Paris 2011 – Researching Design Education

The initiation of the international conference series

Erik Bohemia
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Introduction

Number of events led to development of the International Conference for Design Education Researchers. One of these was declaration by the Design School’s Dean where I used to work that academics in design field should not be pursuing design education research. I felt this was poorly conceived idea as most design academics are concerned about their students learning and thus would be motivated to become introduced to practice research to evidence their ‘good’ pedagogical practices. Second was realisation that, in the UK, design education research was seen as uncritical and thus trivial by the Research Exercise Review Panel members and the third was my impatience with the Design Research Society, after I joined its Council, to provide a platform for design education researchers to improve their research practices. The idea for a general design education research conference was also informed by having an opportunity to chair the 9th International Conference on Engineering and Product Design Educational (E&PDE) conference (Bohemia et al., 2007). The chairing 2007 E&PDE provided me with an insight on how the Design Society used the E&PDE to develop its flagship ICED conferences. The unlike large conferences which can be intimidating the E&PDE conference supported design academics to become familiar for the first time with academic conference format in a friendly community setting.

Getting the event through the DRS Council was over two years long, bumpy and onerous journey. And it was not until I was able to get the CUMULUS association on board that the DRS Council members reluctantly agreed to let the event to go ahead.

Decade later from when the 1st event was staged, the DRS Learn X Design conference is now established as the key platform for the Design Research Society’s Design Education SIG to disseminate research related to Design Education getting the members.

The 1st International Symposium for Design Education Researchers took place in Paris, France on 18–19 May 2011. The Symposium was held under the auspices of the Design Research Society’s Design Pedagogy Special Interest Group and CUMULUS which the International Association of Universities and Colleges of Art and Design.

Beside the reasons outlined above, one of the aims of the symposium was to develop and to establish relationships between CUMULUS and DRS Design Pedagogy Special Interest Group. The idea was to bring members from these two societies and strengthen the capacity to enhance the quality of design education through examining how innovation in education is informed by and is informing design research.

To do this, together with Brigitte Borja de Mozota, from the hosting institution and Luisa Collina from CUMULUS, we have invited a diverse mix of speakers experienced academics to explore the symposium’s broad theme of Researching Design Education. Initially, the invited speakers submitted brief proposals. Then they submitted full papers which were critically double-blind peer reviewed by members of the International Scientific Review Committee. The revised 12 accepted papers, 3 keynotes and an editorial formed the symposium’s proceedings.

The presenters came from different disciplinary backgrounds and different countries, including the Netherlands, the UK, France, Switzerland, Finland, and Italy. The outcome was a symposium that tackled diverse design education issues from a variety of perspectives, both disciplinary and institutional.

An intensive poster seminar session with seventeen PhD candidates was the opening activity for the
symposium.

Figure 1. The 1st International Symposium for Design Education Researchers was held in the Paris Bourse Exchange building.

Figure 2. One hundred delegates attended the 2011 symposium.
The keynotes were delivered by Ezio Manzini, Bridget Borja De Mozota and Andy Polaine. Ezio Manzini delivered his keynote via Skype from his home, which at that time was a novel way to organise a keynote delivery (see Figure 2). In his address, Enzio stated that design schools have a greater agency as they can operate with greater degrees of freedom than commercial design agencies and thus potentially could deliver more innovative solutions (Manzini, 2011).

Polaine (2011, p. 59) in his address argued that:

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\text{Despite the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity, design research and design education research have become too convergent and discipline specific. Much like the towers of medieval San Gimignano, academic careers are built by adding layers to one’s own discipline tower while attempting to demolish those of others. Trying to prove ourselves wrong may seem counter-intuitive to a field that is trying to gain credibility outside of its usual place in the food-chain, but it is also the mark of self-confidence.}
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Borja De Mozota (2011, p. 25) in her keynote titled Design Economics—Microeconomics and Macroeconomics: Exploring the Value of Designers’ Skills in Our 21st Century Economy (see Figure 3 and Figure 4) suggested that:

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\text{Design consultancies do not have the same power to change the view of design in the foundations of}
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management science and organization theory. An outside designer is a consultant working within the budget and under the authority of another organizational function, most frequently R&D or communications or marketing.

She proposed that the design education have to be active in reinventing the Design guilds for designers to “become more effective entrepreneurs in order to help society at large to face the changes in this transitional period between two socio-technical systems. They also have to design their profession as a part of the creative industries.” (Borja De Mozota, 2011, p. 38)

Figure 5. Brigitte Borja De Mozota delivering her keynote address

Figure 6. Andy Polaine who delivered the keynote address titled “Design for General Education”

CUMULUS Association and DRS Design Pedagogy Special Interest Group coming together signalled the increased importance of re-examining design education in these changing times. The two associations signed a
collaborative agreement at the 2013 Oslo conference. For example, CUMULUS Association and DRS Design Pedagogy Special Interest Group are planning to organise a joint international conference in 2013. The more immediate plan is to produce a Special Issue of ‘Collection’, a research journal on the theme of ‘Informing Design Education by Research’ from selected papers presented at the symposium. Another set of papers will be selected for an edited book on the theme of ‘Researching Design Education’.

Number of people and organisations have been helpful in organising the symposium and preparing the set of proceedings. These include Christian Guellerin President of Cumulus and Michael Tovey the conveyor of DRS PedSIG (see Figure 4).

Figure 8. Elvin Karana, Peter Lloyd and Kath McKelvey listening one of the presentations.

Figure 9. Alison Shreeve discusses possibility of design education to lose its character.
Jacques Leroux (see Figure 4) from the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry and his colleagues and team who kindly provided the venue and made the symposium delegates welcome; the team from CUMULUS Association Eija Salmi and Justyna Maciak (see Figure 5) based at Aalto University.

Geneviève Sengissen and Pascale Labé and their team based at L'École de Design Nantes Atlantique who provided the logistics; Anne Schoonbrodt and Alessandro Biamonti for organising the poster session; Deborah Wickham from L'École Parsons à Paris who encourage her students to produce artwork proposals for this proceedings, Samantha Schulman and Tanya Benet whose design proposals were adopted and every member of the International Scientific Review Committee who provided their time and expertise during the review.
process.

**Figure 11.** Geneviève Sengissenat who was instrumental to managed planning and organising the local logistics

This was a truly international team effort by symposium committee whose members from DRS and CUMULUS Association were dispersed across European universities. These included Aalto University, L'École de Design Nantes Atlantique, Coventry University, L'École Parsons à Paris; Northumbria University and Politecnico di Milano.

**Figure 12.** The conference delegates continued their discussion over the lunch
Figure 13. Attending a fashion show was a highlight

References


Erik Bohemia
Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway
Design Education Research Center, Shandong University of Art & Design, China
erikbohe@oslomet.no
Dr Bohemia’s ongoing research is in the broad area of ‘Materialities of Designing’ with focus on how cultural elements are shaping designers’ approaches. He has co-chaired over 20 key international academic conferences with international societies such as the Design Institute Management (DMI); Academy for Design Innovation Management (ADIM); Design Research Society (DRS) and Design Society (DS).