Rethinking Graphic Design Education to Tackle the Climate Crisis: Repurpose, Reform, Reimagine

Tina Sleiman

Associate Professor, College of Arts & Creative Enterprises, Zayed University, Abu Dhabi, UAE

Abstract:

Graphic design is engrained into our products, values, and actions. It has the potential to extend or reverse the environmental crisis through our collective choices: the type of products we make and how we package and transport them, the values we believe in and instill in new generations, and the ideas we turn into experiences. Brian Dougherty states that designers are, on the surface, makers of tangible products; on a deeper level, visual communicators; and at the core, agents of positive change. Taking this viewpoint as reference, this paper proposes a framework that rethinks some aspects of graphic design education in order to tackle the climate crisis in three major steps: *Repurpose* or re-designing artifacts, *Reform* or re-designing course content, and *Reimagine* or re-designing opportunities. *Repurpose* explores the concept of upcycling packages and designing for re-use with examples from student work in the packaging design class at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, UAE. *Reform* draws from existing literature to suggest ways in which values and skills nurtured in educational institutions can be revamped to tackle environmental challenges. *Reimagine* proposes bringing together various fields of study in experiential spaces designed to educate the community on circular economy.

In short, the aim of this paper is to show examples of how graphic design education can contribute to global efforts of tackling the climate crisis by repurposing existing material, reforming course content to prepare individuals to find solutions to the crisis, and reimagining community-based opportunities for social transformation.

Keywords:

Graphic design education – pedagogical framework – climate crisis.