Redefining Critique Methods as an Assessment Tools
In Architecture Design Studio

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Abstract: The architectural curriculum has been based on the design studio model which focuses on learning by doing and all processes and procedures of problem solving are transmitting through lectures and critique sessions. The current model in studios is based on ancient model. In some cases the traditional design studio in a school of architecture consists of a teacher telling students what to do and student doing what they are told. This traditional model must be redefined and be made clearer in order to improve both learning and teaching methods. This paper tries to analyze studio types and implemented methods of critique in order to find their weak and strength points and also to identify procedures and tools that can be used to support the studio based pedagogy in architecture.

Key-Words: - critique (crit); design studio; Architecture; assessment tool; evaluation.

1 Introduction

Since the teaching of architecture has been carried into the studios of architecture on beaux-art, teaching of design is realized in many different ways, with the critique session as the backbone of its assessment, in spite of this the assessment system has rarely been subjected to serious critical analysis. Many architectural schools do not establish clear goals or objectives for design juries [1]. And till the domain of design is described as requiring creative thinking more than other abilities, the criteria used in assessment have been ambiguous.

Well designed assessment leads to clear expectations and provides opportunities for students to self-monitor and practice and receive feedbacks[1]. Also understanding of the process of criticism would also allow the students to make demand of the critic instead of being content as a recipient [2].

Designing is a praxis that requires a controlled conduct and the Knowledge of design will transmit to the student through the critiques in the studio so, critique is not a simple lecture given in the class because students listen and imitate the teachers.

What happens within an individual’s mind and what happens between two people may lead to different results. John Hopkins asserts that the used framework for criticism would “move criticism beyond personal preference and I like this/I don’t like this and subjective statements”[3]. The instructors communicate design knowledge within certain frames that can be further classified into specific categories depending on the purpose of the message[1].

In this paper first we take a look on what is going on in design studios and then by classifying the critique methods in different type of studios and explaining each will explore the reasons of dissatisfactions and at the end will give some suggestions to upgrade the existing assessment system.

2 Classification of design studio practice

In current academic courses, design studio education is reflected in homework revision practice. Students and teachers collaboratively develop a design theme, share objectives, ideas, issues and solutions[4].

At the beginning of a semester, a design problem is given to solve till end or in part of the semester. The design problem is given in the form of a brief or program that contains client goals, user requirements, site conditions and other technical information. During the early stages of the design project, students may be asked to participate in doing research on the general issues related to the design problem to be shared with the whole studio class. Also, some lectures from the instructors on various aspects of the problem are often given to the studio class in which a number of design precedents are reviewed and criticized. The studio instructor suggests some revisions in the design that he or she feels will be better in solving a particular aspect of the problem. Following the desk crit, the student is expected to more fully explore and test these options and suggestions by revisiting his or her solution. The studio instructor will then review the outcome of the student’s revised solution suggesting further changes. Concurrent with the formal studio desk critique, students will informally critique each other’s work throughout the
semester, and learn various design skills and drawing and model construction techniques from each other. The solution will present in various evolving forms from sketches to fully developed drawings and models, dimensions and scales of the design problem.

There are different types of design studio applications which can be implemented by the supervisor of design studio. These applications are categorized into four groups according to the critic style and/or given possibilities to the student to be creative and productive.

Fig.1 shows crit type 1, there are eight or twelve students in each group. Students are obliged to take crit from studio supervisor for their design work which studied outside of the studio environment. They sit around a big desk as seen in figure. Frequently the professor manages the discussion so the participation of the students is limited; the communication is under the control of the supervisor.

Fig.2 shows crit type 2, there are eight or twelve students in each group. Students are obliged to take crit from the studio supervisor for their design work studied inside and outside of the studio environment[5]. They are supposed to study their own desks. The studio supervisor gives desk critics, answers questions individually. No discussion takes place in the studio.

Fig.3 shows crit type 3 that the studio work has to be done by a group of students under the supervision of a group of professors. Each professor gives advice to a different student at his/her desk. Thus each student can have different point of view by taking crits from different professors. Generally, there can’t be any class discussion. Each student has to construct his/her own solution to the specific design problem according to the given advice and recommendations.

Fig.4 there is a “frequent jury” system in the studio teaching. A group of professors who are responsible for different student groups come together regularly in the juries. Common jury discussions will be held.

3 Assessment in architecture education

The most important points in assessment of architectural projects are when the critique should add to the process of design and what the best type of critique is for each session, to have best control mechanisms over the design process. Because whenever the critique has imported to the final product of design, designers such as students or architects will show the Defensive behavior so no effective influence will achieve. Analyzing the different implemented critique methods
in, architectural schools lead to classification of the assessment tools in architectural design studios in nine categories.

3.1 Individual critique
One to one discussion tutor and students.

3.2 Formative critique (interim crit)
Crits which usually take place at some interim stage during a project/module before work is submitted for summative assessment. This is the most common form of crit giving students feedback which can allow them to learn to critically evaluate and move forward with their work. It will stop students taking more care to grades.

3.3 Summative Critique (Final Crit)
Critique sessions where grade is given for the work. Researches shows that students often find these crits frustrating as they are not able to act on any feedback given in order to improve the project art/design work. Tutors state that the crit is to teach students how to evaluate and reflect on their work and develop their own critical judgment, not be told what is wrong or right. The purpose of the crit needs to be made clear to students.

3.4 Peer Critique
These are crits run by the students group with the tutor acting as a facilitator. Usually the student group is divided into smaller groups and the group critiques the work of those in their own group or those in another group. Students need to be given agreed criteria to critique against. The tutor as facilitator feeds into the discussion where there may be questions. Peers then may give feedback to the group verbally or often through written comments given to the individual student through nameless sheets. Peers crit can be feedback given by members of the same project/module group or invited students from higher level of the course.

3.5 Group Critique (Expert Crits)
It is the most common form of the crit sessions. Group of students take part in a crit by one or more tutors. These can range in time from a series of short half hour session with a small group of students and tutor to all day session for a large group of students and tutors. Usually students will present their work in front of their tutors and peers and receive feedback which can be from tutors only.

These crits are usually tutor led. Students can see that teachers have variety of perspectives and can have apparently contradictory positions and show disagreement between teachers in crits. This is important since this shows there is not just one true way.

3.6 Public Critique
Where an invited professional from industry or other department is part of the crit panel. Students can give external experience from external perspective and feedback.

3.7 Written Critique (May be Online Form)
The criteria for comments have to discuss before criticizing. This type makes chance to give more explanation on each comment and also makes it easier to think about feedbacks. This can be use in peer’s crit and they will give their idea more honest when they are not in face to face situation. All comments can only be accessed by the individual student and tutor.

3.8 Seminars
These types of crit sessions usually take place around a table in a non-hierarchy situation and this will lead to more participation from shy students and quieter members.

3.9 Panel Discussion
The panel is employed by discussing the projects which are selected randomly or intentionally by the instructors without knowing which student it belongs to. These discussions, which are carried out in a participatory atmosphere, are effective mediums of learning. This format provides feedback to the students indirectly, and avoids the critic to be taken personally. It is preferred at the first stages of the design process in the upper levels of education, which then leaves its place to formal jury. The function of this type of review is specifically important in the beginning of design education since the objective of design studio for beginning students is not limited with experiencing the design, but also providing basic terminology and notions of design [4].

4 Criticism Processes
All of us can remember the first days we were standing in front of our classmates and teacher to present the project which we had spent all last night awake to prepare something good from our opinion. But all feedbacks were consisting of disagreement of the teacher. This situation was predictable; all the past experiences were different from on goings. Lecture classes replaced by design studios and the answer of the questions were not tough before, so there was no expected outcome to the assignments. The tutorial system in design studios is same as master-apprentice. So students learn during a communication. By this way each student will have a chance to express his/her own perceptions and ideas and make a dialogue with experts.
(teacher) and peers and expose him/her self to their judgments.

Elizabeth Meyer (1991) [6] believes that employing criticism in practice has three important contributions to the discipline of architecture. First, it helps to foster a precision of design language. Through describing, comparing, and use of terminology, criticism narrows the possibility for ambiguous interpretations. Second, Criticism creates new ways to think and evaluate. By employing existing theories, which reflect past values, new values and ideas are likely to emerge. Thus, practice as criticism can lead to new directions for approaching design. And finally, Contribution criticism can have for the discipline is to motivate for changes.

But all done researches show that students feel so frustrated and frightened to present their designs in crit sessions in front of looking eyes. And they are worry to belittled and slighted by the peers and jurors. Bringing these senses to crit sessions makes students to just look for the acceptance from the instructors and if it doesn’t happened they feel disappointed and loose other statements and suggestions coming after and just want to know what the exact solution is. Beside this teachers are also unsatisfied by this and they believe that students don’t grasp what they told and act different from what expected.

When the jurors find the discourse fascinating the discussion is only between the jurors and the students didn’t know what the hell was going on. It was entirely uninteresting to them. On the other hand, juries that appear interesting to the students seem boring to jurors, “because it was going over things that may have been old hat to the people on the review, but were new to the students. Remember, each year we have new students. [It’s] very hard to repeat things year after year, but some things may need repeating”[4]. Indeed the evaluating system in architectural education never had classified to things may need repeating[4]. Hence the evaluating system in architectural education never had classified to things may need repeating[4]. Indeed the evaluating system in architectural education never had classified to things may need repeating[4]. Indeed the evaluating system in architectural education never had classified to things may need repeating[4]. Indeed the evaluating system in architectural education never had.

4.1 Listening and seeing

As John Dewey believes the function of criticism is the reeducation of perception of works of art; a difficult process of learning to see and hear, critique starts with active listening to students intentions to understand the process that lead to the invention of that special design. And trying to recognizing the students’ decision making in their drawings and 3 dimensional model by careful looking on them. Professor listening to the student’s verbal description of ideas assisted by sketches and models[7].

4.2 Description

The critic gives verbal account of what one sees and responds to the design. By this the students will understand what others realize from his/her design and compare it with his/her intentions. Three things has affect on how a critic describes a project. First the critic’s own perception, second Different ways of describing and third Sharing different aesthetic experiences.

4.3 Analysis

John Dewey implies that Analysis and discrimination must result in unity. For to be a manifestation of judgment it must distinguish particulars and parts with respect to their weight and function in formation of an integral experience.[7]What is meant is that the critic shall seize upon some strain that is actually there, and bring it forth with such clearness that the reader has a new clue and guide in his own experience. In an architecture jury, analysis may consist of discussing how different elements reinforce the student’s concepts.

Hopkins also says that Analysis should incorporate issues of context, including cultural, historical, geographical, ecological, social, and political context to better understand the work. The process of analysis would allow the opportunity for discussion of differing viewpoints on the project to be exchanged between teachers and students. Criticism is a way of revealing our habits of seeing the cultural and logical frames within which we look at things. Criticism is also a way of seeing things in relationship to other things. That is, it is a way of analyzing the connections between a work and its larger cultural, social, and environmental context[3].

4.4 Interpretation

Hopkins implies that Interpretation helps to explain the meaning of the work, forms, or style, based upon the critic’s own beliefs, culture, and values. Interpretation may also include the critic’s emotional or intuitive response to the work. This step should be adjoining to guidance[3].

4.5 Guidance

The criticism should offer suggestions for future design decision to inform the student. Wayne Attoe believes that The ends of criticism should be beginnings. If criticism does not have a forward looking it will be of little use and in fact of only passing interest.
4.6 Evaluation

By Darracotts’ mind Evaluation is a summing up which places the work in the experience of the critic in order to reveal value or worth total student’s design, and help others to form an opinion[4].

5 Discussion and suggestions

Martha Schwartz, professor at Harvard states that the final jury is almost always going to be anti-climatic. You’ve already done 90% of the learning during the design process. You’ve already been through your struggle, and it’s over by the time you present. The real learning process has already happened. Students often think that they’re going to get this big kick at the end of all this, but I think they’re looking at juries in the wrong way. The jury’s job is not to tell students whether or not their work is good or bad. Instead, their job is to raise issues and make the student think. Rather than evaluation, Schwartz’s ideas of a jury include the purpose of discussion and teaching students to be critical and constantly question existing conventions, experiment, and explore their design ideas. Self-criticism is a behavior a student enacts while creating a design to explore possibilities, and debate ideas inside their own mind[8].

Elizabeth Marie Graham[8] expresses that the stage of evaluation should not occur during a public situation of a jury for a few reasons. First of all, if the purpose of a jury is to be focused upon a discourse between faculty and students, the misconception that a jury evaluates a student’s project should be eradicated by not allowing a verbal evaluation to be a component of the verbal criticism a student receives during a jury. Second of all, instructors admit that a critique of students’ work in a jury happens too quickly and spontaneously to adequately evaluate the students project. She implies that evaluation can occur in two ways after the design jury is over. The written interpretation of the verbal comments would then be given to the student after the jury. This would allow the student to reflect, to consider and analyze the criticism he/she received. This may help the student form a self-evaluation and learn from someone else’s perceptions. Also, a written evaluation of the student’s project from the design instructor could be given to the student after the instructor has had adequate time to review all of the projects. Before giving any frame work for criticizing we have to study about the crit types and their strength and weakness.

5.1 Strength points of used critique in studios

Based on observations and studies we mention some important strength point below:

S1) Crits encourage the teachers to deal with the education of the individual as well as development of portfolio.
S2) everyone gets a chance to see each others’ work. This is important now that students work less in studios, often do not have their own spaces and not suitable spaces e.g. studios filled with tables and chairs or no computer in studio.
S3) Crits improve students confident and get students used to critical judgments on their work. This helps develop skills of critical thinking.
S4) Crits are an opportunity for students to share and learn from one another, and develop their critical awareness.
S5) Crits teach students to think on their own feet and also teach them to prepare for talking about their own work and responding to others, learning where to bluff and when not to bluff.
S6) Crits enable students to learn to benchmark their work, argue for it, acknowledge difficulties and distinguish which advice was appropriate to follow through on.
S7) Enable students to benchmark self against peers
S8) potential for dialogic approaches and understanding the role of different views.

5.2 Problems of used critique in studios

According to students and teachers experience in design studios and their feelings and feedbacks here, we mention some important weak point below:

P1) every crit type, the design process is an educator—centered.
P2) In every crit type there is limited participation and collaboration between students. There is not enough group study to motivate students to be creative and socially satisfied.
P3) Assessment system which focuses on the “end product” makes the process unimportant.
P4) Emotional impact of crit and danger of comparing two students work with each other (It is not fair)
P5) Danger of using difficult language that students do not understand.
P6) Sometimes teachers think they shouldn’t interfere with creative process, so they not saying much at all.
P7) Giving some undefended opinion to students without giving suggestions about what they can do.
5.3 Suggestions
By asserting the strength and weak points of available crit methods we can help to make some effective changes to upgrade the existing system. There are some of the suggestions:

1- Generally in every crit type, the design process is an educator-centered one. Conversely, the design process should be changed into a student-centered process. Because educator-centered activities inhibit students’ creativity and prevent them from doing practice freely.

2- In every crit type there is limited participation and collaboration between students. There is not enough group study to motivate students to be creative and socially satisfied. Dividing help students to learn how to present in front of other students and give more confidence for presentation and also make chance to give some new ideas from students in group to shift their design process to next level.

3- Start with positive critique instead of negative to avoid of some bad effect on students. And don’t use of shock tactics.

4- Implementing dialogic feedback make the students this opportunity to ask questions about meaning of the feedbacks.

5- Using constant jury system in the studio teaching. Spread Studio, 2-3 professors manage the studio operations. The students who are in different academic level and responsible for different project assignment.

6- Using a 'model only' review. That the presentations are limited to models only, with no drawings permitted, to encouraging students to explore a wider range of model-making techniques in order to describe their ideas.

7- The studio has to focus on design process rather than end product. Developed product is recognized as the representative of the process. In evaluating students’ success, the steps taken from the beginning of the process until the end is very important.

8- Four or five major project subjects may be offered in any academic semester. Students can freely choose one major project assignment. Furthermore, they are also responsible for solving the sketch problems, minor assignments, exercises, case studies and etc. throughout the process

9- Offering students a time to sum up and collectively reflect on ideas that were discussed during a jury would reinforce ideas the instructor and students may feel was learned from the jury.

10- Better time management of juries would include limiting the time in which each student has to present his/her ideas and allowing the same amount of time for feedback to each individual project.

6 Conclusion
As Sabol [4] explain architectural design education can be said to fit into the authentic assessment tool rather than the standardized. Authentic assessment does not focus on the factual knowledge as end itself. Rather, it focuses on the ability to use relevant knowledge, skills, and process for solving open ended problems. Another key factor that distinguishes authentic assessment from traditional one is that it provides opportunity for students to integrate many kinds of learning [2]. Some design studio teachers already utilize many of the steps in this process, but without the placement of a label upon the behavior. If a structure and consistency were applied to the criticism they receive, students would be better prepared to give and receive criticism.

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