Zeitgeist Vancouver

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Abstract: In early 2018, design students came together with long-term care facility residents to co-write and also co-design a series of small publications that would focus on the life and experiences of the residents. Small groups of 2-3 students were paired with 1-3 residents and asked to produce a mini-publication over a series of 6 meetings. Entitled Zeitgeist, this project brings together students, residents, their families and care facility staff, creating the opportunity for meaning exchange and interaction between all parties. It can offer residents a voice and opportunity for true creative expression and stimulation through meaningful activities, while simultaneously providing a rich community-based learning experience for design students. Zeitgeist Vancouver was inspired by the Zeitgeist Kollektiv, a public editorial design and storytelling project within a care facility in Zurich, led by Carolyn Kerchof and Martina Regli.

Introduction

Zeitgeist Vancouver was an editorial design project conducted by Emily Carr University of Art + Design, at UBC Purdy Pavilion, from January 2018 to May 2018. Facilitated by a recreational care therapist, undergraduate Communication Design students from Emily Carr University came together with residents in a long-term care facility to co-design and co-write a mini publication series featuring stories of resident's lives, experiences and "big life questions", such as would they prefer to live on the moon, or on the bottom of the ocean?

Figure 1. Example of student and resident co-designed magazine.

Storytelling, Design and the Search for Meaning in Old Age

The idea for the project was directly influenced by Carolyn Kerchof's *Turning Nursing Homes into Media Homes* project, in which her stated goals were "to design a publication that was attractive, readable, and interesting for nursing home residents using participatory methods", while also designing something inspirational and meaningful to the residents that could integrate the residential care facility within the city's culture (2015, 5). This took the form of Zeitgeist magazine which, "combines storytelling, design, and the search for meaning in very old age" (Kerchof, 2018).

Zeitgeist Vancouver seeks to further develop a framework for project implementation within facilities in Vancouver, while observing how visual design can also aid in resident storytelling and inter-generational communication. The project embraces Kerchof's belief that "being able to articulate and share experiences is essential to leading a satisfying life for many people, most of all toward the end of life" (2015, 5).

Emily Carr students were grouped with pairs of residents from UBC Purdy Pavilion and together engaged in a series of activities aimed at firstly building a relationship, before they would together co-design a magazine focused on the resident's life experiences.

Figure 2. Students and residents engage in storytelling activities.

As a society we have never had such a large proportion of elderly people but being overly concerned with care makes it easy to forget that old people still have a considerable amount to contribute (Diamond, 2012). In the book "Design When Everybody Designs" Manzini says, '"Consider the elderly not only as a problem but also as possible agents for its solution; support their capabilities and their will to be actively involved and optimize use of their social networks." 'This initial revolutionary move of considering the elderly not only for what they need but also for what they are able and willing to do has led to a number of social inventions and enhancements' (2015, 13).

To begin this project, all students and residents engaged in an introductory storytelling experience, during which they shared something about themselves that we might not know as a way of introducing themselves to the group at large. In response to the first session students designed and facilitated *Getting to Know Me,* scaffolded activities specifically targeted at learning all about the individual residents they were paired with. Design students worked in small groups of 2-3 students with 1-3 residents for six 1-hour sessions in total. We observed that the residents were often far more interested in learning about the students than telling their own story. They would frequently turn the questions back onto the student and press the issue until they knew everything they could possibly know about their work, family and relationship situation. A hearty dose of career and relationship advice would often follow, with the residents clearly enjoying the opportunity to pass on a little life advice.

Figure 3. Example of resident story translating into visual design by students.

The following two sessions were focused on content generation for their publications through conversation, storytelling, games and creative activities such as collage, illustration and photography. With the content generated from these sessions the students began to develop some initial design concepts and editorial layouts that spoke to their resident's individual personalities and experiences. These initial designs were then taken back to the residents for a consultation session during which they expressed their preferences on copy, editorial design, typography and choice of imagery. The rapport students had developed with residents allowed them to have nuanced discussions around the visual design of the publications that best spoke to the content and taste of the resident, avoiding the cliché approaches, such as simply making the type larger for an elderly readership perceived to prefer this approach. Often the students wouldn't get the positive response they expected and residents would challenge and press the students to rework visual designs to be more to their taste. Once the visual design and copy had been approved with residents, students produced multiple copies for sharing with residents, their families staff and wider dissemination.

The final session with the residents took the form of a celebration event, which loosely mirrored the first storytelling session, only this time students and residents presented the results of their collaboration together.

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Figure 4. Students and residents take part in ice breaker activities, facilitated by recreational care therapist Donna Levi.

One of our initial aims for the project was to unite all of the individual publications within one larger publication with a unified aesthetic. What we observed during the process of each group making their individual publications, is that the aesthetic and nature of the materials was directly influenced through the student and resident interactions, and as a result also served as a way of documenting the experience and the relationship that had been developed. We therefore took the decision not to unify the design, but instead sought to find a way of grouping each of these individual expressions together.

Figure 5. Collection of finish student and resident co-designed publications.

"There is only one solution if old age is not to be an absurd parody of our former life, and that is to go on pursuing ends that give our existence a meaning — devotion to individuals, to groups or to causes, social, political, intellectual or creative work... in old age we should wish still to have passions strong enough to prevent us turning in upon ourselves. One's life has value so long as one attributes value to the life of others, by means of love, friendship, indignation, compassion. When this is so, then there are still valid reasons for activity or speech" (De Beauvoir, 1970).

One of the primary objectives for this project was to create a mutually beneficial and reciprocal relationship between residents and students. One of the challenges for design students is to find original content to work with and apply their skills to. Residents have an abundance of interesting stories to tell, but often lack the opportunity or audience to do so. The care facility provided an unconventional and rich learning environment for the students to work within and their expertise in capturing and visually communicating stories can enhance the well-being of the residents. The Zeitgeist project looks at elderly people not just for their needs, but as potential contributors and collaborators who have something meaningful to contribute (Manzini, 2015). In the upcoming school year, we intend to expand upon this pilot project to further develop a model for intergenerational exchange that enhances therapeutic recreation services that care homes are able to provide, which enhancing the academic experience of students.

Acknowledgements

About the authors

Jon Hannan is Assistant Professor of Communication Design at Emily Carr University of Art + Design, Vancouver, Canada. He holds a BA and MA in Design & Art Direction from Manchester School of Art as well a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) from Huddersfield University and a Fellowship from the Higher Education Academy. Jon's research has been featured in international publications and on platforms such as IdN, Computer Arts, The Guardian and CNN amongst others.

Caylee Raber is the Director of the Health Design Lab at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Within this role, Caylee establishes and leads health design projects that bring together faculty and students with industry and community partners to improve health services, experiences and products through a human-centred design approach.

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Caylee's research interest lies in the use of co-design and participatory design methodologies. Caylee has a Master of Design degree from Emily Carr University.

Emily Ellis is an artist, designer and researcher. She received her BFA from the University of Victoria and Master of Design from Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Her work explores design interventions for an enhanced environment in long-term care, and narrative care in relationship-centred care practices. Emily is an independent design consultant as well as a Research Assistant at Emily Carr University of Art + Design's Health Design Lab.