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## Editorial

# Design Learning for Tomorrow

## Design Education from Kindergarten to PhD

This special issue of Form Akademisk consists of four peer-reviewed articles developed from papers presented at the 3rd International Conference for Design Education Researchers (themed 'LearnXDesign2015'), which was held in Chicago on June 28–30, 2015. The conference was organised through close cooperation between the Design Research Society (DRS) and the International Association of Universities and Schools of Design, Art and Media (CUMULUS). It was hosted by the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Robin Vande Zande, associate professor of art education at Kent State University in Ohio and chair of the conference, described it as follows:

With representatives from 34 countries participating, a major theme of the conference debate was that the global community must change in a very fundamental way if it is to become stable. Why are these issues of concern for design educators worldwide? If we are to have a better world, the general populace has to build it, and if we are to be successful, everyone must take responsibility. Design thinking through the design process of problem solving is an approach to rethinking certain assumptions by looking at our everyday world with a new perspective, challenging what is possible, and reconsidering our relationship to things familiar. Design education is addressing the welfare of people and the environment, reflecting a renewed appreciation of and respect for nature. Sustainability is taught to show that a less consumptive lifestyle, respect for the environment and the interdependence of life, creating safe objects for long-term use, and concentrating on communities and economic systems will help improve our world. There is attention being given to designing for improving the physical and emotional quality of life for everyone, referred to as universal design. Socially responsible design reflects the growing awareness of our finite resources and factors that are damaging to the environment as well as the realization that designed objects should have flexibility in order to be accessible to all. Design education brings all of this to the consciousness of students in order to show them ways to be empowered to do something constructive to help (Zande, 2015, p. ii).

This quotation emphasises that global and social consciousness connected to our material world of artefacts has now become a major concern for the industry and that design has established itself as a fundamental part of the manufacturing process for all of the artefacts around us. It is also vital for social justice that the design community communicates its concerns to the public. The involvement of this professional community will have a major impact on the future of our societies. We are therefore pleased to present the important contributions included in this issue.

### Articles in this Issue

**Meredith James** serves as assistant professor at Portland State University's School of Art + Design. She leads the graphic design programme and focuses on design thinking, research, theory, and design for well-being. In *Advancing Design Thinking Towards a Better Understanding of Self and Others*, she addresses two key themes: 1) the movement away from materialism occurring in the field of design, and 2) improving problem-solving skills through self-awareness. The first theme anchors design in a process rather than a product, something that is native to the concept of design thinking, while the second anchors the designer in ethics.

Designers who have a strong sense of self-awareness and understand their own roles, biases and influences, and the larger contexts they inhabit are better equipped to solve problems. This article presents the models that we might follow if we are to continue to advance design away from materialism and towards self-awareness.

**Vicky Lofthouse** is a senior lecturer of industrial design at Loughborough University's Design School. In *Preparing the Way for Mainstream Sustainable Product Design*, she proposes that there is a need to ensure that undergraduate design students' education is aimed at developing responsible practitioners as they enter the workplace. The multifaceted approach to achieve this that was adopted by the Design School at Loughborough University is presented. The article outlines and reflects on the differences between the idealistic environment provided within an educational setting and the actual situation in the design industry, where there is little evidence of mainstream sustainable design practice. The article concludes that it is valuable to provide students with a range of skills that support sustainable design thinking even if they are not highly valued in the current design industry. This is because doing so allows the students to develop the potential to lead the next generation of design practitioners.

**Kathrina Dankl** is as an associate professor at Design School Kolding. She teaches cross-disciplinary design students and focuses on methods and process. Her research interests include shared decision making in healthcare, design diversity and ageing, participatory design, and design pedagogy. In *Intuition, Reflection and Reflexivity: Participatory Design for Shared Medical Decision Making*, she synthesises findings from a design method course that focused on a design brief in shared medical decision making. In her paper, the term 'design methods' is used to describe any action undertaken for a forward movement in the design process. The course was based on a selection of assignments that targeted intuition, reflection, and reflexivity. The findings of this case study allow design students to integrate theory into their practical work, contextualise the meaning of design, and understand the confrontation found in current design research literature. Additionally, students are inspired to develop an individual stance on the purpose of design.

**Carol J. Overby**, assistant professor of design and management, **Aaron Fry**, associate professor of studio methods, both work at the School of Design Strategies at Parsons School of Design in New York. **Jennifer Wilson** is an associate professor of mathematics at the New School for Liberal Arts' Eugene Lang College in New York. In *Narrative Visualisation for Co-Design with a Community Partner*, the three researchers present a case study that examines a collaboration between a class of design students and a community-based financial counselling organisation that aimed to develop financial literacy comic strips for use with low-income clients. They describe and analyse the communication challenges that occurred between the community partner and the academic institution. Additionally, they detail the communication modes employed to overcome these challenges. These modes included questionnaires and surveys completed by the counsellors, direct emails between students and counsellors, and—most successfully—a hands-on visualisation workshop for counsellors. The visualisations engaged the counsellors in generative-based design practices, which resulted in greatly improved communication with the design students. Lessons from this experience may be broadly useful for any collaborative efforts among academic institutions, design students, and community partners.

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Follow this link to the formal proceedings of the 3rd International Conference for Design Education Researchers for more information: <https://issuu.com/josephschwartz/docs/learn-x-design-2015-v2>