

Do No Harm 2.0

David Spendlove, The University of Manchester

david.spendlove@manchester.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Previously, I have proposed that the current incarnation of England's Design and Technology, version 1.0, is outdated and requires a new manifestation in the form of Design and / or Technology 2.0. Within this context a starting position for 2.0 subsequently acknowledges that on any given day students across the globe, who have adopted a form of version 1.0, are potentially doing more harm than good. Students are being 'processed' into a capitalistic consumption and production mode of thinking through contrived processes of generating 'products' under the pretence of solving problems. In this paper, a challenge to the community, I draw on the medical Hippocratic oath of "Primum non nocere", known as "Do no harm" and consider the pragmatic, ethical and philosophical implications of adopting this principle as a central feature of 2.0.

In this paper I will also consider an alternative discourse for the current pervasive materialistic 'outcomes' in the context of 'do no harm' through challenging the anti-democratic, exploitative, perpetual rapid growth-oriented capitalist ideologies that manifest within 1.0 as 'artefacts', driven by self-fulfilling 'needs and wants'. Consequently, learner accountability, liability and culpability are located as central features of a 2.0 'activist' strategy that is earth and sustainability centred. A 2.0 mantra of 'do no harm' consequently aligns with UNESCO's commitment to equity and transformational Education Sustainable Development through empowering lifelong learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity.

Key Words 2.0, Hippocratic, Sustainable.

1. INTRODUCTION

Following the interruption of the Covid pandemic, I once again visited a design museum, as I have done many times previously, looking forward to being intellectually stimulated by the creativity and innovation of past designers. However, something was different, as instead of looking at the 'products' through my usual lens I was struck by the celebration of overconsumption, environmental damage and naïve vanity being celebrated in the name of design. This moment of cognitive dissonance was not however new as this was something that had pervaded my thinking for some time, in that it linked to my reoccurring questions for the

Design and Technology community as to whether ‘the subject’ is potentially doing more harm than good?

A starting position for this short essay therefore acknowledges that on any given day students, across the globe, studying a form of ‘England’s’ Design and Technology education (which I will refer to as version 1.0) are potentially doing more harm than good. They are potentially being processed into a capitalistic consumption and production mode of thinking through contrived processes of generating ‘products’ under the pretence of solving problems, product design and manufacturing. Inevitably there are numerous and potential justifiable counter arguments to such a provocation. However, it is essential that we examine whether the existing default mode of 1.0 and the consequential damaging impacts on both the individuals and the environment can legitimately justify the means.

In asking the question above, it is within a broader existential context where in reality (and my personal view) the current model of Design and Technology (version 1.0) in England is now so diminished and damaged that it is difficult to envisage anything more than a modest recovery, given that the majority of infrastructure that saw the organic evolution of the subject has been both dismantled and disenfranchised (Spendlove, 2022). In many respects this can also be regarded as positive, in that the next iteration of the subject cannot be built on the same model from which the subject originated, given the local education authority networks, advisory services and initial teacher education provision within universities, that contributed to research, curriculum development, accreditation and professional learning for teachers have increasingly become marginalised and replaced by new structures and organisations.

Therefore, in posing my question of the potential and significant unintended consequences of Design and Technology, extends my journey of thought and publications questioning the existing 1.0, and speculating on an alternative iteration of Design and Technology, in the form of Design and or Technology 2.0 (Spendlove 2017a; Hardy 2020; Hardy and Norman 2021). This follows and builds upon previous considerations and theorisation about the contradictions, coercion and collusion (Spendlove 2013) within the subject and the limitations of the ‘thinking’ elements (Spendlove 2017b), activist opportunities (Spendlove 2022a) and future sustainability (Spendlove 2022) of Design and Technology education. Indeed, the origins of this journey start from England’s superseded national curriculum from 2007 and in particular the statement of importance where children were expected to ‘intervene to improve the quality of life’ (Spendlove 2008). Whilst many may have glossed over the ‘statement of importance’, driven by a preoccupation to exemplify the subject norms of consumption and production, I have often been struck, and have written (Spendlove 2008), about both the profundness, and the opportunity of the challenge that was set, when considering what intervention ‘to improve the quality of life’ might look like and how it may paradoxically challenge many of the existing beliefs and values that the existing version of Design and Technology was built upon.

2. THE CHALLENGE OF CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

As we come to the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, you can choose any number of avenues by which to decide how the current iteration of Design and Technology got to where it

is today. Within this context, over time and across the last half of the previous century ‘the subject’ and historical incarnations has adapted from predominantly a craft apprentice and manufacturing oriented model to increasingly include a more diverse range of materials, processes and technologies shaped by examination boards and shifting political priorities. Across this period has also been a consistent theme of production, typically artefacts, often legitimatised both as means of aspiration (taking something home) and mode of assessment and frequently endorsed by the contrived concepts of ‘needs and wants’ (DfE, 2013). Such justifications have however increasingly become difficult to acknowledge as whilst considering the indefensible material waste within the subject, it also confirms the implicit message of the naive legitimising of consumption of materials on the basis of contrived justifications. As such Design and Technology has been built upon the excesses of unethical, hierarchical, capitalist principles of production and consumerism which thrive on the evolutionary flaws of gratuitous accumulation and consumption.

Previously I have challenged the assumptions that designing is a conscious, intuitive and rational act, positing that as design ‘thinkers’ we are prone to cognitive limitations and cultural distortions. In this context a blind spot remains particularly within in an education system where the means to notional ‘successes’ within existing subject configurations is demonstrated through adherence to, or giving the impression of, reproduction of capitalist, consumerist and colonialist view of the world. Apple and Weis further identify how schools exemplify such complex structures through which social groups and activities ‘are given legitimacy and through which social and cultural ideologies are re-created, maintained, and continuously built’ (1986 p.9). Therefore, our existing culture of production and consumption is legitimised and reinforced through the cultural norms of schooling. It is therefore only through disruption of the existing mode of Design and Technology that an opportunity exists to confront and critique our relationship with production and consumption in order to challenge preconceptions of power and influence.

Ultimately and ironically, we therefore have an education system, and specifically with the current mode of England’s Design and Technology, where the means to ‘success’ is also the means to long term failure, as in ‘performative success’ is through the reproduction and acceleration of capitalism, class systems, and climate crisis. Yet the moral imperative for the broader ‘design’ community has long called for a commitment to the broader social, environmental, financial, and ethical challenges (Papanek 1985). As a consequence, we have a subject disconnected from the ‘real world’, caught in a mobius strip like continuum of misalignment that neither connects with or reflects the major challenges of society whilst maintaining its own self-perpetuating eco system of production and consumption. Likewise, the teaching profession itself needs to be ‘educated and politically astute’ (Sachs, 2003), as teachers are uniquely placed to ‘see first-hand’ the inequity and economics of poverty played out in their classrooms and local communities. More specifically, teachers, and in the context of 1.0, need to be aware of their presumably ‘unconscious’ reproduction of the broader neoliberal (Giroux, 2004) project that constrains rather liberate their students.

The challenge is therefore an economic, social, cultural and environmental one, manifested through a crisis of ‘design’, in which it has taken only a century to establish a dependency through the selling of an illusion based upon consumption, mass production, aesthetics, industrialism and ownership. The consequence of dependencies engrained within society and reinforced through

1.0 are now apparent and unsustainable and where future iterations of 'design' education cannot be passive (Micklethwaite, 2019).

3. DO NO HARM 2.0

Right here. Right now. This is where we draw the line (Thunberg, 2019).

In attempting to reconceive what an alternative vision of the subject should be for 2.0, the adoption of an equivalent of the Hippocratic oath, which when translated from its Latin expression, *primum non nocere*, as "above all do no harm" (Ashton 2004), is proposed. Whilst the origin of the Hippocratic oath is open to contention (Smith 2005), the positing of 'do no harm' as a set of ethical value and moral conduct for 2.0 is both desirable yet inevitably simplifies a complex topic that is far from resolved in the medical field.

In his book 'Do no harm' (2014), the brain surgeon Henry Marsh highlights the dissonance of navigating the fine line between seeking to improve the quality of an individual's life and the potentially fatal consequences of getting such decision making wrong. The parallels, albeit not in such dramatic immediacy, with the argument being made within a 2.0 context, should therefore be clear that contradictions within 1.0 are potentially contributing to cumulative and fatalistic consequences through poor decision making.

However, whilst 'do no harm' gives the appearance of a desirable guiding principle, ultimately it is insufficient to guide the practice and general ethics of medical professionals (Lasagna 1967) as the limitations are exposed by complex ethical problems. Equally whilst the Hippocratic oath may serve as an important reassurance to patients and epitomises the values and ethos of profession, in reality it is open to interpretation, inconsistencies and contradictions (Weising 2020).

The Hippocratic oath nevertheless provides an underlying guide and symbolic set of principles that provides a challenge to consider what would be the equivalent to such an ethical and guiding set of principle within 2.0? Unsurprisingly such a challenge is far from easy, made all the more difficult when the prevailing discourse, governance and structures contribute to a climate of negligence and 'unintended' consequences through reinforcement of culture of compliance and consumption within 1.0.

Adopting a 'do no harm' philosophy does however offer an alternative discourse for the current pervasive materialistic 'outcomes' that promotes anti-democratic, exploitative, perpetual rapid growth-oriented capitalist ideologies that are manifest within 1.0. Equally 'do no harm' questions the legitimacy of 'artefacts', driven by self-fulfilling 'needs and wants' and offers a justifiably sustainable future 2.0 version of the subject. Consequently, learner accountability, liability and culpability are located as central features of a 2.0 'activist' strategy that is earth and sustainability centred. A 2.0 mantra of 'do no harm' consequently aligns with UNESCO's commitment to equity and transformational Education Sustainable Development through empowering lifelong learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity (2019).

Inevitably the simplistic adoption of ‘primum non nocere’ quite deliberately generates more questions than answers as to where the ethical and moral lines are drawn. Yet this is precisely what needs to happen as teachers and students need to be questioning under what circumstances, if ever, it is legitimate and justifiable to embark on activities that ultimately have negative social and environmental consequences. In such circumstances the challenge is in the examination of whether the educational gain outweighs the magnitude of the ethical and ecological ramifications. Indeed, this reflection alone, of the cost benefit analysis, offers potentially greater educational value than much of what occurs in 1.0 and exposes some of the fallacies upon which the subject has become dependent on to legitimise existing practice.

In drawing parallels with education and specifically 2.0, similarities with the life and death matters of the medical profession may appear facile. Yet to adopt such a position fails to acknowledge the significance of education or to recognise that Design and Technology in its current and future iterations is far from neutral and represents a place of social, political, theological and cultural ideologies manifested as an entitlement within the curriculum. As such increasing our expectations about what happens, and importantly in the case of ‘do no harm’ what doesn’t happen, becomes of critical importance.

4. CONCLUSION

I have previously called for a 2.0 version of Design and or Technology as both a theoretical opportunity to examine ‘what if’, but also the means to take action. The starting point being in this context to recognise that the 1.0 version of the subject is now outdated, operating on a set of redundant values and principles that may have been legitimate in the previous century, but which currently sit uncomfortably in the context of increasing inequalities and climate crisis.

In previous provocations and challenges to the community, a starting position is that Design and or Technology 2.0, within an education context, should be activist orientated and accordingly, it is not a choice whether to be activists or not, it is the extent and direction of the activism that is for consideration. Furthermore, a further dimension of 2.0 is the prioritisation of a ‘Design Thinking’ mode that foregrounds and acknowledges inherent cognitive limitations when making decisions.

My third dimension for 2.0, as highlighted within this short essay, emerges from the concerns of an outdated default ‘modus operandi’ of consumption and production that negates to acknowledge the damage and limitations within 1.0. Accordingly, the prevailing western economic model, premised on sustained growth with finite resources fuelled by exploitation of the cognitive flaws of consumerism and consumption, is exemplified through populist manifestations of the subject. This ‘challenge of the commons’, where individuals neglect the well-being of society in the pursuit of personal gain, leading to over-consumption and ultimately depletion of the common resource, is to everybody’s detriment (Boyle, 2020) and is now very apparent. Adopting an equivalent of the Hippocratic oath and a commitment to consider ‘primum non nocere’, therefore offers the opportunity and expectation to contemplate the educational and environmental cost benefit analysis of future iterations of the subject.

The reality is that a ‘Design and or Technology education’ has significant potential to contribute to shaping a ‘better’ society and to meet the 2007 national curriculum ambitions of intervention ‘to improve the quality of life’. It offers a powerful context to question assumptions about civil liberties, political and economic power, society, poverty, media, consumption and wealth as each is implicit and embodied within the pedagogy of the teacher and the decision making of the students. 2.0 therefore challenges many of the preconceptions that underpin everyday actions within 1.0 and fundamentally questions the legitimacy and premiss of capitalist consumption and exploitation which do more harm than good.

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