#Decolonise!

Design educators reflecting on the call for the decolonisation of education

The Benefits of Incorporating a Decolonised Gaze for Design Education

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Abstract

Although calls to decolonise education can be seen as threats to replace existing curricula they can also be seen as an opportunity to scrutinise what is valued in design education and how this might be impacted by calls to decolonise. In this paper, which makes use of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) (Maton 2010a, 2014) to identify the underlying knowledge-knower structure of graphic design assessment, the significance of a specialist gaze for disciplines such as design is outlined. The gaze (Maton 2014) provides knowers with access to the valued knowledge of the discipline and in disciplines such as graphic design is essential to being able to recognise good and bad design and to make the decisions required in the design process.

As design education and the valued knowledge and knower are influenced by factors outside of academia including technology, industry, practice and national education initiatives such as the internationalisation of curricula, design education is particularly vulnerable and open to change. This openness and the challenges of designing for complex problems in today's world, encourage the cultivation of multiple gazes that value different forms and sources of knowledge, knowing, doing and being. This paper therefore presents the decolonised gaze as a gaze with the potential to strengthen the design knower in acquiring "multicentric ways of knowing/doing/being" (Dei 2013, p. 1) which better equip them to create designs that address complex real-world problems and contribute to positive social change.

Keywords:

Graphic design, Legitimation Code Theory, decolonisation, knowledge, gaze, assessment

Introduction

The decolonisation of education is a complex and charged topic which questions the very nature of higher education, universities, curricula, pedagogy and assessment. This paper offers a tentative first step in contributing towards the decolonisation of design education by providing a description of the existing underlying knowledge-knower structures found in graphic design education and how these structures relate to the potentiality for decolonisation. The approach taken has a narrow focus but is necessary because "as long as our everyday expectations, embedded as they are with unexamined assumptions, are normalised, it can be argued that we are implicated in the reproduction of class divides" (Boughey & McKenna 2016, p. 4). The aim of this paper is therefore to explicate the underlying structures of what is valued in graphic design assessment in order to consider how such structures might be impacted by calls to decolonise. This provides a basis for suggesting how decolonisation might contribute to design education.

The paper is informed by a case study in which Legitimation Code Theory (LCT), a conceptual framework devised by Karl Maton (2010a, 2014), was used to frame and analyse data from the graphic design assessment practice at one Private Higher Education Institution. The data included a lecturer survey, study guide documents, observation of internal panel marking and external moderation sessions on multiple campuses at both the formative and summative assessment stages, as well as a member check focus group. The case study was limited to the assessment of discipline-specific Graphic Design Studio 1, 2 and 3 and Web Design 3 subjects as part of a Bachelors Degree in Graphic Design (Giloi 2016). Although LCT expands on concepts proposed by Bernstein (1986, 1999) and Bourdieu (1990, 1995) and thus emerges from the Global North, the interpretation of data using LCT makes the unseen yet active structures that create phenomena more open to critique and consideration. Thus, through revealing the valued disciplinary knowledge and knower, and who may make the claims that define success and achievement in graphic design, the underlying structure of the discipline is made more explicit (Giloi 2016). Although the research was limited to the field of graphic design assessment, the approach and findings may inform the broader field of design education.

In the following four sections, I firstly, consider how the graphic design curriculum is influenced by contexts outside of the academy. These contexts influence the selection of knowledge to be used and valued in design education and contribute to the external logic, or what Muller (2008) refers to as the 'contextual coherence' of the discipline. In the second section, I outline the Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) dimension of Specialisation (Maton 2014) which provides the language of description and conceptual tools used to identify the specialist knowledge and knower valued in the case study of graphic design assessment. The third section considers the decolonised gaze, and in the fourth section, I propose certain benefits that a decolonised gaze might offer design education.

The construction of graphic design curricula

As vocations or professions, design disciplines align with Bernstein's (1996) description of 'regions'. A region is where knowledge is recontextualised for use in education. Here existing and new knowledge is selected and adapted for use in curricula, textbooks and the like (Bernstein 1986, 1996). Regions face inwardly to disciplinary knowledge and outwardly to the influences of the vocation or profession (Bernstein 1996). These two sides impact on the knowledge selected and recontextualised for use in curricula and the further selection that occurs when knowledge is reproduced in the classroom and assessment (Bernstein 1986, 1996). Although there is a growing body of graphic design knowledge, it is recognised that graphic design, along with most forms of design, draws knowledge from multiple sources and disciplines (Buchanan 1992; Christiaans and Venselaar 2005; Feast 2013; Popovic 2007).

For instance, in graphic design lecturers might select knowledge from disciplines such as Psychology, or from other regions such as Marketing and Business Studies.

The more direct outside influences on the graphic design region include practice, technology and industry (Giloi 2016). The practice of design along with its strong ties to technology and industry shape the inclusion and exclusion of certain knowledge. Broader influences on Higher Education in South Africa include calls to ensure graduate employability as a contribution to the economy (Griesel & Parker 2009) and more recent proposals that the curriculum be globalised or internationalised (Department of Higher Education and Training 2017). National proposals such as these ultimately impact on the knowledge selected for use in education.

Because disciplines such as graphic design do not have a body of knowledge that is highly codified, well-defined and agreed on (Armstrong 2009; Margolin 2010), they lack what Muller (2008, p. 21) refers to as "conceptual coherence". Instead, the outside context or 'real world' dominates and provides the "contextual coherence" for the discipline. All disciplines have elements of both conceptual and contextual coherence but are dominated by one or the other (Muller 2008). Problem-solving, derived from practice and industry, might be seen to provide the contextual coherence for graphic design (Giloi 2016). This is illustrated by the problem-based (Ellmers & Foley 2007) or project-based (Lee 2009) approaches to pedagogy, and the use of authentic assessment, such as briefs that mimic those found in industry. Design education aims to equip students with the decision-making capacity to draw on a range of appropriate knowledge(s) at each stage of the design process, this being necessary to identify complex design problems and produce viable solutions that are often positioned within real world scenarios (Giloi 2016; Steyn 2012). In addition, it is common practice in summative design assessments to include industry practitioners as external moderators who are tasked with evaluating final portfolios. The approach to pedagogy and assessment reflects the significance of the industry's influence on design as a region.

As indicated previously, graphic design derives its contextual coherence from outside influences, and these influences change over time. Initially, graphic designers dealt primarily with image and text in printed form; now graphic design includes moving images and designs are built and viewed on digital sites (Harland 2007). Technology, such as computers and software, have altered the knowledge that designers need, how they work and what skills they need to acquire. Furthermore, Dorst (2008, p. 7) indicates that the design industry transforms itself not only in response to technological advances but to meet the demands of society, the economy, global contexts, sustainability and changing value systems. These exterior influences contribute to the evolving contextual coherence of the discipline which impacts what is included and valued in design education. With rapid change comes the expectation that design graduates should have the knowledge, skills and attributes to function within diverse and changing contexts and that education should be "flexible and responsive" (Triggs 2011, p. 125).

In a region such as graphic design, practice, technology and industry have significant influence (Giloi 2016), however, Clegg (2016, p. 458) suggests that we need to look beyond the traditional influencers on regions to consider "geo-political and social movement dimensions". This is particularly relevant in disciplines such as design that have a largely 'hidden curriculum' (Morgan 2011; Rowe 2007) selected by a dominant social group (Heleta 2016). To this end, in the following section, I will briefly describe LCT(Specialisation) and how the theory bridges the divide between epistemic and social.

Legitimation Code Theory and the dimension of Specialisation

Design disciplines, as with all disciplines, have their own procedures and ways of doing, a pool of knowledge that they draw from and their own definition of success or status. Maton

(2004, 2014, 2016) offers Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) as a theory, language of legitimation and conceptual tool which accommodates both the object of the discipline, that is knowledge and its related procedures, and the subject, or knower and their disposition. The LCT dimension of Specialisation enables a discipline or practice to be analysed in terms of epistemic relations (ER) and social relations (SR) (Maton 2004, 2014).

In graphic design the principles of design, technique and methods, industry practices, sustainability and multidisciplinary knowledge are included in epistemic relations (Giloi 2016; Giloi & Belluigi 2017). Social relations appear in graphic design as aesthetics, concepts, the design process, professional and/or scholarly behaviour and the ability to integrate "concept, aesthetic, technique and function for effective communication" (Giloi & Belluigi 2017, p. 13). Bernstein's (1996) concepts of classification and framing assist with identifying the relative strength and weakness of epistemic relations and social relations (Maton 2004, 2014) in order to gauge and plot these as illustrated in Figure 1. The limits of this paper do not allow for detail, but in graphic design epistemic relations are relatively weak (ER-) primarily because the discipline has no agreed on, cohesive and explicit body of knowledge. In graphic design, social relations are more significant and stronger (SR+) as students at the higher levels of study have a large amount of control over what they learn and when they learn it, framing becomes weaker demanding a specialist design disposition of the student. In order to participate in such a discipline, the student as a specialist knower must cultivate a valued disposition or gaze (Maton 2014). I will discuss the gaze in more detail later in this paper.
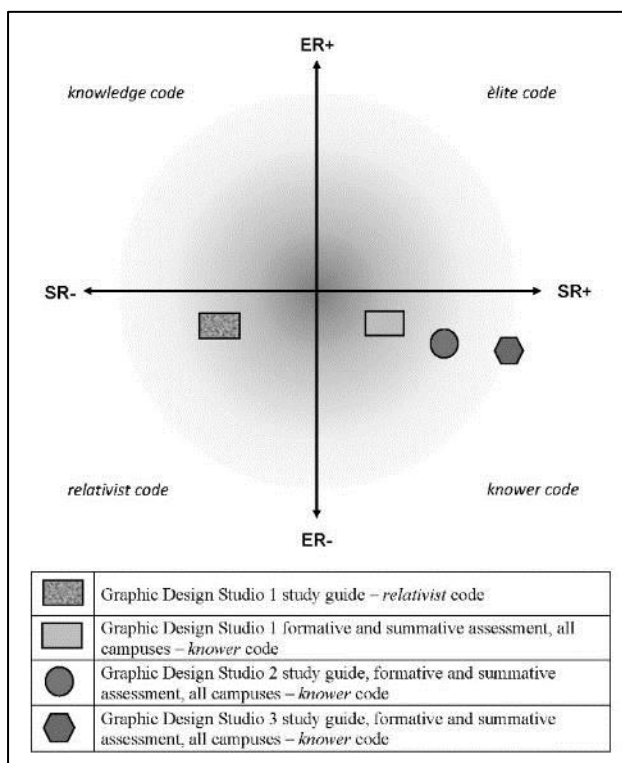

Figure 1 Identifying the relationship of specialist codes in undergraduate graphic design (Giloi & Belluigi 2017, p. 16)

By considering disciplines as combinations of epistemic relations and social relations and their relative strength and weakness, knowledge-knower codes categorised as: *knowledge, knower, elite* and *relativist codes* can be identified (Maton 2014). In Carvalho's (2010) research she establishes that Fashion design demonstrates a *knower code* (ER-, SR+), Architecture an *elite code* (ER+, SR+) and Engineering a *knowledge code* (ER+, SR+). In the case study that this paper is based on, and illustrated in Figure 1, what is valued in graphic design assessment is predominately a *knower code* (ER-, SR+) (Giloi 2016). The valuing of a

knower code in graphic design is likewise identified by Clarence-Fincham and Naidoo (2013) in an analysis of graphic design curriculum and lecturer's perceptions.

Codes may shift at different stages of education and between different fields of design. The knower code valued in graphic design assessment varied in strength across the three years of study. Figure 1 illustrates that at second- and third-year levels the courseware indicated the valuing of a knower code (ER-, SR+) and this matched what assessors and moderators valued. However, in analysing the first-year courseware, which included learning outcomes and assessment criteria, a relativist code (ER-, SR-) was identified. These shifts and clashes have significance in education (Maton 2014) as they are unseen and therefore not made explicit (Giloi 2016).

The valued gaze

In knower code disciplines students must develop a gaze in order to recognise what is "authentic" to the discipline (Bernstein 1996, p. 164). The valued gaze, which is often tacit, provides insight into the discipline and its rules of engagement and success (Luckett 2012). A specialist gaze in design and design education enables the designer to describe, discuss and debate design, recognise good and bad design and is equally essential for making decisions during the design process (Giloi 2016).

Maton (2010b) relates the strength of the gaze to how difficult it is to acquire. He defines four forms of gaze: born, social, cultivated and trained. The strongest and most inaccessible gaze is the born gaze (Maton 2010, 2014). If it is believed that designers must possess an innate creativity or "God-given talent" (Rand 1987, p. 65) this would require a born gaze. A social gaze is a slightly weaker form of the gaze and is "determined by their social category, such as standpoint theories based on social class or on race, gender and sexuality" (Maton 2010b, p. 166). The social gaze can therefore only be possessed by certain groups of people. Other weaker forms of the gaze include a cultivated gaze and trained gaze. The cultivated gaze is acquired through education which requires immersion in practice and exposure to recognised knowers (Maton 2014). This educational approach requires students to spend extended time in practice under the instruction of experts, which aligns with traditional and existing forms of design instruction (Logan 2006; Manchado-Perez, Berges-Muro & Lopez-Fornies 2014). The aim of such forms of education is to cultivate a certain type of knower who is initiated "into ways of knowing rather than explicit states of knowledge" (Maton 2010b, p. 171). In other words, in design a specialist gaze becomes part of the professional identity. The trained gaze can be acquired by almost anyone and is, therefore, the weakest and easiest to acquire (Maton 2014).
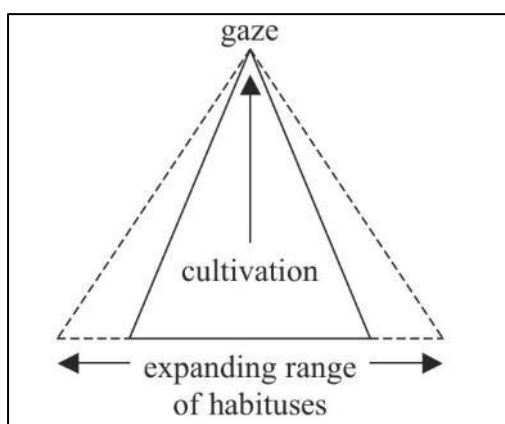

Figure 2 Growth of hierarchical knower structure with a cultivated gaze (Maton 2014, p. 99)

As discussed above, Maton (2014) indicates that in knower structures the valued gaze can be cultivated through education. He goes on to describes how the ideal knower develops the valued gaze through the integration and inclusion of many habituses into the smallest number of gazes (2010, 2014). The Bordieuan 'habitus' is defined as "our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being. It captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways" (Maton 2008b, p. 52). As illustrated in Figure 2 Maton (2014) represents the progression of integrating habituses to become the ideal knower as a hierarchical knower structure. In this structure, many knowers situated at the base of the triangle cultivate dispositions and gazes in order to ultimately be recognised as an ideal knower at the apex of the triangle. The valued gaze builds on the existing canon of what was valued before, rather than replacing the previous canon. A broad range of knowers can cultivate the ideal gaze, even though it is socially and historically situated (Maton 2010b). Using theories such as LCT makes the gaze, which is often tacit, more visible and therefore in education it may become more accessible (Maton 2014).

Graphic design education often relies on students spending extended time in practice where they are exposed to experts or knowers who already possess the valued disposition and gaze. These knowers may be fellow students, design lecturers or designers encountered in industry settings during work integrated learning opportunities. The valued graphic design gaze is thus a gaze that can be cultivated (Giloi & Belluigi 2017). As the cultivated gaze builds on previous examples and practices, it may be more, or less accessible to individuals and groups from different cultural backgrounds. Where the gaze is linked to a narrow Eurocentric canon, some students may "experience a cultural system and curriculum that devalues and negates their home languages, cultures, histories and identities – thus positioning them as culturally deficient" (Luckett 2016). Access to the gaze and becoming a knower, therefore, has significance for design education, not only in terms of inclusion and exclusion, but in providing the opportunity to challenge and influence the valued code and gaze (Giloi 2016, p. 220).

The decolonised gaze

In the previous section, I established that the current valued graphic design gaze is a cultivated gaze that can be acquired through education. However, given the various influences on design education, there is ongoing competition over defining the valued knowledge and gaze and what defines good design, or a good designer, and who may make these claims (Dong, Maton & Carvalho 2014). The calls to decolonise education present additional claims regarding what and who should be valued in design education. These claims encompass demands to consider "cultural assets [that] are not recognised or valued as 'capital' by the academy" (Luckett & Shay 2017, p. 4).

As calls to decolonise education vary in strength they can be considered to communicate the valuing of either a social or a cultivated gaze. The range of stances on decolonisation and the Africanisation of the curricula are reflected in Jansen's (2017) definition of three approaches used in articles that make up the book *Africanising the Curriculum*. He identifies these as calls for replacement, addition and re-centring of the curriculum (Jansen 2017). Stances that demand the replacement of Eurocentric curricula with for instance an Africanised curriculum reflect a social gaze, as the decisions on what knowledge is valued and selected for use rests with a social group; Africans who have experienced the violence of colonisation. However, if decolonisation calls for the imposition of a social gaze, the danger of creating another "monoculture education" (Morrow 2007, p. 193) exists. The decolonised gaze, as a social gaze, would have limited power to influence, change and build the discipline, as exclusion means that some are "denied access to the means of creation and circulation of symbolic products and their experiences often excluded from the shared library" (Maton 2010b, p.

171). Those who are not Africans who have not experienced the violence of colonisation cannot be included in the hierarchical knower structure represented in Figure 2.

Although addition may be seen as an option, where "African knowledge should simply be added onto what already exists" (Jansen 2017, p. 1) it does not accommodate calls for the pluralisation of knowledge (Fataar and Kruger 2017) or the recognition of different forms of knowledge and ways of knowing and doing. Re-centring provides an accommodative approach (Jansen 2017) demonstrated in calls "for knowledge pluralisation, incorporation of the complex ways of knowing of subaltern and all previously excluded groups, in other words, an expansion and complete overhaul of the Western knowledge canon" (Fataar & Kruger 2017). Re-centring does not "require removing white men and women, both foreign and local, from the curriculum. However, they cannot be seen as the all-knowing and all-important canon upon which the human knowledge rests and through which white and Western domination is maintained" (Heleta 2016). Thus, re-centring would require the ideal design knower to cultivate an expanded gaze that includes a greater range of knowers and their habituses and to acknowledge that no one form of knowledge or canon is more powerful than another. In this light decolonisation as a cultivated gaze

> originates with the experiences of particular subordinated or marginal groups and the legitimation of their voice and the view that society is unjust; but it is not exclusive to people positioned in these categories. Any knower can learn to see social reality from the standpoint of the oppressed, provided they adopt a certain normative and empathetic position. But the novice knower also needs to be initiated into the specialised vocabulary and theory of diversity literacy; there are particular ways of knowing as well as particular sensibilities and dispositions (Luckett 2012, p. 15).

If a decolonised gaze is seen as a gaze that values different forms of knowledge, ways of doing, being and knowing that have been ignored or devalued in the past and that all students would benefit from understanding that no "one's own knowledge system is superior and thus sufficient for complex living" (Fataar & Kruger 2017), then acquiring such a gaze may better equip the ideal knower in dealing with our complex world, and as a designer, designing in and for this complex world.

Potential benefits of a decolonised design gaze

A cultivated specialist gaze is necessary for designers to integrate different forms of knowledge from a range of disciplines in order to address complex problems (Giloi 2016). In the design process, designers can seldom only focus on aesthetics or commercial considerations, they must consider ethical and moral obligations as well (Akama 2012; Hernández 2013). The responsiveness of decision making required during the design process speaks to Santos's (2009) challenge to the tunnel vision of Western scientific knowledge and a narrow positivist view of knowing, which has limited power to address complex problems. Complex problems positioned in divergent contexts require multiple ways of knowing that access multidisciplinary sources of knowledge as the problem "determine[s] the ways of knowing" (Santos 2009, p. 117).

With a decolonised gaze as an integral part of being an ideal design knower, the designer or design student can access a range of knowledge(s) and ways of doing and apply these in a range of contexts. Designers are increasingly being challenged with what are referred to as 'wicked problems' (Rittel & Webber 1973). These problems and the even larger "strong questions" that require "strong answers" (Santos 2009) cannot be approached using only one paradigm, procedure, form of knowledge or one group's experience and way of knowing. In the case of design education, students would have to cultivate the dispositions and gazes that allow them to work within these complicated and ill-defined scenarios and to design for

and with groups who have different experiences to their own. In adopting a decolonised gaze, design students would not only gain a better understanding of diverse experiences and perspectives, but would gain access to multiple forms of knowledge, knowing and ways of doing.

How this might be achieved is not in the scope of this document, however part of the process of acquiring a decolonised gaze might require students to cultivate empathy and compassion qualities that are already receiving attention in the design discourse (Akama 2012; Kerkos 2016; Rojas 2013). In decolonising design education curriculum, pedagogy and assessment would all need to be addressed, as what is valued in one does not always carry through into the others. If assessment focuses on "narrow, highly competitive, individualised cognitive performances, framed in hegemonic discourses" (Luckett & Shay 2017, p. 11) it would negate changes to the curriculum. It might be more advantageous for assessments to ask 'strong questions' (Santos, 2009) which would require multiple ways of knowing. With such an approach come challenges to pre-define, evidence and measure the cultivation of the valued gaze and the transformation of the knower (Giloi 2016). However, progress in decolonising design education could only be made when all three areas of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are addressed.

Conclusion

Design and those disciplines categorised as knower codes offer opportunities for decolonisation. In identifying underlying knowledge-knowers structures and the specialist gaze, assumptions regarding curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are made more explicit. As a starting point, this presents a way of viewing design education as a form of education aimed at the cultivation of a valued gaze which provides students access to knowledge. The expansion of the valued gaze to incorporate diverse and previously unrepresented knowers may provide the opportunity of widening access and success, as well as providing students access to multiple forms of knowledge. By acknowledging that no one form of knowledge is superior to another, what becomes valuable is for the ideal knower to be able to use multiple forms of knowledge and ways of doing that are appropriate and effective in a context. A decolonised gaze therefore strengthens design education in providing students with access to working with multiple sources of knowledge and ways of knowing, doing and being.

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