Design Identity Formation and Self-Reflection Strategies in the Development of Students'
Design ePortfolio

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Innovative Strategy

An apparel design portfolio is a purposeful collection of artifacts and serves as a communication tool that reflects a comprehensive skill set including visual, technical and analytical, through portfolio focus and presentation. In order for students to successfully market themselves to a professional audience, visual literacy is a key element of a portfolio which is achieved by communicating a consistent and strong visual brand aesthetic with respect to design elements (typeface, color etc.), design principles and individual style. Yet students are commonly challenged to articulate their personal aesthetic or design philosophy in order to create a holistic pattern of artifacts and a unifying visual identity for their portfolio. This paper shares some best practices on overcoming this challenge through student's engagement in self-reflection and identity formation processes.

Purpose of Strategy

The senior-level portfolio development course for apparel designers to which this strategy was applied contained several objectives – to develop a design portfolio in print, PDF, web and mobile formats that reflect a range of possessed skills, and convey fashion ideas through an individual style which is mirrored in design communication, logo, layout, and presentation. The strategy discussed in this paper is an integral and critical starting point to the portfolio development course in order to achieve the course objectives.

The role of identity and self-reflection within an ePortfolio has been highlighted by various authors (Jenson, 2011; Nguyen, 2013). The process of personal identity formation is "a self-reflective process of turning thought inward to analyze and reflect on intrapersonal views, values, and convictions" (Berzonsky & Barclay, 1981, pp. 207). Nguyen (2013) emphasizes that identity is crucial for analyzing ePortfolios since they become a "living portal" and provide a means to perceive oneself and others (pp. 143). Jenson (2011) emphasizes that student's self-reflection is an important aspect in reviewing their own work and modifying it. Identity and self-reflection strategies, hence, provide the valuable rational for the analysis and selection of artifacts to be included in a Portfolio.

Implementation of Strategy

As part of this strategy related to expression of design identity, students were asked to reflect on the following questions in a narrative form: Who am I as a designer? What defines me? Where do I get my inspiration from? What are the unique aspects of my work? The students were then asked to collect all relevant artifacts and bring them together. Through one-on-one meetings, students were encouraged to self-reflect on their previous design works by critically analyzing the artifacts and identifying common inspirational themes and similarities of visual identity. Observed similarities related to design principles (e.g. contrast, complexity, novelty)

and elements (e.g. colors, line) of the final garments or illustrations, textiles, silhouettes, and garment styles. During the self-reflection process, students described: a) their inspiration b) the process they went through to accomplish the final artifact, and c) how the inspiration and initial thought process are translated into the final artifact.

Following the first phases of design identity formation and self-reflection, students participated in carefully selecting the artifacts that best exemplify what defines and characterizes them as an apparel designer. Based on the selections, students revised their artifacts including concept and fabric boards, flat drawings, and illustration, so that the artifacts showcased a personal branding and marketing tool which is suitable to their chosen design market of their portfolio. Students then communicated their logo and other elements that represented their personal style and visual identity, such as layout and background, color, and typeface into each portfolio page to create a unifying and holistic design identity across all portfolio pages. In a second individual meeting, students were asked again to self-reflect on what they have learned about themselves and how they attempted to incorporated certain patterns into their artifacts. In the final phase of their portfolio development, students developed their ePortfolio including an introductory page with a cohesive visual brand identity, professional summary highlighting their statement of design philosophy, career goals, accomplishments, resume, as well as their artifacts.

<u>Effectiveness and Continuation of Strategy</u>

The main objective of this strategy was to help students to identify and articulate their personal aesthetic and design philosophy, and consequently to create a visual identity within a whole body of artifacts. It was evident that recording students' self-reflection in the form of a metacognitive oral report encouraged and motivated identity development in their portfolio. Several examples of student portfolios are available to showcase this successful design identity formation process. Further, students expressed their satisfaction in the ability to participate in the selection process of artifacts by self-reflecting about what they want to showcase about themselves and why. Overall, student outcomes from this class exceeded expectations and several students' Print and ePortfolios have been used to promote our department at various events. Compared to ePortfolios developed in previous terms, the applied strategy in the Portfolio development course was deemed more successful in portfolio design identity formation and reflection of personal style through a cohesive visual identity and body of artifacts. Hence, it will unquestionably be implemented in subsequent terms by investing even more time in the individual meetings at the beginning of the course since it provides students with a clear self-reflected direction and motivation for a successful ePortfolio.

<u>References</u>

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