Developing Design Perspectives through Critical Reflection

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Active learning, defined as instructional methods that engage students in the learning process, was developed as an effective tool to enhance the classroom experience for students. Engaging students in the learning process and involving them in meaningful learning activities is the foundation of the active learning model (Prince, 2004). This type of cooperative learning allows "a structured form of group work" while allowing individual assessment (Prince, 2004, p. 223). Through active learning, students can experience four modes of learning; concrete experience, abstract conceptualization, reflective observation and active experimentation—which is the key tenant of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory (ELT). Therefore, via active learning approaches based on ELT, the learner can engage with concrete examples that become the basis for their reflections, and those reflections help create abstract concepts of the subject.

Ryan and Brough (2012) indicate, for fashion-related students, it is imperative they develop design perspectives, the ability to communicate what has been or what needs to be changed in a design, by critically reflecting on designs and interpreting how styles are appropriately used in the design. However, these skills are not taught effectively in the study of fashion (Ryan & Brough, 2012). Therefore, the authors concluded that integrating reflection, specifically non-textual modes of reflection, is important for developing successful design perspectives. To address these challenges, the lead author, who has taught an introductory fashion design concept class to fashion-related students over 10 semesters in a large mid-Western campus, created a set of active learning assignments. The fashion design analysis assignments incorporated textual and non-textual reflection using concepts of design elements and principles.

First, students viewed current runway collections to experience high-end fashion not yet interpreted in the mass market. Second, students assessed how style elements were re-interpreted by high-end designers in the following eight products categories: (a) pants and shorts; (b) skirts; (c) dresses; (c) blouses and shirts; (d) waistlines; (e) jackets and coats; (f) pockets, collars and cuffs; and (g) sweaters. Third, students conceptualized how high-end designers incorporated and defined style elements into their designs using design interpretation. Fourth, students used the elements and principles of design to reflect on the design reinterpretation to determine whether the design was successful. The results of the reflections from the first three steps were submitted via written reports, providing textual reflection opportunities. Finally, students used non-textual reflection opportunities by discussing the results of their written reports in both small group and whole class settings.

The project outcomes were assessed via two methods: (a) an online survey to measure students' perceptions on relevance, helpfulness, and enjoyment of the assignments; and (b) overall teacher's assessment on student learning outcomes based on student interactions and reflection. An online survey was provided to students enrolled in the class three times during the semester (i.e., week 5 after introduction of the assignment [A1], week 8 after assignment had begun [A2], and week 14 after assignment was completed [A3]) for two consecutive semesters; fall 2014 and spring 2015. There were no statistically significant mean differences in student responses in two semesters, therefore, the results were combined and analyzed as one group. Overall, students' perceptions on relevance, helpfulness, and enjoyment of the assignments decreased as the semester went along. The results of ANOVA showed statically suggestive mean differences in relevance among the three assessments periods (F=2.619; p=.078). Post-hoc mean differences showed a mean decrease from A1 to A2 (M_{A1} = 4.543; SE_{A1} = .135; M_{A2} = 4.257; SE_{A2} = .135) and from A1 to A3 (M_{A3} = 4.114; SE_{A3} = .135). The results of ANOVA also showed statistically suggestive mean differences in helpfulness among the three assessments periods (F=2.470; p=.090). Post-hoc mean differences showed that there was a mean decrease from A1 to A2 (M_{A1} = 4.286; SE_{A1} = .158; M_{A2} = 3.829; SE_{A2} = .158) and from A1 to A3 (M_{A3} = 3.886; SE_{A3} = .158). Finally, for enjoyment, the results of ANOVA showed statistically no significant mean differences among the three assessments periods (F=.732; p=.484).

The results suggest that students had a more positive view of the assignments at the beginning of the semester. Despite the overall mean decrease the instructor believed, by observing in-class reflection, that student learning did improve. Students displayed an enhanced vocabulary when reflecting on their design perspective of the style categories discussed. In addition, their written analyses showed increased depth and knowledge as the semester continued. In the future more time will be spent explaining the assignment goals and demonstrating the relevance of the design perspective assignments to the industry setting to build student acceptance. This can be achieved through lecture and guest-speakers. This will help communicate the role of design perspectives in the industry and set expectations of students learning outcomes throughout the assignments.

References

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