

New thinking in practice-led research in Design in Aotearoa New Zealand

In recent years, creative work and its potential relationships to scholarly research are increasing in influence and introducing critical vitality to Universities, opening new approaches for collaboration, interdisciplinarity and community engagement. For practitioners, it offers a research approach that merges personal experience into the designer practice, skill set and design artefact.

Practice-led research is considered an approach to research through practice, in which the research and the practice operate as interdependent and complementary processes with specific methodologies, leading to original forms of knowledge. In this framework, practice is the purposeful action taken within a specific context by creative means: the making, modifying or designing of design artefacts and processes.

The consideration of practice-led design has been part of the academic landscape in the last years, with several PhD and Master's programmes raising awareness of the particular kind of knowledge that creative practice can convey. Knowledge, in this context, can take the format of new methods, techniques, taxonomies and models. However, the application of practice-led as a paradigm in tertiary design education is scarce and requires more investigation.

The DAT LINK 2023 Dossier showcase 12 designers/practitioners/researchers: Damian Wilson, Izzy Hutcheson, Jade Chambers, Kat Frewen, Kexin Shan, Kristen Lum, Ruby Brown, Sophie Ardern, Sophie Lewis, Silvia Kostandini, Tara Falconer and Qianying Li.

This special issue presents their design projects led by creative practice conducted at Auckland University of Technology in Aotearoa New Zealand. These emergent thinkers focused on personal reflections on their experiences and what they investigated through doing their research projects.

These new design researchers feel increasingly unsettled tensions against conventional research methods, which seem too obtuse to record the dynamic of the inquiry that lies at the center of their personal experience. These academics undertook inquiries with a unique agency to the research process through creative practices in the broad field of Design, creating an artefact alongside a written exegesis to fulfil academic requirements. Through their research, they discuss outcomes such as research paradigms, frameworks and methodologies that contribute to the knowledge or methods that another practitioner can use. To do this, they invested in discursive reflections about the making processes they engaged in, including an account of how any creative works were made and appraised.

The collection creates a unique voice that speaks outwardly to all Design practitioners and the practice-led research larger community and raises awareness of the potential of practice-led research as a methodology for practitioners. With the DAT LINK 2023 Dossier, we aim to foster reflection on creative practice as an approach to research in higher design education. At the same time, it offers scope for the investigation of practice as singular to the practitioner-researcher. While working within this scope, it is envisaged that some arguments and inferences will have applicability beyond the Aotearoa and for other creative practices, practitioners and researchers.

Enjoy the reading!

Marcos Mortensen Steagall

Guest Editor