University of Washington professor of philosophy Jana Mohr Lone: Ask children if they ran the world, what would they do differently?

EXCLUSIVE

IRAN DAILY: Many of the very young children are apparently asking questions about all sorts of structural evils present in the society, in the case of our society mostly about poverty or at least precarious economic situations. How would you advise parents or educators to approach a dialogue with children (mostly under 10) on such matters?

JANA MOHR LONE: As with all deeper questions from children, I would advise adults to begin by listening and not rushing to answer the question. And the child questions that elicit what he or she is thinking about, and engage with the child by reflecting your self about the question. Often the most rewarding conversations with children emerge when we respond with curiosity and openness to the more challenging questions they ask, questions that also perplex us, and that allow us to think with them instead of just giving them answers.

We’d appreciate it if you could give us some concrete examples for public use, because it seems that at least some children are taking a deeper look at their surroundings, sometimes in a comparative manner, asking really difficult questions about why their society, or even the whole world for that matter, is running into so many troubles.

I would suggest to parents and teachers that they encourage children’s growing awareness of the economic and political challenges in their communities and our world.

Ask the children what they think. Why do they think more families are struggling? What do they think we should do about this? And perhaps offer them suggestions for reading, and reading something together that delves into these deeper issues – which can be as simple as a picture book that raises issues of inequality and injustice.

Thus spoke the artist: Classy designers know how to hand-draw

Even though the phrase “graphic design” first appeared in print in 1922, the art form’s origins are tied to the rise of printing in 15th century Europe. The growth of consumer culture in the aftermath of the industrial revolution, however, was the main reason it emerged as a profession and closely associated with advertising.

In spite of the fact that the academic education of graphic design in Iran dates back to the 1960s, when a few French designers were employed by the College of Fine Arts in Tehran University to teach the principles of the art, by the late 1990s, it was still considered a risky venture by many Iranian families.

“Back then, parents were not quite certain about the nature of graphic design as a profession, especially worrying that it might not lead to a financially secure future. So, they quite understandably – in retrospect – were against their children pursuing it academically,” said the 42-year-old graphic designer Hooman Abarian. He was, therefore, somewhat puzzled towards natural sciences in high school, a prelude to a career in medicine.

But, how the future had something else in store for Hooman, who is pleased to announce that he is a "self-taught artist." The seeds of a career in producing aesthetically appealing objects, however, were already there. He was born in a family of connoisseurs, with his father being a movie director for cinema and television.

"Learned from him a lot, as I used to hang out behind the scenes of his movies, observing everything that was unfolding, if not actually serving as an intern assistant," Hooman plunged his way into his field of choice by working as a photographer, as well as editor, for the printing press, almost 23 years ago.

"Jumped into the work environment the first chance I got, and learned things by doing. It was no piece of cake, to be honest," he said.

By the time he started working for the papers as a graphic designer, competitors had already begun to best layout designers who took great pride in their work, which required many manual skills.

"Before that, when I was younger, they used to be such pompous beings, en- tering the editorial rooms as if they owned the place," he said chortling.

As it turns out, though, Hooman himself is nothing short of a snob when it comes to the crucial rivalry: Hand-drawing versus digital-drawing.

"Something is definitely not right with designers who can’t work with their hands," he said, denoting a doodling gesture. The hip-looking designer claims that his best, most memorable work is the cover of the ‘Harmoon’ Ruler album he did for the renowned pop singer Mohsen Chavoshi – for free. Many tracks in the album, whose lyrics are written had from Rumi, have something to do with Sufi whirling.

"That bunch of thorns picked, set and photographed for the cover; I imagine, are themselves whirling, not entirely unlike their original setting, on a stem of rose."