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Reconfiguring the Poster Presentation as Interactive Exchange Through Dialogical Artefact: An Homage to Marín-Viadel and Roldán

A. R. Woollock

Daitō Bunka University

Abstract: It may not be a popular opinion amongst those who have accepted the poster presentation as a ubiquitous vehicle for scholastic dissemination. For the author, however, this questionable facet of the academic landscape has become the single most avoidable aspect of any academic conference or scholarly gathering. The reasons for this disdain are threefold and located in the domains of aesthetics, content & function, and purpose. In addition to these significant flaws, posters are intrinsically static, inherently unidirectional, and invariably non-dialogical in nature; arguably being the research equivalent of wallpaper adorning conference lobbies or ‘non art’ spaces. Furthermore, they have a questionable purpose and intent, what exactly their purpose is and where they situate themselves within academic fields, protocols, and practices remains, to the author at least, largely unclear. Moreover, by what means they aim to achieve their design objective(s) has likewise, never been clear to the author. Finally, in the current époque with the advancements of technology at our disposal, coupled with what we are still learning about learner types, cognitive proclivities, and how individuals receive and process information, a uniform, homogeneous poster appears all the more moribund. Working against these perspectives, the author, taking inspiration from Marín-Viadel and Roldán, set about disrupting, reinterpreting and re-configuring the aims, objectives, and final output of the poster presentation. Intending to better reflect the diversity of learners, approaches, and academic disciplines, notably within their own field, and also to provoke wider debate as to the effectiveness and appropriateness of ingrained practices which remain unchallenged over time in academia. This research note is intended not to be a monolithic treatise, rather to act as a conduit for further exploration. Outlining the author’s process and intent in seeking an alternative solution, this brief articulation addresses the task from a Freirian ‘problem posing’ perspective aiming to stimulate further discourse and encourage alternative approaches.

ポスター発表を学術的な情報発信の標準的な手段として受け入れている研究者の間では、賛同を得にくい意見かもしれない。しかし筆者にとって、この学術的慣行は、いかなる学会や研究集会においても最も避けたい要素となっている。その理由は、美学、内容と機能、そして目的という三つの領域に存在する。こうした根本的な問題点に加え、ポスターは本質的に静的で一方向的であり、対話を生まない。会議場のロビーや「非芸術」空間を飾る壁紙に等しい、とも言えよう。その目的や意図も曖昧であり、学術的な場においてポスターがどのような役割を担うのかは、筆者には依然として不明瞭なままである。さらに、その設計上の目標をいかに達成しようとしているのかも、明確ではない。現代においては、テクノロジーの進歩に加え、学習者のタイプ、認知的傾向、情報の受容と処理に関する知見が蓄積されつつある中で、画一的なポスターという形式はますます時代遅れに映る。こうした問題意識を踏まえ、筆者はマリン＝ビアデルとロルドンの実践に着想を得て、ポスター発表の目的や成果を刷新・再構成する試みに着手した。これは、学習者・アプローチ・学術分野の多様性-とりわけ筆者自身の専門領域において-をより適切に反映すること、また長年にわたり問い直されることなく続いてきた慣行の有効性と妥当性について、広く議論を喚起することを意図している。本稿は網羅的な論考を目指すものではなく、さらなる探究への足がかりとなることを目的としている。筆者の思考過程と意図を概説しながら、フレイレ的な「問題提起」の視点から課題に向き合い、新たな議論と代替的アプローチを促すことを目指す。

Woollock, A. R. (2026). Reconfiguring the poster presentation as interactive exchange through dialogical artefact: An homage to Marín-Viadel and Roldán. *OTB Forum*, 12(1), 24-34.

The Problem

As with all solutions or alternatives, one first needs to identify the problem which one is attempting to improve or best. As alluded to in the abstract above, the author posits that there are significant flaws with the fundamental idea and format of a poster presentation and the culture they have spawned. Indeed it is arguable that the very term contains two antithetical entities and competing ideas. A poster, as a two-dimensional, flat object is invariably conceived to outwardly transmit an idea (information/communication design) or sell a product/good/service (advertising design). Contrast this with a presentation, which, as a dynamic performance and exchange or transmission of sorts is a three-dimensional, animated occurrence whereby the presenter attempts to convey something (story/emotion/idea/doctrine) to the recipient or audience. In both cases, however, there is a fundamental flaw of commonality which is the linear, unidirectional nature of the situation. Even in the case of a performance, unless it is a Q&A, a call and response, or the audience is invited to participate such as in English pantomime, both entities remain largely non-dialogical in nature; the audience and the performer. That is not to negate laughter, reactions or movement at the micro, neurological or cognitive levels in the brain's synapses, merely to elucidate that the reality at the macro level, at least, (which is all we really can know) is that these are largely static forms of communication.

In addition to these concerns, to the author, as a trained graphic designer and practicing artist, when viewed, read, and evaluated critically as a piece of

Minimum 3cm border

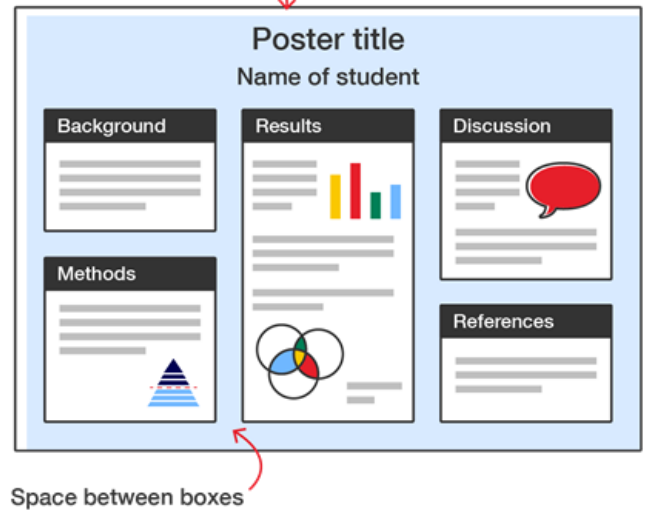


Figure 2. Another example of an apparently 'good' format for a poster presentation ©RMIT 2025

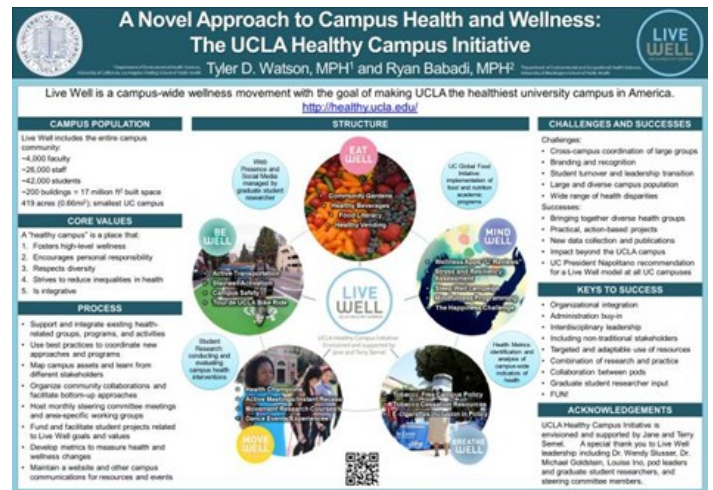


Figure 3. Example of an apparently 'good' format for a poster presentation ©UCLA 2025



Figure 1. An example of an apparently 'good' format for a poster presentation ©NYU Libraries 2025



Figure 4. Large scale 'poster' placed next to the frame in the Donegall Pass to explain the research project to local residents ©Woollock

information design (which is what they essentially are) the posters displayed at academic conferences and scholarly gatherings invariably have two clear flaws which can be summarised as design and production. As the three examples of supposed ‘good’ posters clearly demonstrate (Figs. 1, 2, and 3), the ‘design’ appears not to have been properly conceived nor systematically developed in terms of formulating a coherent aesthetic or visual narrative—it doesn’t follow or conform to any of the basic standards, requirements or parameters laid out in any brief from any design institute the author has ever studied at or taught at. Because tertiary art institutions and universities don’t utilise the generic poster as part of their andragogical outworkings it is fair to state that the vast majority of posters at poster presentation events are designed by non-art majors and likely those with little or no robust design training. They do not appear to be the outworkings of a designer or the net result of following a robust design process. Instead, they appear to be what they most likely are, the layperson’s manifestation of what they perceive to be information design. Rather than being the result of formal design training to the author’s critical eye, they appear instead to have been influenced by websites claiming to offer design advice not necessarily based upon design principles, industry standards or aesthetics, but more on basic factors like legibility, content, and format such as the examples below, all of which, if submitted in the UK for a diploma or degree in graphic design would unequivocally fail to gain a passing grade. Compare that instead, to Figure 4 which, although somewhat difficult to see in print, was a very large scale poster panel placed next to the frame containing the community’s *e-ma*. This panel performed much the same task as a typical poster presentation poster, in terms of outlining the research project to those who had not attended workshops and had not been directly informed. In addition to this, however, it was properly designed according to design standards and aesthetics aimed at its target demographic.

The second major flaw of the average poster pertains to the software used for the task, which of often the least appropriate software for such tasks. Rather than using a dedicated design software like

Adobe Illustrator® or InDesign® which have much steeper learning curves and require a basic understanding of design and design principles, students and faculty most often use a Microsoft® product such as Word® or PowerPoint® which is wholly inappropriate for the task. To be fair, even a trained graphic designer would struggle to produce a poster of any artistic merit if required to use such a platform, so the layperson is really setting themselves a near insurmountable challenge hoping to use these software applications to produce something of aesthetic worth.

Introduction to the Research

The methodology and some of the theory for the author’s doctoral research, a Ph.D. from The Queen’s University of Belfast (QUB), was situated in exploring and utilising the Japanese cultural artefact *e-ma* (絵馬、えま). For those who might not be familiar with this artefact, it is a wooden votive tablet from *shin-tou*¹ (神道、しんとぅ) the Japanese indigenous animistic belief system. An *e-ma* (pronounced like the girl’s name ‘Emma’) is a small wooden tablet about the size of a postcard, onto which visitors to *shin-tou* shrines in Japan write their hopes and aspirations for the coming year. These are usually displayed on frames at the shrine for a year and then burned so as to offer a fresh point of focus for the coming year². Since 1999, the author has been working with exploring the use of *e-ma* for non-standard or secondary purposes, initially for a master’s degree in photography from England’s Nottingham Trent University (NTU) where they were utilised as a means of displaying photos of contemporary Japanese culture. Later in Belfast they were re-employed as a means for working class citizens from the Donegall Pass, a forgotten working class neighbourhood in the City, to engage with ideas of future hopes, aspirations, and desires—something residents were inherently lacking. However, in the second iteration, rather than writing their future wishes and aspirations on the *e-ma* (as is customary in Japan), participants at intimate workshops held in the local community by the author, were invited to paint them instead. The collective *e-ma* from more than one hundred and sixty participants were then

¹The author rejects the Hepburn system of Romanising Japanese as ineffective, imperialist, and inauthentic. Instead they Romanise according to principles of the Japanese language insofar as how it corresponds to the original phonetics based upon the Sino-Japanese kan-ji (漢字、かんじ) characters and the syllabaries of hira-gana (平仮名、ひらがな) and katakana (片仮名、カタカナ).

²An *e-ma* serves roughly the same function as a New Year’s resolution does in Western countries.

used for discussions and focus groups as a means of allowing visual data to give rise to oral data, thus, this once inert object was transposed into the realm of dialogical artefact. Following each small workshop the *e-ma* were collected and displayed at a public park in the community (see Figure 3). Little-by-little the frame was filled with *e-ma* and became transformed into a public dialogical installation which also acted as a focal point of the community for considering their future hopes and aspirations.

Specific Context of the Research

Whilst a doctorate student in the School of Education at QUB (2013-2016), the author, along with other government funded students³, was required to produce a poster for a poster presentation event aimed at showcasing the current research then being undertaken in the School. In addition to the aesthetic reasons noted above in Section One, the author has always detested the poster presentation, its inclusion in academia, and the types of people who gravitate towards using them in Japan, often as a way to fluff their résumé in order to climb the academic career ladder.

Despite that strongly held position, as a funded student, the author was obliged to join the event and so set about trying to rethink their participation based not upon producing a homogeneous two-dimensional poster (the desired response), rather,



Figure 5. The final community installation piece which contained more than 160 *e-ma* painted by local residents and was displayed in their park.

upon creating a more considered and nuanced response which reflected the actual underpinnings of their research; the theory becoming the methodology, as it were. Given that the author was conducting research under the umbrella of a visual paradigm called Applied Visual Enquiry (AVE), they decided that rather than produce a 2D text-based poster as per everyone else, that they should instead remain aligned to core values of their research and try to reflect, reinterpret, and showcase the central tenets of their research in their mode of presentation. Taking their lead from an article by Marín-Viadel and Roldán (2013), the author took their visual arts methodology and produced not a poster, but instead, an installation piece based directly on their research. In effect they reinterpreted the requirements and re-configured the outcomes of the event to fit a visual solution rather than a text-based one; reestablishing the rules of participation based on their methodology rather than adopting an unsuitable one from another academic discipline. In actuality this is nothing more than one should expect at the doctoral level: appropriate and justifiable use of methodology and theory being a fundamental underpinning to all postgraduate research and something which is invariably questioned and challenged at one's viva voce.

The Concept and Approach

A poster intended for a presentation event is of a universal, predetermined, and designated size stipulated by the organisers (usually A0 size) and should contain certain key elements which should also be conveyed to participants. These elements often mirror, although incompletely, those of an academic thesis, e.g., abstract, discussion, methodology, results/findings, etc. Whilst posters intended for sharing general scholarship, constrained by size, legibility, and other logistical factors may not include all the sections of a doctoral thesis, those intended to showcase doctoral research should ideally contain all the various elements which will find their way into the usual eight chapter 'big book' thesis. This standardised structure comprises: introduction, research questions, literature, theoretical framework, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion. In order to reconfigure the poster presentation, the author decided to build a miniature version of the full-size frame which can be seen above in Figure 5. Onto this smaller A0 size frame were hung a total of

³Years 2 and 3 of the author's Ph.D. were fully funded by a competitive award from Northern Ireland's Department of Employment and Learning (DEL), for which sincere thanks should be extended. The supervisors for this research were Professor Ruth Leitch (primary) and Professor Maruška Svašek, also to whom thanks should be extended.

eighteen *e-ma*, each of which each represented a specific aspect of the research, together these replicated the poster presentation requirements and with the frame maintaining the dimensions required for the event.

In short, the 2D paper was transposed into a 3D wooden frame and the usual text-box sections of a typical poster were manifested as visual representations and painted on eighteen different *e-ma*. In terms of how the images were conceived and rendered, a specific approach was taken here insofar as most of the images were intentionally ambiguous and abstract. This intentional choice was made to further disrupt the linear/passive core of a typical poster presentation event. That is, by painting intentionally ambiguous imagery on the *e-ma* the author forced the passive observer at the presentation event to either become an active interlocutor and engage in dialogue with them, if they wished to ascertain the meaning of the individual *e-ma*, or remain passive and unknowing. In essence the *e-ma* used in the this event mirrored how they were used in the community as a leaping off point to creating dialogue and discourse on the subject of hope⁶. In this regard, not only did the frame and *e-ma* conform to the requirements of the poster presentation, but they also directly showcased, in real time and in real terms the actual research. Two of the eighteen elemental *e-ma* are shown in Figure 6, and the complete set appears

in the Appendix.

Discussion

The post-postmodern époque is awash with an almost overwhelming abundance of creativity and visuality. Such is the prevalence of the visual in contemporary societies, that it is not hyperbolic to attest that such a pervasive visual culture has not been witnessed by any generation prior in the span of human history. Whether we are aware of it or not is, creativity, as an exportable concept through innovation, enhancement, and development is at the forefront of our lives which are themselves both dominated and mediated by visual forms. Currently it is arguable that contemporary human existence is centred around three core tenets: technology (including of course AI), smart media (tablets, smart phones, smart watches, smart homes, games, etc.), and old-fashioned human interaction (often mediated by the two previous facets). The commonality which bonds those three elements and that which both drives and connects these factors are visuality, creativity, advancement, change, and innovation. That established, however, if we turn and face global academia and education, notably tertiary education, what do we see? Do we see the pervasive cultural and social mores, aesthetic and artistic values of contemporary society reflected back at us? Can we witness the technological advancements and enhanced comprehension of cognitive proclivities and learner types of our post-industrial society? Prob-



Figure 6. The author's postgraduate exhibition at NTU, 1999. ©Woollock



Figure 7. Starting the conception and production process for the poster size frame. ©Woollock

⁶One of the key findings of the author's research was that *e-ma* produced both visual and oral data, the latter of which comprised three kinds: monologue data, discursive data, and focus group data.

bly not. In actuality if you traverse the corridors of most educational establishments you are more likely to witness a quasi-historical scene which looks more like 1926 than 2026. Thus, ask your students to pull up an image of a Victorian classroom, for example, and watch their faces as they see rows of educands sitting facing a chalkboard, and come to realise that not much has changed in a hundred years or more. Academia, it often appears, has become an analog interlude in the digital lives of students, a relic of a long forgotten past. From more than twenty five years spent in global academia working in divergent cultures, the author would attest to the fact that if you entered almost any classroom in any country, at any strata of education from primary to tertiary, you would see a startlingly similar *mise-en-scène*. Current modes of education, interaction, and practices *de rigueur* in much of academia are archaic, moribund, and inappropriate for the neurological disposition and learning proclivities of post-millennial students. Academia can no longer afford to remain in this disconnected position, because in such a form its appeal and influence is waning to a point of insignificance and irrelevance. The truth is that most students now enter higher education, not for what they can learn or how they can mature, grow, and develop, rather, for the certificate they can acquire upon graduation, a certificate which will facilitate the employment they want so that they can then aspire to lead the lives they desire. Academia has become a routine stepping stone on a person's life journey, not a pinnacle nor a right of passage. Why is that? Of course there are numerous possible reasons for this and it might appear somewhat incredulous or even preposterous to some, to propagate the notion that the mere poster presentation has anything to do with it, but in actuality it does. It does because, for all its flaws noted prior, it is still considered both an appropriate and fitting element of academia and academic discourse by those driving educational policy, hence, they believe it should be maintained because it has been maintained, just as sitting in rows facing a board has remained. If these were not methods or practices believed to be fitting and appropriate, they would have slipped into history unnoticed. In this instance, however, it has not, in spite of the fact that from the author's perspective, at least, it has little discernible merit in its present form and could be replaced in an instant by a plethora of more interactive and technologically advanced alternatives. What it is, and the fact that it is maintained, indeed championed in the current *époque* is simulta-

neously both telling and a damning reflection of how far mainstream education is from meeting the needs of a rapidly changing and precarious, post-COVID global society. At the most basic level, with the advancements of screen technology and significant reduction in hardware costs, not to mention the environmental concerns about wasting paper and inks for an A0-size printout (that may require more than one attempt to get it right). In addition to these factors, there is of course the capital equipment needed for printing the poster all of which could be eliminated should the poster be transferred to the screen. In that format, despite still being too static, it could at least be interacted with, zoomed in, expanded, embedded with sound, video, and QR codes—this should be the minimum standard in 2026 and would start the process of becoming a dialogical artefact. At a university, for example, these screens could then be left in situ to provide a rolling showcase for research in a lobby or library, this is not an *avant-garde* concept by any means.

A three-dimensional artefact, unlike a two-dimensional poster has a life that extends far beyond the narrow confines of the event it was created for. Although the author has on very rare occasions been in colleagues' offices when they have displayed their posters, for the most part they appear to be discarded or stored in tubes seldom to be extracted. In stark contrast to this, however, once the event was over, the frame and the *e-ma* had a secondary life as a means of both further sharing and showcasing the author's research to various students, University wide and beyond. Having been invited to speak to other postgraduate students in other faculties and schools at the University, the author was able to take the frame and the *e-ma* they had painted, and either use it as a basis for providing a short talk or lecture or to use it as a point of departure for eliciting questions about their research in a more informal manner. As can also be seen below, after the event, the frame also served another purpose and was utilised for temporarily displaying the *e-ma* painted by participants at workshops before these were transferred to the larger red frame located in the Community's park (Figure 5).

Conclusion

The author does not set out to claim that their simple reconfiguration and disruption of the poster presentation was especially revolutionary or transcendental, however, what it was and what it tried to do was, for a number of reasons. In essence it took some-

thing which had a standard, almost derivative format coupled to a standard outcome, and deconstructed it before reassembling it so as to enhance and elevate both the method of presentation and the outcomes. In the first instance the output, the artefact embodied, reflected, and directly replicated the author's research methods and practice in a way that a simple poster would have not. Secondly the unique presentation method helped enliven a typically dull poster presentation event and transformed the conventional static norms by replacing a unidirectional 2D poster with a 3D dialogical artefact. This not only invigorated a very pedestrian event, but replicated one of the methodological approaches taken by the author in their fieldwork. The alternative approach taken required the viewer to engage in dialogue with the author if they wanted to understand the research, this instigation of discourse being a fundamental underpinning of their research methodology. What transpired at the event, was that the viewer was able to see in real terms the embodiment of the research, its theory and methodology, and its origins (in the Japanese *e-ma*) all within the narrow confines of a routine poster presentation event, demonstrating in primary terms exactly what their research was about, an outcome none of the other posters could match.

Afterword

Because of the binary, 'big tent' nature of the quantitative/qualitative divide, those disciplines which find themselves on the qualitative side (the majority of fields) are extremely heterogeneous and varied in nature. Although such a statement is clearly a moot point, critical examination of the research and dissemination methods and approaches employed within often disparate fields, faculties, and schools seems antithetical to this divergent state. Whether driven by global metrics, quality assurance standards, global frameworks or simple conformity, a varied array of academic disciplines located within the qualitative field find themselves sharing similar methods, practices, and degree titles which are not always appropriate, meaningful or fitting. Additionally, despite the postmodern promise of heterogeneity, diversity, plurality, and multiplicity it often seems like we are facing greater convergence, increasing homogeneity, and a litany of essentially binary choices, e.g.: Android® or iOS®, Firefox® or Chrome®, Windows® or Apple, Coke® or Pepsi®, capitalism or communism &c. In academia this situation favours some subject areas over others and makes some disciplines (the creative arts, for

example) compete in ways which do not play to their strengths. This is especially true in terms of assessment, evaluation, and value assigned to research, especially under frameworks such as the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF) where the visual is not considered equal to the written word. We can see this situation in Japan too in terms of academic promotion at universities where, for example, publications (however minor they may be) count towards a required threshold of academic output and yet exhibitions do not. The point to conclude here is that the poster presentation is yet another example of a standard (quantitative) format being applied across all disciplines creating and maintaining unfair bias. As this briefest of forays into reconfiguring the poster presentation has demonstrated much more research dissemination and formatting should reflect at the macro level, the innate characteristics of individual disciplines and at the micro level, individuals themselves.

As much as fields within the broad discipline of art & design; fine and applied arts should be influenced by the academic rigour of both the 'hard' and 'soft' sciences—liberal arts and humanities, so the converse should also be true. The flow of academic discourse and practice should not be top-down, despotic, or unidirectional (from the hard sciences, or quantitative disciplines down), rather, it should be a fair, balanced, and respectful exchange. As a democratic construct, academia not only needs to be genuinely interdisciplinary, but the scope and parameters of scholarship and appropriate practice needs to be examined to ensure that it includes aspects from all academic fields, and approaches which are not simply linear. As with the above example, it is also the visual practitioner's responsibility, nay, duty to reconfigure the academic discourse and to play an increasingly active role in setting and defining the various agendas surrounding education delivery, assessment and practice. The onus lies as much with creative practice and creative practitioners to ensure that they approach research, scholarship, and rigour on terms which are derived from and appropriate to their own discipline and where possible to continually challenge the status quo. The approach noted in this brief paper is but one such way in which this can be done.

As art and design institutions tend not to focus on research which falls neatly into standard qualitative frameworks their creative research output is, by its inherent nature not appropriately configured to the set format of a poster presentation. Final summative

exhibitions of students' work invariably takes the form of showcasing the actual design work resulting from the design brief, formative critiques, and feedback. If, for example the brief was to design a poster, then the cohort would display a creative poster, not a poster presentation of the poster.

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About the author: Dr. A. R. Woollock is an associate professor in the Department of International Culture at Daito Bunka University. He has been active in both tertiary education and the field of visual arts for over 25 years.

Appendix



