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Successful Use of Newspapers in Curriculum Development for First-year College Students

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The course introduction and background. The course, Fashion and Society, is designed to provide first-year Clothing and Textiles major students with an integrated view of fashion as social phenomenon. From the survey on the first-year students' perceptions about fashion, we have found that many students considered fashion tend to be irrelevant, something fancy and distant to their daily life, and difficult to understand. Based on the comments, we need teaching materials that can be perceived to be "not difficult" (and fun) and relevant. We also needed to design the course to provide students opportunities to apply their knowledge to real life. Thus, we developed the course using several newspapers to help students experience various fashion expressions and reflections a society carries in.

The use of news media, indeed, has been credited as one of the successful teaching methods for courses dealing with social phenomena (Metz, 1983). For example, newspaper news is recent and covers real-world events; and it also provide the basis for critical thinking and analysis as it is presented in a form of information and opinions (Reinertsen & DaCruz, 1996). However, the declining trend has been observed in the readership (Turner, 2009) and in the popularity of newspaper assignments in colleges (Reinertsen & DaCruz, 1996). In fact, current college students tend to be more prone to instant multimedia streaming contents than traditional read-it-all newspapers. Then, how can we use daily newspapers successfully as a teaching resource in order for students to benefit from newspapers while it does not make students feel bored or overwhelmed? In the course, we designed a series of progressive activities and assignments to help students enjoy and benefit from newspapers.

Class progression. First, each class was designed to be with a little surveillance works through news clippings. Instructors collected newsworthy contents from various newspapers that had reflected current trend that was regarded to bear higher relevance to students. Wade (2001) suggests that interestingness should be a major factor in selecting texts on topics. Current news is in fact showcasing social phenomena and personal interest, which made students intrigued, curious, and engaged since the news topics were having practical relations to the class materials and provoking interests. Once it triggered students' curiosity, fashion related theories and facts were discussed. The news contents served as a bridge between academic elements (e.g. theories, concepts, psychological reasoning, etc.) and social presentation of the academic elements.

Second, the course required students to use newspapers to help students recall information, comprehend and apply what they have learned, and analyze the subject by synthesizing their knowledge, which are consistent with Benjamin Bloom's levels of learning objectives (Lowman, 1995). For its success, careful management was required for the curriculum development since college students' newspaper readership tends to be low. Thus, before this curriculum started, we conducted survey prior and found that our students' newspaper readership

and their level of interest were both low. Due to the fact, we organized activities in such a way that students could gradually adapt to the needs of reading newspapers by starting from easy activities to help students get familiar with newspapers. As the semester was in progression, the requirements had been extended. For instance, in the early parts of the semester, students were asked to skim newspapers to clip articles and photos that were relevant to a list of class topics. Another example of get-to-close activities was 'key things finder': students were asked to find keywords from news stripes from several articles, which were then use to describe social phenomena and consumer trends that were connected with class ideas. Although the tasks required did not require students' serious reading, such tasks helped enjoy the activities and understand the concepts since the lists and the clippings were used to explain relevant fashion theories. As the semester progresses, the level of difficulty and involvement became higher: they were asked to read and analyze articles, and connect the news to the concepts of class discussions. At the end of the semester, students utilized their improved skills in connecting class ideas and real world examples, analyzing and evaluating information, and even critiquing social phenomenon using fashion theories.

Results debriefing. Positive responses from students were noticeable. It was easy to detect that students were gradually developing in-depth understanding of the news contents. This positive aspect even further stretched to allow students to have a level of emersion and critical thinking. This achievement was visible through their self-appraisal and voluntary Q&A efforts. Instructors were impressed by the end results of the curriculum. Constant debates and discussions were carried in and out of the class. This constant engagement revealed how students had felt relevant the class materials to their own interests. Students' voluntary actions, their satisfaction with learning experience were also impressive. Many students expressed that they were pleasantly surprised when they found themselves enjoying the discovery of social phenomena, making connections, and critiquing.

Conclusion. Despite of students' low interest and readership in newspapers, we realized that a proper level of complexity in newspaper activities can still make students to enjoy the activities and to gain benefit from the use of newspapers when studying fashion as social phenomena. As Csikszentmihalyi (1975) suggests in the flow theory, we have observed that proper challenges based on students' level of skills lead to flow experiences. To provide students with such flow experiences in the learning process, awareness of students' level of skills is a prerequisite (e.g., survey before a course); then a careful management for a proper level of challenge and constant changes in challenge to increase students' skill level is recommended.

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