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# The contributions of workshops on formal interior architecture education

Umut Tuğlu Karşlı<sup>a\*</sup>, Serpil Özker<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Doğuş University, Faculty of Fine Arts&Design, Department of Interior Architecture, Istanbul 34722, Turkey*

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## Abstract

Formal interior architecture education is a design-focused type of discipline. In design education, the only way to learn how to design for students is to experience the design by his/her own. In this context, apart from formal education, informal studies such as workshops have an undeniable contribution for student's design thinking techniques. The purpose of the research is to discuss the contributions of workshops on formal education as an informal learning tool. In this framework, workshops are studied as an informal learning environment and the evaluation of skills gained during the workshops through a survey administered to the participants of two workshops are examined in order to discuss the contributions of workshops on formal education.

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## 1. Introduction

Interior architecture as a design-focused discipline has a complex structure intertwined with the abstract notions. In the modern interior architecture education, in contrary to the traditional sharing of only the concrete knowledge; abstract notions like imagination, intuition, flexibility and creativity come to the forefront. Abstract notions can more effectively be learned through self learning rather than being taught. Likewise, in design education, students acquire to experience the design, which is one of those abstract notions, by his/her own and this is the only way to learn how to design. Design education has a structure that directs the student towards a creative and dynamic process of thinking and “ways of knowing as a designer” (Schön, 1987; Cross, 2006). Today, many researches are about

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +90-216-444-79-97-1942  
E-mail address: [utuglu@dogus.edu.tr](mailto:utuglu@dogus.edu.tr)

developing new and more effective learning methods. According to Ciravoglu (2003), in respect to modern developments, the purpose of the education is that the student and the teacher produce the new knowledge working together. Besides, future predictions based on the rapid improvement in computer technologies show that new concepts in education will dominate the education in the near future and the self learning approach will support the individual to consolidate his/her knowledge and experience with informal education (Ciravoglu, 2003). Similarly, Kahvecioglu (2008) suggests that the complex structure of architectural design education necessitate the use of creative management strategies or organizational processes, both individually and in groups. Formal architectural education is to be structured around compulsory theoretical and studio courses. The integration of unique activities such as informal short-term studies and diverse group organizations into the formal curriculum will provide a more creative atmosphere for the students (Kahvecioglu, 2008). Above-mentioned informal education means extramural education excluding the current system and rules, where there is no hierarchy between the student and the teacher. The common opinion between the circles of architecture education is that the education is not bound to be limited to school or studio. For an architecture student, all environments stand as an observation field, automatically a part of the education environment. Extramural education is a flexible educative environment where the order at school changes and the stern hierarchy of the formal education are aimed to be refrained. (Yurekli&Yurekli, 2004). Some of the informal education environments appear spontaneously while some are pre-defined. Some of these organized informal education systems are workshops, conferences, seminars, exhibitions, excavations and competitions. In architecture education, especially workshops have some outstanding results on experiencing abstract design knowledge and developing design thinking skills, intuitive knowledge and creativity (Polatoglu&Vural, 2012). In this context, the purpose of the research is not to discuss the validity of the formal interior architecture education, rather to assess the contributions of workshops, a type of informal work, to formal education. In this framework, workshops are primarily determined as an informal learning environment, two workshops entitled ‘Cardboard’s Second Life 1&2’ are presented as case studies and finally the evaluation of knowledge, skills and experiences (noted in CIDA Professional Standards 2014) gained during the workshops through a survey administered to the participants are examined in order to discuss the contributions of workshops on formal interior architecture education.

## 2. Workshops as an informal learning environment

The definition of the workshop as an educational tool may well be made like “*an educational meeting where a small group explore some subject, develop a skill or technique, carry out a creative project, etc.*” Workshops are one of the most important informal learning environments which provide an effective short-term training method that can be used in a wide array of settings with an infinite number of topics. (Brooks-Harris & Stock-Ward, 1999). At this point, it will be useful to define the informality and informal learning concept. Formal education means an education system based on a certain curriculum. The purpose of formal education is to teach people the current order and values, standards and judgments pertaining to it. Informality, which aims at going beyond the normal and ordinary, provides an environment excluding the current order and rules where hierarchy is taken down. The most important benefits of informality are motivation, a communicative environment where different ideas come together, expressing oneself individually, and gaining self-confidence. Informality constitutes an important part of design education in terms of assessability of the abstract, immeasurable and unpredictable features of design and supporting a game-environment where flexibility, intuition and common sense come forth (Yurekli&Yurekli, 2004). Workshops are one of the most important systems of organized informal education.

Workshops enable people from different backgrounds, disciplines and schools work together. Workshops can focus on a certain problem as well as more general themes. The purpose is to create alternatives for the solution, to assess the situation in a multi-dimensional approach, to have different points of view and create a discussion environment. The informal nature of the environment supports the intuition to come up without pre-assessment and judgment on ideas as in the example of brain-storming (Ciravoglu, 2003). Creativity is the backbone of design education. Özçer (2005) describes creative environments as organizations that enable the production of knowledge, facilitate learning from experience. The most important distinctive feature of workshops is that it triggers imagination and creativity in an environment distant from restrictive and formal processes (Ciravoglu, 2003). In interior architecture education where creativity has a great place, the "workshop" concept consists of studies that do

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