

CONVERSATION TEMPLATE

Abstract

Academics have recently explored establishing two education networks in graphic design and communication design, one respectively in the UK and the other in Australia. However, although based on similar concerns, beliefs and aspirations, the two networks have assumed different names.

For some, graphic design and communication design are interchangeable terms. For others, they mean different things. This may be confusing for some in a higher education sector that has continually evolved and expanded in recent decades.

This will explore the similarities and differences between through group work. The formation of these networks will be briefly outlined, and delegates will then work together to identify how various defining qualities – competencies, knowledge, skills, activities, functions – define and differentiate graphic design and communication design.

The conversation objective is to establish where there are converging and diverging interests, and where there needs to be further research into differentiation. Exploring this from a design research perspective will challenge territorial assumptions about practice, theory, and history in graphic design and communication design.

Proposed Conversation Title: Divergence and convergence in graphic design and communication design

Keywords: graphic design; communication design; pedagogy; research

1. Convenors Information

Convenor Name	Email	Affiliation
Robert Harland (Lead and Contact)	r.g.harland@lboro.ac.uk	Loughborough University
Veronika Kelly	veronika.kelly@unisa.edu.au	University of South Australia
Karel van der Waarde	waarde@glo.be	Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne + Basel School of Design.
Eamon Spelman	eamon.spelman@lit.ie	Limerick Institute of Technology

2. Context of Conversation Topic

Two national education networks formed recently in graphic design and communication

design. In 2014 the Graphic Design Educators' Network ([GDEN](#)) was founded in the United Kingdom (UK) and a Communication Design Educators' Network (CDEN) in Australia (AUS) has explored the scope for establishing a similar organisation based on a set of aims established by GDEN. Two of the convenors in this conversation proposal, Harland and Kelly, played a central role in establishing these networks. At DRS2016 they discussed the creation of GDEN in the light of setting up a network in AUS. Through further correspondence, it soon became apparent that educators in the UK and AUS were experiencing similar concerns about pedagogic practice, research and scholarship. This shared apprehension was reported soon after the formation of GDEN (Burns, Corazzo, Hardie, Harland, Raven 2015).

In establishing these networks GDEN approached it from the perspective of recognising the plurality of graphic design in the UK, whereas CDEN adopted an approach that reflected a widespread transformation of graphic design undergraduate programmes into communication design in AUS, a pattern followed by some universities in the United States (e.g. University of Cincinnati). GDEN's approach responded to a considerably expanded field since 1992 when schools of art and design became part of the university sector through the transition of polytechnics to universities. This spawned new programmes over the next decade (Harland 2007) such as visual communication, graphic communication, illustration or digital media, to name a few. Some conflate graphic design and communication design into 'graphic and communication design', as is the case in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK.

Some promote graphic design research but at the same time express a preference for calling it communication design (Walker 2017), reinforcing the idea that the two are interchangeable. Others treat graphic design as an object created by visual communication design in the context of communication design (Frascara 2004). Conversely, in practice, graphic designers see communication as a small component of their skillset, either as part of 'communication strategy' (van der Waarde 2009) or something allied to knowledge & process management skills in presentation (Dziobczenski & Person 2017). In Australia, graphic design in practice has diminished considerably, with designers emphasising their services as design for communication and as a cultural imperative. The aim of this conversation is to test these assumptions by exploring the similarities and differences between graphic design and communication design. The objective is to establish where there are converging and diverging interests. Exploring this from a design research perspective will help challenge territorial assumptions about practice, theory, and history in graphic design and communication design from different geographic perspectives.

This proposal is aligned with the *Design Education: Catalysing Design Capability* theme.

3. Conversation research question

The conversation brings design educators and researchers into an engaging dialogue about the sometimes ambiguous relationship between graphic design and communication design.

An overarching question will guide the organisation of the conversation session:

What are the similarities and differences between graphic design and communication design?

Additional sub-questions will shape the focus of the conversation:

How are these similarities and differences represented in curriculum design?

What are the convergent and divergent design research agendas in these disciplines?

What are the direct consequences of the ambiguity for design researchers?

Where and who are the respective design practice communities?

4. Set-up of your session

The proposal is for a workshop session with active input from DRS audience members and the conversation convenors. It will last for 90 minutes.

0–20 minutes: van der Waarde will introduce two short 5 minute presentations by Harland and Kelly, respectively explaining the formation of GDEN and CDEN, with some provocations to encourage discussion in the next phase. The provocations will focus on encouraging delegates to consider research and practice in graphic design and communication design, and the impact of artistic and/or scientific influences. This will provide some context for the workshop and van der Waarde will field questions immediately afterwards.

20–40 minutes: audience members will split into groups of six and each will be provided with a set of cards designed to facilitate discussion about similarities and differences between graphic design and communication design. These will feature, for example: competencies, knowledge, skills, activities, functions. Three flip chart pads and marker pens will be required, and large post-it notes so that contributions can be positioned in graphic design, communication design, or both. Session convenors will join in with the discussion.

40–60 minutes: each group will communicate their discussion to the session delegates.

60–80 minutes: open discussion about similarities and differences between graphic design and communication design, led by Harland and Kelly.

80–90 minutes: van der Waarde will lead some concluding remarks with Harland and Kelly clarifying what they have learned from the session discussion.

Spelman will document contributions through notes, photographs and recordings to further disseminate to delegates, future network meetings, and for a future journal publication.

5. Type of space and equipment required

We anticipate this will be a popular session due to graphic design and communication design in some form or other being universally taught. Account for 30-40 delegates with 4 convenors, computer and projection facilities, and 6–8 tables to seat working groups of 5–6 people. Two easel pads for recording discussion and a marker pen for each table, plus 12–16 large post-it note pads(enough for a couple per table).

6. Dissemination strategy

The goal of the session is to identify similarity and difference between graphic design and communication design, for sharing more widely amongst session participants and DRS delegates in general. Ideas and outputs will be shared through social media and in a position

statement as a concluding document. Not only can this be disseminated on the DRS2018 site following the conference, but it will also be used to stimulate discussion between GDEN and CDEN members at their respective future meetings, symposia and conferences.

7. References

Burns, J. Corazzo, J., Hardie, K., Harland, R. G. Raven, D. (2015). Graphic design educators' network: re-establishing the purpose and value of a graphic design subject association. *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education*, 14 (2), pp 199–205

Dziobczenski, P. R. N., and Person, O. (2017). 'Graphic Designer Wanted: A Document Analysis of the Described Skill Set of Graphic Designers in Job Advertisements from the United Kingdom.' *International Journal of Design*, 11(2)

Frascara, J. (2004). *Communication design: principles, methods and practice*. 3rd edition. Allworth Press

Harland, R.G. (2007). Redefining the plural domains of graphic design and orientating the subject towards a model that links practice, education and research. IN: *Emerging Trends in Design Research: Proceedings of the International Association of Societies of Design Research (IASDR07)*, Hong Kong Polytechnic University School of Design, 12–15 November 2007.

van der Waarde, K. (2009). *On graphic design: listening to the reader*: Avans Hogeschool Research Group Visual Rhetoric AKV | St. Joost.

Walker, S. (2017). Research in Graphic Design, *The Design Journal*, 20:5, 549-559, DOI: 10.1080/14606925.2017.1347416

About the Convenors:

Dr Robert Harland is a Senior Lecturer at Loughborough University and chair of the Graphic Design Educators' Network. His research explores the relationship between graphic objects and urban objects through graphic design as urban design.

Dr Veronika Kelly is Senior Lecturer in Communication Design, University of South Australia, and has co-led the establishment of an Australian Communication Design Educators' Network (CDEN). Veronika's research focuses on design and rhetoric, critical design pedagogy, and design practice culture.

Dr Karel van der Waarde studied graphic design in the Netherlands (BA) and in the UK (MA & PhD). He combines a commercial Graphic Design – Research consultancy in Belgium (Designing and testing information about medicines), teaching (Basel School of Design, Switzerland), and research (visual argumentation & reflective practice).

Eamon Spelman is Programme Leader of Graphic Design Communication at the Limerick School of Art and Design/LIT and is a Professional Panel member of the 100 Archive.

His areas of specialisation include; data visualisation, typography and Irish graphic design culture.