Hello, and welcome. I am your host, Neil Ward, and I'm grateful that you are taking time out of your day to learn more about Design Educators' paths to Tenure. I truly appreciate it.

On this episode of Tell It To Neil, we're chatting with Professor of Web Design, Dan Wong, from New York City College of Technology, part of CUNY, the City University of New York in New York City. Let's listen in.

**Neil**: Hi Dan, thank you for being on Tell It To Neil!

**Dan**: Hi Neil, thanks for inviting me.

**Neil**: Of course. So let's get started. How did you get into the world of Design?

**Dan**: Um…getting into Design was actually a lot of necessity and happenstance. Two things that basically happened when I left graduate school was I moved to New York and as a lot of people know, whether you live in New York or you've heard about people living in New York is that it's incredibly challenging and expensive. So I actually moved to New York to be a Fine Artist. My background is in Fine Art and in order to pay the rent and, you know, and find a paying job, I got into Design. And one of the motivations for getting into Design was because I'm an, I was an international student. I'm from Canada, and so the options for me required that I find a career that suited my credentials and given that I had an MF, a Fine Art MFA, that meant those jobs would be basically Design related: Interior Designer, Graphic Designer, Industrial Designer. It wouldn't include jobs that were in the Fine Art world. and so that's basically, you know, how I made my decisions. The first few months of living in New York I considered the three options; I actually seriously considered Interior Design and then found that the entry level pay wasn't such that it would give you a living wage in New York and I also did a year studying Industrial Design in my undergraduate program and I also realized that that, you know, there's few and far between; those jobs are very challenging to get and you definitely have to have a degree in Industrial Design, which I did not and so my thinking was, well, everybody needs, every corporation or every business needs work, you know, things designed: marketing materials, that sort of thing, so that's what I pursued.

**Neil**: Interesting. Hmm.

**Dan**: It was an interesting challenge to do because my background, you know, I went through a very traditional Fine Art, Bauhaus education so the first two years was Foundation and you learned drawing and you learned competition…composition, so you know, you learned in the first year or two the basics of all of the Fine Art and Design fields and so I had actually originally gone into Fine Art, or gone into Art School because I wanted to be a Graphic Designer, so it's actually interesting that I kind of did this loop of wanting to be a Graphic Designer, finding Industrial Design more challenging and interesting and then finding that that, I found too many limitations in that program and moved into Sculpture and Installation. So once I graduated, you know, I hadn't worked on a computer in years; I had learned a lot of sculpture techniques and I was based, you know, my partner at the time, or my husband, my partner at the time who turned into my husband, said, you need to buy a computer and software and I was like, I don't have the money for a computer, I can't really afford this! I was, up until that point, I was always brought up to, you know, pay down your credit cards and like, don't live on debt. And he convinced me, he was like, you know what? This is an investment in your career. You need to tool up and really, you know, teach yourself how to be an effective Designer, and so that was the first thing that I did was to go into debt! Buy a computer and software, which was a good investment, in the long run.

**Neil**: And that's some really good advice too: invest in yourself.

**Dan**: Yes, absolutely, absolutely!

*(05:00)*

**Neil**: Did you find that your education in Art and Design, did you feel like those principles kind of prepared you to do anything in the Design, capital D, Design world or…

**Dan**: Definitely. I mean, there was a…there was, you know, a pretty intense learning curve for me once I, you know, decided to take that path, I had to teach myself Typography; I had to teach myself way out; I had to teach myself all of the, you know, the software, so Photoshop and Illustrator and at the time, Quark…

**Neil**: Oh my goodness!

**Dan**: Yeah! Which, I mean Quark is actually a really, it was a simple tool to use, I understand why it was the standard at the time because it was, you know, there was only so many things you could do with Quark. But yeah, it was…it was a steep learning curve but you know, because…because I had a Fine Art background and you know, it was both undergraduate and graduate, there was this sense of aesthetic through all of that and so it, to me it wasn't, you know, I was also very much interested in Interior Design and I was, you know, always looking at magazines so you know, a lot of Design has to do with replication and referencing other design aesthetics.

**Neil**: Yes, and what an amazing place to be, in New York City, to expand on your education and research to just walk outside or go to an event and you see amazing work!

**Dan**: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. Another thing that, you know, I think one of the reasons why, because I was a practicing Designer for ten years, or longer, and prior to attending Art School I was actually studying Psychology and I had been seriously considering becoming a Psychologist and going into Graduate School and studying Clinical Psychology and so I was wrapping up my undergraduate degree and I was working as a Research Aid at a Psychiatric institution and you know, I was like, oh, this is something that I thought was going to be interesting but in fact it was a challenge and an environment that I had decided that I didn't want to spend the rest of my life in. That being said, the undergraduate degree was very science-based and research-based so you know, I got…I got my research shops and understood the process of doing research with a scientific approach with that degree. When I stumbled into my first jobs as a Designer in New York, it was in medical communication and pharmaceutical marketing and at the time, that was kind of like the ugly step-child industry of the Design world and…but I was able to, and I was really happy to be able to do this, to mix my understanding of scientific information and my interest in doing design of that material and so I really felt like, you know, an effective Designer really understands the information that they're designing and in this case, I did understand it because I had the scientific background.

**Neil**: And what an amazing job to be able to combine all those interests.

**Dan**: Yeah, yeah. It was definitely a lot of fun, you know. I think one of my favorite things to do was to design, lodge and start journals, because you would be able to do the branding for the new journal, you'd be able to determine what the style and aesthetics were of the covers of the journal and then you also got to get into the nitty-gritty of the internal layouts, the, you know, ten-point type and all of these charts and graphs with like very detailed nitty-gritty information.

**Neil**: Yes, and I would imagine that information was really dense!

**Dan**: It was very, very dense! I was regularly, you know, when it comes to references, you'd be like setting that in like six-point type. It was….very, very dense, yeah. You were cramming a lot of information on an eight and a half by eleven page!

*(10:11)*

**Neil**: So, how long did you work in that area?

**Dan**: I actually worked in that area up until when I started teaching.

**Neil**: Oh, perfect. So, when was the "A-ha!" moment that you thought, Design Education might be for me?

**Dan**: Well, this is actually a really incredibly interesting conversation. At least, I think it's an incredibly interesting…

**Neil**: *(laughs)*

**Dan**: And it's such a New York, it's such a New York experience and you know, it really goes to show that you need to put yourself out there and just be ready to do anything and everything. So…what happened was, a friend of mine, at the time I was running a Design and Technology firm with my husband, he's a Computer Programmer, Developer and I'm, you know, I was actually at the time largely doing print design but then I would design the interfaces for the websites that he would be working on. So a friend of mine said, oh, I know somebody who's curating an art show so why don't you drop by; I went to this art show and I'm standing next to this sculpture and this guy's like wandering around and he was like, oh, hey, is that your sculpture? And I was like no, actually, but I am a Sculptor but I do Graphic Design and he was like, oh, that's interesting because I'm an Architect but I teach Graphic Design and…

**Neil**: *(laughs)*

**Dan**: I know! And I was like, oh, that's pretty cool. He was like, oh would you like to come in and be a Visiting Critic for my students? And I said, oh sure, that would be like a lot of fun. So I did that and he kept on, like I was his regular Visiting Critic for a number of semesters and he kept on saying, you really ought to teach, you really ought to teach. There was times actually when he was being observed when I was coming in and doing my song and dance and like, critiquing the students. And the Faculty member who observed me said, you're really great, you know, do you teach? You should think about teaching; I was like, yeah…well, you know. At the time I actually didn't think that I could teach, legally, because I thought I needed a special visa to do that but I contacted my lawyer and he said, oh no, it's simple, you just need a letter of employment. So…so after a couple of years I said oh, you know what? Maybe I'll try teaching a course; it sounds like fun. So I taught one semester at City Tech. I taught a Three-Dimensional Design course which was kind of easy, being a Sculptor. And at the end of that Semester I got a phone call from the Department and the Administrative Assistant said, would you like to come in for the Web job? And I'm like, what…I mean, I actually thought that there was a possibility that there was a web project that they wanted me to consider and interview me for: it wasn't really clear. And I was like, can you tell me any more about the web job, like is this some sort of project that you want, and she seemed really confused and she was like, give me a second. She comes back; she's like, you teach here, right? And I was like yeah, I do. She was like, do you want to come in for the Web job interview and I was like? OK, why not? I really had no idea what I was interviewing for!

**Neil**: *(laughs)* No!

**Dan**: I had Googled it and I didn't see that there was a job, you know, a Tenure Track position that they were advertising, but I didn't know whether or not I was, so I actually went in with my portfolio fully expecting to like, talk about some sort of web project that they needed. And then I walked in and…they said, oh by the way you're interviewing for a Tenure Track position and I was like, oh, OK, well I'm not sure that I want a Tenure Track position because business is really good, but let's do this interview anyways. And so like I went through, you know, I went through, jumped through the hoops and did it and I said, you know, one of the things is, business is really good with my business and my husband had been, I mean at that time, gay marriage wasn't legal, so really it was really important I had been in the country for ten years, corporations were not willing to sponsor me for a Green Card, so what happened was he started a business, we worked together and this business was going to sponsor me for a Green Card, and so I asked them, well, you know, business is good and I'm trying to get a Green Card and they said, oh well we can actually get you a Green Card and we can expedite it because for Faculty positions, because they're publicly, like internationally advertised and they really go through the process to see who's available, that if they need a Green Card, they can expedite it and can get it done in two years.

*(15:29)*

**Neil**: Oooh, that's nice!

**Dan**: Yeah, it's great. And so I thought, OK, well you know what? And they'll pay for all the legal fees so I was like, OK, well you know what? I will do…I'll do this, I'll, you know, get my Green Card in two years and see how it goes. And it's now like eleven years later. I mean, I quickly found that academia was the right place for me. I really enjoy teaching the students and I really like the environment; I like the fact that it's very self-motivated, so you work on what you're interested in working on and that you interact with people. The people, there's, you know, the Faculty's always the same, the students are always changing and…and the fact that you really do impact the students' lives in really positive ways.

**Neil**: Which is extremely rewarding!

**Dan**: Yes, yes, absolutely, absolutely. Particularly for our school. I mean, we're a public institution; all of our students come from the public school system, the New York City public school system which doesn't have the best reputation and so…and also the students also don't necessarily…they come from very impoverished or working-class backgrounds so they are both challenged by life, they often have part-time or full-time jobs while they're going to school or they have major family responsibilities in addition to being full-time students and you know, and their parents are not necessarily professionals, so not only are they often the first times to go to university but I find that if they work hard and they apply themselves and they take every opportunity that we offer them, they do very well. And sometimes, and oftentimes do much better than we do, as educators!

**Neil**: You've been in this position for ten years now, right, or so?

**Dan**: Yes.

**Neil**: Ten or eleven?

**Dan**: Yeah, actually this is the eleventh year so I started in 2008.

**Neil**: Congratulations!

**Dan**: Thanks.

**Neil**: And, Web Design has changed quite a bit over the past ten years. But certain things have kind of remained the same. So, I'm kinda interested to pick your brain on how you've addressed those changes over those years and kind of what your, the projects you're doing now with your students.

**Dan**: You know, in some ways the projects haven't changed. The complexity of them is…you know, has changed. Given that the courses are fifteen weeks, there's only so much that can be done in that short amount of time. And so you know, I've…I've always designed my courses for success. That's my goal. Like, if I don't get most people to create a successful project by the end of the course then I have failed. So I do everything possible to keep the standards to a point that they will find success within the course. Now, in terms of keeping up with technology, I gotta say, sometimes I really envy the Drawing Professors in our program *(laughs)*

**Neil**: Why is that?

**Dan**: Well, because I mean, drawing is drawing is drawing, I mean, like drawing, I mean, some of the tools slightly change but really when you are a Master Illustrator, let's say, you…your approach to teaching doesn't change that much, you know, you do life drawings, you do, you know, still lives, you do figure drawing, like that has never changed and that really will never change and the technicalities of perspective and what have you, you know, that kind of stuff doesn't change. You need to learn some of the latest tools but you could also just really teach students to draw using paper and ink and pencils. So, whereas with technology, you know, it's changing, it changes exponentially, it's really hard to predict where the direction is going. A perfect example is Flash, you know, Flash was never an easy tool to use and it was always a difficult thing to teach because you know, it's easy to do a simple animation but if you really wanted to be effective at it, you had to get into action scripting and coding which is really, really difficult for most creatives; it's work-intensive, it takes a lot of time and a lot of effort.

*(20:58)*

**Neil**: Yes, it did!

**Dan**: And yes! And then, and then it's gone. Like, it's gone in a split second, I mean it literally, the beginning of its demise was when Apple refused to support the Flash player on its phone. And so I had two courses that I had written that were Flash focused and when…as Flash was dying, I struggled to figure out what the next thing…what was going to replace it. And for a time, there was this prototype called Edge Animate, which is now called Adobe Animate and so we were teaching that for a while but then there became a licensing problem because it was in Beta, you couldn't get a license for it and Adobe wasn't really helping us out getting licenses for it to teach, so…but the fact is that that didn't replace Flash. What replaced Flash was Rich Media, because the cool interactivity things that Flash was being used for, you don't do on a phone. You don't do hover effects and you don't, you know, there's a lot of things that you don't do on a typical website on a phone, you know with a phone you just click and play and so that click and play thing basically introduced things like podcasts, video and it brought back animated gifs, you know, and so really those are the things that replaced Flash and you could never predict that that was gonna, I mean maybe some people would've predicted it but it's really hindsight that you realize that oh, when Flash died, it went in a totally different direction. So that's just an example of you know, there's technology which is very complex to teach to Design students and then there's just like predicting the trajectory of technology.

**Neil**: That makes so much sense and it's so funny, because for educators that have been around for a while, when you mention animated gifs, the first thing that comes to mind is something extremely…extremely brightly colored and flashing!

**Dan**: Yeah, yeah. The animated gifs of the nineties, yeah. They were just horrendous and hideous and nobody ever wanted to use them!

**Neil**: No and no! And now, when we say animated gifs, they're a lot better to look at!

**Dan**: Yeah! yeah. They're basically just mini-stripped down five second videos.

**Neil**: Yes!

**Dan**: And…

**Neil**: Totally different connotations!

**Dan**: Yeah, yeah, absolutely, absolutely, it's pretty cool.

**Neil**: So are you working on any scholarly projects?

**Dan**: Yeah. So I…I think it was 2014 right prior to, just as I was approaching my Tenure Review and you know, up until that point, professional practice had been recognized as Research and then suddenly it wasn't. and so I looked around for opportunities to do some more traditional forms of scholarship and research and just backing up a little bit, you know, we have to remember that in our field the terminal degree is the MFA and for the most part MFAs, at least my generation and I think even still a lot of programs, MFA programs are creative professional practice programs. They are not academic research programs, so when you compare those to other academics, people who get their credentials and their jobs, it's a PhD, and so within those fields of study, they are taught how to write a research paper, how to do research, what is research in their field. And so when they get their first Tenure Track job, they've possibly already been published. They hit the ground running and they know exactly how things are done and then they pick their little niche, their tiny little like, flies on a specific…wings on a specific fly and how flies fly kind of…

*(25:53)*

**Neil**: *(laughs)* Yeah!

**Dan**: …a granular research and then go for it. And so in our field, research itself is not defined. The methodologies by which we're expected to do research is not defined. You know, publishing opportunities…

**Neil**: No, that is something that is really wide open and under the guise of peer review.

**Dan**: Right, right. And you know, there are journals and such that we can publish in but even there, you know, we are, we have to do research to figure out number one what the journals are, and number two what they're looking for, number three, how to teach yourselves how to write, you know, there's all these things that PhDs come with a toolkit, they've already had that. We're kind of in the dark. And then, you know, many people go into Design not because they're interested in that but because they are creatives, and so the flip-side for us is this ridiculous notion that we can take our Design work, which in some ways we're going to do in a bubble without a client, and then present it in exhibitions, like Fine Artists present in exhibitions but you know, it's not like there's Design exhibitions and Design galleries all over the place, I mean, those kind of things don't really exist. We don't work in a bubble, you know, for the most part we work with clients and so it's…it's a little bit disingenuous in some ways for the Academy to be comparing our field to…disciplines that have existed for hundreds of years. And then on top of that, our discipline has been changing so drastically and so rapidly over the past twenty, thirty years, I mean, you think about how print was ubiquitous for so long and then the internet came along and print publishing was decimated. And that was our field of expertise. And so they are people who are Designers, visual Designers with print backgrounds having to re-tool, then you have, you know, Interactive Designers, like, what is that? What is that? Not only what is that, but you know, what is the research for that and what kind of work are you supposed to be doing? And on top of that, the landscape is changing to rapidly. I teach this one course called Web Analytics and Traffic. And literally within this semester, I'll have said something and then within weeks, Facebook will have changed their algorithm, or Google will have changed their reporting structure and I'll have to go back…

**Neil**: *(laughs)*

**Dan**: I know! And I'll have to go back and say, oops, like, oh yeah, there's a change: what I told you last week is no longer true. It was just, I think it was last semester or the semester before, where Twitter went from a hundred and forty characters to two hundred and eighty characters and I was like, yeah, you know, Twitter a hundred and forty characters and this kid put his hand up and he was like, you mean two hundred and eighty? And I was like…yeah, I kinda noticed lately that there was, I could put more in a Tweet but I didn't note down what it's going…they were like, oh yeah, they changed it to two hundred and eighty. That was the impetus for creating Design Incubation. Actually the original impetus for creating Design Incubation was my frustration with professional practice not being recognized as research and so I thought, we need to create an organization and a venue for people to present their professional practice under the lens of academic, you now, interrogation and review and presentation. So that was the original, the original purpose of it, and it was really kind of, it was an invitation, it was by invitation, we were…we reached out to other Faculty members, it was myself, Katherine Weinstein at Queens College and Genevieve Hitchings at City Tech. And we would invite people that we knew around New York who were doing interesting stuff and we said, hey, will you present your work and in a colloquium kind of structure. We limited it to Pecha Kucha because that way we wouldn't bore each other to tears!

*(30:55)*

**Neil**: Yes!

**Dan**: And it was a hit, like the very first one was a hit and every, you know, every single one after that, people came around really inspired and just they had gotten so much out of it. You know, over, you know, as things progressed and again, this kind of took off right way, it shifted because one thing was that people, you know, full-time educators who were really focusing on their teaching, not…they weren't necessarily doing professional practice because they didn't have time to, people saying Community Colleges were not expected to do, you know, a high degree of scholarly activity, and so people were presenting their teaching practices. And so then I began to think about, and we began to think about, well, what is research? Because teaching practice isn't technically pedagogy; I mean, like, pedagogical research is really studying, you know, education and you know, doing case studies on how you're teaching a course isn't necessarily studying educational practices per se. And so that's when I began to think about, well what the heck is research? And what is research in other fields? And it's so…

**Neil**: Yeah, that's definitely important to compare or to have that contrast between what others do. Just to have a better idea of how to frame research in our field in those terms.

**Dan**: Yes. Absolutely. And you know, some people will say, oh, well you know, I'm doing this, you know, re-branding so I'm getting online and I'm looking at other companies and I'm seeing what's going on in trends and I'm seeing what's happening with logo design and colors and then I'm developing a project and so that background research to them is research. My background actually before I got into the creative area, the creative fields, I was, I studied Cognitive Psychology, behaviors, so it was very experimental, you know, it's actually taught Statistics when I graduated from undergrad, I was a Research Aid at Psychiatric Hospital in Toronto and we were doing really rigorous scientific research and so I'm familiar with what scientific research looks like. But you know in the Social Sciences field, which I think is in some ways interesting, because you know, measuring behavior is we're trying to understand causal relationships or correlations with behaviors is really, you know, in some ways the idea is challenging; it's really hard to quantify but they've, you know, over hundreds of years managed to be able to measure that kind of thing. And so…so that's kind of my trajectory right now, with Design Incubation is trying to begin to, you know, be completely inclusive; allow people to define research in the field in different ways, but also recognize that there actually is a way that we could be doing research in Communication Design, using the tools of science. And in a lot of ways we're already doing that, you think about we take surveys, you do interviews, you quantify that; you run statistics on it and you make…you create hypotheses and determine whether or not these ideas are supported by the feedback that you get from people that you interview. So…yeah, so that's, you know, that's kind of what we've been doing with Design Incubation. We've been regularly all presentations are, you know, published, their Abstracts are published so that there's a Design record, you know. One thing that again we're not taught to do in the MFA programs are lit reviews, and…

*(35:31)*

**Neil**: No! No, we're not!

**Dan**: Right, and we're so often just re-inventing ideas that have been published somewhere that we haven't actually found and so in the very least, I would like to say, you know, this idea has been presented here at Design Incubation and this is the person who did it and this is when they did it. We now practice this double-blind peer review, so when people submit their Abstracts for the colloquia, they're sent to two peer reviewers. The people who are doing the peers who are reviewing it have no idea who offered the Abstract. And then we send the reviews back to the author and they don't know who did the reviews. But we do send them back because given that we haven't been trained in, you know, academic writing and research, part of our mission is to move the discipline forward and educate the educators. I'm not sure the exact statistics in terms of how many people we reject and how many people we accept. I would say it's not unlike, you know, the typical classroom setting; it's a bit of a bell-curve! So there's that, like you know, there's that top few that are just like, you're excellent, everything that you do and write about is excellent; you are accepted. Then we get the ones that are, please read the reviews and edit your Abstract and upon, you know, reviewing those edits, we will accept it for presentation and then there's those that are just…inappropriate topic-wise, poorly written, don't really have a thesis whatsoever and to them, basically when we say, you know, unfortunately you were rejected, but read these reviews and re-submit. And if you re-submit we will re-review them and if we can get it to a point in time we will accept you for presentation and if it's not a time, continue to edit it and we will, you know, keep on working on it and if you get to the point where we'll accept you, we're doing colloquia on a regular basis so you can be, you know, you can present that at one of our many colloquia but yeah, so that's, you know, then we kind of branched out to other things like, again, one of these ridiculous things of awards competitions, so you know, for Tenure and Promotion, if you win an award for the work that you've done then that is, you know, high acclaim. Well, in our field, it's…it's, you know, we're competing with people in industry; we're competing with people that have like three million dollar budgets and can pay the three hundred and fifty dollar entrance fee to the Webby Awards with a chance of actually winning. I mean, for academics, we're working full-time. We're not for the most part allowed to work that much on professional activity outside of our jobs, so the idea that we could possibly get, you know, a project that is going to win an award that will be recognized for Tenure and Promotion is a bit ridiculous, so we, you know, we specifically came up with the Design Educators' Awards to recognize Educators and their efforts Service and Teaching published in a creative work specifically outside the realm of industry so that they had a chance of actually being recognized for something.

**Neil**: Yes! *(laughs)*

*(40:00)*

**Dan**: And we've been getting some really amazing submissions, and then we get some submissions where it's kind of like you're taking a snap at it but you know, they're not there yet. In some ways, you know, it's unfortunate, what we would actually really like people to do, because oftentimes, you know, you can only have like one or maybe two winners in a category and sometimes we actually would like to recognize more than that many, but you can only have that many so I think people might get discouraged, because when you work on like a handful of really in-depth research projects in your professional career and so I would say anybody who is listening to this, just because you didn't win, doesn't mean that you are not deserving and I would like say, keep on submitting to these awards because it's one of those things that, you know, there are good submissions that just we can't recognize everybody.

**Neil**: That's really good advice. Keep trying!

**Dan**: Keep trying! Exactly! I often think about actors and I'm just like, their lives are full of rejection; I could never be an actor but you know, people who keep on trying will eventually find success.

**Neil**: Exactly! No, but Design Incubation, I've been involved in a few, or I've been involved in a colloquium, a panel presentation and most recently submitting to the Design Educator Awards and I find that the organization as a whole is really, a really great resource for us Design Educators! It's really…

**Dan**: Yeah!

**Neil**: There's that opportunity for peer reviewed awards and other peer reviewed opportunities that can be recorded on your CV.

**Dan**: Absolutely.

**Neil**: And the more I meet people, the more I talk about Design Incubation!

**Dan**: Which is great, yeah.

**Neil**: Yeah, and the more people that I can tell about it, the more people know about it. So I'm there to support you. I'm an advocate for Design Incubation!

**Dan**: Thank you, thank you, yeah! So, we are…we're a fully volunteer organization that works on zero revenue. I mean, we have a small fee for the Fellowship, the Fellowship program, running Fellowship program and we have a very small fee for the awards and then other than that, it's really all people donating their time, their expertise and space in their institution and you know, it would be really great, we've often thought, how do we monetize this because we can just really use some more money so just to, you know, put stamps on envelopes and that sort of thing. But you know, it's a work of love and we're always looking for people to be peer reviewers. We're actually in the midst of putting together a peer review Webinar because there are, you know, different criteria for peer review for different things, you know, there's criteria for Journals and in Journalism, there’s books, there's conferences and such and so we're going to be, you know, putting the presentation together so that people will understand how to peer review but you know, what the criteria are and what the definition is of their conference criteria. We're also going to be putting together a Webinar in how to write an Abstract. They have been getting better! But they're still surprising not great. We…I wrote this with the colleagues, I wrote this White Paper on how to write an academic Abstract and again, a lot of this came from my experience in studying Cognitive Psychology, you know, there's thesis and there's, you know, research and ideas and thesis and crunching the numbers and observations and outcomes and conclusions and that sort of thing and there's a general structure and if you were to follow this structure, it is pretty easy to knock out an Abstract. And also if you can't answer all of these criteria, then perhaps your Abstract is not substantial enough to be presenting. So…there's now a Wizard, do you know about the Wizard, the Abstract Wizard?

*(45:21)*

**Neil**: I do not. Please tell me!

**Dan**: Oh OK, yes, so there is an Abstract Wizard on the Design Incubation website and basically it's like, you know, give me one line that gives that explains the title of your research and give me your, you know, the background, you know, two sentences for the background information and one sentence for your hypothesis and blah-blah-blah, and basically just breaks it down to component parts and it's not really meant to give you a finished Abstract but it's basically to give you the outline of an Abstract with all of the components that you will need to be able to massage and craft for submission to you know, what have you journals or conferences or whatever.

**Neil**: I was going to say, wait a second: there's, I just put in a couple of sentences and it writes it for me? That's amazing!

**Dan**: Yeah, basically yeah! Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's a little wizard and I'm hoping that it'll help people. So…yeah, we're always growing and changing. And we're always looking for volunteers to help us out and it's, you know, it's our discipline, you know, we're a really hot discipline I’ve got to say, you know? Communication Design is…everything that we see in front of us. All the technology that we use presents information that requires designers to figure out how to present. And so…you know, so there's that. One other thing that, you know, I've thought about quite a bit; with my scholarly activity and you know, it often informs itself in what we do with Design Incubation is how does industry differ from academia? You know, in so many ways, in so many fields, academia is leading, is the leading charge, you know? A lot of discoveries happen in universities that change and revolutionize the world; in Medicine, in Physics, in you know, what have you. And in a lot of ways, well first of all Communication and Design was the ugly step-child of like the Fine Art departments…and the Sciences.

**Neil**: Always!

**Dan**: It's just like, you're doing what? That's so not cool! But now it's like that's, you know, from what I'm hearing, Fine Art departments are shrinking rapidly because everybody wants to be studying Design. And so you know, we are really…we are really changing and growing and I don't see, you know, I don't see the internet going away and I don't see technology going away; hence I think that our jobs are going to be around for a really long time. But they're also just sort of changing rapidly.

**Neil**: Well, and that's what also gets me thinking about kind of, not necessarily a new area but in User Experience and User Experience Designers, that's kind of at the edge of Graphic Design; it's kind of at the edge of Computer Science…and it's kinda at the edge of, I don't know, Analytics maybe, Data Analytics too. So it's just like right at the edge of all of these areas and with User Experience Design, what type of…what type of research and what type of peer review would be applicable there for that? So it's just…

**Dan**: Yeah, I would argue that we're not at the edge. I would say that we're in the center of it all! I would say that we're literally in the center of it all and it is these specialty fields are happening, either because other fields are encroaching into our field or because specialties are branching out from within, within us. Like for instance…

**Neil**: I like that description better!

*(49:42)*

**Dan**: Yeah! I mean, User Experience and User Interface, you know, I've been around long enough to know, we've always been doing that. I mean, we've always, when you think about, I mean we weren't always doing it in an efficient way, so if you think about, say, Flash websites, do you remember when Flash websites first came out? They were just so cool and they were like, you had to dig into the interface to discover where the information was. It was like a game, like, it was hidden in there, so we were already playing around with the user experience, like oh, you roll over this and suddenly music plays and if you click it twice, then it opens up this new image. I mean, it was always very experiential. You know, what's changed is like how efficiently can people get from one place to another and how much information can you cram into the simplest interface possible. But you know, to me it's a buzzword because I feel like we've always been in, I mean, if you think about just print. You think about a book or you think about a journal, you know, there's a user interface with that. There's a table of contents; there's the index and there's chapters and there's page numbers and…you know, there's small, little pocketbook and then there's big coffee table…I mean, those to me are also user experiences that we've always been involved in. You know, the way that I describe our role as Designers is we, our role is to take information and take data and parse it in a way for the quickest, easiest, most efficient consumption of that information. So I often tell, you know, people, we're like the New York Times, you know, I just read the New York Times, the Washington Post, like constantly; it's my go-to because I got off of Facebook and…

**Neil**: Good for you, by the way!

**Dan**: Yeah, that's a whole nother story! But basically, you know, our job is to take information and highlight the important parts and structure it in a way so that somebody can just scan the front page of a newspaper and say, I want to read that; I see that headline, I understand what that means, I'm gonna scroll down, it's not important right now; I want to see what's happening in this area. Oh, look at this headline: this sounds interesting. Let me dig in a little further. You know, that's…because basically, you know, other people do the writing for us and then we interpret that writing and present it in the way so that people get the value and the importance of the different aspects of that content. And so to me, you know, that is our role as Designers. Parsing information and parsing data and you know, now you have like Information Scientists and Data Scientists and such. Yes, they do definitely very different things and they work with technology but it's definitely also a field that is our role. And we should be sure to not kind of let other people usurp that.

**Neil**: Well said!

**Dan**: I'm very passionate about this!

**Neil**: You are, you are. I love it! No, and that makes a lot of sense putting it in those terms. So I just want to leave a little bit of time to see if you had any parting thoughts that you would like to talk about?

**Dan**: Um…I think that our discipline is in a very exciting place. It's amazing how much growth there is, how many new programs there are; the one thing that I do find interesting is that there, you know, in addition to not being, not teaching graduate students how to write, which is something that they really need to do, is if you go to graduate school and you don't plan on becoming an academic, there are certain things like areas like Motion and Interactive that is, are both areas with great employment potential and I find that programs are still teaching print basics. They're teaching type…for instance, they're teaching typography, talking about leading and kerning and picas and the reality is, the majority if you think about the information that you consume in a day, how much of that comes from a piece of paper and how much of that comes from something you're looking on your phone or watching on a screen and so I think that we need to jump ahead and teach, you know, screen-based and motion-based design first and foremost. That should be our main focus, before anything else. Because that's…that is the now and that is the future. And to spend a lot of time on print is a real disservice to the students. I don't know if that has anything to do with Tenure and Promotion!

**Neil**: No, no, but some really good advice for those out there that might be involved in curriculum revisions for their universities or departments.

**Dan**: Right, right, absolutely, absolutely. And if you're a graduate student, that's what you should be focusing on and if you're…yeah, and if you're developing curriculum it's definitely what you should be focusing on.

**Neil**: Well, thank you very much for spending time with us today!

**Dan**: I hope that this is useful.

This concludes Season Two, Episode Six of Tell It To Neil. If any of the facts or information included in this Episode are incorrect, please feel free to get in touch through our email, hello@tellittoneil.com

If you would like to get in touch with Dan, please contact him through his website at www.dan-wong.com

*(end of recording 56:40)*

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