Trust the Process: A Collaborative Approach to Teaching the Design Process in Two Fashion Design Courses

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Introduction: Studio-based courses in fashion design are characterized by extended time-blocks and class projects consisting of students working independently or collaboratively on projects that are subject to critiques. Teaching collaborations in studio-based courses are typically hampered by the instructors' hectic schedules. But when teaching collaborations are feasible, instructors and students can draw benefits from them. Collaborative teaching is a partnership that is formed between two instructors in an educational environment, that is the basis of designing and teaching course content, typically in a classroom and using group learning techniques (Robinson & Schaible,1995). Several collaborative teaching approaches exist such as team teaching, linked course teaching, and alternative teaching (Davis, 1995), each one with its own set of advantages and disadvantages.

For this study we modeled our collaborative teaching approach after a variation of linked course teaching (Davis, 1995). To begin with, the students in both our classes were part of the same cohort. Our two classes were linked by a shared final project. Each instructor was responsible for developing our own individual class, and students completed different parts of the final project in our separate classes. This allowed us to tailor the project sections that were completed in our classes on the subject matter directly related to our course (i.e., ideation was completed in the Fashion Illustration and Technical Design II course while prototyping was undertaken in the Advanced Patternmaking course).

There is some research on teaching collaborations in the fashion design discipline, but some challenges still exist in developing worthwhile collaborative projects that guide fashion design students through the entire design process. The purpose of this research was to explore this collaborative teaching approach, all the while capturing students' experiences, while guiding them through the design process. With the results from this study, it is our aim to improve the project brief for our future teaching collaborations.

Theory: Design thinking provides a solution-based approach to identified problems or needs. This 5-stage process was applied to the completion of the collaborative project that linked both courses. We tasked students with designing a women's wear capsule collection inspired by two online fashion exhibitions. Students began the design process by viewing two online fashion

exhibitions to fully understand the messaging of each exhibition. With that understanding, students were able to process and choose the exhibition or parts of the exhibitions that would serve as inspiration for their own design work. During the ideation phase, students practiced divergent thinking in that they explored an array of design ideas, often combining design elements in new and unexpected ways. These first three stages of the design process were completed within one of the courses and culminated in a mid-semester critique that both instructors conducted.

The purpose of the midsemester critique was to help students narrow down and identify the ensemble that they would construct given their skill and time constraints. We encouraged students to practice convergent thinking during this stage. The next step of the process was to transform their fashion illustrations into 2D (patterns) and 3D (garments) prototypes. This stage of the process was iterative, and students were given feedback and then they refined their prototypes until they were ready to construct them in fashion fabrics. The conclusion of the final part of the design process was a public critique by three industry professionals.

Methods: We restricted the teaching collaboration to two semester-long courses in fashion design, taught by two fashion design instructors at a land grant university in the USA. We (the instructors) had at least 10 years of experience in teaching fashion design using a studio-based approach. Each of us had full control of our course, so there was no need to adjust our teaching philosophy and methods to accommodate the other instructor's. The objectives and expected outcomes of the shared project were clearly outlined and presented by the beginning of the semester and included guiding the students through the final project design brief.

Data were collected from the six students enrolled in the two fashion design courses. All students were majoring in fashion design, were in their first semester of their junior year, and had previously completed three fashion design studio courses. Two focus groups were conducted and recorded over Zoom. The first focus group was conducted after the mid-semester critique with both instructors present to understand their experiences of the first three stages of the design process. The second focus group was conducted after the completion of their ensemble and the public critique of their work.

Results: We listened, transcribed and analyzed the focus group data for themes related to our students' experiences during the five stages of the design process. The most significant discovery we made was the importance our students placed on feedback throughout the design process to clarify and steer them to the end goal. Feedback from the mid-semester critique allowed them that helped them to "mix and match the individual pieces to create a cohesive ensemble". The fact they felt that they could "bring it all together" given this feedback from both instructors was a benefit of this linked course approach. Similarly, after the final critique with industry

professionals, students valued the objective feedback they were given, and said that it motivated them "to do better," and affirmed that they were "on track." Students cited that even the negative feedback they received would be used to improve their future design work.

Conclusion: Creating a designer mindset in a student is something that we strive to do as fashion design instructors. Part of that includes building our students' confidence in their ideas, skills and abilities. We have found that through this collaborative teaching approach, students better understood the importance of design thinking in developing their ideas and felt empowered as designers through the formal and informal feedback they received from their peers, instructors and industry professionals.

For future teaching collaborations using the linked course approach, we suggest the following practical considerations: (1) Students should be enrolled in both classes, for the collaboration to be successful, as there was no flexibility for students who may have been enrolled in one class but not the other, and (2) The instructors need to consider offering alternate projects for students who may not have enrolled in both classes that are part of the teaching collaboration.

References:

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