A theoretical framework of design critiquing in architecture studios

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While critiquing is generally recognized as an essential pedagogical tool in architecture design studios, no systematic attempt has been made to develop a descriptive theory that can account for the complexity of critiquing. Various studies exist that describe the design studio, but many of these provide fragmentary descriptions of critiquing. In this paper, through a review of publications that are concerned with the architecture design studio as well as other areas of design, we identify a basic set of factors that enable us to articulate the variables that affect the practice of critiquing in design studios. Based on these factors, we then propose a conceptual framework that allows studio instructors to systematically plan and examine their critiquing practice.
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The design studio lies at the heart of architectural education. Students devote a tremendous amount of time and academic energy into their studio learning. Many students actually spend most of their time in the design studio, where they work, study, eat, and even sleep (Anthony, 1991; Cuff, 1991). A casual review of any university architecture curriculum will reveal that the studio is the central activity in every architecture student's life.

In most other disciplines throughout the university, lecture classes are the most common mode of teaching and learning. Instructors teach by lecturing, assigning homework, and assessing student performance through tests. The studio is different. Unlike a lecture course, in a design studio, students learn through working on projects, where the students are asked to provide an effective solution to the hypothetical design problem defined by the instructor. Rather than being assessed by tests and homework, students in

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an architecture studio are evaluated through a series of presentations and discussions. Through the processes of working on and presenting their work (often publicly) and receiving feedback from the instructor and classmates, the students reflect on and revise their designs. The instructor—often an experienced architect—provides feedback on student work for the duration of the studio course.

This feedback is called *critiquing*, and it is the predominant way through which architecture students acquire design expertise from their instructors. In light of this, it is remarkable that we lack an in-depth understanding of critiquing in design education. Ochsner (2000) points out:

> There has been surprisingly little examination in depth of design studio as an educational environment. In particular, there seems to be almost complete silence on two questions: (1) the precise nature of the creative process in which students are asked to engage in design studio; and (2) the character of the interaction between students and faculty that would best enhance the students' learning of design. Little is written on how faculty might enhance this interaction or how they might improve the quality of their design studio instruction.

We certainly can find studies about the architecture design studio, and many of these include fragmentary information related to critiquing. We know, for instance, that critiques are an essential pedagogical tool in the design studio, and that critiques are based on the instructor's expertise and professional experiences. However, we also find that theoretically or empirically informed discussions on design pedagogy are uncommon among the instructors of architecture studios.

1 Background

The instructional methods used in the architecture design studio have inherited the historical tradition of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and its atelier model. Moore argues that instructors in architectural studios have followed ingrained conventions through generations without seriously examining the underlying pedagogy (Moore, 2001). While practicing architects no doubt bring a great deal of experience to the studio, their teaching methods are often based only on their own learning experiences or on intuition (Grasha, 1996). They often cannot articulate what instructional method they are using, or is appropriate, for a specific condition.

While we can continue to rely on the instructor's intuition or implicit understanding of critiquing, we suggest that by providing instructors with a systematic means of examining their own critiquing habits and strategies, we can improve the learning experience in the design studio. Our goal, then, is to develop a framework for describing and understanding critiques that take place in design studio. What do instructors do to convey their design expertise and