

Conceptualization in Fashion Design and Applied Arts. Methods and Approaches to Stimulate Creativity

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The development of creative industries can be used in transdisciplinary pedagogical approaches, supporting the implementation of models of learning and stimulation that foster students' creativity in the fields of applied arts and design. In this context, the design of teaching-learning methodologies within the curricular programs in visual arts and design emphasizes the active role of students in shaping the learning process. Thus, working methods are structured to respect student diversity and individual needs, offering flexible learning paths that are student-centered. The design, implementation, and evaluation of these programs prioritize the learner, employing a variety of pedagogical methods through different models of organizing the learning process.

Keywords: clothing, design, fashion, creativity, method, approach.

A Brief Theoretical Approach on Teaching Creative Industries and Design

The development of creative industries, arts, and design positions students' creative engagement as both a research method and a means of exploring emerging models of learning and conceptual development. Artistic production not only serves as a subject of research studies but also functions as a method of inquiry in itself, making art and design practices a legitimate field of research. This new paradigm treats arts practices as interdisciplinary, connecting with other fields through the exploration of novel concepts. Artistic education aims to cultivate artistic thinking through creative processes and conceptual skills, enabling students to acquire new skills. Individual artworks or design projects facilitate the development of new methodological approaches to refine the artistic experience. A work of art is understood as both a learning tool and an aesthetic object. Additionally, artistic practice is guided by the interests of the students, with the teacher serving as a facilitator of the creative process. Through such practices, art becomes a vehicle of creative exploration, discussion of new concepts, processes, contents, and working methods, with potential applications that extend beyond the artistic field to influence other disciplines.¹

The design projects proposed in these courses aim to stimulate students' creativity through individual research and by proposing new elaborated concepts, creating new ways of reinterpreting forms, reorganizing the composition, redefining the design object, and exploring new chromatic variations, textures, and shapes. This process values the integration of artistic and research experiences within the context of each student's individual creative research, fostering the ability to generate new approaches and perspectives in the execution of a project. Thus, within the implementation of these working methods, student diversity and individual needs are respected through flexible, student-centered learning paths. The design, implementation, and evaluation of projects prioritize the learner, employing a variety of methods and organizational models. Design objects, including clothing, are an integral part of our identity. Through design and clothing individuals can present themselves in expressive and unique way, creating

1 Julia Marshal and Kimberley D'Adamo, "Art Practice as Research in the Classroom: A New Paradigm in Art Education," *Art Education* 64, no. 5 (2011): 12–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2011.11519139>.

an identity that satisfies aesthetic, cultural, and social needs, which reflect membership in particular communities or groups.

Perception of design objects varies from person to person. Consequently, the interpretation of assigned design projects is approached uniquely by each student. Multiple cognitive factors such as empathy, attention, expectations, and individual differences influence the creative process. Thus, each project begins with a certain concept that guides the initial sketches, based on observation and analysis of the task, including considerations of horizontal and vertical planes and sequences. The second stage involves representing shapes through intuitive, personal interpretations that integrate perception, individualized understanding, analysis, and personalized approach. Students then explore multiple variants and interpretations stemming from the initial concept. Technical illustrations, compositional studies or color explorations reproduce shapes, volumes, proportions, and angles while distilling the design to its essential characteristics. In many cases, creating visual representations involves a synthesis of previous observations to simplify and harmonize contradictory chromatic or compositional elements.

Recently, increasing attention has been given to metacognition—the ability to analyze and reflect on cognitive processes—which is closely related to creativity. Creativity is often understood as a dynamic interplay between convergent and divergent thinking.² Future research in the field emphasizes the interaction between creative thinking, its stages of development, the synthesis and application of concepts, and metacognition, which analyzes these creative processes across various fields. Together, these elements create a cause-and-effect dynamic.³

Models of creativity as cognitive processes include numerous sub-processes. Empirical studies of that individual creativity typically assess the potential of individual creativity rather than creativity itself. Research in this area highlights divergent thinking structured through sequential

- 2 Ronald A. Finke, Thomas B. Ward, and Steven J. Smith, *Creative Cognition: Theory, Research, and Applications* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); Monica L. Bink and Richard L. Marsh, "Cognitive Regularities in Creative Activity," *Review of General Psychology* 4, no. 1 (2000): 59–78.
- 3 Xiaoyu Jia, Weijian Li, and Liren Cao, "The Role of Metacognitive Components in Creative Thinking," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02404>.

sub-processes such as generation, selection, exploration, evaluation, refinement, comparison, synthesis, and application.⁴

Creativity, therefore, represents a cumulative outcome of cognitive processes and sub-processes shaped by individual social and cultural components that contribute to the uniqueness of each individual's creative process.

Teaching Conceptualization – An Experimental Transdisciplinary Approach

Conceptualization is the process of defining concepts or expressing abstract ideas in a manner that is more understandable and relatable. This process is fundamental across various areas of knowledge and research, including art, science, philosophy, and communication. However, in design and applied arts, the concept lies at the core of coherent creation, providing it both meaning and purpose. In other words, the concept serves as a guiding framework for the entire creative process, defining and expressing the meaning, intention, and planned outcome of a work.

In design and applied arts, a concept represents the central idea of a work—whether visual, thematic or process-oriented. It conveys a message, an idea, a statement, an emotion, or a narrative and serves as an effective means of communicating the artist's or designer's intentions. A clearly defined concept brings coherence and unity to the creative process, creating a structured environment that supports committed decision-making. Moreover, a deep understanding of a given or chosen concept opens new opportunities for exploration and development of new and unexpected ideas.

Teaching conceptualization involves imparting abstract ideas and foundational concepts to learners, enabling them to develop a deeper understanding of a subject matter. It is a multifaceted pedagogical approach that seeks to foster critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and cognitive development. According to Cross,⁵ conceptualization entails the capacity

4 Gregory Boldt, "Artistic Creativity beyond Divergent Thinking: Analysing Sequences in Creative Subprocesses," *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 34 (2019): article 100606, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2019.100606>.

5 Nigel Cross, "From a Design Science to a Design Discipline: Understanding Designerly Ways of Knowing and Thinking," in *Design Research Now*, ed. Ralf Michel (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2007), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-7643-8472-2_3.

to generate, articulate, and evaluate ideas within specific contexts, forming the basis for innovative problem-solving. As highlighted by researchers in the field, conceptual change theory posits that learners construct and re-construct their understanding of concepts through experience, interaction, and exposure to new information. This underscores the educators' role in guiding students through meaningful learning experiences that challenge existing misconceptions and scaffold the acquisition of new knowledge. Furthermore, Rothwell and Kazanas⁶ highlight the role of education in cultivating conceptual skills, suggesting that structured learning helps students develop a repertoire of conceptual tools essential for navigating the intricacies of design practice. Likewise, Lawson emphasizes the value of providing opportunities for experimentation and reflection, enabling educators to empower students to engage critically with concepts and translate abstract ideas into tangible outcomes.⁷ A comprehensive pedagogical approach that combines theoretical insights with hands-on experiences is therefore essential for nurturing the conceptual proficiency of future designers and practitioners in the applied arts.

Following the theoretical aspects outlined above, we implemented a non-conventional and applied approach to teaching the subject Conceptualization in Design and Applied Arts to first-year master's students at the Faculty of Design, Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad, Romania.

The Assignment: Context, Process, and Outcome

CONTEXT

The master's program in Design and Product Development at the Faculty of Design in Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad spans two years and is open to students who typically hold a bachelor's degree in Visual Arts. These students are already familiar with a creative approach, yet their prior education occurs in a comparatively guided and specialized environment. For example, alumni of the bachelor's program at the Faculty of Design

6 William J. Rothwell and H. C. Kazanas, *Planning and Managing the Design Process: Developing Conceptual Skills* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004).

7 Bryan Lawson, *How Designers Think: The Design Process Demystified* (Oxford: Architectural Press, 2006).

study one of three fields: Design (Product and Graphic Design), Interior Design, or Fashion Design. In addition to their specialty subjects, students engage with complementary courses that broaden their conceptual and artistic understanding.

In contrast, the master's program offers greater autonomy and encourages interdisciplinary research. It demands creative courage, curiosity, rigor, and vigilance, while expanding students' perspectives beyond their prior specialization.

In the first year of the master's program at the Faculty of Design, thirteen students are enrolled. Most are alumni of the three bachelor's specialties mentioned above, while a few have graduated from other universities.

As tutors, we faced two potential approaches to teaching Conceptualization in Design and Applied Arts. The traditional method would involve presenting theoretical concepts first, followed by an assignment aimed at applying the acquired knowledge. Instead, we opted for an alternative, applied approach.

THE ASSIGNMENT

Referring to the piece *Exogenesis Symphony* by the band Muse, each one of the students was tasked with identifying and justifying a concept. Using that concept as a starting point and drawing on the multidisciplinary knowledge acquired to date, students were required to create a design or applied art object that vividly illustrates the essence of the musical piece. The creative process involved several steps. Firstly, the students documented and interpreted the piece subjectively.

This involved repeated listening to the symphony in various contexts, taking notes on ideas, feelings, and impressions during and after each listening session. Additional research on the composer, the band, the meaning of the title, and the lyrics was expected. While studying elements of composition and music theory was not compulsory, it was recommended for a deeper understanding of the melodic line. Brainstorming, sketching, and other methods of scientific or empirical research were also encouraged. The objective was for students to extract a core concept from the musical

work, interpret the abstract idea, and to translate it into a tangible object of their choice. Throughout the process, creativity, personal interpretation, and interdisciplinary approach were encouraged, ensuring that the final outcome reflected both the versatility and complexity of the concept.

PROCESSES

The project centered on interpreting and translating the themes of Muse's *Exogenesis Symphony* into a tangible form through design or applied art. The process began with thorough documentation and analysis of the musical piece. Students engaged in multiple listening sessions in different contexts to grasp its nuances, mood shifts, and underlying motifs. Detailed notes were taken during and after these listening sessions to capture impressions, emotional responses, and conceptual ideas, with all reactions and feelings—including negative ones—considered relevant. In cases where students expressed dislike of the musical piece, this response became the starting point for their research, influencing the concept they ultimately extracted.

Extensive research was conducted into the composer's background, the band's artistic approach, and the broader cultural context surrounding the creation of the symphony. In-depth examination of the symphony's lyrics and thematic elements helped uncover layers of meaning, symbolism, and narrative structure. Analysis of musical composition principles shed light on the structural elements and melodic motifs that define the symphony's sonic landscape. This contextual understanding informed subsequent stages of conceptualization and design. For some students, especially those with a detail-oriented approach, this step was essential, providing a framework within which to navigate the creative process with minimal self-imposed constraints.

Brainstorming sessions generated conceptual frameworks inspired by the emotional contours, narrative themes, and imagery evoked by the music. Students explored multiple conceptual avenues, ranging from abstract symbolism to narrative storytelling. Brainstorming was conducted individually, in small groups, with and without tutoring. However, the tutor's goal was to interfere as little as possible in each student's creative process.

Guidance was deliberately minimal, limited to ensuring consistency in research and helping students overcome possible obstacles.

Once a conceptual vision was established, the design phase began. Students translated their conceptual frameworks into tangible forms, materials, and aesthetic expressions, each strongly reflecting their personal approach as well as insights gained from the previous investigative stage. Iterative prototyping, experimentation with forms, volumes, shapes, textures, colors, and spatial configurations, combined with rigorous critique sessions, refined the designs progressively.

Over the fourteen-week semester, the project emphasized creativity, personal interpretation, and interdisciplinary collaboration. The final designs or applied artworks served as testaments to the transformative power of music, demonstrating how abstract concepts can inspire and transcend boundaries of expression and perception.

OUTCOME

Although all students drew inspiration from the same source material—Muse’s *Exogenesis Symphony*—each project undertaken by students displayed distinct characteristics, reflecting the diversity of interpretation and creative expression. Out of the fourteen students enrolled in the course, ten demonstrated notable dedication and successfully completed their projects, underscoring the commitment and engagement fostered within the educational environment. The proposed concepts spanned a broad spectrum of themes and artistic mediums, showcasing the students’ versatility and imaginative capacity.

A recurring motif among several proposed concepts was the exploration of transition, approached through ambient design to evoke a sense of fluidity and change. Innovative use of materials and spatial arrangements aimed to capture the ephemeral nature of transitions, inviting viewers to reflect on the dynamic interplay between stability and flux.

In parallel, themes of anxiety and discomfort were explored through transformative furniture designs, where unconventional forms and textures acted as visual metaphors for inner turmoil and psychological unrest. By

challenging traditional notions of form and function, these projects sought to elicit visceral responses and provoke introspective engagement with the complexities of human emotion.

Other projects addressed existential inquiries, with decorative art serving as a medium for exploring the intricacies of human existence. Through intricate patterns, symbolism, and juxtapositions, students engaged with existential themes of mortality, identity, and purpose, inviting viewers to confront the fundamental questions of life and meaning.

Furthermore, the concept of infinity was ingeniously explored through graphic design, where students experimenting with visual representations of boundlessness and eternity. Techniques such as tessellation, fractals, and optical illusions were employed to transcend temporal constraints and evoke a sense of awe and wonder at the infinite expanse of the universe.

Similarly, serenity and restfulness emerged as central themes in product design, where students applied minimalist aesthetics and ergonomic principles to create functional yet tranquil objects. By prioritizing simplicity, balance, and sensory comfort, these projects offered refuge from the frenetic pace of modern life, inviting users to reconnect with a sense of inner peace and tranquility.

In contrast, the fusion of futuristic pragmatism was encapsulated within the realm of fashion design, where students explored avant-garde silhouettes and innovative textiles to envision the garments of tomorrow. By blurring the boundaries between fashion and functionality, these works embodied a vision of pragmatic futurism, integrating style with utility to meet the evolving demands of tomorrow's world.

Lastly, the concept of mark-leaving travel was poignantly realized through an animation project, in which students employed digital storytelling techniques to chronicle the transformative journey of self-discovery and personal growth. Through evocative visuals and narrative symbolism, the projects charted the protagonist's quest for identity and belonging, engaging with universal themes of resilience, adaptation, and self-realization.

In summary, the projects collectively demonstrated the students' diverse talents, intellectual curiosity, and capacity for creative expression,

reaffirming the intrinsic value of arts education in nurturing individuality, empathy, and critical thinking. Through their imaginative endeavors, the students not only enriched their own understanding of the world but also contributed to the broader discourse on the interplay between art, design, and human experience, sparking dialogue, inspiring empathy, and fostering cultural exchange.

Discussion and Conclusions

The primary objective of the assignment was to explore the intricate dynamics of conceptualization and to underscore its inherently subjective nature, particularly within the expansive realm of creative industries. In design and applied arts, concepts are not evaluated as strictly “good” or “bad,” nor confined to binary categories of “correct” or “incorrect.” Rather, the assessment of a concept depends on its robustness, coherence, and the depth of research and argumentation that supports it.

At the core of any concept lies its capacity to convey a coherent message and effectively engage its intended audience. A well-crafted concept serves as the foundational framework for a product, guiding both its technical precision and functional efficacy. When grounded in such a meticulously constructed concept, a creation holds the potential to resonate with audiences on multiple levels.

Moreover, within the dynamic landscape of design and applied arts, originality is equally critical. The pursuit of uniqueness and innovation defines these disciplines, distinguishing products and creative works within competitive contexts. Originality enhances not only aesthetic appeal but also the cultural and market significance of a creation, contributing to its longevity and impact.

In light of these considerations, one may naturally question the necessity and relevance of a subject like Conceptualization in Design and Applied Arts, where interpretation and argumentation are central. However, its significance, particularly within the context of a master’s program, extends far beyond mere theoretical discourse. At its core, the subject serves as a catalyst for cultivating continuous learning and self-exploration. By

encouraging students to interrogate their own perspectives, challenge pre-conceived notions, and engage in rigorous debate and discussion, it fosters critical thinking skills essential for navigating the complexities of creative practice. Moreover, the subject provides a platform for the exploration of new avenues for creative expression, pushing the boundaries of conventional thinking and fostering a culture of innovation within design and applied arts.

Ultimately, the overarching goal of the subject is to equip individuals to operate within the multifaceted landscape of creative practice with confidence and ingenuity. Through its emphasis on critical inquiry, self-reflection, and interdisciplinary exploration, the subject equips future designers and applied artists with the tools and insights necessary to thrive as innovative thinkers and practitioners in a dynamic and ever-evolving field.

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Santrauka

Konceptualizavimas mados dizaine ir taikomojoje dailėje: kūrybiškumo skatinimo metodai ir būdai

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Reikšminiai žodžiai: drabužiai, dizainas, mada, kūrybiškumas, metodas, požiūris.

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas konceptualizavimo vaidmuo mados dizaine ir taikomojoje dailėje, daugiausia dėmesio skiriant pedagoginiams metodams, kuriais skatinamas dizaino studentų kūrybiškumas. Autorės teigia, kad šiuolaikinėms kūrybinėms industrijoms reikalingi edukaciniai metodai, kai peržengiami tradiciniai mokymo modeliai ir vietoj to siūlomi tyrimai, eksperimentavimas ir tarpdisciplininis bendradarbiavimas.

Pirmajame skyriuje plėtojama teorinė sistema, kurioje menas ir dizainas įvardijami ne tik kaip kūrybiškumo produktai, bet ir kaip savarankiška tyrimų praktika. Šioje sistemoje kūrybiškumas vertinamas kaip sudėtinga kognityvinių ir metakognityvinių procesų sąveika, kur skirtingas ir konvergentinis mąstymas kartu su asmenine interpretacija lemia unikalius rezultatus. Šiame kontekste yra labai svarbūs į studentą orientuoti mokymo modeliai, nes tada besimokantieji gali pasiūlyti lanksčius mokymosi kelius, pritaikytus jų poreikiams ir kultūrinei kilmei.

Toliau straipsnyje pristatomas eksperimentinis mokymo metodas, įdiegtas Arado „Aurel Vlaicu“ universiteto Dizaino fakulteto Dizaino ir produktų kūrimo magistro programoje. Pasirinktas dalykas „Konceptualizavimas dizaine ir taikomojoje dailėje“ buvo dėstomas atliekant netradicinę užduotį: studentų buvo paprašyta interpretuoti roko grupės „Muse“ muzikinį kūrinį „Egzogenezės simfonija“ ir išskirti jo koncepciją, kurią būtų galima paversti apčiuopiamu dizaino arba taikomosios dailės objektu. Šis projektas pareikalavo, kad studentai derintų subjektyvią interpretaciją su griežta dokumentacija, idėjų generavimu ir kūrybiniu prototipų kūrimu.

Pedagoginė strategija nukreipta į minimalų dėstytojų kišimąsi, paliekant erdvės individualioms studentų nuomonėms, interpretacijoms ir tyrimo metodams. Keturiolika savaikių studentai kūrė įvairius projektus – nuo baldų ir gaminių dizaino

iki mados, grafinio dizaino ir animacijos. Rezultatai atskleidė pasikartojančias temas, tokias kaip pereinamoji būseną, nerimas, begalybė, ramybė, futurizmas ir egzistencinė refleksija. Kiekvienas projektas parodė, kaip vienas įkvėpimo šaltinis gali turėti daugybę kūrybinių išraiškų, kurias formuoja asmeninės perspektyvos ir kultūriniai kontekstai.

Straipsnyje autorės teigia, kad dizaino konceptualizavimas negali būti vertinamas kaip „teisingas“ ar „neteisingas“, o turi būti vertinamas pagal argumentacijos stiprumą, rišlumą, originalumą ir tyrimo gilumą. Siūlomos tyrimo temos įrodė, kad stiprių konceptualių įgūdžių ugdymas yra gyvybiškai svarbus būsimiems dizaineriams, nes jis ugdo kritinį mąstymą, inovacijas ir gebėjimą veiksmingai perteikti idėjas.

Galiausiai tyrime pabrėžiama eksperimentinių, į studentą orientuotų ir tarpdisciplininių mokymo modelių integravimo į dizaino ugdymą būtinybė. Derinant teorinį pagrindą su praktiniais eksperimentais, studentai įgalinami užtikrintai ir originaliai valdyti kūrybinius procesus. Tokia pedagoginė praktika ne tik stiprina individualią meninę raišką, bet ir parengia absolventus prasmingai prisidėti prie kūrybinių industrijų kaitos.