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PROGRAM

# GROWING UP WITH DESIGN

CONCEPTUALIZING DESIGN EDUCATION FOR  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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## ABSTRACT

While design-oriented industries are calling upon sophisticated design methodologies to solve complex problems, school systems are failing to meet the growing need for such design curricula, especially for younger student groups. When available, design education in secondary schools is often wedged into a visual arts curriculum, where teachers erroneously introduce design as a mere creative extension of art. The purpose of this research is to collect experiences and perspectives from design educators on how they conceptualize design education for adolescents and to explore the benefits of design education for this specific age group.

Some of the challenges in implementing design into the mainstream curricula lie in the fact that the very discipline and role of design have evolved over time, shifting its primary role from making artifacts and objects look and work better to improving social, economic, and physical systems around us. The lack of clear articulation and consensus around the definition of design has inevitably contributed to the shallowness of public understanding around the concepts of design, design process, and design education.

Secondly, the structures and methodologies of education systems as a whole continue to lag behind, leaving not much room for the creative divergent thinking processes that design education seeks to foster. Current education systems condition students to temporarily memorize facts to obtain "the right answer" rather than to engage in creative processes to find answers to complex problems.

By examining how design has evolved over time, this thesis aims to present an updated definition of design in today's learning and design context and answer the question: how does one teach design, which cannot be mastered only through book study. By collaborating and building consensus with current educators and designers, a step towards bringing design learning to secondary schools could be achieved. We need to promote design education as a solution to bridge the gaps seen in the existing education systems. Nigel Cross famously described design as a "third area of education," pointing to the important role that design has in bridging the humanities and sciences. By seeing design as a fundamentally prosocial interdisciplinary activity, educators and policy makers have an opportunity to leverage the power of design to raise up future generations of human beings.

Given that design is relatively new compared to other disciplines, there is a lack of resources and field work experience existing. Thus, a concept mapping method is used to ask the research question to current design educators, "How do current design educators conceptualize design education for teens?" Using this mixed methods approach, an up-to-date conceptual framework for design education is developed, which can then guide the planning of a scalable design curriculum for secondary schools and alternative ways to make design education more accessible to the adolescent teens.