

Exploring Design Education in INDIA



Design Education

Lena Shafir from Amsterdam-based 'Shafir etcetera design' has been professionally involved in Visual Design Communication and Design Education for more than 20 years. Her teaching and work experience in countries like Israel, USA, China, Lithuania, and Germany give her a unique perspective on design education across the world. On a recent visit to India she was able to compare the Dutch and Indian systems of design education. Some impressions...

days a week. That makes it more profit than pleasure. The pleasure of looking sideways is inevitable in creativity.

3. In the Dutch perspective the student is responsible for time management and study results. He or she will receive the support needed based on individual progress and investment. The time spent at school is approximately 25 hours a week. Results show that productivity, efficiency and creativity drop dramatically when the workload increases. In India, from what I have experienced, students follow classes the whole week. They have an overload of assignments and exercises, many of which seemed to me to be meaningless.

4. In Dutch design education the applicable design solution comes from the process of research and analysis. Consistency in following this method leads to quality of solutions, products and ideas. In India, while interacting with students, I noticed that consistency of process is more a term than a fact. While doing research, students produce a great deal of text, on many sheets of paper, and then draw conclusions. But when they apply design it has very little to do with the findings of the process.

Observing this I found something unusual: most of the students I interacted with use very few images to support their research. I was puzzled. Later I asked this question in a different class and the answer was: 'Words are the truth and you can rely on them.' A fascinating detail in a visual culture such as India!

During the trip of almost four weeks, taking in Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore, Ahmadabad and Delhi, I learned many things about Indian design and tradition.

I enjoyed wonderful Indian food and I met very warm and enthusiastic people. I have a strong feeling that the challenge and opportunities are there. The chain of progressive approach in design education needs to be started today rather than tomorrow.

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The challenge is to find the adaptor to connect the Dutch pragmatic approach to the Indian visual culture in exploring new ways of design education.

My second visit to India was a private initiative to explore India's design education approach, a follow-up to Design Yatra 2009, the occasion of my first visit to India. At the time I had been fascinated by the surrounding visual culture. The conference provided the opportunity to encounter and interact with Indian students and listen to them expressing their awareness of the quality of design education and their responsibility in all of this.

Coming from the Netherlands, my contribution during the matchmaking session consisted of a presentation in which I was sharing my thoughts on design education – addressing the value of design, the necessity to renew by exploring new roles and engaging in new forms of collaboration.

What have I learnt so far?

1. The Dutch and Indian approaches to design education are almost opposite; therefore there is a great potential to develop collaborative new approaches. We are globally connected to each other but make little use of the differences in a constructive way.

2. The Dutch educational system is based on the fact that tutors are independent designers and artists, only partially involved in teaching. For them, teaching is more pleasure than profit. In India, however, I met mostly teachers that were involved in school activities for five



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