



# Conversation pieces: talking about artefacts in design education

Dr Arlene Oak

Alberta College of Art and Design, Canada  
<avo@shaw.ca>

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Although design practice results in autonomous artefacts, during the process of design there are many occasions in which the artefact does not stand alone, but rather is interpreted, assessed, and debated through talk. The interaction between talk and objects is particularly significant in design education, where students use talk to explain and account for their objects. This paper uses the micro-sociological method of Conversation Analysis to analyse the talk of University-level, product-design students as they interact during the critique or 'crit'. Through asking 'how do student designers use talk in relation to their objects?' this paper explores the importance of artefacts as communicative devices that help students express forms of knowledge and a range of perceptions.

The discussion of objects in the crit allows student designers to present and account for the nature of their artefacts, but in so doing, students also express aspects of their self-perception and their ideas of what is needed or wanted by others - the hypothetical users of their objects. The artefacts thus become locations around which past, present, and future interactions and actions accrue. Through the relationship between the materiality of the objects and the interactions and actions that they stimulate, the artefacts accumulate personal, professional and social meanings.

The issue of how communication involves and surrounds artefacts in design education is significant because it is during design education that students are introduced to artefact-related behaviours (including talk) that are considered appropriate for design professionals; thus what students learn in design education about the roles of artefacts, and how to communicate these roles in talk, will impact upon their future lives.

In summary, this paper uses a micro-sociological perspective to explore artefacts in relation to talk in the context of the tertiary-level design education crit. This paper's enquiry into, and analysis of, aspects of the talk that relates to artefacts reveals these objects to be significant mediators between individual perceptions and representations of others; together such perceptions and representations contribute to ongoing conceptions of what constitutes the professional practice of design.