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Rune Pettersson, Ph.D., is Professor of Information Design at the Department of Innovation, Design and Product Development at Mälardalen University, Eskilstuna, Sweden. He is also Chairman Art & Design, Faculty of Science & Technology. Dr Pettersson has been Vice President of International Institute for Information Design, IIID. He has also been Vice President of the International Visual Literacy Association, IVLA, six times and President during 2000-2001. He has also been an International Advisor for the International Division of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology. He has published 206 papers and 65 books.

Questions

1. When, where, how and why did your interest in information design emerge? Why did you choose it as your main research area?

Some 40 years ago I was teaching biology. Next to the real thing it was good to have access to pictures. Then I worked four years as a science editor and a publisher's reader. It was necessary for me to develop editing skills. Then I worked as a manager of AV- and video-productions. For twelve years I was responsible for R&D at a major publishing group in Sweden. In connection with some international co-operative projects I realized that people interpreted image contents in many different ways. I think that I have always been interested in the functions of words, visuals and form. At an early stage I learned that it was necessary to study several different established academic disciplines. The study of information design is a multi-disciplinary, multi-dimensional and worldwide consideration. A well-designed information material makes everyday life easier for people, and it grants good credibility to the senders or sources. The main goal in information design is clarity of communication.

2. One of your main research interests is information design education. Do you think education in this area differs from other design areas? Do you think we need a special pedagogical model for teaching information design?

Yes, information design education is one of my interests. I have limited personal experience from teaching of other design areas. There may actually be more similarities than differences if we compare education in different design areas. Personally, I am much more concerned with the learning aspects than with the teaching aspects. Like architecture, dance, fine arts, music and theatre, also information design has a practical as well as a theoretical component. Like the two faces of a coin, *infography* and *infology* are the two main parts of information design. Infography is the actual, practical formation and execution of structured combinations of text, pictures, and graphic design. Infology is the science of verbo-visual presentation and interpretation of information. On the basis of man's prerequisites, infology encompasses studies of the way a verbo-visual

representation should be designed in order to achieve optimum communication between sender and receiver. Students need to learn about processes and theories, and at the same time develop their practical skills. It is not enough to read a textbook. It is not enough to learn how to use a program for word processing. We have found that students may learn a lot from working with real projects.

Infodidactics is the methods used for teaching the various aspects of information design. The huge spread among the different disciplines makes information design an interesting, but also a complex area of research and teaching.

3. Students usually have different learning styles and learning strategies. How do you think we could deal with this diversity when teaching information design?

First of all it is important that teachers of information design have got proper teaching skills. In order to meet the demands of different learning styles and different learning strategies we need to provide a number of different learning materials. It is not enough to have just one text or just one exercise. However, it takes time to develop proper learning materials. This is an area where I would like to see international co-operation. Information design is still a young discipline. It would be nice to have regular meetings for ID-teachers, maybe on the Internet and also in connection with conferences.

4. Undergraduate design teaching is usually focused on collaborative learning and group working. In contrast, postgraduate research students usually work on their own, discussing their work almost exclusively with their supervisors. Do you think design education in these two levels should really be so different?

No! Undergraduate design students need to get time with supervisors. Sometimes research students may have this function. Postgraduate research students need to take part in collaborative learning and group working. For example several research students can work together and present their results on a conference.

5. Information design projects are usually highly interdisciplinary. It is widely known that the main goal in information design is clarity of communication. Do you think information design teaching should also be concerned with communication during the design process, especially when people from different backgrounds are involved?

This has been the focus for a few of our projects. I think that it is important that students understand that people use different terminologies within different disciplines. Sometimes one word represents different concepts. This is often the cause of misunderstandings.

6. Do you think information design practitioners are really benefiting from the knowledge generated by research in this area?

Some, but certainly not all, design practitioners are probably benefiting from the knowledge generated by research in this area. As a researcher I have an obligation to make my findings known. In my view, it is not a good idea to “hide new knowledge.” However, the practitioners are responsible to further develop their own levels of knowledge.

7. Could you comment on your current research interests/projects?

At present I am writing a book about creativity and the processes of formation, and how people find inspiration.