

## The Intellectual Diet in Pastoral Spaces of Activity in Digital Design Education

Andreas Ken Lanig

[https://doi.org/10.21606/drs\\_lxd2021.10.112](https://doi.org/10.21606/drs_lxd2021.10.112)

During lockdown, students are excluded from the inspiring learning space of the university. Students receive a different "intellectual diet" here than they do in the university. In the studio learning of the traditional face-to-face university, the artistic and cognitive impulses are curated with a design pedagogical concept. This concept contains visual, intellectual and social impulses. This concept did not exist in the previous three semesters - it was left to the respective family and home environment of the students during the lockdown. While this is generally the case for distance learning students, it was exacerbated during the lockdown. Students operate in remote-learning mode via primarily digital channels. For the case study presented here, the question of the holistic nature of these stimuli presents itself. The adjective "pastoral", for example, is to be understood as the hypothesis that, over the course of the past two semesters, in addition to subject-related teaching, teachers were partly responsible for the aesthetic and – this remains to be demonstrated – the pastoral dimensions of a degree course in design. On the basis of in-depth interviews, the case study develops categories of teaching activity within digital spaces of action to which students attribute a particular degree of effectiveness. The feedback was evaluated by means of a written survey and in-depth interviews with students of online programmes at the bachelor's and master's level. A working atmosphere that was free of hierarchy in digital relationships was a prerequisite here. On this basis, teachers convey "internal" stimuli (that are specific to the curriculum at hand) as well as "external" stimuli (that fall outside of the particular curriculum). These then express themselves in autonomous learning, which is motivated by appreciative criticism in social groups. In digital spaces, too, this does not succeed from the start, but is rather built up through personalised contact in the form of relationships of trust. These gain in effect through the dimensions of the verbal, non-verbal and symbolic interventions.

Keywords: Design pedagogy, hybrid studios, distance learning, aesthetic education

### Starting Point and Relevance

Over the last two semesters (2020/2021), the discourse about hybrid studios has taken on a new, substantial dimension. Up until then, the actions of learners in virtual learning spaces were a minor exception, but the isolation of design students in their digitally networked studios provides a complex laboratory of global proportions for design education. It is to be expected that the construction of theories for developing design competence in digitally expanded studios will increase in intensity.

The case study outlined here makes a contribution to this by researching the effects sizes of teaching from the reflections and the feedback from students.

### Theoretical Contexts

In the learning behaviour of students taking virtualised design courses, status passage (first year of study), self-organisation and self-care (second year of study) as well as expansive learning (third year of study) emerged as central concepts (Lanig 2019). The research question pursued here of communicative interaction in hybrid studios builds on these findings. The three core concepts, as sensitising concepts, are premises of this study. The literature on coaching in artistic processes of development points out that special interaction concepts



This work is licensed under a

[Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

(Truninger 2019) and spatial concepts (Thoring 2019) must exist. In the spatial concepts, in particular, the "signature pedagogy" manifests itself as a didactic calculation that is tailored to the character and socialisation of young designers: these "signature pedagogies" (Gurung et al. 2009, Sowa 2019) reflect the deep structures of the profession. These dazzling semiotics are formulated in design using the deep semantic field surrounding the term 'studio'. This term is scintillating because it is part of a lasting discourse about an often transcendently documented space of creativity and its current justification.

In the past two semesters, far beyond providing support in their own subjects, teachers in design schools have dealt with questions of social and learning space, which has been fundamentally changed by the lockdown situation. Even institutions that do not explicitly practice remote learning had to deal with the potential and shortfalls of "hybrid studios" (Lanig 2019). This is because the educational and social communication strategies for learning in studios are known and intuitively tangible. This is mainly due to the fact that teachers can reproduce their own learning experience in the studios. For digital learning spaces in which teachers do not have their own learning experience, this is a theoretical requirement. The case study therefore focuses on processes of support and advice in artistic contexts.

The coaching process must empathetically incorporate the specific development processes involved in the generation of ideas. The studio concept is also intended as a social concept of symbolic communication. This studio concept particularly emphasises social learning in groups. The "community of practitioners" (Wenger 1998) shows the learner paths by cultivating critical and favourable feedback.

The transfer of these principles of design education into the virtual space is explored from the perspective of the general "internal" and "external" development of students (within and outside of the curriculum) (Lanig 2019) as well as the supporting educational and technological settings (Lotz et al. 2019). The focus on the effects of artistic coaching in virtual learning spaces still represents a conceptual need here.

Based on this consensus of design education that has been established for decades around the studio as a place of learning, the last few semesters have shown that these two premises of design education can only be transferred to an online environment with shortfalls. At this point, empirical evidence of distance learning within design departments can offer insights into the transfer of design education.

## Research Questions

The paper proposed here introduces the pastoral realm as an approach to virtualised design education.

Drawing on the pastoral profession, the aim is to address the question of how lively learning relationships can succeed in design education in view of distance. It is not the religious connotation of this term that is intended, but rather the holistic view, as was also cultivated in historical studios of the past.

Regardless of the religious connotation, the pastoral idea of multiple coding (Bucci 1997) describes the field of tension in education between verbal and non-verbal stimuli. The leading idea is that in the area of implicit communication, the symbolic becomes effective and affects the subconscious. This emphasises the important role of dramatic art and staging, as was traditionally practised in religious contexts and – and this is the thesis – as is also used in traditional studios as a form of holistic education. As a result, the case study considered here raises the question of to what extent design teachers can use the three poles between the verbal, the symbolic and the unconscious in a didactically targeted manner in teaching–learning scenarios that are conveyed digitally.

In order to provide an empirical foundation, the proposed case study considers a number of interventions that were offered optionally and online during the 2020/2021 winter semester. During a first, quantitative phase, three question contexts were opened:

1. What changes do students see when looking back over the past year?
2. What interventions and ideas/stimuli from the teaching staff were helpful or hindering?
3. What affective dimensions were activated in this regard?

## Study Design

These question categories were asked in February 2021 to students in the "Design and Media" department at DIPLOMA University. Twelve students took part at the bachelor's and master's level. The answers that were submitted in writing were analysed for similarities in content. The resulting codes were managed and displayed in MaxQDA. Research was thus carried out in this way for content-related clusters in the verbal data.

Table 1. Categories of verbal data (phase 1) and their frequency distribution.

	Changes in self-image	Effective input from teachers	Affective influence of the input	TOTAL
Development internal to the curriculum	7	4	0	11
Positive self-image	9	1	0	10
Connection to the professional profile	0	7	2	9
Financial issues	5	2	2	9
Appreciation	0	6	1	7
Personalisation	0	7	0	7
Self-efficacy	1	6	0	7
Social learning	4	2	0	6
Space for experimentation	0	3	2	5
Humour	0	3	2	5
Doubt and crisis of meaning	0	3	1	4
Own decision	0	2	2	4
Leaving the comfort zone	0	0	3	3
Hierarchy-free working atmosphere	0	2	1	3
Teachers' self-disclosure	0	0	1	1
Own standards too high	0	0	1	1
Authentic interest on the part of the teacher	0	0	1	1
TOTAL	26	48	19	93

### Key Results of the First Phase

The verbal data from this **first phase** show the following key results:

1. General stimuli that are external to the specific curriculum in the introductory phase of the study positively change the way one sees oneself and others. This can be seen in the self-confidence category. Students tie this to a changed response from their environment. These developments are closely related to the social processes in the small groups.
2. In order to be able to experiment successfully, students work on perfectionism, which was perceived as a hindrance. The prerequisite for this is the knowledge that one has to go one's own way and not that of the teacher.
3. Discussions result in a systemic expansion to include subject-specific questions. When teachers create an empathetic closeness to the learners, credibility is created. This results in self-efficacy in artistic development. The systemic change of perspective is often related to the effect of humour. Students particularly appreciate this when the teachers authentically identify with the educational issue at hand. This applies, in particular, to the relevance for applying the learning content.
4. The unsettling openness in conversations during the introductory phase of the course turns into a helpful appreciation of one's own development. Teachers and fellow students thereby become a part of this "internal" and "external" development within and outside of the curriculum.

These causal relationships of design education activities verify existing findings. This makes them the starting point for an in-depth study during a second, qualitative phase of the case study. Selected aspects of the verbal, the symbolic and the unconscious were questioned here in depth. This survey, which took the form of in-depth interviews, is interested in the subject-specific and educational effects of these interventions.

### Key Results of the Second Phase

In the **second phase**, two test subjects from the first sample were specifically spoken to. Both test subjects are studying design degree programmes. **Subject 1** is a student in the master's programme (4th semester, aged 32 years). At the time of gathering information, this subject had already completed twelve semesters of online study. Subject 2 is a student in the bachelor's programme (5th semester, aged 38 years). The in-depth interviews were initiated with the following narrative stimulus:

*"My research interest is interactions in the hybrid space. What interactions are there and how are they effective? They are probably subject-specific things, but there are also things that are unconscious, that are informal, that are between the lines." (In-depth interview 2, item 4)*

In these conversations, the symbolic interactions in the conversations of the hybrid studio were deepened. This is because the question of how an effective level of openness between learners and teachers can be established promises to yield the greatest gain in knowledge for design education in digital learning spaces. This question category focused on how an efficient way of dealing with verbal, symbolic and unconscious communication can be achieved from the student's point of view.

By means of interviews, the stimuli from teachers are sought that are effective for development in digital learning spaces. By focusing on the interventions in design education that are actually effective, work carried out in this field promises to uncover strategies that are particularly effective in a virtual framework. As already stated in the "hierarchy-free working atmosphere" category, communication with the individual is the starting point for a lively learning relationship:

*"With [person], (it was) the constant reference to 'how we (as designers) work'. (It went) from 'we' to 'me'. At some point, I then had the sensation of 'oh, he's talking to me' – he wasn't talking to us as a group, but rather was talking to me" (in-depth interview 2, items 11–12)*

This personalisation of communication makes it possible to pass the responsibility for the learning process back to the individual. The learners understand that it is not about collective expectations in the sense of a learning path. A relationship thus builds up and this results in the first pivotal moment where this responsibility for one's own learning progress is laid down during the introductory phase of a seminar as a basis for learning through discovery:

*"For me, it's about, was I able to do what I wanted to do? Was I able to do what I thought was right? And can I then actually defend what I then do in the assignments?" (In-depth interview 2, item 19)*

Only when this autonomy of the part of the learner has been clarified is the basis established for independent development of learning content. In the process, teachers only provide elementary technical contexts of design as resources by means of subject-specific explanations and demonstrations. These principles are acquired during a phase of acquisition. During this phase, everyday experiences and explicit study activities become blurred:

*"This freedom to be able to do that all the time, including outside of my assignments in photographic design, and to develop oneself as a creative photographer opened my eyes. (I learned) to act, work and design as a student." (In-depth interview 2, item 30)*

In this respect, students' perception of space constitutes a continuum that results from their own actions. It is described as an "area, a form of surface that (can) be reached in various ways. To take up the example of the studio – one that arises and expands in the moment, but then also shrinks and closes" (depth interview 2, item 35). A first criterion for success can thus be derived, which is that teachers must make clear that one is responsible for one's own learning. Only by doing so in the necessary condition created for students to be able to gain mastery of creative activities beyond the already diffuse boundaries of an online degree course. In a further step of development, it then becomes possible to assess the subjective and relative performance of others. This is done through active participation in group and project meetings, which have a systemic function. These meetings are not about grading learning progress. Instead, they are a matter of confronting a

social group or the teacher with one's own development. They must instead be about socially reflecting on the development process. Precisely because this is not about a "model solution" (in-depth interview 2, item 31), learners can distinguish between personal and factual criticism:

*"I even had to turn off the camera in one lecture and cry. I took it personally. It wasn't until later that I understood that [the person] who made me so frustrated and angry at the time was actually encouraging and supporting me." (In-depth interview 1, item 4)*

This learning process through group discussions is the norm in traditional studios. At the same time, a transfer into the digital space has to be designed with special features that entail technological fragility of the interpersonal contact between those involved. It is a path that involves creative developments on the part of those involved and which is accompanied by crises and humiliations. As a result, one generates the skill to assess one own performance through internalised group discussions and to lead one's own creative development process:

*(It gave me the ability to) "assess myself, assess my own abilities as a student. To see: Okay, I have shortfalls here. These are shortfalls that I want to work on. These are shortfalls that I don't want to work on." (In-depth interview 2, item 63)*

When Looking at the first and second phases together, it becomes possible to determine which interventions, strategies and methods of teachers are particularly effective from the perspective of the learners:

*Table 2. Categories of the verbal data from the written survey (phase 1), their weighting and reference to classic examples from the in-depth interviews (phase 2).*

Categories from phase 1	Weight	Classic examples from the in-depth interviews in phase 2
Connection to the professional profile and development internal to the curriculum	20	She gives you a lot of freedom (...) but is always there when you call her. If you don't call her, then she's not. Like a guardian angel maybe. (In-depth interview 1, item 7)
Affective influence: positive self-image, doubts/ crisis of meaning, humour	19	I notice this by how emotions stir in me, be it joy, pride or frustration, for example. (In-depth interview 1, item 3)
Self-efficacy and own decision	11	You (become) ready to continue developing throughout your life. If a path (...) doesn't work, it doesn't mean that you can't get there. There is probably another way. (In-depth interview 2, item 53–54)
Opening up spaces for experimentation and social learning	11	[People] insist on requests to speak, which does not allow for anonymity. Some are very challenged by this. This promotes the relationship with one another. (In-depth interview 1, item 16)
Hierarchy-free working atmosphere and personalisation	10	With [person], it is the video messages that personally speak to me emotionally. It feels good to be treated as an individual. (In-depth interview 1, item 6)
Appreciation in the teaching–learning relationship, systemic mirroring	7	His authority and his human, non-judgmental manner make me gain a lot of confidence in his leadership and professional competence. (In-depth interview 1, item 9)

With the highest number of mentions by far, students rate the **connection to the professional profile** the highest. That makes sense – after all, the "internal" desire (as relates to the curriculum itself) to learn about the domain of design by studying is the real reason for a degree course that is mostly practised part-time. There is also help that is provided "outside of the study context" (in-depth interview 1, item 9), which blurs the boundaries of the degree course and general subject-specific coaching: in the online relationship, in terms of **emotions**, value is placed on the fact that the course "gives you freedom, offers support – including beyond the boundaries of the degree course – that teachers provide personalised care and thus create meaning" (in-

depth interview 1, item 12). In retrospect, it is also appreciated when teachers "contribute personal anecdotes" and use humour and provocation and addressing people authentically (cf. in-depth interview 1, item 4) to make this relationship multi-faceted. This way, "emotions of trust, joy and motivation" ([ibhttps://doi.org/10.21606/drs\\_lxd2021.](https://doi.org/10.21606/drs_lxd2021)) are aroused, which arise in particular through personalised video messages. It is made clear here that didactic stimuli are effective when they happen promptly and on informal platforms via messenger (in-depth interview 1, item 11).

It is clear here that the teacher not only acts on the basis of an advantage of skills internal to the curriculum, but also on the basis of **systemic sovereignty**. This is the only way for it to be made credible that the teacher is concerned with the process of development and not primarily with the result. Only then do the students gain autonomy and self-responsibility for their own development (in-depth interview 2, items 53–54). This seems to be a high requirement, especially in online replacement lessons that are geared towards efficiency. However, this systemic boundary is important in order to enable learning that is divorced from the studios, by means of personal responsibility. At the same time, this educational technique is probably the most valuable gain in knowledge for design education for the time after the pandemic.

One conceptual element here is that the teachers stand on a systemic boundary between thematic domains and the learners. When viewed in this way, the cultivation of relationships mediated via media gains particular importance through personalised address. In terms of method, this means using suitable experiments to allow design skills to be discovered. The learners need the courage to cross this systemic boundary. To do this, they need encouragement from an authentic teaching–learning relationship.

### Summary and Conclusion

The expansive learning within a project, i.e., the agile acquisition of required skills over the course of the project, provides the scope for this teaching–learning relationship. It is interesting that in the discussions the students pointed out the heterogeneity of different temperaments among the teachers as well as the effect of humour. Both criteria indicate the relevance of this systemic boundary between domain and project, of which the teacher is the gatekeeper.

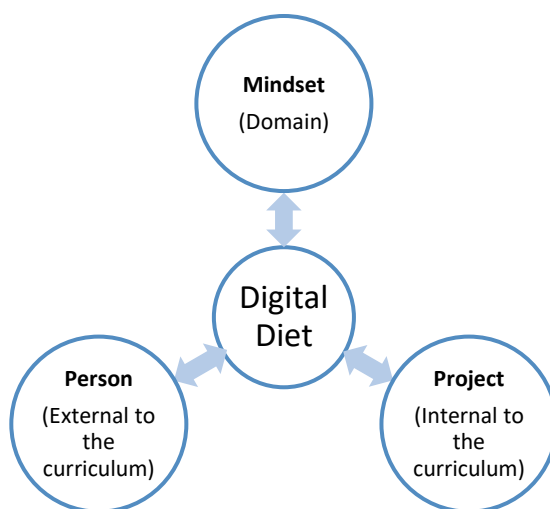


Figure 1. The cause-and-effect relationship of the "digital intellectual diet" for learners in the 2020 summer semester and 2020/2021 winter semester.

Aesthetic education in general is an essential domain for universities. Naturally, this is restricted in lockdown. It makes sense to diagnose general socialisation in the professional field as a need.

If this need is combined with the above-mentioned gatekeeper function, this results in a pastoral function on the part of the teacher: if the socialising effect of the complex learning space of a university with its studios is limited to digital channels, the "digital intellectual diet" must be curated with an even greater degree of responsibility. Because the interdependence of these stimuli precisely does not result from formalisation within official lectures, but rather from **serendipity**. On the one hand, these are the already identified processes of observational social learning (Lotz et al. 2019). The survey and the conversations during the two semesters during lockdown also show that the optional events and the informal interactions contribute to providing stimuli in creative development processes.

The following methodological approaches result for the pastoral idea of multiple coding (Bucci 1997):

Table 3. Summary of digital principles of care in the three dimensions according to Bucci 1997

Verbally coded stimuli	Non-verbally coded stimuli	Dramaturgical and holistic coding
Auditory lectures and talks	Visual contact through facial expressions and gestures	Ritualisation and rhythmisation
Written feedback	Passive feedback ("likes") and observations during the projects	Bodily stimuli, e.g., online gymnastics
Customised and personalised video messages	Expanding of boundaries through contact beyond the degree course	Unconsciously effective symbols

The key moments and episodes identified therein prove that these discoveries must not be a mere accessory in digital learning cultures. The "digital intellectual diet" of a university should be a consciously curated and carefully produced educational offering on a voluntary basis. The three dimensions of pastoral care can represent a blueprint for achieving an academic holistic approach in the arts in the digital world.

## References

- Bucci, W. (1997). *Psychoanalysis and Cognitive Science: A Multiple Code Theory*. New York, Guilford Press.
- Gurung, R., Chick, N., Haynie, A. (Eds.) (2009). *Exploring Signature Pedagogies. Approaches to Teaching Disciplinary Habits of Mind*. Sterling, Stylus.
- Lanig, A. (2019). *Virtualisierte Fernlehre in gestalterischen Fachbereichen* ("Virtualised distance learning in design departments"). [Dissertation], University of Vechta.
- Lotz, N., Derek, J. & Holden, G. (2019). *OpenDesignStudio: Die Entwicklung des virtuellen Studios über ein Jahrzehnt* ("OpenDesignStudio: The development of the virtual studio over a decade"). In N. A. G. Z. Börekçi, D. Ö. Koçyıldırım, F. Korkut, & D. Jones (Eds.), *Proceedings of DRS Learn X Design 2019: Insider Knowledge. Fifth International Conference for Design Education Researchers 9–12 July 2019, Middle East Technical University Ankara, Turkey*. (pp. 267–280). METU Department of Industrial Design.
- Sowa, H (2019). *Die Kunst und ihre Lehre: Fachsystematik – Bildungssinn – Didaktik* ("Art and its teaching: Subject systematics – meaning in education – didactics"). Munich, kopaed.
- Truninger, P. (2019). *Die Lehrpersonen als Coach. Beratung in kreativen und künstlerischen Prozessen*. ("Teachers as coaches. Advice in creative and artistic processes.") Munich, kopaed.
- Thoring, K. (2019). *Designing Creative Space: Eine systemische Sicht auf die Gestaltung von Arbeitsräumen und ihre Auswirkungen auf den kreativen Prozess*. ("Designing Creative Space: A Systemic View of the Design of Work Spaces and Their Effects on the Creative Process"). [Dissertation], Delft University of Technology.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge University Press.

### Andreas Ken Lanig

Professor at DIPLOMA University, Germany  
[andreas.lanig@diploma.de](mailto:andreas.lanig@diploma.de)

Prof. Dr. Andreas Lanig is a university lecturer for design, further educator and freelance graphic designer. He has a doctorate in virtualized distance learning in design disciplines.