



Using the PEST framework to facilitate active learning in fashion history class

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Introduction

Fashion history is a course that is included in the curriculum of many fashion merchandising and design programs. Typically, these courses have been lecture-based, which makes it difficult to engage today's students who learn best with logic based, experiential pedagogy (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). According to Banning and Gam (2013), different approaches for teaching fashion history have been reported including connecting the past to the future, showing images, collaborative projects, the use of a costume collection, and having students conduct research. Marcketti (2011) discovered that active learning and hands-on opportunities were effective strategies for teaching fashion history. A Midwestern University implemented multiple active learning strategies as well as the PEST framework into the fashion history course to increase active learning and encourage students to critically analyze items of dress.

Active Learning Strategies

Active learning happens when students are engaged in learning, constantly process, and critically analyze information (University of Michigan, 2016). Many of the active learning strategies recommended by Marcketti (2011) including artifact analysis, where students evaluate historic garments, fashion magazines, and movies are included in the fashion history course. Students also interview a person from another generation about their perspectives on an item of dress and research and present about the evolution of a designer or garment. Music from the time period being covered is played as students enter the class to set the mood. When available, the Nearpod app is used to give students the option to do a virtual tour of related buildings, such as an Egyptian pyramid or medieval castle. The music was appreciated; on the end-of-course (EOC) evaluation a student stated, 'I appreciated the music playing in the beginning of class that went along with that era.' However, students still found it difficult to connect fashion history to their lives and recommended more active learning activities on EOC evaluations.

The PEST Framework and Fashion History

Therefore, the PEST framework was applied to the common themes that are related to changes in dress over time. PEST stands for Political, Economic, Social, and Technology; the PEST analysis is commonly used to examine external factors that affect business (Gupta, 2013). However, it was discovered that most of the themes identified in the historic background information in each section of *The Survey of Historic Costume* by Tortora and Marcketti (2015) fit into the PEST framework. Many important items of dress in a time period are also related to PEST constructs, so students can define and identify an item of dress, but also make a connection

to what societal factors contributed to the popularity of the item. This connection allows students to identify patterns in fashion history and link changes in dress to world events and changes in society.

Implementing the Pest Framework

The PEST framework is introduced the first day of the course and current dress examples are given to show students the connection between fashion and the PEST constructs. Students also complete a ‘personal fashion history’ of items of dress they have worn in their lifetime to give the framework a connection to their lives. As information is covered in class, students fill out a sheet about the events of the time as related to the PEST framework. Students then define specific items of dress and explain their relationship to constructs in the PEST framework; some garments are only driven by one PEST construct, while others have multiple relationships. For example, the Kashmir shawl popular during the Romantic Period, is associated with politics because Louis Napoleon banned their import from India, France made a version of the Kashmir shawl to stimulate the French textile industry (economic); however, having an imported Kashmir shawl was a symbol of status, so illegal imports from India were still desired (social). The daily PEST analysis assignments are simple, but require students to analyze the garments that are discussed during class for their relationship to the PEST constructs. Constant information analysis and processing is considered active learning (University of Michigan, 2016). The assignments also help students manage the mass quantity of information that is covered and help them study for quizzes.

Results and Recommendations

Using the PEST framework along with artifact analysis, research, and other active strategies was successful, because students were able to connect items of dress with what happened in the time period, leading to better retention of information. On the EOC evaluation, a student stated, ‘I learned A LOT, it was all very interesting and the information stuck with me and the PEST analysis worksheets actually really helped me learn the material.’ Further, linking societal factors to fashion history through the PEST framework enabled this course to fit into the social sciences general education competency on this specific campus leading to increased enrollments from students across campus. In 2008 and 2009 before the PEST framework was implemented, only 10% of students who took the course were non-fashion majors or minors who were required to take it. During the 2017-2018 school year, nearly 40% of enrolled students were from majors outside of fashion merchandising. Overall, the PEST framework has been an effective tool to simplify information and help students connect fashion history with historic events and context in a simple and easy to follow format. From the instructor perspective, this has helped manage covering a lot of information and engages students with the content. While additional active learning strategies can always be implemented, the PEST analysis was successful at this University.

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