

Educating through design

Azza Maaoui

ISBAT, Tunisia

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Birth of a design club

Design is everywhere in our private as well as collective spaces. It accompanies our real as well as virtual daily life. Ignoring it would represent a danger, exploiting it is an obligation towards the new generation. The experience reported in this article was within *El Kendi / Esprit* elementary school in Tunis. A scheme meant for the National Board of Education for it brings about changes which, in our opinion, the public sector should be the first beneficiary, and which found, in the private sector, an opportunity to be experimented and tested. This new pedagogical approach is meant to exploit design methodology, the solutions and services created by designers in order to better deal with a given issue.

It is, therefore, in that laboratory spirit that this first teaching of design could be fulfilled during 2017-2018. A club-mode teaching for two hours with ten students aged between 8 and 10. Every Wednesday afternoon, the classroom is turned into a workshop. A dynamic and re-adjustable space favourable for a certain freedom of movement and actions. A living together approach that often led to useful doing together. The children were drawing, colouring and manipulating materials and ideas in a good mood, singing and chatting.

Preliminary session: explaining, sensitizing

What is meant by design? Look around you, look at your objects, your books and their pictures, look at your shoes and your schoolbag. They are different from your friend's ones. You choose them because of their shapes, their colours and their material. Or still, because they have something special, like a secret pocket where you can slip your mother's photo without fear! **All those reasons can be summed up using the word 'design'.** **Design creates beautiful things and showcases beautiful feelings.** Look at the advertising poster, doesn't it inform and attract you? It is a designer who is the author as much as the products that is represented. You can see that the object of your everyday life hides art and know-how, a lot of work to satisfy you! Design is a profession, the designer is an artist who works in collaboration with other professionals such as technicians, doctors, engineers. **His or her job is to create products that are beautiful but always useful and usable.** The factory and craftspeople will take care of the manufacture.



Workshops

Awareness on the environmental issue was the first pedagogical objective of this experience. The choice of the packaging as a study support was obvious because of its multiple presence in the child's environment. It is also, by far, the most polluting design product! Most exercises started with a game.

The guessing game: empty milk packages, hidden labels to identify the answers were unequivocal: the word packaging was never mentioned, substituted for milk content which was immediately recognized. One should wonder if the children were simply aware of the presence of this product. Once the object is shown and named, the children, all ears, **discovered an object of everyday life occulted by the use, trivialized by its function. The packaging is an object systematically neglected because it is associated with the notion of waste that is to say 'nothing'.** A 'nothing' with serious consequences for the environment. They were unaware of it!



The surprise gift game: make a package to understand and not neglect it anymore. The choice of content should amuse and surprise one's friend.

They said that the pictures on the milk package didn't appeal to them, they made drawings which were more explicit as regards the milk benefits for the junior recipients that they are. They are the new suggested and tested labels.

The game of throwing in the green and blue baskets is an experience discovered through waste sorting. First a mess, then, colours are noticed, questions asked, and the sorting is accomplished. The additional information was to emphasize that the dustbin colours, the pictograms in the packages are an **international language created by designers** to facilitate the sorting and the protection of the environment.



Raising up civic action

Visit to a plastic packaging factory, discovery of a technical process but also of a material. Plastic is grains, then a hot sheet, then a shape coming out of a mould. They said: **it's magic, but plastic smells bad, it cannot be good for health, why do they put milk and yogurt in it?**

Reporting this adventure to friends and parents with a drawing for a drawing talks to children and adults. Adding a short sentence to get a clearer message. A message that will be posted on a supermarket bag and shown to everyone. **It is the essence of awareness they quickly understood it as they were themselves convinced of the cause.**

The exhibition of the design club activities was a moment of discovery for the parents and a constructive exchange between the authors of the experience. Is it sure that the contribution of the design subject is pedagogical, unavoidable? It rests with us to decide. If one qualification should be given to this experience, it would unhesitatingly be demonstrative. It is undoubtedly interesting, positive and recreative, but the most important thing is that it **showed how design can concretely contribute to the child's education.**

Four 'recreation' workshops, intersected those of the central theme in order to lighten, amuse and discover.

Book reading, discovering other objects of everyday life, a course about cultural reference and the notion of heritage.

The realization of a cube, passage to two or three dimensions then to the useful object as a container or / and a support. Here pictures of milk containers through time and space. A little history lesson.

Colouring, carving, personalization of a standard print to make one's own invitation to the club's expo.

Making one's own sandals, it is simple and amusing: a sole cut on one's foot and fasteners to choose from.

Thank you to the children of *Wednesday Design Club El Kendi* for that beautiful experience!



Educating by design, the advocacy

Design should prevail at school on the same level as drawing, music and any other artistic subject programmed to develop the cognitive skills of the child of today and best prepare him for the adult of tomorrow. Educating by design would make this child an informed, responsible and creative citizen.

The project consists in the introduction of the design subject in the Tunisian educational system. A rich subject likely to dynamize the present pedagogical approach and bring an answer to its quest for renewal.

Design is the discipline of service and usefulness that caters for everyday needs. It takes root essentially in action, technique, semiotics, ethology, and sociology. A meeting place between art and culture par excellence. That is why it offers to pedagogy varied as much as precise tools. The design approach takes root in art, senses and knowledge, develops the child's pragmatic and creative sensory skills. The child who will learn to establish a link between aesthetics and the functional, between the service provided and the message contained in all that is proposed. He or she will go to the discovery of trades and crafts and industrial know-how. A certainly different and fulfilling learning. The design approach is also a tool for raising awareness about current issues such as pollution, particularly that caused by when the object becomes waste. A teaching which would denounce what is useless, harmful, misleading advertising and abusive consumption, as well as other harmful attributes of our society, to which the child is daily exposed. He will learn to 'review', 'recognize' and de-normalize the object (in the broad sense) of his or her daily life for a fair relationship. The final goal is to enable the child to have the necessary perspective to trigger a significant awareness from primary school age.



Educating by design means multiple pedagogical objectives since and from the design reference. Showing, demonstrating, questioning, manipulating the design object is giving a history lesson or a lesson of things in a different way. It means giving a civic education course as persuasive as it is light, apart from any moralization.

Besides, it is important to emphasize **that the particularity of this teaching requires that the teacher be trained for it..** The knowledge of the terminology, methodology and the design process are required. To be able to manipulate them and make them accessible to that age range, it is important to master them, at least to have studied and for the better to have applied them.

That's why, this advocacy is in favour of the graduates of the Higher Schools of Design, particularly of the product speciality (design product). Their integration is possible, even quite desirable, within the National Education as well as the visual artists and not to replace them. They are, with no doubt, useful educators, necessary for today's pedagogy. It would be enough to go and discover the experiences acquired elsewhere to be convinced. There is no question of a model to apply, but a singular personal strategy which makes it possible to project oneself into a better future. An approach that is adapted to our educative needs and to the social model that we wish for our children. Thus, to envision the integration of the newly qualified in design in the National education as educators or as trainers of educators is certainly favourable for the employment sector as well as for pedagogy.

