

*A Design Project Aimed to Promote Social Change:  
From the Classroom to the Community*

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**Abstract**

This study reports on pedagogical practice carried out in an academic context with undergraduate students from the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Communication Design at Lusófona University of Porto (ULP) in the first semester of 2021/22. A collaboration project with Pedro Hispano Hospital (PHH). Students were invited to design posters integrated into The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) – *Learning Compass 2030*, a framework that aims to help navigate towards future well-being – attitudes, values, skills and knowledge for 2030, Personal and Social development of children and adolescents. Twenty-four posters were displayed in strategic areas of the hospital, educating patients and their families about competencies to acquire based on core values such as respect, equality, equity, empathy, solidarity and resilience – a strategy from the hospital to engage and change community behaviours through a creative initiative. The creative process used the *Design Thinking methodology* (problem definition, project ideation, prototyping and implementation). The article has four parts: Introduction, literature review, work methodology and conclusion. An enjoyable and appealing way of communication that motivates patients to make sustainable life changes. This is an opportunity for students to blend a pedagogic activity with a collaborative stakeholder in a real-world project and play an essential role in generating creative ideas, interacting with the local community and promoting sustainable change. A concrete chance for students to learn, gain experience and aid the community.

Keywords: Co-design, Design Skills, Design Educators, Pedagogical Practice, The Role of Design, Design for Change, Social Design

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## **Introduction**

At Lusófona University of Porto (ULP), we believe that design students must develop sensitivity to social problems. A way for students to work with real projects helping those most in need, and allows them, among other things, to find good use of their skills in praxis. A collaboration project was developed with Pedro Hispano Hospital (PHH). Students were invited to design posters integrated into The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) – *Learning Compass 2030*, a framework that aims to help navigate towards future well-being – attitudes, values, skills and knowledge for 2030, Personal and Social development of children and adolescents (OECD, 2018). Twenty-four posters were displayed in strategic areas of the hospital, educating patients and their families about competencies to acquire based on core values such as respect, equality, equity, empathy, solidarity and resilience – a strategy from the hospital to engage and change community behaviours through a creative initiative.

## **Design Skills for the Common Good and the Importance of Collaborative Project**

During a conference held at OCAD in Toronto, Margolin (2014, p.3) introduced the idea of a "citizen-designer." This term describes designers who fulfil various roles, each with its own political and social implications. He named these roles "Action Matrix" and divided them into three levels. The first level is an individual action, which includes topics like art schools and universities. The second level serves as a mediator between individuals. The third level is made up of the government, international organizations, and big corporations. Design scholars must motivate design students to develop projects not only for profit but also to help those most in need. They must prepare young students and future designers to face contemporary challenges, using their skills as an alternative way to promote social change Clune (2010, p.75) states that design for behavioural change has an important role to play in bringing a sustainable society and has indicated "(...) a process for encouraging design students to engage in design for behavioural change. The outcome of this process is an altered understanding of the vocational roles designers could adopt as agents of large-scale behavioural change."

Design scholars must have intervention methods in social issues through collaborative projects to prove to their students the role of design in promoting positive change. These projects also offer a solid opportunity to prepare graduates for the real working world and encourage engagement through innovative practice; as argued (Tromp, et al, 2021), hands-on, inspiring and exciting to use design skills for the common good. We need to inspire the new generation of designers to have an empathetic mentality and not only work for profit but also for a better world.

## **Work Methodology**

In the Autumn term of 2021/22, students from the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Communication Design Bachelor in the module of Introduction Design were invited to design a set of posters integrated into The Organization for *Economic Cooperation and Development* (OECD) – *Learning Compass 2030*, a framework that aims to help navigate towards future well-being – attitudes, values, skills and knowledge for 2030 — Personal and Social development of children and adolescents. Twenty-four posters were displayed in strategic areas of the hospital, informing patients and their families about competencies to be learned with core values such as respect, equality, equity, empathy, solidarity and resilience.

Client: *Pedro Hispano Hospital*, Matosinhos, north of Portugal.

Briefing: Students were invited by the Hospital to design a set of six posters integrated into The Organization for *Economic Cooperation and Development* (OECD) – *Learning Compass 2030*, a framework that aims to help navigate towards future well-being – attitudes, values, skills and knowledge for 2030. A guide to defining competencies needed today for children and adolescents' future Personal and Social development. Twenty-four posters were displayed in strategic areas of the hospital, informing patients and their families about competencies to be learned with core values such as respect, equality, equity, empathy, solidarity and resilience.

(2 classes a week/3, hours each). The creative process was done through the *Design Thinking methodology* in the following order: *problem definition, ideation, prototype and implementation (problem-solution)* [Lupton & Philipps, 2011].

Stage 1. *Problem definition*: Participants (n=17) from the first year of Communication Design undergraduate were divided into small work groups of two or three. Each group must carry out a set of four posters on the following themes from each topics Autonomy, Solidarity, Diversity and Democracy, based on a table shared by the Hospital (Figure 1).

Poster dimension, A2 format (410X594 mm), preference for vertical orientation; unlimited colour according to Johannes Itten contrasts (Itten, 1970); analogue, digital or blended technique; and hierarchies through the basic elements including the type size, typeface choice, and things like weight, colour, capitalisation, and style, that make a visually appealing and easy to read. Also, highlights the most important content, guiding the reader to pay attention through a visual focus that attracts the reader's initial attention to the most important element.

# CITIZENSHIP IN HEALTH

The hospitalized child learns to build personal life story being cooperative and committed to the history of collective life.



## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

### AUTONOMY

1. Learn to manage your daily routines, occupying your free time with educational activities.
2. Learning to get along with others.
3. Maintain family relationships and friendship with the outside world.
4. Make yourself available to cooperate with health professionals.

### SOLIDARITY

1. Able to make a commitment responsibility to you, learning to preserve your health and well-being.
2. Realize the needs
3. Being sensitive, cooperative and with a sense of unity is a good practice.

## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

### DIVERSITY

1. Learning to live with a new style of life while hospitalized.
2. Adapt to change and learn to be resilient.
3. Promote interpersonal relationships and intergroup.
6. Learn to foster inter-generational dialogue.

### DEMOCRACY

1. Respect patients' rights.
2. Respect the desires, preferences, and feelings of others.
3. Recognize and value freedom of expression and participation in the decisions of each.
4. Be active and participatory in the process recovery.
5. Be communicative and learn to live with those who are part of life of the sick.

Figure 1 – Citizenship in Health, Empathy, Creativity, and Main errors of thought, based on the table shared by the Hospital.

Stage 2. *Ideation and Prototype*: ideas were generated with tools such as words, images, colours and shapes through brainstorming, keywords, action verbs, brain dumping, a mind map and a mood board. During the creative process, meeting groups facilitate dialogue and share ideas rather than issuing instructions. Creating a collaborative class is a way to learn through engaging students, sharing insights, and gathering feedback from the group. A collaborative process where everyone involved benefits from a positive discussion where solutions are found and sometimes lost ideas are rescued (Figure 2 and 3).



## BRAINDUMPING



Figure 4 – Joel Maia student visual brain dumping.

Stage 4. *Implementation (problem-solution)*: Student groups prepared a 10-minute presentation of their project. The final solution was developed, finished, and presented to the whole group with the creative process, and all the steps were justified accordingly. The final assessment considered creativity, relevance, impact, hierarchy and legibility.

Figures 5 to 19 show examples of the student's final work.



Figures 5, 6 and 7 – Joel Maia student.



Figures 8, 9 and 10 – Student Carolina Freitas and Sarah Chaves.



Figures 11, 12 and 13 – Student Klára Svobodová and Sofia Neves.



Figures 14, 15 and 16 – Student Gustavo Silva, Danilo Luvuno and José Soares.



Figures 17, 18 and 19 – Student Gustavo Silva, Danilo Luvuno and José Soares.

## Conclusion – Final Considerations

The Communication Design course at Lusófona University of Porto is designed to encourage the development of competencies in several areas, such as design methodology, critical and creative thinking, co-creation, multidisciplinary teams, and innovative ideas. We believe that test ideas, processes and techniques challenge the traditional way of teaching.

This pedagogical practice proved to be an opportunity for design students to have an immersive design project that focuses on a specific social situation and the possibility of applying the tools and methods learned in the curriculum course for a better world. Students must believe that design should play a role in social issues and not work just for profit. Also, it was an opportunity to prepare students by engaging through innovative practices for real problems and preparing them for the challenges they will face and will positively impact society. This academic project also proved that going beyond traditional university practices could be an opportunity to develop core skills for the workplace. A partnership between the university and Pedro Hispano Hospital that proved to be valuable: The Hospital benefited from a multitude of solutions, free of charge; students from the advantage of seeing their posters displayed in a public place; for patients and their families, the possibility of being informed creatively about attitudes, values, skills and knowledge.

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