

Cultivating voice through personal manifesto-making – a strategy for developing accountability, ethics and integrity in tertiary design curricula

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Abstract

There has never been a better time for tertiary curricula to provide a learning framework for the development of personal as well as professional ethics and accountability. Research shows that tertiary education today should address the development and transformation of the self (Mezirow 2000), as a whole person with an individual voice (Covey 2004), towards producing self-determining graduates and civic-minded critical thinkers (Cadle 2011). However, teaching ethics and accountability in tertiary curricula presents challenges in a postmodern context. In the South African context, it would be unwise to prescribe an absolute set of ethics for individuals, rather curricula should engage the spirit of constitutional freedoms that demand a democratic and accountable practice.

World leaders such as Nelson Mandela have bestowed the highest responsibility of all on education. It is well understood that a certain type of education will generate a certain type of generation. Education must respond pro-actively to the challenge of supercomplexity (Barnett 2000). Self-aware, self-determining, responsible, creative (Jackson 2006) and critical citizens (Barnett 2000) is what a university education should foster, not only for the world of work, but also the world of being. To this end, if curricula engage students' life-world by validating their individual autonomy, values and beliefs, the development of authentic leaders (Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber 2009) will ensue. In line with employing learning strategies that promote a more intrinsic (Davies & Reid, 2000), self-driven approach (Pink 2011), this paper outlines the merits of introducing the practice of personal manifestoing into design curricula, with the aim of facilitating opportunities for self-reflection (Schon 1983), aiming (Nelson and Stolterman 2012), personal development (Jackson 2006) and personal integrity required for authentic leadership.

I propose that cultivating and training the student's voice is key to meeting these outcomes. To this end, I will outline the concept of an individual voice as presented by Covey in his 8th habit. Furthermore, I propose that developing the voice can find expression in writing or designing a personal manifesto. The parallels will be explored, showing how they can work synergistically in an education environment.

It is worth understanding and explaining the function and evolution of manifestos (Danchev 2011) to appreciate the wisdom and effectiveness of appropriating the method and the culture towards personal development at a tertiary level. There is little research done on the theory of manifestoing, despite it being conspicuously present in the worlds of politics, leadership, corporate identity and commerce. The fact that it has become a staple ingredient for business and corporate entities calls for its counterpart in tertiary education. This however has not yet filtered down into tertiary design education in South Africa. In light of this lacuna, manifestoing is presented as a self-reflexive practice that meets outcomes for life-long learning, ethics and accountability (SAQA 2000). Parallels between branding and manifestos make it especially suitable for design students, as both require the formulation of a vision, character, values and personality.

Keywords: curriculum development, moral knowledge, wisdom, voice, autonomy, ethics and accountability, desiderata, manifesto-making, benchmarking, whole person, authentic leadership, self-reflexivity, character

Introduction

It has been claimed that universities are suffering from a lack of wisdom (Bitzer 2011) due to an overemphasis on knowledge production, economic responsiveness and exploitative/instrumental methodologies. In this scenario, industry-oriented productivity and skills-based pragmatism have ousted the more idealistic, humanitarian and holistic aims of classical education, such as liberation, critique and ethics. This has resulted in concerns that the “marketization and managerialism of HE ...and entrepreneurial forms of academic capitalism” have become “the current benchmark of institutional innovation” (Muller and Subotsky 2001, p. 173).

This research presents one way to counter this colonization of the curriculum by market values (Lockett 2011, p. 51) and introduce wiser learning opportunities into the curriculum, namely: to cultivate students’ voice by creating an educational culture and practice around manifesto-making. I argue that this strategy develops high levels of reflexivity and drives intrinsic motivation that enables learners to integrate their own values, ethics and social responsibility (CHE in Lockett 2001: 50) into the learning process. This creates a foundation for personal accountability and ethics and as such, it meets four of Barnett’s (2000) six purposes for higher education, namely democracy, self, critique and emancipation. Making manifestos is democratic because it honours individual ideals and values, it centers around the learner’s sense of self, it encourages critique by allowing learners to set up intrinsic and personally meaningful criteria for judging extrinsic scenarios, and it emancipates learners to freely choose a meaningful direction and personal vision for themselves and others. This paper proposes that if implemented wisely, manifesto-making should develop the well-rounded, self-reflexive, self-driven and accountable learner envisioned by global trends and national policies alike.

Moral knowledge, character and consciousness raising

The quest to include personal development and self-reflexivity in tertiary design curricula is supported by cross-disciplinary research that asserts the need for cognitive criteria to be supplemented with moral knowledge, and consciousness-raising strategies. In order to understand the importance of this shift, educators can draw from numerous theoretical frameworks, such as Consciousness Studies (Russell 2007, Zohar 1999), Integral Theory (Wilbur 2000), the science of oneness (Hollick 2010), whole person theory (Covey 2004), and deep ecology (Naess in Fox 1990), all of which concur that human potential can only be fulfilled when body, mind, heart and spirit operate integrally. In the field of education giants like Sir Ken Robinson, Howard Gardner, Jack Mezirow, Paulo Freire and Norman Jackson have validated learner-centered pedagogies, introducing a rich pluralism, and an ethics of inclusivity, emancipation and personal agency in the form of studies on multiple intelligences, types of mind, learning styles, personal development, self-realisation and learner transformation. The types of thinking or ‘minds’ typically associated with the creative arts are increasingly being heralded as crucial tools for the new millennium, but it’s clear they need to be balanced with moral knowledge and wisdom.

Right types of minds

This global trend in education, commerce and culture at large is identified by Pink (2005), Gardner (2009), Friedman (2005), Codrington (2008) and numerous others. Pink’s studies on right-brained competencies (2005) and intrinsic motivation (2011) are important sources, because they serve to highlight and correct entrenched biases toward left-brain skills by reviving flagging motivation levels with new opportunities for emotional and even spiritual self-expression, through developing right-brained aptitudes, such as imagination, play, inspiration and creativity. Pink (2000) re-positions right-brained aptitudes axiomatically in what he terms the conceptual age. In this context, he argues that while technology can increasingly simulate and execute typically left-brained aptitudes, the more uniquely human abilities to design, to play creatively, to act and think empathically, to synthesize and

symphonise, to seek and find fulfillment in purpose and meaning are fast becoming valuable human resources.

Gardner (2009, p. 10) applies a similar methodology in a pedagogical context. His seminal work on multiple intelligences is further developed as he outlines the five new types of minds that he believes must be cultivated in order for individuals to thrive, as well as tolerate and collaborate with one another in the new millennium. According to Gardner, disciplined, creating and synthesizing minds are primarily cognitive, while the respectful and ethical mind informs the human, moral sphere. Friedman (2005, p. 281-293) echoes Gardner's emphasis on synthesis, claiming that the skills that will be in demand in the new 'flat world', include synthesizing, orchestrating, collaborating, adapting, greening, localizing and personalizing. Codrington's studies in generational theory (2008) also reiterate the relevance of Gardner's ethical mind, ascribing the following qualities and attitudes to Millennials "optimism, confidence, media & entertainment, tech savvy, overloaded, street smart, diversity, civic duty, ethical consumption, morality, global citizens."

Gardner (2009, p. 19) warns against the "sheer cultivation of cognitive capacities, in the absence of the human dimension" dismissing it as "a dubious undertaking." Cunliffe (in Rayment 2007, p. 92) agrees that skills, knowledge, cognition and traits are not sufficient in the fields of arts and design, and singles out wisdom as the determining factor in the ultimately quality and success of design. Pink similarly (2005) has argued that the right brained aptitudes of empathy and spirituality are necessary skills for the new conceptual age. The problem inherent in the arts education status quo remains that "the importance of ethics for optimizing the cognitive processes for thinking and creativity" has been not been sufficiently addressed (Cunliff in Rayment 2007, p. 92). The danger of this is "that a person who has developed cognitively reliable habits of mind could use these for unethical ends. Equally high levels of creativity can serve unethical purposes" (Cunliff in Rayment 2007, p. 93). This brief cross-disciplinary overview of cultural and educational trends serves to remind one that while we celebrate the fact that creativity is gaining currency at a rapid rate, we should also seek to balance cognitive and creative genius with an ethical backbone.

However, ethics are deeply personal, so an ethical 'backbone' can only be developed from the inside out. This research is anchored in Covey (2004) conceptualisation of voice, what he calls the 8th habit. While the ultimate goal of consciousness-raising is collective ethical awareness directed towards manifesting and maintaining the well-being, equality and higher consciousness of communities, the starting point is, as it has arguably always been, squarely placed on an individual coming to terms with who he or she is. Answering the question "Who am I?" has always underpinned the quest for deep and meaningful knowledge since Socrates. In a contemporary context self-reflexive practice (Schon 1983; Jackson 2006; Mezirow & associates 2000) paves a way for looking at the role of character in leadership, which now more than ever should be considered an educational priority (Nelson and Stolterman 2012), in light of the view held by Gardner (2009, p.10) amongst others, that character is 'higher' than intellect.

The importance of character in education and design

While HE policies and curricula have traditionally focused on developing intellect, cognitive knowledge and academic prowess, supplemented with industry driven training in skills and scenarios, character lies in an altogether different learning sphere. According to Muller and Subotzky character is based in moral knowledge, which they define as "the incalculable and practice of autonomy" (2000, p. 163). It is the learning sphere where the new knowledge worker could be empowered with a sense of agency, reflexivity, and learn how to take responsibility and make good judgments.

It is especially important for designers who manipulate the desires and dreams of society. As Melucci (1989 cited in Muller & Subotzky 2001, p. 165) states, 'to desire and dream we use the language provided by the media'. As such, Nelson and Stolterman place a hefty responsibility on the designer to make critical judgments "ranging from reflexive off-hand judgments, to judgments emerging from

our core being” (2012, p. 158). They highlight the designer’s special task of moving concepts, ideas and possibilities from the realm of the ideal (formed in the imagination) into the realm of the real (manifested in the world). According to them, the success of this important enterprise depends almost entirely on the designer’s good judgment. While Nelson and Stolterman insist that “design judgment relies on all our capabilities as humans ... rational and conceptual thinking, as well as aesthetic and ethical considerations” (2012, p. 188), they single out the character of the designer as the fundamental starting block of good judgment. They assert that “design knowledge cannot be separated from the knower (2012, p. 188), thus design judgments always depend on the designer’s core values. In this framework, a designer should ideally be “a self-reflective individual with a fully developed character” (2012, p. 209). Therefore, in design, character counts.

Nelson and Stolterman’s emphasis on the designer’s great responsibility as guarantor of good design grounded on correct judgments substantiates why developing character and voice are as important as learning skills and creativity. If as Nelson and Stolterman (2012, p.209) state “to be a designer is to be the co-creator of a new world” which “is a calling of enormous responsibility, with its concomitant accountability”, then curricula must adapt accordingly. This can be done by making space, in content-filled and skills-based design curricula, for honouring and developing ‘personpower’ (Muller and Subotzky 2001). When learners are given permission to come to terms with their own truths and sense of integrity, by means of manifesto-making, it gives clarity to their perceptions, strength to their decisions and actions, and a profound sense of security to their lives. (Tulka 1991, p. 102). This self-knowledge enables them to guide their lives “in healthy and meaningful directions” (Tulka 1991, p. 102) and self-reflective, self-driven graduates are “deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own as well as the values and moral perspective of others” (Avolio in Branson 2009, p. 112).

Desiderata and manifestos: strategic tools for developing voice

Genuine self-knowledge goes hand in hand with the development of desiderata (Nelson and Stolterman 2012) and voice (Covey 2004; Mezirow 2000). Using Nelson and Stolterman’s concept of desiderata, a designer can develop his/her voice by formulating future aims and intentions, based on what he/she deems desirable and beneficial for himself and relevant others (2012, p. 111). From this perspective, design is seen as more than mere problem-solving.

Desiderata initiate the emergence of “that-which-is-not-yet” and link human capacity with human achievement, anchoring design choices in deliberate intentions, rather than reactive response. Desiderata envision, articulate and create what ‘ought to be’. These projected aims and desires are based in ethics and morality, while conventional problem solving is more descriptive and explanatory (Nelson and Stolterman 2012, p. 106).

For Nelson and Stolterman (2012, p.113) intentionality is a key factor in design, as aim determines the direction in which design will go. Desiderata free the designer from the constraints of reality, by using imagination and intention to transcend redundant realities and create better ones. These ideas are fundamental to Nelson and Stolterman’s (2012) theories on the purpose of design, to drive, manifest and manage ethical, aesthetic and rational changes in the world all the while exercising good judgment and integrity. From this perspective, design evolves from a type of crisis management to a conscious imagining of potentialities that are desirable to all parties involved. However, learning to formulate desiderata is best practiced by each individual, before moving on to more complex collaborations.

Applying Covey’s whole person paradigm to Nelson and Stolterman’s desiderata, the individual should align personal desiderata with the four core human faculties ensuring that body, mind, heart and soul have each been given attention. As such developing voice must recognize and integrate the following: “talent (your natural gifts and strengths), passion (those things that naturally energize, excite, motivate and inspire you), need (including what the world needs enough to pay you for), and

conscience (that still, small voice within that assures you of what is right and that prompts you to actually do it)" (Covey 2004, p.3). Covey explains that the developing vision, discipline, passion and conscience (i.e. voice) results in a personal engagement with work because it generates their vision, taps their talent, fuels their motivation and draws them to respond with conscience to a "great need in the world". The committed student of 'greatness' is encouraged to pay attention to all four in order to obtain optimum success, therein lies the power of their voice, or as Hillman (in Covey 2004, p. 3) puts it their calling or "soul's code". This is a dimension of experience critical to a person's sense of meaning and fulfilment, and without it progress will be slower, more slippery and superficial.

An individual's voice is a unique expression of self and those who walk that path committedly will be "rewarded with the character, competence, initiative, positive energy, and moral authority that inspires themselves and lifts others" (Covey 2004, p. 3). Those in the process of finding their unique personal significance, i.e. voice, are looked up to as leaders. Leadership is always anchored in a clearly outlined and well-rounded sense of identity who are able to develop "a vision of great things they want to accomplish", take initiative, cultivate a greater understanding of the needs and opportunities around them and rise prepared to meet those needs with their unique talents, gifts and strengths (Covey 2004, p. 3).

In light of this I conclude that my cross-disciplinary synthesis of relevant theories shows that that the pursuit of self-knowledge, character and voice are determining factors in developing an individual's sense of autonomy, accountability and integrity. Armed with this knowledge, graphic design curricula would do well to consider the benefits of personal benchmarking in the form of manifestos. Paradigm shifts in micro- and macrocosm demand nothing less than the re-evaluation of established pedagogical criteria, standards and methods. In South Africa, SAQA's response to education's post-apartheid challenges was to reformulate core outcomes that would address national education imperatives. Three of these outcomes have particular relevance to this paper, namely Ethics and Professional Practice; Accountability and Management of self and (life-long) learning (SAQA 2000). These outcomes emerge from the domain of moral knowledge (Muller and Subotzky 2001) and include personal development planning (Jackson 2006) and self-reflexivity.

I propose in this paper that a personal manifesto, being a formulation, articulation and declaration by the self about the self, is an effective learning platform and tool for personal development, self reflexivity and learner transformation, by means of which an individual or group's desiderata may be developed and managed. Manifestoing demands self-reflection, which makes the manifesto an effective tool for measuring self-reflexive outcomes so central to learner-centered pedagogy. Robert Noziak (1989 cited in Nelson & Stolterman 2012, p. 210) confirms that developing character requires that we live 'the examined life'. It is ensured that when 'we guide our lives by our own pondered thoughts, it is our life that we are living, not someone else's'. These outcomes demand a critically reflexive practice as advocated by Barnett (1997). Ultimately we should prepare students not only to meet externally determined outcomes, but also to engage with, adapt and ultimately customise a set of standards and outcomes that give voice to their highest ideals, sense of purpose and unique significance. This kind of critically reflexive practice honours democratic principles of self-determination and if pursued, could create the circumstances that lead to an individual's emancipation from oppressive regimes and blind conformity. It is a practice that will meet Freire's call for a praxis of liberation that depends on men and women "consciously acting, reflecting on and ultimately transforming themselves and their world" (Freire 1993).

A manifesto is a good starting point for effecting personal transformation by means of self-reflection. Mezirow's theory of transformational learning insists that students draw from personal life to effect personal transformation (Mezirow 1991). Kitchenham (2008) explains that Mezirow's transformational learning requires critical self-reflection in the quest to develop greater personal autonomy. These authors imply that without anchorage in the domain of self, knowledge can easily slip back into the ocean of information from whence it came. Linking learning to the self, anchors it more authentically, intrinsically and therefore more permanently. Without anchorage to the self,

knowledge lacks moral, emotional and spiritual value and application, leaving the learner informed but aimless, not a desirable combination. Put another way, reflective practice is key to find one's voice and developing character. Reflective discourse "is the forum in which 'finding one's voice' becomes a prerequisite for free full participation" (Mezirow 2000, p. 11).

I write this paper as a lecturer and curriculum developer of dHistory of Graphic Design. This research was spurred on when I began to see my subject not only a collection of data, but can also as a rich source of voices, from which students may draw in order to develop their own unique voice. If curricula move toward honouring the whole person, encouraging pride in uniqueness and facilitating personal development, each individual would be empowered to formulate personalized aims, values and goals. Thus on a fundamental and intrinsic level the student could benchmark, drive and monitor his/her own progress, measuring his/her output against his own criteria for distinction and success. This type of self-assessment practice contains within it the seeds of learner accountability and integrity. By creating personal standards, the student has something relevant against which to measure his/her own progress and achievements. A manifesto is concrete and assessable evidence of this process, a documentation of the examined life so prized by educators (Mezirow in Kitchenham 2008). It is a declaration that makes explicit what would otherwise remain tacit, lying unused beneath the surface as untapped potential, namely intentionality (aim), desiderata (ideals) and stance (Nelson and Stolterman 2012). Thus a manifesto releases the potential of a person to find their voice, choose their legacy, express their deepest desires, design their future, and thus make their unique mark meaningfully in the world. In this way, the student determines and declares their principles, values and vision, and the success of this process is determined from beginning to end, by the character and judgment of the student.

It is worth understanding and explaining the function and evolution of manifestos (Danchev 2011) to appreciate the wisdom and effectiveness of appropriating the method for tertiary level design students. History of Graphic Design includes many manifestos and they play a central role in driving change and benchmarking the course of history. They are most succinct documents containing a wealth of information about their author's intentions, dreams and visions for the future. Once the province of kings and politicians, now manifestoing can be seen in the corporate environment, thinly disguised as branding. Corporate culture quickly recognized the power of public manifestoing to entrench values and principles as incentives to brand loyalty. A brand slogan is basically a manifesto point that has been singled out for attention. Parallels between branding and manifestoing make it especially suitable for design students, as both require the formulation of a vision, character, values and personality. However pedagogical studies have nowhere near tapped the potential of using manifestos as a strategy for personal development. There is little research done on the theory of manifestos, despite it being conspicuously present in the worlds of politics, leadership, corporate identity and commerce. For some reason, manifestos rarely feature as learning tools in educational contexts, and I found no evidence of it being used specifically to facilitate learner PDP in HE curricula. Hence my ongoing research of the manifesto as a device for cultivating voice.

The implication of ignoring student autonomy and voice, means that the student remains unconscious and disconnected from their own inner motivations and lifeworld. Then even core beliefs and values can lie dormant indefinitely, as untapped potential, which is a less desirable outcome for a graduate. Fortunately, when prompted to self-reflect, students respond eagerly and perform well. Self-reflection increases confidence, as students more feel empowered to study a subject well known to them, i.e. themselves. Thus the manifesto stands out as a relatively simple yet effective strategy for developing leadership potential and articulating a personalized creed that can include vision, mission, aim, purpose, philosophy and/or plan of action. In this way, it facilitates learning opportunities for self-reflection (Barnett 1997; Schön 1983), character building (Nelson and Stolterman 2012), PDP (Jackson 2006), self-assessment and self-determination (Schunk and Zimmerman 2012). Put another way, making manifestos develops a student's voice, as students formulate not only what they want to do, and how, but also who they want to be.

Clarence-Fincham and Naidoo interviewed design educators at the University of Johannesburg to arrive at “a deeper, more explicit understanding of the nature of the discipline and the values underpinning it, the kind of curriculum emerging from it and the student identities associated with it” (2013, p. 83). Their findings confirm Barnett’s view (2000) that “in an unstable world of ‘supercomplexity’ students need to ‘learn to be’ rather than simply to ‘learn about’ (Fincham and Naidoo 2013: 83). They also refer to Maton’s view that knowledge valued in the ‘soft’ Humanities and Social Sciences differs from the hard Sciences, in that it “focuses more on the identities and dispositions of the knowers as a way of measuring success and less on the possession of specialised knowledge” (Clarence-Fincham and Naidoo 2013: 6). These findings speak to and about Norman Jackson’s work on personal development planning (PDP).

Jackson has contributed significantly to pedagogical practices of PDP. He ascribes a moral function to higher education and puts students at the centre of their own learning experience. He asserts that the HE should exist to “to make a positive difference to students’ lives and ... to help students develop their potential as fully as possible at this level” (2006, p. 1). For Jackson creativity is “most definitely a matter of heart” and should be applied to “the development of students’ potential in a more holistic sense than most higher education experiences currently provide” (2006: 1). He conceives PDP as a creative, critical and student-centred pedagogic practice that facilitates a greater sense of self awareness in students.

Self-awareness is increasingly relevant to pedagogic discourse, as seen for example in SAQA tertiary level outcomes such as Accountability and Management of Learning (SAQA 2000). In the field of creative arts and educating designers, self-reflexive practice facilitates the development of the individual’s own frame of reference and desiderata, allowing them to customize their desired future according to the promptings of their newly discovered voice, rather than formulating some prescribed set of ethics. In this way curricula reflect the spirit of constitutional freedom that demands a democratic, ethical and accountable professional practice.

Conclusion and relevance of research to conference theme

To conclude, this research puts ethics and accountability at the root of tertiary learning, and firmly in the hands of the learner themselves. The paper outlines how tertiary education today should address the development and transformation of the self (Mezirow 2000), as a whole person with an individual voice (Covey 2004), towards producing self-determining graduates and civic-minded critical thinkers (Cadle 2011). It is well understood that a certain type of education will generate a certain type of generation, so education must respond pro-actively to the challenges of supercomplexity (Barnett 2000). Self-aware, self-determining, responsible, creative (Jackson 2006) and critical citizens and leaders (Barnett 2000) is what a university education should foster, not only for the world of work, but also the life-world. If curricula engage students’ life-world by validating their individual autonomy, values and beliefs, the development of authentic leaders (Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber 2009) will ensue. For this reason the study and practice of manifesto-making provides an effective platform for establishing a critically reflexive, intrinsically motivated PDP practice that establishes voice as a valid aim and tool for learning. By cultivating voice through medium of the manifesto, the student embarks on the path of life-long learning, equipped with a self-determined sense of purpose and set of ethics that lays the foundation for the practice of accountability in life and design.

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