

Teaching in a State of Flux and Uncertainty: Transitioning the Design Studio during COVID-19

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Design-based research or DBR is a methodology developed by and for educators that aims to improve the impact, transference, and translation of education research to benefit practice. In DBR, the educator is simultaneously the teacher and the researcher (Kuhn & Quigley, 1997). It is a flexible approach that facilitates iterative analysis, design, development, and implementation, based on collaboration among researchers and practitioners in real-world settings (Wang & Hannafin, 2005). The collaboration in this design-based study acknowledges that researchers also function as educators to create and measure the impact of design interventions (Collins, 1992). In this instance, the interventions were the strategies required to translate communication design curricula from an on-campus face-to-face teaching and learning studio model to a distance learning paradigm due to COVID-19.

This abstract presents the impact COVID-19 had on a first-year curricula revitalization aimed to progress students from a standards-based criterion (often accused of shallow learning) to a tertiary culture predicated on active and experiential inquiry. Two main points will be discussed: firstly, the pedagogical components of design studio practice, its cognizance of materiality and craft and objectives to foster students learning and engagement, appreciative of diverse worldviews and epistemologies. Secondly, it will present the disruption and experience of the academic team having to recalibrate, develop and prototype online content to accommodate the technological parameters and functionality of an obsolescent learning management system.

A review of the syllabus commenced in 2019 to reenergise an outdated studio course for incoming first-year students, with a new brief, intending to function as a scaffold from the passive behaviour, associated with the secondary sectors NCEA1 model, towards an engaged and autonomous learner that is required at tertiary level. Accordingly, identity and belonging were selected as key themes, aiming to advance aspirations for a reciprocal learning culture, encouraged by the need to

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establish connections and community; the knowledge of identity and agency for self-actualization (Maslow, 1962), alongside understanding relevant media and communication design conventions.

Dewey (1937) argued that learning is based on social and interactive processes, and the notion that students accumulatively learn more from their peers also acknowledges the requirements of specific interventions to construct the conditions for peer-to-peer learning experiences and relationships.

March 2020 would, however, present another variable that would alter the trajectory of our two semesters substantially: the advent of a global pandemic and the challenges it imposed, requiring unprecedented recalibration as students and lecturers conjointly faced the sudden onset and pivot to adopt the virtual remote classroom.

This paper will examine the data and findings collated from this period and reflect on the adaptation of a studio paradigm designed for on-campus in-person delivery into an online undertaking, teaching in a state of flux and uncertainty.

¹ National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) are national qualifications for senior secondary school students in New Zealand.

KEYWORDS

Curriculum Design, Online Learning, Design Education, Studio Practice, COVID-19

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