

Challenges in Barbadian Design Education – When Graphic Design & Product Development Collide

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Abstract: The Barbados Community College’s BFA Programme in Graphic Design has been in existence for over 20 years. The year 2009 marked a shift in design application, with pockets of students using graphic design as a catalyst to develop products that are potentially marketable. The current economic climate has made it harder for students to be employed in agencies and studios. One would anticipate that they would follow through in creating new spaces for themselves as designers, i.e. developing products as viable sources of income in a struggling economy, but sadly most do not. Through an exploration of case studies ranging from plush anthropomorphic toy letters, and interactive Caribbean storytelling, there must be some revelation on how best to harness this talent. How should the bridge be built for further training so that the product enters the commercial market? Are there socio-economic and psychological factors, which create this gap in idea to enterprise? The aim of the paper is to investigate why graduates are not pursuing self-initiated projects as profitable business ventures, and to offer viable solutions for how this can be achieved.

Keywords; Product Development, Graphic Design, Caribbean Culture, Education

1 Introduction

Barbados is an independent British Commonwealth nation densely populated with 285,000 inhabitants within a 166 square mile radius. Land is precious and pricy, and finding employment remains competitive.¹ The Barbados Community College (BCC) was formed in 1968 by the Government, as a means of educating and providing employment opportunities for the people of Barbados. Prior to this date, employment by way of the old colonial apprenticeship model offered little scope for growth and financial wealth. Thus the establishment of the BCC and the BFA degree

¹ *Umemployment rate in Barbados: 2017-10.2%, 2016-10.2% - www.tradingeconomics.com
Barbados Statistical Service: 2015 – 11.5% - www.barstats.gov.bb*



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in Graphic Design, was timely and visionary. The school has exceeded its initial capacity in student enrolment and course offerings therefore leading to challenges in plant capacity. The plant for Graphic Design is small and in turn the student enrolment averages twelve new students per year. This number has recently plummeted with the introduction of tuition fees for all undergraduate programmes. Limited studio space is further compounded by obstacles, such as insufficient equipment, and a budget too small, to meet essential operational needs. Despite these challenges, our students continue to produce at a reasonably high standard. Many students who have graduated have gone on to work in agencies, studios, and as freelance designers, creative directors, art directors and so on. In essence they are gainfully employed, where we typically imagine them to be.

Being the only undergraduate programme in Graphic Design has placed the department in a very unique position at the forefront of design in Barbados. As students seek higher learning along with their varied interests, the programme has sought from its inception to tap into the multifaceted talents of those enrolled. Normally in international art institutions degrees are specialist. For instance programmes such as BA Illustration, BA Film/Video Production are degrees in their own right. Due to the limited space of the entire Division of Fine Arts the school must also be mindful of 'over offering' other art degrees, as enrolment will be significantly lower. The programme allows the students to explore what are normally considered specialty areas in the arts, as both modules and singular projects thereby creating a version of the 'interdisciplinary area of design'. For instance, if a 'core' graphic design student is not as capable of creating illustrations, but must complete the task requiring those skills, they can be expected to find ways of resolving this challenge, irrespective of the other students who may have a flair for illustration. Essentially, the student who could pursue a successful career in illustration sits in the same space with the student who does not fully possess the skills to illustrate.

Components within the programme include:

1. Creative Writing
2. Illustration
3. Digital Photography
4. Design Management
5. Web Design
6. Video – Film & Script Writing

Since the aforementioned subjects are undergraduate disciplines in their own right, to those outside, this approach may seem like a ludicrous consolidation of disciplines, when one considers all the components or arms within the field of Graphic Design. It is this interdisciplinary blend, which allows the students to flex their creative muscles. Barbados still remains a 'jack of all trades' culture. The students brief exposure to the full range of disciplines, allows them to better survive as practitioners outside of the college studio setting.

The case studies introduced in this paper are a *by-product* of the Department's design theory and practices. By-product in this context signifying: the synthesis of graphic design and product development, by a select few. The objective of this paper is to critically look at the forces in play, which may either help or hinder our graduates from getting their products onto a commercialised platform. Although there will be some mention on the application of cultural identity in the work, it is not the driving force of the paper, but provides context for revealing some perspectives on the work. The case studies are introduced with project descriptions and illustrations, followed by a summary of responses gathered from the interviews. The inclusion of some dialogue gives the reader a sense of the process and challenges in the student's own voices. Moreover, challenges with psyche and the positioning of local entities with regards to support, will be discussed at length, followed by solutions on the best way forward.

2 Methodology

Empirical research is integrated with six case study projects that demonstrate recent developments, within the past nine years under the BFA in Graphic Design. A series of twenty to thirty minute interviews with five graduates were conducted on their experiences, whilst undertaking their respective projects, along with their thoughts upon finishing the programme. Very little research has been done on the development of Graphic Design in the Eastern Caribbean region, and furthermore, pertaining to a trend such as this one. Therefore these case studies can contribute to the body of knowledge on design practice in the region. They serve as critical indicators of the heterogeneity of the programme, and highlight both the significance and value from a potential market perspective. One out of the six case studies has achieved success but there must be an analysis of the variables on why this is so.

The following questions guided the interviews:

Line of Inquiry to Graduates:

1. Describe your project.
2. What was the driving factor that made you create the product in the first place? (Considering the nature of the programme).
3. What were the most challenging areas of the project?
4. You have reflected on your work. What would you have done differently with regards to the product you created?
5. Did you make it a point after graduating, to research if there are any organisations, that could have assisted you with regards to developing, manufacturing and getting your product to market?
6. If approached by a prospective investor, would you sell your product to them?
7. Other details such as residential status and current job title have been recorded.

The case studies have been evaluated and pulled together in a summary.

3 Cultural Signposts – The Products

Saga clearly indicates how national identities are formed through a series of socio-global phenomenon and diaspora:

Several post war events have helped to boost the development of culture nationalism in the region. They are the independence of the Anglophone Caribbean, migration, mass media technologies, the black power movement in the United States and the Cuban Revolution. Race played a more significant role in the formation of national identities in the Anglophone Caribbean than in the Hispanophone islands. (2001, p. 250)

As stated in the abstract, we are seeing pockets of students eager to assert indigenous cultural form through Caribbean and Barbadian folklore. Those who seem to demonstrate this interest speak of family who have instilled pride and appreciation of things cultural. Identity is deeply rooted through organic means and its survival is not fully bolstered via post-colonial institutional means. Although this trend has been occurring, a parallel can be seen with some students solving tasks under the proverbial guise of Eurocentrism². Conditioning still runs very deep. (Figure 1). According to Nettleford:

In an ex-colonial society doused in colonial attitudes and mores, old practices of colonial vintage die hard. (1979, p. 20)

² Eurocentrism is the practice of placing emphasis on European (and generally Western) values and culture at the expense of other cultures.

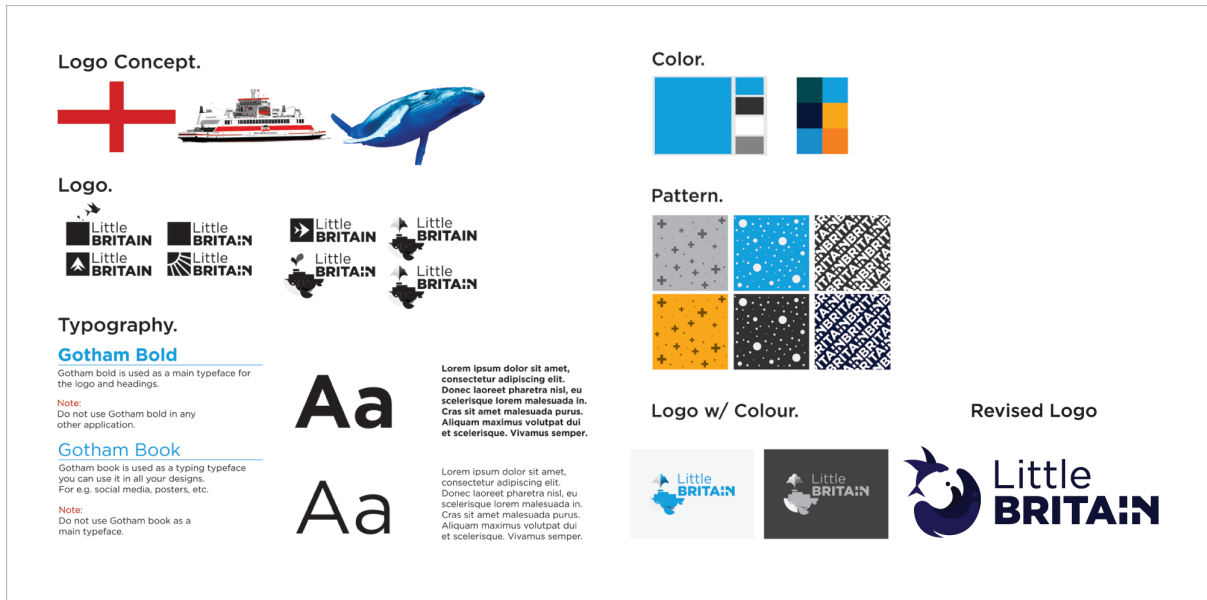


Figure 1: Cultural penetration personified. A first year student adamantly sticks to the name 'Little Britain' for a local ferry service. 'Little Britain' is 'Barbados's old colonial nickname. After two tutorials on the notion of changing the name to fit the modern context in which we reside, the student concedes to remove the whale but holds on dearly to his brand name. National colours were explored and eventually abandoned.

Indeed it is stirring to the soul, to view what is classified as a spirited curiosity in cultural identity, manifests itself in the hankering for ancestral tales and symbols, never losing authenticity.

The following case studies include a brief description of the project with illustrations. We have observed the emergence of two definitive streams of interest within the product development context of which we attempt to define as:

1. Cultural revival – Caribbean folklore with Barbadian infusions, the latter in particular, emphasizing notions of contemporary and historical references along with interpretations of the physical environment.
2. Mainstream concepts – Commercial products that exude international mass appeal.

3.1 Ref. 1 - Phantom Haven-Divine & Darkness – A Publication

'Phantom Haven' is a reference collection of thirteen evil entities from Caribbean folklore culture. It is a depiction of how these creatures became evil phantoms, as well as those who had sold their souls. For instance the legend of the 'Soucouyant'³ from Dominica, Trinidad and other territories, and the 'Steel Donkey'⁴ creature who originates from Barbados. The intriguing concept of 'Phantom Haven' is compiled in a printed publication and interactive platform, with each folklore character unveiling a perpetual life of loyalty, hatred, obedience, respect, trust, etc. which is conveyed to the audience. The lack of virtues intertwined with the victim's fears and feelings of guilt disciplines them. Ultimately, Phantom Haven encourages and illuminates a divine perspective on these legendary folklore spirits, teaching audiences the importance of morals.

³ The 'Soucouyant' found across the Caribbean region is an evil, old wrinkled hag, who by night sheds her skin and becomes a roving ball of fire to seek out victims, especially babies whose blood she sucks before returning to her skin.

⁴ 'Steel Donkey' is a legendary supernatural creature of Barbadian origins, whose presence is manifested by the jangling of metallic sounds and other strange occurrences.



Figure 1a: Ref. 1- Phantom Haven-Divine & Darkness. 'Phantom Haven' logo and the tale of 'Soucouyant' in a double page spread. Design and illustration by Andre Trotman

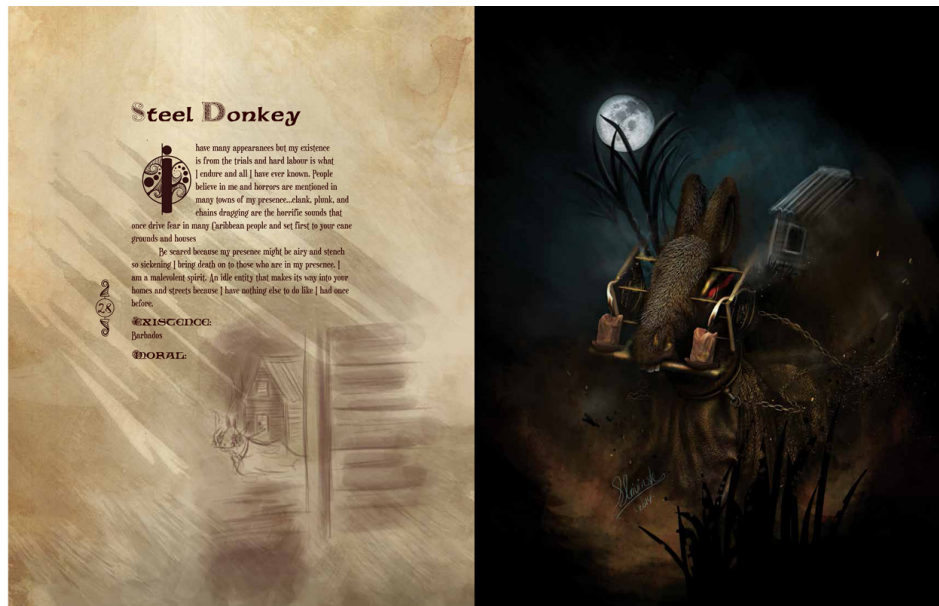
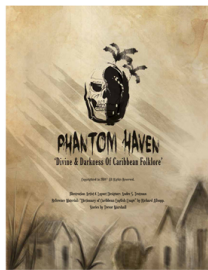


Figure 1b: Ref. 1- Phantom Haven-Divine & Darkness. 'Phantom Haven' opening spread and the tale of 'Steel Donkey' in a double page spread. Design and illustration by Andre Trotman

3.2 Ref. 2 - Mongoose Playing Cards

'Mongoose Playing Cards' are presented as whimsical illustrations split into four categories: Folklore, flora, fauna and places of interest. Other indigenous information on the island of Barbados has been included in a matching booklet.



Figure 2 C: Ref. 2- Left: 'Mongoose Playing Cards' kit, which comes with a keepsake booklet on Barbadian heritage. Right: The notorious Rachael Pringle owned slaves, a tavern and the Royal Navy Hotel, which was essentially a brothel in the capital of Bridgetown.



Figure 2: Ref. 2- 'Mongoose Playing Cards'. Left: A) The late 'King Dyal' a dapper Bajan who frequented social events particularly the game of cricket at Kensington Oval. B) Considered the national social beverage, a bottle of rum accompanied with a tumbler. The designer uses the 'Mount Gay' brand of rum as the marker. Mount Gay Rum Distilleries boasts over three hundred and fifteen years of history and is said to be the oldest distillery in the western hemisphere. C) The 'Clock Tower' at St. Ann's Garrison, the signpost of the British Militia. Design and illustration by Sheba Phillips

3.3 Ref. 3 - Mass Anthology – A Graphic Novel, Volume 1.

Mass Anthology is a graphic novel of Barbadian content targeted at readers of fiction. It is a collection of illustrated stories by the director and his peers, which brings the novel together. Stories such as 'Babylon' and 'Steel Donkey' can be found in the collection.

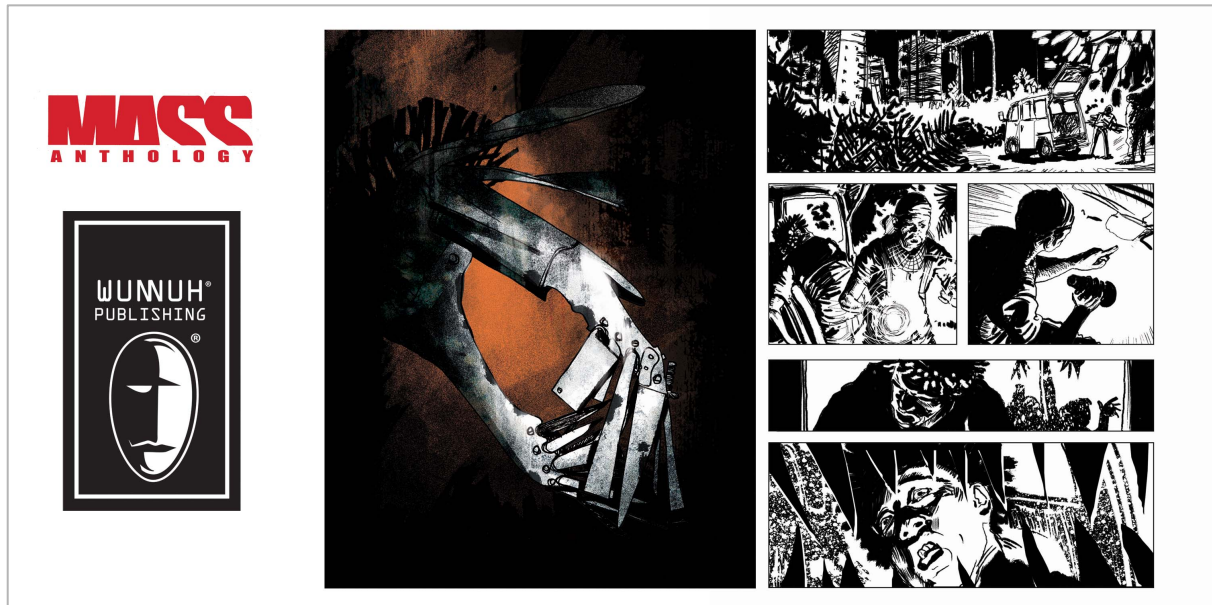


Figure 3: Ref. 3- Left: 'Mass Anthology's' graphic novel masthead and 'Wunnah Publishing' logo. The word 'Wunnah' means, 'all of you' and its origins can be traced to the Igbo people in West Africa. Right: 'Steel Donkey' is reinvigorated in an opening spread. Design and illustration by Matthew Clarke

4 Cultural Signposts 2 – The Mainstream Products

The following products fall into the *mainstream* categories as mentioned in Section 3.

4.1 Ref. 4 - Cozees – Plush Toys

'Cozees' is a toy line of plushed toys or 'plushies'. The initiative comes from a mixture of work and play, and targets children ages 2-7. The toys are developed from alphabet letters and brought to life further by adding human characteristics. Choose your favourite 'letter' from the collection and it comes packaged with crayons and a colouring book. Over time, you can build your own collection. 'Cozees' make great gifts and are for those avid plushie collectors looking for unique items. Most importantly, the 'Cozee' product stimulates play whether at kindergarden or home.



Figure 4: Ref. 4- Cozees Plush Toys. The lower case letter 'T' takes on anthropomorphic qualities. Graphic design and product design by Sonya Goddard

4.2 Ref. 5 - The Great Chair – Portable Seating

'The Great Chair' is a portable multifunctional piece of furniture that can be used both as a table, stool and chair. It can be folded compactly for easy carrying and storage, and used for indoor and outdoor activities. This furniture piece comes with dynamic surface skins inspired by Barbadian flora and fauna, adding style and character. Some of the colourful skins refer to 'Carambola Fruit'⁵, the 'Bearded Fig Tree' and the 'Hawksbill Turtle'.



Figure 5a: Ref. 5 - The Great Chair. Left – A bold pattern inspired by the endangered hawksbill turtle. Right – The carambola fruit is expressed using a warm palette. Graphic design and product development by Sheba Phillips

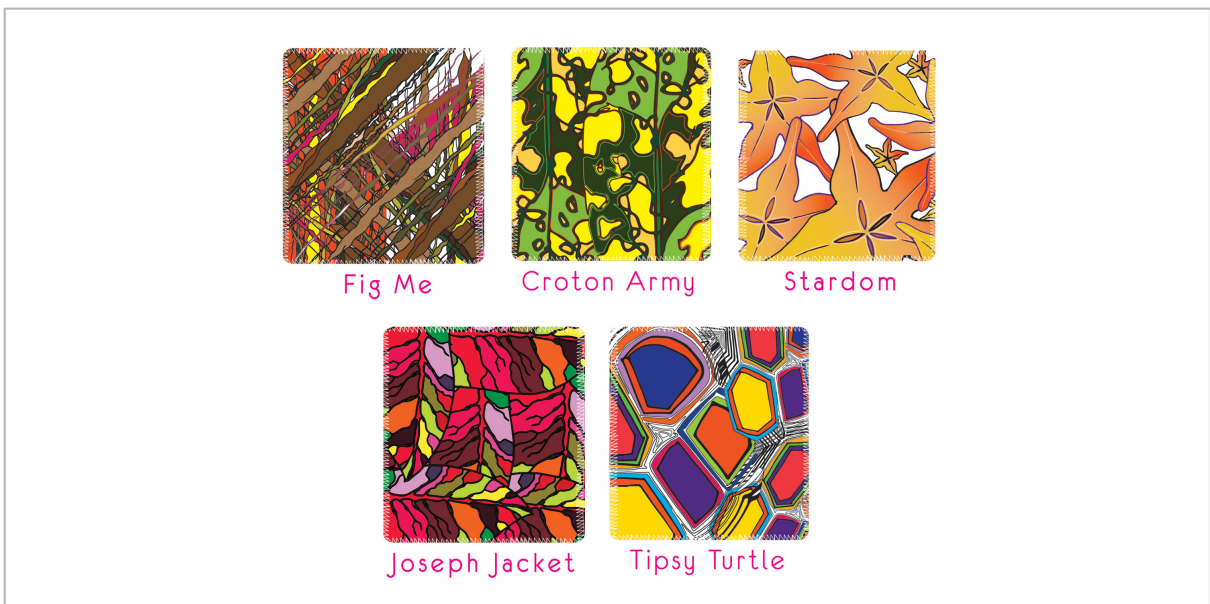


Figure 5b: Ref. 5 - The Great Chair. A complete collection of bold skins inspired by nature. Graphic design and product development by Sheba Phillips

⁵ The carambola is a tropical tree that grows ovoid shaped fruit resembling a five-pointed star. Variants of the name can be found in the West Indies such as 'five finger.'

4.3 Ref. 6 - Own It – Hair Dye

'Own It' is a line of bright and fun coloured hair dyes. It is targeted at College students and young adults and for those who are young at heart. The range is uniquely packaged in test tubes, which are transparent allowing the consumer to see the colour of the dye.

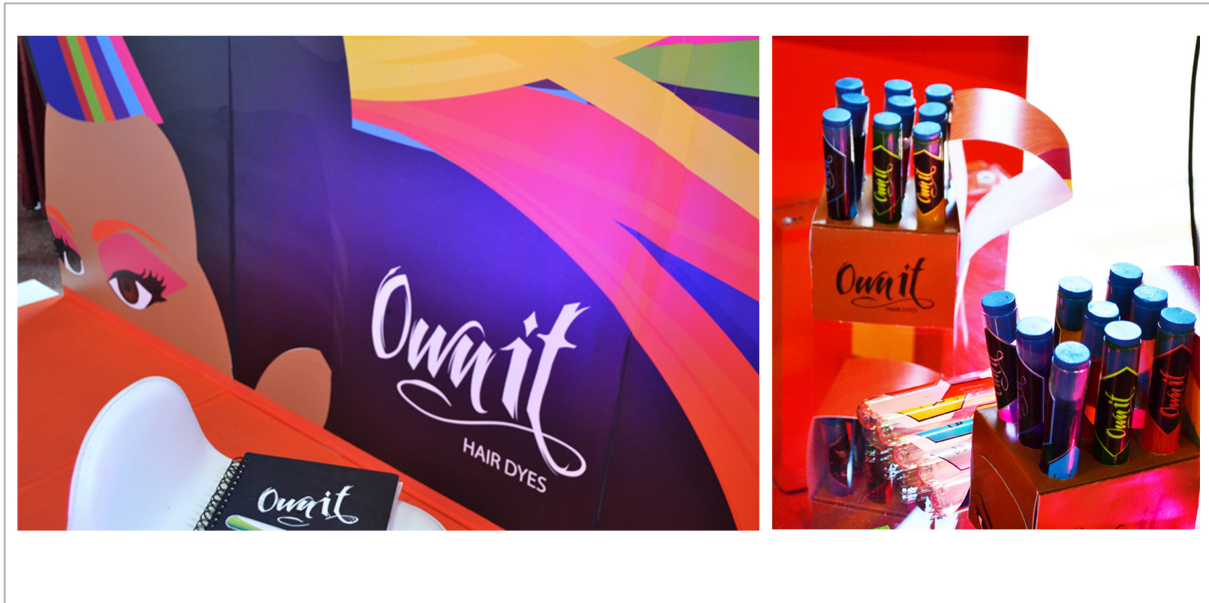


Figure 6: Ref. 6 - Own It Hair Dyes. Bold fluid graphics bring the product to life with unique packaging. Graphic design and product design by She'niqwe Clarke

5 Case Studies Summary

The six interviews conducted showed compelling results, forging a way toward relevant solutions for the obstacles of industrial development. (N.B. Two of the case studies Ref. 2 - Mongoose Playing Cards and Ref. 5 -The Great Chair are from the same graduate). Whether it is Caribbean ancestral tales, iconography or local characters, the stories are generally passed on intimately through oral traditions. Students proudly explore the notion of identity whether that may be from a holistic perspective or from a localised point of view. Case studies such as: (Ref. 1 -Phantom Haven, Ref. 2 - Mongoose Playing Cards, Ref. 3 - Mass Anthology Graphic Novel) may be classified as viable *cultural* commodities. Meanwhile mainstream products from, Ref. 4 - Cozees Plush Toys, Ref. 5 -The Great Chair, and Ref. 6 – Own It Hair Dyes generally expressed their inspiration through personal need. The latter three studies were verbally supported best by; Ref. 4 – Cozees Plush Toys that, “I wanted to design something that becomes part of your life.” (Ref. 4 Cozees Plush Toys). Of particular interest is Ref. 5 – The Great Chair, which beautifully straddles indigenous signifiers, form and function.

The responses on whether participants had researched establishments that could assist them in their venture proved less than favourable. The majority gave up due to external factors, or simply abandoned their venture, after having obtained full time employment. The following quote shows the absolute best case of unrelenting pursuit that fell short of its goal.

While I was still at College, I sourced test tubes from abroad to achieve the look I wanted but I incurred cost. Also I had challenges with the function in terms of getting it to stand correctly in the outer packaging, in addition to presenting it correctly to the consumer. Now I would change from glass to plastic tubes as during opening night of the show, test tubes fell off the table, broke and the colour ran all over. Immediately after College, I contacted a well-known laboratory in Spain to get them to mix the colours. I sent numerous emails and never got a final cost from them. I asked them, “How do you want to be paid? How do I get a sample?”

Also, I made a request for minimum quantities, but no answer. I tried another company in China but the minimum volume was too high, at 2000 units per colour, which is too much for me as a start-up. I tried also to work with a chemist in Trinidad, but they said that they would only mix particular pigments, red and brown tones. The quality of the dye was not vibrant and very watery. By then my spirit towards my hair dye project was gone. (Ref.: 6, Own It Hair Dyes, 2017)

Unanimously, the participants agreed that they wanted to develop the project further and that they had additional ideas on how to creatively expand the projects. Some responses included:

I would like to finish the entire 26 letters of the alphabet. I would also have to look into manufacturing elsewhere, but I got so caught up in trying to work on my graphic design business day to day, pleasing clients, making money and so on, that I lost the passion to create and work on the other things I love. (Ref.: 4 - Cozees Plush Toys, 2017)

Of worthy note, four out of five graduates have not registered the brand name of their product as a safety measure in the absence of securing a patent. The Corporate and Intellectual Property office sells trading names for one hundred Barbados dollars, the equivalent of fifty United States dollars.⁶ The lack of foresight in protecting their interests (in the meantime) is baffling. Graduates in the study have monthly income and have been working for more than three years.

Feelings were mixed with regards to selling the idea to an investor. Some of the perspectives included:

No. They may not fully execute or hold on to the vision I have for it. They may not want to keep the look and feel, which is the essence of 'Phantom Haven', so I will work on it slowly and steadily until I have built enough income to launch it myself. (Ref.: 6, Phantom Haven, 2017)

Give me a proposal and I would seriously go over it. I'll think about it... but really 'no' because if you see the potential in my work, why can't I? (Ref.: 6, Own It Hair Dyes, 2017)

5.1 Ref.: 3 – The Story of Mass Anthology: A Graphic Novel

The challenge the director of 'Wunnah Publishing' faced initially was the coordinating of pulling together the illustrators and writers in a timely manner. On reflection, the director would have done a short story upon leaving College. No series, no anthologies. While at College, he saved his money from freelance work, and looked into professional printing locally. At his graduate show the publication almost sold out within a week. Once he graduated he decided to print the next run overseas. Intrinsically printing is not an obstacle, as it is a readily sourced. It is worth noting that the Barbados Investment Development Corporation (BIDC) approached him to undertake a course in building a business, but he declined as the course was offered during the week, clashing with his full time job. He conceded that had they offered a weekend course, he would have participated in the programme.

'Beyond Publishing Caribbean' has room for expansion. All the comics can be accessed at the Comic Con Convention in New York City. They have a representative who manages a booth, which informs patrons to purchase either printed comics, or access them online. He aspires to make a film, cartoon or game from the 'Hard Ears' series, a contemporary interpretation of Barbadian iconography. If approached by an investor, he would consider selling the franchise depending on the price. He is fully aware that down the line, he will have to compromise on the development of some of the characters in order to tap into the international market.

⁶ Corporate Affairs & Intellectual Property Office: <https://caipo.gov.bb/site/index.php/fees/article/65-business-name-application>

This director has defied the odds by turning a passion into a business reality. The amalgamation of 'Wunnah Publishing and 'Beyond Publishing' has produced over thirty graphic novels since 2009. Their primary markets include the Caribbean, USA, Canada, Russia, Great Britain and Brazil. Setting up 'Beyond Publishing Caribbean' allowed some of his friends as well as colleagues to publish their work under this name. Matthew and his team promote the company heavily via social media channels. The works of 'Beyond Publishing' can be accessed on multiple platforms, i.e. print and digital options are available. Unlike the three of the six case studies shown, his only physical material was paper and online media. We must recognise that access to 'new or alternative' materials was a struggle for those working with toys, furnishing and beauty products, and that access to manufacturing for example, plush toys and the engineering of hair colour, poses unique challenges locally.

To summarise, an action plan needs to be set in motion to solve some of the manufacturing issues. 'Ref.: 3 – Mass Anthology: A Graphic Novel' is the success story of the six case studies, and shows an outcome with a *collaborative* approach. He simply brought others along with him. The other graduates worked in an insular manner, with virtually no result to propel them to the next step.

6 Strategies In Motion: On the Cusp of Micro-Evolution Through Coursework

Though microscopic on the Graphic Design programme, attempts to accommodate product development have begun. The courses are 'Typography I' delivered in the first year and 'Professional Challenges in Design' delivered in the second year.

Typography I

Thus far, the interplay of graphic communication and product in Typography 1 has been introduced on a minor scale allowing students to 'play' with the aesthetic and functional qualities of letterforms, which they create through a hybrid alphabet exercise. The task is to study existing letterforms and reinvent new language via form. The exercise is essentially type as image and artefact. The results have been mixed with some students solving just enough to get through that component, (those who have little interest in the area of product or three dimensional application), while others immersed themselves in the exercise attempting to create interesting product ideas whether it was a strength or not.

Professional Challenges in Design

The earlier course outline of 'Professional Challenges in Design' allowed students to reflect on their Practice, through a series of visiting professionals within the field of advertising and graphic design. The course is now tailored to function as a foundation in the 'Art of Developing a Business Model', with the official course name still in tact. The Department has formed a partnership with the Barbados Youth Business Trust⁷ (BYBT), a private sector initiative that offers a dynamic entrepreneurship programme to enable under served young people via entrepreneurial skills development, advisory and marketing support services, business mentoring and start-up capital. The BYBT delivers the second phase of the course. Students individually generate a business model and address issues such as time management and value sessions related to legal requirements, intellectual property and copyrights. Of particular significance is the inclusion of record keeping and basic accounts (VAT/NIS/Taxes).

⁷ Barbados Youth Business Trust - <https://www.youthbusiness.bb/>

7 Discussion

A discourse must be undertaken on the infrastructure and the notion of access with regards to design, manufacture and policy in Barbados. Amir looks at *design in the third world* from the perspective that:

... A more comprehensive formulation of the concept of design for the Third World should begin from an understanding of the complex interrelationship between design and social, cultural, and political factors. (2004, p. 69)

An attempt will be made to pinpoint problem areas. How can a proactive and constructive pathway be created from inception to implementation of these graduate products? It is evident that more research needs to be undertaken.

Findeli who speaks on the issue of *rethinking design education* in the 21st century reveals that:

Today, everybody tends to agree upon the necessity of including art, science, and technology in a design curriculum. But disagreement will soon arise, on the one hand, as to the relative importance, and on the other hand, as to their respective function, i.e., the way they should be articulated. (2001, p. 8)

The aforementioned quote speaks to the notion of striving for balance, while pursuing research in multidisciplinary fields.

Manufacture Issue

The biggest challenge is that there is no access to a space for the student to further engage in 'play' and let alone manufacture. There needs to be a specialised programme with a focus on testing and prototyping, that by extension permits successive stages of refinement, before seeking capital and going to market. If your industrial design has a variety of components, one is expected to 'move around' to build the prototype and in some cases it may not be even feasible to construct locally. The steps and labour involved can prove to be costly.

The manufacturing sector is very small. If we refer to the case studies summary with regards to responses to 'funding, research and manufacture', this gives us great insight that there is a persistent mentality, that if you are to make any type of progress that you must 'do-it-yourself' (DIY), somehow. This attitude of trying to get it all done on one's own terms appears to be distinctly a Barbadian ethos, particularly if you are a budding small business owner.

Supporting the statement on exorbitant prototypes and 'small man mentality', the Executive Director of the Barbados Manufacturers' Association explains:

The biggest challenge in manufacturing is the overhead costs with regards to utilities, materials and services in general. Barbados is the most expensive country in the Eastern Caribbean. We have many companies that do well in manufacturing but not enough is being done to promote their success stories. We would like to offer an official partnership with the students of the BCC particularly in the field of art and design. We are campaigning for more schools at secondary level to be more entrepreneurial well before they enter tertiary level education. They shouldn't have to wait until tertiary level to understand the creative process and footprints of good business. We are also facing some perceptions with the public, that only big businesses are our primary interest. We are here to embrace and help everyone generate income, even 'the little person'. (B. McKay, 2017)

Continuing on the subject of manufacture, we have two ensuing challenges. The development of industrial products is low thereby the acquisition of hardware and software tools needs to be selected with care, as there could be the risk of the under utilisation of equipment. If we look at the

comprehensive contributions of Centro Brasil Design (CBD)⁸ and the Brazilian Government's 'Diagnostic Review of Design in Brazil', they reveal the same obstacle that Barbados could face; yet our scenario could be further compounded by acute economies of scale. The report states:

New technologies for the design sector are constantly becoming available in the market. However, many of these tools are imported and costly, and are therefore used only occasionally by a small group of Brazilian designers. (2014, p.82)

Business Issue

Contemporary buzzwords such as 'Ideation', 'Incubator', 'Innovation', and the touting of business models and marketing plans are ubiquitous in many local institutions. While this is promising of progress being made, the information generally sourced is focused on conducting 'business'. Additionally, some institutions established to promote training are steeped in historical turf with mandates that could be decades old. The old adage that, "You can only teach what you know," comes to mind. Collectively they may be failing to address greater investment in alternative areas, particularly industrial design, that require growth. Therefore diversification of content or services offered by the said institutions needs to be examined, but in order for that to occur they must be willing to collaborate fully with political and community leaders, educators, designers and the public at large, on how best to execute new mandates or policies, that will stimulate all sectors.

Table 1 An objective list of key players and policy makers who bridge the gap from college graduate to savvy entrepreneur.

Barbados Coalition of Service Industries (BCSI)	Barbados Youth Business Trust (BYBT)
Barbados Cultural Industries Development Authority (BCIDA)	Enterprise Growth Fund (EGF)
Barbados Entrepreneurship Foundation (BEF)	Fund Access (FA)
Barbados Investment & Development Corporation (BIDC)	Ministry of Community Development & Culture
Barbados Manufacturers' Association (BMA)	Ten Habitat
Barbados National Standards Institute (BNSI)	Uni. of the West Indies (UWI) - Cavehill School of Business
Barbados Small Business Association (BSBA)	Youth Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES)

The contribution of the Barbados Investment Development Corporation (BIDC) has been significant. In 1991, two statutory institutions, the Export Promotion Corporation (EPC), and the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), the latter having a design arm, were subsumed to form the BIDC. Funded by the European Union (EU) under the BIDC, the 'Design Centre' was formed, with the objective to provide direct assistance in the area of design to manufacturers and businesses, and to advise government and its agencies on the matter of design. A design department is also a part of the corporation. It was critical for the BIDC to train professionals, provide workshops and seminars on the importance of design. Their mandate has been pivotal in developing export capacity, and they have facilitated training on the value of design to Small to Medium enterprises (SME's), along with design service delivery. With regards to design policy and standards, there may be a grey area with documentation. An 'on the verge of' policy document entitled '*Understanding Product Development*' was drafted twenty years ago. The BIDC offers many services to the community at large, but these are somewhat fragmented or snippet-like in character. We can deduce that within the BIDC, there is a need for common ground, which addresses the needs of design, manufacture, and the business industry.

Social Issue

On the notion of cultural ideology, we summarised in the case studies that there is a culture of 'DIY', which needs to be examined. Many simply did not ask enough questions or researched who could assist them in their ventures. There is also the notion of the post-colonial glass ceiling which is

⁸ Centro Brasil Design (CDB) - <http://www.cbd.org.br/>

explained, in the following quotation. In essence many abandoned their projects seeking job security, which by most local standards is an ideal source of comfort. Nettleford remarks on psychological trappings:

The paradox of Caribbean life is that the more things change the more they have remained the same. The vault-like ascent by the society from slavery into freedom and then from colonialism into constitutional independence is yet to be matched within the society by a corresponding progress from cultural inferiority of the vast majority to cultural self-confidence. (1979, p.3)

The majority of graduates come from lower middle to middle-income households where there is no pressure to leave the nest. This is a common lifestyle found in the Caribbean. Students and graduates alike need to recognise these trappings of 'doing enough or just settling' and that they can achieve more than they are led to believe, recognising that in fact, they are the masters of their own development.

To summarise, prototyping is exorbitant and in some cases the aforementioned cannot be constructed locally. Some key players may need to revisit their mandates and look to diversify the training and practice, particularly in the field of design, and look more to the benefits of design, which stimulates innovation within their companies. Island wide, socio-cultural challenges persist and it is imperative to acknowledge its presence and have a discourse on how best to tackle the issue.

8 Recommendations

Based on the case studies, a new environment needs to be fostered to cultivate more culturally enriched ideas whether from a localised or international perspective. From a historical perspective the interdisciplinary subjects undertaken on our BFA programme i.e. illustration, web design etc. must remain, but with a new paradigm. Students will need to develop a wider range of skills as the solutions developed encompass areas such as design and innovation, business studies and other variables. Intrinsically, they must learn how to collaborate with other practitioners in a variety of fields. The graphic design department's introduction of the business model and basic accounting through BYBT, though in its infancy, means that more time must pass before we can truly assess that it is successful. In the meantime, consideration to move towards the inclusion of learning about profit through an economic model system is feasible i.e. A 'Project Level' model introducing components such as development expense, unit cost, product performance, schedule, sales and distribution. The utilisation of a simple economic model will allow the student to make better decisions by quantifying rather than playing guesswork. The intersection of principles of business, industrial design and its management, and marketing are resounding.

We must be mindful of maintaining the balance of research and graphic design, as we are led to believe, that they are interested foremost in their principal vocation. Moreover, the theory and practice of design thinking and user experience needs to be applied as a module to the programme. This can help shape the students' outlook on the human centred facet of what they do and in particular, this training will be highly fruitful, to those who feel a greater affinity to notions of industrial design and product development.

The benefit of a prototype facility can be highly substantial. For the purposes of the remainder of this paper, the facility shall be called the 'Kick Start Prototype Facility'. 'Kick Start' may be developed as a '**start up**' serving the needs of students and graduates to test the feasibility of products before considering going to market.

If we look at the fully equipped 'Product Support' facility of the Craft & Design Institute⁹ (CDI) in South Africa, we can create a similar blueprint, but edited to lessen the issue of under utilisation.

⁹ http://www.thecdi.org.za/?page=equipment_tools

'Kick Start' will be able to serve the arms of other educational institutions such as the University of the West Indies (UWI). Hypothetically speaking, student and graduate products initially developed under the tutelage from both the BCC and the UWI, can reside in the same space. Perhaps both institutions find intriguing yet complimentary patterns in subject matter, thereby allowing the construction of better solutions for products leading to business partnerships. This can be a starting point, serving to eradicate the DIY mentality, therefore fostering mutual benefit through collaboration. Continuing on an all-encompassing path, there is no reason for persons from any socio-economic strata, untrained in the field of design, from using 'Kick Start'. One certainly doesn't need a university degree to have a great idea for testing. If the approach to testing and measuring is made accessible to all, better structures on serving the community can be built even though it may be conceived through trial and error.

Contents of the 'Kick Start' prototype facility can be as simple as:

- laser cutting machine
- three-dimensional printer for rapid prototyping
- sewing machine
- heat machine for bending wood
- large format printers
- metalwork and woodwork stations
- video cameras and digital cameras for recording tests
- assorted hand tools – traditional, electronic and digital

All supervised by technicians and advisors, the aforementioned are great assets for productivity. Ultimately Barbados is not set up for creative experiments and the importing and outsourcing of many products and services could be significantly reduced.

There is absolutely no doubt that there are organisations that can assist with business development and entrepreneurship. Placed under scrutiny, many key players have overlaps in their services. If mandates are diversified to include design and the benefit of design to the SMEs they normally target, they can evolve more readily with global trends in business and adjunct sectors. The amalgamation of some of the functions could result in the consolidation of funds, and services could be diverted accordingly, for a more effective facility.

Secondly, there is no Design Institute to actively facilitate policies, standards, support in design education and spread the goodness of design to the community at large. To reiterate, the BIDC is the closest entity encouraging and promoting the benefits of design, but the majority of the time is spent on working with SMEs and designing material for those entities.

For the remainder of the paper, this proposed institute will be called the 'FutrLux Design Institute' (FDI). The FDI is a subsidised space where shareholders partner with the Government to shape policies and standards for Barbadian products, (with heavy emphasis on the design agenda), so that the latter can flourish locally, regionally and internationally. FDI works in partnership with 'Kick Start', helping either student or graduate and any other shareholder, see their design to fruition. The 'FutrLux Design Institute' functions to:

- promote and exercise design as an enabler of innovation in a multi-sector landscape
- set design education best practices
- train design teachers in design thinking
- modernise design curriculum in educational institutions
- devise campaigns with government to promote the value of design to the wider public
- utilise design methods to shape policy development
- develop the export capacity of all design disciplines
- collect historical data on design works produced locally
- develop design exhibitions

- research how the public and private sectors use design
- establish a bi-annual conference and the publishing of papers in design circles
- host workshops fostering professional development
- organise design competitions through schools as well as in the professional arena
- encourage the appointment of design managers to work in private and public sector departments
- establish mentorship programmes with students and recent graduates
- examine international standards and correlate in the context of Barbados
- gather data on the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in relation to design growth.

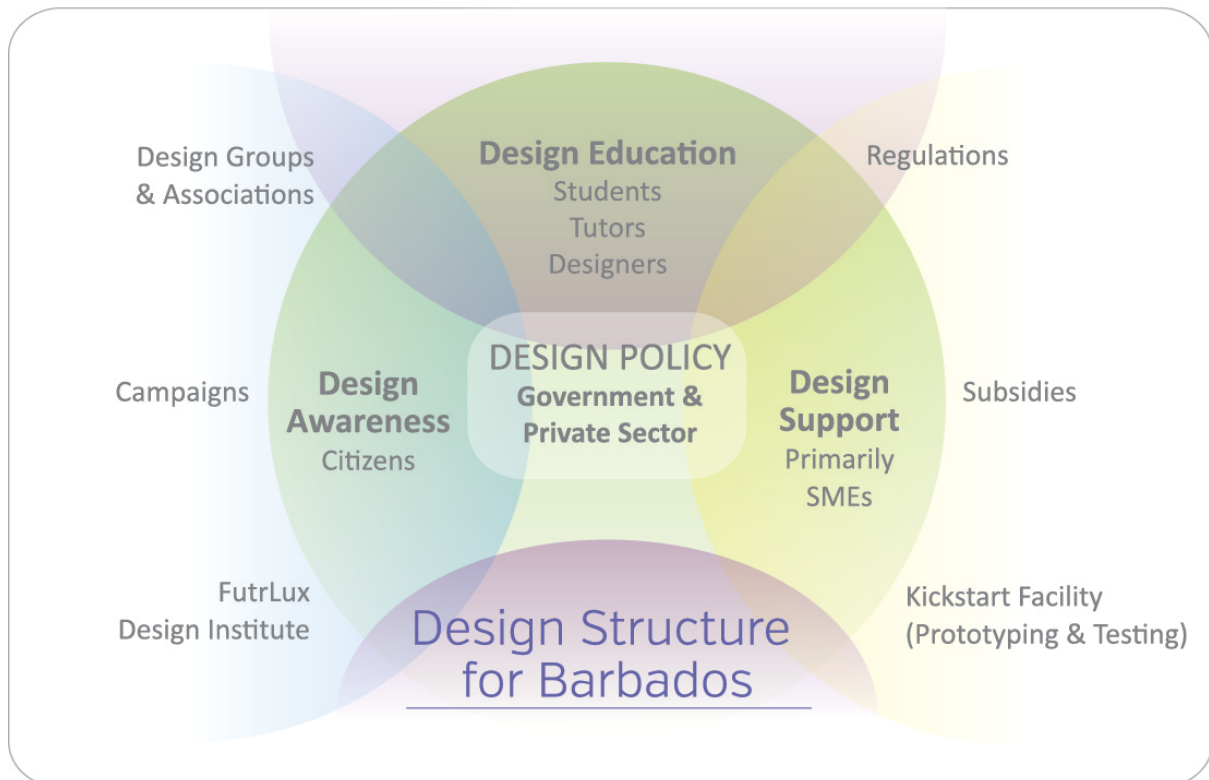


Figure 7: A proposed system for the future of design in Barbados.

But firstly, a discussion with all stakeholders needs to take place on how best to tailor FDI based on the needs of the country. In 2015, the Visual Arts Department at the UWI in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago established a colloquium seeing the urgency of having a Ministry of Design, and they continue to campaign for its emergence. Compared to some of our developing nation counterparts, we have fallen behind on achieving this type of reform.¹⁰ Amir informs us of three developing nations that looked to expand their product competitiveness:

In India, design policy is implemented through the establishment of the National Institute of Design, which puts an emphasis on educating designers and serving industry. In Colombia, there exists Artesanías de Colombia, while in Cuba there is an Oficina Nacional de Diseño Industrial (National Office of Industrial Design) (2004, p. 71)

To summarise, the benefits of having the 'Kick Start' facility and the 'FutrLux Design Institute' can change the course of economic growth by the act of diversification. Small steps must be taken to analyse the needs of not only the students, but the citizens of Barbados thereby creating what is suitable, yet dynamic in approach.

¹⁰ Sourced online from the World Design Organisation (WDO) under 'Community'. www.wdo.org

9 Conclusion

The old and restrictive paradigm, within which we reside, can no longer exist in light of so many available and emergent technologies. Educators and designers must work in unison to form a new model in order for design education to evolve. It is evident that whatever we tackle must be an on-going process, as it is relatively unknown territory on which we tread. The design student must be prepared to work in various capacities, straddling new technologies in design, business, manufacture, human and social sciences. If we agree that necessity is the mother of invention, then it can be said that the 'Kick Start' prototype facility working in tandem with the 'FutrLux Design Institute', can create an alternative path for growth in the creative sector. The elephant sleeping in the room continues to be the post-colonial glass ceiling; a ceiling that affects political and community leaders, educators, parents, and children. This micro study of five participants which represents a microcosm of the society, has revealed that those who feel more secure financially are comfortable maintaining the status quo, i.e. stable job, a house with picket fence mentality, while those who feel financially insecure express a need for more time and income to invest in their product.

For those who lack the initiative to see the product through to market readiness, three solutions are suggested. They include grant funding where the student develops the idea in a supportive environment. Secondly, sell the concept to a venture capitalist i.e. purchase the patent outright, or negotiate a deal for use of the patent and pay the student royalties. Lastly, provide the opportunity for partnership, where the student bears none of the expenses, nor the responsibilities of administration, but is however allowed to direct or manage the product's creation.

Ultimately the driver is expansion. If national leaders from both the public and private sectors create options, Barbados can grow. Building a design sector drives the economy making for a richer Barbados ethically, socially, financially and politically. Critical building blocks are attributes, such as heritage, legacies, and fostering an environment towards equal footing on a global platform. We must begin this process of capturing the student's product ideas well before graduating so that they have a better foundation from the powers that be, on the infrastructure of 'design, business and manufacture'.

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