

ABSTRACT

It may be difficult for some design professors to realize that not all students approach design in the same manner that they had, perhaps for decades. The students may favor other, perfectly valid approaches and it would be helpful for the professor to understand how and why students favor one approach over another.

Three primary research questions guided this inquiry; 1) How do students describe how they approach design? 2) What approaches do they prefer and why? 3) How can faculty help them to become more comfortable and confident designers?

Since design is a complex and multifaceted task a qualitative research methodology was used which allowed for the exploration of the research questions from multiple directions. This research followed the phenomenological paradigm that "describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon." (Cresswell 1998, 51). Kevin Lynch's seven approaches to design (Lynch 1971) were used as a theoretical foundation. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed. A stylized coding form was developed to guide the qualitative inquiry. Member checks were also used to validate the findings.

Results indicated that students tend to use several approaches and that they varied with the circumstances. The research also discovered that students who tended to favor a single approach were often frustrated and confused. Consequently, it is important for professors to understand that students will often use multiple, perfectly valid approaches when solving a design problem.