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## WORKSHOP REFLECTIONS

# Designing interaction design education workshop

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The Interaction Design Education Summit met for its fourth year in 2016, this time in collaboration with Interaction 2016's education partner Aalto University in Finland. Each year, the Summit brings together design educators from research academia, design & art schools, vocational programs, corporate/industry training, and lower-ed (K-12) as well as industry practitioners to talk about how all of us can better fulfill the Interaction Design Association's (IxDA) mission of advancing its subject. Daniel Harvey and I were invited to run a workshop on our proposed topic of 'designing designers'. Daniel and I submitted this proposal because we are both firm believers that design education is one of the design industries biggest design challenges. Designers have more influence than ever before. Our discipline is valued and appreciated by the tech and business world. Furthermore, governments and institutions around the world are embracing our methodology. This raises a vital question of how might we educate future designers.

Daniel Harvey leads the new talent programme at Sapient Nitro. Sapient Nitro is a marketing and consulting company that provides business, marketing, and technology services to clients. I've spent time as a student at Duncan of Jordanstone School of Art and Design, an employer as founder of Snook (a service design agency) and an educator at various universities and private schools across the world. So together we feel really strongly about this challenge from various angles. We're keen to celebrate the innovative work that is happening in industry whilst being a bridge between learning and practicing, helping to prototype new ways of doing things.

We kicked off our three-hour session by inviting the workshop participants to self-organize using a 'scale of agreement' in response to two statements: 'design education is broken' and 'design education should be better understood'. We crafted these statements in the hope they would be provocative but continue to be open to each participant's interpretation. Participants were invited to introduce themselves and then share their position with the group.

For example, Michael – a workshop participant, explained: 'My problem isn't a design problem it's a people problem.'

We used the responses from the scale of agreement to push us towards identifying themes or ideas as well as to raise relevant questions for discussing in the workshop:

- What would an accreditation board look like?
- Do we need better collaboration at the 'hand off' stage between industry and educators?

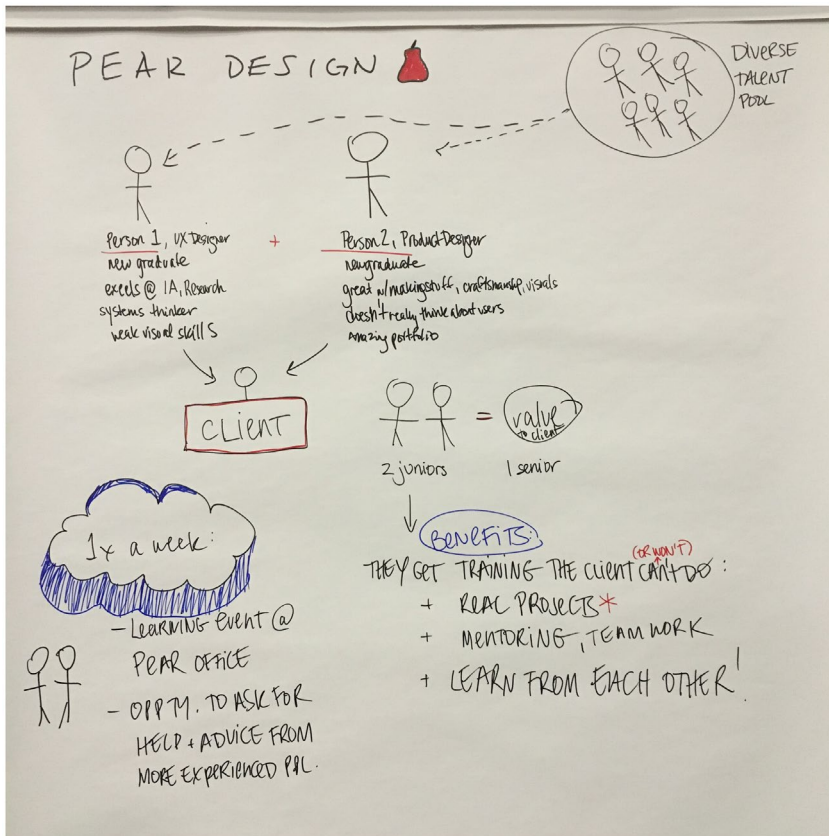


**Figure 1.** Lauren Currie (author) addressing audience of the Design Education Workshop. *Image courtesy of the author.*

- How can we test and measure critical thinking?
- Should all this start earlier? What would it look like in pre-school?
- Who do young designers aspire to be like?
- What should our relationship with business be? Do we try to change the system from the inside or do we create new systems like Hyper Island, Kaos Pilots and General Assembly?
- Are designers required to have a license to design?
- How do we go about agreeing on the fundamentals of a design degree?
- How can we help industry understand better what design grads are good at?
- Should educators ask for more clarity from companies on what they need?
- Does design needs to be taught to everyone?

Following an initial discussion, we then split up into teams and focused on five key questions for the remainder of the sessions. They were:

1. How might we help the industry better utilize and understand the skills of graduates?
2. How might we create the foundation for all interaction design courses?
3. How might we enable a more person centered transition from a student identity to a professional one?
4. How might we create the best design school in the world?
5. How might we create better structures for collaboration between academia and industry?



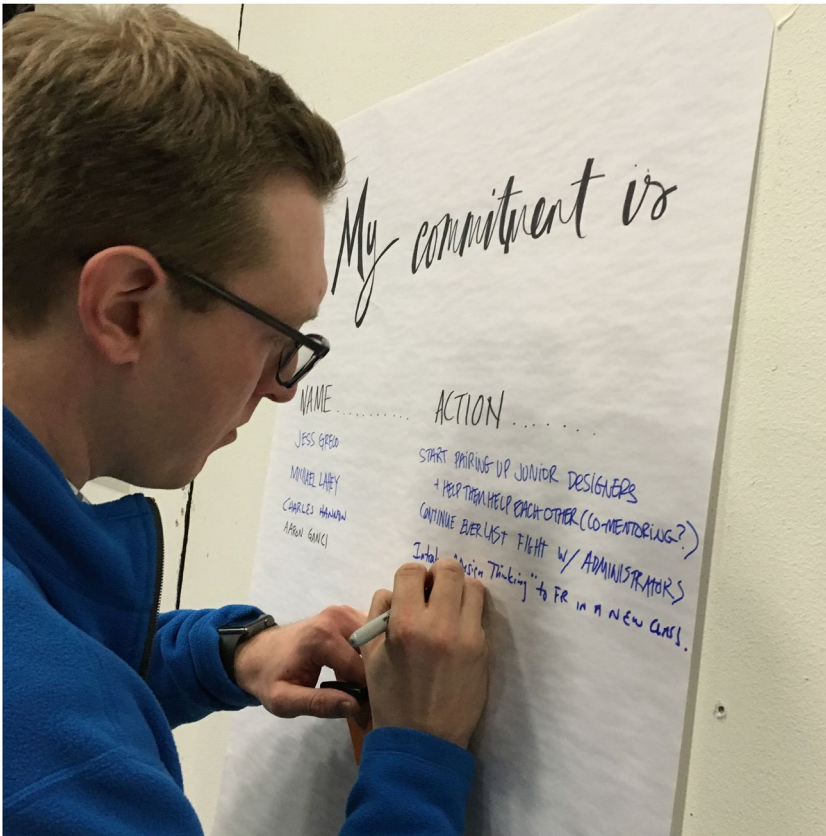
**Figure 2.** Participant sketch of their proposed idea. *Image courtesy of the author.*

'I don't care about design, I care about helping students be intellectually engaged with the world' – Michael, Participant

Each team spent time working on their problem statement and prototyped a solution in order to start a conversation with the other teams. One example that came out of the workshop discussions was the identification of a potential solution called 'Pear Design'; that is, a new way to structure a design agency to encourage learning and development amongst its employees.

We ended the session with a commitment to action. This is a big conversation in a very short amount of time. It's often easier to talk than it is to do, so we encouraged all participants to commit to an action and to share this with us. The resulting participant actions ranged from an events-orientated approach including, for example, more presentations about design education to actions which proposed pairing up junior designers with senior designers and developing a mentoring scheme between practitioners and students.

We ended the session with a 'check out'. Checking out is a favourite tool of mine to allow each group member to reflect or express a feeling. The range of sentiments nicely reflected the non-judgmental tone of the workshop which everyone found refreshing. Some left feeling optimistic, others left feeling a deeper understanding of the complexity of the problem, while others doubled-down on their commitments to action.



**Figure 3.** Participants committing to an action. *Image courtesy of the author.*

My personal reflection was that the role of a designer as a sole (and more often than not male – think Philippe Stark, Mark Zuckerberg and Steve Jobs) hero who creates an ingenious multi-million dollar idea in his bedroom, is the type of designer many educators and practitioners think education should be promoting and producing. This scenario scares me and is the opposite of the type of designer a) I strive to be and, b) that the world needs.

Perhaps the workshop is best summarized by a quote from entrepreneur and assistant professor at MIT Media Lab, Kevin Slavin, who observes: ‘We can build software to eat the world, or software to feed it. And if we are going to feed it, it will require a different approach to design, one which optimizes for a different type of growth, and one that draws upon – and rewards – the humility of the designers who participate within it’ (2016).

### Notes on contributor

**Lauren Currie** is a Scottish designer and entrepreneur. She makes, thinks, writes and speaks about design, social change, education and entrepreneurship. She co-founded Snook, Scotland’s leading service design and social innovation agency which uses design to make public services better. *Management Today* recently named Lauren as one of the UK’s top 35 business women under 35. She was recently featured in *ELLE UK* as 30 women under 30 changing the world. Lauren now lives in London and splits her time between Good Lab and #upfront.

## Reference

Journal of Design and Science. "Design as Participation." MIT Press, 2016. Accessed March 13 2016.  
<http://jods.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/design-as-participation>