Virtual and blended design studios

**Keywords:** virtual design studio, digital collaboration, design education, design practice

1. Catalyst Information

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2. Conversation Description

The design studio has been the preferred environment to support creative, social and artefact-centred design education and practice (Crowther, 2013, Howarth, 2013). While corporate design studios become increasingly connected across locations, design education becomes progressively augmented with virtual learning environments (Broadfoot and Bennet, 2003, Robbie and Zeeng, 2012, Jones, 2013, Lotz et al, 2015).

Virtual and blended studios differ from traditional physical environments in significant ways. With designers working at a distance, the people, resources, and objects of design are not physically co-located, which poses particular challenges but also offers some unique benefits. Designing at a distance leads to an increased need for communication. Managing expectations and motivations through social interactions as well as the conception, sharing and implementation of designs can be a challenge. New opportunities arise through distributed expertise and product development. New forms of user engagement and skills
development may change the way designers work. This conversation is going to tackle the question: How can we best support learners in virtual design studios? Guided by examples of virtual environments and physical objects that represent aspects of design studios, participants will be engaged in artefact-centred discussions. Each catalyst will facilitate a smaller group discussion on one specific topic: industry collaboration, social interaction or assessment of learning followed by a group discussion presentation. A plenary discussion on best practice in virtual studios will bring the session to a close.

3. Organizing research question
The main question is: How can we best support learners in virtual design studios?
The sub-questions explored in groups are:
How can we support social interaction in virtual design studios?
How can we facilitate collaboration between design practitioners and learners in virtual environments?
How can we design assessment of learning virtual design studios?

4. Set-up of your session
After a very short pitch of each topic by the catalysts, participants will pool into three groups. Each group will have physical artefacts related to their specific topic at their disposal. The design of assessment is discussed with examples of assessment strategies, designs to be assessed, and stakeholders involved. The support of social interaction and industry collaboration is examined using examples of interactions and communications, roles and goals of stakeholders, and designs to be shared and produced.

Participants have a variety of tools for thinking at their disposal. Sheets of paper and pens, Inspiration cards, Play dough and Lego pieces will help to playfully explore the sub questions. Participants are encouraged to draw or build diagrams, models or collages of processes and strategies to support above areas.

During the conversation, examples of virtual studio environments will be accessible for the audience to experience and experiment with. Making use of virtual studios and conferencing software, two virtual catalysts will join the conversation and contribute to the group discussions. Afterwards the groups present their ideas to each other.

In a closing plenary discussion, the catalysts note down overlapping ideas and best practice identified by the groups in ‘clouds’ on the social networking site Cloudworks (http://cloudworks.ac.uk/), forming part of the dissemination strategy.

5. Type of space and equipment required
1. Room for 30 participants,
2. 3 tables fitting up to 10 chairs each
3. Fast Internet connection for remote participation,
4. 2 projectors,
5. 3 flip charts and markers.

6. Dissemination strategy
The diagrams and models together with notes from the plenary discussion on best practice will be shared with all participants on Cloudworks (http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloudscape/view/1966) extending an already on-going conversation on best practice in design studios and design pedagogy. The DRS forum will be used to advertise the space and invite further participation from delegates who could not attend the conversation session.

7. References

About the Catalysts:

Nicole Lotz Lecturer at the Open University. She designs, develops and teaches award-winning design courses in online design environments. Her research interests cover design pedagogy, design patterns, cross-cultural collaboration and social interaction in online design environments.
Erik Bohemia is the Programme Director in the Institute for Design Innovation at Loughborough University. Dr. Bohemia’s research explores changes associated with Globalisation and the impact on Design. This research has been used to develop an innovative international collaboration named the Global Studio.

Sam Dunne is a design strategy professional. Sam has worked with University of the Arts London to develop a series of intensive two-week interdisciplinary digital collaboration workshops that aim to equip students with the skills needed to flourish after graduation.

Georgy Holden Senior Lecturer, Open University, qualification lead for Design and Innovation, has designed, developed and supported many distance taught and online design courses. Research interests include design education, use of web interfaces for learning, participative and collaborative design and patterns.

Joi Roberts A User Experience professional with creative and technical expertise. She is an initiative-taker who believes in the power of community building, social networking and multicultural, interdisciplinary collaboration, and an active contributor to the broader Design community through conference planning, industry events, keynote presentations and publications.