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Encouraging Responsible design

The use of value thinking and psychology in the education of graphic communication designers

The following article considers the case for integrating students' personal values into the work processes of graphic communication design (GCD) to encourage an ethical approach. The author is currently undertaking action research to explore how this might happen. This article explains the author's position in undertaking the study. It looks at the area of education for sustainable development (ESD), and considers a study where an ESD framework was tested in a graphic communication design education (GCDE) context, to evaluate its potential. The author also evaluates an example of value thinking used in a GCDE context. Through assessment of both examples, the author suggests that there may be benefits in considering the psychology of values in further explorations of ESD in a GCDE context. This follows from investigation into the psychology of values in the area of ESD. The author's research in this area is then described.

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Introduction

Education is well placed to encourage responsible practice, yet there still appears to be a gap between educational objectives and professional reality, despite decades of discussion on how to bring it about. The author, an educator herself, uses the term responsible in a universal, social, environmental and cultural context. A resource that was designed to support educators in encouraging responsible design is "*The Designer's Accord - Integrating sustainability into design education toolkit*" (edutoolkit.designersaccord.org, 2009). 100 academic and professional institutions were involved in its formation. This reflects acceptance by many educators that fostering responsible graduates should be their goal. Dritz (2014) undertook an American study in the area of sustainable graphic design. Her research suggests that professional graphic designers credit their own self-direction, rather than their education, for skill development in the area of sustainability. Dritz's study suggests a gap between rhetoric and action in education. The aforementioned toolkit is available online since 2009. Though there is a facility to do so, there have been few project suggestions uploaded on the Designer's Accord website. The latest one

submitted was on April 1st, 2011. This might reflect a lack of engagement with the resource on an ongoing basis. The author believes that considering new developments in educational policy, both globally and nationally, in the area of education for sustainable development might contribute to closing the gap.

Background

Value thinking in GCDE - the case for development of an educational method.

Education for sustainable development is becoming widely accepted as integral to nurturing responsible graduates. The UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) describes the benefits of ESD. "*It can promote a shift in people's mindsets and in so doing enable them to make our world safer, healthier and more prosperous, thereby improving the quality of life*". (UNECE 2005, p1; UNECE, 2009, p15).

New policies such as the UNESCO'S "*Education 2030 – Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action*" (2016) and Ireland's "*National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (2014-2020)*" (2014) encourage urgent action to incorporate ESD in all disciplines. This suggests GCDE should be taking account

of it. An example of ESD integrated into the discipline of GCDE follows.

There are plenty of well-established ESD approaches. A framework that has been tested in a GCDE context is the “*Sustainability Education Framework of Teachers (SEFT)*”, developed by Warren et al (2014). In her conference paper “*Integrating Sustainability Literacy into Design Education*”, Quam (2016) tested the framework in a GCDE classroom and describes it as successful in the aim of developing skills in systems thinking, future thinking, strategic thinking and value thinking. There are many definitions of value (or values) thinking. In the context of sustainability, Wiek et al. (2011) describe it as “the ability to collectively map, specify, apply, reconcile, and negotiate sustainability values, principles, goals, and targets”. In Quam’s test, value thinking is encouraged by asking students to role-play, an established ESD technique. As a result, students become mindful of the perspectives of others, therefore gaining an understanding of others’ values. Though Quam acknowledges that value thinking helps students clarify their own identities, she concludes that one of the strengths of the framework is that it requires students to think outside themselves, at a time when there is a strong focus on the self (Quam, 2016, p11). This, of course, is of benefit, in an attempt to encourage students to have a more universal view. But it is our personal connection to sustainable issues that encourages us to invest in them. In her book, “*The Designer’s Atlas of Sustainability*”, Ann Thorpe describes this. “*Many of the issues confronting us in the landscape of sustainability are those that feel more personal*

than professional, for example, your connection to nature, your politics as a citizen, or your willingness to put your personal resources toward ecological sustainability.” (Thorpe, 2007, p195).

Maybe the first step in encouraging students to adopt pro-sustainable attitudes and behaviours, is through exploration of students’ own values. Perhaps educators can encourage graphic communication design students to act responsibly by using this emotional connection to values? This is not to say that this does not happen already. The author hosted a discussion at The Graphic Design Educator’s Network Conference 2016, “*Exploring Territories*”, where educators discussed the notion of using students’ values to encourage responsible design. Most agreed that they did this, but they did not think they had consensus on the best method. Dissemination of a researched and tested method was discussed as being of future benefit (Lettis, 2016). To begin to explore what that method might be, the author returned to research in ESD.

Value thinking and the psychology of values in education

Value-centred pedagogies in ESD – use of the psychology of values.

Value thinking is investigated by Murray et al. (2014) in an article titled “*Evaluating values-centred pedagogies in education for sustainable development*”. In the article Murray et al. attempt to quantitatively evaluate methods of teaching that help learners clarify their personal values systems. It is important to note that here the authors are not attempting to change student values

“By connecting them (students) to holistic values and sustainable frameworks within design inquiry, designers can make better, more responsible, more sustainable decisions”

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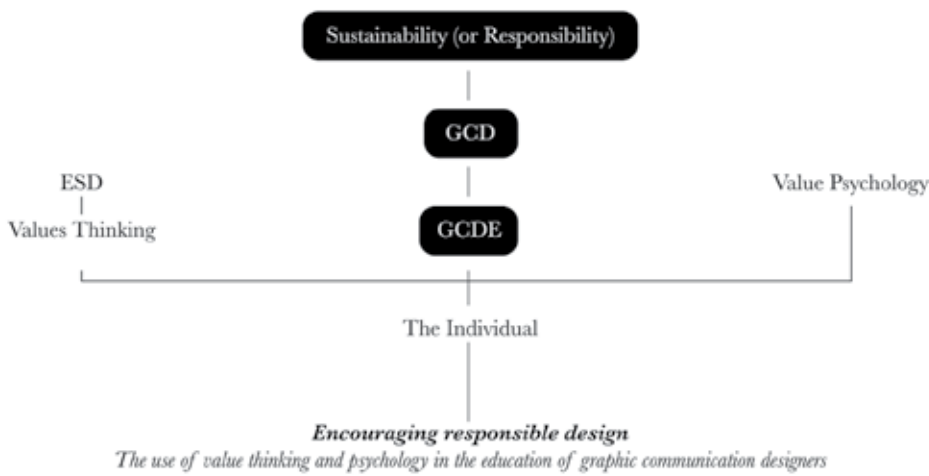


Figure 1: Outline of the exploration of value thinking and psychology in GCDE

but to facilitate intra-personal processes that allow students to move towards other values they might hold. This is the intent of value-centred pedagogies.

Within the study Murray et al. held workshops with students, where theories in the psychology of values were explained. Values can be described as “*trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or group*” (Schwartz, 2007). Therefore, the psychology of values can be described as the scientific study of the use of those principles by a person or group. Students then went through a process of clarifying and connecting their own values to sustainable issues through a range of ESD methods, such as role-play, discussion and stimulus activities. Murray et al. (2014) then quantitatively assessed if there was a shift in perception, using questionnaires. They found a small but significant shift towards potentially pro-sustainable motivations and values. They also concluded that mobilizing already-inherent values, rather than attempting to encourage adoption of new ones, was more likely to lead to pro-sustainability behaviour (ibid).

Quam’s conference paper demonstrates that the SEFT framework, as an example of a sustainable framework, can give a structure to the way ESD can be approached through GCDE. But, since a connection to universal issues might happen through identification of what we care about on a personal level first, the author believes there is opportunity for further exploration in the area of value thinking within GCDE. A method already developed in a GCDE context provided a platform to begin further exploration. That method is described below.

Value thinking in GCDE – a current method and the case for further investigation.

In a GCDE context, an example of the use of value thinking can be seen in the work of Pamela Napier (2012). Napier designed and tested a method that enables students to embed values into their design process, allowing them to work in a co-design context. The process can be seen in action in a co-authored article with Eric Benson. Here students explored their use of values, in relation to their personal ambitions and sustainable issues. Students are not only learning in their language, i.e. design tools and processes they are most comfortable with (generative tools, collaborative visualization and reflection in action), but also their values are embedded within their process (Benson and Napier, 2012). However, there are gaps in the method.

The author discussed the method with Napier on January 10th, 2017. Napier agreed that developments could be made, particularly as there have been further developments in the areas of ESD since her study. Also, her work had not considered the psychology of values in detail. Further application of psychology theory and techniques in ESD, as both Quam and Murray have used, may give rise to interesting learning opportunities. The author is exploring this in an ongoing extensive study. An outline of the study can be seen in Fig. 1. The requirement for a method is now reiterated and more detail on the study is given.

Rationale for further study

Murray et al. (2014) conclude with the suggestion that value-centred pedagogies considering psychology, need to be explored within other disciplines. The author believes there is a requirement to do so in GCDE. Some might argue that providing critical education is becoming more difficult. Finance is a continuing problem, for example. Institutional, departmental and individual financial pressures may lead to a culture that facilitates those who provide the means for survival. This year, the theme for the Graphic Design Educator’s Network Conference is “Ideas of Revolt”. The theme is reflective of an appetite for educators to stand up for education. Perhaps disseminating an educational method based on value psychology and thinking is the true provocation that will light a fire of revolt? Implementation of such a method



Figure 2: Examples of teaching material and student work in the study

might allow students to develop an in-depth understanding of themselves and how they connect to universal concerns. For this reason, and because it is suggested that people connect to sustainable issues through their values, the author has undertaken a comprehensive action research study in value thinking and value psychology in a GCDE context. This article provides an introduction to the study. Details on this study are outlined below.

Outline of further study

Through a series of iterative projects, an action research approach is being used to develop an educational method. The method aims to include tools that allow students to identify and work with their values in a GCDE context. A number of approaches have been explored thus far, examples of which follow. A psychological questionnaire is utilised. This allows students to identify values. The questionnaire has been used in studies across 40 countries so far (Schwartz, 2017). Students are then aligning chosen values with set goals. Students use "The Eulogy Exercise" (FitzPatrick et al, 2016) to focus on what they want to achieve in life. They then set goals and the values and goals are then aligned, and an exploration of how values and goals connect to graphic communication design is undertaken through use of Napier's method. Fig. 2 shows examples of teaching material, and student work that have resulted as part of the study so far. The method aims to encourage students to integrate their

personal values into their work processes, in a practical way. The intention is not to change students' values but to facilitate processes that allow students to identify and decide on value use within specific contexts. The author will assess if the method facilitates a development in student attitudes and/or behaviours that move towards responsible design.

Conclusion

To conclude, graphic communication design education needs to consider development in policy and research in education for sustainable development. Within this type of education, value thinking requires particular focus because of the potential it has in facilitating connection to sustainable issues. The potential benefits of value thinking in education for sustainable development have been explored within education for sustainable development, and somewhat within graphic communication design education. But further investigation is required, an example being in the use of the psychology of values. Further investigation in value thinking has the potential to lead to an increase in responsible design, through education.

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