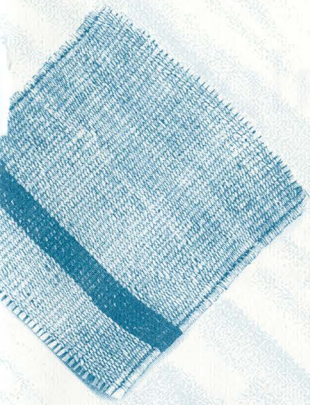




previous example and concerns an aspect of formal education.

One of the projects set two years ago for our third year industrial design students at the Cape Technikon was to design a basic compact disc player. Apart from having to satisfy the technical requirements, it was a no holds barred exercise for local or export market. There were several very strong forms resulting from a variety of sources. Two however, had achieved a very special quality and originality. Both had been derived from African traditional craft but were essentially appropriate contemporary pieces of audio equipment. Here was a case in point where the unique cultural identity would have successfully stood out amongst the competition in a foreign market.

It seems to me that design education presents an ideal situation in which our rich and varied craft heritage may be confronted and explored. As a developing country we have the advantage of some continuity in our traditional material cultures which can, with guidance and support, be fostered into craft industries. From this source, and through its continuing influence, design education could be nurtured.

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Measuring Design Competence

Adrienne Viljoen

While attending the Design Renaissance Conference in Glasgow in September 1993, I obtained some interesting information on a system for the standardised assessment of vocational competence.

National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) programmes were inceptioned in the United Kingdom in 1985 with the aim of reforming various British vocational qualifications into a unified system capable of measuring current vocational competence. The system was also developed with a view to an easier exchange of labour between Britain and the European Community nations as well as the mutual recognition of qualifications.

By March 1993, assessment programmes had been completed for seven design disciplines: graphic, exhibition, interior, furniture, ceramic, fashion and constructed textile. Qualifications may be achieved on five different levels of increasing complexity and on the amount of professional responsibility carried by the candidate.

South African designers thinking of working abroad with a view to extending their experience would do well to take note of these programmes. Receiving a recognised qualification by having their competence measured would be advantageous particularly to designers whose existing qualifications are unknown or not recognised by countries they intend to work in.

In South Africa, perceptions of status are often still linked to academic qualifications. This means that many vocationally com-

petent people, who have not had the opportunity to attend academic institutions, are denied adequate recognition. A system developed to measure vocational competence would be of enormous assistance in helping to overcome this problem.

More specifically the design profession in South Africa should perhaps consider developing and using such a system for the recognition of designers. We have a tradition of competent designers practising without having received formal training. A possibility worth considering would be to extend the current certification of design courses at the technikon design schools to include measuring vocational competence in the workplace. Another route might be to utilise the experience and infrastructure of the existing certification body to develop an independent system for assessing design competence irrespective of formal qualifications.

More information about Design NVQ's may be obtained from:

Industry Lead Body for Design
29 Bedford Square
LONDON WC1B 3EG
Telephone: 071 631 1510
Facsimile: 071 637 0954

Open University Validation Services
344-354 Gray's Inn Road
LONDON WC1X 8BP
Telephone: 071 278 4411
Facsimile: 071 833 1012