

An Action Research to Enhance Learning and Teaching in Design

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This paper reports two small action-research enquiries that focus on improving the performance in a drawing module of students who have been studying Exhibition Design (Interactive Media). The theoretical notion of action-research for educational issues treats teachers as researchers and learning by doing especially by adopting discussions and sharing between participants (Leith and Day, 2000; O'Brien, 1998). Since the module concerned lasted for 15 weeks, enquiries were kept low profile in order not to disturb students' learning progression. Discussions and sharing were carried out in several small groups, and focused on students' drawing experience and their progression in each assignment. In addition, the teaching contents were real life mono tone sketching exercises allowing students to accumulate spatial, aesthetic experiences and visualization practices. This permitted students to behave naturally like being in a regular drawing lesson.

The first case involved 58 2011/12 year two students, and the second case involved 30 2012/13 year two students. The first case attempted to make enhancements in design abilities by using drawing lessons. The second case aimed at searching for effective ways to offer students, who show comparatively less interest in sketching and drawing, essential drawing experiences. Both cases are common under the challenge of today's Dilemma of Design Education: the blossoming of new designing technologies have often been squeezed into a rigid education time frame. Despite the known benefits of handcraft designing, we - design teachers - confronted with the question of whether to reduce teaching hours or even withdrawing the old school handcraft skills of Design such as drawings, modeling, drafting and so on in order to deal with the continuous reduction of time span for the growth of teaching contents. This is worsened in Hong Kong when adapting new students to Hong Kong's education reform.

The findings showed surprising results that were different from our common expectations. Firstly, when applying the T-test to examine the correlations between students' drawing marks and their custom design marks, their drawing performance (judged by the accumulation of new and artistic drawing experiences) showed a statistically insignificant correlation with design performance. While individual students may have achieved a breakthrough in their drawing experiences either in skill level or observation and layout level, their design performance improved too. Secondly, the separation of drawing tasks highlighted individual students' own weaknesses, such as lacking three dimensional vision, being conservative in layout arrangement, poor observation abilities and others.

During discussion and sharing, students' personal existing design and drawing experiences matched with the findings. These cases together indicate that the contribution of learning handcraft design is mostly concerned with raising students' own capabilities rather than achieving technical imitation. They inspire a quest for a reflective framework that may extend the contribution of classic handcraft designing: giving diagnosis as feedback about students' potential and weakness in their own capabilities as suggested by Leith and Day (2000). Secondly, it also raises the question of whether there is a possibility of developing supreme designing craftsmanship to equip students with competences that may overcome emerging digital software. Since few studies have examined these two areas, this paper can serve as a stepping stone to raise attention to making enhancement for the benefit of design teaching and learning.

References:

- Leitch, R. & Day, C. (2000). Action research and reflective practice: towards a holistic view. *Educational Action Research*, 8(1).
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