

ASSESSMENT TOOLS IN ART AND DESIGN: A CASE STUDY OF PRINCESS NORA UNIVERSITY

Dr. Ruba Abou Hassana

Graphic Design and Digital Media Department,
Princess Noura University, SAUDI ARABIA.

rhabuhasna@pnu.edu.sa

ABSTRACT

The assessment of student learning, student development and program outcomes is essential to the health and validity of academic programs. Students' performance in art and design is often considered difficult to assess with reliability because it depends on subjective judgments and it deals with varied components of the problem solving act and the cognitive processes underlying them, including application of understanding, organizing, formulating, solving, reflecting, and communicating processes. This paper identifies some of the distinctive strengths and weaknesses of the assessment tools /methods used in Princess Nora University College of Art and Design - Saudi Arabia. From the faculty member's interviews and classes observations current teaching methods have been identified concentrating on the assessment processes implemented and particularly the portfolio.

Results indicated that portfolio considered as an effective assessment tool in art and design due to its several advantages that solve the fairness, equity and accountability issues raised from the subjective assessment of art and design works. However, the use of portfolio is still limited as there is a need for faculty's development workshops to enhance their implementation of portfolio as a learning and assessment tool in art and design.

Keywords: Portfolio, art and design, assessment criteria, assessment tools, critique, teaching methods

INTRODUCTION

Art and design encourage creativity, which is 'the growth of individual competence and achievement in learning to express feelings, thoughts, and values in visual form. Creativity is not simply the manipulation of art materials, but the purposeful exercise-using skills, technologies, and materials with which the student has become competent - of mind, heart, and hand in the translation of an artist's private visions into public realities' (Dobbs, 1992).

Art and design work are cross-disciplinary and belongs to the field of creative process and products. The assessment of such works is not easy; they need to be framed within theories of creativity. Assessment designers must require the students to engage in higher order thinking (or cognitive) processes with the goal of reaching solutions for realistic, authentic tasks which require integration of skills; art and design assessment also confront students 'with non-routine problems that require the student to invent a novel solution strategy' (Meyer,1992).

For the benefit of students in art and design education it is important to design well defined instruments of assessment and evaluate its efficacy and consequences, it is not just a question of status of the subject or to respond to the pressures of accountability, it is essentially because students deserve the opportunity to be fairly assessed in arts and use their artistic performance results as qualifications for their careers. It is also because teachers deserve to

get valid feedback of their work and because art education should not be distorted by a narrow conception of assessment.

Moreover, to reach an authentic assessment in the art and design flexibility should be preserved in order to attain fairness and equity. As discussed by Eca (2002) to ensure fairness, students should have multiple opportunities to meet standards and should be able to meet them in different ways and assessment information should be accompanied by evidence about access to the curriculum and about opportunities to meet the standards.

A portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work, exhibits effort, progress and achievements in more than one areas including student participation in selecting contents and self-reflection (Barret, 2000). It allows teachers to assess student development over periods of time, sometimes across several years. Davies, and Le Mahieu (2003) have expressed optimism about the role of portfolios in educational reform.

In Saudi Arabia, portfolios use as an assessment tool emerged lately. Currently it is being used in a wide variety of settings, in various domains, and at all levels of education from primary school through university studies, to asses and promotes progress and achievement.

The question of whether or not portfolios contribute to educational improvement cannot be answered without referring to specific contexts and clearly defined aims (Wiggins, 1998). Thus, the present study considers the assessment tools used in the Collage of Art and Design – Princess Noura – Riyadh (Governmental University – accredited by the Higher Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia and free tuition fees). Considering that Princess Noura College of Art and Design consist of 6 departments: Painting and Printmaking, Sculpture, Art History, Interior Design, Graphic Design and Digital Media, Fashion Design).

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This paper identifies and discusses some of the distinctive strengths and weaknesses of the assessment tools used in Princess Nora University College of Art and Design - Saudi Arabia.

The researcher achieved the aim through the following objectives:

1. Understand the teaching methods currently used in the Art and Design College;
2. Identify the assessment methods/tools used currently in the Art and Design College, their advantages and disadvantages;
3. Recognize the uses of the portfolio in the College;

RESEARCH METHODS AND SUBJECTS

40 Faculty members from the College of Art and Design participated in the study. 20 Faculties from the Fine Art Division (Painting and printmaking, Sculpture, Art History) and 20 faculties from the Design Division (Interior design, graphic design and digital media, fashion design) have participated in the study.

The researcher used “analysis of the literature”, “classroom observations”, and “semi structured interviews”. 18 Classes (3 classes from each department) were selected randomly from different levels to be observed in the Fall Semester in 2012. Simi structured interviews were conducted with 18 faculty members, 3 faculties from each department.

RESULTS

Regarding the current teaching methods used, 32 out of 40 indicate that they rely on lecturing as a main method to convey information to the students. The percent of applying lecturing in the classes depends on the area. In Art history courses, lecturing represents 97% of the classes time while in the design classes (Interior Design and Graphic Design and Digital media) all the 16 faculties pointed that lecturing is limited to 30% of the classes time and they described their teaching as being more student-focused than in most other areas of higher-education teaching. In design classes faculties are more likely to give students the opportunity to explore their own creative ideas and help students change their worldviews or conceptions of the phenomena they are studying.

12 out of 40 said that brainstorming represents 30% of their classes' time while 28 out of 40 did not consider brainstorming as teaching method.

Faculties in all the College disciplines except the Art History faculties indicated that 70% of the classes' time is studio based and the staff/student ratios are high. Within this studio environment, perhaps the most characteristic form of learning is the project, which can be teacher led, group or self-initiated. The project itself is an integrative form of learning where a variety of knowledge and skills are brought to bear in responding to a brief, which may be staff or student initiated and led. Projects focuses on individual problem setting and solving, group collaborative work and group critique involving self reflection through the integration of theory and practice.

According to observations, students work heavily on a one-on-one tutorial that generally takes place between the teacher and the student as a discussion about the particular project on which the student is working. This is followed by an examination of the work "on the critique board" and often results in the teacher demonstrating her own expertise to improve some aspects of the student's work. Moreover, faculties indicated that the largest amount of their time during an average teaching day is spent moving from one student to another giving over-the-shoulder advice to individuals. In addition, 18 out of 20 design teachers pointed that they learn more during the teaching of their subjects and are more likely to give students the opportunity to explore their own creative ideas.

Regarding the critique stage, Fine Arts faculties (Painting and Printmaking and Sculpture) 14 out of 20 indicated that they used individual feedback as a critique method and all Art History faculties depend on theoretical exams as a main assessment tool. 17 out of 20 design faculties (Interior Design, Fashion Design and Graphic Design and digital media) indicated that they rely on group critique while 3 out of 20 pointed that they focus on individual critique.

In grading the student's projects, 32 out of 40 pointed that the assessment should consider the development of learning against the students herself and not by referring to other students.

22 out of 40 faculties graduated from the Home Economics College in Saudi Arabia and are not Art and Design graduates. Only 18 out of 40 graduated from International Universities. 19 out of 22 (Home Economics) never produced a personal portfolio and portfolio development was not considered in their courses files. 17 out of 22 indicated that they need to be trained on the portfolio development in order to apply it as a tool in their teaching. While the remaining 12 faculties confirmed that they are using portfolios in their teaching for several purposes.

37 out of 40 of the faculty members agreed that portfolios are used for different purposes in art and design. 31 out of 40 indicated that portfolio is used for a formative rather than a summative assessment purpose. It aims to guide the learning process rather than to make an

overall judgment based on past achievements. 28 disagreed on what should go into portfolio, which should make the selection how the portfolio should be assessed.

Regarding the educational uses of portfolios, 34 out of 40 faculties agreed that portfolios could be used for the following purposes: (1) Final exams of studio work; (2) Major requirement for Art and design higher education admission; (3) as an educational tool in order to develop the self assessment ability among students; (4) to provide all students an opportunity to demonstrate growth and proficiency over time within courses; (5) to build a student's sense of responsibility for her learning; (6) Quality assurance and benchmarking on an organizational level.

DISCUSSION

Most of the studies that have led to the descriptions of the relations between teaching and learning have been conducted with teachers from disciplines other than art and design. According to the results, teaching methods used in art and design classes in Princess Noura could be classified as follows: (1) Lecturing (2) Project based teaching (3) Critique and (4) Exhibitions. Davies (2000) supported this as he identified four key practices of the art and design teaching and learning environment: project-based learning; the public critique; studio-based teaching; and the 'final show'.

As art and design education is considered as creative education and subjects is often described in ways that are quite different to descriptions of teaching in more traditional subject areas such as science. The NACCCE Report, 'Creative Education', Robinson (1998), recognises four characteristics of creative processes: (1) They always involve thinking and behaving imaginatively; (2) This imaginative activity is purposeful (directed to achieve an objective); (3) These processes must ultimately generate something original; (4) The outcome must be of some value in relation to the objective.

A typical artwork develops according to processes such as problem-finding; decision making; system analysis and design; trouble shooting and evaluation, these processes are not specific to art, they can be, and they are used in assessment in a wide range of areas (Meyer and Wittrock, 1996); Vonsiadou and Ortony, 1989). Decision making tasks includes understanding the information given, identifying the relevant features and constraints involved, creating representations of the perceived problem, selecting the best solutions from a set of options, and then evaluating, justifying and communicating the decisions. System analysis and design tasks usually requires understanding the complex relationships among a number of interdependent variables, identifying their critical features, creating or applying a given representation, analysing a complex situation and identifying the problem or designing a system so that certain goals are achieved. Trouble shooting tasks involve diagnosing, proposing a solution, and, at times, executing this solution. The task requires the student to understand how a linear, causal device or procedure works, to identify the relevant features for the task at hand, and to create a representation or apply a given representation.

All these features or problem types are included in artistic processes, artworks might be viewed as creative problem-solving (Getzels, and Csikszentmihalyi, 1972), but artworks are not completely defined by problem solving processes. Artworks are part of a specific area of knowledge which requires its own processes of problem-finding and judging or evaluating. The core of artistic learning focused on the development of such skills orientated the definition of criteria and grade descriptors to assess students' performances in visual arts. As mentioned by Eca (2002), the criteria and grade descriptors currently in use in several countries may be grouped in four main areas: (1) research/investigation/analysis; (2) formation and development of ideas/synthesis; (3) critical appraisal; (4) making/realising.

Assessment should be regarded as a learning opportunity. It is needed to provide students with an opportunity to get effective feedback during a project (formative) to measuring their achievement overall for the purposes of an award (summative). The final assessment event (summative) is the point where judgements are made about the whole performance of the student in relation to the project. However, if assessment is going to be of any use to a student it must be integrated into their experiences of the project rather than be a bolt-on event at the end.

Opportunities for student involvement in the assessment process in studio-based environments occur in a variety of ways and include peer and self-evaluation through staged critical reviews and tutorials as a project develops. Student involvement in these activities includes presentations both individually and/or as part of a group and these are major methods for developing students' abilities to articulate and discuss their ideas, and creative processes within a historical/theoretical and/or professional context. This type of assessment activity can be very productive in terms of learning opportunities, efficient in terms of staff and student time, and can help support students in targeting personal objectives and learning outcomes as the weighting shifts progressively from formative towards summative assessment. The more students are allowed choice and participation in formative components the more they are able to own and contribute to the whole of the learning process.

However, the difficulty of a fair assessment in art and design resides in the fact that the value of an artwork depends on the interpretation of criteria as arts are objectively assessable; this leads to a lack of accountability, control and monitor of curriculum. Some qualities such as technical expertise, knowledge of contexts; selecting and organising information or articulating it might be viewed as unproblematic to assess, but artistic process is often a continuous development of all skills, understandings and criticism, it would narrow the concept of an artwork to limit it by the fragmentation of the performance in separate units of achievement just because it is less problematic to assess. As indicated by Eca (2002) , the artistic process is not a linear progression, but is based on interaction of the thinking process and experimentation. Through continuous evaluation and criticism, students often go back to their initial ideas to refine it and create new alternatives. Sometimes the starting points of art works are not problems to solve but problems to find by formulating intentions, reflecting upon possible representations of realities and transform it in new representations. A linear approach to problem solving would certainly not be beneficial for students' artistic learning.

To reach an authentic assessment in art and design, flexibility should be preserved in order to attain fairness and equity. To ensure fairness, students should have multiple opportunities to meet standards and should be able to meet them in different ways and assessment information should be accompanied by evidence about access to the curriculum and about opportunities to meet the standards (Barret, 2000). Taking these purposes into account portfolio assessment presents several advantages in the art and design.

Gillespie, et. Al. (1996) offers the following definition: "Portfolio assessment is a purposeful, multidimensional process of collecting evidence that illustrates a student's accomplishments, efforts, and progress (utilizing a variety of authentic evidence) over time."

In fact, as supported by Davies and Mahieu (2003) portfolios are so purposive that everything that defines a portfolio system: What is collected; Who collects it; How it is collected; Who looks at it; How they look at it; and What they do with what they see are all determined first by the purpose for the portfolio. In addition, portfolios can contain many different types of evidence and from different sources.

Portfolios resolve many assessment problems, especially in equity and moderation (Cooper, 1999; Cooper and Love, 2000). They also provide a “richer picture” of students, their learning and their competencies Barret (2000) as they provides opportunities for students to document and reflect on their thinking, and working processes and the various stages of projects, as well as the final results or end products. As discussed by Lindstr (1998) portfolios are projects were students explore a topic, plan and elaborate, present and evaluate the work.

Additionally, portfolio provides fairness and equity in assessment, encouraging the continued use of assessment modes and task style; and expanding the range of indicators, so that those who are disadvantaged on one assessment have an opportunity to offer alternative evidence of their expertise. Through portfolio multiple evidence is presented allowing systematic sampling or repeated measures for assessment; the same quality can be present in several works. With portfolio evidence the judges can observe a series of works over a time-frame, then they are able to gauge the consistency (or inconsistency) of work quality over time, and their judgment about student's ability should become both more reliable and more valid.

CONCLUSION

This paper concerns the current teaching practices in the College of Art and Design in Princes Nora University. From the faculty member's interviews and classes observations current teaching methods have been identified concentrating on the assessment processes implemented. Results indicated that portfolio considered as an effective assessment tool in art and design due to its several advantages that solve the fairness, equity and accountability issues raised from the subjective assessment of art and design works.

However, as the use of portfolio is still limited due to the lack of understanding of the following related aspects: (1) Portfolio development process; (2) portfolio assessment criteria; (3) Portfolio purposeful uses, there is a need for faculties development workshops to enhance their implementation of portfolio and a learning and assessment tool in art and design.

This paper has contributed to knowledge by identifying advantages of using portfolio as an assessment tool. However, there is a need for further research to achieve the following: (1) identify the obstacles facing faculty members in using portfolio as an assessment tool; (2) understand the students' perspective on developing portfolios and its benefits on their learning; (3) Evaluating the effectiveness of using portfolio as an assessment tool and Internship plan. Student's reflection reports on their internship experience, the companies mentor reports and assessment forms should be examined in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the currently implemented study plan in the department and proposed the needed development to enclose the gap between the department graduates and the market needs.

REFERENCES

- Dobbs, S. (1992). *The DBAE Handbook: An overview of Discipline Based Art Education*, Santa Monica: Getty Center for the Arts.
- Meyer, R. E. (1992). *Thinking Problem Solving Cognition* (2nd Ed.). New York: Freeman.
- Eca, T. (2002). *A conceptual framework for art and design external assessment*, European Conference on Educational Research, University of Lisbon.

- Barret, H. (2000). Creat your Own Electronic Portfolio, *Learning & Leading with Technology*, 27(7).
- Davies, A. & Le Mahieu, P. (2003). *Assessment for learning: reconsidering portfolios and research evidence*. In M. Segers, F. Dochy, & E. Cascallar (Eds.), *Innovation and Change in Professional Education: Optimising New Modes of Assessment: In Search of Qualities and Standards* (p. 141-169). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Wiggins, G. (1998). *Educative Assessment: Designing Assessments to Inform and Improve Student Performance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Davies, A. (2000). *Making Classroom Assessment Work*. Merville, B.C.: Connections Publishing.
- Robinson, K. (ed) (1998). NACCCE Report, 'Creative Education', Allan Davies, Head of the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design at the London Institute, Royal College of Art and Wimbledon School of Art
- Meyer, R. E. & Wittrock, M. C. (1996). *Problem-solving transfer*. In: Berliner, D.C. & Clafee, R.C. (Eds.) *Handbook of Educational Psychology* (pp.45-61). New York: Macmillan.
- Vonsiadou, S. & Ortony, A. (1989). *Similarity and Analogical Reasoning*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Getzels, J. W. & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1972). *The Creative Vision: a Longitudinal Study of Problem Finding*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Gillespie, C., Ford, K., Gillespie, R., & Leavell, A. (1996). Portfolio Assessment: Some questions, some answers, some recommendations. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. 39, 480 – 91.
- Cooper, T. (1999). *Portfolio assessment: A guide for lecturers teachers and course designers*. Perth: Praxis Education.
- Cooper, T. & Love, T. (2000). *Portfolios in university-based design education*. In C. Swann & E. Young (Eds.), *Re-inventing Design Education in the University* (pp. 159-166). Perth: School of Design, Curtin University.
- Lindstr, M. L. (1998). *Criteria for Assessing Student Performances in the Visual Arts*. In: Piironen, L (Ed.) *Portfolio Assessment in Secondary Education and Final Examination*. University of Art and Design Helsinki (Finland), Department of Art Education, 1999, pp.7-16. Report of EU Comenius 3.1 Project.