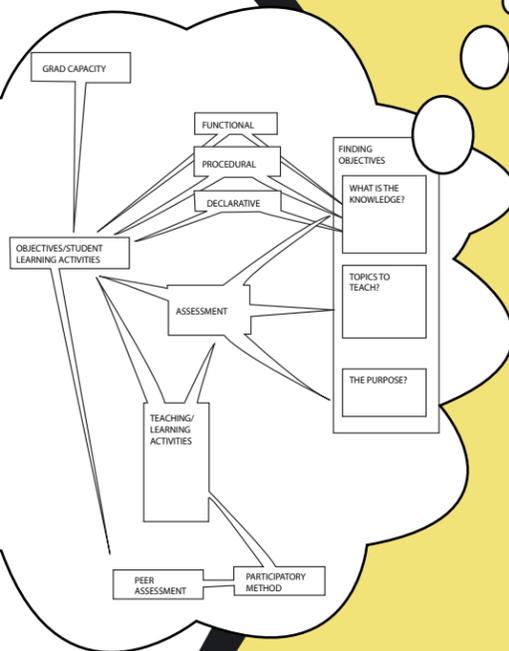


EMPLOYING GRAPHIC LITERACY: FACILITATING PEDAGOGICAL AWARENESS IN GRAPHIC DESIGN TEACHING

Graphic design education has been left behind. It has not kept up with the advances of pedagogical theory simply because education has been conditioned towards the production of applied outcomes and the visual language. In consequence, teachers are finding it difficult to encourage processed enquiries and deep learning approaches in the classroom. (Brew 1995) Many teachers are unaware of the theoretical dialogue necessary in teaching and the principles that can lend towards a research-learning environment. (Biggs 2003) It could be time to take our skills as excellent visual communicators and use them to help the design education system. Graphic literacy could be the answer.

The frameworks established by educational theorists have uncovered how the awareness of surface and deep approaches in learning can help educators structure their learning activities. These activities help stimulate high cognitive thinking throughout the learning process. (Ramsden, 2003) Principles such as the alignment of objectives with assessment, the structuring teaching and learning activities and student-led learning have been available for some time now but are rarely reflected upon deeply in the classroom. Pedagogical texts available are quite often written in a research language not commonly used in design education making the knowledge quite inaccessible to many teachers. Throughout its history graphic design has 'missed the pedagogical boat' when it comes to teaching theory but it has excelled in its communicative visual language. These inherent design skills could be a better way to communicate to educators the necessary pedagogical theory to be used in the classroom.



Recent studies have found that visuals in teaching result in a greater degree of learning. (Stokes 2001) Stokes also states that "visualization helps make sense of the data that may have seemed previously unintelligible." Many disciplines especially in the social sciences have found the use of the graphic language to communicate complex information a method that increases the facilitation of learning.



McCloud, Scott *Understanding Comics*, 1993

Even business has seen the value of the graphic language. *Johnny Bunko* an online business and career guide in Manga format has had great reviews. Author Daniel Pink describes the format as quickly assessable and a method of visual literacy that captures the attention of the audience immediately at the same time communicating strategic theories otherwise lost by its complex formation. (Pink 2008)



Pink, Daniel, H. *Johnny Bunko*, 2008

Comic books and graphic novels have started to become a mainstay in the libraries and some tertiary teaching methods because they promote a multimodal literacy (text and image). (Jacobs 2008) Scott McCloud's book, *Understanding Comics* is also a required text in some first year communication design programs. This literacy encourages a critical engagement of the text and creates a highly cognitive learning environment. (Yannicopoulou 2004)

Comics have paved their way through history from being an outcast and labelled as detrimental to learning towards a tool that encourages deep learning. Scott McCloud, states that cartoons resemble our non-visual self-awareness, so we inherently identify with them, whereas we react to a more realistically drawn character as being apart, other from ourselves. He says that cartoons are conceptually closer to words than realistic portrayals are, and therefore words and cartoons are closer to a 'unified language'.

Using comics as a graphic literacy to engage educators in an awareness of pedagogical principles may be a logical step in the development of graphic design education. The comic may allow the flexibility needed in the hypothesizing of various teaching and learning scenarios that tie in directly with key pedagogical literature. Through the visual sequencing, and developed narratives they also create a familiarity with educators and encourage deep teaching (Biggs 2003) approaches. Gene Yang's online guide (*Comics in Education*) embodies a thinking that is typical of many educators who advocate the use of comics. Yang claims that the educational strength of comics is that they are motivating, visual, permanent, intermediately and popular. Some educators feel that the use of comics as merely a stepping-stone to the acquisition of other higher skills is limited. (Jacobs 2003)

Comics and graphic novels provide a framework for the facilitation of multiple mode literacy, which can be used as a tool in teaching to engage students and teachers with the skills necessary to understand systems of knowledge. (Jacobs 2003) They also provide teachers with an environment to explore 'test' various teaching methods, principles, theories and ideas through a narrative re-enactment of their own teaching experiences. Not only can they be used as a tool to engage educators using a literacy common in their practice but also may be used to create reflective space where teachers understand their own perceptions and conceptions of the learning environment.

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