

Choosing Theme affected PBL

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Abstract

Choosing a theme in PBL for photography criticism course was a problem, because lecturers had never thought photography criticism, students had a little prior knowledge about photo criticism, social issues and photo history, and also PBL had never been used in Visual Communication Design, Tarumanagara University. The objective of the research was to design and developed problem-based learning for Tarumanagara student who were learning to interpret photographs. Structured observations, written questionnaires, and oral questionnaires, interviewed were used to gather in depth data of students 'learning on how to interpret various photo's themes. The action research conducted in 50 students from visual communication design, fifth semester, Tarumanagara University, Jakarta.

The designs of problem based learning models in the first cycle was created as follows (1) prepared the learning materials and gave urban theme as a problem, prepare Barrett's model criticism for delivery and assignments (2) delivered materials and assestments, presented problems and brainstorming (3) described individual and group assignments (4) fasilitated student to interpret photographs (5) supervised student to combine data and discussed sub theme (6) provided feedback and summative evaluation. The second cycle used only the fifth and the sixth steps.

Choosing the themes for PBL became important because the photo themes were interpreted to be the learning outcomes. PBL method made students became more active in discussion about photo interpretations and students learned new ways of learning. From all the results, choosing themes could affect PBL process, if the photo themes were all abstract pictures, student could not have feeling responds to photos. Therefore, the PBL would be not successful. I recommended to select the photo theme follow the history of photography. Themes which were developed by modernist photographers such as still life, landscape and portrait should be given in basic photographic course, and postmodernist themes should be given in the advanced course.

Keywords: Modern, Postmodernist, Barrett's photo criticism model, Visual Communication Design

INTRODUCTION

. Theme in photography were simple at the beginning of twentieth centuries or modern times such as portrait, still lifes, nudes and landscapes. During this time, many photographers used large format cameras; therefore they were limited to take movement object. Theme in photography were getting more complex in the postmodernist era (after 1967). Postmodernist issues related to culture, gender, race, identity and so on favoured by issues-based approach could be formed into problems for PBL unit (Constantino, 2000). In photography criticism, theme or subject was interpreted as a call for personal freedom (Barrett, 2006). Choosing a theme in PBL for photography criticism course was a problem, because lecturers had never thought photography criticism, students had a little prior knowledge about photo criticism, social issues and photo history, and also PBL had never been used in in Visual Communication Design, Tarumanagara University in Jakarta, Indonesia The interpretation of subject or theme would be crucial in the implementation of problem-based learning, and those results were led to the learning outcomes for photography's criticism.

Students would discussed theme, when they applied Barrett's criticism model to evaluate photo. Lecturers had never used Barrett's criticism model in photography course in Tarumanagara University; therefore, PBL method had been chosen to integrate Barrett's criticism model to photography course. Most photography courses in Tarumanagara University were studio productions, and the lecturers used only studio's critiques to improve student's work. Most photographic lecturers had seldom introduced Ansell Adams, Henry Cartier Bresson, Mendur and Kassian Chepas etc; therefore, students had little knowledge about history of photography and photography criticism.

Futhermore, I chose urban as a theme in problem-based learning model which was implemented with participatory action research (Cresswell, 2008). The action research would have to answer research questions how to design, and developed problem-based learning as a new method to teach photograh'y's criticism in visual communication design.

THE THEORITICAL FOUNDATION OF PBL

PBL is an inquiry-based method that organizes the curriculum around ill-defined problems that reflect real-life situations. Theme or subject is ill-defined problems for photographers. When student wanted to interpret the theme, the students should know about photo theory (photo history and photo criticism's model), and also photographer's biography, culture and social life's when the photographs was made. Choosing theme for creating unit plans is the first step before other steps (Barrell,2007).

PBL has been claimed to align with the constructive nature of cognition, that is, knowing is active, constructive process- an interaction between the individual and the environment (Greening, 1998). In other works, as individuals define meanings and realities through their interaction with the environment. The component of a PBL environment, that is, the problems, the peers, the instructors, the resources and the tools, are designated to encouraged learners to be self directed in their learning.

Problems as a driving force of the learning process can be explained in Piaget's concept of equilibration (1985), a cognitive construction process as a learning mechanism. According to

Piaget, equilibration is the act of searching for a balance in organizing, assimilating and accommodations. The assumption is that when the cognitive structure is disturbed, it will assimilate and accommodate to generate a new structure because of its tendency toward self-organization. Problems serve exactly as anomalies of experience in PBL, and create a state of disequilibrium, which can only be resolved when a new cognitive structure is adopted.

Piaget's theory of assimilation and accommodation are related with people who want to interpret photography's. Assimilation occurs when people used their existing schemes to make sense of events in their world. Assimilation involves trying to understand something new by fitting it into what we already know (Woodfolk, 2008). During photo interpretation, student found that journalistic and advertising photos were the easiest to interpret. This was possible that the student used their journalistic and advertising' schemes which had seen before in the news paper, internet etc. This was also proved that students were easy to remember journalistic and advertising photos. In contrast, when student saw *three graces, 1994* by Sally Mann. Assimilation and accommodation occurs at nearly sequence times. Accommodation took places when people changed their existing schemes to respond to a new situation. Therefore, the assimilation took places when students saw three female nudes standing on the top of the hill. After the students saw the details of the photos and notice that the unusual actions of three female nudes are standing and pees, accommodation took place. Accommodation occurred when student saw uncommon subject matter or the unusual pose, props in the photos. Usually accommodation took place when student saw fine art or abstract photos. In contrast, assimilation took place when they saw commercial photos. They did not need to change the schemes in commercial photos because they had the schemes in their past experiences (Zahar, 2010).

During this action research, I trained my colleague to learn action research, Barrett's criticism model and problem-based learning. After the training, I with my colleague prepared the learning materials, delivered materials, brainstorming, gave assignments, assisted the student to criticize the photos, assisted student to combine the data, provided feedback and summative evaluation

Step 1. prepared learning materials

1.a. Prepared Theme as a problem:

Theme was not subject matter, but theme was the subject of the photos. Photographic interpretations lead to determine the photo theme, and the judgement of the photos. I chose urban as a theme because there were many photographers took urban pictures which related to gender, social, homosexual, poverty etc and also urban was contemporaries' issues. I and my colleague selected 50 photographers who made the same sub-theme and divided into twelve sub-themes. I used aesthetic exemplars in the form of modernist and post modernist photographers, and Barrett's criticism model as the latest model for photo interpretation.

Each student chose and criticize works of one photographer, and made into twelve groups. The photographers usually made several sub themes in their life time; therefore, students has to select the photos which related to the sub themes.

1.b. Prepared Barrett's criticism model

I chose Barrett's criticism model because Barrett's methods were suitable for photographs (Barrett, 2001), and had been applied in Chia's dissertations (Chia, 2008). Barrett's criticism models would be divided into three steps; description, interpretation, and evaluation. The first step were describing form, medium, style, comparing and contrasting. The second step was interpretation which employed two signifying practices of Roland Barthes: denotations and connotations. A photographs still-life arrangement might denote (show) flowers in a vase on a wooden table; it might connote tranquillity and peace. The third step was the evaluation which determined the quality of photos.

Also the photographic teacher could make format from Barrett's criticism model which helped them in delivery materials, student assignment, feed backs and evaluation.

Step 2. Delivered materials, presented problems, brainstorming

Urban problems illustrated the integrated nature of PBL units, since the students were not only exercise photography practice skills; they also had to study history of photography and social. The lecturer developed and presented the problem situation, but student had to pinpoint the central problem, and then brainstorm how to go about solving it by using Barrett's questions and making a list of questions; what did I see? What did it mean? What was the subject matter? What was the relation amongst the subject matter? What was the form? What was the medium? What was the style? What was the difference between one photos and others? Who made this photo? Why he/she made this photo? Who influenced the photograher? All these questions led to the theme of photos. Students needed to encounter theme of photos with Interdiscipline approach. The theme of photos involved photo techniques to social influenced during the photo was made. Students located information sources for answering those questions, and to draw information from a variety of disciplines. In this way, the themes acted as a central organizer for an integrated unit or curriculum.

Step 3 Described individual and group assignments

Students were divided into working groups, but each student assumed responsibility for a particular questions or area of research and began the investigation process. In this action research, 50 students were divided into 12 groups that consisted of four to five students. Urban theme was divided into 12 sub themes such as unusual subject matter, abstract, violence, gender, homosexual, crime, pollution, nude and sex, culture, cityscapes.

Step 4 fasilitated student to critisize photographs

Lecturer acted as facilitator and helped students to arrange format follow Barrett's model criticism. Students filled the format from subject matter, medium, form, denotation, connotation, style, comparing and contrast, internal and external source of information. Filled the format will be for the first time for Tarumanagara students, and they needed to be assisted and explained during course, discussion, and presentation.

Step 5 assisting student to combine data and discuss sub theme

As a fourth step, students reconvened in their groups to discuss the information gathered, and refined their questions and research strategy. Hence, students were self-directed while learning in a cooperative environment. These steps might be repeated several times inside or outside class until the groups feel that it arrived at a reasonable conclusion. Lecturer facilitated the process when they sorted photos, filled the Barrett's model format, cooperation, assisted student with questions to focus on problems.

Step 6 provided feedback and summative evaluation

At the final stage, students presented their research in a manner authentic to the nature of the problem, for example through a presentation to a panel with power point. The final presentation served as assessment of students learning although self-assessment was embedded in the process as students reflected on their own progress throughout the research experience. Lecturer provided feedback during student's presentations. Also we gave pre and post test and showed five photos with questions; (1) What do you see? ; (2) What does it mean? (3) What is the punctum of the photos?

AN ILLUSTRATION OF PBL IN THE VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN IN TARUMANAGARA UNIVERSITY

Problem based learning had never used in Visual Communication Design in Tarumanegara University, only medical school started to use PBL this year. The program involved fifty students in fifth semester which were selected from one out of four classes. For this particular programme, I did not select student which classified as gifted and talented. Therefore, the fifty student represented the two hundred students. This action research was to answer the research questions. The designs of problem based learning models in the first cycle was created as follows (1) prepared the learning materials and gave urban theme as a problem, prepare Barrett's model criticism for delivery and assignments (2) delivered materials and assessments, presented problems and brainstorming (3) described individual and group assignments (4) facilitated student to interpret photographs (5) supervised student to combine data and discussed sub theme (6) provided feedback and summative evaluation.

Step 1 prepared the learning materials

Prepared theme as a problem- Although Indonesian are multicultural, but most Tarumanegara students came from similar background which came from trade families, Chinese descent, middle class, and most of their parents were high school diploma. Most of them did not have a good general knowledge to know contemporary issues such as feminist movement, global warming, social issues etc. Therefore a good theme as a problem was necessary to improve students knowledge. This program chose urban as a photo theme, required students to act as art critics as they conducted research on fifty photographers who made the urban theme. Their research used aesthetic exemplars in the form of a modern and post modern photographers. These photographs were the works of art which, in the opinion of art critics, represented the highest standard of aesthetic quality (Johansen, 1979).

Prepared Barrett's criticism model for delivery and assignments- This delivery materials were taken only 20-30 minutes per 90 minutes meeting times. We prepared the format from

subject matter, medium, form, denotation, connotation, style, comparing and contrasting, photographic position in history of photography followed Barrett's criticism model.

Student activities

Students tried to find photos from internet and practiced to fill in the Barrett's model format. The format started from subject matter, form, medium, denotation, connotation, style, comparing and contrasting, photographic position in history of photography.

Step 2 delivered materials and assessments, presented problems and brainstorming

Fifty photographers took urban theme as one of their projects. The students acted as photo critics or art critics who evaluated work by fifty photographers. The student made presentation in their final project. My colleague presented the problems and served as facilitator who was in charge of his class. After he introduced the problems, my colleague led the student in brainstorming activity using the questions in Barrett's criticism model to generate the questions on which to direct their research. The brainstorming questions were as follows; what did I see? What did it mean? What was the subject matter? What was the relation amongst the subject matter? What was the form? What was the medium? What was the style? What was the difference between one photo and others? Who made this photo? Why the photographers made these photos? Who influenced the photographer? etc.

Students activities

Students made questions from photos in order to focus on a problem. One photo from controversial Bennetton's advertising showed a young African soldier holding a human femur behind his back with a Kalashnikov hanging from his shoulder. This photo made students make questions; Why the soldier hold a bone? What type of bone was this? Why the bone was big and white colour? One of the students gave a good discussion although you had different colour skins, but your bones had the same white colour.

Step 3 describe individual and group assignments

The teacher helped the students to prioritize the questions and refined their list to 12 areas for investigation;

- Why the photographer took religion symbol?
- Why the photographer took unusual subject matter?
- Why the photographer took abstract pictures?
- Why the photographer took violence as a theme?
- Why the photographer took gender as a theme?
- Why the photographer took homosexual persons?
- Why the photographer took crime as their theme?
- Why the photographer took pollution as his/her theme?
- Why the photographer took nude and sex?
- Why the photographer took culture as his/her theme?
- Why the photographer took humorous pictures?
- Why the photographer took city scapes?

The students were divided into working groups, but each student was responsible for area of research, and investigated one photographer in urban's sub theme. The lecturer divided up the research questions among each group. Each group and individual gave a progress report on the results of their research at a subsequent session.

Student activities

-clarified the assignment and defined the problem

After receiving the assignments, student asked about the assignment. They work together to find photographer's data from internet and books. They interpret the photos and fill the result to the format.

-Chose friend and divided assignment in groups

Students were free to choose their friends but most of them had already been a good friends since two years ago. Therefore they had no problems in working together. They made their individual assignment and combined in one presentation in power point programme.

Step 4 facilitated student to criticize photographs

The lecturer was tasked with facilitating students to evaluate data, sorting photos, and checking the format.

Student activities

-found information

Although the photography books were limited in library, but student could browse through internet. One of the students found problems to sort Carrie Mae Weems who took more than one theme. Carrie was photographer who made racial, gender, politic, and self identity themes. Student found difficulties to sort between racial and gender photos because those themes were seldom discussed in photography course.

-sorted photos followed sub theme: after sorting photos, student found information about photographer's biography, social and culture, and other critics opinion.

-filled the format

Students were encouraged by the lecturers to add their opinions in the format. If there were no critics on photographers or student could not find the data, students had to add their opinions on the photos.

Step 5 assisting student to combine data and discuss sub theme

The information consisted of photographer biography's and photography criticism which could be found in books, exhibition catalogues, art magazines, photography magazines. and the popular press. Unfortunately, most students had only looked from the internet and books. Student were not familiar with racial discrimination of african americans, and gender issues photographs. Therefore lecturer assisted student to sort photos, combined data, dan discussed sub theme.

Student activities

-group discussion inside and outside class

Most of the groups discussed two and three times outside class. One of the groups had seldom discussed outside class, and they did not improve their learnings. They could work together quite well because they knew each other, and they stayed in the same class since two years ago.

-combined individual assignments in one format for group presentation

After 2-3 times discussion outside class, the students combined in one format which followed Barrett's criticism model.

Step 6 provided feedback and summative evaluation

Each student presented in power point presentation although they made presentation in group. One of the students in group made the conclusion about their presentation. Lecturer provided feedback and summative evaluation during these final presentations. Lecturers facilitated the discussion, especially in gender and environmental issues.

Student activities

-individual and group presentation and discussion in class

Each student used 4-5 photos for presentation and the last person in the group tried to compare and contrast amongst the photographer who took the same sub theme. The group presentation started at the fourth meetings and it last until twelfth meetings. In the first action research cycle, step one through step six took around seven weeks, but in the second cycle, the process took five weeks from step five through step six.

THEME AFFECT PBL IMPLEMENTATION

Two most important steps were step 1 and step 6. Step 1 selected the theme as a problems was important because photographers developed theme with various styles. One theme or sub theme could be shown with various subject matter, photo techniques, form, and different designs and various styles. Test results and observations showed that the students had difficulties to responds fine art, still life's, cityscapes and abstract, however, they found easy to respond human documentary or journalistic. Looking at their backgrounds and pre test, most students lived in big cities such as Jakarta but they did not know contemporary's theme issues such feminism and global warming. It means there was learning step to appreciate pictures. I recommended to select the photo theme follow the history of photography. Theme which was developed by modernist photographers such as still life, landscape and portrait should be given in basic photographic course; therefore, students could learn photographic maestro who developed the themes. Postmodernist themes should be given in the advanced course.

The format of Barrett's criticism model helped the lecturer and students to present photo theme's in systematic ways during the course. If students wanted to evaluate the theme of the photos, students had to know the biography's of photographers, history of photograph, form, principle of design and styles. Most students could describe subject matter, form, denotations and connotations, but they found difficulties in describing the styles of photographs. They found easy with external context of photographs because they could find the information from the internet. The benefit of using Barrett's criticism models was to make the student knew the interdisciplinary between art and other disciplines.

Step 6 becomes important because students presented their ability to criticize photos. Each student from each group presented the sub-theme. Student's presentation and feedback were assumed to be one of the biggest factors for students to improve their learning outcomes. Also the interviewed showed that the discussion outside the class helped to overcome the limited course time for fifty students. From all the results, PBL process could be influenced with the way lecturer and students chose the theme of photographs. If the lecturers used all abstract and fine art photos, the PBL would be difficult to be implemented. In other way, if the lectures used all documentary photos, so the themes would be too easy. PBL methods made the students more active and learned new way of learning. Theme such as religion symbols raised many questions during student's presentation. Students dare to argue or give comments when we showed controversial pictures such as Andres Serano photographs. This study also showed that some students were offended by Serano's work on religion symbols. The requirement to be a good facilitator in this research was to comprehend history of arts. Selecting a theme or identifying problems should be student's task; however, lecturer helped to chose the photographers who made the same sub themes, and place the photographers under the sub theme.

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