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Beyond problem-solving: Re-imagining workshop materials

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Citation

Beyond Problem-Solving

Re-Imagining Workshop Materials

Allison Edwards and Hannah Korsmeyer

Design has a rich history of being framed as a problem-solving activity (Simon, 1995). However, this does not fully capture the plurality of diverse practices designers use to engage with complex challenges in creative ways. As we seek to design more joyful and affirming workshops for diverse audiences, we can also re-imagine the roles played by the co-design materials we select or create, beyond functioning as tools for problem-solving. This workshop introduces a framework that leverages the potentially playful and pedagogically rich co-facilitation performed by these materials, and encourages participants to re-image the role materials play in their own participatory practices.

Keywords: co-design tools; material mediation; feminisms; workshops; play

Specific workshop aims

This workshop provides a playful and generative space to re-imagine the role of workshop materials beyond tools for problem solving. We will:

1. introduce a conceptual framework for extending the possibilities of the materials used in co-design workshops - Tools, Toys, and Technologies.
2. Share examples of co-design materials from our previous participatory practices to learn from and with each other.
3. Use this framework to generate new "roles" for co-design materials, towards an open-source resource for co-design practice and teaching that decentres problem-solving.

Workshop outline

This 90-minute workshop will take place online virtually via video conference call and Miro.

Table 1. Workshop Outline.

Activity	Time
Framework Introduction & Warm-Up Activity	20 minutes
Sharing examples of previous co-design materials & Using the framework to re-frame the possibilities beyond problem-solving	20 minutes in small groups & 10 minutes in large group discussion
Generating open-source resource: speculative roles of workshop materials	20 minutes in small groups & 10 minutes in large group discussion
Wrap-up & Next steps for the open-source resource	10 minutes

Expected outcomes of the workshop

We will be co-creating a set of generative cards that can be used by practitioners or with students to inspire different nuances and possibilities of workshop materials. We will also explore answers to the questions: How else can we use materials to come together differently? What do workshop materials make possible or foreclose? How are materials assisting in framing these engagements? Beyond collecting data or working together to solve problems, what are the transformative and/or divergent potentials of workshops, as experiences for participants?

Minimum and maximum numbers of participants

20-30 participants

How the workshop will benefit the participants

This workshop introduces a framework through which to reflect and re-imagine the role of collaborative materials used in creative and participatory practices. Participants will have the opportunity to share and discuss materials from their own practices and re-frame their perception of what is being made possible in materially-mediated workshops. Additionally, they will be creating a co-produced, open-source resource for considering the role of materials. This can be used after the workshop with design students/other practitioners to inspire different kinds of workshop engagements (and all participants will be credited for their contributions).

How the workshop is relevant to the selected track's aims

The workshop explores how we might come together in more joyful, plural and liberatory ways by focusing on the micro-process of designing the collaborative materials for use in workshops. We invite participants to shift attention from the design outcomes so we can interrogate the roles played by the materials that are designed or selected for use in these collaborative engagements (e.g. model-making components, worksheets, craft materials, maps, probes, etc.). Participants will be introduced to a framework developed by the presenters that builds upon existing literature concerning co-design tools (e.g. Sanders & Stappers, 2012). This framework seeks to look beyond the role of co-design materials as 'tools' for surfacing tacit knowledge or as impartial mediators. Instead, we will explore the possibilities for co-design materials as 'toys' and 'technologies.' Together, we will question the ways we are framing "problems" through the co-design materials we prepare, and discuss how we can attend to the emotional and social aspects of making together, beyond problem-solving. Building upon theories about design games (Vaajakallio & Mattelmäki, 2014) and playful triggers (Loi, 2007), we ask, if workshop materials become "toys," are we better able to attend to ways of playfully relating? If we consider even low fidelity materials as "technologies" how does this change our focus to what is being made possible and enacted through the process of co-design itself? We will use this framework to generate speculative roles of co-design materials, with a focus on the varied kinds of engagements they could support for participants. The workshop explores co-design as affective and processual experiences that occur across a plurality of participatory practices. It asks us to go beyond deficit-based problem-solving to imagine more affirmative ways of being together. This decentring of the "problem" allows for a participant-centred approach and explores how we might move beyond empathy in recognising that we are "all in this together but not one and the same" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 54).

References

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Delighting in blurring the lines between work and play, Alli's practice explores what it takes to imagine otherwise and create experiences that encourage affirmative ethics and social horizons of hope. Her research interrogates how designers both underestimate and over rely upon the co-facilitation of workshop materials in these engaging and transformative encounters.

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Hannah is a design researcher in the Monash University Emerging Technologies research lab, as part of the WonderLab (Design and Learning) cohort. Her research explores feminisms and co-design.