

Schön's intellectual legacy: A citation analysis of DRS publications (2010–2016)

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Donald Schön was one of the most influential scholars in the design field; his work was and still is among the most highly cited. But how and why do scholars cite Schön's work? In this paper, we present a content analysis of 120 texts published at the last four DRS conferences in order to understand the function of citations of Schön's work. We find scholars primarily cite Schön either to support their research topics, methods or methodologies, and arguments or to credit Schön for concepts or ideas. We observe few instances of citations that engage critically with Schön or build on his ideas. Our conclusions suggest that a deeper understanding of citation function would be an interesting and important project.

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The design research community has long been engaged in discussions and debates focused on its research practices. These discussions have addressed a range of topics, including the nature of research (Durling, 2002; Frayling, 1993; Friedman, 2008), constructing arguments in scholarly writing (Friedman, 2015a), and doctoral education in design (Durling & Friedman, 2000; Margolin, 2016). One reason underlying many of these discussions seems clear: the design discipline seeks to establish its own intellectual culture, 'acceptable and defensible in the world on its own terms' (Cross, 2001: p. 55).

Scholarly research and writing practices in general can be seen as important aspects of an intellectual culture. In this paper, our aim is to focus on an element of academic research and writing that has received less attention in design research, which is citation function in scholarly publications. Similar to Petrić, we believe 'source use and citation skills ought to receive more attention' (2007: p. 238). Building on a previous study (Beck & Chiapello, 2016), in this article we analyze how authors publishing at Design Research Society

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(DRS) conferences cite the work of Donald Schön. Using a citation function framework developed by Harwood (2009), we analyzed 299 unique citations across 120 papers published at the last four DRS conferences (2010, 2012, 2014, 2016).

We find a tendency among papers in our corpus to cite Schön in order to support their own research topics, methods or methodologies, arguments *or* to credit Schön for his concepts or ideas. We observe fewer instances of critical engagement with (or building on) Schön's ideas. What do these findings reveal about scholarly writing practices in design? What kind of knowledge are we generating? How are we conversing with the scholars and scholarship that came before us? And how are we shaping conversations for current and future scholars?

1 Context

Citation function has been studied in other research communities, including: information science, English for academic purposes, applied linguistics, bibliometrics, and natural language processing. For example, Hyland has studied 'the contextual variability of citations' with the goal of investigating 'the [distinct] ways knowledge is typically negotiated and confirmed within different academic communities' (Hyland, 1999: p. 341).

Many reasons have been proposed for studying citation function. For example, it has the potential to provide insight into the relationship between publications and, thus, the transfer and interplay of knowledge (Teufel, Siddharthan, & Tidhar, 2006: pp. 80–81). Jörg invokes Garfield's establishment of the Science Citation Index and reminds readers that citation counts 'have matured towards a serious means of assessing impact of scholarship' (Jörg, 2008: p. 31). She goes on to argue that 'a better understanding of citation function [could] be the seed for a citation ontology, which [would be] useful for machine learning tasks' (2008: p. 31). Moreover, it has been suggested that a deeper understanding of citation function can improve the efficacy of citation indices, such as CiteSeer (Teufel, Siddharthan, & Tidhar, 2006: p. 80).

Citations thus would seem to be more than an attribution of knowledge. They are complex and meaningful. In some cases, citations credit sources for concepts or text. However, they may also demonstrate researcher competence, fluency in a topic, or the validity of a method or methodology. Harwood describes citations as complex knowledge objects (2009: p. 514) and, similar to Ziman (1968), goes on to suggest that citers' *motivations* are complex. Ziman stated that 'many citations are done out of politeness (towards powerful rival approaches), policy (by name-dropping and argument by authority), or piety (towards one's friends, collaborators, and superiors)' (Teufel, Siddharthan, & Tidhar, 2006: p. 81).

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