

Mapping current research and future directions of Design Literacy with systematic quantitative literature review (SQLR)

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Abstract

Design literacy is an emerging research field that is gaining attention among scholars today. Credit goes to the growing acceptance of design thinking in various disciplines beyond design. Design literacy develops natural abilities in everyone to solve real-world, wicked problems by supporting the cognitive development of concrete (making things) and iconic (making meanings) modes of cognition. The author argues for embedding design literacy in every educational level, particularly across disciplines in higher education. To gain insight into the state of scholarly discourse around design literacy in educational contexts, a systematic quantitative literature review (SQLR) was conducted using 12 databases to map its research direction and define its characteristics. The SQLR revealed several findings. First, the foundations of design literacy are grounded in general education and design education. Second, publications were meagre but well represented by the secondary and higher education level. Finally, two thematic directions were observed - *design literacy for making things* is the situated practice in secondary education while *design literacy for making meanings* is for higher education. This SQLR serves as a benchmark review and a starting point to initiate scholarly discourse on design literacy as it aims to contribute to the advancement of research in the field.

Keywords

design literacy, digital learning, participatory culture, systematic quantitative literature review (SQLR), making things, making meanings

Introduction

Digital technology enabled learning and select human activities to move online, especially in pandemic times. However, not everyone was prepared with requisite skills and mindset to manage the digital shift. The move to digital learning and engagement requires new ways of learning or literacy to participate effectively in the digital environment (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). There are many kinds of literacy that emerged in the information age (Leu et al., 2015) but design literacy is argued by the author as more appropriate to facilitate this transition.

Design literacy is a relatively new term and defining it is challenging and contentious. There is a caveat to this attempt whilst a definition of some kind may emerge from the literature itself. To give context to the term 'design literacy', design as a word and a discipline is defined subsequently. It is used as a noun and a verb to refer to the product or the process of making (Balsamo, 2009). Design is embodied in the artefact in its operation and practice (Jones, 2014). Design as a discipline is the third pillar of knowledge after the sciences and the humanities (Archer, 1979; Cross, 1982). Design exemplifies the practice of *learning by doing* (Archer, 1979; Pacione, 2010; Poggenpohl, 2008; Sheridan & Rowsell, 2010) which is what people do as they

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