London 2017 – The Allure of the Digital and Beyond

Fourth International Conference for Design Education Researchers

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The fourth international DRS PedSIG Conference on Design Education, LearnXDesign 2017, was held at the end of June 2017 in London, UK. Titled "The Allure of the Digital and Beyond", the conference aimed to:

> *"…bring together researchers and practitioners with an international reach and from a wide variety of education design settings with the intention of connecting emergent models and ideas around the digital, with the scholarship of teaching and learning"*

Ravensbourne University Greenwich Campus (right) in front of the O2 Arena, London.

The conference was hosted by Ravensbourne University in their stunning Greenwich peninsula campus, in the heart of London and directly adjacent to the O2 Arena. On the second night, the River Thames served as a backdrop for 'free' fireworks, creating an unforgettable setting for delegates to reconnect or make new connections. The Learn X Design conferences are particularly collegiate experiences and the community gathered in London reinforced this meeting of passionate design educators and practitioners.

The conference hosted nine paper sessions presenting 42 papers, making the conference a very focused event with very involved and detailed discussions. In fact, it was perhaps the scale of event that led to such successful interactions and discussion during the paper presentations: time was available for extended debate and interaction and it rarely felt that we were rushing to the next session.

The opening keynote by Susan Orr (@Susan_K_Orr) superbly summarised the current landscape in design education, focusing on significant aspects of core design pedagogy and noting how these are being understood in our own discipline(s) as well as how they could transfer to other subject domains. Looking into the near future, she described design as continually developing, where "students are the definers of the discipline".

On the second day, keynote Jo Twist (@Doctoe) demonstrated just how significant the games industry in the UK is - both economically and as a discipline and professional endeavour. She observed that "play allows you to fail" before calling for even greater integration between the Arts and traditional (but unhelpfully segregated) STEM subjects that often lead game design.
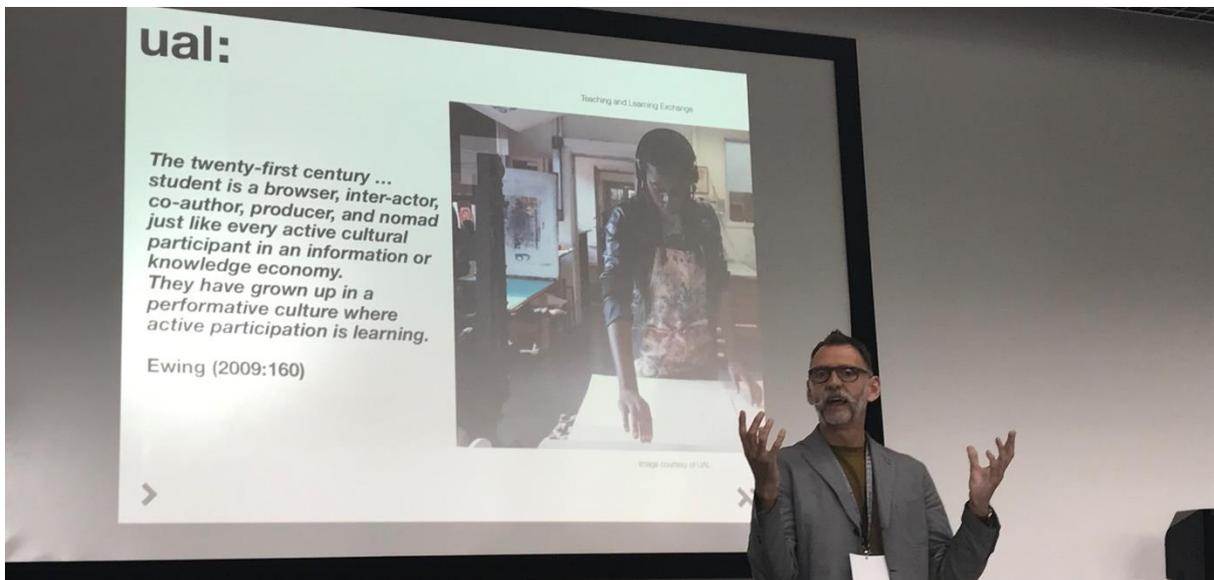
Keynote Speaker, Dori Tunstall.

The closing Keynote was given by Dori Tunstall (@Dori_Danthro) presenting how OCAD U are continuing to decolonise their curriculum and implement Respectful Design across their studios and processes. Echoing Orr's Keynote observation, that the widening of design curricula must be a focus of design education in the coming years, Tunstall presented a positive and optimistic interpretation of how this can be achieved inclusively and without the 'race to the bottom' some may think it entails.

In between these keynotes were the usual range of interesting and well-researched presentations of papers, positions and works-in-progress from across the world. Anyone who has attended a LearnXDesign event will understand that it's usually a group of committed and passionate practitioners, coming together to share and expand their personal and collective knowledge in design education.

Conference organizer, Gary Pritchard.

In summing up the conference, Ravensbourne's Gary Pritchard and Linda Drew reflected what delegates were thinking - it was, as always, the people who made the event.

Hence, it is a great opportunity to thank everyone who contributed to the organisation: Dr Gary Pritchard, Professor Linda Drew, Professor Michael Tovey, Dr Alison James, Professor Susan Orr, Dr Rosemary Stott, Professor Bernadette Blair, Professor Alison Shreeve, and Professor Kay Stables.

The conference proceedings can be found on the DRS EdSIG page:

https://www.designresearchsociety.org/cpages/design-pedagogy-sig

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Derek Jones is a Senior Lecturer in Design at The Open University (UK), part of the OU Design Group, and the Convenor of the DRS Education SIG. His main research interests are: the pedagogy of design and creativity, embodied cognition in physical and virtual environments, and theories of design knowledge.