Curriculum Planning for the Development of Graphicacy

X. Danos
Department of Education, Design and Technology
University of Cyprus

E. Norman
Loughborough Design School
Loughborough University

Summary

The ability to imagine a better future and work towards materialising this is 'key' to economic development and technological change. Recent research has highlighted the importance graphicacy has in these developments as well as in our everyday lives; professionally, socially and culturally (Considine, 1987; Stokes, 2002). Graphicacy concerns the ability to communicate through still visual images, such as maps, diagrams, graphs and symbols (Danos, 2012). The cognitive requirements that accompany such skills, e.g. modelling 'in the mind's eye' and critical thinking, support activity in numerous fields. Important 'life skills' are introduced through education from an early age, using policies on literacy, numeracy and articulacy. Graphicacy, however, which is used extensively in the early years and later through school and beyond, has yet to be introduced through a strategic approach (Hope, 2008; Danos, 2012; Anning, 1997; Wilmot, 1999). Currently graphicacy does not explicitly feature in the structured curricula in England; this is similar in many other countries within Europe, the US and Australia, among others (Danos, 2012; Krane & Dyson, 1981; Balchin, 1996).

Images are powerful and affect people regardless of their academic, economic, cultural or religious status (Poracsky et.al, 1999). They can educate, inform and inspire; affect perception and decisions; and be used for communicating, learning and recording ideas. Baynes (2011) believes they are fundamental to all peoples and cultures; an intellectual activity that links sensing, feeling, thinking and doing. 'They can be used to effectively model core aspects of future reality which cannot be adequately modelled through language or numbers, such as colour, space, shape, distance and scale amongst others' (ibid:4). The power of images includes these and many more possibilities, as our exposure to more media messages increases. However, young people are given little guidance on how to read, interpret and critically evaluate the images and information they are exposed to (Danos, 2012; Hope, 2008). 'This renders them visually vulnerable and potential victims of a language that can influence and manipulate them' (Considine, 1987:635).

This paper describes research targeted at addressing these issues through the development of an appropriate taxonomy of graphicacy, its validation and use to establish cross-curricular links. The taxonomy was developed from Fry's taxonomy (1974) and its use was explored in schools in Cyprus, the UK and USA. Similar patterns of use were found. Further research concerning 5 elements of images in 3 different areas of the taxonomy was completed in order to develop continuity and progression descriptors appropriate for classroom use. Hence the paper demonstrates a potential strategy for research that could underpin the development of curriculum policy in the development of graphicacy.