

THE DESK CRITIQUE: ASSESSING THE ROLE OF TEACHING STYLES IN THE COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS

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1 ABSTRACT

Desk critiques, the term that refers to the ongoing conversations between teachers and students in design studios, has been the lifeblood of design education for centuries. In a typical five-year design-based degree, it can be expected that a student will partake in well over 300 desk critiques, often lasting 15-30 minutes each. However, despite the significant role that desk critiques play in the education of design students, instructors often enter academia without any training as to how their own style of teaching can promote or hinder the cognitive development that is necessary for a student to progress as a designer.

This study takes a mixed-methods approach that aims to better understand the influence of teaching styles on the cognitive development of students, as they were observed in a semester-long graduate-level landscape architecture studio. Modeled after various studies conducted by Professor William Perry, analysis of pre- and post-test interviews determined the cognitive state of each student in relation to a nine-point positional framework (Perry, 1970). Throughout the duration of the semester, desk critiques were audio-recorded and subjected to a content analysis through a categorical coding scheme of the verbalizations (Goldschmidt, Hochman & Dafni, 2009). In doing so, this study was able to identify teaching styles of the faculty, and then overlay this information with the pre- and post-semester cognitive evaluations of each student. Results point to trends that link typologies of teaching styles in desk critiques with observed changes in the students' cognitive state over the course of the semester.

1.1 Keywords

desk critique; design studio; cognitive development; pedagogy; teaching style