Fostering Creativity in Student Oral Presentations: A Case for Mood Boards as an Alternative to Power Point

Amber Chatelain, Eastern Kentucky University

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How might faculty foster student creativity in the classroom? There has been growing recognition that encouraging students' creative potential is a worthwhile educational goal, as creativity is an intricate part of the human experience and a skill necessary for future graduates. Some course subjects are inherently creative by nature; many are not. Discovering methods in which to encourage student creativity in traditionally non-creative courses can be instructionally challenging. Student development of mood boards is one way in which to foster creativity in the postsecondary classroom.

Also called a story or presentation board, mood boards are a visual representation of an idea and "usually consist of a collection of found and/or made images fixed to a board for the purpose of presentation… As they tend to be purely visual, the boards transcend linguistic restrictions. They nevertheless have an important function in developing students' ability to articulate their thinking" (Gardner & McDonagh-Philip, 2001, p. 58) and develop their creative potential. Mood boards are inherently creative by nature, and while they can be as intricate and artistic as a student desires, with the proper instructional foundation, even students typically anxious of creative projects can possess the skills to construct one.

Mood boards are traditionally used by fashion design professionals to showcase concepts for future fashion collections and thus are an important instructional component in many design-related programs. However, not all Textiles & Apparel faculty teach design-related courses, and thus may not see an opportunity in which to integrate student-created mood board projects into their courses. These same faculty, however, may require term projects in their courses in which students deliver oral presentations using Power Point as their primary presentation tool. I propose these Textile & Apparel faculty use student-created mood boards as an alternative to Power Point to foster creativity in the classroom and enhance students' presentation skills.

Research on neuroplasticity suggests students' exorbitant use of technology is re-wiring the brain and they are in need of experiences absent of technology that allow for deep engagement and tactile experiences (Harris, 2014). In their research on hands-on learning, Blakey and McFadyen (2015) suggest "Hands-on engagement offers a nourishing counterbalance to screen-based activity, providing an opportunity for authentic, sensory experiences" (p. 140). Substituting mood boards for Power Points in course projects is one way in which Textiles & Apparel faculty can provide hands-on learning opportunities for students. When constructed in non-design courses, these mood boards are ultimately used as an innovative creative presentation tool that visually illustrates students' understanding of course concepts and their own vision and/or interpretation of those concepts.

Many faculty require term projects in their courses, with student oral presentations delivered in conjunction with a student-designed PowerPoint contributing to a significant component of these projects. Undergraduate students are often unequipped in professional presentation skills. Too often, student presenters use PowerPoint as a crux, creating slides filled with paragraphs of detailed information that is ultimately read verbatim to the class (Nowak, Speakman & Sayers, 2016). Because mood boards contain few to no words, and only visual images, it requires students to foster their oral presentation and communication skills. Usually, I have found, that because students know they will not be able to rely on the PowerPoint, they are better prepared for presentations and are better able to understand and articulate their message.

To get students familiarized with mood boards, during class time faculty can discuss the definition and purposes of mood boards, how to plan a presentation, find inspiration, and specific examples of how to create a mood board. Students should be provided with structural guidelines of the project, but should be allowed the freedom of expression to maximize their creative potential. After all, "all students have creative potential" (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014, p. 57), and it is in the classroom environment where faculty have the opportunity to foster that creative growth.

I use mood boards in a variety of courses as a major or minor component of midterm and/or final student projects. For example, in an introductory apparel studies course, student teams create a mood board depicting an upcoming fashion forecast trend. In a cultural studies in apparel course, students design a mood board illustrating how ethnic dress influences contemporary fashion design. Projects that require the creation of a mood board may also require the submission of a written paper. However, an oral presentation of their topic and explanation of their mood board should always be required.

The use of mood boards improves student success in many ways. First, the artistic creation of the board enhances creativity, a skill recognized as needed for the 21st century college graduate (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014). Second, it helps students to articulate their thinking through visual imagery (Gardner & McDonagh-Philip, 2001) while offering a counterbalance to the traditional technology-based PowerPoint as a student presentation tool. Third, it encourages students to use their imagination and solve design problems. Last, when done in a group setting, it provides students the opportunity to collaboratively work with their peers and foster teamwork learning (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014).

Reference:

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