



## Using Assessment in the Fashion Design Studio

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The apparel design process is highly complex and has a specialized and sophisticated skill set. Designers need to develop flexibility, or the ability to think of many ways to approach a problem or activity, and fluency, or the ability to think of many details associated with each approach to the activity. It also involves divergent and convergent thinking, or the breaking down and building up of ideas. Kвашny (1982) proposed that creativity can be taught. In order to expand their creativity, student designers need to develop the complex thinking inherent in the creative process, and at the same time develop two-and-three-dimensional thinking and eye/hand coordination inherent in a skill-based area of study. Assessment can be used to evaluate a learner's current status, the end goal, and how best to get there (Fulcher, 2010).

Classroom assessment is the sum total of activities conducted by the teacher and student to assess student achievement through observation, written, and creative work (Black & Wiliam, 1998). This can include assessment of the learner's progress in skill development, knowledge, and understanding. A goal of assessment is to enable learners to maximize their potential (The Scottish Government, 2011). Formative assessment occurs during the learning process and is designed to allow change to occur and enable learners to be aware of the gap in their knowledge or skill set in order to determine how best to meet the target performance (Fulcher, 2010).

The primary objective of this study was to determine if students perceived an increase in their proficiency with selected skills and ability to evaluate their own work and the work of others. Students in the Fashion Design and Illustration course at a mid-Atlantic University were asked to participate in a summative-assessment research project. This study was approved as exempt and is on file at the University's IRB office. An assessment tool developed by the professor was used to determine the learners' appraisal of their projects at the end of the course. A 10-item survey using a five-point Likert rating scale, plus seven open-ended questions, was used to determine student assessment of the three major creative projects assigned during the semester. These questions requested student reaction of their ability to analyze, evaluate, and demonstrate competency in different project components as a result of this course. Open-ended questions queried what the student "liked" or "did not like" about their projects plus if anything was still unclear about the projects. The survey instrument was administered by a graduate assistant during the last week of class over two offerings of the course.

Formative assessment tools were used throughout the semester. This process is complex in a fashion design and illustration studio as it occurs in the form of individual and group critique sessions and project grading. The three creative projects focused on the use of: 1) "Luck of the Draw" to select a target consumer, product category, and price point (MacDonald & Matranga,

2009); 2) adult clients with a “Luck of the Draw” apparel category and price point selection process; and 3) a 2-D plus 3-D art-to-wear project using recycled objects. During both semesters, grading matrices were handed out at the beginning of each project so students would be aware of the grading components, weights, and standards. These were used to inform them about the gap in their knowledge/skill set so they could modify their approach during current and subsequent projects. In addition, individual critique sessions were conducted between the professor and each student as part of the creative process and continued throughout the semester. Group critique sessions also were incorporated, first with each student evaluating her/his own work and then opening the critique to all students. They were directed to point out what they liked about a project first and then make suggestions for improvement. This procedure was used for their own work and the work of others.

Mean scores for the Likert items ranged from 4.13 to 4.63 out of five the first year and from 4.36 to 4.82 out of five the second year in reaction to their perceived ability to analyze, evaluate, and demonstrate competency in project components. The mean score for all items was 4.45 and 4.63 first and second year respectively. Written comments for the open-ended questions suggested an increase in understanding of the creative process as students critiqued the positive aspects of their projects and mentioned things that could be improved. Instructor observation also noted increasing student comfort with full participation in critique sessions and a willingness to experiment and try new things. Information gained as a result of student feedback after the first year of the study was incorporated into project information the second year by providing some flexibility in requirements and allowing more time for the final project. Knowledge gained from survey responses the second year will be used to modify the curriculum the next time the course is offered including more in-class guidance with selected project details. A similar, formative assessment process could be used in courses with a mix of design and merchandising students with the goal of increasing student proficiency in skill development and ability to critique.

#### References

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