

Special issue on contributions by the Colour Literacy Project team

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The *Colour Literacy Project (CLP)* is an educational initiative of the ISCC and the AIC to strengthen the bridge between the arts and sciences in 21st century colour education, while addressing common misconceptions and misinformation about colour. Its approach to teaching colour is based on the best available peer-reviewed research on colour. It is an on-going project; due to the complexity of the subject it is expected to be pursued for many more years to come.

The following tenets describe the CLP team's understanding of the fundamental facts about colour. They are what team members support and believe to be useful as of now, but they remain open to new findings.

1. Colour is a highly complex and multi-faceted topic. Research is on-going and knowledge is expanding, but it is not likely that knowledge about colour will ever be complete.
2. What colours are, whether they are properties of substances or light, manifestations of radiant energy, pure subjective experiences, or results of interactions between the perceiving subject and any of the above is a matter of ongoing scientific and philosophical debate. In any account it must be recognised that colours are, ultimately, a visual phenomenon.
3. The perception of colours involves adaptation to the environment and its visual stimuli.
4. Colours are perceived in all natural conditions of viewing in either a spatial or a temporal contrast to other colours.
5. The experience of colours involves psychological and cultural factors, such as emotions, expectations and memory, as well as artistic and aesthetic evaluations.
6. Understanding colour requires first-hand exploration. Theoretical knowledge is helpful in explaining colour and colour phenomena, but a deeper understanding of colour requires the direct experience of perceiving, judging, comparing, using and appreciating colours and colour phenomena.

In this Special Issue CLP team members express their thoughts on many facets of the project itself as well as on some intriguing issues of the vast field of colour theory and application.

The Prologue to this special issue (*One Artist's Journey from Traditional Colour Theory to the Colour Literacy Project*) by **Luanne Stovall** describes how an artist, whose professional colour education was based on Traditional Colour Theory¹, can radically change his/her approach to colour and embrace a new, 21st century paradigm for colour education. The process took Luanne from the comfort of her 'art silo' into uncharted waters; and she has become one of the most enthusiastic and valued members of the CLP Team, being the driving force behind such initiatives as the ISCC Fluorescent Fridays and the Colour Literacy Forums.

¹ For a Contemporary Analysis of Traditional Colour Theory see [1].

As an astronomer and painter, **Robin Kingsburgh**, the author of *The Colour Literacy Project: Revitalising Colour Education Foundations*, embodies the mission statement of the CLP by showing a personal example of how to bridge science and art. In the introductory article on the CLP she discusses the team's approach and preliminary results of some of the teacher training sessions from elementary through to high school levels. The smile on the face of the child in Figure 11. of the article (and we have seen many, many more such smiles) proves that colour does not only need to be taught – it must be experienced.

Rethinking Colour in Design Education through the Human and Social Perspectives by **Ingrid Calvo Ivanovic** is a fresh look on a subject; some aspects of which, according to the author, *have been documented by several scholars during the last 30 years*. What makes this article interesting is Ingrid's approach of not only listing the facts (which she did in her thesis on *Colour Design Training Itinerary, A framework for the teaching and learning of colour in the design discipline*) but also looking at them from different perspectives. She is (together with Luanne Stovall) behind an initiative of the Colour Literacy Project to develop closer links with Cumulus, the world-wide association of distinguished art and design universities and colleges, through the Colour Literacy Forum.

The article by CLP member **Stephen Westland** (together with co-authors Marjan Vazirian and Wenwen Song): *Contemporary Axioms for Colour Reproduction* discusses some of the misconceptions related to colour theory. Among other important topics some of these misconceptions are briefly discussed on his blog². In this article he provides more details on why these concepts are often explained in a way contrary to the current scientific view.

Paul Green-Armytage and **Maggie Maggio**: *Before Colour Theory – Learning to Discriminate, Describe, and Order Colours* provides details of the CLP approach to foundational colour training – teaching the teachers the fundamentals of how to “open eyes”. The authors developed a sorting set based on nine hue families (to expand hue discrimination and also provide a free alternative to proprietary colour order systems) and introduced a new, easily understandable vocabulary for describing four basic variations within ‘hue families’: vivid-muted and pale-dark. This article describes yet another strong example of the CLP approach of experiencing, experimenting, and playing with colour – before colour theory.

David. J. C. Briggs' two-part article *The Elements of Colour* explains in quite some detail many of the basic concepts about which there are so many misunderstandings or downright misconceptions in the literature on colour. Part One considers "what colours are" by reviewing the connections between colour stimuli, colour perceptions, and colour measurement, while Part Two focuses on colour perception, exploring the main modes of colour appearance and the standard perceived colour attributes and their interrelationships. David is well known for his websites^{3,4}.

Harald Arnkil is the author of the CLP recommended textbook on colour for artists, designers and architects *Colour in the Visual World* [2]. He is a highly regarded artist who taught colour and art for over 30 years at Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture and is currently working on a doctoral thesis on the subject of Colour in the Artistic Process of Contemporary Artists. His co-author for the article *Colour Harmony in the Context of Teaching*, **Andreas Schwarz**, is an authority on the subject as the author of the book on colour harmony theories [3] and also the author or co-author of a number of books on colour order systems (with Rolf Kuehni) and on a didactic approach to colour in

² <https://colourware.org/category/colour-theory-in-2-minutes/>

³ <http://www.huevaluechroma.com>

⁴ <https://sites.google.com/site/djcbriggs/colour-online>

art lessons. More details on Andreas' research can be found on his website⁵. Andreas is co-author of another article and author of a third one in this Special Issue of JAIC. In *Colour Harmony in the Context of Teaching* Harald and Andreas give a review of colour harmony theories over the ages, and come to the conclusion, that these theories do not represent reliable guidelines for designers; and their use is equally questionable in the field of pedagogy.

Robert Hirschler, is guest editor of this Special Issue, and co-author (with **Andreas Schwarz**) of *Itten's Seven Colour Contrasts – a Review (in three parts)*. He has been active in the colour field for over fifty years and is the co-chair (with Maggie Maggio) of the AIC Study Group on Colour Education and the Colour Literacy Project.

This review of Itten's seven colour contrasts as well as the last article of this Special Issue, **Andreas Schwarz's** *Josef Albers put into perspective* were strongly criticised during the review process, and both are sure to raise critical comments. Careful study of these two articles reveals that the undeniable merits of Itten and Albers are never questioned, but their teaching is considered under scrutiny in view of modern colour science. Most of the criticism in these two articles is directed rather at the unfortunate teaching practice of taking only the words – and not the spirit – of the teaching of the Bauhaus Masters. The Bauhaus idea of putting practice before theory has been fully embraced by the Colour Literacy Project.

This **Special issue - Contributions by the Colour Literacy Project team** is the result of a labour of love by the CLP team members. We have tried to describe the many approaches 21st century colour education may and should take from the simple eye-opener exercises to the more complex STEAM approach, from explaining the basic concepts related to colour perception and discrimination to the concepts of describing and ordering colour. If some of the statements in any of the articles are found to be controversial it is because colour is such a complex phenomenon that there are often no simple answers even to the simplest looking questions. Readers are encouraged to send comments, letters to the editor.

As guest editor I would like to thank the authors for their hard work, dedication, and patience in producing these articles. Special thanks go to the reviewers, whose conscientious work greatly improved all of the articles.

Robert Hirschler

Chair of the Study Group on Colour Education (Guest Editor)

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References

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2. Arnkil H (2013), *Colour in the Visual World*, Helsinki, Finland: Aalto University.⁶
3. Schwarz A (1999), *Die Lehren von der Farbenharmonie – Eine Enzyklopädie zur Geschichte und Theorie der Farbenharmonielehren*, Göttingen: Muster-Schmidt.

⁵ <https://dr-andreas-schwarz.de/>

⁶ A new edition (2021) with updates is available in e-book format at the [Publisher's website](#), [Google Play](#) and [Apple Books](#).