

Enhancing the learner experience in textile design HE through drawing and making, collaboration and socially engaged practice

Authors: Kerri Akiwowo*; Jemma Bagley; Sarah Green; Kerry Walton

Abstract

This paper builds on existing theoretical perspectives regarding enhanced academic practice within Higher Education, particularly undergraduate textile design education at level 4/first year. From a student-centred standpoint involving individuals and groups of learners, *collaboration* and *socially engaged practice* were employed as alternative practical methods for teaching and learning in addition to drawing and making, within a pedagogical framework. This methodological approach focused on student engagement inside and outside the 'classroom' in order to foster new insights about the anticipated benefits to a students' holistic educational experience in relation applied design practice, curriculum, personal and professional development. This was achieved by engaging externally within local geographical, historical and societal parameters throughout Leicestershire, United Kingdom. Human-centred and programme aspects of scholarship were considered from a textile design perspective.

A collaborative partnership between first year BA (Hons) 'Textiles: Innovation and Design' students at Loughborough University, School of the Arts, English and Drama and local community arts and media organisation, Charnwood Arts was established in 2014. Spanning four years (2014–2018), this annual collaboration involved four different cohorts, approximately 340 students in total, who each undertook a live project brief which focused on drawing and design through hands on making and textile/materials exploration. The projects were underpinned by an historical element or combination of histories relating to the individual student and in response to aspects of Leicestershire's past and social history including: the Industrial Revolution and migration in the mid-twentieth century; a rich heritage in UK textile production, along with other industries such as bell founding and transport. Selected drawings and design samples were publicly exhibited in Leicester and Loughborough.

By focusing on enhanced academic practice in this manner, applied practice in a textile design education context was elevated through collaboration and social engagement. An emphasis on drawing and making steered the process of teaching, learning and student development whilst stimulating the interests and motivations of project partner, Charnwood Arts. Outcomes of this work suggest new approaches to HE level 4 scholarship relevant to educators, learners and curricula in creative disciplines. The study also recognised benefits to external project partners and local communities.

Key words

Enhanced Academic Practice; Higher Education (HE); Textile Design; Drawing and Making; Collaboration; Socially Engaged Practice