

World Conference on Educational Sciences 2009

# Problematization of assessment in the architectural design education: First year as a case study

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Received October 25, 2008; revised December 10, 2008; accepted December 7, 2008

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the ways in which studio instructors assess students' design and performance during the basic design studios. Architecture requires a discipline-based education in which design studios have primary place in the curriculum. In design studio education the primary focus of assessment has always been the studio production (i.e. end products of the students). There is a common tendency to neglect students' experience and process of learning during assessments. Furthermore, assessment criteria of the studio instructors may not be explicitly stated.

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*Keywords: assessment, architectural education, design studio, review*

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## 1. Introduction

Design is the most important and characteristics field of the architectural profession. Because of this fact design courses are the most important and central part of the architectural education occupying almost one quarter of the total educational load. (Bunch, M. 1993) The well documented history of the architectural education records various methods of design training. (Cuff, 1998) In these studies few focus on the types, processes, and the role of assessment (Nicol, D. Pilling, S, 2000). Additionally, few research has examined the architectural design education from the perspective of educational sciences (Lindwall, O., Lymer, G., Ivarsson, J., 2008 ) In this paper, we problematize this neglected area and report and discuss the findings of the initial stage of an ongoing research.

## 2. Assessment in Education

Assessment is a general term used to define the measurement of students' progress. For both the instructors and the students, "grades," in whatever format they are, are the ultimate tools used in assessment and acknowledged as

having a decisive role in education. Well designed assessment sets clear expectations, establishes a reasonable workload, and provide opportunities for students to self-monitor, rehearse, practice and receive feedback. (James, McInnis, Devlin, 2002). The crucial point for the instructors is to see assessment as a part of the teaching-learning process rather than a comparison among the students. The other point that should be acknowledged is that as carefully designed assessment contributes directly to the way students approach their study, poorly designed assessment has the potential to hinder learning and distort the path of progress. As such, assessment contributes indirectly but powerfully to the quality of learning. (James, McInnis, and Devlin, 2002)

Assessment in education is needed to inform the students, about their strengths and weakness, what they need to do to improve their practical skills, technical understanding, the quality of their ideas, and their ability to research and realize their intentions (Hickman, 2002 ). In other words assessment in the broadest sense, involves identification of goals and purposes, selection of procedures, methods, and measures, coordination of timing, analysis of data, interpretation of results, and formulation of responses to the results. Of primary importance in any assessment is selection of criteria on which to base the assessments. (Dorn, Madeja, and Sabol, 2004) Additionally, teachers/instructors need to know and judge the effectiveness of their teaching students' parents need to know the attainment and progress of their children and to understand how to support their learning, and finally other instructors also need to monitor students' progress across the curriculum. (Rayment, ed., 2007 )

Comparing our review of the literature and our observations of different architectural design education environments in Turkey, we argue that there is a lack of concern for the role of assessment in the education. Although teaching and assessment experience are inseparable from each other in the design education, instructors rarely use assessment as a positive learning strategy. Students may feel perplexed after receiving their grades at the end of design evaluations and feel lost within the discrepancy of statements while their work is discussed by the instructors and the grades given by them.

### **3. Operation of the Architectural Design Studio**

Architectural design studios are educational environments that professional education and art education is conducted jointly. Additionally, these studios are premised on a particular kind of pedagogy defined as “learning by doing”. Students are asked to start designing before they know what designing incorporates. These studios are typically organized around projects of design in manageable scales, individually or collectively undertaken by the students, and, depending on the year of education, simulating the actual practice as closely as it can be.

In terms of the dialogue between the instructors and the students, and the evaluation and assessment types, architectural design studios have developed their own ritualistic pedagogies, such as design reviews, desk (individual) crits, and design juries, all attached to a core process of learning by doing. And because studio instructors must try to make their approaches to design understandable to their students, the studio offers privileged access to designers' reflections on designing. It is at once a living and a traditional example of a reflective practicum (Schön, D., 1987). Design studio learning embraces numerous forms of representations, such as: visual, verbal, tactile, written, and is therefore rich in communication potential. It also sometimes involves students working in groups, and so it is arguably rich in team working potential (Nicol, D., Pilling S., 2000).

The literature suggests that there are common problems related with the design studios that are implemented all over the world. We content that the foundation of these problems is grounded in the experience of assessment. Wilkin summarizes the problems related with the design jury/review in three different categories: 1. Large student groups that school of architecture host prevents accessibility of the discussion material. In other words distance from the action is one of the main problems of reviewing processes. 2. Extended review hours create weariness from mental exertion. Large groups enlarge waiting time. As a result students feel that they have had insufficient tutorial time or tutor interest. 3. Finally cultural traditions of how the review is run impose their own constraints on learning (Wilkin, 2000).

These problems can also be considered in between the problems of assessment in architectural education due to the nature of design discipline. It is necessary to note that although one-to-one dialogue between the instructor and students has great importance in teaching and assessment, majority of the students believe that the best part of learning does take place during the reviews.

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