Design Education Innovation: Using Co-creation Strategies to Re-imagine Curriculum and Effect System Change

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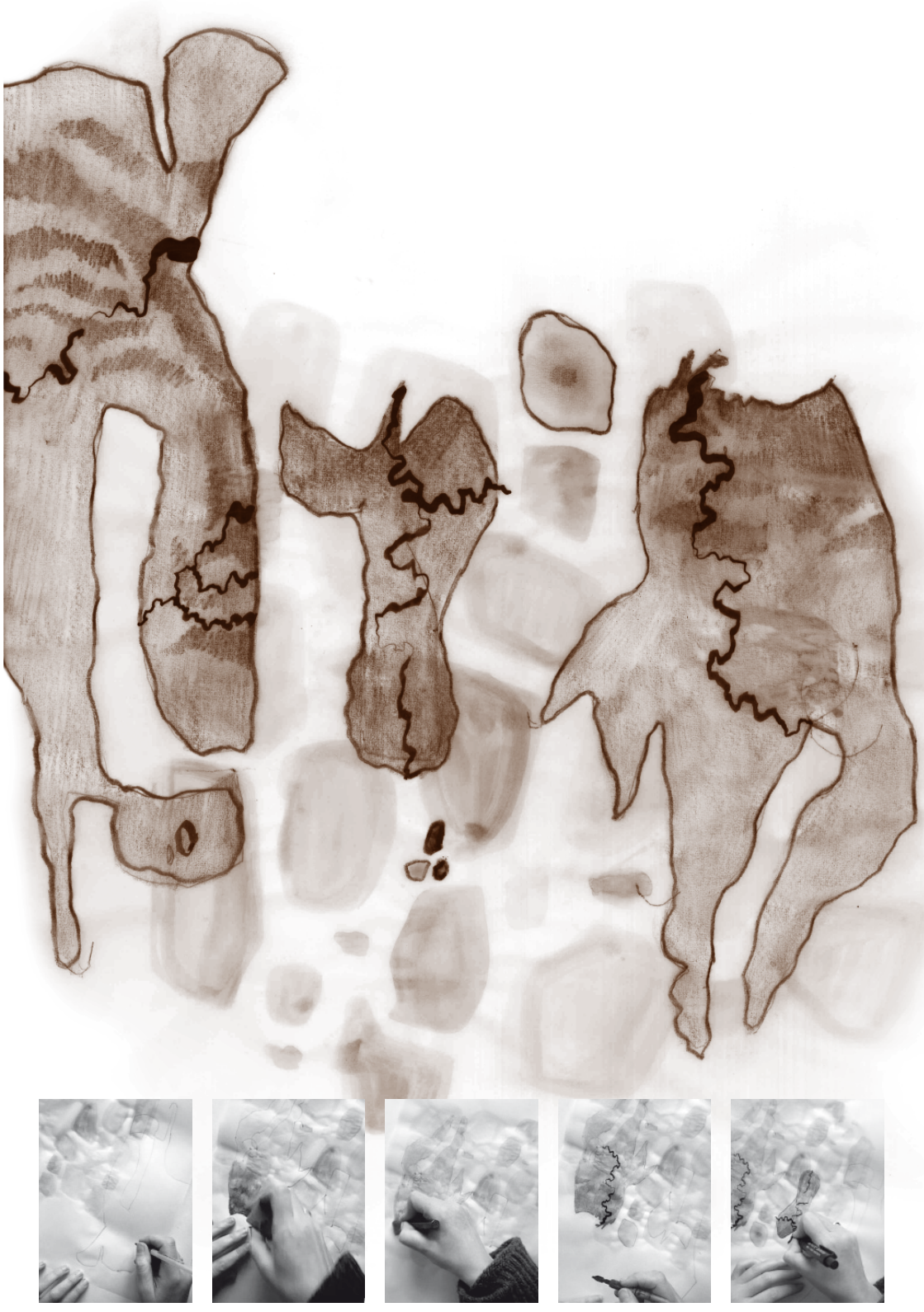

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Abstract

This paper begins with a discussion of approaches to co-creation and the application of design thinking[1]. In this discussion, examples of co-creation approaches include Open Space Technology[2], a model of collaborative, research-informed facilitation and writing mostly used in higher education settings. The discussion reveals aspects of these approaches that enhance co-creation and peer-to-peer facilitation as well as high quality research-informed writing and curriculum development using the cognitive characteristics of design thinking[3]. Significant features of the OST model are assessed to understand relevance for educators and practitioners in design as an anti-hierarchical approach to research-informed writing and curriculum development. The paper goes on to analyze two case studies of different stages in the experience of a group of art and design educators brought together to re-imagine a research-informed curriculum after an institutional merger. The group uses co-creation and OST informed approaches such as World Café and Bar Camps to co-create a blueprint for a research-informed curriculum. This analysis draws on evaluation reports. The paper concludes with suggestions for further development in design Higher Education contexts.

1 2 3

[1] Sanders, E. B. N. and Stappers, P. J. (2008) "Co-creation and the New Landscapes of Design", *CoDesign*, 4: 1, 5 – 18.

[2] Owen, H. (1997) *Open Space Technology: A User's Guide*. San Francisco, Berrett-Kohler.

[3] Oxman, R. (1999) "Educating the Designerly Thinker". *Design Studies* 20: 2, 105 – 122 & Oxman, R. (2004) "Think-maps: Teaching Design Thinking in Design Education". *Design Studies* 25: 1, 63 – 91 & 2004.

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Introduction
Co-creation Strategies

It is often the case that the terms co-design and co-creation are conflated or even deemed to be synonymous. Definitions of co-creation and co-design are mostly limited to design research publications and only exist as outlines in Wikipedia for example.

Sanders and Stappers[4] in their article on uses of co-creation and co-design in multiple contexts refer to these activities as:

"...any act of collective creativity, i.e. creativity that is shared by two or more people. Co-creation is a very broad term with applications ranging from the physical to the metaphysical and from the material to the spiritual, as can be seen by the output of search engines. By co-design we indicate collective creativity as it is applied across the whole span of a design process (...) Thus, co-design is a specific instance of co-creation. Co-design refers, for some people, to the collective creativity of collaborating designers. We use co-design in a broader sense to refer to the creativity of designers and people not trained in design working together in the design development process."[5]

In the examples I wish to discuss, I have focused on the use of co-creation strategies in an education setting at the *fuzzy front end* of the problem phase of idea generation. The use of such processes is well understood in business and marketing situations as well as in co-creation approaches to participatory design. In design education however, the teacher or researcher is often required to produce course designs (modules, courses, learning outcomes etc.) in less than participatory circumstances. How might co-creation be applied to the design of our own education contexts, or at least in the idea generation phase?

"Co-creation practiced at the early front end of the design development process can have an impact with positive, long-range consequences (...) The application of participatory design practices (both at the moment of idea generation and continuing throughout the design process at all key moments of decision) to very large scale problems will change design and may change the world."[6]

In these situations, I have used co-creation strategies as models of facilitation and expression as well as a peer-to-peer approach which is less hierarchical and enables my role as both an educational manager and thought leader to be included in the participatory design rather than fore fronted. The tools used will be discussed in the next section.

"In generating insights, the researcher supports the 'expert of his/her experience' by providing tools for ideation and expression. The designer and the researcher collaborate on the tools for ideation because design skills are very important in the development of the tools. The designer and researcher may, in fact, be the same person."[7]

Design Thinking

In co-creation strategies we can identify the cognitive characteristics of design thinking, a process that uses both visual and conceptual knowledge as well as the dialectic process of design thinking. Schön's process of 'reflection in action' (1987) describes the dialectical phenomenon in cognitive design processes.

"The primacy of this unique cognitive characteristic demands cognitive models of design thinking which reflect both the duality of the visual and the conceptual and their dialectical interaction in design thinking."[8]

It is therefore entirely appropriate to consider both co-creation strategies and how to develop design thinking in those strategies in order to fully develop the idea generation phase of curriculum design or system design in an educational setting.[9] I shall exemplify this with a later description of open space technology and other approaches used in the case study.

4 Sanders, E. B. N. and Stappers, P. J. *op. cit.*.
5 Sanders and Stappers, *op. cit.*, p 6.
6 *Idem*, p 9.
7 *Idem*, p 12.
8 Oxman, *op. cit.*, 1999.
9 Oxman, *op. cit.*, 2003.

What is Open Space Technology?

Open Space Technology (OST) is essentially a methodology or 'tool', which can be adapted to a range of contexts, for example, meetings, conferences, staff development events. It encourages participants to engage actively and take responsibility for the process, hence drawing comparisons with 'student-centered' and 'deep' approaches to learning.[10] Feedback and reflection from participants generally references the importance and quality of 'personal learning' as an outcome. OST can be used to address complex and wide-ranging issues and to achieve meaningful outcomes. It can be particularly successful where the people involved and ideas are diverse, and traditional facilitator-led approaches may be less productive. The focus, assimilating individuals' expert knowledge and experiences creates a greater understanding of issues and realistic practical solutions.

The OST Concept in Educational Settings

I hadn't realized until I attended an OST conference in 2003 that the idea of the co-created or participative event is not new. A well-established conference in Medical Education has been running for more than twenty years[11] and has kept momentum by identifying new themes whilst retaining a 'think-tank', presentation-free format. The significant features of this model are:

1. Choose a topic of high importance.

2. Invite a small, preferably research orientated, group of people knowledgeable about this topic.

3. Add a group of 'users'.

4. Supplement them with good facilitation and working conditions.

5. Add a sprinkling of what might be described as 'new researchers' or 'young blood' in the field, to keep more esoteric delegates' feet on the ground.

6. Set the participants some specific goals. These usually include reviewing the 'state of the art' of a particular area (in medical education), commenting on what research might collectively say about these issues, generating further questions for investigation and encouraging the delegates to publish their findings.[12]

OST Demands That You Structure Participation: Case Study of the Graduate School Model at Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon Colleges

The Graduate School planning group agreed on the principles for the invitation process. We knew we wanted to invite a range of academics, senior managers, researchers, students and other stakeholders (e.g. technicians). Their ability to write, to work as part of a team or to complete projects was deemed essential. The invitation was clearly targeted and we had a clear aim. The aim was to create a model for a Graduate School at the newly merged Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon Colleges of the University of the Arts London. The final plan was to make a collaborative approach to a graduate curriculum for both teaching and research postgraduate activity, spanning nearly 500 full time equivalent taught masters students and over 80 PhD students.

The participative process began with a project initiation document in January 2008, which basically described the management parameters and purpose of the project. There was a two-day 'Purpose and Visions' workshop in February 2008 using OST approaches to co-create the basis for the structure and visions of the school. This was swiftly followed by the drafting of a strategy and the planning for wider consultations with University stakeholders in March 2008. The final OST sessions were in April 2008 to design an implementation plan.

These workshops identified the CCW Graduate School context, research question, purpose and Vision:

CCW Context: Considering the river; embracing uncertainty; our complex network of flows

CCW question: What if we can illuminate the space between knowing and doing?

Purpose: To enable you to enact our futures

Vision: To be the brightest art and design graduate school in the world

The key factors in this mix were determined by the group as:

- Global best people
- Intellectual space
- Communication
- Environment structure
- Unlock potential
- Brilliant courses

[10] MacDonald, R. (2007) Online forum for SEDA 1/3/2007 http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A2=ind0703&L=seda&T=0&P=47 accessed 04/04/11.

[11] Wakeford, R.E., (ed) (1985) *Directions in Clinical Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Medical School.

[12] Hays, R., Jolly, B., Newble, D., Gupta, T.S., Spencer, J., & Wakeford, R. (2000) "The Cambridge Conference: background". *Medical Education* 34 (10), p. 783.

What is the Graduate School at CCW?

In this curriculum change project, we confirmed the Graduate School as made up of all validated, taught postgraduate courses, postgraduate *research* courses at MPhil/PhD and research across CCW. There is no dedicated building that brings these elements together; it is the sum of all the separate college's provision for research and postgraduate programs. From a student perspective, this would also include the other related services such as technical support, library and learning support (archives, collections, exhibitions), student support, housing, catering, buying materials etc.

Obviously, the project could identify many opportunities to develop in terms of diversifying the portfolio of courses, reducing course duplication with regard to course offerings as well as supporting administration and developing significant international links and partnerships etc. In terms of portfolio this includes a mix of fine art, design, theatre and communication courses.

The Graduate School aims to:

- Empower the knowledge capital across CCW
- Activate the relationship between teaching and research
- Bring together the three colleges within CCW

A Project Timeline for 2008-09 was then completed which included milestones for further co-creation activities in order to create a communications strategy and budget model. Based on these deliberations, the Graduate School was launched in September 2009.

The key part of re-imagining the curriculum for the Graduate School was a course portfolio analysis and structure working group, which used OST strategies again to come up with ideas to formulate a postgraduate timetable that worked across three colleges and coordinated marketing and admissions strategy. This two day OST workshop used the following aims:

- Create a shared understanding of our research and practice
- Potential for collaboration
- Identify interdisciplinary directions
- Visualize new spaces for research
- International dimensions

The groups invited included all researchers and teaching academics as well as technical and support staff. In groups across the college boundaries, they were asked to identify curriculum projects that would exemplify the above aims. These outcomes provided enough activity to sustain development through to the first academic year; one year later, in 2010, the groups were reconfigured to further re-examine the practicalities of further development of a collaborative research-informed curriculum.

Developing the Research-Informed Curriculum: Using BarCamps and World Café

Since my colleagues were becoming comfortable by that time with OST principles, we moved to use other complementary co-creation approaches. We developed a BarCamp session to further contribute to ideas already in progress and designed a framework consisting of sessions proposed by participants.

BarCamps are based on simplified variations of Open Space Technology (OST), building on colleagues' passion and responsibility in participation. While loosely structured, there are some rules at BarCamp. Participants are encouraged to present, facilitate and contribute to a session. Everyone is also asked to share information and experiences of the event, both live and after the fact, via public web channels including (but not limited to) blogging, wiki-ing, and photo-sharing. BarCamping facilities include: network access (i.e. WiFi), food and drink, but no sleepovers were planned at this event (although many seasoned BarCamp practitioners stay as long as it takes to develop a project, see for example barcamplondon.org)!

BarCamp rules include the standard OST 'rule of two feet' where participants can move around to listen and contribute to one or more presentations. All ideas generated can be shared and recorded, whether on post-its, flip charts, laptops or through other digital devices. The BarCamps start with ideas and then make plans to realize those ideas. Each presenter/group has an outline that is roughly 'advertised' to others. They then collaborate to realize those ideas. The collaborative process formed into separate groups considering different issues. The issues were grouped into these key areas:

Research

• Assess the impact of technology on pedagogy

• Re-evaluate the Postgraduate 'currency' in terms of mobility/transparency/UK/EU/ global

• Review the relationship between research and postgraduate study (what is their inter-relationship)

• Decide the balance between taught postgraduate study and postgraduate research

Postgraduate Study in Art & Design

• Review the boundaries of subjects - interdisciplinary crossover - create new boundaries.

• Review subject area and their changing characteristics, e.g. Design, innovation and sustainable creative practice

Competition

• Review competition in the light of increased competition from EU counterparts and review the impact of Bologna

• Sustainable Models of PG education

• Need to be cost effective and adaptable to ever changing climates

• Individual college identity in the context of the CCW alliance and the University of the Arts London i.e. The Graduate School has to address ideological issues in aligning three individual colleges with their own ethos under the umbrella of the UAL

Student Care

• Climate is becoming more student-focused. The Graduate school needs to offer what students want: flexibility, community, openness, value for money, industry links, and clear career paths. Need to assess why people study at postgraduate level and create courses and assessments that meet their needs

Collaboration/ Partnerships

• Encourage Artist/Design led collectives through galleries and events

• Widen collaboration and parameters of external engagements at a local, national and international level

World Café

The critiquing and refining process of these issues was then designed by using a World Café format in order to create the conditions for thinking ahead beyond our first year and to consider how we integrated both internally and with external organizations.

World Café uses a cyclical process to use the outlines and build, enhance, refine the ideas developed collectively. Further sharing and refining occurs as the groups change and rotate through three cycles of World Café discussions. In the first round of discussion, the Café table hosts are drawn from the course directors and research leaders and encourage each café table to write, doodle and draw key ideas on their tablecloths or on post-its, flip chart paper etc. Table hosts can photograph for ease of recording, as they are not chairing the conversations. Table hosts can encourage conversation and take note of key ideas on large post-its or index cards. After the first round, one person is asked to remain at the table as the 'keeper of the conversation', while the others serve as travellers or "ambassadors of meaning." The travellers carry key ideas, themes and questions into their new café conversations.

In the second round, the table host welcomes the new guests and they briefly share the main ideas, themes and questions of the first café conversation. They encourage guests to link and connect ideas coming from their previous table conversations—listening carefully and building on each other's contributions. By providing opportunities for people to move in several rounds of conversation, ideas, questions, and themes begin to link and connect. At the end of the second round, all of the tables in the room will be cross-pollinated with insights from prior café conversations.

In the third and final round, (in our World Café, several more rounds can occur according to circumstances and outcomes required), people can return to their home (original) tables to synthesize their discoveries, or they may continue travelling to new tables, leaving the same or a new 'conversation keeper' at the table. After these three rounds of conversation, the facilitator will lead a period of sharing discoveries and insights in a whole group conversation where patterns can be identified, collective knowledge can grow, and possibilities for research-informed curriculum emerge. A large whiteboard or several flipcharts may be used to distill the main points from each café table. These insights form the basis for the curriculum plan, a product of collective knowledge production or co-designing. All of the photographs, flip-charts etc. need to be analyzed swiftly and can be fed back as a proposal to participants soon after the event.

Evaluation of the Experience of OST Strategies for Re-imagining the Curriculum

Often, the most important learning we experience is in reflection on our practice, made even more powerful by sharing that experience with others.[13] We learned a lot about the OST process, about working with each other, and particularly how our experiences may help others, either in contemplating using OST as a workshop or conference model or in considering social aspects of informal learning.

Do OST Models Work?

The Graduate School project team concluded that this model could be used by other practitioners (not just in an educational context) with another theme or goal. For the model to prove a success, we have also observed that a number of key variables need to be maintained. Some of these follow:

1. Project Board. The board contributed to the planning and facilitation of the events - each member leading on different aspects - and during the events contributed to the facilitation of sessions, either in pairs or individually. Together, they represented a range of experience, both within the colleges and in the subject disciplines, which was complementary to the collaborative nature of the planning exercise. Each of them brought a high level of professionalism to the project, both in planning and in execution but also in following up on actions to resolve operational and implementation aspects. Commitment to attend meetings of the group was vital, so a lot of advance planning of meeting schedules was required. A small group could be risky if one person fails to attend, and a larger group may not actually progress tasks efficiently as it becomes more difficult to coordinate and manage.

2. Plan of events. As discussed earlier, it had been our intention to maximize process and discussion, but to make sure that there were concrete outcomes in time for implementation as courses.

3. Ethos and guidelines for working. We talked about the process and overarching ethos of the events right at the beginning, and we talked specifically about how things would be managed. There were a number of non-negotiable rules: for example, the objective was to work towards collectively designing the Graduate School model, but individuals could move between groups over time. Debate and non-consensus was to be positively encouraged and participation in cross-group critiquing was essential. However, all other aspects were negotiable, including where groups met, the size of the group, themes to be debated, how and who did the writing, note-taking and reporting.

4. Participants. Having a mix of participants from across the Colleges and some from outside was essential. Many different career stages and types were represented: researchers, academics, academic developers and senior staff, as well as students (mostly doctoral) and technicians. This mix was important, as was the ability of the invited participants to act as team players with a proven ability to take part in high-level debate, write and also finish projects.

The Working Process. The format for the events received incredibly positive feedback; the few comments to the contrary referred to minor changes to the process in the future. The 'free and open ethos', as well as the non-hierarchical, collegial nature of the events created an inclusive environment where all participants felt able to contribute to the process, and this was recognized. The most frequently remarked upon feature was the opportunity for collaborative activity and teamwork. This came out as the most rewarding aspect for participants. For some it was the opportunity to work with a variety of staff from across the Colleges, from which they felt they learned a lot. Some colleagues drew comparisons on how this differed from the surface approach they were often required to use in developing curriculum as just one of the many aspects of multi-tasking that made up much of their daily routine.

Conclusion

It has been interesting to reflect on this process, and I believe this approach could be used again in another context, or with different themes, if the opportunity arose. My reflection has led to my thinking that this process could

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[13] Schön, D. (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner.* Jossey- Bass, San Francisco, CA.

be used with student groups seeking to build on projects beyond the initial ideation phases, or with colleagues when addressing collaborative writing tasks such as vision and strategy documents. Bearing these future directions in mind, what can we learn that could be transferable to a new situation?

Making sure that plenary or feedback sessions are not all the same in process and format reduces the risk of these being perceived as 'set pieces'. In removing the ritual of reporting back sessions in plenary, we avoid overload and running over time for participants, and this enables reporting to become a peer-to-peer and group-to-group imperative. Much more can be gained through smaller focused critiquing sessions and through informal social exchange.

I have learned that this process is paramount and that these processes can be used for collaborative research and informed writing in other OST settings.[14]

OST guidelines say that 'whoever comes is the right people' and I really like that principle. But of course I am aware that it is absolutely vital to invite the right people to attend and participate, and those people are the ones who can contribute to learning, research and curriculum design together.

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