

Q&A

Engage with ideas

Jorge Frascara

Social and professional responsibility in design practice and education

July 6, 2021

Design Literacy International Network

Universidad del Desarrollo

Oslo Metropolitan University

Chat questions and comments that to which I can respond

15:38:33 From Keesa V Johnson :

I want to know his thoughts on the word: tacit knowledge

I recognize three kinds of knowledge: Explicit knowledge, that which can be easily found articulated and published in one way or another; Implicit knowledge, that which is not readily available but that can be articulated when the need arises; and Tacit knowledge, that which is difficult to articulate and that normally requires working with someone or observing someone that has it. Tacit knowledge is in my view the reason why it is important to learn design in a studio situation and not in a lecture room. The studio situation does not only allow a closer relation with the instructors, but also a richer peer learning possibility. I believe that good learning experiences derive from interaction with the three kinds of knowledge.

15:28:35 From bourgogne :

This inclusion of Behavioral Change in design education is problematic when discussing Creativity and Intuition...

I agree that it is problematic, because when one needs to foster behavioural change through design, there is a need to engage in research and find evidence for the actions one plans to undertake. It is necessary to avoid the temptation to resort to creativity and intuition alone. Chances are that the behaviour change that is pursued without research might not be achieved when trying to use “system one” in the language of Daniel Kahneman. I have nothing against creativity and intuition as long as they are supported by an intimate knowledge of the people and the factors that relate to the change one wishes to achieve.

15:30:09 From Keesa V Johnson :

Those behavior change models comes from Ed technology. Which is embedded in educational psychology.

Not necessarily in my case. I started studying behaviour change in 1986, when I decided to move from information design to communications that address social problems. I had a six-month leave after completing my Chair's term, and dedicated it to re-direct my practice, from information design to social issues. I wanted to select a problem out of the most reported issues that came out in newspapers. After trying several fronts, traffic injuries was the one that first offered me funding and the possibility to integrate a newly formed initiative led by the Alberta Department of Transportation and the Motor Association.

As soon as I started looking at the international experience, as a communication designer, I realized that my task was to focus on behavior change. The policemen present in the group were interested in improving control; the road engineers focused on road systems design, urban and rural; the emergency physicians were interested in broad scope strategies that could reduce the stress on the hospitals' emergency departments. In my case, I did not inherit behavior change from Ed Technology or Ed Psychology, but from experimental psychologists internationally engaged in traffic injuries reduction plans.

15:46:45 From Bourgogne:

Is there room in education for schools that teach learning as well as schools that train to perform at a high level of doing?

15:48:06. From Clive :

It's a good point. The balance between discipline specific skills and a capacity to communicate across cultural and discipline boundaries by developing a generalist, learning-to-learn outlook.

I think that developing both a learning attitude and capacity, and mastering the practical skill for doing and making, must always be present in design education. The extent to which time and energy is dedicated to each, will depend on the position adopted by the school, and on the capacity of its academic staff. Several times I have been shown programs, and been asked what I thought about them. Programs are like wish lists, but, in the end, it is people that matter. And I say people, and not only teachers, because the quality of education depends fundamentally on the quality of both teachers and learners (and to a great extent, administrators in positions of power). Programs and resources (financial, spatial, technological) help, but the determining factor of quality of outcomes is the people involved.

15:49:13 From Kanupriya Saxena :

If design requires interdisciplinary knowledge, then there should be no divisions or streams in design (like communication, fashion, product etc)?

Further to the previous point, the knowledge domain of industrial design, for instance, is different from that of communication design, fashion or interiors, despite the fact that philosophical and methodological issues could be common. When I refer to interdisciplinary knowledge I mean bringing **business, technology or social sciences** to design education. **Breadth** of knowledge of the craft part of

designing would always have to be balanced with **depth** of knowledge. Again, the philosophy of a program will help decide how to distribute time and resources to produce in the end respectable results.

One thing is the supporting sciences that can help the education of designers (as bolded above), another thing is the fields of knowledge where design projects are needed. If I am designing a brochure about best practices in the use of antibiotics I need to instruct myself about the topic in question. I cannot just layout material that I do not understand. That is the extent of interdiscipline that I refer to when I mention the term.

15:51:05 From Lieselotte van Leeuwen:

How to efficiently choose and translate social sciences concepts into a specific realm of design? (I'm a psychologist teaching in design)

Anything connected to human factors is relevant for design. In communication design I see three areas of psychology that are important: perception, cognition and behavior. In a book I edited, *Design and the social sciences, Making connections* (Taylor & Francis 2002), you can find several examples of projects that integrated social sciences with design, and other articles on case studies that are informed by the social sciences. This book was partly based on my work to develop a Bachelor of Design interdisciplinary program (The Bachelor of Design with Pathways, at the University of Alberta), in coordination with programs in Social Sciences, Computer Science, Business and Engineering. I designed and implemented this program between 1994 and 1997 along with the Department Chair, Dr. Desmond Rochefort, and the Administrator of the Department, Stan Szykowski.

In another book of mine, *User-centred graphic design* (Taylor & Francis 1997). I discuss how traffic safety communication planning is highly supported by psychology. Anthropology and sociology are also very relevant to design, fundamentally regarding methods to study user populations, at the micro and the macro scale.

15:53:17 From bourgogne :

The infiltration of psychology into the discipline of design needs to be analyzed and discussed within academia...

The word "infiltration" makes the presence of psychology sound like a subversive element in design. Is that your intention?

15:54:11 From Clive :

Re: Creativity: Creative thinking is thus more than simply coming up with random ideas. It is a tangible competence, grounded in knowledge and practice, that supports individuals in achieving better outcomes, oftentimes in constrained and challenging environments. Organisations and societies around the world increasingly depend on innovation and knowledge creation to address emerging challenges (OECD, 2010[2]), giving urgency to innovation and creative thinking as collective enterprises. (https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA_2021_creative_thinking_framework.pdf)

I could not agree more. My intention is not to eradicate intuition and creativity from design education: my intention is to oppose to the abuse of the terms, as if they were independent from acquired knowledge and sophisticated thinking. I believe creativity is possible when the knowledge of the creative

group exceeds current knowledge. I like Ken Robinson's definition (paraphrasing): "The ability to produce original ideas that have value" (From his TED talk "Do schools kill creativity?").

15:56:00 Francesco Galli :

"creativity" is an act of resistance. Gilles Deleuze, we still addressing the problem from a positivist point of view....what about negative knowledge in the discipline.

I have to confess I do not understand your statement, although I am familiar with some of the work of Gilles Deleuze. I do not understand either what is that you mean by "creativity as an act of resistance," by your complain about "a positivist point of view," or by your reference to "negative knowledge in the discipline." Could you elaborate?

15:57:34 From Felipe Domingues :

Aesthetics in Design Semiotics Research. Developing foundations to better comprehend cultural habits and codes in bottom-up design processes

Again here, I do not understand your intention with this comment. Could you elaborate?

15:59:31 From Paola:

Hola Jorge me parece muy interesante lo de enseñar el amor por los procesos largos. Respecto a este tema, los alumnos hoy en día quieren la inmediatez de las cosas, buscan resultados fáciles para poder lograr resultados óptimos en el corto tiempo, entonces la pregunta es: Cómo integrar en un tiempo limitado para hacer el proyecto las interdisciplinas en el aula y como estudio y conocimiento para la creación del diseño y además motivar a las generaciones que no tienen aspiraciones de conocimiento o la motivación de observar lo que está sucediendo en el entorno social e intelectual. Es frustrante ver que finalmente no existe en la educación la posición de hacerla en base a el compromiso con el entorno social e interdisciplinario o la integración del conocimiento cómo herramienta fundamental para la creatividad para que el alumnado aprenda que para llegar a lo proyectual no puedes crear o elaborar especies de fórmulas o recetas para poder llegar a buen y rápido resultado.

Normalmente, no en el primer año del programa de diseño, yo hago proyectos largos simultáneamente con proyectos cortos de menor complejidad. Tocas varios puntos en tu comentario: en las descripciones escritas de los proyectos que les doy a los estudiantes establezco una contextualización del proyecto en la realidad social en que se inscribe, con clara descripción de los objetivos del diseño y del público usuario. Trato de dirigir la atención de los estudiantes a desarrollar una estrategia que ayude a obtener el impacto operativo del diseño, al tiempo que sea consciente del impacto cultural que pueda tener. En algunos casos, el impacto ambiental también es considerado. Pero lo que dices no se puede alcanzar sólo en el taller de diseño. Todo el programa tiene que apuntar a educar al estudiante en el sistema cultural de valores que el grupo docente quiera promover.

15:59:31 From Paola :

I find it very interesting to teach the love for long processes. Regarding this issue, students today want the immediacy of things, they seek easy results to achieve optimal results in a short time, then the question is: How to integrate in a limited time to make the project the interdisciplines in the classroom and as study and knowledge for the creation of design and also motivate the generations that have no

aspirations of knowledge or motivation to observe what is happening in the social and intellectual environment? It is frustrating to see that finally there is no position in education to make it based on the commitment to the social and interdisciplinary environment or the integration of knowledge as a fundamental tool for creativity so that students learn that to get to the project you can not believe or develop species of formulas or recipes to reach good and quick result.

Normally, I do not work on long projects in the first year of the design program. Starting in the second year I do long projects simultaneously with short projects of less complexity. You touch on several points in your comment: in the written project descriptions I give students, I establish a contextualisation of the project in the social reality in which it is embedded, with a clear description of the project's objectives and the audience involved. I try to direct the students' attention to developing a strategy that helps achieve the operational impact of the design, while at the same time being aware of the cultural impact it may have. In some cases, the environmental impact is also considered. But what you say cannot be achieved in the design studio course alone. The whole program has to aim at educating the student in the cultural value system that the teaching group wants to promote.

16:00:30. From Fabiane Wolff :

On the myth of "the consumer want": what are your thoughts on data, real data, as input for design projects.

Data, hard data, are very important. My decision to focus on the 18 to 24 year old male for the traffic safety project, was based on data, not on some kind of "hear-say" knowledge or prejudice. The male population of Alberta in those years represented 6% of the total population, but it was involved in 16% of injury collisions (this is called "over-representation"). The majority of vehicles involved were low cost sport cars. The worst hours in the week were Sundays from 2 am to 6 am. Very frequently the cars were at maximum passenger capacity. Their dominant color was red or black. These and other data helped with the details of the videos made. People responsible for the crashes should be able to recognize themselves in the video's stories. A number of strategy and detail decisions were based on statistics. The same goes for much of the work I have done with the health sector, often with smaller populations. Numbers are always useful. First to assess the magnitude of the problem, second to measure results after the intervention. Statistics do not help solve the problems, but helps understand its significance, the compositions of factors and people involved. They also help evaluate the impact of the intervention.

16:03:52. From Francesco Galli:

We need myths, the false sense of control and discipline has no power over the rituals and ambiguities that are the basis of myth....

I do not find any use in the promotion of myths in the context of design education, least of all, in the university. I want designers to think, and in my teaching, I want to help students develop further their thinking abilities, and develop mine with theirs. That's where I see the purpose of the university. I do not want to promote myths.

When I design a product, and the product achieves what I intend it to achieve, be it a reduction of traffic injuries, wiser use of antibiotics, or better understanding of prescriptions, I do not develop a *false sense of control*, I develop a *realistic sense of control*. In my work on traffic safety my group obtained a

19% reduction in deaths. Best international examples arrived at 30%. Our work was not the best that it could be, but had a positive impact. The impact did not provide a false sense of achievement.

I believe in the usefulness of knowledge, in learning how things work, and in awakening in students a similar curiosity and drive. That, in my view, is the purpose of education in general, and a very important one for the practice of design.

16:04:16. Sally's Screen :

Design IS about focus on users/ people , it is what makes it different from marketing which focuses on customers.

I could not agree more. Public user research in design aims at understanding better the people affected by a problem in order to serve them better. Marketing, instead, understanding people is aimed at generating the highest possible profit regarding whatever product of service is being promoted.

16:05:24. From Diego Ernesto Maturana Baeza :

Like you said, good judgment is key to good design. As designers we are the channel, the mixers of all concepts, who achieve harmony in the process and in creation. Will it be correct to focus design education on concepts such as ethics, empathy and wisdom? Based on good judgment?

I think it would be quite correct. **Empathy** and **ethics** are motivational forces: they move you to do positive things for your public. You need to complement that with **knowledge**, so that you can do those things well. Otherwise you will be left with only good intentions.

If knowledge comes with wisdom, better even. Wisdom is that higher kind of knowledge that considers the broader contexts and final consequences of one's actions.

To get good results, results that help people achieve their goals, while avoiding harm to others and to wellbeing in general, you need wisdom.

Complex projects require quite a number of decisions, decisions about what to do, for whom to do it, where to do it, and how to do it. All this constantly requires good judgement, and ability to see how every decision has effects on the quality of the design response, as well as ripple effects with short- and long-term consequences that must be considered.

I hope this helps complement my responses to the questions that could be entertained live in the program. Just in case something remains pending, my email is frascara@ualberta.ca

It was an enjoyable event for me. Thank you for participating.

Best regards

Jorge Frascara