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Seven ways of designing

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Abstract

On 18 and 19 November 2015 the Seven Ways of Designing intensification seminars took place. They were attended by third and fourth year students on the Degree in Design at EINA Centre for Art and Design which is attached to the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. The sessions focused on solving two problems: the lack of student autonomy in understanding their own working processes, as detected in their degree final projects, and a drop in motivation in third year students as a result of the overexposure to technical subjects in the curriculum. This article describes the seminars and analyses the attainment of the two objectives from a quantitative and qualitative viewpoint. As a result of the evaluation of the students' processes during the seminars a certain polarisation in student autonomy was observed. The surveys show success in recovering motivation. Interviews with the participants show that learning the design process may be linked to the idea of "personal discovery". In conclusion we stress the need to include this kind of seminar in every term in order to monitor student autonomy in different academic years and to maintain motivation.

Keywords: autonomy; methodology; design; EINA; intensification; process.

1. Introduction

The Teaching innovation group at EINA organised a series of intensification seminars entitled Seven Ways of Designing, with the aim of solving two problems detected in evaluation sessions during the 2014/2015 academic year. The first problem is related to the lack of student autonomy in managing their own working processes, which is seen in the excessive dependence that they have on their tutors for working on their Final Degree Projects. The

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second problem is related to a drop in student motivation in the third year as a result of an accumulation of technical subjects in all the curricular pathways, along with the constant repetition of that content.

This article describes how the seminars were organised to achieve the objectives and proposes a research methodology to evaluate the results separately. As well as an evaluation and weighting of student autonomy we also carried out an analysis of the resulting degree of motivation. Although we could assume that autonomy and motivation are inextricably linked this study does not focus on that link but on its presence in design teaching and professional practice. In future seminars we will be able to contemplate the relationship between the two are dependent variables. We begin by delimiting the area of study of the design process, the place occupied by autonomy and the ways in which to motivate students through practice.

2. Design as a process

To place it within the framework of study in the design area of knowledge, autonomy is defined as an intrinsic element of the decision-making processes that constitute design (Huertas, 2015). Professional designers have to be able to take decisions with autonomy, whatever their role in the studio or agency where they work. So much so that it is impossible to practice design without having a competent degree of autonomy.

The study of design processes has been used for many years in optimising both technical and human resources applied to design. In modern industrial production planning is essential and that involves not only what can be decided *a priori* with respect to the anticipated results but also analysis of the decisions taken in past project which may have repercussions for improving the conditions of future projects. (Font, 1999, p. 149)

We have linked the design process with the project as an autonomous element, an agent for introducing changes in the area and to the designers themselves. The project triggers a certain metamorphosis in the author, causing the author to assume each individual role. (Bartomeu and Rofes, 2013. p. 268)

In terms of both technology and people, Design Technology has and continues to constitute a living branch of study which is currently undergoing profound changes. This was made possible through the use of laboratory protocol study experiments that were in many senses far removed from the reality of everyday design practice (Cross, 2011, p. 115). Despite the fact that methodology is a design speciality, in the undergraduate pathways it is not offered as a subject for study but is worked on transversally through the allocation of projects. We understand that in the context of the seminars we cannot talk about methodology or design method, but what we will study is the design process undertaken by students in carrying out their projects.

In the Final Degree Project the problem detected lay in the lack of student autonomy, understood as the difficulty in managing their own working process. Specifically, the average student delegated their decision-making, generating an excessive dependence on the teacher who ran the risk of interfering with the student's Project. So much so that the student's responsibility to establish a balance in their relationship with their teacher is intrinsically defined. (Huertas, 2015)

We therefore think that working on different ways of doing design and offering students a range of resources to face different working processes will make them more autonomous. By letting them find out the range of available possibilities we are bringing them closer to the world of work. To do so we make them participants in seminars led by different designers to put certain ways of working into practice.

During the seminars, students have to take on different roles to gain an immersion in the processes involved. The immersive and empathetic methods that are habitually used in design and in theatre provide designers with tools to improve their understanding of the problems in context (Gamman, Thorpe, Malpass and Liparova, 2012, p. 172). The idea of the seminars was to condense that context into two days and therefore achieve greater immersion. In terms of how they work, the seminars present a disruption to the constant sequence of classes and this , like a change in musical rhythm, or in the intonation of a voice, generates a moment when the students pay attention.

The theme Design Thinking was chosen because it presents a paradigm of design where research, the generation of ideas and their implementation possibilities cannot be separated. They constitute an iterative process which genuine principles which fit in perfectly with the seminar days. (Drucker, 2011, p. 69)