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AUTHOR NAME: JON SPRUCE

AUTHOR AFFILIATION: LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

Over recent years there has been an increasing understanding by UK business of the role that design can play in enhancing competitiveness and innovation, there is also a growing recognition by government of the value that design can add to the economy. Statistics estimate design to be worth in excess of £11 billion to the UK economy each year. Aligned to this is the growing discourse surrounding the appropriate development of UK Design Education, with many Industry commentators calling for universities to be more proactive in developing curriculum content that focuses attention on topics such as the socioeconomic drivers for design, employer engagement and improved commercial awareness. Design graduates are increasingly being called upon to not only possess high level design skills, but have a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between design and the business context in which it operates.

The design industry is also changing. In a context of increasingly fluid contemporary design practices, traditional roles for design are being challenged. For example, for many years designers have been taught to create artifacts. Design is now moving beyond the artifact into a realm where tangible touch-points form only a part of the practical engagement designers are required to consider [Kolko 2010]. In many ways educators are not moving with the times and changing their curricula quickly enough to be ahead of this change curve. As Sudick [2010] affirms, 'Design was about creating artifacts and we've moved past that to now creating contexts in which activities happen and in which people participate collectively'.

This paper considers how design curricula may be developed to better meet the challenges of rapidly changing contexts in which design and designers are operating.

1 INTRODUCTION

Much research has been conducted into the content of design curricula [1,2]. In recent years, design graduates are increasingly being called upon to not only possess high level design skills, but have a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between design and the business context in which it operates. The educational implications of a changing design industry have, to a great extent, focused upon the need for design graduates to be business savvy while operating in multi-disciplinary contexts. This discourse is characterized by issues of increasing emphasis of design within commerce; multi-disciplinary design engagement; broadening the understanding and skills of tomorrow's design entrepreneurs; blurred career paths for design graduates; and the increasing demand for designers to possess complementary skills that can be applied beyond traditional design boundaries [1,2,3,4].

2 THE CHANGING CLIMATE FOR DESIGN EDUCATION

In UK design education, training at undergraduate level largely focuses upon the development of vocational skills that are required to undertake the role of a design practitioner [5]. This approach is embedded in the craft traditions of art and design [6] and links with notions of the artisan designer. The traditional model of design education has largely focused around the design activity itself – the object or designed article being the most important thing and the final 'output' that is most valued.

The vocational approach employed in undergraduate design education has received much attention [7,8,9] for example, and continues to be the modus operandi in design contexts. Despite new challenges being placed upon design education, Dorst [10] claims that ‘design schools still base their curriculum upon the idea that design is something that that must be learned, not taught’. This therefore raises a key question – How can design students learn the skills they will encounter in practice? McCullagh [11] adds that ‘the studio tradition of *sitting with Nellie* has many strengths’ but he recognizes that the transferral of tacit knowledge by example is not appropriate for all aspects of design education and by itself will not immerse students in a learning experience adequate for entry into the world of contemporary practice.

The design industry is changing. In a context of increasingly fluid contemporary design practices, traditional roles for design are being challenged [12]. For example, for many years designers have been taught to create artifacts. Design is now moving beyond the artifact into the realm of product-service-systems where tangible touch points form only a part of the practical engagement designers are required to consider [13]. In many ways educators are not moving with the times and changing their curricula quickly enough to be ahead of this change curve. As Sudick [14] affirms, ‘Design was about creating artifacts and we’ve moved past that to now creating contexts in which activities happen and in which people participate collectively’. It is also concerned with the implementation of design thinking holistically within a commercial context and business as a whole, employing design strategically as part of a business model where architects, interior designers, furniture makers and lighting experts amongst others need to connect seamlessly in designs successful deployment.

Therefore these changing realities of design and the creative industries are requiring graduates who are not just good problem solvers but people who also possess the awareness to seek out and identify problems, thinking creatively to reveal new opportunities and have the ability to communicate across disciplines in an ever expanding spectrum of sectors. This expectation indeed requires design graduates to be business ‘savvy’ with a clear understanding of the drivers that effect and shape commercial decisions.

In spite of the changing demands being placed upon design education to deliver against an explicit price tag, combined with the shifting ground beneath designers’ feet, UK design education is largely proud of its teaching traditions. Design educators play a key role in the development of the knowledge, skills and understanding of designers-in-training in preparation for the world of work. As a recent policy report notes ‘Creative talent doesn’t appear fully-fledged and successful, but has to be nurtured, developed and stimulated. This is where UK universities play a critical role – developing and fostering creative talent and providing an environment where creativity can flourish, producing new ideas and providing cutting-edge research’ [15].

3 THE CHALLENGE FOR DESIGN EDUCATION

Within the context of increased tuition fees and potential wide reaching changes in the delivery of design education is a key challenge for Higher Education institutions. How to provide a broad curriculum framework within which to creatively explore design ideas as part of the learning process taking creative risk while responding to increasing industry demands for commercially literate, business savvy graduates? This challenge is not just one of curriculum design, as for many it may represent a shift in the philosophy and values of how our design education is planned, delivered and crucially how its successes are measured at an institutional and national level.

This paper now describes the approaches being taken by Liverpool John Moores University in attempting to enhance the learning experience of students, providing explicit currency (worthy of higher rate fees) and preparing them for employment in a rapidly changing market place.

3.1 Embedding World of Work skills

Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) has attempted to uniquely address many of the national issues highlighted for improving students learning experience, via the introduction of the World of Work initiative across the whole University. The programme aims to provide every student the opportunity to develop higher level skills while studying at LJMU. It is the intention to ensure the

journey through Higher Education is as relevant, useful and aspirational as possible. Focusing on the requirement of meaningful engagement with students own learning, addressing employer engagement issues and placing value on the transferability of graduate skills sets via a holistic approach – bringing all these elements of student learning together within the World of Work programme of skills development.

3.2 World of Work initiative

Building upon its impressive record of working with industry (as cited in the Lambert Report 2003), LJMU carried out extensive research and consultation across many industry sectors to identify exactly what is required from a university and its graduates in the 21st century. The message was clear and blunt: a conventional academic degree alone is no longer sufficient; graduates need both challenging educational development and high-level skills. LJMU listened and took action, developing a World of Work skills initiative, involving the re-modelling of all of the University's 230+ undergraduate degree programmes to make work related learning and the development of eight graduate skills explicit to every programme. Uniquely, students were being encouraged to develop higher level 'World of Work' skills in parallel with their degree studies. With the backing of business leaders and the Government, LJMU launched its 'degrees with added WoW factor' in September 2007. [16]

Now in 2012 the University believes this model of higher education can meet employers' demands because it places work-related learning and skills' development at the heart of the university experience without compromising on the academic quality of our degrees. It will also enable LJMU to achieve its ambition of becoming the UK University whose graduates are most valued by employers. [17] In brief, the World of Work student experience consists of the following key elements:

- Graduate Skills development
- Work-related learning
- World of Work skills
- Ready for Work programme

Specifically, the World of Work skills are the core skills, attributes and competences that employers regularly identify as what they actively seek in graduates in addition to disciplinary expectations. They can be briefly identified in three key areas detailed below.

Self Awareness

To be knowledgeable about your own strengths and weaknesses, your values, your ability to work with others and the factors which motivate you to achieve.

Organizational Awareness

To be knowledgeable about different organizations: how they operate and who their 'customers' are. Also: to show an understanding of the link between your personal values and those of the organization.

Making Things Happen

To be able to demonstrate potential in key managerial abilities: strategic action and thought; adapting and managing change; and persuading and influencing others.

Within these three key areas some clear alignments with existing notions of Personal Development Planning (PDP) can be found. As the progression through self awareness develops into broader contextual awareness and understanding of working environments and career aspirations formulate, the final stage of synergy and engagement in professional practice linked to critical reflection of ourselves and others.

Whilst the World of Work initiative clearly aims to address highly relevant needs, the practical interpretation of such broad strategic visions given by University policy makers may not always readily covert into activities and processes that align with a programme's curriculum. It would be true to say that many academics within Art and Design have found limited success in the integration of formalized World of Work skills sessions over and above what would have been delivered as an established part of their degree programmes previously. The extraction and explicit delivery of such

topics in an attempt to heighten their relevance has in part seemingly only served to exile them from the rest of the students learning experience?

Taking the implementation of the World of Work initiative as a starting point, a number of programmes have explored potential alignments between established PDP delivery mechanisms and the meaningful delivery of WoW skills within the programme's academic timetable. A key aim of this integration was to further enhance the benefits and perceived value of World of Work skills, as the increasingly emphasized transferable skills are still viewed by many students as having limited value and as previously stated, secondary or even alien to their core subject studies.

The importance and value of students' engagement in personal development to enhance both their learning experience and future employment opportunities is well established amongst academic staff with design education. Despite this, many university departments within UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are still struggling in successfully implementing the area of Personal Development Planning within their curriculum activities. The explicit recommendations for the introduction of Progress Files as long ago as May 2000 by Universities UK and numerous other reports, white papers and academic studies have failed to comprehensively address the integration of personal development planning as a valued element of the students learning experience.

3.3 Narrowing the gaps

The continuing discourse surrounding the appropriate development and direction of UK design education aligns well to notions of PDP as a student centered learning approach. This being most significantly captured in the publication of two government sponsored reports. Although now four years since publication these reports offer clear insights into the relationship and 'gaps' between design practice and design education. The findings followed a two year consultation process with both the design industry and design education experts. The Design Skills Advisory Panel's 'High-level skills for higher value' report (2007) outlines a national plan for skills development, and the following report 'Design Blueprint' (2008) details the practical steps required to implement the plan. These reports set out a series of recommendations, describing the steps needed to support the development of a highly skilled and more prosperous UK design sector. The objective of the Design Blueprint is to engage with partners in government, education and industry to secure the resources needed to implement and realize a design industry skills development plan. [18]

Significantly for design education, as well as identifying challenges and opportunities for the sector, the reports identify significant gaps between the skills required by employers in the design industry and those being taught and learnt in schools, colleges and universities. [19] The continued expansion of design's influence and input within a diverse range of industry sectors fuels the blurring of career paths for design graduates and further increases the discussion around the demand for designers to possess complementary skills that can be applied beyond traditional design boundaries [20].

Once again, with the heightened emphasis placed on engaging students in better understanding their own learning via a more rigorous approach to personal development the challenge seems to be to adding another layer of delivery into an already crammed curriculum. Below (Figure 1) is a diagrammatical view of how this has been attempted by the Interior Design programme at LJMU – aligning the three areas of core design skills content, world of work skills progression and PDP delivery.

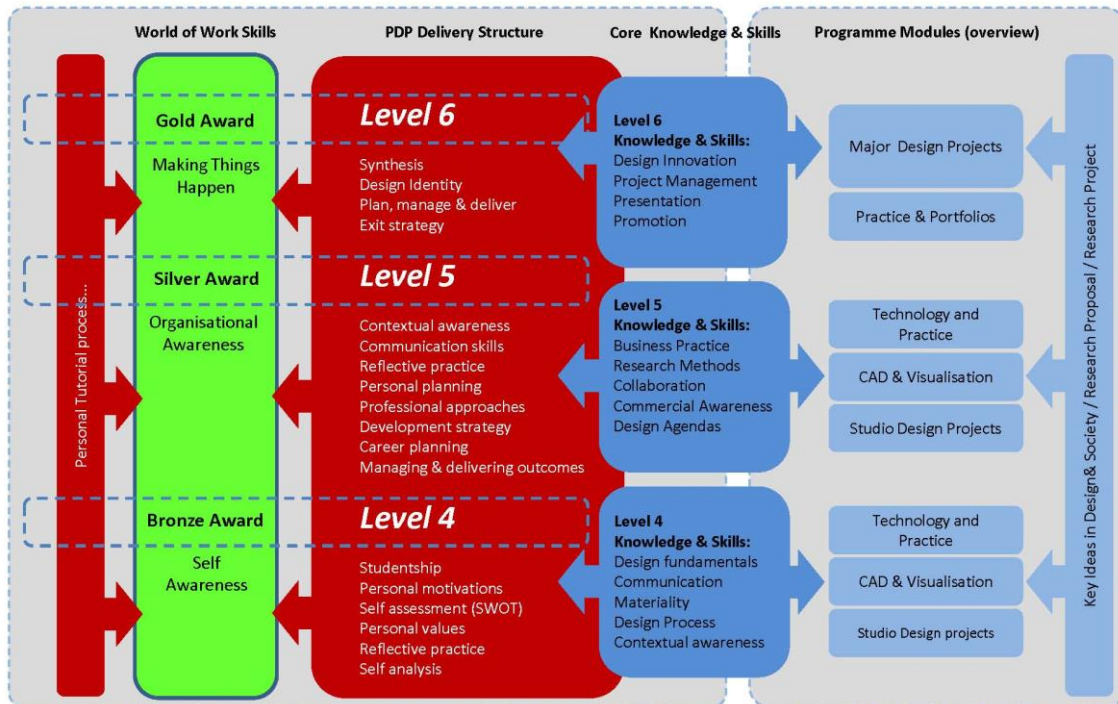


Figure 1. Integrated PDP, World of Work and core skills alignment

4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Design education faces a tough challenge - supplying the needs of an increasingly diverse industry with graduates who are flexible, multidisciplinary and savvy, while at the same time providing students with a learning experience that upholds rich traditional core values of design skills and discipline specificity as a key 'selling point'. It is clear that there are gaps between the experience of a design education and some of the working practices of design professionals. This is expected and is something that should in part be respected.

Within an educational context risk taking and experimentation should be encouraged. University is where designers begin the development of their professional skills, intuition and instinct, yet this is only the start of the development of such competencies. As their career builds, designers are able to draw upon more and more project experience and bring this to bear upon each new challenge.

- Design is part of business – it's a commercial activity. There is a need for designers to understand, and be able to engage with business terminology, concepts and approaches. This is essential to developing the credibility of design within organizations.
- Design skills help designers to define and solve problems and ultimately communicate this to clients. Creative problem solving, visualization and communication underpin designers' ability to add value to commercial organizations. Without such fundamental skills, the designers' USP would be diminished.
- There are a range of business based skills that design education is not successfully embedding in the curriculum. These include awareness of client needs versus designer whims, team working and interpersonal skills, deadlines, the pace of work required, and the economics of design. All of the

above areas are normally included in contemporary design curricula but there may be gaps in the theoretical understanding and real-world application of this knowledge.

- Becoming a designer is a journey, one that takes longer than a three year degree. A design degree provides graduates with the basics and importantly the ability to go out and continue to learn. The learn-to-learn approach often tacitly embedded within design degrees is an important yet underestimated competency.

Any degree cannot fully prepare graduates for entry into the plethora of avenues within industry that they may pursue, yet design degrees provide a range of discipline specific and transferable skills, knowledge and understanding. Where perhaps design educators are not being as effective as they need to be is in the identification of such issues. We as educators may need to help graduates more effectively to identify these issues and draw out their commercial contribution and ability to add value to organizations. We also may need to be a little tougher on students to get them ready for the (harsh) realities of the real world!

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