

# On the Teaching of “Animated Character Design” Course

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the teaching methods of animated character design. Starting from the analysis of teaching status, it explores diversified teaching modes, focuses on grasping and improving students' ability of animated character design, and tries to summarize the innovation of teaching methods, and hopes to have more far-reaching guiding significance for future animation teaching.

**Keywords:** Character design; Teaching reflection

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Animated character design is the preliminary work of animation creation and plays a very important role in animation creation<sup>[1]</sup>. Creating the characters of an animation is like the written (language) description of the characters in a novel or the arrangement of actors in a movie. Therefore, animated character design is an important course in animation education and teaching. This course aims to enable students to have a certain understanding of the concepts, artistic features, and styles of animation styling through learning, to analyze and recognize the impact of different regional and cultural backgrounds on the style of character design, to have a basic understanding of the production methods of character design, to try a variety of other styles of character design such as realism or cuteness, and to use different expression techniques to complete modelling design based on different scripts.

At present, students majoring in animation have studied basic art courses such as sketching and color in the early stage, but the purposiveness is not strong, which leads to a lack of expressive power among students in portraying the dynamics of characters, and that more importantly, during the process of designing characters, students generally have no way to start, scrape together resources and design characters that lack personality and imagination. As students' creative ability gradually weakens, their interest also decreases. So, regarding how to enhance their enthusiasm for learning and better achieve course objectives, the author combines his own teaching experience to share a few insights:

## 1. Use Diverse Teaching Methods to Stimulate Learning Interest

We often say that “interest is the best teacher”. In the usual teaching, teachers should take a variety of teaching methods to optimize the classroom setting, mobilize the enthusiasm of students, and stimulate their interest in learning. Simple learning of theoretical knowledge is easy to make students feel boring and lack of concentration in class. In class, teachers can use more slides to teach theoretical concepts, add more examples to the theory, and enrich theoretical knowledge with examples to make theoretical knowledge easier to understand. They can also choose some animation clips with unique art style for students to enjoy. Most students love to watch cartoons, and some classic and well-known animated character cases can make students feel a sense of identity, which can immediately arouse their interest in the class content. In teaching, students should be the main body. Teachers should not only teach blindly in class, but also interact with students. Teachers can raise corresponding questions according to the content and examples, discuss and summarize those questions with students, and guide students to take the initiative to join the class, which enlivens the classroom atmosphere and cultivates students' learning interest. After class, teachers can assign some homework to help students consolidate the class content. The homework content can be interesting, such as designing an animated image for themselves or their families and friends, or designing an animated image for their favorite celebrities by referring to some Celebrity animations, such as “Happy Station”, “World Celebrity Stories”, Star Animation MVs, etc., which may better stimulate students' creative desires.

## 2. Emphasize Practice Over Theory to Improve Painting Skills

There are similarities and differences between animated character design ability and traditional painting ability. The similarities lie in the understanding and expression of structure of character design, the grasp and expression of colors. However, they have unique

requirements in imagination, performance, and other abilities.

Animated character design is the first basic course that undergraduates majoring in animation need to learn in their freshman year. The main reason is that many students only learn some basic courses of fine arts before entering the university. Even many freshmen have never been trained in sketch up before entering the university, and many of their impressions of animated character design remain in American and Japanese animated character design. Therefore, strengthening students' basic training in animated character design is particularly important for the smooth progress of subsequent animation design courses. And schools are important places for education and training. All kinds of teaching forms need to be explored in schools in a practical way to realize the teaching purpose in practice.

In order to carry out the subsequent teaching smoothly, it is necessary to quickly improve the students' basic practice in animated character design, and focus on the practical practice of character design ability in teaching. In order to accelerate the improvement of students' character design ability, the first task is to strengthen students' understanding and expression of the structure of character design, and choose the content of training reasonably. One of the most effective teaching methods is copying and sketching. Copying is very effective for students to grasp the laws of animated character design, and it is also a convenient and effective teaching method, which has become a very important teaching link in the teaching of animated character design. However, copying also has certain shortcomings, which will cause students to be idle in thinking and only copy the models mechanically in the process of copying. Therefore, in the teaching of copying, it is necessary to guide students to think correctly, let them understand the value and significance of copying, let them copy the models with questions and purposes, let them fully accumulate their own knowledge base of animated character design after in-depth understanding of different fine arts and artistic styles displayed in various animation films, and let them constantly summarize the characteristics, forms of expression, styles and artistic language of animation images to find out the rules, and establish their own design style and concept. In addition to copying, students can also be trained in sketching. Although many animation character designs are exaggerated and somewhat detached from real-life images, their fundamental design foundation still comes from reality. In addition to the above methods, through the teacher's demonstration, the relevant knowledge points are emphasized in the demonstration, and students are encouraged to practice, and targeted guidance is constantly given to students while students practice, and students' ability to capture the shape of things is cultivated through such training methods.

The second is innovative capability in Design. Most students' design scope is too narrow, which is basically similar to the Japanese style. Therefore, students should have a certain sense of design, expand their design ability by analyzing, comparing and learning the styles of character design, and strengthen their innovative ability by describing details. For example, in China, the United States and Japan, the three countries have great differences in the style of character design. Most of the animated characters in the United States have the characteristics of typical European and American people, that is, most positive characters have rectangular or circular faces with three dimensional facial features. The men are tall and powerful, and the female figure is sexy and round. Most of the villains have triangular faces to reflect their treacherous and cunning personality, while their deformed or twisted body movements express their negative emotions. Japanese animations pursue aesthetic characters, and focus on depicting characters' clothing, headgear, etc., and emphasize the beauty of animated visuals. Mostly of the characters have oval face, larger eyes and a slender figure, and have fewer movements. The overall style is cute, gorgeous, and beautiful. The ink wash style is a major feature in the style of character design in Chinese animation. Its style of character design forms a unique style, which absorbs traditional Chinese painting techniques and applies lines to the extreme<sup>[2]</sup>.

As an art work that integrates imagination, creativity and designers' concept, animated character design needs to be combined with outstanding imagination on the basis of reality. In the initial stage of teaching, teachers need to let students quickly cross the threshold, let students understand the significance of this course, grasp the students' interest points, and stimulate students' interest in this course in order to achieve the purpose of stimulating students' creativity and imagination in the learning process. At the same time, in the teaching process, it is not only necessary to introduce the basic concept, artistic characteristics and style categories of animated character design, but also to train them to develop imagination and stimulate creative thinking.

On the basis of the above theories, through a large amount of structural training, students will continue to grow by imitating excellent works, discover the general rules of animated character design, accumulate their own creative experience, and design works with their own style. In this way, we can achieve the teaching purpose of animated character design.

### **3. Establish A Study Group to Establish a Learning Atmosphere in Which Students Promote Each Other**

The number of students in a class is relatively large,the level of ability will be relatively uneven.Some students in the learning process may be afraid of difficulties.It is not enough to rely solely on the power of the teacher to help students.So,at the beginning of the class,the teacher can discover some students with strong learning ability and good painting level,set up a study group,and let the students in the study group play a pioneering role to assist the teacher,help other students,encourage other students in class practice time or spare time,and achieve common progress.In a semester,the teacher can also organize one or two small animation design competitions to evaluate in groups to cultivate students'sense of responsibility and collective honor.It is believed that the learning atmosphere of the class will be very high,and some students with low enthusiasm will also consciously learn.At this time,the teacher should spend more energy to pay attention to these students,affirm and praise their progress,comment on their works from various angles,and guide them to study harder and further improve themselves.

All in all,teaching should not only implement teaching plans and teaching plans in a single way,but should constantly innovate and adopt new teaching methods to achieve teaching objectives.Teaching and learning are common communication activities between teachers and students.It is worth our continuous research and exploration how to achieve harmony and unity between effective“teaching”and students' independent“learning”<sup>[3]</sup>and better realize teacher-student interaction and student-student interaction.

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