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Design Critique Innuendos in Architectural Education (Study on Impacts of Parallel-Critical thinking)



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Abstract: *Design studio work environment is also contributed emphatically by the general practice of design critiques, which can have repercussions and ponders heavy on students' emotional health, otherwise known as 'Juries'. Students work is propagated in universities academic scenario where design work of students is evaluated by experts and design instructors. A study is conducted to enhance the experience of design juries in a more collaborative and constructive parallels, exploring the quantum of critical thinking to retribute learning based on dialogue and positive criticism.*

Keywords: Design Critique, Architectural Education, Dialogue, Critical and Parallel Paradigms

Introduction

As reflected in (task force of AIAS of 2008); American Institute of Architecture Students, "Towards an evolution of Studio Culture" that a vision of studio culture is proposed where a holistic and broader implications are considered for students considering their professional career and how to instill a hope for striving and grueling students of design studios that reframe their mind sets for a higher platform in professional and academic arena. As per an academic survey conducted by the task force in 2007 and 2008 based on detailed data collection reviewed the expectations of students on new frame culture policies that endured a response by the students, faculty and administrators which

included alternative work ethics of students that create less stress on students; for instance focusing on time management and rearranging critique strategies to avoid late night practices effecting students health negatively, also critiques to be less confrontational and more engaging with students so to have a more supportive productive feedback, creating ethos of reverence for diverse ideas through constructive critiques

As emphasized in (Design Juries on Trial by Kathryn H. Anthony 1991) that design jurors being the basic conductor of the students project reviews can be sometimes confusing for students due to poor communication of jurors only acting as the aggressor projecting only

negative elements of students work causing anxiousness and disbelief, labeling design juries to be destructive criticism, rather than to formulate an argument that creates a balance of thoughts for students in process of improvement. Exceptions to some cultures, studios of Institutes are open 24 hours contrary to the limited hours, “While no one is forcing students to stay up all night, the current studio subculture encourages it. Studios are usually accessible 24 hours a day and well-meaning professors sometimes offer criticism so late in the process that students must stay up” (Kathryn H. Anthony 1991). suggesting a balance of a healthier student lifestyle needs to be acquired rather than suffering their health and positive state of mind which is stress free.

(Task force of AIAS, 2008), American Institute of Architecture Students, mentions; one will find that cultural predisposition in architecture as a subject must be greater than the sum of its parts meaning that architectural education must bring about an idea of a broader spectrum to students. That studio learning has parallels that coincide while designing, these parallels consist of cultural and social semiotics and phenomenological connotations offered in fragmented physicality of context and fictional impressions that make the studio design pedagogy an exciting virtue for lateral concepts of problem solving.

Motivational Parallels:

Architecture education is referred to be didactic due to its submissive impression of students in design studio learning, as in contrary it should set prolific interactive and proactive learning standards in education projecting that design education is process oriented and not merely product oriented (Hassanpour, B. 2013). The critical and parallel thinking paradigms in architectural education are imperative to be addressed in studio critiques as well as in pedagogy, where teachers emphasize on how to make students think creatively in design, on lateral terms of social and problem-solving realms in architecture studios. In (Edward De Bono’s Parallel Thinking – 1995) explains the impacts of negative criticism and why the word ‘criticism’ projects a negative connotation as the concept of Western thinking projects the word

as an attack rather than a constructive analysis or judgment, adapted from Socrates method of criticism which suggests clearing false assumptions to put forward better ideas as narrated ‘like a weeding process that is necessary for a neglected garden’ (Parallel Thinking – 1995), a rather direct or aggressive approach to criticism. De Bono suggests that instead of steadfast criticism, a more constructive thinking approach is adaptable and even recognizes that creative thinking or abstract thinking is ranked higher in evaluating process of narratives and design methods. Also developing new ideas within new paradigms is not easy to fit it into old paradigms, recognizing that simple criticism cannot develop new strategies for problem solving and parallel thinking approach does not require harsh judgment of wrong and right as in Socratic system but to recognize multiple possibilities of innovation and engagement reviewed as a collaborative exercise.

The word ‘Possibility’ as proclaimed by De Bono is a strong benchmark in design thinking process where multiple ideas or solutions are put down, side by side/ parallel to enhance the concepts of expanding thought process and abstract thinking amongst students and not be fixated to preconceived and rigid concepts. It is not sufficient to merely encourage innovation in student design projects, we must encourage loud/abstract thinking and nurture risk taking to promote experimentation of alternative teaching methods to address creatively the critical issues facing architectural education. Critiques must give positive aspects to design along with negative connotations explained by Goldberger, claiming that critiques are interpretations for helping students to evaluate architecture for its significance and not for its accompaniments, thus developing a process of criticism to understand multiple aspects that affect architecture and empower it (Quirk, V. 2012).

Critical Consciousness- verdict on studio environment:

The relationship of design Instructor (faculty) with students holds a key perspective to be comprehended in a learning environment, as stated in the celebrated book; (Pedagogy of the

Oppressed by Paulo Freire 1970), Donald Mecedo emphasizes in introduction of the book republished in 2000, that learning involves theorizing regarding shared experience in dialogue process between teacher and student; since this will bring about an epistemological curiosity amongst students which creates a logical reasoning and provides intellectual skills that enables them to better comprehend ideas based on abstract and critical thinking. Also stated that the overindulgence in technological conformities has also led to a risky factor of quick emergence of a new “culture of silence” rather than to become a culture or practice of freedom. “Freedom to create, to construct and to wonder and venture, this freedom requires that the individual be as active and responsible, not a slave or a well-fed cog in a machine” emphasized by Freire. Through constructive dialogue, which is reciprocal in nature, as witnessed in our current scenario of educational environments students are preoccupied with mobile/applications gadgets rather than being engaged physically and mentally with one another. Epistemological relationship of encouraging dialogue is well quoted by Freire “dialogue is a way of knowing and should never be viewed as a mere tactic to involve students in a particular task”. “I engage in dialogue because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing”.

Kenneth Frampton on critiques on Architectural schools explains how the coexisting culture of faculty and students can be changed as a discussion rather than an argument between juror/instructor and student, changing the idea of student presenting like a ‘sales pitch’ leading to harsh criticism and negativity but instead to understand and put forward a meaningful understanding of the subject giving constructive resolution to ideas than to just create abstract confusion. (ARCHI-CULTURE, A Documentary on Architecture Education).

If we depart ourselves from shallow stereotype of judging individuals based on appearance and impressions and accept difference amongst the

next than it can be comprehended that appearances are deceiving in most cases, and it becomes imperative to adapt and comprehend with students more troubled in design solutions or too shelved and shy to be expressive verbally and in artistic expression considering students multiple family backgrounds and multicultural origins. Teacher and student relationship in a studio environment is also characterized as students being the “containers” into “receptacles” to be filled by the teacher (Pedagogy of the Oppressed- 1970), narratives that are given by instructors based on a one-way traffic and not two way which is a give and take process of learning through reciprocity. The education system becomes a process of depositing, where teachers are the depositors and the students as depositories instead of having a relationship based on communication and mutual understanding. A teacher once asked me that ‘how come I and some of the other students do not have or try to develop a relationship of friendship with the teachers outside the realm of an institute? to which I replied that student’s relationship with teachers is primarily based on a grading system and mostly that of a constant receiver than a giver with no reciprocity. Also phrased that students cannot develop “critical consciousness” (Paulo Freire 1970), based on just as a receiver since they have accepted a passive role, so for them to be “transformers” in this world or to be more precise; become visionary thinker who make strong decisions on their own and create examples as leaders of society rather than just followers.

Methodology:

An experimental process was initiated related to the emotional well-being of students that reflected on the pedagogy of architecture design studio exploring the relationship between instructor and students leading to concepts of adaptability in pedagogy. Experiment was conducted in 2023, by means of interviews and surveys at 3rd and 4th year level design studios at the Department of Architecture, University of Engineering and Technology Peshawar, Pakistan.

Experiment conducted to review the emotional

response towards studio environment:

To comprehend the relation between students and instructors and explore the concepts of dialogue and sharing particularly during the process of design reviews and critiques, an alternate approach is adapted in response to traditional Panel Juries/ Presentation technique committed in most architecture design studios of universities, following techniques were adapted to experiment design critiques.

Open Dialogue review:

The first format suggested one on one session between design studio instructors and students and the grievances open response to one another's questions. This open dialogue created between design instructors acting as a friend or a communicator rather than a tutor on high pedestal, shed some weight on acceptance to students' perception and students opening to instructors on an emotional level regarding design interventions and design critiques which holds a major impact on students' mental health to physical wellbeing in a design studio. The emotional values in Maslow's Hierarchy of needs explains the proficiency of love and belonging to self-actualization to be a higher need in psychological connotations as compared to physiological and other safety needs (A Theory of Human Motivation, A.H. Maslow, 1943). This counseling session between studio instructor and students kept from outside of the boundaries of studios was effective to analyze the passive means of learning and communication between students and design instructors.

Peer Evaluation:

The second format of experimentation was to conceive the student – instructor relationship based on peer evaluation or group critiques of studio projects, where students would shed light on each other's works. Smaller groups are created amongst students based on agreed criteria to critique one another, facilitated by the instructor in peer evaluation. As compared to desk critics where critical feedback is given to student's design process to develop problem solving skills, as studio instructor evaluates the student's design process by reviewing the

student's preliminary drawings, doodles and three-dimensional study works, leading to Interim and Final critique and juries' sessions (A Comprehensive Learning of Architecture Education' Utaberta. N, Hassanpour. B. pg. 22,23. 2013).

Desk Critique:

Third format was in relation to critiques of students work in studio projects to a more subtle approach were practiced creating a less stressful environment for students, also bringing out the shy students out of their shell to participate creating significance and compassion or empathy in design critiques. This approach led to critiquing projects with multiple instructors, one on one or with a group of students in a desk/table format calling it the 'desk critique' where students do not display/pinup their work but present in an informal studio class format of siting and discussing the project, trying to create an informal yet analytical approach of passive discussion between externals/ jurors and student and multiple instructors with students. As referred in detail surveys conducted in the research paper; (Happiness in University Education, Grace Chan, Paul W. Miller and MoonJoong Tcha, pg. 38,39, 2005) suggests that enhancement of students' satisfaction should be a high priority in Universities policies, adaptable workloads, time management to reduce stress levels and encouraging good peer relations.

Instructor variable:

In continuation to peer and desk critics, evaluation similar approach but with multiple expert faculties was also conducted to critique the works of students in a group format or individually, other than the instructor of that studio. This practice created a unity of ideas amongst students and gave a wide array of ideas and solutions and guidance to students rather than a single instructor's guidance for the whole semester.

Silent Critique:

The other format titled as the 'silent critique' was experimented where student's design projects were displayed in a formal presentation format where students do not have to present the

project verbally, instead the juror/reviewer takes a silent critique of work displayed by observation of the presentation panels and giving written and verbal remarks to students. Students are present in the critique in case the reviewer/ juror needs to ask direct questions or begin an open discussion with the students, here jurors are displayed as a curator of work. In some cases, the design display panels do not display student's names for unbiased feedback from jurors, also the silent critic mode creates a less stressful environment for students and can be constructive in many scenarios of judging design projects.

Multi-tasking to minimizing tasks:

Strategy was based on combination of peer and multi facilitators/ Teachers task evaluation a

criteria based tasks for evaluations in design studios with short tasks and short spanned critiques dividing a project of four to five weeks into short segments to facilitate students and manage time and stress levels contributed by design and theoretical courses in one semester, resulting in total final target was achieved in a longer span of time divided in weeks' time. Studio Tasks in one studio were based on quick ending tasks in one day to give students relief for other extracurricular activities other than academics which play an integral role in student's intellectual and emotional development.

Findings to review the emotional response towards studio environment in critiques:

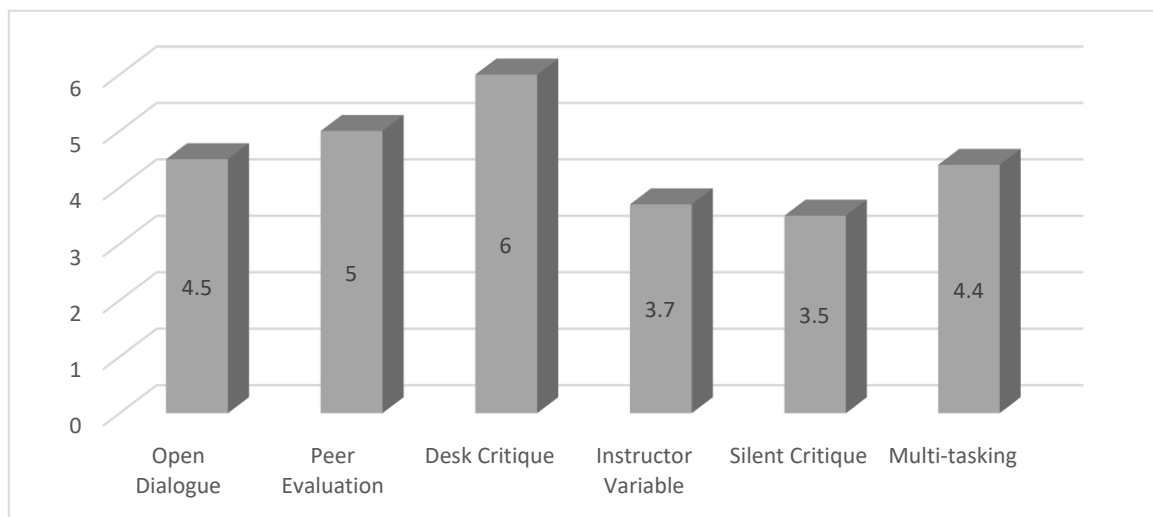


Figure: 1. Opinions of students as per survey conducted, the graph reveals the level of student's fulfillment and understanding of getting better in multiple design task critiques. Five typologies recommended the benefits of each strategy as per student's reviews, suggesting a moderate difference in hierarchy of each experimental approach. The survey projected a purpose of design productivity achieved with levels of satisfaction and emotional response and acceptability to critique techniques.

Survey Connotations:

Open Dialogue:

Dialogue based strategy resulted in a more

cordial reciprocity between the tutor and student, as it proposed through discussion that students were less defensive about the project than in usual panel formal presentations. Thoughtful dialogue-based design review suggested understanding of projects with more clarity and giving open view and multiple dimensions on projects rather to a specific pre-defined solution. The passive means of teaching compared to active one directional preaching as design instructor can have more positive impact on certain students learning process, progressing as a free associative technique to adapt and absorb ideas.

Peer Evaluation:

Peer evaluation traditionally works beneficially

either in group assignments or individual realm on the purpose of serving each other as students in design projects can bring multitude of design ideas and solutions giving an open view to student's stuck or fixated in design particulars.

Desk Critique:

As recommended, this technique proposes a more complimentary approach in conceiving design ideas in collaborative passive approach in studios, where the comprehensive and learning on a more relaxed atmosphere contributes to an integrated design thought process engaging students with multiple instructors. This idea developing technique is beneficial to multiple students in one desk discussion since critiques are reflective in groups of students with individual jurors or instructors.

Instructor Variable:

Instructors' variables were effective but not complimentary in some cases as students were not comfortable with being exposed to too many suggestions, as ending up being confused in design solutions, particularly for students having difficulty in decision making. As some individualistic students with more capacity to take a stance for the project and defend its design justifications in critiques, brought a clearer understanding of their design intentions and in return the process of design became richer and elegant.

Silent Critique:

These critiques suggest an element of suspense and anxiety amongst students since there is no one on one dialogue transfer between the students and the jurors, yet it can bring certain prestige to design process evaluation by having intricate analysis of panels and giving a curators response projecting a non-verbal critique, disconnecting, or keeping minimum mode of conversation in design jury culture.

Multi-tasking to minimizing tasks:

Task management in students design projects played a prominent role since it brought more sanity and less confusion of work overload in student's daily routine. As the tasks were shortened as per minimizing project needs the

juries also became more precise and concise in argument suggesting only constructive points to improve, diffusing emotional tyranny towards students as in some critique cases.

Conclusions:

Emotional hazards are a part of studio environment delirium, as it pervades passionate inauguration that flows invigoratingly in design battles and affairs of human desires 'to be' and 'evolve' as a unique creator, which brings highs and lows of feelings in a competitive and hyperactive nature of design studios. Students having been able to develop self-belief and self-resistance in design environment can cause emotional drawbacks and heartbreaks contributed by workload, design expectations and design juries. Faculty acting as counselors and mentors can balance the extremes of stress and fatigue in students by emphasizing time, stress management, pedagogy of studio design suggesting breathers to pacify hormonal adolescent conundrums.

Architecture students are also masters of procrastination, keeping on pushing limits till it's over or on the edge gives suggestions on individual student's academic performance in a studio culture and their preference to emotionally function within work paradigms. Interactive studio environment promotes an active studio, verbally and in form of sharing gestures, ideas or even jokes and sometimes recommends spaces which prefer a solitude approach to be at peace and not be disturbed and be able to produce and give thought to introspection, since both factors of solitude and intermingling will coexist as part of a studio ethics and models in pedagogy and design critiques.

The subconscious plays an integral role in design ventures for students as it can devalue preconceived notions and bring about purity of design ideas. There is a cerebral phenomenon known as the 'sudden solution' achieved through the process of cultivation of brainstorming (McInerny & McInerny, 1994). The process creates a solution through unconscious mind after an individual has stopped intensely thinking about a particular

problem and the images and ideas stored in the hard disk of the mind, which is the subconscious, starts generating ideas on its own without the conscious effort which is a powerful tool used for many years by creative archetypes. Similar term coined in creative arts is free associative design intent, encouraged through passive means of dialogue by the instructor, which is purely produced on using hand or any medium tool working as a thinking mechanism based on subconscious or unconscious level, developing some of the most imaginative concepts amongst students.

Passive learning and passive preaching can advance a procedure to empower students mentally as it has been frequently practiced in architectural design studios for centuries. Dialogue based critiques by studio instructors can be highly effective in gaining students attention and curiosity since the method suggests teaching in an informal attire of attitude as instructor and student having discussion in a casual manner or configuration outside the class room of studio space, where seating can be in a form of an informal congregation rather than a typical active method; where the teacher is predominately talking and the speech is a one way affair rather than a two way mutual dialogue.

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