

DESIGN AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN PEDAGOGIC CONTEXTS

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Abstract

When developing projects for pedagogic contexts, designers make choices that participate of social development, emphasizing, predicting, questioning or modifying social differences and cultural prejudice. We analyze the designer's interdisciplinary actions on didactic books publishing, that respects the Didactic Book National Plan (Brasil, 2007), in order to ponder graphic projects and image use in our society. We suggest that the book Design comply the visual and multimodal/multiliteracies requirements in contemporariness. We believe the insertion range have a direct influence on the cultural development of the subjects, having a national range and acting on a country of an ample cultural diversity.

Keywords

Graduation in Design, Social Responsibility, Social Impacts, Didactic Books

Presenting the subject

Focusing researches and practices on actions in, with and to society, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro/PUC-Rio-Brasil Design Course combines with Participation Design methodological focus.

The student is brought to interact throughout production steps with the social group to which the project is being developed. The goal is to benefit from interactions amidst men, objects, society, culture and environment, through a sort of practice on which the problem approach, identification and definition, and the project development occur within the very context of those interactions or in the core of the target social group.

At the Design Centre we are conscious that designers make choices. Information systems and objects, which they develop, circulate the world. They are the bridges that interact

with historical and cultural moments. They maintain traditions and also question and show ways. Derived from a technological nature and interdisciplinary vocation, Design is open to interaction, dialogue and partnership.

Talking about Participative Design

Under the focus of Participative Design many projects have been developed in the Design Centre under graduation and post-graduation courses.

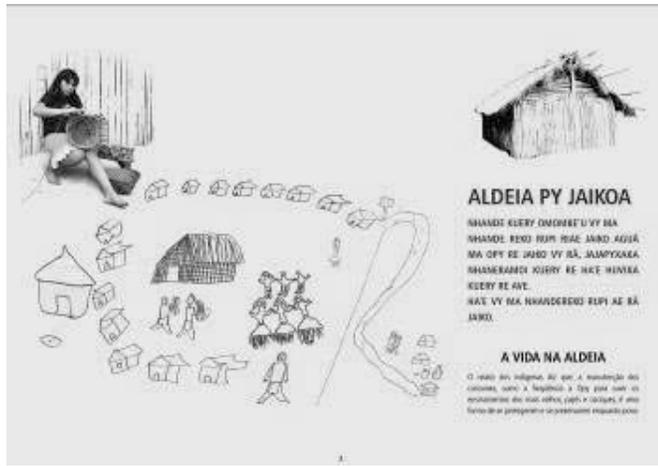
Many of them are developed aiming pedagogical contexts and they are logged in the Design Information & Reference Center, created on 1993 as a part of the Design Pedagogical Post-graduation Laboratory. These project's recurring appraisals have led to check whether Design teachers must be aware that Design teaching should consider the professional as a social issue agent who must be conscious of equalities/inequalities, concepts and prejudices. Experience shows that the designer is a co-participant of the meaning webs in which everyone is socially involved. His project solutions have impact on environment, nature, culture and society. Examples are as follows:

Game developed at INES, National Deaf Institute.



Figures 1 & 2: Master Graduation Project - Digital game for deaf children language acquisition, Carlos Klimick.

Primer developed in Paraty's Indian Community.



Figs. 3 & 4: Master Degree Project –Health Care Indian Agents Primer, from Ricardo Carvalho.

Primer developed for Environmental Ministry.



Figs. 5 & 6: Master Graduation Project – Puppet Workshop Primer, from Eduardo Andrade de Oliveira.

Presentation of project solutions have assisted real context issues with specific demands and generally valued a limited production of objects/systems exclusively projected for the social group. As for Participative Design in research field, the student is lead to search for solutions which comprehend possible processes and materials managed with autonomy by the social group. The scope is to understand

cultural and environmental values in which the social group is inserted, an understanding which may accomplish the exchange established within interaction, social intercourse, partnership and autonomy process.

Surpassing low range production

There are many challenges in Design learning to pass from actions directed to small/exclusive range production to an action intended to medium/large range production.

We exemplify analyzing the designer’s interdisciplinary actions to the Brazilian didactic book editorial and publishing market in order to ponder the graphic projects and the image use in a society where speed, diversity, hybridism and fluency eventually reflect or are reflected in the design project. The choice of the place for analysis development considers that the didactic book editorial and publishing market in Brazil respects the Didactic Book National Plan (Brasil, 2007), developed by the Education and Culture Ministry, having a national range and acting on a country of an ample cultural diversity. Through the Plan, Brazilian government gathers researchers from federal institutions to produce the Didactic Book Guide with summaries on the approved books. The evaluation criteria consider visual language and multimodal character of the book, but exclude the right place of Design in reading promotion. The Guide is sent to the Brazilian public schools and the selected books are freely distributed to approximately 25 million students in the junior public high schools and to 7 million students in the senior public high schools.

At the beginning of this century, the book editorial and publishing market faced the implicit urgency to be tuned to the multiliteracies idea, or the idea of “integrating important modes to make sense, where text is also related to vision, space, behavior, etc.” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000:3). According Rose (2001:1), “we live in a world where knowledge as well as many types of leisure are visually construed, a world where what we see is as much important as what we read and hear, or perhaps more important than that”. One of the changes that have occurred seem to have its origin on the so called book’s death announcement, which was largely spread through the beginning of our century (Bauman, 2003). Nearly immediately, editors began to invest on graphic projects which had to do with the hard copy books’ “aura” deconstruction, especially for the fundamental students’ level #1, manufactured as spiral school books.

Bringing theory together to practice, didactic book in the form of spiral school book furnishes students the possibility to answer proposed questions on its own pages, and graphic projects began to care about furnishing space for exercise answers. Unexpectedly, students from first series of fundamental series reported that those books were not good because they “caused pain”. Investigating the fact, we discovered that children, on the first series were

instructed to use the whole length of the line through the page, just to separate syllables, which caused their arms to rest on the spiral, turning the book's utilization uncomfortable. Surely a simple ergonomic issue, easily observed during the use of the spiral school book, but not so easily diagnosed when associated to a medium and large range production. In this case, the designer has not assured close contact to final consumer (student/teacher). Their relation is intermediated by the editor whose horizon, in Brazilian context, is far apart Design lecture encouragement possibilities. Generally, during the project's development stage, Designer has on hands nothing but profiles which inscribe the student from capacities and skills developed through age, gender, and economic and regional level. Finally, market managing does not consider unexpected project conditions which require original solutions.

In our papers published in 2006 and 2008 (Farbiarz, & Farbiarz, 2006; Farbiarz & Cavalcante, 2008), we demonstrate that the market presents a king of customization instead of a serious study which would also encompass national curricular parameters from a given year, the potential welcoming of a social group, the abilities and skills to be developed and the specific context where the book is to be inserted. Customization is more obvious in the use of image in graphic projects. Seemingly it is also due to Design the dialogue establishment with the social group (end user – student) which is inscribed within imagetic society where speed, diversity, hybridism and fluidity are the so-called words. The following examples illustrate the large profusion of images one can find on these pages.



Figure 7: Portuguese language didactic book pages of fundamental classes #II, 2008

The ellipse bleeding the border of the page corresponds to a detail of the Fall of Icarus' picture, from Jacob Peter Gowi. The three rectangles on the boxes are illustrative images, as it is an VIth century b.c. amphora photograph telling the Theseus and Minotaur tale. Variegated boxes in size and color apply to differentiated situations. Now lead to a glossary, then to curiosities which are complementary to the unity knowledge. Elements aim to attend speed, hybridism and fluidity meanings, part of our day life. We verified different visual modes' presence within the same content unit without maintaining its insertions' original context. Paintings, for instance, are meaningless. Close to them lies

a photograph which is also out of its real significance unit. As for text types, we can find glossary, informative text, narrative text and mnemonic exercises, simultaneously. The insertions do not consider the original context of each visual/discursive genre mode, and they do not clearly present target which could lead students to develop their visual language and their multimodal communicative skills. Whether, at first sight, the graphic project corresponds to an innovation from the beginnings of the XXIth century, with one more look we can deprehend that besides announcing new paths, the book Design has been seen by editors as a contemporaneous reproduction tool for the "social yearning".

Inappropriate relation between verbal and non-verbal language in graphic projects associated to the didactic book market is also continuously observed. Urging to fulfill an empty space, an editor would request images to the illustrator in order to compose his book pages. With no designer counseling, the verbal and non-verbal language relation is not taken into account, and there may appear problems as in the following page.

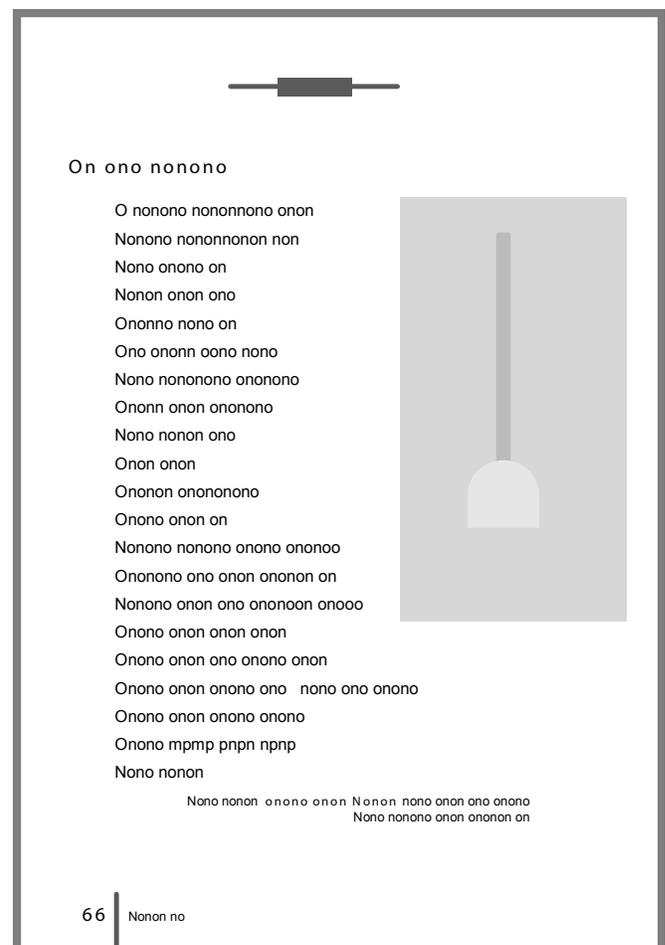


Figure 8: Portuguese language didactic book page

From Gilberto Gil, the book's text is about racial differences and it uses cleaning as a hook, which belongs to the title. Jasper Johos' picture was developed for a cultural context well delimited, and a broom was chosen to figure as text illustration, but it creates a non-advantage relation to the understanding of the text as well as to the very image. Putting it all together, we observe that not only Design courses should consider their students was inserted within an ever transforming techno-cultural universe, but that book editorial and publishing market itself is experiencing also an adaptation instant to times which present the task of multiliteracies. Therefore, consolidated field researches, and historically limited profiles of end users are being quickly surpassed by fast and concrete present demands. One of formation risks encompasses the design student removal from the end social group/population involved, and many times, this fact can awaken prejudices and the development of solutions conforming to the student own values, or at most, with the involved group/population generic profile values passed by the intermediators which are part of the production process.

Final Considerations

In general lines, Design field receives students who come as lecturers and actors of the time-space they live in, and need a formation that may prepare them to be authors of this same time-space in a continual interaction, dialogue and partnership targeting autonomy. So, it is due to the Design field to develop capacities and skills that furnish the student ways to understand that his projects are situated within the relations developed between his own values, others values, his client, and values which are established by natural and cultural environment, even when acting with methodological scopes that apart him from specific and/or exclusive productions as beforehand evidenced in Participative Design focusing.

We come to the conclusion that the Participant Design methodological focus must be strengthened in Design formation, even when the student finds himself in a large scale project. We suggest that the didactic book Design comply the visual and multimodal requirements in contemporariness, connected with multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000:3). We believe that the insertion range amplifies the designers' responsibility in the development of the project, as the suggestions for the project solutions have a direct influence on the cultural development of the multiple and plural subjects involved in the interaction situations.

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