Binational multidisciplinary project #appreciating simplicity

Proyecto binacional mutidisciplinario #apreciando la simplicidad

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Introspection through Design, Psychologically Inclusive Design.

This project aims to enhance the design as a vehicle to assist students' well-being in social conflict situations. In this case, the implementation of the project took place during the Fall semester of 2020 pandemic closure when students took online classes, and on-campus socialization was not allowed by governments due to the COVID global health crisis. The design process was developed based on empathy and introspection, implementing Human-Centered Design methodology and Psychologically Inclusive design principles. The participants were nine Graphic Design students from CETYS University Ensenada, Mexico, fifteen Graphic Design students from San Diego State University, United States, and seven students from Engineering in Graphic Design School from CETYS University Ensenada, Mexico. Even through cultural, language, and geological differences, there were strong connections and creative Graphic Design solutions were created between students from Mexico and the United States. Similarities were found in the way students built the design concept and approached the problem. Technology provided the opportunity to employ an inclusive ambiance. Multidisciplinary work took the project to the next level, and provided a significant level of motivation, which was an essential factor during pandemic closure in the virtual learning environment. Meetings and presentations were held in English; which was not a problem as all Mexican students spoke fluent English\. This could be a limitation to consider when replicating the process between countries with different languages. Integration took place during the project, and cultural differences were not significant. The project's design process facilitated building connections, strengthening human relations, and motivating introspection.

Introspección a través del diseño, Diseño psicológicamente inclusivo, Diseño de pensamiento positivo.

El propósito de este trabajo es potenciar el diseño hacia el bienestar de los estudiantes en situaciones de conflicto social, en este caso el proyecto se llevó a cabo durante el cierre de la pandemia, los estudiantes tomaron clases en línea, la socialización no fue limitada debido a COVID19. El proceso se desarrolló con base en la empatía y la introspección implementando la metodología del Diseño Centrado en el Humano y los principios del Diseño Psicológicamente Inclusivo. Los participantes fueron 9 estudiantes de Diseño Gráfico de CETYS Universidad Ensenada, México, 15 estudiantes de Diseño Gráfico de SDSU, Estados Unidos y 7 estudiantes de la Escuela de Ingeniería en Diseño Gráfico de CETYS Universidad Ensenada, México. A pesar de las diferencias culturales, hubo fuertes conexiones entre los resultados gráficos de estudiantes de México y Estados Unidos. Se encontraron similitudes en la forma en que construyeron el concepto y abordaron el problema. La tecnología brindó la oportunidad de construir un ambiente inclusivo. El trabajo multidisciplinario llevó el proyecto al siguiente nivel, fue un aspecto importante para la motivación, durante el encierro por la pandemia. Las reuniones y presentaciones se realizaron en inglés, esto no fue un problema ya que los estudiantes mexicanos hablaban inglés con fluidez, sin embargo, esto podría ser una limitación si el proceso se replica entre países con diferentes idiomas. Durante el proyecto hubo integración, las diferencias culturales no fueron limitantes. El proyecto evidencia el uso del proceso de diseño para construir conexiones, relaciones

humanas y motivar la introspección.

1   Introduction

In the Spring Semester of 2020, students worldwide stopped attending schools and universities on campus due to the Covid 19 global crisis . On the 11th of March, the World Health Organization (WHO) stated that the situation had turned into a Global pandemic (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). Faculty had to change teaching modality to a completely online platform without the possibility of planning the process (Fidalgo-Blanco, et al. 2020). This sudden situation affected continuity and students´ spirits and interest in the class. 80% of the Superior Education Institutions (SEI) states there has been a negative impact in enrollment. Almost all have reported Covid-19 affected the teaching-learning process and confirmed it is an opportunity to propose more flexible learning possibilities (Ordorika, 2020).

This situation led to a collaborative teaching opportunity, #AppreciatingSimplicity Multidisciplinary Binational Project, conducted by professors from two universities, one in Mexico and one in the United States: CETYS University, in Ensenada Baja California, Mexico, and San Diego State University, in California, US. The idea arose from communication between the students in these universities in the middle of fatal daily news about the crisis, hospitalizations, illness, death, socialization restrictions, and uncertainty. People from all genders, ages, nationalities, cultures, countries were affected in different ways. Actions we did not think about before the pandemic took on greater importance as we had to do things differently, such as keeping distance, wearing a mask, cleaning hands constantly, coughing into a bent elbow or tissue (Advice for the public, 2021).

Technological Facilitators

Facebook was used as a technology tool to spread creative thinking prior to the project. We challenged students to uploadi photographs daily for 100 days with the hashtag #ApreciatingSimplicity. The goal was to provide visuals that were significant to the author centered around simple details or moments that enhanced beauty and raised their spirits. As photos were uploaded, friends in the social media platform started sharing their images and ideas. Responses from those submissions and online conversations produced a sense of well-being and ignited the idea to design a project with an educational purpose. Figure 1 demonstrates the final post published in Facebook when the challenge was completed. Under the principles that design can enhance well-being, as Escobar (2017, p.35) affirms, "it attempts to construct alternative cultural visions as a driver of social transformation", design is eminently user-centered, participatory, collaborative, and radically contextual.

Figure 1. Personal challenge 100 days #AppreciatingSimplicity

In this case, participants in the project were students from the School of Design the 3rd semester and Engineering the 8th from CETYS University with Professor Robinson, and students in the 6th semester taking the course of Graphic Design (GD) in SDSU with Professor Choi. Collaboration between students from Mexico and the United States, from different fields of study, Designers and Engineers, came together to generate new ideas based on diversity, inclusion, and tolerance.

Reviewing the academic curriculums of courses from both schools, Graphic Design students from both Universities had to create Poster Designs, so designing a poster became their project application. As socialization was limited, each group was guided by Facilitator Robinson and Choi, and classes were held and supported by the Zoom digital platform. In addition to Zoom, communication was facilitated between professors on additional technological media platforms such as Messenger, Whatsapp, and email.

Purpose

The purpose of the posters was to communicate appreciation towards the small and simple things that surround us. There were no limits as long they were of personal inspiration, such as the sound of different rhythms, music, the beauty in vegetables, colorful fruits, flowers, plants, the touch of

smooth textures, daylight projected through a window, pets, aromas; whichever is in an approximate reach and commonly ignored or not fully appreciated.

2   Methodology

Human-Centered Design (HCD) is a methodology that believes even major global problems such as poverty, lack of water or gender equality may be solved. The key is to understand communities, their traditions, beliefs, and way of life. It is important to listen to the voice of those in the situation by not giving solutions, but instead building with them hand in hand. It is based on three main phases: Inspiration, Iteration, and Implementation to build deep empathy with the persons or communities we design (IDEO, 2015).

This methodology enlarges Design solutions. As Escobar (2017) explains, "design evolves from solution–making to become a medium in the service of society and is more attuned to its ability to contribute to creating a better world."

The aim of the **#Appreciating Simplicity Project** is to spread positive thinking in the middle of the global pandemic. It asks students to answer a basic question: *In these challenging times, what makes me feel better?* This question helps students become more conscious and reflective of their surroundings, recognizing that we usually ignore the simple things and moments surrounding us. Applying the HCD methodology, this project is centered on students finding their own solutions through self-observation and introspection. Students are encouraged to evaluate their feelings and peaceful moments to determine how they positively influence their thinking and promote creativity when looking for solutions to conceptual challenges. The project uses design as a tool to promote students' well-being, communication, and a place to collaboratively share personal views to inspire one another.

Binational and multidisciplinary cooperation are two essential features of this project. By having Graphic design students that live in different countries, Mexico and the United States, the project helps bridge cultural differences. Students in the border area of Ensenada and San Diego) had an opportunity to personally experience living together through the global pandemic. Working on the same project and presenting their posters to one another, also helps broaden the students' perspectives about what makes each person feel better.

Multidisciplinary collaboration with Engineers in Graphic Design adds digital interactive solutions to the posters. Students from the School of Engineering attended the final digital presentation of CETYS and SDSU designers. They listened and learned about the conceptualization and process Graphic Designers applied and the significance of each poster. This motivated them to think of digital experience solutions to enhance the project by respecting the original concept for each poster idea.

Psychologically Inclusive Design

Psychologically inclusive design is an approach to creating digital environments that afford equal opportunities to diverse learners by strategically manipulating content and design cues to influence construes and attributions. The digital format offers unique opportunities to create psychologically inclusive learning environments compared to physical classrooms (Kizilcec & Saltarelli, 2019, p. 2). This project's use of different digital platforms contributed to inclusion.

Students from both universities had cultural, social, political, and economic differences, but also similarities. They were men and women from 20 to 25 years old, enrolled in a Graphic Design university-level course, taking an asynchronous online course, living in a confined environment during the global pandemic with their fears, struggles, and worries. Among all participants, there was an overarching empathy for each another.

The Process

The process focuses on reflection and human introspection based on Human Center Design methodology and Psychologically Inclusive Design Principles. The project enhanced creativity and opened opportunities to connect with one another through a unified digital space.

Students from the school of design of both universities created posters to communicate their appreciation for the small and simple things surrounding them. During the global pandemic, things we generally ignore made a difference to them. Design students worked on the same project, with the same purpose and parameter under Professor Robinson and Choi's guidance, without interactions amongst the two classes while developing the poster designs. Each student produced one final poster design, including the title #AppreciatingSimplicity.

The final Poster Design file submissions:
1) Print: PDF, 60cm x 90cm, CMYK, 300 dpi, Outlined Type, Portrait Format
2) Digital: JPG, 1701 x 2501 pixels, RGB, 72 dpi, Portrait Format
3) Video Record: 5 minute long presentation briefly explaining the design research/ introspection, moodboard, concept, sketches, and final poster design

Students from both schools met via Zoom for the final poster design presentation and participated in providing feedback and sharing ideas. Figure 2 to 7 display student poster designs that exemplify various design approaches.

Figure 2, 3, and 4. #AppreciatingSimplicity Poster Design developed by Graphic Design Students, CETYS University

Figure 5, 6, and 7. #AppreciatingSimplicity Poster Design developed by Graphic Design Students, SDSU

Digital Design Engineering? students joined the final presentation to observe and understand design student's thinking behind each poster design. In collaboration with Digital Design Engineers from CETYS University, a digital strategy was designed based on Animation, Augmented Reality, and an online self-guided gallery to share the posters and spread the concept. Engineering? students worked on teams. Three groups were formed. They built a strategy based on Animation, Augmented Reality, and an Online Digital Gallery. The objective was to make posters attainable for as many people as possible using technology. Figure 6, 7, and 8 show the self-guided Art Gallery, and Figure 9 is an example of Augmented Reality applied to a poster.

Figure 6. Virtual gallery developed by Engineers in Graphic Design, CETYS University
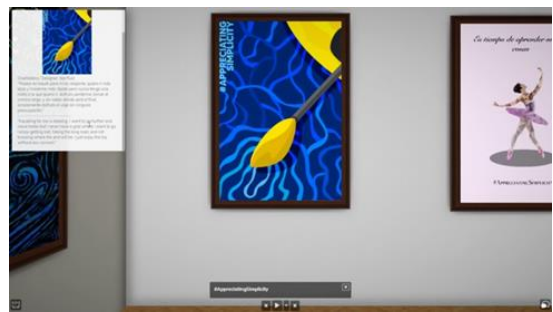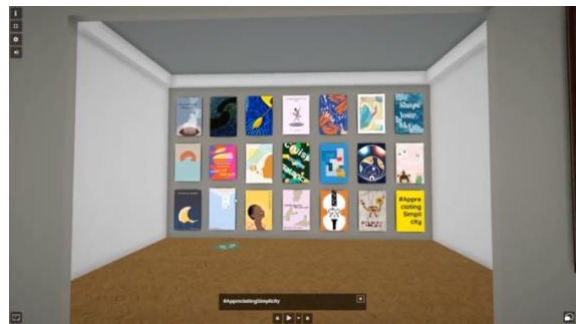

Figure 7. Description posters virtual gallery

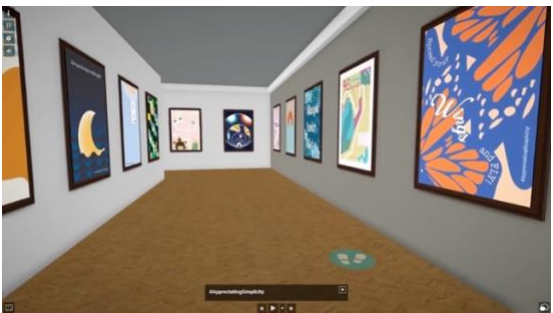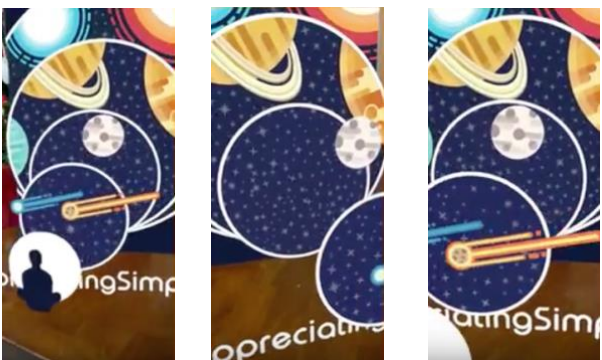Figure 8. Final room Virtual gallery, 21 posters Project #AppreciatingSimplicity

Figure 9. Posters Augmented Reality and Animation. Project #AppreciatingSimplicity

Digital platforms

Enhancing Human Centered Design

It was a priority to consider digital platforms, which allowed inclusiveness, collaboration, image and video sharing. Several Digital Platforms were implemented to assure proper communication.

Zoom video conference platform was used for:
- Synchronous online class
- Professors project preparation
- Student presentations
- Student video recording presentations

Blackboard and Canvas Education Learning:
- Organize Project guidelines
- Distribute content
- Evaluation process
- Discussion forums

Adobe Creative Cloud:
- Execute design ideas
- Implement poster design into interactive digital solutions

Linoit.com web sticky note service was useful to:
- Upload and distribute students design concept videos
- Feedback

Along with the Project Development, other technology tools used were:
- Emails
- Whatsapp
- Facebook Messenger

Results and Findings

The collaborative multidisciplinary project **#AppreciatingSimplicity** drives students towards introspection, where they share their motivations and feelings. It empowers them to express their ideas about a vulnerable situation during their confinement.

Students felt they were part of something bigger. It included them in a network of sharing that promoted enhanced wellness. Using digital graphic solutions allowed students to share their positive ideas with the rest of their community and contribute to other's well-being. Listening and providing feedback to students from different universities and fields of study enriched their experience as future professionals.

The Design solutions and forms presented by students demonstrated their similarity between one another. Despite differences of culture, race, language, and geological location, their empathy and vision toward unity shined through. We consider likeness is due to certain factors such as:

1. Proximity. The border Tijuana-San Diego and close cities such as Ensenada, share interests even though they are two different countries. The border creates a special bond balanced on diversity and synergy, it is a shared ecosystem (HOME, 2021).
2. Participant profiles. They all are young, between 20 to 24 years old. They graduated from Middle School to get a university degree, which narrows down differences.
3. Sources. To build their moodboards students get visual inspiration from Pinterest, Stock Photography and/or Google search.
4. Social media. Most students use and navigate through Facebook, Instagram and/or TikTok, platforms where there is mostly a common visual language among young people.
5. Hegemony. The region has its own microeconomy, trade exchange that influence inhabitants. There is a predominance of U.S. economic power over Mexico.
6. Visual Context. Media, billboards, advertisement and branding in the region spear visual messages that capture the consumer's eye and influence decision making. Students are part of this receptive target market.

The majority of design solutions used the vector graphic approach, while one student explored a photo collage. Design might be significantly influenced by the globalization of internet and social media. Students search the internet for design inspiration to an even greater extent as a result of staying at home during the COVID pandemic.

Online course and technological platforms made it possible for professors to develop the project during the global pandemic. Having the dynamic, face-to-face, on-campus meeting could have been a limitation as crossing the border physically implies transportation, legal permissions, and universities validation. The project can be replicated in an online format. We consider that the only restriction could be language. Students must communicate fluently to articulate their design thinking

and provide feedback to peers. In this case, CETYS university requires a high-level of English in all studies to graduate.

The COVID global pandemic tends to bring out negative emotions, worries, and frustration. In the middle of the crisis, designers are tasked with spreading positive and encouraging messages to the world. We have learned to adapt and do things differently. The need for change has become mandatory. This situation has also inspired us to explore new teaching opportunities, creative experimentation, and innovation.

A collaborative project builds connections, human relations, and motivates introspection.

Design can enhance good.

Design is borderless.

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