A matter of questioning: A comparative study of reflective practice in graphic design courses in the United Kingdom and Indonesia

Rosa Karnita¹, Andrée Woodcock², Kollette Super²

¹Institut Teknologi Nasional, Bandung (INDONESIA)

²Coventry School of Art and Design, Coventry University Coventry, West Midlands (UK)

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ABSTRACT

- This paper describes the results of the first phase of a PhD study looking at reflective practice in undergraduate Graphic Design courses.
- A comparative study of undergraduate graphic design courses in the UK and Indonesia was undertaken to understand differences in teaching and learning experiences offered to students.
  - Observations were made in a sample of lectures, seminars, tutorials, critiques, studio practice and visits.
  - Semi-structured interviews were held with tutors at both universities to understand the value placed on reflection and its benefits for student progression.
  - The student perspective on reflection and its encouragement through different forms of teaching was gained through focus groups in Indonesia and the use of STERLinG’s questionnaire [1] at both universities.
- Although reflection was valued and supported in the UK by both students and teachers and was facilitated through self-assessment and peer reviews.
- In Indonesia, reflection is not widely used in the classroom.
- In the next stage of the research the results will be used to inform the development of a teaching intervention to stimulate reflection as a teaching tool in undergraduate graphic design courses in Indonesia.
INTRODUCTION

• Aim
  – To investigate reflective practice undergraduate graphic design courses

• Hypothesis
  – that cultural issues, learning and classroom management influence student reflection.
Reflective practice

- Reflective practice is commonly used in western countries where it can form an intrinsic part of the curriculum.
- It can be developed through specialised modules which encourage students’ personal and professional development – for example by asking students to reflect on problems they encounter during the course and completion of coursework.
Cultural differences

• In Far Eastern cultures, such as China and Indonesia, an instructionalist or transmission style of teaching is adopted [3] in which the teacher is the sole authority and source of information.

• The teacher’s role ‘is to effectively transmit facts or processes, explain the what, why and where of the subject matter, and present new knowledge.’ (p.9, [4]).

• The student is the listener, or receiver of information, silent except when answering questions.

• Where questioning does occur, it is not for promotion of dialogue and reflection.
• Although sometimes appropriate, the instructionalist mode is widely criticised for stifling creativity.

• Teacher led lectures may create students who are obedient to authority, passive in class, lacking in critical thinking and adopting inadequate learning strategies (e.g. [5], [6] and [7]).

• Such courses do not devote time to training in logic, and the development of learners’ thinking skills.

• ‘As a result, students do not have many opportunities to express their thoughts clearly in words—they are shy, or don’t necessarily know how to do this.’ (p.9, [4]).
Research context: Indonesia (1)

• Rosa as an experienced lecturer in Indonesia, noted that tutors recognise the difficulty students have in articulating their ideas.
• On the one hand, lecturers are not sure how to develop dialogues with their students.
• On the other, first year students, emerging from Indonesian schools, may be unsure about how to approach their teachers, and too shy to ask questions or engage in conversations about their work.
The Ministry of Education and Culture in Indonesia is aware of new paradigms in teaching and learning in higher education, with the emphasis on student-centred learning.

In its Higher Education Long Term Strategy for 2003-2010, it seeks to foster student-centred learning through improving both hard and soft skills.

In accordance with this, tutors have been encouraged to adopt more student-centred approaches.

However, many tutors do not understand what is needed or how to provide teaching activities to support this approach.

Reflective practice per se, is not encouraged in teaching and learning activities although many tutors are aware of its benefits.

This research will provide convincing arguments for its inclusion in graphic design, and guidance regarding how it could be fostered in the classroom.
Reflection

‘a form of response of the learner to experience, and reflection in the context of learning is a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations’. (p.18-19)

• No studies have been conducted about reflective practice and its implementation in higher education in Indonesia.
Aims and objectives

- The aim of this research is to investigate ways in which reflection could be used to improve the teaching and learning of undergraduate Graphic Design courses in Indonesia.
- The research will be undertaken in four stages, following a design research lifecycle – understand, propose, realise/implement, evaluate/reflect.
- This paper covers the first two stages of the research, relating to:
  1. An understanding of the current situation with regards to supporting reflection in the undergraduate curriculum, and taking,
  2. The argument for the design of the intervention to support reflective practice in Indonesian graphic design courses.
METHODS

• Four studies were undertaken to understand teaching and learning in the UK and Indonesia.
  1. Classroom observations in the UK, to observe the differences in teaching and learning in the UK and Indonesian graphic design courses.
  2. Interviews with graphic design tutors in the UK and Indonesia to understand how reflective practice is supported in the classroom.
  3. Survey of students’ appraisal of tutor’s support for reflection.
  4. Focus groups in Indonesia to gather more detailed information on student experiences.

• The results from the studies triangulated well, showing that there is a cultural difference in teaching and learning, pointing to a need for more constructivist approaches to teaching in Indonesia.
1. OBSERVATIONAL STUDIES

• Aim
  – To understand how reflective practice is embedded in the overall graphic design curriculum and experiences of the students

• Method
  – 29 observations (totalling 50 hours) were made over two terms in Coventry School of Art and Design in the UK.
  – Unobtrusive methods were used with the researcher sitting at the back of classrooms, sometimes accompanying the observations with note-taking, photographic and video recordings.
  – Artefacts were collected which demonstrated how students had been encouraged to record their thoughts, findings, process, self-assessment, and feedback to their peers.

• Results
  – Reflective dialogue characterised many studio-based activities such as small group tutorials, one-to-one tutorials, peer reviews and seminars.
  – Students’ work showed that they were encouraged to engage in self-reflection in reflective journals
  – They also participated in groups’ discussion when a member of a group presented their project to others for peer review.
Examples of classroom activity

Figure 1. An example of student's reflective journal

Figure 2. Group discussion and giving peers' feedback

Figure 3. Seminar activity in small groups

Figure 4. Written feedback in Peer review activity
Dialogues

• In the seminar session, the tutor led discussion with small groups of students.
• Students were encouraged to articulate their thoughts in a non-critical setting (Fig 3), thereby facilitating rich higher-order thinking.
• Dialogues and questioning to probe and increase understanding were common.
• In the peer review session, every student was asked to give feedback to other groups (Fig 4) through a structured feedback form provided by the tutor.
• This helped students to gather feedback in a concise form, and students are stimulated to build constructive feedback to their peers.
2. INTERVIEWS with tutors in UK and Indonesia

• **Aim**
  - To understand the role of reflection in the tutors’ own development and how students were encouraged to be more reflective

• **Method**
  - Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 10 UK tutors and 10 Indonesian tutors

• **Analysis**
  - All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and analysed using NVivo 10.
Specimen results: UK (1)

• Recording reflections and willingness to learn how to do this are key to improving reflection.
• Students can be easily distracted and reflections or key learning’s forgotten if they are not externalised.
• Reflective outputs are therefore assessed through the evidence exhibited in students’ sketchbooks, journals, and reflective writing.
• Tutors
  – Stressed the importance of questioning that leads to dialogues as essential in fostering students’ reflection, as well as the need to embed reflective practice in all teaching activities.
  – Suggested that the best way to increase students’ reflective ability was to be with them in the studio, discussing their achievements and stimulating reflective ability by providing critical questions (how and why). Some students find this difficult and are a challenge for tutors in both countries.
Specimen results: UK (2)

• “I’d say ‘keep it that’s evidence of your reflective process, that’s where it went wrong you’ve reflected on the process this is where it went right’, so we’re keeping a record of it so we can see that they’re actually using reflective processes and practices” (Tutor 4, UK Interview)

• “the key to success is dialogue, the key to success is conversation ...is tutorials, is questioning the student ‘why have you done that?’ ‘how do you think you can do that better?’ how have you thought of this?’ a lot of it is in the questioning and, and then that draws out reflective practice” (Tutor 4, UK Interview)
Specimen results: UK (3)

• The tutors also stressed the importance of being approachable in order to give a safe environment to the students.

• “you have to create a safe space so ... a safe space ... so that ... students can come back towards you, they can perhaps ask a question, they can react to what you’ve said knowing that whatever they say” (Tutor 6, UK Interview)
Specimen results: Indonesia (1)

- In Indonesia, reflective practice is not encouraged, it is left to happen naturally.
- Students and tutors avoid feedback because they are afraid of conflicts and overwork. It is difficult to ask reflective questions because of the lack of resources to support reflective teaching.
- Although the Indonesian tutors were aware of the need to question, they were not able to give examples of how questioning would lead to dialogues. Their definitions of reflective practice included:
  - “It is when I encourage my student to know more about the lesson by giving them questions or pursue them to asking questions” (Tutor 1, Indonesia interview)
  - “It is a type of evaluation that helps the tutor to over view their teaching process and for students to over view their learning process” (Tutor 8, Indonesia interview)
  - “It is one of the learning processes that force the student to recall their memory of the lesson I have taught them” (Tutor 10, Indonesia interview)
Specimen results both countries

• Tutors experienced difficulties in encouraging reflective practice especially when students are asked to produce reflective writing for their sketches or design.
• Some students find reflecting on their work difficult and are a challenge for tutors.
Interview: Conclusions

• The interviews showed that questioning socratic questioning, providing feedback, evidencing the process and thoughts are fundamental for successful reflective learning.

• The Nvivo analysis showed a difference between the two countries in terms of the sophistication and number of themes raised by the two groups of tutors.
  – Indonesian tutors seemed less aware of reflective practice and the ways in which it could be encouraged
3. COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO TUTORS FACILITATION OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

• **Aim**
  - To understand student perceptions of staff facilitation of reflective practice

• **Method**
  - STERLing questionnaire
  - Completed by 31 students in UK, 51 in Indonesia

• **Analysis**
  - Comparison of combined scores relating to extent to which the tutor
    - Supported self-insight
    - Created a safe environment
    - Encouraged self-regulation
Results

- The UK students rated their tutor more highly on all questions.
- The UK students rated no items below 2.
- Indonesian students differed most from their UK counterparts in the scores given to questions relating to the creation of a safe environment.
- This study has shown that UK and Indonesian students differ in their ratings of a representative tutor’s ability to facilitate reflective learning.
- Whilst this alone may not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that Indonesian tutors may need help in creating classroom environments which facilitate reflective practice, the results agree with those derived from other parts of the research.
4. FOCUS GROUPS

• **Aim**
  - To gather more information about the perceptions of Indonesian students towards the extent to which their tutor encourages reflective learning

• **Sample**
  - 17 students who had completed the STERLing questionnaire

• **Method**
  - Random assignment into three focus groups

• **Analysis**
  - All discussions were audio recorded, transcribed and translated into English prior to analysis using Nvivo10
Specimen results: Classroom management

• The results revealed a gap between the tutor and students interaction. The main problem identified by the students, related to the method of questioning.

• The tutor’s questions did not produce a dialogue but just caused embarrassed silence.

• In this condition, some students stated that they did not feel engaged:
  – “…about the lesson, if tutor give us project, unfortunately they seldom give us clear explanation about the project. When we want to make some brainstorming, we don't have a chance” (student 3, group 1)

• Staff availability
  – “…when we want to get assisted in reviewing our project/task, we wait quite long and it really waste our time” (student 1, group 2)
  – “…and the pity is after marking attendance session, our tutor goes back to their room and leave us almost 25 minutes each session, and then they come back and directly give us a task, without introducing anything” (student 4, group 2)
Specimen results: Feedback

- The tutor did not provide written feedback on students’ work, so students did not learn from their mistakes.
- Although the tutor suggested personal recording of the design process through their sketchbooks, little attempt was made to encourage reflective ability.
- The students did not know how to do reflective writing or annotate their sketchbooks.
- Sketches were used only for visual exploration, not as a research or reflective tool.
- Similar comments were made in all focus groups.
  - “No. All we know about the sketchbook is for sketching only. To make some alternatives, some ideas” (all students, group 1)
  - “No. We do it by ourselves because tutor asked us to provide some sketches” (all students, group 2)
- In relation to providing feedback, some students said that their tutor did give them verbal feedback when they showed their sketches but this was not recorded.
  - “About feedback when we do and have done our project, we seldom get it. We had got once only for the first task, but for other tasks and when we get mark for final assessment, we didn't receive feedback both verbal and written” (student 2, group 1)
Specimen results: Responsibility for progress

• In the UK, students are required to undertake Personal Development Planning (PDP).
• This enables students to take responsibility for their own progress.
• In Indonesia, such a system does not exist.
• Students may find it difficult to manage their projects, but do not easily learn from this, because the reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action cycles are not supported.
  - "Sometimes we didn’t make a good result because we have other tasks to do and must be collected at the same time, so we didn't have much time to do the tasks." (student 4, group 3)
Focus groups: Conclusions

• The focus groups showed that there is less engagement between students and their tutor and less dialogues and feedback provided.
• This study supports the previous study, which used the STERLInG questionnaire.
• It indicates that the tutor:
  – needs to spend more time with the students,
  – should be more approachable and more willing to engage with them
  – should encourage students’ reflection through questioning the students.
• This will provide opportunities for dialogues and will encourage students to improve their learning through the use of learning journals or developing their sketchbooks to evidence their thoughts.
OVERALL DISCUSSION

• Clear differences emerged in the studies about the way in which teaching and learning was conducted in the two countries
  – A greater emphasis and level of support was given to reflective learning in the UK
  – Environments, relationships and materials were developed which enable student reflection to grow and become an integral part of activities
  – In the UK the sketchbook provided one means of supporting reflection, whereas in Indonesia this was only used for design development

• Tutors in both countries appreciated the value of reflection but that this was difficult for some students
OVERALL CONCLUSIONS and FUTURE WORK

• The results from the studies triangulated well, showing that there is a cultural difference in teaching and learning, pointing to a need for more constructivist approaches to teaching in Indonesia.

• The results have been used to develop an intervention plan to explore different ways in which reflection may be stimulated in undergraduate graphic design courses in Indonesia.

• This plan is currently being implemented to assess which methods of facilitating reflection are most appropriate for the Indonesian culture.
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For more information, please contact Rosa......
Email: oca@itenas.ac.id,
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