Stories from Our Wardrobe:
Developing 21st-Century Competencies Through Storytelling, Zines and Exhibition-Making.

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ABSTRACT

This paper revisits *Stories from Our Wardrobe*, an action-research initiative addressing the challenges of facilitating student collaborations and fostering design exploration among diploma design students. Employing storytelling, zines, and exhibition-making, the research aimed to cultivate the student outcomes outlined in the Ministry of Education's framework of 21st-century competencies: active contributors, self-directed learners, and confident individuals. The essay proposes classroom conditions that promote mutual learning, adaptability, collaboration, and exploration. Drawing from a diverse source of qualitative data from student surveys, interviews, and reflections, it advocates for a shift towards engaged pedagogy in design education. This paradigm values personal narratives as integral to the learning experience and encourages educators to embrace their role as facilitators.

Keywords: Design Education, 21st Century Competencies, Collaboration, Exploration, Storytelling, Zines, Exhibition-Making, Engaged Pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

In the field of design, there is a tendency to look up to a few individuals with reverence. In fashion, these individuals are often creative directors and they are lauded for their ingenuity in changing the course of fashion. These individuals helm powerful roles as creative directors of fashion houses in major fashion cities such as New York London, Paris and Milan. Seen as the driving force behind these brands across the collection design, marketing and branding, fans of the brands are quick to praise or shame the creative directors on their social media platforms, crediting them with any new work from the fashion brand. This dynamic has perpetuated the perception of the "lone creative genius," wherein a single individual is credited with the brand's creative output, despite the collaborative nature of the fashion industry.

As a lecturer on the Diploma in Creative Direction for Fashion at LASALLE College of the Arts, with a curriculum that prioritises vocational training to prepare students for work upon graduation. Students learn about the fashion systems, technical software skills and create content for marketing. Group projects are a common format to

promote collaboration and shared workload. However, my biggest challenge as an educator is facilitating these collaborations due to student's mismatched expectations and poor communication, leading to conflicts and a preference for individual work.

Students tend to take a mimectic approach to online references and avoid uncharted territory, possibly due to the programme's focus on industry briefs, which in turn, encourages students to look to successful case studies as "right answers". The college promotes a Southeast Asian perspective, and lecturers support this by including regional references in the lectures to expose students to a wider variety of possibilities. However, this rarely translates into the student's work and design process, and students often gravitate towards established fashion capitals in their work. Consequently, critical reflection and exploratory ideation remain underdeveloped despite strong technical skill acquisition.
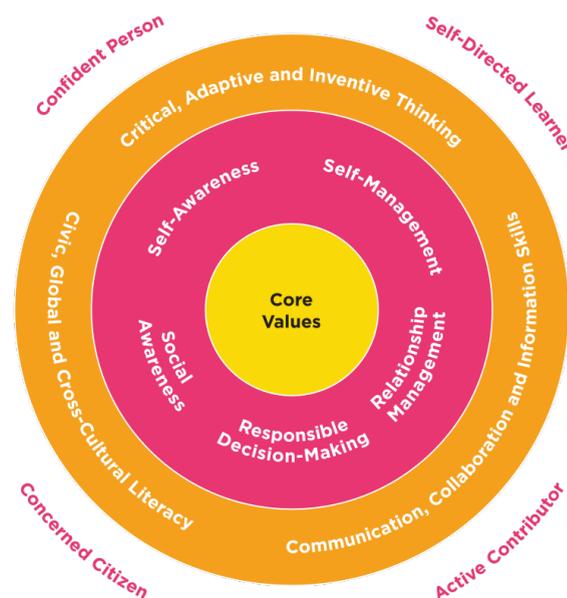
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Figure 1. *Ministry of Education's Framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes (2023). Available at: https://www.moe.gov.sg/education-in-sg/21st-century-competencies (Accessed: 3 March 2023).*

As such, I wonder if our students are developing the necessary skill sets to meet the needs of a changing industry. Singapore's Ministry of Education (MOE) (2023) emphasised the importance of developing students to achieve 21st-century competency. The framework is centred around the core values that develop students' social-emotional competencies illustrated in the pink ring of Figure 1. The aim is to develop active contributors and concerned citizens who are confident and self-

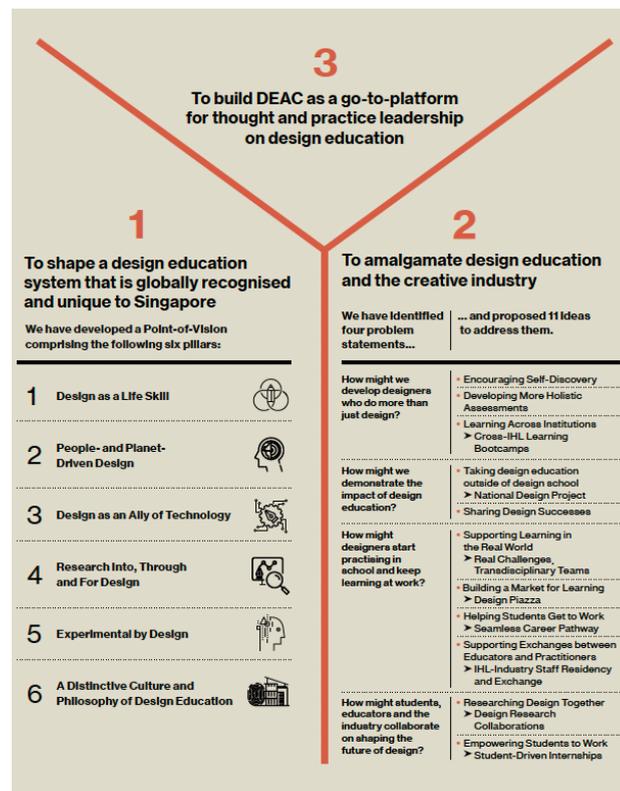directed learners who thrive in and beyond school through critical thinking and social management skills.

Figure 2. *Overview of recommendations and ideas by DEAC (DEAC, 2022, p9).*

Figure 3. *Design skills needed to navigate the new future by DEAC (DEAC, 2022, p14).*

Design Education Advisory Committee (DEAC) mirrors this in their recommendations for a reimagined Design Education in Singapore by 2050. In Figure 2, two of the six pillars highlight the need for curriculums that promote collaborative and social management skills, which helps students see "Design as a Life Skill" for a "People-and-Planet Driven Design" (DEAC, 2022, p9). Four of the seven skills identified as design-related in Figure 3 (DEAC, 2022, p14) such as "active learning and learning strategies", "complex problem-solving", "creativity, originality and initiative" and "reasoning, problem-solving and ideation", overlap MOE's framework, highlighting the importance of such skills to shape confident, actively contributing self-directed learners. However, it seems that the current design curriculum does not yet support the development of these skill sets.

In 2019, I initiated the grassroots project "Don't Mind If I Ask" to explore Singapore's communication design community, conducting a comprehensive digital survey with business owners, employees, freelancers, fresh graduates, and students. Through the survey, I found that there was a lack of confidence and soft skills among graduates, despite industry demand for these attributes. While design competitions and internships are often used to bridge this gap, they only serve a small group of students who are already confident to pursue these options. As an educator, I found the need to develop a curriculum that fosters collaboration and exploration to equip students for the evolving challenges of the 21st century.

Reimagining New Possibilities through Engaged Pedagogy
In this paper, I propose fostering collaboration and 21st-century skills by moving beyond responding to industry briefs and instead encouraging students to explore personal narratives in their design work. DelSesto (2022) advocates for engaged pedagogy, emphasizing the importance of reflection on personal experiences as a precursor to exploring new possibilities. This aligns with the views of liberatory educators such as Freire (1998), hooks (1994), and Greene (1994), who emphasize personal narratives as a tool to disrupt hegemonic thinking. More recently, Ahmed (2018) advocated educators to experiment with innovative fashion pedagogies, using her example of challenging students to design from a place of love which resulted in outcomes that resisted Western beauty and fashion norms. I identified an opportunity to implement a more introspection and collaborative brief in the Design in Fashion Publishing component. Designed for year two students, the classes equip them with creative and technical skills in layout design. Having taught this component for two years, I noticed that the brief only tested students' abilities to organise and design information. In addition, the original brief to create a six-page brochure advertising make-up products had lost its relevance in the age of social media, where brands were more likely to advertise via Electronic Direct Mailers or social media platforms. This gave me an opportunity to challenge students to explore storytelling through the format of publishing. Thankfully, I was permitted to rewrite the brief.

When reimagining the brief, I asked, what are the conditions necessary for Diploma students to develop 21st-century Century Competencies and foster confident, active contributors and self-directed learners through collaborations and explorations?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & LITERATURE REVIEW
As the educator and researcher in the classroom, I engaged in this study as what Kurt Lewin (1946) terms an "action researcher," planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting on interventions across the weeks of classes.

Forging New Relationships in the Classroom by Sharing Personal Fashion Stories
I redesigned the brief to invite students to share a story about an object from their wardrobe in an eight-page zine format, embracing "experience, confessions, and testimony" as equally valuable to other learning processes (hooks, 1994). This approach was inspired by my favourite book (and now a Netflix series), *Worn Stories* by Emily Spivack (2014) about one piece of clothing from the contributor's possession. Telling stories through fashion objects has the power to reveal how we control the presentation of our identity through our choice of clothes, worn (Kaiser, 1990) as well as those in storage (Cwerner, 2001). Theatre practitioner and educator, Brian Bower (2019) shared that he learnt more about his students' identity when he invited them to develop stories with their objects. Stories are widely recognized for their ability to empower unheard voices (hooks, 1994; Greene, 1994); however, Haas and Genishi (1994) stress their role in building classroom relationships. They urge the use of stories as a powerful tool to proclaim ourselves (Haas & Genishi, 1994: p.5-6). In Singapore, however, Xingyun Shen (2023), Fashion Revolution's coordinator, notes the scarcity of local fashion stories reflecting personal habits and identities. This encouraged me to incorporate personal storytelling in the curriculum as a means for students to connect and relate to each other more authentically and to see the value of their stories in the development of their work.

Zine-Making as a Tool for Storytelling and Exploration
The accessible nature of zines makes them an ideal tool for introducing beginners to publishing and storytelling (Duncombe, 2008). They have been successfully employed across various educational fields (Cheang & Suterwalla, 2020; Creasap, 2014; Ashtari, Huq & Miraftab, 2022; Desyllas & Sinclair, 2013) to validate personal experiences, foster critical thinking, and encourage participatory learning (Hoffmann & Stake, 1998, as cited in Creasap, 2014, p.156). However, zines remain underutilised in fashion education, partly due to their perceived aesthetic divergence from traditional fashion publishing (Hall, 2021).

This underutilisation presented an opportunity to explore zines' transformative potential within my classroom. By engaging with zine-making, students were

challenged to express their stories through visual and textual elements, integrating writing, image curation, layout design, and material selection. The experimental format encouraged creativity beyond imitation and pushed students to step out of their comfort zones. To ensure professionalism, students were required to use InDesign and produce professionally printed, bound, and trimmed zines.

Making Collaboration the Core of the Project with a Collective Goal

I added a new condition to the brief: by the end of the semester, all the zines would come together as a collective publication, simulating the collaborative process of fashion publishing. While students worked independently due to software limitations and individual grading rubrics, they were challenged to align on shared elements that unified their stories. I also set a goal for the class to exhibit the publication at the end of the term, giving them a shared purpose and the chance to showcase their work beyond the classroom.

Shifting from Instructor to Facilitator

The new brief challenged me to rethink my teaching approach. Previously, classes followed a teacher-centred model, starting with lectures and moving to assigned exercises. During consultations, I played the role of industry expert or client, which unwittingly prioritized outcomes over the design process. Muratovski (2011, cited in Souleles, 2017) argues that teacher-centred approaches often confine students within familiar boundaries due to fear of rejection. Souleles (2017) further critiques this master-apprentice model for limiting students' capacity to ask open-ended questions, instead replicating the instructor's narrow perspective. Augsten and Gekeler (2017) advocate for educators to guide students in their pursuit of knowledge rather than delivering it pre-packaged. As such, the curriculum was redesigned with only two formal lectures over 14 weeks, emphasizing facilitated discussions to support the design process.

Redesigning the Curriculum

Twenty-three students participated in three-hour sessions encompassing class discussions, creative writing exercises, and InDesign tutorials. I co-taught this class with an experienced book designer, Felix Sng, the sessions focused on translating student stories into printed zines. The interventions are illustrated in Figure 4-8, with a detailed lesson plan in Appendix A.

Figure 4: Rahmat Bin Adnan, *Photo montage of establishing a safe space for sharing*, (2023).

Figure 5: Rahmat Bin Adnan and Nur Fatimah, *Photomontage of cultivating collaborative learning community, (2023).*
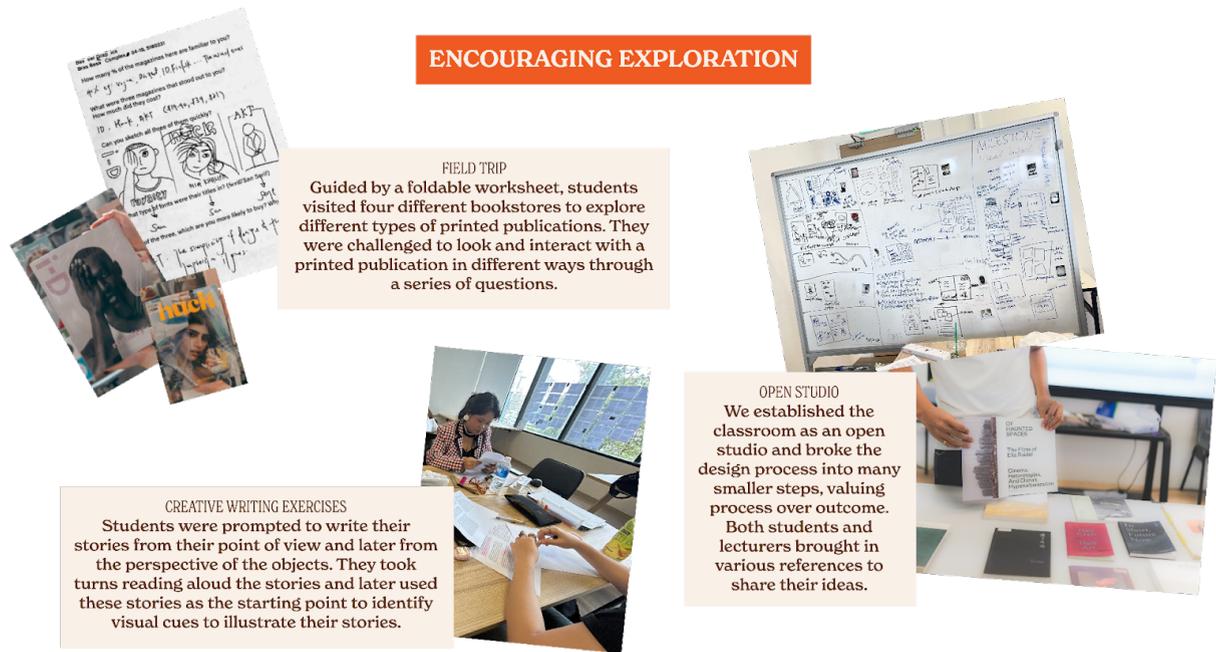
ENCOURAGING EXPLORATION

FIELD TRIP
Guided by a foldable worksheet, students visited four different bookstores to explore different types of printed publications. They were challenged to look and interact with a printed publication in different ways through a series of questions.

CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISES
Students were prompted to write their stories from their point of view and later from the perspective of the objects. They took turns reading aloud the stories and later used these stories as the starting point to identify visual cues to illustrate their stories.

OPEN STUDIO
We established the classroom as an open studio and broke the design process into many smaller steps, valuing process over outcome. Both students and lecturers brought in various references to share their ideas.

Figure 6: Rahmat Bin Adnan and Katherine Lim Balzomo, *Photomontage of encouraging explorations*, (2023).

EXHIBITION OF ZINES

VOLUNTEER PARTICIPANTS
In the 11th session, all students were sent a Google form to indicate their interest in exhibiting their zines as an extracurricular activity.

STUDENT-LED ORGANISATION
Those who opted in worked with me to organise, design and market the exhibition during their one-month term break in December 2023. The team was made up of three main departments: Marketing, Design and Logistics. I oversaw the planning process as the Project Manager.

Figure 7: Xu Jiayuan, *Photo of student volunteers for the zine exhibition, (2024).*

Figure 8. Rahmat Bin Adnan. *Photomontage of "Stories from our Wardrobe" (2024)*

Data Collection

Students were informed about the research's observational nature and consented to participate. Twenty-one of the 23 students agreed. Qualitative data was collected through student reflect journals, one interview with my co-lecturer, focus groups with students, digital survey and personal observation journals. The data was analyzed to identify themes related to student experiences, classroom dynamics, and learning behaviors.

Students were briefed at the start about my intention to observe and record their participation and behaviour as part of my research. Permission was sought through consent forms that were completed by the students. All but two of the 23 students agreed to be part of the research. The other two were often absent from the class and would not have been suitable research participants.

As I was interested in the emotional and social changes in the classroom specific to collaborations, I relied on the qualitative data listed in Table 1. They were then coded to identify emergent themes about student's experience, changes in classroom dynamics and learning behaviours (Appendix C).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Across the 14 weeks of classes and the resultant exhibition, I identified key conditions for fostering collaboration, exploration and the development of active, self-directed

and confident learners.

Setting the Stage for Active Contributions
Building Classroom Communities
It is difficult to work with a stranger whom you have little in common with, much less be an active contributor. Initially, the interactions between students were distant and apprehensive, so in the first three weeks, I focused on making students share the stories of their objects to break down barriers and shift classroom dynamics.

This proved to be extremely invaluable in creating new bonds in the classroom. 100% of the survey respondents (Appendix B) said that listening to each other's stories was extremely important. Students often used words such as "warm", "cosy", "heartwarming" and "wholesome" to describe their experiences listening to the stories. In the quotes found from students' research journals, there was a sense of privilege and gratitude in discovering new aspects of their classmates.

Ha Phuong shares in her research journal "their stories revolve around family, love, memories, a gift, the first times, new experiences, memories and personal interests. I feel like a visitor, coming to listen to their stories". I found a similar quote in Smriti's research journal "There were so many different stories but to me, each one was very vulnerable and I found myself fortunate to be able to hear these stories".

During the exhibition, on behalf of her classmates, Katherine displayed the following reflections about sharing stories in the classroom:

Figure 9. Rahmat bin Adnan, *Image of Stories from Our Wardrobe's exhibition push-cart with images and handwritten notes from students and me, (2024).*
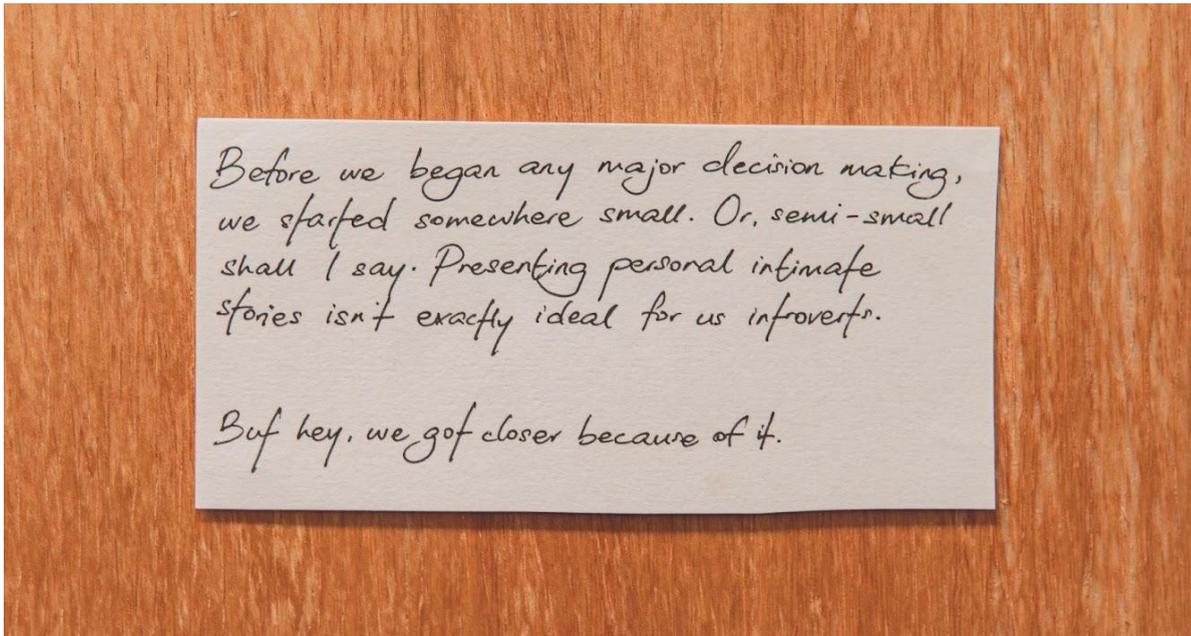
Figure 10. Rahmat bin Adnan, *Second of four handwritten reflections by Katherine on the process of creating a collective zine and having to share stories in class, (2024).*
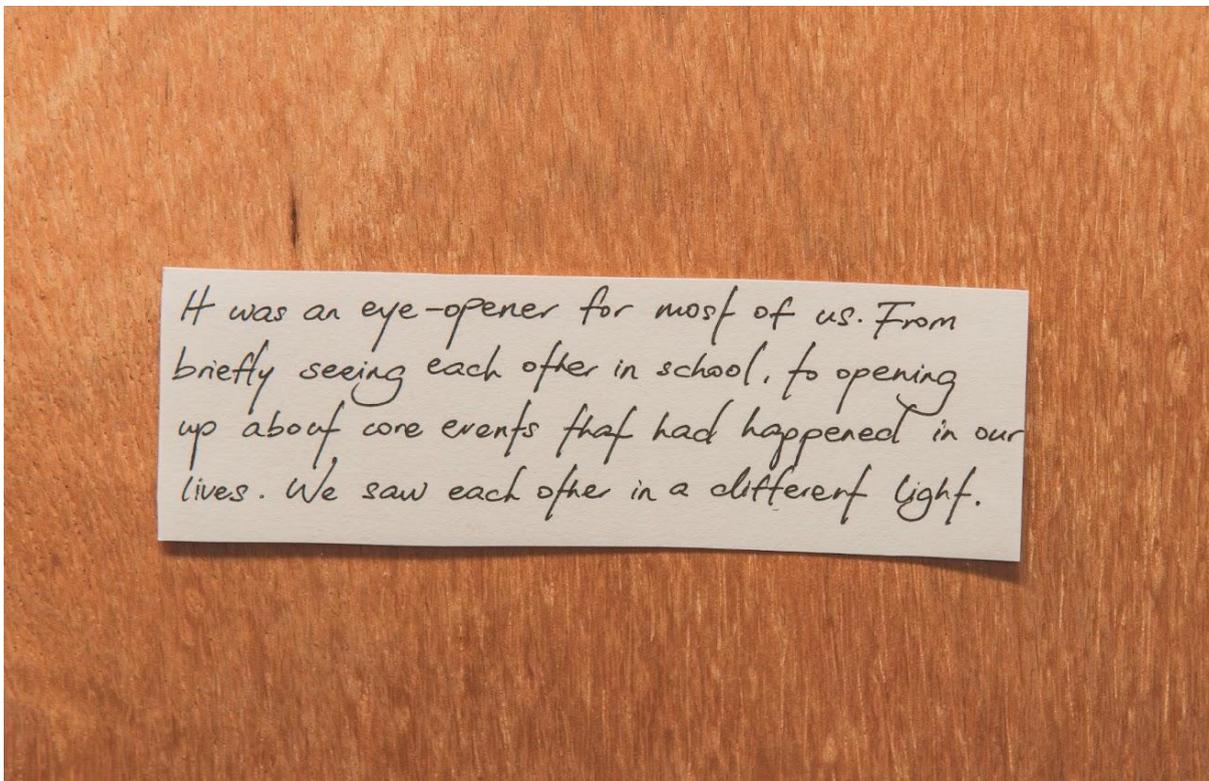

Figure 11. Rahmat bin Adnan, *Third of four handwritten reflections by Katherine on the effect of having to share stories in class, (2024).*

I observed that sharing personal stories fostered a sense of empathy and curiosity among the students, aligning with research on the role of storytelling in building relationships (Greene, 1994; hooks, 1994). This newfound understanding also fostered a sense of equality, which I believe helped to facilitate future collaborations. To address the language barrier present in the classroom, I implemented a creative writing exercise that allowed students to write in their native language before translating to English. This proved particularly beneficial for international students, who were able to express themselves more confidently and share their unique experiences. As Smriti noted, these shared stories facilitated emotional connection and fostered a sense of familiarity, which Blatchford and Russell (2020) highlight as crucial for effective teaching and learning. My co-lecturer, Felix, also observed that listening to the students' stories provided valuable insights into their perspectives and working styles. This experience reinforced my belief that personal storytelling is essential for both students and teachers to actively contribute to a positive and inclusive classroom environment.

Encourage Mutual Learning

Instead of lectures being the sole source of knowledge, students were encouraged to be each other's teachers. A key change involved students pinning up their work-in-progress on the wall for mutual critiques, which were particularly beneficial for typography and layout classes. This approach allowed students to contribute diverse perspectives and highlight variations in design solutions.

Students valued learning from each other's successes and mistakes. Jiawen, for example, shared in his reflection that through the mutual crits, he saw many excellent works and enjoyed how his classmates used illustrations across spreads to create visually appealing work.With the help of written feedback from her classmates, Elmira was able to identify the problems of her zine through the perspective of the readers. Despite initial anxiety about having her work assessed, she says "I'm thankful for this activity as the views from my classmates are different and I can improve with the remarks from them".

As the classroom environment shifted to an open studio, students began to rely on their classmates as sounding boards and explored new methods to bring into the classroom for the next showcase. While lecturers were present to help facilitate learning, students now saw that they could also teach each other.

Create Different Ways to Contribute

It's not always easy to be an active contributor, especially when, as Katherine put it, the class is "coming together [as] one big brain" for the first time. Fatimah said the most memorable part was "working together as a class instead of a group," while Adawia shared that her favorite moment was "us coming together, even though it was tough." Katherine described the unique format: "Your group is the whole class...

everything... is based on everyone's opinion," but also admitted that working through different styles and reaching consensus wasn't easy.

Many students found large group discussions challenging. Some shared that the emotional effort needed to involve everyone was "tiring," and a few admitted staying quiet because they were worn out from always leading discussions. Language barriers made it harder for some, while others felt intimidated speaking up in a big group. Smriti summed it up perfectly: "In smaller groups, it's easier for people to voice their opinions. But in a big group, they won't say a single thing."

Still, the large discussions had their benefits. Elmira reflected on how working as "one big brain" helped build connections and discover strengths:

> Through this discussion, I became closer to Cindy. She translated for classmates who struggled with the language barrier, and they shared great ideas for the front and back pages. Even though it was hard to hear everyone, we used voting to make sure everyone agreed. I hope we have more discussions like this—it could help build confidence in some classmates.

Cindy shared a similar experience, saying she felt proud to help her friends express their ideas and was encouraged when her own ideas were accepted. These moments boosted her confidence to speak up more in the future.

Looking back, it might have been helpful to balance these big group discussions with smaller brainstorming sessions first. While large groups helped students connect and appreciate each other's contributions, smaller groups might have made it easier for everyone to feel comfortable and get involved.

Fostering Ownership and Scaffolding Collaboration
For "one big brain" to work, each cell must understand its role in the bigger picture. Many students struggled with the autonomy and scale of collaboration, needing guidance to work effectively. A phrase I often repeated was, "This is your magazine, what would you like to do?" Later, it evolved to "This is your exhibition." While simple, this was important for students used to structured assignments and clear answers. It was vital for them to understand that the project was theirs to shape and that their unique perspectives mattered, though they struggled to take ownership without adequate support.

It was also important that students had some foundational knowledge in design and layout before working on this collaboration. In the focus group, Rahmat shared that as a second-year student, he was only able to create more "amazing work" due to the "skills and knowledge accumulated" from the previous year of design and layout classes. Katherine adds that the first year was essential for her to find out her interests and style to know what she would like to bring to the collaboration.

Beyond skills, students needed to understand the steps involved in collaboration. By week 9, while students had started working on their individual zines, they were unsure how to tackle the collective zine. To address this, I facilitated an exercise to clarify their roles and responsibilities in creating the collective zine, mapping out the steps required for content development and design (Figures 12 and 13). This exercise helped students grasp the scope of the project and the importance of project management. By the end of the exercise, I observed a shift in classroom dynamics, as students proactively collaborated to address areas needing attention.
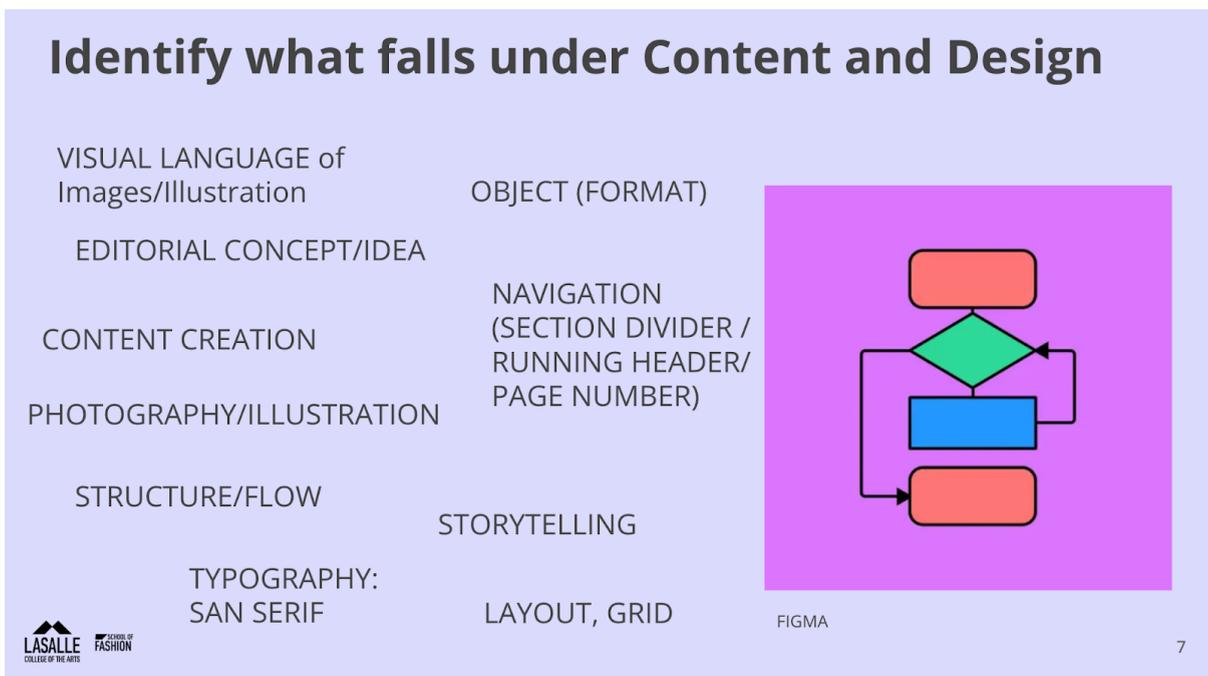
Figure 12. *Google slides listing out all the steps that fall under editorial design, (2023)*

Designing your Publication

Some of the steps include:

1. Deciding on the format.
    In the instance of this project, this has been decided for you (A5)

Some other design decisions include:

1. Layout/Grid (This has also been decided for you)
2. Visual Style/ Language of the image/illustration
    (We haven't covered this yet but you should have references for what you intend to do
3. Navigation: How do you create order and logic through section dividers, running headers etc
4. Cover Design: What best represents your story?

Figure 13. *A recap of the discussion by students to organise their workflow. This recap was sent to students who were absent during the discussion. (2023)*

Self-Directed Learners Emerges
Researching and Exploring in New Ways

Over time, I noticed a significant shift in students' commitment and approach to their learning. Working with their stories challenged students to embrace a process-driven workflow and explore new ways of working. They started to expand their mode of research beyond reliance on digital tools and also developed a process-driven approach in their design development.

Figures 14 and 15. Rahmat bin Adnan, *Rahmat with library books in the classroom. Retrieved from Rahmat's research journal (2023).*

In Rahmat's research journal, he revealed that, for the first time in years, he has been spending time in the library until the lights turn off and reading books as part of his research (Figures 14 and 15). He shares various iterations of his designs, inspired by digital tools like Pinterest, and physical books. Despite his mimetic approach, he critically analyses his design in favour of his story and is willing to start afresh to explore new techniques when required. Through the series of images and reflections (Appendix A), he reveals his struggles of not achieving his intended design, his persistence to overcome the hurdles and his immense pride when he finally arrives at the final version.

On the other hand, Mengxue found inspiration to develop illustrations from her own story of a jacket she bought with her first paycheck. She shares that her most challenging moment was "drawing illustration, as this is the first time I am using Procreate so it took me a long time to learn". Her research journal (Appendix B) details the trial and error of learning three methods to illustrate her story. In her process, she displayed resourcefulness in seeking tutorials to learn new design techniques and even purchasing new tools. The final result was a carefully rendered illustration developed from initial sketches on paper to a digital programme she taught herself. Her illustrated zine drew praise during the exhibition, with an enquiry for potential freelance work.

Many students echoed these sentiments, demonstrating self-directed learning within the supportive environment. Embracing risk-taking and viewing failure as part of the design process, they grew more resilient and, importantly, proud of their accomplishments.

From Learners to Confident Designers
One of the biggest joys of going through the research journals was reading student's closing reflections. They expressed pride in their newfound skills, resilience in overcoming challenges, and gratitude for the supportive learning environment. In her closing reflection, Katherine shares "Overall I'm feeling really proud of how far I've come. From not having a direction to being consistent in terms of design. Though I will need to tweak a few things like placements, titles and kerning from feedback, I am still proud nonetheless. Of all of us", highlighting her journey from uncertainty to design consistency.

Confidence was a recurring theme, many saw the project as one of personal growth and self-improvement which challenged them to step out of their comfort zones, improve communication skills, and become more adaptable to challenges. As an educator, I was also proud to see that students, such as Elmira, recognized the potential to apply their learning to future endeavors

Empowered Designers in Action

Whilst planning the exhibition with the students, I witnessed the positive impact of fostering self-directed learning and collaboration. Nine student volunteers formed marketing, design, and logistics teams to manage the exhibition. While enthusiastic, they required guidance due to their lack of experience. Taking on the role of the project manager, I provided clarification and direction, similar to the approach in week 9, creating a to-do list and guiding them through the steps. Once roles were clear, students worked independently, meeting on Zoom and sharing departmental plans. My role shifted from "approver" to "guide," offering support when needed, particularly for tasks requiring technical skills they hadn't yet acquired.

Student teams demonstrated self-direction and collaboration throughout the exhibition process. Their interactions revealed increased confidence in seeking help and providing feedback. Coordinating with external partners also honed their professional communication and time management skills. The pre-event survey confirmed the project's positive impact on their confidence and skill development, with 100% of students reporting feeling better prepared for future opportunities. The exhibition-making process fostered growth in communication, organization, and design, marking significant milestones in their learning journey. The survey also highlighted students' excitement for the upcoming exhibition.

Following the exhibition, students expressed joy, gratitude, and pride in their journey. While most felt confident to organize another exhibition independently due to newfound skills, Katherine shared that "making this was such a team effort, I don't think I would have made it as successful if it was by myself", highlighting the value of teamwork for the exhibition's success, demonstrating the curriculum's effectiveness in fostering collaboration and confidence.

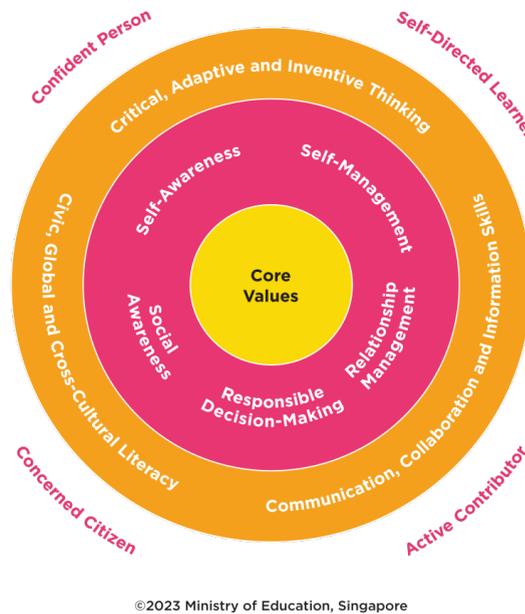**The Makings of A 21st-Century Competent Designer and Learner**

Figure 1. *Ministry of Education's Framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes (2023). Available at: https://www.moe.gov.sg/education-in-sg/21st-century-competencies (Accessed: 3 March 2024).*

Within the MOE's diagram of 21st-century competency, there is a huge focus on individual skills development, with only "Relationship Management" and "Communication, Collaboration and Information Skills" that suggest a relationship with others. In addition, the diagram seems to suggest that the student outcomes are independent of each other.
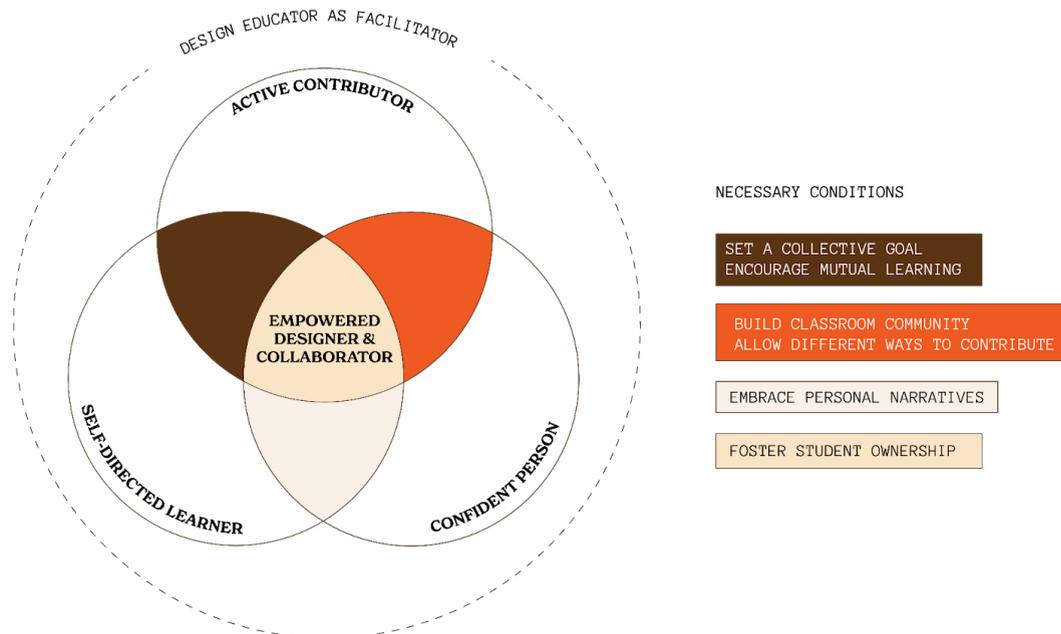
Figure 16. Pixie Tan, *Diagram of necessary conditions to develop an empowered designer with 21st Century Competencies, (2023).*

However, my experience running this redesigned curriculum revealed that a 21st-century competent student, especially in the context of design education, is developed through mutual learning and interaction with others. Most importantly, *active contribution*, *self-directed learning* and *confident persons* are reliant on each other. Through my observations and findings, I've learnt that an active contributor is empathetic and curious about others. They are generous in giving and receiving feedback and see value in their contribution to a common goal. The self-directed learner, on the other hand, is a motivated and adaptable learner who is empowered to explore different ways of working and is determined through a series of trial and error. When properly facilitated through the process of collaboration, self-directed learners see value in active contribution and gain the confidence to take ownership of the project to achieve a collective goal. These values need to be cultivated through safe spaces that promote contributions in different shapes and forms, encouraging students to share and listen to each other. As a design educator, I had to let go of old instructional practices and become a facilitator, being equally vulnerable and adaptable to the process, shaping the project alongside the students. Although the entire process required adjustments to the lesson plans and many backup plans, by embracing the iterative nature of the process, students also began to appreciate the journey more than the result.

CONCLUSION

As design problems become more complex and interdisciplinary, we need to prepare our students to think creatively and beyond existing formats. It is more important than ever to design curriculums that empower students to work alongside others and embrace open-ended design approaches. It needs to inspire confidence in students to self-direct their learning and see themselves as active contributors.

While the technical skills needed for the future may change, the soft skills to listen, tell stories, adapt and empathise will always be required, and are applicable across different challenges. Cultivating these to meet the changing needs does not demand grand solutions. *Stories from Our Wardrobe* is by no means a revolution to change design education. Mutual critiques, open studios, zines and collaborative work have always existed in some shape and form in design education. When pressed for time, there will always be a preference to prioritise industry partnerships that may give students an edge when seeking employment. *Stories from Our Wardrobe*, however, does suggest that small changes could be made to existing diploma curricula to embrace personal narratives and cultivate empathy. Instead of only seeking knowledge from case studies and success stories, there is much to learn from a student's own experiences. The most important and challenging shift would be for design educators to embrace the role of facilitators, incorporating open-ended approaches in their curriculum as a means to promote exploration. No longer an

instructor or master of knowledge, design educators can facilitate students through larger peer collaborations, fostering the value of collective wisdom and accompanying students in their journey to discover new knowledge along the way.

While preparing the handwritten notes to exhibit alongside Katherine's reflections, I found myself in the spirit of bell hooks, concluding my experience working with the students on their zines and the exhibition with "When you lead with love, students will always reciprocate". To all design educators who may decide to attempt this, I quote my student Elmira to say "Enjoy the journey!".

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Appendix A: Rahmat Bin Adnan's Design Development and Reflections

DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES OF
STORY USING A GRID TEMPLATE
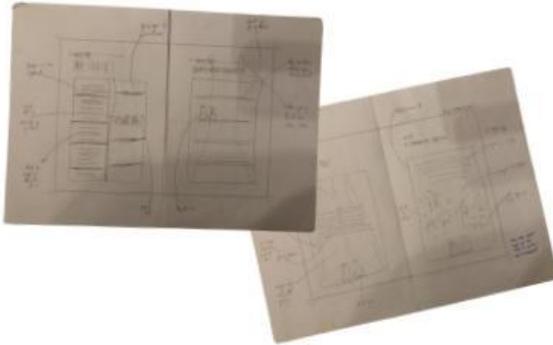
"This was pretty interesting. My first ever design sketch on the far left, which is horrible, to my 4 spreads, which will eventually pave the path towards my final zine."

DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT 1

"This was one of the most satisfying moments of my creative endeavour. I can now slowly create bits of my vision into reality and with consistent practice, I hope to be able to create much more beautiful works than this simple layout which I experimented with textures.(...) Also, I had so much fun designing this. I remember I was in the zone and completed it within 3-4 hours. But the cover page... let's not go there."

COVER DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

"I don't know how many times I designed the cover page."

IMAGES RETRIEVED FROM RAHMAT BIN ADNAN'S RESEARCH JOURNAL

REDESIGN OF PUBLICATION

"You're not going to believe it, but I spent more than a day just sitting down and finalising the cover page. I went through many iterations of designs (again). (..) In this monochromatic concept design, I experimented with shapes for the first time using the grids. It's actually quite scary, because it's like walking on a fine line between cringe and modern."

FINAL PUBLICATION

"I don't care what anyone says, but I'm proud of myself. I came from nothing, and I persevered. I kept researching, observing, learning and experimenting and I managed to create a design which I've always admired on Pinterest. Although, this may be a risk, (especially the monochrome red), because I have no experience and it's my first time. I added a little handwritten scan at the last page. Another bucket list checked. I've always wanted to incorporate handwritten text on a design. I'm learning so much these days and it's adding to my confidence bit by bit. I also can't wait for feedback because I want to learn more and improve on it.

I Love Design."

IMAGES RETRIEVED FROM RAHMAT BIN ADNAN'S RESEARCH JOURNAL

## Appendix B: He Mengxue's Design Development and Reflections

INITIAL SKETCHES
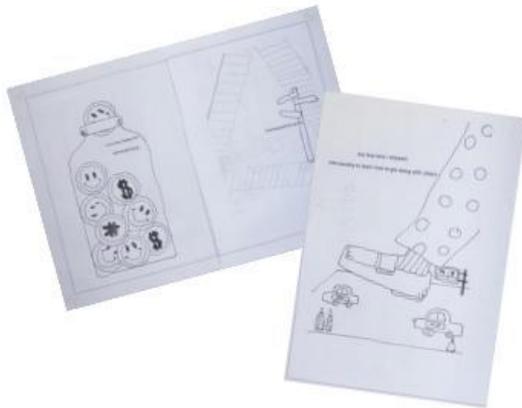
"I plan to use Ai for creating simple illustrations using various shape tools. The illustrations will have a cheerful color palette leaning towards vibrant hues like yellow, orange, red, green, etc. I've chosen these colors to reflect the joy and excitement I experienced at that time."

DIGITISING OF SKETCHES
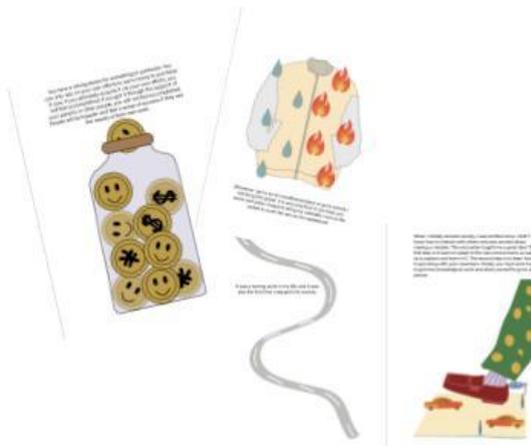
"Initially, I underestimated the complexity of creating my illustration, believing it would be a straightforward task in AI. However, I encountered some challenges along the way. I ended up redoing the illustration three times due to my lack of proficiency in AI. My approach involved a combination of watching instructional videos and experimenting, which, although tedious, contributed significantly to my learning process. Despite the hurdles, the perseverance paid off, and I'm genuinely content with the final result."

DIGITAL SKETCH VERSION 2
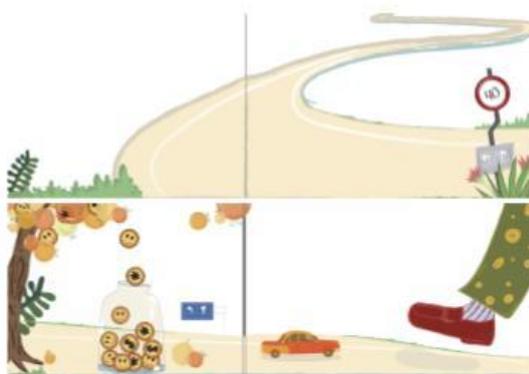
"Using AI to create this illustration consumed my entire day – it was quite challenging! Initially, I attempted to work on the computer, (...) my iPad, for which I specifically purchased an Apple Pencil (...) in pursuit of achieving better results, I reluctantly spent over $200 on it.

Working on the iPad proved significantly more convenient. Initially, there was a learning curve in getting accustomed to the operations. As I accumulated errors, I gradually became more proficient. Eventually, I successfully produced this version."

IMAGES RETRIEVED FROM HE MENGXUE'S RESEARCH JOURNAL

DIGITAL SKETCH VERSION 3-4

"I noticed that the page with the tree illustration was overly crowded, leaving inadequate space for text. This was an oversight on my part—I was so engrossed in drawing that I forgot to leave space for the text. Hence, this week, I'll be re-drawing it once again. For this attempt, I plan to use Procreate, which will be my first time using it. Hopefully, I can smoothly complete the drawing without the need for further revisions."

"The teacher remarked that the hairstyles and clothing were inconsistent with the preceding pages, suggesting to align them in some aspect of attire. Following the advice, I made improvements by opting for a unified hairstyle—using braided hair across all characters—and for attire, I employed the colors and patterns from the clothing in the second page's illustration for the tops, bottoms, and skirts."

FINAL ZINE

IMAGES RETRIEVED FROM HE MENGXUE'S RESEARCH JOURNAL