artistic media. Our own ways of *speaking* about writing and the feedback we provide might well be reviewed to see which of these views of writing they support.

Awareness of process

All students are often uncomfortable with the process of writing and designing and associate them with pain, but differences arise between those two processes. Writing is *only* pain; when asked for a metaphor that describes their writing process, students say it is like:

> beating my head against the wall

> being painfully constipated

> going to the dentist

> pulling teeth

> having brain surgery

> walking over hot coals

These physical associations always include something that was inflicted upon them. Even though "they" may be beating their heads against a wall or walking over hot coals, there is an outside element that caused pain: the wall, the coals, the dentist. It is as if they have recognized their agency in the act of writing, but uncontrollable, outside forces inevitably disable their ability to act.

When these same students are asked to use a metaphor to describe their A&D process, they often refer to it as a puzzle, or as pain plus gain:

> a crossword puzzle. Every mark leads you to the next or prevents you from getting there until you take it out

> figuring out a mathematical problem - there are many steps but it all flows together if you are on the right track

> reading a good book, sometimes you don't fully grasp the details until you finished it and then you still want to go back for more

Here students describe their process as something chaotic or not yet formed, something to which the student can bring order - the student is the active agent, not the one being acted upon. Student metaphors describing the art process as physical in nature still display the sense of control - and reward - that students associate with their work:

> a marathon: hard, tiring , frustrating but has great outcome when you are finished

> having an anxiety attack; then putting things in perspective and realising it's not so hard and hopefully enjoying the rest of the process with a good outcome.

Instructors, therefore, face a major challenge over the difference in the emotional response these students have to writing and to art and design: a sense of joy versus a sense of pain; a sense of control versus no control. Their ability to shape their medium is absent when that medium is language

When asked what they do once they have an idea in writing, it is not uncommon for students to give opposing approaches:

Student A

> *on art*: As a photographer, I often set up a situation and then once I begin shooting, I let my intuition take over.

> *on writing*: Whatever the requirements are I try to meet the guidelines. Often I read over other guides, suggestions, etc.

Student B

> *on art*: Once I get an idea, I try to figure out the media first. If I was a drawing, I'd pick pencils and the right paper, then you just start. Let the pencil guide you.

> *on writing*: When I get an idea to write, I put in a CD, open the windows, sit at the desk for maybe a half hour, look at what I got, which is not much.

Student C

> *on art*: I'll brainstorm with an idea and start with that and proceed as the project itself just progresses

> *on writing*: I don't know how to proceed. If anything, I get angry.

Those stopping points in students' writing process again indicated a disconnect from their medium - words.

> I get blocked because I don't feel like writing any more.

> I can't put my feelings into words.

Students often cited similar answers about the reasons they would get blocked while writing and while working on their art. For example, a student states that he would get blocked by having to do the "small details" in his art projects, but he similarly has a hard time "filling up the required pages." Another notes that while designing she hates "getting stuck - not knowing how to express what I want," and similarly she claims about her writing, "I just don't know how to continue." Yet even though there are similarities between the reasons students may get stuck in their processes, there are differences in how they talk about getting unstuck.

About 50% of the students who are writing and get blocked "get away," "take a break," "walk away and come back fresh." The majority of the other students conceptualize their strategy for unblocking in terms of defeat:

> I move forward whether I'm happy or not

> Just proceed. I finish, I do my best.

> I just ignore the stupid rules and write.

When they are faced with a block while working on their art, many students also may take a break, but the way in which they express their "walking away" is much more generative and confident:

> I take a break. Come back a couple hours later, see what is wrong and where you need to go. Change the music.

> Sometimes its necessary to just relax and work almost independently. Reverting back to whatever makes me more comfortable regains my confidence and eases tension.

> I try to take some time for myself.

Implicit in these students' words is that taking a break involves not just getting away from a task with which they might be frustrated, but getting away to refresh ideas and to reassert themselves.

The students working on art also have many more resources to which they turn when they are blocked as opposed to when they are working on writing. As writers, they turn to textbooks or the assignment. As artists, these same students:

> look at artists' works I haven't seen

> talk about problems with peers or professors

They also express far more often, and confidently, their ability to

> Force yourself to work

> Work through it with confidence.

> Go back to what I know best

> Concentrate - getting over the fact that I have to erase a lot

> Push harder - work longer.

Art is not easy for these students, but they are willing to work through their difficulty, take time out for the process to gel, or seek inspiration and feedback. Only two describe what, for those teaching with writing, may be a clue to helping students cross the barriers that have been set up between designing and writing. Just as art is a puzzle to put together, a student notes that when his writing is blocked:

> I make a puzzle by extracting the nouns and descriptive words into a grammatical diagram. So instead of "earth" it just says "noun goes here." Then I rearrange the blocks until I am happy.

A student who visits a gallery when blocked by an art project, reports that he would "try writing something in a different way, inspired by another writer."

We suggest that there is great potential for teaching writing in the strategies students use to make their art. They first need to see writing more as a creative endeavour instead of "stupid rules." While there may be no help for those few who choose to remain islands in both areas, for the majority of students who are visual learners or learning visuals, it would be useful for them to understand the processes they employ when working in both spheres and determine for themselves how they might be able to use similar strategies not only to unblock themselves, but also to become motivated.

Time

Another key difference to emerge between attitudes towards design and writing was the way students talked about time. Though time is an extremely complex concept (Adam, 1995; Zerubavel, 1981) and permeates all aspects of our world view, it is seldom recognised as other than an objective, finite resource. There is little recognition of the phenomenological nature of time, that people, both as individuals and as groups, experience time in different ways in different contexts. We do not wish to argue that art and design students are necessarily different from others, but given what we have seen about their perceptions of writing and design, their conceptualizations of time in relation to art and writing offer insights into how we might think about our teaching.

We all "make time" for activities we value. We regard time spent on non-valued activities as "wasting/losing time". We can split or divide time and have a hard or an easy time. We can "lose" time or "make" time. We have competing time demands made of us which create time pressures. Our time can be interrupted by others or we can choose to interrupt our time to take a break. The use of such language points to the degree of personal control or lack of control students believe they can exert - or are willing to exert—over time. When writing, they might procrastinate but "then I have to get it done" or they might just "bite the bullet." The words they use to express their experience of time and writing signify defeat or resignation. While just as many students spoke of procrastination when they produce art, they talk in terms of using a deadline to produce quality:

> My best work comes when I procrastinate and the stress seems to work for me.

> I do work exceptionally well under pressure.

> I always do deadlines, but a week beforehand nobody thinks I'm going to. I seem not able to concentrate on my work until I have got no choice.... I'm very good at drawing up schedules, but then looking at them and thinking—actually it doesn't look that much on paper—and then forgetting about the schedule.... I meet deadlines. I might stay up for three days in order to achieve it but I meet my deadline.

> I'm afraid I tend to get in over my head on projects with deadlines as I'm an overachiever and commit myself to more work than is sane. I wind up working full-tilt non-stop, but somehow I always manage to get things done.

This last student says of her written work and time: "I tend not to do it until the last minute. I once wrote a seven page paper in an hour and a half. I don't like being that stressed, though." Responses like this about deadlines are typical for art and writing, but not only are deadlines generative for art, and negatively stressful for the act of writing, students speak of strategies to make time for their art:

> By blocking out areas of time in my week in which I must devote to my project—I usually don't have trouble making time.

> Make a timeline. Pretend it's due earlier than it is. Set up dates with people.

> If I know I need more time then I make time to come into the lab.

If any time issues were discussed about students' writing, they were articulated as inevitables:

> I wait until after I write it down first, then type.

> I have to get started early because it takes me a long time to do a short paper.

> "I never manage time."

While these students seemed to know they had to cut time out for writing, they didn't actively describe their timelines and processes for creating it. On the other side, a picture emerges of student-artists attempting to control time, even if they are not always successful. They are, nonetheless, willing to exert control over their process because they value their activity and are willing to devote time to it. Time is as valuable as their art, and they work to create both, even if that means working within a short period to create the rush they need to complete their design.

Applications and Further Thoughts

Writing teachers, teachers of visual literacy and teachers within the disciplines can help students see what they think they know, what they know and what they might do as a result. Vygotsky's (1978) zones of proximal development are relevant here: an instructor needs insights into the student's position and perceptions so she can help students do something or see something that they were not able to see on their own, or help them stop doing something that they can't yet stop themselves. In order to do this, teachers have to listen, find out - as do the students. From this initial research with students, we offer several pedagogic strategies that are adaptable to multiple classroom environments that work with students who are visually adept There are some common practices that need to be considered more frequently:

- Encourage students to use physical representations of knowledge in order to hone their skills, but also, have them write about their experiences or write up research using visual representations as springboards or accompaniments to text.

- Writing centers have long had students color code parts of their paper using marker pens to enable them to "see" the structure of their writing. The same can be used when students must learn to balance their voice with the views of others; students can color code each to see visually if the proportions are appropriate to the requirements of writing in that particular discipline.

- Teachers with an interest in writing development as an important aspect of student learning are usually keen on planning structures but are perhaps too wedded to this only in a written form. For students who operate through diagrams or story boarding, these have to be developed as design techniques for a piece of writing.

- We saw earlier that students can feel that they have a shortage of ideas for writing unlike design. We should encourage the use of the notebook as an equivalent tool to the sketchbook as a way of gathering lots of research materials, in essence the creation of a textual sketch-book (Orr and Blythman, 2002).

Besides generating the use of these and other classroom strategies (see also Childers, Hobson, and Mullin, 1998), the responses we collected from students argues for a social practices approach when teaching writing to visually adept students. Mitchell et al. (2000), studying writing in the context of dance education, argue that the distinctions made between dance and writing are based more on perceptions than "actual radical disjunction" (p. 88). By understanding the theoretical and pedagogic relationships of students' visual practices and writing we believe we can show them the areas where the disjunctions are not so large and help them build their writing confidence and effectiveness:

- Instructors can set up a questionnaire or interviews similar to those in the appendix (shorter or longer) in which they ask students what their processes are for reading and then creating (maps, graphs, websites) . Ask the same about their reading, writing, composing or listening processes (depending on the class). Examine these with each student or let students examine them in small groups, and report on the comparisons among their answers. Let them collaborate about the language in which they articulated their differences; let them teach each other strategies, or point out that they already have strategies that can transfer to writing or imaging.

- Additionally instructors need to build a repertoire of visual metaphors to use when explaining writing so that we are making links between the design process and the writing process. We need to use design metaphors to explain writing processes or compare writing with design processes. For example, students need to understand that surface features are of limited importance since the surface and structural features of text interact. Instructors can refer to what are considered the technical/ surface features in design or art work and expand this vocabulary when providing feedback on student writing.

- Art and design students, and others, may be more confident with electronic and non-linear tools. Many students who are afraid of writing a paper, thesis or dissertation feel quite confident about building a website. Dufflemeyer and Ellertson's article in this issue point to ways that can be done, and advocate for opening our writing classrooms to multimodal forms of composing, but in the meanwhile, even the simple change of discourse to "building" a dissertation can increase understanding and confidence.

Whether we are teaching visually adept students (or teaching students how to be visually adept), we need to understand the students' construction of reality and the way they approach learning. The fewer assumptions we make about our students' positions and knowledge, the more opportunities we will make for them to construct the knowledge they need out for their particular set of experiences in a particular time and place (e.g., Lea and Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001): Are they a researcher or a design realization person? What is the student's previous educational background? What is the lack of confidence/comfort with writing about? What subset of the art and design disciplines does the student come from? What are the dominant metaphors, research and planning processes, and structures of that sub-discipline? These are all areas that would benefit from more research by the world of academic writing. However, while doing so, we need to remember that many of us are strongly word-based in our own approaches. As said other in places in this issue, even those of us doing work in visuality and writing may be actually reinforcing static ways of thinking about texts and their production. The increasingly visual world can challenge our own approaches to learning and our own subjectivities in ways we don't even see. Since our self-esteem and academic identity may be firmly grounded in our success with the written word, those of us incorporating visuals or their terminology into our classes will want to find out how effectively word explanations and metaphors are translating. Those of us new to the research here and to the other articles in this issue will want to keep in mind our own constructions of texts and reflectively examine our own personal relationship to our written texts, our audiences, definitions of process, and time in both the written and visual worlds as a means for developing classroom strategies for all of our students.

References

Adam, B. (1995). *Timewatch: The social analysis of time*. Cambridge: Polity.

Alfano, C. L., & O'Brien, A. J. (2005). *Envision: Persuasive writing in a visual culture*. New York: Pearson Longman.

Fabian, H. (2001). *Dyslexia in art and design higher education: Hidden strengths, hidden weaknesses*. Paper presented at 5th British Dyslexia Conference, York, UK.

Faigley, L., George, D., Selfe, C., & Palchik, A. (2004). *Picturing texts*. New York: WW Norton & Company.

Gnobscik, L. (2005). *Academic writing: Theories and practices*. London, UK: Palgrave/McMillan.

Lea, M., & Strierer, B. (1998). Students writing in higher education: an academic literacies approach. *Studies in Higher Education, 23*(2), 152-72.

Lillis, T. (2001). *Student writing: Access, regulation and desire*. London, UK: Routledge.

Mitchell, S., Marks-Fisher, V., Hale, L., & Harding, J. (2000). Making dances, making essays: Academic writing in the study of dance. In M. Lea & B. Street (Eds.), *Student writing in higher education*. Buckingham: Open University Press. 86-96

Mullin, J. A. (1998). Alternative pedagogy: Visualizing theories of composition. In E. Hobson, P. Childers, & J. Mullin (Eds.), *ARTiculating: Teaching writing in a visual culture*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann/Boynton-Cook.

Orr, S., Blythman, M., & Mullin, J. A. (2004). Introduction [Special section]. *Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education, 3*(2), 75-79.

Ruszkiewicz, J., Anderson, D., & Friend, C. (2006). *Beyond words: Reading and writing in a visual age*. New York: Pearson Longman.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Zerubavel, E. (1981). *Hidden rhythms: Schedules and calendars in social life*. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.

Appendix

An appendix is available.

Note

[1] It should be noted that while it might be taken for granted that in general art and design students are more within their comfort zone in design than in writing, there is an interesting debate around the extent to which many visual artists and designers feel less comfortable with the written word than other highly educated people, including discussions on the distribution of dyslexia. However, this goes beyond the focus of this article.

Contact Information

Susan Orr is the principal lecturer for quality management and enhancement in the School of Arts at York St John College in the UK. Susan's research focuses on higher education pedagogy and her interests include students' writing, students' approaches to textual and visual assessment and assessment as a social practice in art and design. She has presented papers at a number of conferences in the UK, Europe and the USA and has co-authored a range of articles, papers and chapters with Margo Blythman.

Margo Blythman is Director of Teaching and Learning at the London College of Communication, University of the Arts London. Her responsibilities include staff development, the quality of teaching and learning, tutorial systems and study support. She has published with Susan Orr on such topics as retention, development strategies within higher education contexts and the development of student academic writing, particularly in the context of art and design. Her academic interests also include

the impact of quality assurance systems on the working lives of academic staff and micropolitics in UK higher education.

Joan Mullin, is Professor in the Division of Rhetoric and Composition at the University of Texas at Austin where she leads the College of Liberal Arts WAC initiative. From 1987-2004 she initiated and directed the WAC program and Writing Center at the University of Toledo, publishing in writing center, WAC and disciplinary journals across the curriculum. *Intersections: Theory-Practice in the Writing Center* won the 1994 National Writing Center Association Award for Outstanding Scholarship, and, *ARTiculating. Teaching Writing in a Visual Culture* indicates her current research interest in visual literacy across international curricula.