

Designing for a real need

A teacher's perspective

Rachael Randall is a teacher and the coordinator of design and technology at Bradfield College.

During 1998 Rachael attended the consultation workshops regarding technology teacher training run by the Training and Development and Curriculum Support Directorates. In March 1999, Rachael approached Sally Tranter and Lyndall Foster offering to facilitate a workshop for a group of talented Bradfield College students to develop the graphic images to be used by the Department for the purpose of promoting technology teaching throughout NSW.

In this article Rachael explains the project and the benefits for students of working with an authentic brief and client.

At Bradfield College students can study a wide range of vocational courses, as well as their Board-developed subject choices for the HSC. Students must complete a minimum of 120 hours of industry experience within their chosen vocational area. A large proportion of design students choose to complete some of these hours within the graphic design industry. Many of these students are very focused on design and have various industry contacts to draw upon for advice.

I felt that by working with Lyndall and Sally we could make a great contribution to the development of the much-needed promotional material as well as having an authentic design brief for my students with a real client.

The first stage was to negotiate a brief with the clients, considering in particular the constraints of time and resources. We brainstormed various ideas and developed an open-ended brief for the students.

A whole-day workshop was arranged for late March, where a group of 25 students from the design vocational area were selected because of their flair with design and their ability to work within the constraints of briefs. Each student was briefed about the nature and purpose of the day.

The authenticity of the brief was established, with the understanding that the Department was the client and had requested their services to meet the outlined brief within the time frame.

All students arrived full of enthusiasm for the day ahead. The facilitators were two technology teachers and a qualified graphic designer with experience in print-ready corporate graphics. The students were welcomed by the Director of the college, Pam Peelgrane, and briefed by Sally Tranter and Lyndall Foster, representing the Department. This was an important stage in the process, as most of the students were not aware of the broad range of subjects involved in the TAS KLA.

Past promotional material was examined and the students had the opportunity to brainstorm the positive and negative aspects of the existing materials.



Poster design by Belinda, Kylie and Alice from Bradfield College.

The students identified the primary and secondary target markets for the promotional material and considered the interests and needs of the different target groups.

As one of the primary target groups, the students discussed their feelings about the profession of teaching and what would attract them to pick up a brochure and read it further. All of these ideas were vital to the final outcome.

The day proceeded with the students forming into groups and brainstorming key concepts about technology teaching. All participants were encouraged to record their thinking and any actions undertaken in the development of the brief. Documentation was an important step, as some students found themselves going back to their initial ideas after they had assessed a variety of possibilities.

The groups consolidated their work toward the end of the afternoon, when they were required to produce a “rough-in” of their designs. A panel was formed, including the client, and the groups were required to present their ideas and findings.

An impressive range of interpretations were completed, clearly demonstrating the imaginative ideas and innovative thinking that took place during the session. This final activity provided an opportunity for the students to discuss and reflect on the success of their own designs whilst learning from the outcomes of the work of the other groups.

The whole-day workshop provided students with an opportunity to be creative and enterprising, whilst developing their ability to design in teams. The flexible learning environment allowed students to loosen up, develop their skills and have fun, as they had very few restrictions placed on them throughout the day. All participants viewed the challenge with great enthusiasm, and the entire day was of significant value.

All of the “rough-ins” and documentation of the day were taken back to the Department for evaluation. At this stage the design brief was finalised.

The brief was made more “closed” by the addition of specific constraints that the students had to meet in their next responses. This limited the scope of the students’ ideas and provided a particular focus to the final stage.

While all students had an opportunity to work with the final brief, only a select few took up the challenge. These students were very innovative and worked within the tight deadline and the limitations that the Department had placed on them.

Authentic design briefs: Implications for teaching

The delivery of authentic design briefs needs a high degree of planning and preparation. It requires a shift from a teacher-centred classroom to a more flexible, student-centred environment, where students and teachers work together.

Students benefit from experts in the field of study and from having relevant work experiences that link the subject matter taught in class with industry learning occurring in or outside of school. Appropriate resources need to be available, and an emphasis on time management is necessary.

The implementation of authentic design briefs helps students to become highly motivated and confident as they are given the opportunity to apply academic and practical knowledge to real-life situations. They are given the opportunity to develop skills which are transferable to future career paths and lead to lifelong learning.

A student's perspective

I am currently an HSC student at Bradfield College with one of my subjects being design and technology. I enrolled at Bradfield College primarily on the strength of the design vocation offered.

As a student of Bradfield College I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to be involved in a workshop to design promotional material for technology teaching.

Although all of the students who participated had prior experience with briefs in design and technology, none of us had ever actually worked with an authentic brief.

Although guidelines were provided, the brief itself was open to creativity and the entire day was spent brainstorming ideas. The overall atmosphere was one of enthusiasm, despite the time limits placed upon us. I stress the fact that it was authentic because it was the driving force behind the students' dedication. It gave us a sense of pride as well as being the incentive for participating.

The day generated an array of creative and innovative ideas expressed in visuals, concepts and phrasings. The entire day was treated professionally and a panel was set up to view the final presentations. The quality of work produced and presented was of a very sophisticated level. The Department then took all material to be examined, with a clear understanding that recognition would be given to the students and college if their idea or concept was used.

This event was a valuable experience for all involved. The students gained valued skills and know-how of the industry while the Department received a creative and sophisticated basis for its promotional material.

Personally the event gave me great insight into the processes involved and experience in an area where I aim to make my career. I highly recommend this type of client/student liaison in the future for Bradfield College as well as other schools statewide.



Bradfield College students promoting technology teaching