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A Focus on Pedagogy: Teaching, Learning and Research in the Modern Academy



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# INTRODUCTION

# A Focus on Pedagogy: Teaching, Learning and Research in the Modern Academy

This publication is the product of the conference *A Focus on Pedagogy: Teaching, Learning and Research in the Modern Academy* held virtually 2022 based on the following call:

Today the education sector is going through what most commentators see as an unprecedented period of change. The assumption is that in the wake of COVID-19, many standard modes of teaching and learning have changed forever. While that is undoubtedly true and of fundamental importance, many aspects of what we do remains the same. Our need to publish, bring in research funding, and get positive student assessments have not gone away. The knowledge we need to impart, and the mindsets we seek to loosen or develop, remain as engrained as ever. Similarly, long established research areas are still to be explored. Whether it be the environment, learning psychology, social networks, creative practice or design thinking, what we research remains relevant and pressing.

In addition, despite the 'strangeness' of the change around us, some disciplines find themselves in unexpectedly familiar domains. The digital arts, media and communication studies are operating on platforms many see as natural. The proponents of distance learning are employing techniques they had been honing for years. Acolytes of educational technologies are perfecting platforms they have been developing for decades. The effect of the pandemic on our teaching and research then, is far from uniform or wholly negative. Set in this context, this conference reminds us that, in addition to the pandemic, there are other issues at play for educators and researchers today. Asking us to take a step back from the flux we have been in recently, it invites us to discuss both the radical realignments that have been necessary in recent times, and those aspects of our pedagogy that have continued unaffected by remote teaching. Bringing both sides of this coin together, the intention is to better grasp the tenor of teaching and research in today's changing, and increasingly hybrid, academy.

This publication captures the diverse responses that emerged from the event and the variety of ways academics internationally currently operate with today's education sector.

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# **HUMANS OF INTERIORS – DIVERSITY BY DESIGN**

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#### INTRODUCTION

Knowing the world is often about seeing the world. Within the disciplines of Interior Architecture and Design, visual depiction of spaces is a powerful tool to communicate use, users and qualities of the designed/proposed spaces. With a mixture of techniques we can produce images capable of plunging viewers directly into these imagined spaces. Visual depictions of people demonstrate social norms and values, teaching viewers how the world works and their place within it via symbolic socialisation. Such visualisations, so provocative and seductive, are carefully designed to communicate the atmosphere that the designer is aiming to create, but if they fail to include a fair representation of the people those spaces are designed for, they misrepresent the aim of the project. This distinct lack of diversity and inclusivity within visuals is indicative of both a lack of consideration of the existence of people who are not the same as the designers themselves (who are overwhelmingly young, white and able-bodied<sup>3</sup>) and an equally problematic lack of understanding of the needs of these populations.

The paper is the account of a collaboration, a research project and a series of workshops conducted over the last few years by the University of Lincoln and Middlesex University London. Humans of Interiors/Diversity by Design aims at promoting a discussion across education and industry on the impact that visualization has on the representation of future spaces and whom these spaces are addressed and designed for: a discourse about social sustainability of spatial design. The research activities underpinning Humans of Interiors/Diversity by Design and the workshops devised internationally, help establish equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) as an integral part of the design process and enable participants to apply their own critically reflective knowledge and understanding of these principles to the development of their design.

#### **REPRESENTATION MATTERS**

"Representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation."

Over recent decades, interior architecture and design has established itself as an influential discipline, able to draw connections between spaces, people and objects and effectively communicate and disseminate to a broad audience: exponential growth in terms of projects, courses and debates has contributed to opening up the discipline on a global scale. However, despite working with and teaching a growing international group of people, we are aware that our cultural narratives tend to originate from a specific western canon, shaped by a very specific geographic and cultural niche. The way in which we model and explain spaces is deeply rooted in our own culture and in a very specific way of understanding the world.

Figure 1. Figures produced by BA and MA IAD students during the T&L innovation funded workshop 2020, University of Lincoln

As educators, we aim to foster a global spatial-narrative dimension for interiors, which allows a wider social, political and economic context to emerge. The work produced by our students reflects these ambitions, questioning the way we inhabit the world and how we can provide everyone with a better space to live, work and enjoy life.<sup>5</sup>

We can proudly assert that those principles translate into disruptive proposals, deeply rooted in research and innovation. However, when it comes to students visualising their ideas, often the representations of inhabitants for their spaces tend to fall short of reflecting the real world - portraying a more narrow and rather conformist view. The images used to portray our designs are much more than a communication tool as they offer an insight of a vision of our future world. More specifically, how we choose to visually depict people in our designs, demonstrates the social norms and values of this future world.

However, in investigating the process of producing such visualization, we understand that this part of the process is often no more than an afterthought, which demonstrates a lack of understanding of how the final visualizations impact the future of those spaces; most of the time these images are not even reflective of the demographic they have been designed for. More consideration of diversity and inclusion within design have the dual effect of encouraging end-users to feel more welcome within a space, and to highlight to the design community, the fact that end-users have differential needs based upon their individual characteristics



Figure 2. Figures developed by Elizabeth Fadairo, Interior Architecture Graduate 2021, Middlesex University

# **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY BY DESIGN**

Design is a human-centred discipline with many interrelated and complementary fields that imagine and realise objects, spaces and future scenarios. Spatial design, specifically, is a very complex multi-disciplinary realm where different knowledge merges in order to explore, propose and produce spaces that can enhance human inhabitation and experience. The way in which we communicate our projects to stakeholders and end-users is a key part of what we do as designers, as the way we present and represent the spaces we design, impacts upon how these spaces are perceived and used. Extended research prompts the final choices to communicate materiality, usability, performance, functionality and technology, and the images used to portray our designs are much more than a communication tool

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- they put forward ambitions and ideas for the vision of our future world.

Inhabitation, and how we choose to visually depict people in our designs is key - demonstrating the social norms and values of this future world, but - when it comes to populating the imagined spaces with inhabitants, designers rely less on extended research. Both in academia and industry, there is a reliance upon stocks of readily available images of people, which do not always reflect the diversity of the context, and therefore, the needs of the project. This lack of diversity in the people represented undermines the communication of the ideas behind the design; if we are designing a community centre but fail to include the full range of local inhabitants, we miss the aim of the project, no matter how good the project is in other respects. Of course, the project visualisations are not the only criterion through which a project is assessed, but they are crucial to how it is accessed and understood by the wider public.



Figure 3. Image developed by y2 Interior Architecture and Interior Design students, Middlesex University 2021-2022 (ID: Bielecka, Marlena, Marshall, Roslyn, Shahrestani, Rayhaneh, Wadud, Tasnim Taz, IA: Alessandro Viscardi, Diana Caiza, Hope Irinoye, AT: Jamally Francis).

The quality of the spaces we research, reflect on and design, has a big impact on the quality of people's lives. Decisions about how we imagine those places, their details and the interaction between people, spaces and objects can enhance or restrict a sense of belonging.

Designing spaces, we can help by removing real and imagined barriers between people and communities and foster a better world. On the contrary, such misrepresentation of users of the designed spaces can cause individuals or groups to feel excluded from spaces that are not welcoming, safe or designed for them<sup>6</sup>. 'People that have difficulty accessing and/or using products and services ("edge users") are often not included in the design process' and are very rarely represented within design visuals. While some people on this spectrum are excluded altogether, a much greater number are inconvenienced, and these spectrums are rarely linear; in many cases, they are intersectional and multi-dimensional.

It should be noted that architectural visualisations do occasionally represent individuals with physical disabilities, however, this is typically because disability directly relates to pragmatic needs in

buildings for: entry access; vertical circulation throughout the building; escape routes; and accessible WCs. There tends to be little consideration beyond this in terms of EDI<sup>8</sup>, and when there is, these portrayals can be negative, one-dimensional or reflective of incorrect assumptions and stereotypes<sup>9</sup>. It is important to acknowledge that each of the choices made by a designer about who to include as an inhabitant of a space is a political decision, a specific way of spatial identity-making and urban space-production, so this lack of attention is not just a matter of superficiality - it also reflects a limited cultural approach, in which designers are either unaware of, unable or not inclined to question the socio-political environment in which they are working.

To counter such limitations, we encourage the careful consideration of specific key personal and 'group' characteristics. Including these as part of the creative process can prompt critical reflection about who the inhabitants really are, and whom these spaces are actually being designed for 10. More diverse and inclusive visuals in design projects have several positive effects, such as a wider range of end-users feeling more welcome within a space (a 'mirror' for marginalised groups to view themselves as included). The generation of more diverse and inclusive visuals will also highlight the diversity of the needs of end-users, based on their individual characteristics (serving as a 'window' through which designers themselves can understand more diverse needs). By extension, this also widens access to design as a career and a cultural field, as people from diverse backgrounds feel included when they see that design is for people like them.

# **Starting with Unconscious Bias**

As we have stated, this distinct lack of diversity and inclusivity within visuals is reflective of both a lack of consideration of the existence of people who are not the same as the designers themselves, but also a lack of understanding of the needs of diverse populations<sup>11</sup>. For the most part these exclusions are not deliberate; they simply reflect the experience, awareness and inclinations of the students themselves, but this is how unconscious bias is communicated - providing a subtle message about who a space or place is meant for.

Our own qualitative investigations have revealed that this may be due, in part, to a lack of explicit instruction in how to counter unconscious bias and consider EDI, not only during the first steps of the research, but across the whole design process<sup>12</sup>. The conventional lens through which inhabitants are represented needs to be clearly redressed to include non-western ways of living, non-binary ways of being and to reflect on issues of class, gender, race and other individual characteristics. Our workshops involve challenging and remaking the current pedagogy, which has thus far been rooted in a specific geo-cultural niche.

## **Humans of Interiors/ the Workshop**

This project is a collaboration between academics from The University of Lincoln's School of Psychology and the Interior Architecture programmes, and Interior Architecture at Middlesex University, and the Academic Writing and Language team at Middlesex University. We have developed a series of targeted and inter-disciplinary workshops with which to ensure that Interior Architecture and Design students, educators and practitioners, are equipped with the knowledge they need to deliver presentations and discuss unconscious bias in representation, as well as inclusivity and diversity. We encourage our students to challenge un-/subconscious social norms by introducing the psychology behind the ideas of bias, individual differences and intersectionality (the understanding of how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege, <sup>13</sup> and how these combines to impact our way of viewing and experiencing the world. Our seminars and exercises then facilitate discussion of how this change of perspective can be used in a practical sense to impact design outcomes and ensure diverse and

inclusive end-user engagement to develop meaningful relationships with communities that contribute to a design: designing with rather than for. These workshops also teach the importance of including a broad range of figures who represent the users of buildings; not just to highlight a practical necessity, but to represent and promote the diversity within our society.



Figure 4. Figures developed by Charlie Wooton (Year 3 IAD) during a research project associated with our workshops, University of Lincoln.

In January 2020 the University of Lincoln Teaching and Learning Innovation Fund supported an initial Diversity and Inclusion Workshop that was run within the School of Design, experience that was repeated in October 2020 at Lincoln. This workshop exposed students to an understanding of unconscious bias, established EDI as an important principle within IAD, and guided students in the application of this knowledge to develop innovative figures for their visuals.

At Middlesex University, EDI is an important principle that guides the briefs, carefully devised to be inclusive and open to define projects that are relevant for all.

In November 2020 these two approaches merged in delivering a collaborative workshop that was delivered at Middlesex University, combining the seminars on unconscious bias and EDI with a seminar on text-based narrative and the creation of graphic figures. We used exploratory writing activities to help our students invest the people they drew with believable personal identities. These activities included asking students to go and find an object that they imagined might belong to a person they were drawing. We asked them to focus, in spontaneous free-writing, on concrete-actual qualities of these objects; and then to make up anecdotes about them, that the person they were drawing might tell. This kind of generative writing helped the students build up a believable sense of their characters, so that when they drew them, they felt they knew them, a bit.



Figure 5. Figures developed by Year 3 in Interior Architecture at Middlesex University in connection with our workshop. The gallery includes the inhabitants of the Major Projects of Imaan Zorah Daureeawoo, Chung Yin Ha, Tiar'Na Aaliyah Iesha R A J T Banton, Jr-Yun Lin, Sareh Sarvar, Marwan Mohamed Hagi Mak, Leah Yazmina Roberts, Nancy Surajkumar Prajapati, Elizabeth Fadairo, Katherine Louise Dixon, William David Webster, Hozan Aziz, Ashna Butt, Paulina Agnieszka Kalferszt, Viktorija Marcinkeviciute, Tamara Oluwakemi and Hannah Orebiy.



Figure 6. Figures produced by year 2 IAD students Lauren Glass and Wiktoria Rabij as part of the UROS project 2020, University of Lincoln.

The figures produced by students were inclusive, innovative and reflected the protected characteristics. The range of figures produced can be used in students' projects, as a teaching tool, as will serve to help internationalise the representations used within both student and staff projects, and provide significant wider impact as a result.

The workshop has been the starting point of a revision of the design process and methodologies across the programme to embed EDI throughout the curricula.

The workshop has been piloted, refined and run at the University of Lincoln and Middlesex University in the UK in 2020-2021, and again in 2021-2022. Humans of Interiors is part of the curriculum and is delivered, in different versions - each one with specific outcomes, to all year groups

in the BA and MA programmes in Interior Architecture and Design Programmes. From the current academic year, we have delivered talks and presentations to conferences and international partners<sup>14</sup> and are designing an event that will broaden the context looking at other creative industries programmes like Fashion or Graphic Design.

#### CONCLUSION

Quantitative and qualitative feedback from our workshops has demonstrated that students feel they come away with a better understanding that different end-users have different needs in different contexts, with more awareness of personal characteristics and how these interact to impact upon the individual, and an increased understanding of the impact that visual depictions can have.

Following the workshop, one student from the University of Lincoln reflected

I was shocked to reflect upon my own work thus far and that of my peers only to recognise such blatant exclusion... I felt instantly compelled to engage with the [workshop] and it is my hope that through my participation and contribution to it that I will be able to educate those around me now and a wider circle as I progress through my career. <sup>15</sup>



Figure 7. Image produced by Irma Signe Linnea Vesterlund, Interior Architecture, Middlesex University, y2 2019-2020.

Prior to our workshops, 82% of student respondents rated the choice of visuals as "somewhat important" whereas afterwards 91% rated this as "very important" and although 58% of respondents were only "a little bit" or "somewhat" confident in engaging with, including or designing for marginalised communities beforehand, afterwards 75% of respondents were "very" confident. We also found that 88% of respondents felt that our workshops had positively influenced the way in

which they considered the inhabitants of interior spaces when designing visuals.

"My design has more multicultural figures and is definitely more 'alive' since I brought diversity into my projects", <sup>16</sup> "I could see the benefit not just in mine, but my colleagues' designs and them becoming more inclusive after the session." <sup>17</sup>

The legacy of the workshops intends to contribute to a sustained understanding of the effects of unconscious bias, both when selecting figures, and the consideration of inclusivity in a broad sense when working on design projects. The positive effects of the unconscious bias workshop and following conversations have resulted in a deeper understanding and application of knowledge surrounding intersectionality and the application of this knowledge to projects. This is evidenced with several award winners and shortlisted projects from Middlesex University at the Interior Educators awards in the category of 'equality, diversity and inclusivity' as illustrated in Figure 7 and 8.

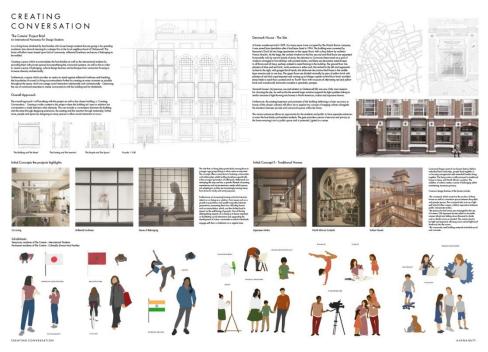


Figure 8. Images produced by Ashna Butt - Interior Architecture Graduate 2021, Middlesex University.

Students awareness not only of what they produce as designers and how they represent people in visuals, but also how an understanding of unconscious bias can support them moving forward in to the workplace was emphasized by recent graduate Josh Haynes. He states the following

With the aspiration of attaining a successful career spanning geographical boundaries, cultures and social contexts, it is imperative that my work (individual and collaborative) be both tangibly and intangibly respectful and accessible to all people. Devoting my personal time to the ongoing research into *unconscious bias* and contribution to awareness campaigns is something I am eager to do as part of the ongoing mission to offer equal opportunities to everyone in the modern day as well as my personal inclination to collaborate with those of differing professions (in this case psychology) in order to develop a holistic outlook within both my career and my personal endeavours.<sup>19</sup>

The evaluation of the workshops, seminars and projects has been evidenced in the success of final design projects and in the attention they gained specifically on their ability to be inclusive, <sup>20</sup> both within the university and nationally, as well questionnaire responses and qualitative feedback. Further action is proposed to evaluate the students understanding and application of unconscious bias and EDI principles in design and written work over the duration of their time spent at University and post-graduation. Once in the workplace, follow up discussions with students could take place to evaluate

whether the workshops have lasting effects in relation to the approach to design projects and choices of figures used, as well as decision making in seeking jobs and determining whether a company has an inclusivity statement and is actively seeking to employ people from diverse backgrounds.

#### **NOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> GIllian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (London: Sage Publications, 2001)
- <sup>2</sup> David H. Weaver, "Thoughts on Agenda Setting, Framing, and Priming." *Journal of Communication* 57, no1 (2007): 142–147. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00333.x.
- <sup>3</sup> Sally Benton, Stephen Miller and Sophie Reid, *The Design Economy* (London: Design Council, 2018), https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/report/design-economy-2018.
- <sup>4</sup> George Gerbner and Larry Gross, "Living with Television: The Violence Profile," *Journal of Communication* 26 (1976): 172-199.
- <sup>5</sup> Edward Steinfeld and Jordana Maisel, *Universal Design: Creating Inclusive Environments* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2012)
- <sup>6</sup> Catherine Horwill and Elli Thomas, *Inclusive Design: Beyond Accessibility* (London: Design Council, 2019), https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/inclusive-design-beyond-accessibility
- <sup>7</sup> Centre For Inclusive Design, *The Benefits of Designing for Everyone* (London: Price Waterhouse Cooper, 2019),

https://centreforinclusivedesign.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/inclusive-design-report-digital-160519.pdf.

- <sup>8</sup> EDI stands for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion.
- <sup>9</sup> Catherine Horwill and Elli Thomas, *Inclusive Design: Beyond accessibility* (London: Design Council, 2019), 6. https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/inclusive-design-beyond-accessibility.
- <sup>10</sup> Tasoulla Hadjiyanni, "Rethinking Culture in Interior Design Pedagogy: The Potential Beyond CIDA Standard 2g", *Journal of Interior Design* 38 no3 (2013): v–xii.
- <sup>11</sup> Rob Imrie, "Architects' conceptions of the human body", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21 no1 (2003): 47–65, https://doi.org/10.1068/d271t.
- <sup>12</sup> Matteo Zallio and P. John Clarkson, "Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility in the Built Environment: A Study of Architectural Design Practice", *Building & Environment*, 206 (2021): 108352. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.buildenv.2021.108352
- <sup>13</sup> Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum,* 139 (1989); Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis," *Signs* 38 no4 (2013): 785–810. doi:10.1086/669608.
- <sup>14</sup> Design School, Politecnico di Milano, MSc Interior and Spatial Design, April 2022.
- <sup>15</sup> Year 3 Interior Architecture and Design Student, University of Lincoln (UK).
- <sup>16</sup> Year 3 Interior Architecture and Design Student, Middlesex University (UK).
- <sup>17</sup> Year 3 Interior Architecture and Design Student, Middlesex University (UK).
- <sup>18</sup> Interior Educator is the subject association representing well-established Interior programmes from across the UK with more than 50 Higher Education institutions. The National Awards are a well-established student competition that awards prizes for graduate and progressing students. From 2022 the National Awards has introduced a specific category *Diversity*, *equality and inclusion* that "awards for projects which address issues of social justice and equality, and fundamental human rights and dignity for all".
- <sup>19</sup> University of Lincoln, Undergraduate research opportunities scheme grant application 2019.
- <sup>20</sup> Diversity, equality and inclusion for the National Awards by Interior Educators. In 2022 for Graduating Students, Shortlisted Ashna Butt Middlesex University London, for Progressing Students Irma Vesterlund - Commendation Middlesex University London

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