

# **A Case Study on Teaching Art and Design Practice-Led Research in University: Integrating Creation with Theory and Writing**

Wen-Ling Ho<sup>1</sup>

Chang-Franw Lee<sup>2</sup>

Chung-Hong Chen<sup>3</sup>

## **Summary**

Art and design practice-led research is increasingly being emphasized in universities worldwide, and is considered to have beneficial applications in teaching both graduate and undergraduate students. However, considerably more research has been conducted on applications at the graduate level than at the undergraduate level. In addition, art and design education is currently facing challenges caused by the postmodern paradigm and the economic impacts on universities. The curricula and methodologies must be reconsidered, and the incorporation of practice-led research in art and design studios has become a necessary and promising approach for enhancing the efficiency and academic status of art and design disciplines.

By adopting a qualitative case study method, the objectives of this study were: (1) to analyze student learning in creation practice, theory and writing, as well as in combinations thereof, and (2) to analyze student learning situations in art and design practice-led research by using the form/theme/context/function (FTCF) model. The emphasis of the instruction method is the application of the teacher - developed FTCF model to creation, writing, reflection, and teaching improvement - to enhance practice-led research. To implement such an instruction, the teacher (one of the authors, she has 18 years of college-level teaching experience) developed a

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<sup>1</sup> Doctor Candidate / Graduate School of Design, National Yunlin University of Science and Technology

<sup>2</sup> Professor and Dean / College of Design, National Yunlin University of Science and Technology

<sup>3</sup> Professor and Dean / Creative Design College, Asia University

teaching structure and content concerning art and design practice-led research for 42 juniors (including 12 men and 30 women) at the college at which the teacher was teaching. The students had taken courses on art theory and studio art for more than 2 years, and, in the course entitled art criticism, they learned basic knowledge and verbal skills for critiquing.

Based on the findings of the authors' previous research, the instruction method was designed to enhance the students' verbal ability in describing and interpreting the processes and production involved in art and design, ability in theory inquiry and its applications, and ability to recognize the correlations among writing, theory, and creation. Although the research was essentially a case study, it also had the features of an action research project because it involved the teacher's problem awareness, the teacher's reflections on the interaction between students and teachers, and successful teaching modifications. The students were required to write on five categories: research plan, theoretical study about context, production journal, problem solving, and reflection. Each of them completed their art and design works and wrote a final research paper.

We observed that writing obviously enhanced the development of students' metacognition. For the students, writing involved: (1) recording the thinking process and ideas, objectively describing their observations of surrounding phenomena, and documenting personal feelings and comments, and (2) identifying and reflecting upon the problems that occur in the creative processes, the necessary solutions, and the evaluation of works. In other words, writing can make the creative process transparent, which is a feature of practice-led research that promotes self-awareness, a necessary skill in metacognition, as well as enhances the critical thinking skills required in completing production. Without constantly documented, some information and thoughts are forgotten, and eventually, self-examination and self-adjustment are inadequately achieved. By applying the FTCF model, the students demonstrated different sequences in their creative processes. These different sequences of FTCF model corresponded with the students' respective characteristics and expressive purposes. The students were able to flexibly use the FTCF sequences for their creations. However, two main styles of creation were deduced and identified as planning and exploring. This implied that the teacher should be aware of the expressive differences among students, allow a flexible approach for individual needs, and provide relevant and comprehensive instructional assistance.

By making the necessary modifications, the instructional framework and implementation

method presented in this article are applicable for instructing art and design practice-led research in similar situations. Concerning creation practice, theory and writing, and combinations thereof, the patterns of learning problems and their improvement identified in this study can benefit teachers involved in such instruction. In other words, new strategies can be developed and instructional transformation can be achieved by further analyzing the teachers' respective conditions.

A teacher should be aware of the merits and limitations of planning and exploring styles to be able to guide students to produce works creatively. In addition, a teacher can design lessons for developing each mode of thinking and working, as well as those for flexibly integrating both modes.

This article also provides suggestions that further research be conducted concerning the methodology of art and design practice-led research as well as its related theory. The suggested research topics include the theoretical foundations and methods, and the strategies involved in such research. Teaching theories and methods for art and design practice-led research must also be investigated. To enhance learning and teaching, evaluation criteria of design and practice-led research must be developed. In addition, the foundations, research methods used, content, and problems in existing related articles, theses, and dissertations can be analyzed. Based on these, the knowledge in the domain of art and design practice research can be expanded.

**Keywords: FTCTF model, art and design education in university, practice-led research, art and design production**

