

Lecturers' Understanding of Integrating Social Responsibility Dimensions Into Graphic Design Curriculum

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Abstract

Integration of social responsibility dimensions into graphic design curriculum has received increasing attention nowadays, and that is due to exclusive impacts designers have in society. Despite this, precise understanding among lecturers of integrating social responsibility pertaining to societal, environmental, and cultural dimensions into graphic design curriculum, specifically in the Malaysian context is inconclusive. In this qualitative study, 3 lecturers from 3 private colleges in Malaysia shed some light on their understanding of social responsibility dimensions with regards to integrating these dimensions into the graphic design curriculum. Results indicate that all lecturers have a sufficient but diverse understanding of the social responsibility dimensions. However, despite their planning of meaningful content and pedagogical processes for the graphic design courses, no specifically related formal goals are integrated into the curriculum. The results, therefore, suggest that more precise definitions of each social responsibility dimension needs to be integrated into graphic design curriculum, specifically in the curriculum purposes, content, pedagogical processes, and assessment methods.

Key words: Social Responsibility Dimensions, Societal Dimension, Environmental Dimension, Cultural Dimension, Graphic Design Curriculum.

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Introduction

Due to the advancement of digital technology, global communication trends have become more sophisticated. Coupled with the modern idea of progress, such trends are incessantly affecting human greed, causing an affluent consumer culture, financial and economic crises, poverty and inequality, climate change, cultural decline, and environmental degradation (Pavlova, 2013). Calls for envisioning 'education' for sustainable development (SD) and for integrating inherent moral and ethical visions into the education systems are so intensive, that educators are compelled to not only question if curriculum is effective but to ask, is it moral? (Joseph, 2011, p. 11). The case of graphic design (GD) education and curriculum is not exempted. Recently, thus, integration of social responsibility dimensions (SRDs) into graphic design curriculum (GDC) has received increasing attention.

There is an immense body of growing literature on the relationship between GD practices and SR (Berman, 2009; Heller and Vienne, 2003; Frascara, 1997; McCoy, 1994; Mononutu, 2010). For example, designing for social change (Shea, 2012), integration of SR into GDC (Costandius & Rosochacki, 2012; Vessella & McKay, 2011), using GD education to enhance the socially responsible positions of GD profession (AIGA, 2014; ICOGRADA, 2011; Social Impact Design Summit, 2012), and so forth. This indicates to the concerns of that the new global community about developing creative and sustainable solutions while meeting the advertising demands of new global marketplace. However, there is a lack of such studies as conducted within the context of Malaysia. The present study, therefore, investigated the Malaysian context in terms of GD lecturers' understanding of the SRDs, and practices in integrating these dimensions into the GDC.

Literature Review

Social Responsibility and Graphic Design Education

Social responsibility (SR) is about every individual taking accountability of their decisions and actions to the planet, its people, and the environment (Vesselle & Mckay, 2011). Different authors have interpreted SR in GD differently. Cranmer and Zappaterra (2004) refer to it as the acts of benevolence or goodwill by participating in pro-bono projects. More recently, Bernard (2009) views SR in GD as the creation of permanent, effective, integrated GD solutions. According to Gamman and Thorpe (2006), “the ethically motivated nature of our [graphic designers’] work... address [es] and drive[s] social issues, and include[s] as part of its objectives, the desire to bring about social change” (p. 732). In other words, a socially responsible design goes beyond the typical definitions and functions of GD from the commercial standpoint. It explores the alternative design solutions to positively improve people’s lives, especially the vulnerable and marginalized (Social Impact Design Summit, 2012). Many issues, for example, the issue of ecological balance between human and the natural environment has been voiced up as an issue of concern more often nowadays. This environmental challenge calls for a more ethical design practices that include the use of sustainable design materials, methods, and outcomes (American Institute of Graphic Arts [AIGA], 2014; The International Council of Graphic Design Association [ICOGARDA], 2011; Thorpe, 2006).

In other words, the very nature of GD is social. Graphic design practitioners (GDPs) deal with different range of human related issues while performing their visual communication skills in various commercial aspects such as branding, marketing, advertising, promotion, and packaging. In that sense, as opined by Mononutu (2010), GDPs are key agents of social change because they have the ability to shape public information and influence people’s lifestyles. They are at the forefront of making the world a better place for living for all (Whiteley, 1993). Traditionally, the GD profession depends on set of design processes, competences, methods, and tools. However, its survival as a profession “may depend... more on responding strategically to contemporary changes, influenced by ethical and environmental issues as well as technological advancements” (Cassim, 2013, p. 190). Philosophically, this means to say that there is no neutral [graphic design], where relationships is “merely to objects”, rather than “the values attached to its application” (Hansen, 1997, p. 52).

When taking account of the educational processes in GD, the question of producing effective designers should focus on fostering the sense of SR with regards to its societal, environmental, and cultural dimensions. This is particularly important, because the contemporary looks for a transformative paradigm, where “future innovations will require intensive collaboration between stakeholders” (Gardien, Djajadiningrat, Hummels, and Brombacher, 2014, p. 119). In GD profession the stakeholders are the members of the society, and GDPs are out to serve them in an ethical, and sustainable manner (Gardien et al. 2014), where ethics denotes to the societal and cultural dimension and sustainability takes account of the environmental dimension of SR.

Societal Dimension

Societal dimension of SR with regards to GD is about designers improving, rather transforming the society (AIGA, 2014; Perkins, 2006). To Cipolla and Bartholo (2014) a social designer needs to indulge with his or her local problems, respond to the needs of the members in the community and maintain “dialogical relations” (p.87). Designers, therefore, are to use their skills and propose solutions in order “to improve both their own conditions and the conditions of those who live in the same context” (Cipolla & Bartholo 2014, 87). To Berman (2009) and Perkins (2006), it is about accelerating awareness, transmitting positive information, social values, and norms along with using persuasive design skills, instead of creating artificial needs and promoting unnecessary products through advertising and marketing messages that are manipulative or deceptive. In the context where designs are considered corporate assets, therefore, GDPs should utilize their skills and opportunities “[not to] just do good design, [but] do good” (Berman 2009, 156), in ethical and sustainable manner.

Cultural Dimension

Cultural dimension is about GDPs valuing the heritage, tradition, norms, languages and beliefs maintained by the society. Meyer (2008) believes that it is important for graphic designers to understand the existing culture and its manifestations in the society. It is their responsibility to first sieve their subjective view with the cultural aspects represented by the collective society (Meyer, 2008). Before publicizing a designed product, they must be alert of the topics, subject matters, content, messages, words, images and of different groups of audience. In order to avoid misunderstanding or conflicts, graphic designers need to “possess the broad range of knowledge and disposition, including cultural awareness and sensitivity, necessary to produce successful cross-cultural designs” (Cheung, 2012, p. 496).

Environmental Dimension

Environmental dimension, according to AIGA (2014), the oldest, largest, and most prestigious American professional design association is about “sustainable practices” such as graphic designers selecting environmental friendly paper, using ecological inks, disposable, non-toxic printing materials, reducing the use of harmful materials and excessive waste, encouraging the development of renewable energy, instilling environmental awareness to every design user, and considering recyclable design solutions (Thorpe 2006). It is about Deign = Business + Ethics, i.e., creating an environmental condition that can eventually support human wellbeing.

In short, designers in general and graphic designers in particular have exclusive impacts in transforming the society at the three dimensions through outreach and service to community (Pavlova, 2013). This is because, as relevantly pointed out by Berman (2009): “Over 95% of the designers who have ever lived are alive today. Together, we [graphic designers] have the power to define what professionalism in our field will be about: helping increase market share or helping repair the World” (p. 156).

Accordingly, variedly identified as human-centered design (HCD), “design with intent”, “human-centered principles”, “design for behavioral change”, “persuasion technologies”, and “interaction design” (Chmela-Jones, 2011, p. 1), SR has been integrated in GDC of international design institutions such as Woodbury University in California (Vessella & McKay, 2011) and Stellenbosch University in South Africa (Costandius & Rosochacki, 2012) for some time.

For example, Woodbury University has developed a comprehensive 4-year GDC. It aims to cultivate a sense of SR and sustainable practices among design students. According to this new GDC, every decision that designers make carries certain impacts on the planet. Hence, students need to understand these impacts and thus to accept their responsibility as designers. In order to encourage students to use their design skills responsibly, significant changes and reinforcements in both the scope and pedagogy of GDC are taken place. Below are the changes and reinforcements done by the curriculum team of Woodbury University in the process of integrating SR into their GDC (Vesselle & McKay, 2011):

- (1.) The concepts of SR are included in each GD course in a sequential level of competency: introduction, investigation, application, and practice;
- (2.) Related reading materials are specifically assigned, and research requirements for design projects are implemented;
- (3.) Weekly discussions are arranged. Students are active participants of these discussions. They are encouraged to analyze the related topics or social issues, internalize the information, integrate those information into their design process, and arrive at unique design solutions; and,
- (4.) Students are further stimulated to make a greater understanding of the SR of a graphic designer through different projects. The topics of the projects include: the physical, cultural, and social human factors that affect GD solutions; the principles of sustainable practices in relation to GD; the civic and ecological attitudes of graphic designers; and, the cultural awareness issues such as social justice and tolerance.

Furthermore, to assure and enhance the teaching-learning effectiveness and the performance of both lecturers and students, yearly evaluation is conducted. Through the evaluation, as Vesselle and

Mckay (2011) disclose, tremendous improvements are made in students' knowledge and sensitivity concerning social issues. More importantly, students are stimulated by the pedagogy and they start to take their initiatives to express their voices regarding some controversial issues. Apart from students, this innovative SR integrated GDC also contributes to the university community, campus environment, and the relationship between Woodbury University and the immediate outside community.

Indeed, the successful integration of SR into GDC of Woodbury University is encouraging. However, such meaningful integration does not happen by chance. Plenty of efforts are required in making appropriate adjustments in the curriculum in order to develop better understanding of students with regards to SRDs and its related issues. This study therefore investigated the socially and culturally diverse context of Malaysia to find out GD lecturers' understanding of the SRDs, and practices in integrating these dimensions into the GDC.

Graphic Design Curriculum in Malaysia

There are growing numbers of colleges and universities in Malaysia that offer GD related programs ranging from certificate, diploma, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctoral degree due to the popularity of GD as a profession nowadays. Their GDC, as required by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), have to combine both practical and theoretical aspects to expose students in a balanced approach to the theory and practice in GD. Both creation as well as analysis of the meaning and functions of the particular communication designs is parts of GDC. The courses as identified by MQA for the GD programs include advertising design, computer graphic, corporate identity, drawing and illustration, visual culture, media and time-based art, packaging design, principles of design, publication design and electronic pre-press, typography, and visual communication (2012, pp. 54-55). Various pedagogies such as Inquiry Learning Model (ILM), Problem Based Learning (PBL), and Integrative Learning (IL) are among the recommended by MQA (2012) emphasizing on developing and polishing the academic and professional knowledge, understanding, critical judgment and creative thinking skills, problem solving abilities, communication, teamwork, interpersonal skills, and active and reflective thinking skills of students so that they can undertake the challenges of the creative industry through these courses. Learning outcomes of each component of GD curricula are to be assessed for their distinctive objectives using both summative and formative techniques.

In Malaysia, in line with the aspiration of the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia (MOHE) to "produce individuals who are competitive and innovative with high moral values to meet the nation's aspirations" (MOHE, 2009), the MQA's Program Standards (2012) for Art and Design related programs, particularly include SR as one of the significant domains of intended learning outcomes. Among eight domains of intended learning outcomes identified by the MQA, domain 3 and 4 are particularly relevant to SRDs. They are domain (3): social skills and responsibilities; and domain (4): values, attitudes, and professionalism (MQA, 2012). Thus, they are significant for guiding the development and implementation of GD related program in Malaysia, in terms of their contents, pedagogies, and assessment methods. The general aims set by the MQA for the Art and Design Programs is to provide graduates with in-depth and broad-based knowledge, advanced visual communication skills, critical thinking skills, creativity and innovation in specialized and interdisciplinary areas of studies, contextual understanding, entrepreneurship and professionalism, which contribute towards the creative industry and the visual culture.

As argued by Ornstein and Hunkins (2004, p. 134), educators are responsible and cannot "opt out" of participating in formulation of the future of general society. With regards to GD, Findeli (1994) argues for the design curriculum to be more sensitive with SR issues, whereas McCoy (2003) stresses the need for GD lecturers to adjust their curricula, so that students are trained not to be passive economic servants who abandon their personal beliefs, but rather to unleash their potentials so that they can engage more meaningfully with the world around them. However, Cassim (2013) points out that it is challenging for contemporary GD lecturers to prepare and educate students to be "hands on", "hearts on", and "minds on" while responding to the widening and transforming nature of GD profession as well as changes in SR (p. 190). Apparently, thus, without a thorough understanding of the relationship between GD practice and SR, it is unlikely that the GD lecturers can integrate SRDs

into the GDC meaningfully as they organize and determine the curriculum purposes, contents, pedagogical processes, and assessment methods. In other words, as pointed out by Pavlova (2013), this should address the concerns for transformative education, where students would be assisted “to recognize the interconnectedness among universe, planet, natural environment, human community, and personal world through critical reflection, holistic approaches and relationships with others” (p. 735).

Thus, this study explored how lecturers of GDC understand the societal, environmental and cultural dimensions of SR and particularly, how they integrate SRDs into the four essential components of curriculum: purposes, contents, pedagogical processes, and assessment methods of the GDC.

Research Methodology

In this study, three lecturers associated with GD related programs from three private colleges in Malaysia were selected according to non-probability purposive homogeneous sampling technique (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2000) to find out how they integrate SRDs into the GDC. Homogeneous sampling aims to achieve a homogeneous sample whose units (e.g.: people, cases, and etc.) share the same or very similar characteristics or traits (e.g.: a group of people that are similar in terms of gender, background, occupation, and etc.) (Patton, 2010). The decision to choose them was made based on their professional teaching experiences and knowledge in relation to the GD practice (Table 1).

GD Lecturers	Gender	Teaching Experiences	Current Position	Course Taught
Informant-1	Female	10 Years	Senior Lecturer	Final Project (Multimedia)
Informant-2	Male	6 Years	Head of Department	Communicate with Words and Images
Informant-3	Male	3 Years	Part-time Lecturer	Packaging Design

Table 1. The profile of GD lecturers.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were reviewed for their clarity, understandability, and relatedness in achieving the main objectives of the study through expert judgment. Before conducting interview, respondents were presented with three situations or cases, each referring to any of the societal, environmental, and cultural concerns in Malaysia. According to the given situations or cases, the lecturers were required to provide their understanding of each SRD in relation to GD practices in Malaysia and how they integrate respective dimension into the GDC components.

Data from the interviews were then transcribed, and sent back to respondents. This according to Mero-Jaffe (2011) is done to validate the transcripts, preserve research ethics, and, empower the interviewees by permitting them control of what is written. Then, the transcribed data was coded, classified, categorized, and organized into specific themes according to their frequency of occurrence (Creswell, 2007).

Results of the study

Lecturers’ Understanding of Social Responsibility Dimensions in relation to Graphic Design Practices

After watching the TV commercial, all lecturers expressed their vivid appreciation for the creation of this video and thought that graphic designers have the power to influence people’s thinking and action through positive messages and social value. As Informant-3 said that:

For this kind of advertisement... the important aspects that worth looking into is the value and message that convey to the audience.

Further, Informant-1 also pointed out that:

This TV commercial had produced and delivered something that could really influence people and the society.

To all respondents, the means used to deliver this kind of messages and social values is the key. Informant-2 stated that this advertisement urged people to look into the problems of their family in a classy way:

I think that was the “winner” behind it. It really touch the heart of other people especially Chinese. This is really really really the biggest role of graphic designers in Malaysia.

All of them, therefore, asserted that designers should be more attentive to the societal problems. Designers are part of the society and they have a distinctive role to play to identify the problems attached to the society and use their expertise to propose creative and effective solutions. To Informant-2, the real strength of the video in the first case was “her ability of reading what was wrong or lacking in a typical group of people in Malaysia”.

But the struggle for balancing or integrating social values in the commercial advertising is a key concern in the Malaysian context. Both Informant-1 and Informant-3 share this concern. To Informant-1, it is challenging for the graphic designers to propose this kind of idea to commercial clients in Malaysia. Informant-3 is doubtful of Malaysian clients’ level of acceptance, as the commercial needs should come first. This is because, as he claimed:

...The design agency or studio is relying on the clients to survive.... Clients spend their money with reasons.

Informant-2, however, provided a quite different opinion. To him, there is no excuse for local designers to compromise this due to the commercial needs of the clients because it is all about the way in which the designers pitch for the job. He maintained that:

When was the turning point when the advertiser of the TV commercial finally agreed to give the agency with the opportunity to do this advertisement? How did the agency do it?

As for the environmental dimension, both Informant-1 and Informant-2 claimed that designers could use their visual communication skills to promote environmental awareness among public by creating effective campaign. Due to the problem-solving nature of GD profession, Informant-1 said that designers have to spread environment-related messages more creatively. Informant-2 listed waste management as example where he felt graphic designers have to play the biggest role. Nonetheless, he expressed his concerns that those very “ideal” designers who really care about the environmental issues in Malaysia are still very limited.

However, all three respondents agreed that graphic designers have to be more selective on the types of materials, papers, printing techniques, and inks to be used in their design because misusing the foregoing materials could multiply the environmental pollution. Informant-1 believed that designers can be friendlier to the nature and this does not mean to limit the possibilities of the design solutions for their clients.

“Client will be happier if you can help them to solve their problems based on your creative idea. Client pays for the idea not only for how many things you have designed...” Informant-1 claimed.

Regarding the cultural dimension, both Informant-1 and Informant-2 expressed their disagreement on its creation in Malaysia. Consequently, they shared the opinion that the messages were too direct and lacked cultural sensitivity. Informant-2 criticized that:

I think this video is really dumb... what is the thinking behind it? That is somebody to be too creative [but] just totally not sensitive to how our community really works.

Both of them thought that designers have to be careful with the words and images presented in their designs. Even if the messages and content may be intentionally good for the particular group of audience, the designers have to care about the “acceptance” of other people. “The acceptance must be there!” as claimed by Informant-1. Further, she pointed out that:

Our country is different and we must really care about it. When the acceptance of the video is not there, hatred and discomfort can be developed among the different ethnic groups of people in Malaysia.

Since the designers have the power to shape the perception and understanding of people in viewing particular issues, Informant-1 felt that designers have to create “more love than hatred”. Informant-2 vividly agreed on Agnes’ opinion as he mentioned that in a country that consists of diverse ethnic groups like Malaysia; the graphic designers “are given opportunity and platform to bring out some kinds of mutually respectful messages among different groups of people”. Additionally, Informant-2 stated that graphic designers have to be sensitive with how a society works. “They just cannot be isolated, doing things individually, and hiding one corner trying to create masterpieces”. He felt that designers have to use their power responsibly as they are those who stitch the society together.

However, Informant-3 had a totally different view. He thought that the advancement of social media provided designers a new platform for communication. In this case, the audience themselves should have the ability to judge what is right or wrong. To him, the designer of this video was just an “agent of communication”.

“If you get provoked and when this is a video that has particular political agenda, I would say this video is a successful one...” as argued by Informant-3.

Hence, different from Informant-1 and Informant-2, Informant-3 concluded that designers should not bear the consequences of this video, but the audience. This is because when the video is put on social media and the audiences can choose if they want to watch it or not.

The Ways in which Graphic Design Lecturers Integrate Social Responsibility Dimensions into Graphic Design Curriculum

This section further explains the ways in which the lecturers integrate each of those SRDs into the four essential components of curriculum, namely the purposes, content, pedagogical processes, and assessment. The responses of the lecturers are based on the respective GD courses they are teaching.

Only one GD lecturer, that is Informant-1, included the societal dimension-related objectives officially in the course outline. Informant-1 stated those objectives in her course kit and she explained them to her students at the beginning of every semester. Rather, she also gave relevant examples to allow students to understand their societal role as graphic designers. However, Informant-2 and Informant-3 only reminded their students verbally regarding the societal awareness as a designer. As Informant-2 pointed out that:

Unfortunately...When I was teaching this course, I did not structure it in a very formal way... The actual document like the course outline that I pass to them and all that, there is no mention of it.

Similarly, Informant-1 and Informant-3 said that the environmental dimension-related objectives were not formally stated in the course outline but they did remind verbally about the important environmental considerations, for examples the selection of particular media, materials, and papers to their students at the beginning of the semester. However, Informant-2's responses revealed another side of the story. He said that those environmental considerations were not the key features of the course he taught; hence, he did not specifically state or address those considerations in the course objectives as well as in other curriculum components.

As for the cultural dimension, Informant-1 would provide relevant examples and create platform for in-depth discussions with the students so that they can be more critical when dealing with sensitive issues. She exposed students with lots of controversial issues and tried to discuss with them at the beginning of every project.

All lecturers agreed that they have to ensure the up-to-datedness of related content. For example, Informant-1 said that she was the information source of her students. She said that she would gather latest social issues that faced by the Malaysian society, sort it out, organize the most relevant one, and deliver to the students. All contents were purposefully prepared and delivered to students based on the societal value that she viewed as important.

Nonetheless, due to the different levels of maturity and exposures of the students, some of them may not be so sensitive with the social issues. Hence, both Informant-1 and Informant-2 thought that while providing such kind of contents to students, they have to assist the students to view the social issues from multiple perspectives. "I will discuss with them but I will not give them a definite answer... Students themselves should know how to analyze and evaluate..." because "a lot of information and facts that the students exposed to nowadays are not entirely neutral and it creates difficulties for them to make fair decision during the design process", Informant-1 stressed.

In addition, both Informant-1 and Informant-3 thought that students are very "forgetful" with regards to those environmental considerations during the design process. Students tended to approach their projects without considering the effectiveness of media and the negative consequences of materials towards the environment. As a response to such tendency, Informant-1 would develop a conceptual map to link all the interrelated considerations together by using some key words. For Informant-3, he would pose a lot of environmental-related questions to trigger students' thinking and "force" them make reflection. Further, Informant-3 would try to make himself as a role model. He averred that:

I will tell them I have a lot of recycle bags in my car. I do not ask for the plastic bags when I go supermarket or shopping centre to buy something. I compress the bottle of mineral water or the can of soft drink in front of my students after I drink those beverages.

Subsequently, Informant-3 found that the students could digest and remember environmental-related information more effectively. Both Informant-1 and Informant-2 mentioned that the ways in which they structure cultural dimension-related contents were more or less the same with the other two dimensions. Two of them agreed that the lecturers play particularly significant role in transmitting cultural sensitivity to students. GD lecturers need to be very selective with the teaching materials and should try to create platform for discussion about the cultural awareness as a graphic designer in Malaysia.

All lecturers designed multidimensional, reflective, and student-centered learning activities to allow students to construct their own knowledge during the learning process. For example, Informant-1 would divide her class into two groups debating for a social issue. She thought that debate is an effective activity as "it trains students to look at both sides of arguments of an issue" and "they have to find reasons to support their standpoints from a variety of resources". Such activity directly enhances their critical and analytical thinking skills.

In the light of the above, all lecturers said that they set their project briefs in a very open manner and students can pursue any topics of interest to them. However, Informant-1 would encourage her students to explore those small but serious social issues that people commonly ignore and to create awareness among the public. By dealing with different social issues in their projects, students were required to synthesize information from different resources, discover and develop new

solutions, and govern their own learning. According to Informant-2, this was the “golden period of learning” because “students would make a lot of reflection, rethinking, analysis, and re-analysis” in the process.

Both Informant-1 and Informant-3 thought that it was less effective to enhance students’ environmental awareness in traditional classroom. Hence, both of them created opportunity for the students to “learn out of the class”. For example, Informant-3 would bring his students to visit the printing company to allow students to know more about the printing processes. Live experiences to the printing company, thus becoming an effective learning stimulus for students to enhance their environmental awareness. On the other hand, project is another tool that Informant-3 used to deepen his students’ understanding of the characteristics of different materials. Specifically, Informant-3 assigned his students with a lot of small packaging projects and each deals with particular types of materials.

On the other hand, in order to enhance the cultural sensitivity of their students, both Informant-1 and Informant-2 would use the weekly tutorials to discuss about the cultural considerations of their designs with the students. Nonetheless, Informant-2 pointed out that to develop cultural awareness among students was challenging because “it went down to their deep understanding of the mutually respected relationship among different ethnic groups in Malaysia”. If the students were lacking of related exposures, it could be difficult to discuss these issues with them during the design process.

For the societal dimension, formative assessment happened during the time when the students developed their projects. According to Informant-1 and Informant-2, this was an important time to shape students’ understanding of related social issues. They used a variety of methods to assess if their students had reached a desired state of understanding. The methods they commonly used were tutorials, sharing sessions, discussions, feedbacks, and reflections. Both Informant-1 and Informant-2 mentioned that:

I will make judgment based on their research and reference... through the sharing sessions in the class, I will know how much they have done such as the photo they take or the interview they do.

During the design process...I would also give them feedback so that they can understand or develop further about those things [in relation to their SR]... during the formative assessment time it is easier for me to evaluate their understanding of all those things...

However, Informant-3 expressed that although he did do formative assessment on students’ understanding of related social issues, he could not manage doing it weekly due to the constraint of time. Hence, very often, he inclined to use summative assessment to judge the understanding of the students. During summative assessment stage, Informant-3 said he “focuses very much on the final outcome” such as the idea, solution, and technical ability. As Informant-3 suggested:

If their final outcome can achieve all these aspects, which means that, their result will be very good. If the final outcome is not able to convey the [societal-related] message...this can be interpreted that they did not reach the intended objectives of this project.

Informant-2 agreed with Informant-3 and declared that: “at the summative assessment time, there are still a lot of realistic aspects which need to be taken into consideration, for example the outcome”. However, Informant-2 simultaneously pointed out a contradiction of such “outcome-oriented” assessment:

Unfortunately in the rubrics... it was more to do with outcome and not so much to do with the “theme” [societal dimension] I mentioned just now. There is no specifically talk about the social responsibility and all that. And so if the students want to do something which is not connected with the social responsibility stuffs, but if they

achieve all the criteria, I mean the objectives of this class, they will still get very good marks.

For the environmental part, Informant-1 would provide guidance to individual students “because some of the students may catch these kinds of things [environmental awareness] very slowly as compared to some”. On the other hand, Informant-3’s answer was relatively sharp and concise: “It is also from the final outcome. Yes”.

Both Informant-1 and Informant-2 conducted formative assessment to give feedback to the students concerning the cultural sensitivity part of their projects. They said that the methods were approximately the same with the other two dimensions. However, for cultural dimension, they would discuss more about the issues and the use of words and images especially in the Malaysian context.

Discussion

With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility

The results from the study indicated that all lecturers have a sufficient but diverse understanding of the SRDs. They all agree that graphic designers have exclusive power to impact social change. This is in line with Berman (2009), Perkins (2006) and Mononutu (2010)’s notions of graphic designers assuming certain responsibilities as key agents of social change. However, in specific, although a clear consensus about the SR in terms of environmental dimension was found among them, concerning the societal and cultural dimensions, they had different views. For example, with regards to the reciprocal relationship between societal responsibility and meeting the needs of commercial clients, they keep disturbingly conflicting idea. Informant-3’s concerns on practical constrains that the GD industry is relying on the clients to survive, in a way conflicts with Informant-2’s view that there was no excuse for GDPs to underplay their societal role even when surrounded by a lot of practical constraints. This vividly suggested that it would be very challenging for graphic designers in Malaysia to balance commercial success and societal responsibility at the same time.

Less is More

As for the environmental dimension, all lecturers showed a clear consensus about the responsibility of graphic designers. The responses of GD lecturers in this dimension can be organized into two broad categories. First, since graphic designers are typically trained as facilitators of communication, all lecturers thought that creating a successful environmental awareness campaign is the least the graphic designers can do. Both Informant-1 and Informant-2 felt that as there is no related campaign in Malaysia to talk about environmental issues and this is a good opportunity for the designers to exercise their communication expertise. Second, they are aware of the notion, “less is more”, thus avoiding unnecessary wastes in the process of selecting the raw materials, production methods, usage, and so on. These understandings of GD lecturers are in consistent agreement with the guidelines of ICOGRADA (2011) and AIGA (2014), and with the “sustainable development” - a term Thorpe (2006) defines as: “development that cultivates environmental and social conditions that will support human well-being indefinitely” (pp. 6-7).

You [can] Build Bridges But You Can Also Burn Bridges

Should the graphic designers be imposed with the responsibility to care about the “acceptance” of the diverse audiences while delivering the culturally sensitive messages if it is their intention to invoke the provocative emotions of the audiences? Or, should the diverse audiences themselves be responsible for the ways they choose to interpret the messages? These were questions raised by respondents in the study. Such arguments in the wake of the rapid growth of social media as a new platform for communication, indicated absence of unambiguous guidelines on cultural issues, albeit the rapid advances in technology.

Graphic designers always find themselves in dilemma when it comes to being objective and value-free. For example, Blauvelt (1994) urges them to detach from social, cultural, and political

stances, for decisions or solutions as the graphic designers have direct and huge implications on people's perception. In the study, for example, on case # 3, while Informant-3 posed that "I would look at this [kind of] video [that deal with sensitive issues of the society] from more positive direction...[as a] new media [that] brings us a new platform for communication... [and] we cannot blame the designers to have their own political preference", in contrary, Informant-2 thought that "this video is really dumb". In this regard, McCoy (1994)'s note is distinctive. She opines that design skills can be used flexibly to support graphic designer's personal ethical beliefs when the designed products are not served for commercial purposes. Essentially thus, GD is not value-free as it can be potentially used to advocate certain changes in the society or to inspire and convince others to participate and take an active stance on sensitive issues.

In summary, however, the respondents in the study understand how design skills could be best applied to preserve the harmonious state in Malaysia through careful reflection on the diverse but sensitive ethnic, religious and cultural tradition and groups in here. As Informant-2 argued that "you [can] build bridges but you can also burn bridges...[and] this is very dangerous".

Then on these GD lecturers' integration of SRDs into the curriculum purposes, content, pedagogical processes, and assessment methods, respectively, the results indicated that in general there were no formal related educational goals as stated in the respective course syllabus regarding different SRDs. Only Informant-1 included societal dimension-related objectives in her course outline. Thus, mostly informal ways such as verbal reminders or example showcases were used to facilitate students' understanding of each SRD. Such "unintended" practices made, may be entirely upon personal preferences of lecturers, obviously, do not fulfill the requirements of MQA (2012) to serve SR as one of the significant domains of intended learning outcomes.

In a positive step, however, it should be noted that respondents in the study indeed found ways to integrate different SRDs into other curriculum components, specifically in the content and pedagogical processes. They kept the content updated as to the societal, cultural, and environmental issues, and as relevant to the time and to the context of Malaysia. With regards to pedagogy, they fostered critical thinking skills among students when dealing with SR and related issues. More precisely, they did it by encouraging students to view particular issues from multiple perspectives and probing them to think deeply before making any decision.

Since "a lot of information and facts the students exposed to nowadays are not entirely neutral," as Informant-1 notes, in order to communicate a message or solve a problem effectively, lecturers should involve students in a great deal of critical thinking (Ciampa, 2010; Tippet, 2008). To attain certain level of sophistication in the design work, they need to be trained on making decisions. Critical decision-making comes while "a student is able to recognize and comprehend all the different facets of the situation at hand and to consider multiple possible solutions to determine which most appropriately addresses the situation" (Tippet, 2008).

Thus, responses of the GD lecturers indicated that they used constructivist-learning approaches such as discovery, inquiry, discussions and debates, feedback, and reflection in transmitting the contents to students. These happened mostly when the students develop their design projects, and specifically when GD lecturers set their project brief, which they did in a very open manner. These approaches, thus, correspond with methods recommended by Vesselle and McCay (2011), Costandius and Rosochacki (2012), ICOGRADA (2011), and Findeli (1994). To them active project-oriented pedagogy is more effective in stimulating a greater understanding of the SR in students as they learn by doing.

Since SRDs deal with the real issues in the society of various types and sizes, real world exposure is highly beneficial to students (Ciampa, 2010). The GD lecturers involved in the study also believe that it was less effective to enhance students' understanding of the SRDs and related issues in traditional classroom. Beyond the classroom, they created plenty of opportunities for students to "learn out of the class". For examples, Informant-1 would purposely bring her students out to observe the lifestyles and cultures of different groups of people in Malaysia while Informant-3 would conduct field trips to printing factory to permit his students gaining firsthand knowledge regarding the materials and methods of production.

With regards to assessing students' understanding of different SRDs, the lecturers conducted tutorials, sharing, critique, and discussions sessions almost every week. Mostly, they provided feedback on student works assuming that they would utilize them to reflect upon their experiences,

understanding, and performance. Ellmers, Bennett and Brown (2009) state that structural critical reflection is important to encouraging enhanced cognitive engagement and to support articulation and knowledge transfer of the design students.

Then, as there were no formally stated educational goal on SR in respective syllabus, predictably, there were also no related assessment criteria addressing each SR dimensions during the summative assessment stage. To the lecturers, the final design outcome is the primary measure of students' learning and achievement. Outcome-based education and assessment rather created a dilemma, as Informant-2 said: "if the students want to do something which [does] not [have] connection with the social responsibility stuffs, but if they achieve all the [other] criteria, I mean the [intended] objectives of this class, they will still get very good marks". Then, what is the point for the students to achieve those "unintended outcomes" of the course? This in turn brings in the question of what MQA's guidelines would mean to the curriculum of GD and those who deliver them. Hence, it is high time that MQA integrate SRDs into the intended learning outcomes (ILOs), around which curriculum and assessments are designed to facilitate student learning (Cheung, 2012).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the current study, which sampled three lecturers and sought their views about their understanding and integration of SRDs to GDC, indicates to a great deal of lecturers' understanding of SRDs. Furthermore, the evidences show that clear efforts have been made by GD lecturers in Malaysia towards integrating SRDs into the GDC, although not formally and comprehensively in each curriculum component. This in turn implies that further steps be taken that specific and distinctive issues of concern in each SRD are accurately considered, and delivered in the GD related programs in a comprehensive manner. In this regard, the future Program Standards may make specific references to "social responsibility" and to the means of integrating SR in relevant contents, pedagogical processes, and especially, the assessment methods of the individual courses in GDC that students acknowledge more with why they are learning than with how or what they learn.

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Appendices

Case 1: Societal Dimension

“Kasih Sayang Keluarga, Anugerah Paling Ternilai”, PETRONAS Chinese New Year TV commercial, 2006

Description of the video:

This TV commercial sets in the background four elderly longtime friends having social gathering in an open courtyard. One lady asks her friend, “Ah Hoon, it’s been a long time since we last met your children”. Ah Hoon starts bragging about the achievements of her son and daughter. As this conversation continues another lady says, “My son is a well-known cardiologist who makes more money by performing surgery on a patient just for few hours only”. The third lady does not want to be lost out, starts to boast about her daughter, a chartered accountant earning RM 450,000 a year.

However, surprisingly, the fourth lady who did not join them but only answered that her son is just a simple, ordinary, and healthy person. He will later come to fetch her home. She looked a little bit tired or dizzy while hearing of her friends celebrating themselves higher achievements of their children. Instead of feelings of jealousy, but felt rather sorry for others because it does not matter how good and luxurious their lives are, they can hardly spend quality time together with their children.

All of a sudden, the son of the fourth lady came by bringing along her grandson and daughter. She felt so happy and talked to her friends that, “I have to leave now, my son is here to get me home”. Meanwhile, her son showed his concern to his mother and asked, “Mother, how’s your health? We are going to Cameron Highlands to celebrate our Chinese New Year”.

The TV commercial ends by showing the tagline to sum up the message and value, “Love of the family is life’s greatest blessing. *Gong Xi Fa Cai.*”

Case 2: Environmental Dimension

According to Datuk Ahmad Suhaili Idrus (FMT News, 2013 Nov.), the director of the National Key Result Area for Urban Public Transport and National Key Economic Area for Greater KL/Klang Valley in the Performance Management & Delivery Unit,

The average Malaysian throws away 1.64kg of waste per day. According to a World Bank report, this is 0.44kg of additional waste that is produced by the average worldwide city dweller at 1.2kg.... Malaysians throw away and waste more than normal. At this rate, the waste production of Malaysians would increase by a drastic 65% from 10,000 tonnes per day in 2010 to 17,000 tonnes per day by 2020... Yet at the same time, our waste recycling rate is way below the average levels at a mere 11% of the total solid waste being produced compared to 57% in Singapore and 66% in Germany.

Case 3: Cultural Dimension

“Onderful Malaysia”, TERESA KOK Chinese New Year Video Clip, 2014

Description of the video:

The 11-minute video clip on Youtube entitled “Onderful Malaysia CNY 2014” (or in Chinese words “Ma Lai Sai Lei Ah”), depicted Teresa as a talk show host with 3 guests “acting” as the roles of “specific” politicians. It was meant to be a political drama revealing the “bad sides” of politicians and political parties. It poked fun on a variety of hot issues in Malaysia such as the corruption, education system, and the Sulu terrorist intrusion in Lahad Datu, Sabah in 2014.