

New Education Pathways for Future Designers in a Changing World

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Abstract

The article presents the results of the debate that emerged during the 8th *International Forum of Design as a Process*, organized in Bologna by the design units of three partner institutions: the University of Bologna, the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and the Tecnológico de Monterrey (20-22 June 2022). In particular, the Authors were chairs of the New Education Pathways for Future Designers in a Changing World theme track. It focused on two complementary perspectives. First, how designers can apply their peculiar “productive thinking” to educational spheres or other forms of organizations; second, how a non-hegemonic approach to design education could introduce new perspectives on future experiences. After an introduction about the overall theoretical background, five themes have been created to frame the papers by international scholars. The conclusion outlines some elements that can be considered in a process of continuous research and discussion.

Keywords

Pluriverse education
Responsible knowledge
Collaborative learning system
Knowledge prosumers

Introduction

There is a large consensus about the idea that the pandemic crisis that affected the Planet in the past years has transformed almost everything with impacts for the next years or decades. The crisis is lasting, and its behavioral and social implications could even be permanent, transforming the way we will produce and consume “knowledge” as a direct manifestation of our culture. These exceptional conditions represented the occasion to rethink about our own learning and education frameworks and methods to prepare future designers having a significant role and impact on the emerging challenges transforming organizations and the overall society (Meyer & Norman, 2020).

Starting from these assumptions, the Track New Education Pathways for Future Designers in a Changing World reflected upon two complementary perspectives. The first, how designers can apply their peculiar “productive thinking” (Celaschi et al., 2020) to specific educational spheres (i.e., academies, universities, schools), but also to other forms of organizations, to produce impactful changes related to cognitive processes and artifacts. The second, how a non-hegemonic approach to design education could introduce new perspectives on future experiences, opening to a more collaborative, inclusive, transdisciplinary and collective learning system (Escobar, 2018; Bosco, Gasparotto & Formia, 2021; Boehnert, Sinclair & Dewberry, 2022; Noel, 2022; Formia, Gianfrate & Succini, 2023).

If knowledge has now to be considered at the same time a product, a service, a space, a time, the Track hosted researchers, practitioners, students and professionals who shared experiences and studies on design-driven processes and related impactful projects on new formats and contents, technologies and interactions, local spaces in global geographies, for the ideation, production, distribution and regeneration of education (Salamanca, Mercer & Briggs, 2019; Succini et al., 2021).

In general, the attention has overpassed the practices arisen during the pandemic period being mostly interested to explore future-focused research and processes. The selected essays answered the call of *8th International Forum of Design as a Process's Track* in creative ways. This led to the publication of 24 papers, by 59 Authors, coming from 10 countries. In particular, the involved institutions and organizations are: Federal University of Pernambuco State, Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso, and UNISINOS (Brazil); Langara College (Canada); Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (Chile); Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Cali (Colombia); Université Côte d'Azur (France); Codesign Toscana ETS, Iuav University of Venice, Politecnico di Milano, Politecnico di Torino, Sapienza University of Rome, and University of Bologna (Italy); Rzeszow University of Technology (Poland); Polytechnic Institute of Portalegre and University of Aveiro (Portugal); University of Borås (Sweden); University of Applied Sciences & Art Northwestern Switzerland (Switzerland).

To provide for a general overview of the main topics collected in this part of the volume, we started from the word “E.D.U.C.A.T.E”, whose anagram contains the key concepts identifying the stream presented below: Empower, Diversity, User-Centricity, Creativity, Ambition, Transition, Ethics. Each of these keywords has been set in

relation to the others, arriving at the identification of commonalities between the Track contributions, resulting in five main themes. Below, we briefly summarize them, point to fruitful moments of connection, and thereafter highlight opportunities for future development.

Theme 1: Design Ethics and Enabling Education for Emerging Challenges

The first topic is related to Design Ethics and Enabling Education for Emerging Challenges. It focuses on the role of design to get the right “posture” towards wicked problems, such as decolonization, social coexistence, democratic participation, student-centered education, employment perspective. The Authors address design-driven models, experiences, and projects developed in academic environments, but also linked to non-institutional contexts and implemented in local communities.

Starting from the case of Langara College when the Author has been asked to lead a new course called *Decolonizing the Design Process* — which reflects Canada’s nationwide trend toward Indigenization of educational frameworks —, Scot Geib (*Decolonizing the Design Process: A Case Study In Authorship, Power, and Control*) explores opportunities and obstacles related to a shift in education models with a focus on Western paradigm disruption. The theme of democratization emerged also in the paper by Valentina Facchetti, Laura Galluzzo, and Ambra Borin (*OpenMind Handbook. A system of design tools and processes to empower democracy culture in primary schools*) that investigates the role of Service Design in activating participatory processes that can foster the co-creation of educational experiences aimed at raising awareness of social coexistence. On the other side, Sasha Londoño-Venegas and Adriana Jaramillo Botero (*Architecture, design and community in Colombia. More Urban, more Rural, more Social: the workshop experience*) focus on the multiple roles of knowledge that calls researchers, teachers and academics to share experiences and studies on small-scale impact projects related to non-conventional formats. In the context like Colombia, which is described as case study, with high rates of neglect of vulnerable sectors such as school-age children, the paper points out the social responsibility of the academia to work on knowledge innovation in terms of formats, contents, practices and methodologies.

Practices for enabling students towards their future opportunities are described in the paper by Lara Maria Luft, Debora Barauna, and Gustavo Severo de Borba (*Creative Community for Generation Z teachers in Brazil through Strategic Design*). It explores the reasons behind the observed lack of engagement among young individuals in pursuing teaching as an appealing professional path. According to the Authors, to overcome the perceived lack of interest among GenZ, design can play a significant role in addressing this issue by fostering the creation of creative communities that enhance connection among members and encourage collaboration (such as the *CoNU-Mldade Turbo experience* mentioned in the paper as case study). Finally, Clio Dosi, Eric Guerci, Jacek Jakiela, Joanna Świątoniowska,

Eleni Vordou, Maria José Varadinov, Matteo Vignoli, Gastão de Jesus Marques, and Joanna Wójcik (*Design Thinking and Career Development: A Comparative Study*) highlight the importance of career awareness for university students and the related social responsibility of universities to guide them through the process of choice driven by employability criteria and a counseling approach.

Theme 2: Innovation, Creativity, and Diversity to Lever Collective Intelligence and Inclusion in Complex Environments

The second topic is related to Innovation, Creativity, and Diversity to Lever Collective Intelligence and Inclusion in Complex Environments. It reflects on the role of design to value diversity and inclusion (Costanza-Chock, 2020), hybridizing learning paths by culture and creativity as catalysts for innovation. The first group of papers is strongly connected to the dimension of private organizations such as companies, investigating design-driven innovation perspectives as form for disrupting canonical processes towards a more inclusive and creative vision. Progressively the attention moves towards eco-systems that include wider groups of stakeholders such as universities, creative and cultural industries, local actors, and communities. Finally, the last group of papers reflect methodologically upon the agency of creativity in complex innovation environment.

Isabela Moroni and Amilton Arruda (*Design Processes: from the historical perspective to the application in startups companies*) underline the role of innovation in maintaining an organization's competitive capacity. This dynamic is fundamental for the construction of the central competence of a company which is the ability to generate knowledge. A five-step process is described for this purpose. By presenting the Electrolux case, Marco Limani (*Design and innovation: where do we want to play? Inquiry into some design's strengths and weaknesses in innovation*) discusses the role of design education compared to managers educated in design. According to the Author, fundamental barriers exist to successfully overtaking and legitimizing design in innovation processes. This is because the discourse cannot be siloed among design, business, management, marketing or technology; world complexity requires a holistic approach and the support of each discipline's vertical and horizontal capability to increase the innovation likelihood of success.

Starting from the case of *Design Ecosystem* in Portugal, Marlene Ribeiro and Francisco Providência (*Design ecosystem in Portugal. Education, research and entrepreneurship*) investigate the role of design in creating new problems, activating change in consumption habits and organizational evolution. In this light, the research tries to identify possible causes for the still fragile connection between design and industries and to point out alternatives for a more effective collaboration. In a similar perspective, Rita Duina, Marco Berni, and Andrea Del Bono (*The design posture: a collaborative learning-by-doing approach*) present the perspective of *Codesign Toscana Project* on the idea of "design posture", which emerges as a multifaceted concept with a different nuance when discussed by "experts" or "practitioners". According to the workshop

series described in the paper, experts adopt a self-reflexive attitude towards their personal and professional life as designers for communities; practitioners are more oriented in conceiving the concept as a “mood” towards the community they work or live in and as a widespread sense of agentivity among people involved in design processes. The research also tries to formalize “design posture” both theoretically and in practice to trigger a series of active citizenship dynamics that can facilitate the multiplication of spaces for inclusion and empowerment. Moving towards a more specific sector, Daria Casciani (*Advanced Manufacturing for Sustainable Fashion. Developing interdisciplinary educational experiences*) investigates the fashion industry as a creative industry with high cultural, social, and environmental impacts, demanding a paradigmatic shift through digital transformation toward a sustainable change. Starting from the lessons learned from the *Advanced Manufacturing for Sustainable Fashion* (ASMF) module conducted at Politecnico di Milano (Design School) in the course Design for the Fashion System, the paper states how fashion education needs to nurture professionals who can tackle increasingly complex challenges, dive into technological systems. Davide Fassi and Francesco Vergani (*Co-designing contents with situated stakeholders: an in-field process in Nolo – Milan*) describe OCN – *Open Campus Nolo*, a living lab promoted by Politecnico di Milano: a multi-purpose format that proved to be suitable for binding research, teaching, and action together, providing methodological principles that could be scaled and replicated in local environments. This context emerges as “design incubator” characterized by the proactivity of local actors - such as citizens, shopkeepers, associations, informal groups -, acting at the core of the design process by developing brand-new and tailor-made solutions, and, at the same time, providing environmental, economic, and social beneficial transformation in an inclusive and democratic way.

Starting from the case of *NUBE Lab Project*, Alejandra Amenábar Álamos (*Creativity and Mirror Effect. Teaching creative skills through non-traditional pedagogies*) aims to indicate creativity and innovation as future engines of the global knowledge economy. In this scenario, a consistent role is played by “design pedagogy” which is crucial for transferring project methodologies and fostering creative skills. However, the technological and social transformations of this century have challenged traditional educational canons and the very definition of creativity. The paper overcomes these challenges by analyzing non-traditional educational paradigms to address them from a design methodology perspective. Finally, Yuqing Zhu and Yunyu Ouyang (*How Design Thinking Could Benefit Future Educational Environments in a Post-Pandemic Era?*) reflect on the change of the learning environment pattern which has characterized the post-pandemic era. As an effort to better support the new traits, design thinking, especially the empathizing, redefining and prototyping strategies, could help in adapting to the new surroundings at three different scales: the family and neighborhood scale, the regional medium-scale learning experience, the international scale, where innovation could be focused on the creation of virtual platforms to grant equal access for learners from developing countries.

Theme 3: User-Evolution to Build New Knowledge Pathways

The third topic is related to User-Evolution to Build New Knowledge Pathways. It reflects on the role of design to build knowledge trajectories focusing on the continuously evolving user-perspective by exploring new topics and the impact of enabling technologies to create hybrid form of education.

Daphne Degiorgis, Marco D'Addario, Beatrice Lerma, and Doriana Dal Palù (*How a technology identity can enhance the diffusion of good design practices in Product Sound Design*) investigate Product Sound Design as a promising research field. The case study is a patented method-and-tool, conceived to collect, analyze, and recreate various sounds to develop a new generation of products with designed mechanical and, eventually, digital sounds. Spreading this innovation within the design community is fundamental to stimulate future more focused and aware practices and can be seen as an example of a way to “educate” the designer to future-focused themes and reconnect the technology to potential users.

Vittorio Linfante and Andrea Manciaracina (*Learning and teaching from and by social media. Instagram to support blended learning models*) investigate the effectiveness of social media, particularly Instagram, within a teaching activity. The assumption behind is that digital transformation drives new visualization, promotion and storytelling processes of the design system, defining new relationships between physical and virtual spaces in which users are not just spectators of the creative phases, but are increasingly involved in processes of “value co-creation” and “cooperative investment”. On the other side, the case study *Gamelon Pad*, developed within the research activities of the Open Design group, as part of the virtualLAB (Politecnico di Torino) activities, in collaboration with Fablab Torino, is described by Fabrizio Valpreda (*Education & Practice in Open Design. Improving the learning experience through knowledge connections*) as the occasion to test a new approach to a multidisciplinary design process, starting from the educational experience. The paper underlines a scenario where a student is put into conditions to experiment the entire design process, in order to develop a physical design solution for a user with disabilities.

Theme 4: Design for Transition

The fourth topic is related to Design for Transition. It reflects on the role of design to enable ecological, social and technological paradigm evolution (Irwin, Tonkinwise & Kossoff, 2022).

Angela Grosso Ciponte and Evelyne Roth (*You can never solve problems with the same mindset that created them. How can we change the how and the what we teach to enable our students to become truly «terrestrial» designers? A proposition following Bruno Latour's «Terrestrial Manifesto»*) describe a series of workshops where interdisciplinary teams of students, as well as lecturers, work in cooperation with enterprises on concrete cases to explore methodological approaches to circular design. Results validate the hypothesis that education can successfully work in an open process and collaboratively convey circularity. Transition has to be consid-

ered as a target of education at the university level, while companies in transition can operate sustainably in a circular way, even if the main economy does not yet follow this model. Starting with didactic design experimentations, Loredana Di Lucchio and Ivo Caruso (*Good for Good. Designing packaging in the era of deliveries*) point out the attention to process innovation as the result of a progressive loss of centrality of product design. Due to a deep change of scenario, in recent decades design as a discipline and practice has shifted its attention from the morphological and technological aspects of an object (both material or immaterial) to questions related to the interaction in between object and man (Human-Centred Design), in between object and environment (Design for Sustainability), in between object and object (Design for Interaction), in between object and society (Design for Social Innovation), to arrive to exclude the object from the innovation process (Design of Services) and to open to the broader field of systemic design. Leonardo Moiso, Sofia Cretaio, Cristina Marino, Chiara L. Remondino and Paolo Tamborini (*Onboarding future Systemic Innovation Designers through informal and collaborative activities*) highlight the importance of educational methodologies in shaping digital environments, with the designer's expertise playing a pivotal role. This methodological application is also explored in professional development programs or lifelong learning initiatives, where incorporating digital tools and educational methodologies improve individuals' skills in a rapidly changing digital landscape. Delia Dumitrescu and Martina Motta (*Material practices in transition: from analogue to digital in teaching textile and fashion design*) present case studies exemplifying diverse ways of approaching the teaching of material design in textiles and fashion field, wherein haptic knowledge is combined with digital media. The results of each case study are an example of the positive impact of a cross-disciplinary approach, and of the benefits of combining tools in a context shifting from Industry 4.0 to Industry 5.0. Starting from ARTERI'A Project in Vigolzone (Italy) municipality, Nour Zreika and Daniele Fanzini (*Designing for the Future of Education Through Cultural Heritage*) highlight the role of schools and the importance of cultural heritage education. The contribution points out the importance of informal education to be considered as a formal learning tool to be used in a new concept of school that becomes think tanks for designers, stakeholders, and policymakers.

Theme 5: Future-proof Scenarios and Perspectives

The fifth topic is related to Future-proof Scenarios and Perspectives. It reflects on the role of design to build, unbuild, rebuild new scenarios and narratives for the future, including different fields of application (Celaschi et al., 2019).

Suzanne E. Martin (*We Need to Talk About Learning Design. A Proposal for Critical Conversation*) underlines the need for a significant reorientation of design theory and practice to make this a transformative moment in history. According to the Author, design education has the responsibility to re-imagine learning and enable new ways of shaping pedagogical knowledge, finding ways to illuminate the words that visualize that future. Based on the emerging trend of

the “living publication scenarios”, Eleonora Lupo and Sara Radice (*Collaborative learning of Ph.D. candidates in Design on emerging scenarios in scientific publication*) show models and practices to disrupt traditional publication patterns and envision new formats beyond the canonical “article”. They point out how new typologies research products and new forms of dissemination meet the challenges of an impactful design education to empower PhD students. Finally, Liana Chiapinotto, Fernando Guimarães Horlle, Tássia Ruiz, and Celso Carnos Scaletsky (*Scenarios, networks and systems: an alternative to dichotomous patterns*) outline an alternative point of view on the way design teaches and thinks scenarios, beyond prospective methods that stimulate speculation by antagonisms. Network elements allow us to imagine the future and reflect on the past and present in a systemic way, with the density and specificity that are required from the design professional in problematic situations.

Discussion

Encompassing a variety of aspects regarding the connection between design and knowledge innovation, the previous compilation is far from being exhaustive. A series of “wicked problems” (Rittel & Webber, 1973) have not gone into detail in it. For instance, the rise of artificial intelligence, the urgent challenges for maintaining the Planet, the post-human perspective, the new hybrid-flexible forms of learning linked to enabling technologies, the “education gap”, the multidisciplinary contaminations, the growing of skills-centered education ask for new theoretical perspectives, as well as concrete design actions. Addressing our attention to such topics, considered as the contemporary condition of Transition Design (Irwin, 2015) Education, but also Transition Design in and for Education, could yield even more interesting results paving the way for further scholarly discussions.

The second aspect is related to the distance between design research and teaching, that needs to be considered because they “have always had a close (and difficult) relationship in most contemporary educational settings” (Jonesa et al., 2022). The submission received clearly demonstrates that processes of action design research are strictly linked to educational contexts, both inside and outside academia. This is true also if we consider a non-hegemonic approach that overpasses the dominant Western centric perspective.

Finally, the overall discussion opens to consider design education as a specific field of knowledge with all the complexity and contradiction that entails, but also to enlarge the perspective on design as a driver of new eco-systemic education which includes a huger set of contexts (private and public organizations, associations, institution, etc.) and a wider set of not-institutional and informal practices.

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