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Creative Debate as a Tool to Empower and Create Disruptive Thinking within Learning Contexts in a University Design Environment

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Abstract

With this text we focus on the ability Creative Debate has to empower and create disruptive thinking, within the context of University design studies. This research understands creative debate as any debate where participants create the layout, reach agreements, manage its own development and assess the results, all lead autonomously and creatively. One of the items that define the debate as creative is the participants' design of the "discussions", that is to say, the design of the activities that bring the topics to be discussed into play on a more experienced way. And this means to previously work on developing a script and a phase of pre-production for those activities that will help to boost, generate, create arguments within the debate. And this work is starting to being developed by design professionals who focus their own work on the design of intangibles (services, systems, situations, cooperation), instead of producing material goods. As a case study we will use a debate undertaken by students from 3rd year at Grau de disseny d'Eina (Eina's Bachelor Degree in Design), Art and Design College, on April 2015.

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1. Creative Debate. Negotiation processes and collective construction knowledge

This paper is part of a wider research on advantages on learning dialectical exchanges, in particular using the layout we have called “creative debate”. The development of the idea of creative debate, its sizes, functions and layouts are one of the topics of the research of the Research Team “Processos de disseny. Pràctiques avançades en art i disseny” (Design Procedures. Advanced implementations in art and design) from Grau de disseny d’Eina (Eina’s Bachelor Degree in Design), College affiliated to the Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona.

With this paper we focus on the ability of the Creative Debate to empower and create disruptive thinking, within the context of University design studies. Likewise, we suggest it to any other College scope.

This research understands creative debate as any debate where participants create the layout, reach agreements, manage its own development and assess the results, all lead autonomously and creatively. One of the items that define the debate as creative is the participants’ design of the “discussions”, that is to say, the design of activities that bring the topics to be discussed into play on a more experienced way. And this means to previously work on developing a script and a phase of pre-production for those activities that will help to boost, generate, create arguments within the debate. And this work is starting to being developed by design professionals who focus their own work on the design of intangibles (services, systems, situations, cooperation), instead of producing material goods.

Engaging in discussions is part of the design tools used in creative debates to promote the birth of “emerging categories”, in the words of Íngrid Sverdlick, by building new relationships between the debate parties. Fostering the emergence of emerging categories or concepts, through substantiated dialogue, is one of the aims of any debate who would like to be considered as a research activity.

Accordingly, the emergence of new concepts or contents fits in the paradigm of dialogue explained by Guba and Lyncon (1989) where assessing is also considered from a constructivist, holistic and intrapersonal point of view. In the *Visió constructivista de la quarta generació (Constructivist perspective of the fourth generation)*, lead by the above-mentioned authors, an assessment aiming at the research of quality, merit or virtue is rejected and the idea that assessment is the result of the participants’ development and the negotiation of groups is being defended.

Arising from that the knowledge the students have gained comes from the interaction they maintain in a collaborative working system that allows them to exchange opinions and ideas that will enrich and broaden their points of view.

However, the engagement that we are seeking to boost targets the scope of communication and dialogue in order to incite a joint development of knowledge (Flecha, 1997). We are not trying to seek for absolute truths; we are looking for subjective understandings full of meaning (Bolívar, 1995). Doing so, one can overcome a mere exchange of arguments (bidirectional and linear) and promote generating negotiation processes which in fact build knowledge. Thinking similarly, Coll and Solé (1990) defend teaching under a constructivist conception and define it as “(...) a continuous process of negotiation of meanings, of establishing mental contexts that are being shared, result and system, simultaneously, of the process of negotiating”.

2. Discussions. Cooperative learning for empowerment.

Using discussions also helps to overcome the tendency of group discussions to position themselves on two opposite sides that do not give space to raise other alternative points of view. This is an issue for group discussions because they tend to be structured on dichotomies, the problems tend to be explained using opposite thesis, so at the end there is a distortion on the approach itself. In fact, duplicating the group between “ones” and “others” ends up on stereotyped and conventional approaches that do not allow for the subject matter to move forward an innovative point of view.

Certainly, the construction of concepts by association of belonging to something based on dichotomous differentiations is also created within social environments: we/others, friends/enemies, truth/false, fair/unfair, etc. Although these differentiations are useful to focus topics, we must not lose sight of that they also restrict the freedom to undertake argumentative and conceptual relationships (Serrano, 2015).

Creativity needs to find new subjective commands beyond those socially instituted and, for this purpose, uses a variety of methodologies such as lateral thinking (De Bono, 2006), flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) and

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