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Examining the Value of Three Critique Methods in an Introductory Apparel Design Studio

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Background, Purpose and Theoretical Underpinnings

In the discipline of design and product development, the most common presentation genre is the critique, and the most central aspect of this genre is the feedback (Dannels & Martin, 2008). Critiques allow students to assimilate information efficiently and be engaged in the critical analysis (Owens, 2007). Even though design education scholarship emphasizes the importance of the critique, few studies have examined student feelings about critique methods. Students entering the apparel industry are required to have strong oral, written, and visual communication skills, therefore must design courses build these skills. Based on Bandura's (1977) social learning theory (SLT), human behavior is explained as a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences. Therefore, this study examines the effects of three different critique methods: (a) one-to-one critique with an instructor, (b) one-to-one with a peer, and (c) larger class group, in a 100-level design studio. This class introduces the elements and principles of design in fashion and apparel, fashion illustration, technical drawing, and fabric rendering; along with application of written and verbal presentations to communicate fashion and apparel design concepts. As SLT states that people learn from one another, via observation, and imitation, examining these three critique methods allowed the researchers to examine their effectiveness, plus strategies to better serve students in apparel design courses.

Method

To examine the three different critique methods, a convenient sample of 40 students enrolled in a 100-level course at an U.S. university each experienced each method of critique. At the end of each critique, each student took an online survey asking about his or her experience regarding the critique method. Survey questions included Likert-type scales, open-ended questions, and demographic information to learn students' opinions on the effectiveness of each method.

Data Analysis

To ensure trustworthiness, three of the researchers independently conducted a content analysis of the qualitative data by inductively coding the open-ended responses. Main themes and sub-themes emerged from the coding (Creswell, 2009). Differences in coding were negotiated by the researchers and an inter-coder reliability of 98% was achieved. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 19.0 software was used to analyze the descriptive statistics.

Findings

The findings of this study showed that *critique with instructor* was the most helpful methods among the three: "*Critique with an instructor, because it gave honest individual advice (both*

positive and negative) from an expert” [P27]. Specifically, when asked about the most effective part of critique with instructor, the majority responded that it was the instructor’s direct explanations for improvement: *“It was nice to have one on one feedback and to see and hear exactly what we can improve, rather than just reading it off our grading rubrics.”* [P28]; *“Being able to hear what I did right and what I can improve upon. I was able to ask questions.”* [P21]. Some disadvantages of this method include having no peers’ opinions: *“Not being able to here [sic] other ideas from your peers”* [P9].

Followed by the instructor, the next helpful method was *one-on-one peer critique*. When asked about the most helpful part of this method, the majority responded hearing individual peer opinions, acknowledgements from peers, and comparing projects with peers: *“We could relate on areas that we big struggle with and share how we overcame the problems”* [P9]. Some disadvantages of this method include that peers were too nice, *“Since we're peers, I think we went a little bit too gently on each other. We didn't want to hurt one another's feelings so we may not have been as honest as was needed”* [P33].

The *large group critique* was the least favorite method. The students responded positively that hearing multiple perspectives from peers, comparisons of other works was: *“also a confidence booster when I hear my peers speak fondly of my work.”*[P13]. Some disadvantages include not getting picked and not receiving individual or negative feedbacks, *“Sometimes it's discouraging if you hear nothing about your board.”* [P13]; *“Only hearing positive feedback”* [P19].

Significance

The findings confirm the importance of both instructor-led and student-led critiques in design studio setting, confirming the tenants of STL. When developing syllabi, instructor can strategically integrate the advantages of each critique methods to each project and balance the three different types of critique methods. Especially, training students to develop constructive criticism is imperative to have active learning and move the dialogue towards intended learning outcomes. Gaining these skills at the 100 level will allow for growth and proficiency by the senior year in the program and further enrich learning outcomes.

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