

Critique: A Communicative Event in Design Education

A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON WESTERN FACULTY AND ASIAN STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Critique is a communicative and sociable event in which students present their design and critics provide feedback. Students often find it difficult to explain their work and articulate their thoughts because most design knowledge is tacit by nature. If design is about new concepts, then in a critique, students have to describe and clearly present their idea. However, in critiques, the focus is often on the content, but not as much on the communication competencies of delivering the idea across a group of people. Using a qualitative research methodology and interviewing Western faculty and Asian students, this study explores how communication between Western faculty and Asian undergraduate design students alters the effectiveness and affectiveness of a group critique. Implications of this study provide reflective insights for faculty and students on how critiques can be improved.

INTRODUCTION

IMPORTANCE OF CRITIQUE

Critique has been frequently used in design studio classes and is applied widely in most design disciplines like Visual Communication, Product Design, Architecture or even interdisciplinary classes like Design and Management. The critique sessions are held because the processes and techniques are critical to help students develop and evaluate their technical, aesthetic, written and verbal skills (Whittington, 2004). And since discussions on design moved away from product-oriented to process-oriented perspectives and then finally to the cognitive process of the designer, critique became an important activity to transfer design knowledge among instructors and students (Uluoglu & Taksim, 2000).

PROBLEMS IN CRITIQUE

Language is an important component in a critique, as critique involves verbal presentation and feedback and English is the international business language in today's world. In a cosmopolitan city like Hong Kong, where students' mother tongue is Chinese, but they are asked to present their work in English, language can be a communicative barrier. If a language barrier is present, poor communication results. The popular press has discussed the poor communication skills of college students in general, suggesting that peppered conversation with "like" and "you know" deteriorates sound reasoning, critical thinking and professional communication (Zernike, 1999). This may also be due to another challenge of critique: design students have to explain verbally something that was accomplished in a non-verbal process (Whittington, 2004). In this case, critique should not only help the students learn how to speak like a designer, but also provide them with clues regarding what it *means* to speak like a designer (Dannels, Gaffney, & Martin, 2008). If in a critique, the majority of the students didn't prepare for the presentation and they are asked to present in their second language, the students will require more time and effort to explain their work during the critique and critics may misunderstand the work, provoking students' emotions because their work is misunderstood and undervalued.

This study provides an addition to the current knowledge of critique with a population with various levels of English language skills. Results of this study can provide readers with a better understanding of the relationship between the expectations of Western faculty to Asian design students in a critique, or vice versa.

DEFINITION OF CRITIQUE

Critique involves assessment (Whittington, 2004), knowledge transmittal (Uluoglu et al., 2000), communication and presentation in a public setting (Dannels et al., 2008). In design education, critique is a communicative event in which students present their design and critics provide feedback (Dannels et al., 2008). Critique is also classified according to the development of a project: beginning, mid-point and final critique. This study defines beginning critique as understanding the objectives of the project; mid-point critique as discussion on how to improve the project from this stage to the next; and final critique, also known as juries, as a public evaluation of the finished project. The word “critique” has often been related to “tutorial” (Uluoglu et al., 2000). To tease out “critique” from “tutorial” by definition, critique is a critical estimation or discussion while tutorial is a class conducted by a tutor for one student or a small number of students (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2010). The scholar Donald Schön (1983) in his book *The Reflective Practitioner* explores the nature of a tutorial; immersing one’s self into and reflecting on the design situation. Schön’s (1983) model is more about the one-on-one tutorial situation. If this is put into design education context, a tutorial is performed to communicate with the student and live in his/her world (Uluoglu et al., 2000). Research (Uluoglu et al., 2000; Horton, 2007) has also identified different forms of critiques in design education, which are stated in *Table 1*.

In this study, the focus is on mid-point in-class group critiques in general because it is less about the pace and process of students’ work, rather it is a form most involved with communication and understanding of context.

Group critique is defined as a critical evaluation and discussion among students and teachers as a communicative event to transfer design cognition. Since “feedback”

FORMS OF CRITIQUE			
	Group Critiques	Desk Critiques	Juries
Characteristic	A form of formative assessment.	Most frequently used in design studios.	Performed to bring students together at definite intervals for an overall evaluation of work.
Function	To demonstrate to students the typical issues and problems in design.	To tune up the pace and working style of individual work.	To help the slow students to keep up with the quick ones.

Table 1: Different Forms of Critique (Adapted from Uluoglu et al., 2000; Horton, 2007)

is the transmission of evaluative or corrective information about an action, event or process to the original source (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2010), therefore, “critique” is interchangeable with the term “feedback” in this study.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How does communication between Western design faculty and Asian undergraduate design students alter the effectiveness and affectiveness of a critique?

LITERATURE REVIEW

BRIEF HISTORY OF CRITIQUE

Critique is an assessment process that originates in the traditional fine art field (Whittington, 2004). It was developed in the early stages of the art school, where the ‘art school’ idea was a pedagogical experiment in action within the public space, called the ‘Chamber of Horrors’, established by Henry Cole and Richard Redgrave within the government-funded ‘Department of Practical Art’ at Marlborough House in 1852 (Quinn, 2008). In the ‘Chamber of Horrors’, students were like visitors to a museum, which was actually an art school, and the lesson was conducted by exhibiting examples of poor design (Quinn, 2008). However, this ‘Chamber of Horrors’ was a threat to the manufacturing industry because it was critiquing the commercial commodity. Henry Morley argues, in *Household Words* (1852), that people who have acquired the notion of ‘Correct Principles of Taste’ from the ‘Chamber of Horrors’ would alienate individual critics from the all-encompassing social world that capital had already built (Quinn, 2008). However, in today’s design education, students are often trained to be prepared for a professional career in the real world, where commercial commodities dominate.

REVIEW CURRENT RESEARCH ON CRITIQUE

Research on critiques has been done in multiple disciplines including English as Second Language (ESL) (Yoshida, 2008), professional disciplines such as engineering, business and medicine (Dannels et al., 2008) and specifically in architectural design (Uluoglu et al., 2000). Most of the research suggests that the kinds of feedback commonly given in academic settings have been ineffective in terms of students’ learning experience (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Yoshida, 2008).

Therefore, research provided suggestions to improve the process of critique in art and design (Uluoglu et al., 2000; Whittington, 2004; Hetland, Winner, Veenema and Sheridan, 2007). However, little research has been done on the effectiveness and affectiveness of a critique in the design discipline as a communicative event. This study investigates critique as a communicative event where English is commonly used, but it is a second language for students in this study.

EFFECTIVENESS OF CRITIQUE

As mentioned, critique is a communication event in which students present their design and critics provide feedback (Dannels, Gaffney and Martin, 2008). This definition seems like a very unidirectional form of communication, however, critique from various people can happen simultaneously because critique is not only targeted towards students' presentations, but also towards another critique, i.e., critiques can be built upon each other. How can critiques be organized as a system so that the feedback given is responding directly to the problem in design? Research (Whittington, 2004) has suggested that students are confused when a significant portion of time in design classes is spent on critique, while addressing and evaluating multiple issues in each project. Mid-point critiques often delay completion of a project and inhibit creativity because students do not have the opportunity to explore more options and tend to change overall conceptualized ideas too soon. In order to effectively communicate design knowledge among faculty and students, a process needs to be designed. If the process is designed carefully and executed successfully, students will be able to readjust the first component (project critique) and provide a better direction for the second component (critique process); instructors will be able to modify objectives if the critique projects need improvement (Whittington, 2004).

AFFECTIVENESS OF CRITIQUE

Emotional concern is addressed in English as a Second Language (ESL) research regarding the teachers' perspectives in choosing the kinds of feedback given to students (Yoshida, 2008). Students' fear of critique may be due to emotional concerns. Students may prefer receiving correct answers immediately after errors are identified in order to avoid the social embarrassment triggered by not being able to present proper answers. Most teachers decide to use recasts, giving correct answers immediately as feedback, because it is not always easy for teachers to determine whether or not the learners have some idea about correct answers (Yoshida, 2008).

CRITIQUE AS A COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITY

Critique is a communicative activity with a social aspect to it. Whenever designers, or people in general, see images, words and objects, etc., they interpret them. What happens within an individual's mind and what happens between two people may lead to different results (Uluoglu et al., 2000).

Critique is heavily involved in language because students have to verbally explain, criticize and present the visual ideas of their design work. Research has been done in communication competencies in design education and the study suggested that critic feedback reflects "expected communication competencies in design studios, which involves interaction management, demonstration of design evolution, transparent advocacy of intentional explanation of visuals, and the staging of the performance" (Dannels et al., 2008, p. 1). However, the problems of language and terminology used in critiques have not been investigated in Dannels' (2008) study. Quinn (2008) argues that the language used in a critique lacks refinement or culture because language in design reveals a struggle with an internal division of language and the problem of understanding a foreign tongue. In order to have the language understood, definitions need to be agreed upon and widely circulated among the design community and this process takes time. Language should be recognized and acknowledged within the unconscious continuity of a preoccupation with a foreign tongue in critiques, which disrupts the conscious continuity of progressive development of critical speech in design (Quinn, 2008). In a design education context, communicative problems can arise when language is one of the barriers: 1) when students fail to use an appropriate vocabulary to present their work, critics are not able understand the presentation; 2) when critics provide feedback using terminology that students do not understand, students fail to improve.

CRITIQUE IN OTHER DISCIPLINES

Critique, as a communicative and social event, is not limited to academic settings in design. It can be applied to businesses, client education and other academic disciplines. Accreditation boards such as ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology) and SACS (Southern Accreditation of Colleges and Schools) have highlighted the need for communication competence by making communication instruction and assessment critical for accreditation (Dannel et al., 2008). Accreditation boards in disciplines such as medicine, design, business, engineering, agriculture and mathematics are becoming increasingly focused on oral communication competence (Bennett and Olney, 1986; Dowd and Liedtka, 1994; Krapels and Arnold, 1996; Kreps and Kunimoto, 1994). Moreover, pedagogical

spaces in which feedback plays an important role in the instructional process, also suggest the critique's potential for shaping disciplinary identities, relationships and social contexts. (Dannels et al., 2008)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Oral communication involves aspects of verbal language, body language and visual representation. Scholars have theorized feedback as a meaning-making dialogue between a teacher and a student (Straub, 1996). However, the knowledge transmitted via the critique possesses different characteristics and the representation of knowledge within a communicative intent is different from one's own internal interpretation (Uluoglu et al., 2000). One of the reasons resides in cultural interpretation of semiotics. Language and images possess different meanings and interpretations between Western and Asian cultures due to various ways of collective acting, thinking and feeling in different cultures (Hofstede, 2004). A simple example is: in Western culture, the color red is seen as danger; while in Asian culture, red symbolizes happiness. Such differences not only alter the effectiveness of a critique session, misunderstanding may also affect emotional response among the persons involved, therefore causing poor transfer of the knowledge to be delivered and received. Hofstede (2004) has found five frameworks for assessing culture: 1) Low vs. High Power Distance; 2) Individualism vs. Collectivism; 3) Masculinity vs. Femininity; 4) Uncertainty Avoidance; and 5) Long vs. Short Term Orientation.

Relating to the situation for research in this study, China is used as an example. 1) China has a comparatively larger power distance when compared with other countries. In this case, Chinese students tend to depend on teachers and treat them with respect (Hofstede, 2004). Therefore in critiques, teachers tend to initiate all communication and students try to avoid giving opposing comments to the teachers. 2) China has comparatively weaker uncertainty avoidance, therefore, Chinese students tend to control their emotions and tolerate differences in class (Hofstede, 2004). This makes it even harder for teachers to read students' mind and emotions, and therefore, more difficult for teachers to know if the students understand the knowledge intended to be delivered or not. 3) Since China is a more collectivist country, Chinese students tend to learn how to do instead of how to learn (Hofstede, 2004), thus making communicative competencies, language and verbal presentation less valuable. Moreover, Chinese students' individual initiatives are discouraged and students tend to speak up in class only when they are sanctioned by the group rather than by their own interests (Hofstede, 2004). This links back to the power distance issue for Chinese students, as in general, Chinese students avoid critiques.

RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

PURPOSE

Interactions in critique can be observed; much research has been done using observation methods (Dannels et al., 2008; Yoshida, 2008). As Pica (1994) and Breen (2001) point out, observational data are not always sufficient to explain the participants' perception of interactional events. Using interviews within a qualitative research methodology, the understanding and expectations of a critique from the perspectives of Western faculty and Asian design students was studied.

STUDY DESIGN

In order to add deeper knowledge to understand critique as an interactional communicative event, qualitative content analysis of interviews was done in this study to discover elements that were not immediately apparent in the interactions. Prior to the interviews, all participants were assured of anonymity in the report. Moreover, interview questions were not delivered prior to the interviews, in order to get spontaneous, less calculated feedback to the questions. The study was approved and faculty was contacted via email to set up a time and place for the interview. Students were mostly interviewed in their working studios. Participants were asked prior to the interview if they were willing to have their interview videotaped or audio taped.

SETTING

The School of Design (SD) in The Hong Kong Polytechnic University was founded in 1937. In the 2009–2010 academic year, the School of Design enrolled approximately 117 students (108 of them were Asian students) and 65 faculty members were present (19 of them were Western). SD includes 3 departments: 1) Art & Design in Education; 2) Design: Visual Communication, Industrial and Product, Environmental and Interior, and Advertising; 3) Digital Media.

DATA SOURCES

The data emerged from in-depth qualitative interview with ten faculty and eleven undergraduate students in SD. The preset participant characteristics were that faculty must not be Chinese native speakers and both faculty and students have experience in some kind of critique process in the school environment. Year three students were chosen because they are more reflective on critique as they have experienced the critique process for at least three years. Participants were

DISCIPLINE	GENDER	NATIVE LANGUAGE	YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE	YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE	TAUGHT IN OTHER COUNTRIES
Industrial & Product	Male	Spanish	15	7	Yes
Advertising	Male	German	20	1.5	No
Industrial & Product	Male	English	38	25	Yes
Architecture; Environmental & Interior	Male	English	8.5	8	No
Interdisciplinary	Male	English	14	10	Yes
Digital Media	Male	South Asian	18	6	No
Industrial & Product	Male	Italian	28	11	Yes
Industrial & Product	Male	German	7	15	Yes
Architecture; Environmental & Interior	Male	French	5	15	Yes
Industrial & Product	Female	French	18	6	Yes

Table 2: Faculty background

drawn from any design discipline because this study only focused on participants' perception of critique in general. This was a pilot study using a convenient sample due to time and location constraints.

For faculty, five of them were from Industrial and Product, one from Advertising, two from Environmental and Interior, one from Digital Media and one from an interdisciplinary background. Interviews lasted from thirty minutes to two hours each depending on how much the faculty liked to share. The ten faculty members participating in the interviews represented a wide variety of training and educational background (e.g., trained as designers, photographers, story tellers and architects), and they also had various cultural backgrounds (e.g., United States, Germany, Italy and France). Faculty background is in *Table 2*.

Five students were from Industrial and Product, three from Visual Communication, two from Advertising and one from Digital Media. Students' age ranged from twenty-one to twenty-five. Five students were male and six students were female. Each student interview lasted ten to twenty minutes. For both faculty and students, general interview topics included description and characteristics of

critique, emotional and language issues of critique and benefits from critique. (See *Tables 3 and 4 for interview questions.*) Some questions evolved during the process of interviewing different participants, for example, the difference between a tutorial and a critique. These questions were important to note, but appeared spontaneously from some participants. Literal transcriptions of these interviews provided over one hundred and twenty pages of text for analysis. Interviews were transcribed using the transcription conventions in Table 5.

<p>FACULTY BACKGROUND QUESTIONS</p> <p>→ What classes do you teach?</p> <p>→ How many years of teaching experience do you have?</p> <p>→ What's your current position in school?</p> <p>→ Why did you decide to teach in this school? Or in this cosmopolitan city other than in your own country?</p> <p>QUESTIONS REGARDING CRITIQUE</p> <p>1. Please tell me about your understanding of a critique? (Back up question: Are group critiques pretty much the same?)</p> <p>2. What characterizes a group critique from your standpoint? (Back up question: What elements should be present in a critique?)</p> <p>3. Could you say something more about that (critique) in the context of your current teaching especially in a class with students with various language skills? (Back up question: What characterize a good or bad critique session?)</p> <p>4. How do you think critique affects student's emotions? (Back up question: Have you ever experienced students having emotional outbursts during critiques?)</p> <p>5. How does critique benefit you? (Back up question: How does critique help your teaching? What is valuable in a critique for you?)</p> <p>6. How does critique benefit your students? (Back up question: What is valuable in a critique for students?)</p> <p>These are all the questions that I would like to ask.</p> <p>Thank you very much for your precious time.</p>
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Table 3: Interview Questions for Faculty

STUDENT BACKGROUND QUESTION

→ How old are you?

QUESTIONS REGARDING CRITIQUE

1. Please tell me about your understanding of a critique?
(Back up question: How would you describe a critique?)
2. What characterizes a critique from your standpoint?
(Back up question: What usually happens during a critique?)
3. Could you say something about a critique in a class with faculty who cannot communicate verbally in your native language?
(Back up question: Do you have enough words to express your ideas and design in a critique?)
4. Have you ever had a bad or ineffective critique experience?
(Back up question: Share with me one of your most memorable critique experiences (positive or negative)?)
5. Do you think critique affects your emotions?
(Back up question: If someone says something negative about your design, how do you feel?)
6. How does critique benefit you?
(Back up question: What is valuable in a critique?)

These are all the questions that I would like to ask.
Thank you very much for your precious time.

Table 4: Interview Questions for students

{ }	Line to be discussed in the text.	<< >>	The speaker's emphasis for the portion.
—	Portion of special note to the current analysis is underlined.	[]	Reduced volume.
?	Rising intonation.	<>	Translation of the meaning of the sentence with an error.
(())	Comments enclosed in double parentheses.	T:	The faculty. (Faculty A–J)
(.)	Brief pause. (Under 3 seconds)	S:	The student. (Student A–J)
(..)	Longer pause. (More than 3 seconds)	R:	The researcher.

Table 5: Transcription conventions

DATA ANALYSIS

Not all categories are covered in this research report as the amount of data gathered exceeds what is reasonable for this report. Consequently, the most telling categories (good critiques, bad critiques, definitions of critiques, differences between tutorials and critiques, emotions and language) are fully represented here.

Participants were coded as TA, TB, TC... TJ (faculty) and SA, SB, SC... SK (students). A sample appears in Figure 1. Videotaped transcripts were analyzed using a typological analysis framework—an inductive analytical framework committed to three general flows of activity: reducing data and identifying its source, creating thematic categories and drawing conclusions (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The first data was reviewed to identify the units of analysis for the research question. For example, in the interview transcripts one faculty said, “When it comes to emotions, if you’re able to communicate that, make sure students get that, you’re with them and really paying attention to what they are doing ... and working out with them for tangible progression, the emotions are alright.” This statement was coded as 4J3 Emotion: teachers should pay attention to student’s emotions (4—interview question 4 [How do you think critique affects student’s emotions?]; J—Faculty J; 3—third paragraph responding to category “Emotion”). All the transcripts were analyzed consistently. The categories included definition of critique, critique versus tutorial, elements of critique, emotions, language, good critique, bad critique, acknowledgement, culture, atmosphere, master versus bachelor, students’ benefits and teachers’ benefits. The coded notes were then segmented from each transcript and organized into the above categories. Finally, holistic diagrams (*see figure 2*) with all the coded notes that fell into the same category were created for synthesis.

R: RESEARCHER; TA: FACULTY A

R: What characterizes a critique from your standpoint?

TA: (..)Well. [That's a very open question.] [What characterize a group critique]. I would say (..) I can tell you (..) I don't know what characterizes it, I can tell you what makes me enjoy it more.

R: Okay.

TA: One over the other is, when a student is (..) inspired on a project and the project is interesting (?) and spark in quality and (..) um (..) and commitment (..) you know, usually good ideas make a critique interesting coz it gets the tutor more engaged. I mean there are more levels of engagement, at least in my case and as well as I can perceive in others' engagement as well (?). If, you know, a student is unresponsive, passive, and not committed and not caring, and the idea is not very interesting, or a group of students, [because usually critiques are group projects], then (?) it's kind of boring. Right? That's how I would characterize it. Boring versus exciting. So, there is usually those go inside for the potential learning, both for the student <<and>> for the teacher, there is a lot of learning (..) from the teachers part (..) because you know you are exposed to a lot of different topics, many (..) many (..) of the times the students' research (..) illuminates you in terms of certain topic that, you know, (..) that you are not familiar with.

R: RESEARCHER; SA: STUDENT A; SB: STUDENT B

R: What characterizes a critique from your standpoint?

SB: I think a critique should be unbiased.

SA: I think it needs to be polite. (..) Because sometimes when you are too rude, although it's still characterized as a critique, this kind of rude critique will not be as effective. Other students may not get one's opinion in a rude critique.

R: What if one really thinks the design is "not good", how would you express your opinion in an unbiased and supportive way?

SA: I think if I see the design as not good, doesn't mean that I'm biased. When I think the design is not good, it is an opinion. But being unbiased has a reason that I think the design is not good.

SB: When I see the design as not good, I usually have this habit of (..) for example, when I want to say negative comments about another student's design, I will first talk about the positive elements in his or her design, then I will go on and say "but maybe you can try to do this and that..." In this way, the critique becomes more polite and creates a more comfortable atmosphere.

Figure 1: Sample Interview Transcripts

GOOD CRITIQUES

5B1

Good critiques: suggest improvements;
constructive

2D1

Good critiques: based on professional
experience (culture, power distance); with
reasons to support; give suggestions

4D3

(Immediate comment in critiques)

Good critiques: focus on development, process
and execution of idea

4E1

Critiques are usually good experiences

4F1

Most critiques are ok

4G1

Good critiques: negative but with reason and
ways to improve

5S1

Good critiques: constantly looking for question
and answer

4K1

Good critiques: comments can apply to own
project

4J1

Good critiques: more comments

BAD CRITIQUES

5B1

Bad critiques: pure like/dislike without reason
(may take it personally)

1D2

Bad critiques: focus on topic, not following
trends

4D1

Bad critiques: student's own shortcomings:
minimal involvement; reading directly from
prepared notes; student's lack of preparation

4D3

(Immediate comment in critiques)

Bad critiques: focus on minor typographic
things; presentation skills

1E2

Bad critiques: value judgment without reason
(not why but what could be done)

4G1

Bad critiques: don't know what to do next;
(culture) ask for clarification but (expectation
difference) didn't get good answers

4H1

Bad critiques: minor stuff, not focused on big
picture: conflicting comments by faculty

Figure 2: Analysis Diagram (students: good and bad critiques)

DATA SYNTHESIS

After categorizing the coded analytical notes from faculty and students, a color-coded cross synthesis diagram (see *figure 3*) across students and faculty was created to look for the agreement and disagreement within and across faculty and students. The color-coded units are organized in a hierarchy according to “levels of agreement.” The purpose of this cross synthesis was to compare if the expectations from students and teachers were similar or different and in what ways. Arguments were then created to see how each unit of analysis is related to another.

STUDENT SYNTHESIS

Negative (4C2)

→ Unhappy (negative comments) (5C1, 4D1)

→ Hate pinpointing (5C1)

I just want to finish it, don't pin point on me, sometimes

I think ...I don't know... (sigh) this reminds me of some

unhappy memory.

→ Cry (admit failure) (5E1)

→ Angry (5S1)

I usually will get angry, and oppose the critics, but this is not

rational. However, it's hard to control.

→ Emotional in general (5G3, 5K1, 5J1)

Student's approach in critique

→ Tends to say nice things first (2B2)

→ Neutral (5E1, 5F1)

Embarrassed (facing too many people, failed to answer questions) (1D1)

→ Scared (when no one comments) (4D2)

→ Won't ask faculty for clarification, tends to ask other students (3B1, 3H2, 3J3)

TEACHER SYNTHESIS

Negative

→ Upset with negative feedbacks/work has been ignored/low grades (3F3, 4E1, 1F4)

→ Teachers are honest and pinpoint weakness (1H3) When you say very honestly and you can pinpoint at which stage they are weak in your opinion.

→ Cry (under stress, acknowledge self inability (4A2, 4C3, 4D2, 4G1, 4J4)

Ego, both teacher & student (4A2, 4B1, 4D1)

→ Students should not take critiques personally/should disassociate themselves from work (1E2)

(Disagreement among faculty) Students as designers need to have certain ego (1H4)

→ Emotional in general (4A1, 4C1, 4E1, 4G1, 4J1) (because)

Emotional investment in projects (4A1, 4C3)

Teachers be aware & be careful of student's emotion (4A2, 3E2, 4F1, 4G1, 1H4, 4J2, 4J3, 3J2)

→ Change according to years of study/age (4C3, 4D1, 4H1)

Teachers approach to students

→ Nice (1H3, 4B2, 1F1)

→ Praise sandwich (nice & harsh & honest) (4C2, 1D2, 3H1) (Disagreement among faculty) Harsh (1C3, 1D2, 1E2, 1E8)

Figure 3: Coded Cross Synthesis Diagram (emotions)

LIMITATIONS

All data collected was analyzed and synthesized in a systematic way. The research was a pilot study; no claims based on the research findings are fully representative of the School of Design at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University in this study. Results are reflective of the context-specific data gathered in this particular institution from the specific faculty and students interviewed. It is possible that results could suggest similarities with other institutions and disciplines; however, they are not generalizable across contexts. The result may raise awareness among foreign teachers and stimulate reflection on how critiques can be improved.

RESULTS

Results of this study described the elements that contribute to good and bad critiques in design and the view of English language differences between Western faculty and Asian students. Results also suggested that although faculty and students can spell out the definition of critique and agreed with it, when they were asked to tease out the differences between tutorial and critique, they had disagreements among themselves and even conflict within their own definition of a critique.

GOOD CRITIQUE AND BAD CRITIQUE

In the following section, the agreement between students and faculty members on how they defined the elements in a good critique and a bad critique are compared. Table 6 shows the summary of how they perceived good and bad critiques.

GOOD CRITIQUE	BAD CRITIQUE
Objective comment with reason	Subjective comment only
Teacher facilitates	Teacher dominates
Students participate	Students unprepared
Egos held in check	Egos dominate
Perspectives shared	No comment
Students separate self from project	Students confuse project with personal identity
English language understood	Lack of English vocabulary

Table 6: Definition of good and bad critiques

OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE COMMENTS

Most students agreed that in a good critique, comments were objective, rational and unbiased. Although most of the students tended to say nice things in a critique, they themselves did want to receive negative comments that were backed up with reasons, because that allowed space for further improvement in their own projects. They were asked to justify how they defined objectivity; most students claimed objective comments should be based on faculty members' professional experiences:

And sometimes I hope they comment based on [teachers'] own professional experience. Like: 'You are doing this, but it won't work.' I hope there is a support behind what [the teachers] say. It's not like they comment and then it's over. I hope they will advise [with] suggestions, i.e., since you have banned this, so what do you (teachers) think will work. (Student: 2D1)

Even though most students agreed that bad or useless comments were subjective comments only, no matter whether the comments from the faculty were subjective or not, students took them in without much questioning. At the same time, faculty members acknowledged that designers are also human beings, therefore, no matter how hard the faculty members tried to be objective in a critique, there was a certain degree of subjectivity in the comments delivered. One faculty illustrated the human nature of critique:

I try to make them [comments] as neutral as possible, meaning as objective towards the advertising industry as possible. But then, again, I have to... because... as a human being, I have to weave in my subjective points of view with my experience. (Faculty: 5B1)

ROLE OF FACULTY

Most students and faculty members agreed that critique should be a two-way communication between the faculty and students and among the students themselves. Faculty acknowledged that during a critique, the faculty did most of the talking, but they agreed that students should actually dominate in critiques with faculty only acting as a facilitator.

...there are like 5 professors and they all say something to that one person, and the others have to sit around and not say anything. That is a very bad feedback section. I think it's terrible, it's torture. I'm a strong believer that students learn a lot from each other. (Faculty 3H3)

[Critique is] not always something delivered by the faculty, it can be delivered by fellow

students, in fact, I think the most effective critique is when classmates critique each other with the guidance from the faculty. (Faculty: 1C1)

One faculty suggested a strategy to get students heavily involved by asking students to act as teachers by role-playing the real world industry.

[W]hat's happening is I'm secretly teaching, we think we were focusing on this guy's project, but in fact, everybody is learning something, because by doing a critique, you are learning, you are thinking: "what's good about this story? What's bad about it?" So in fact, the whole class learns at once, I learn too, because they are all acting as teachers, and often they make a comment and I think: Wow, that's smart, I've never thought of that. (Faculty: 1F1)

STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION

Students claimed that bad critiques happened when students were unprepared for the presentation. When students were unprepared, they felt embarrassed because they could not answer the questions asked by the critics.

Another time [of bad critique] is my lack of preparation, I'm not even familiar with the topic I need to present, and when I have to answer the questions, I cannot answer them at all. So that's why it feels like I haven't really done anything. (Student: 4D1)

Other students claimed that they needed to prepare a script for the presentation because of their lack of English vocabulary.

It depends how much time you have for preparing your presentation. If you have time, then you can look up [words in] the dictionary. But if you don't... or just have very little time, then you will use the same vocabulary over and over again. (Student: 3A2)

EGOISM

Most faculty members brought up the issue of ego when questions about emotion were being asked. They claimed that students should not take critiques personally and should disassociate themselves from negative comments. What the critics said towards a project did not apply to the student himself.

The critique [needs] students to disassociate themselves personally from their work, what happens to their work is not about them individually, so that [they] can take bad news. You know, that's where students learn that... it can't just be all nice and pretty and... 'that's really

good' and descriptive, it has to be demanding and negative, critical, that's where the word came from. (Faculty: 1E2)

Not only the students had ego issues in a critique, but also the faculty members. Some faculty members claimed that a critique is bad when critics viewed it as a place to show off knowledge instead of genuinely giving feedback for students to improve.

I think if students have that fragile... um... ego that it's a bad critique. The same if the critic has a fragile ego and just sees the critique as a place to show off, the place to, you know, have a bit of power and an audience watch them, show them how much they know, that's a horrible critique. (Faculty: 3D7)

While students acknowledged this ego issue and at the same time wanted negative comments for improvement, most students still unconsciously felt upset or angry when they received negative comments. Therefore, emotion played a large role in critiques.

When students were emotional during a critique, the critique was ineffective because the teacher needed to take extra time and effort to smooth over reception by the student. Most faculty members agreed that they should be aware of students' emotions during a critique.

One thing that many times could happen is the student crying... maybe because they struggled a lot to find solution and solution doesn't come... You have always, always, always to be very careful how you speak with students, because many times, you don't know with whom you are talking. (Faculty: 4G1)

However, faculty members had no agreement regarding how to approach critique. Some faculty thought critiques should be harsh, pointing out problems, some thought it should be positive focusing on success and some thought it's a combination of both.

SHARING OF PERSPECTIVES

Most faculty members and students agreed that critiques encourage critical thinking because the nature of critiques involved students taking a stand and putting out their perspective in front of an audience. It was also important that while participants were sharing their perspectives, the audience should also acknowledge the different perspectives being put forward. The acceptance or rejection towards

a perspective involved critical thinking skills, i.e., students should judge whether these were merited and useful comments.

For unbiased comments, these comments should be expressed through one's critical thinking. Critical thinking allows you to realize which comments should be taken into account, while others can be ignored. (Student: 2E1)

However, most students claimed that they usually did not give comments and were not responsive during a critique.

You mean if I'll comment? Actually, not much. The atmosphere of School of Design, I don't know about other disciplines, but in my discipline, advertising, not much feedback is given. I don't know if it's an Asian or Chinese cultural thing, not many people give feedback. (Student: 1D4)

Students seem to be <<extremely>> reluctant to do that [confront yourself] in here [critiques]. Yea. I think it's obvious why, secondary school, you know, there is not a lot of desire to expose yourself, that makes you so vulnerable . . . it's not rocket science why they don't like it. (Faculty: 3E2)

UNDERSTANDING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Faculty members and students varied in their concern towards language during a critique. Some thought English language was an issue since a low level of English limits learning experience and understanding the project in context, while others thought English language was not an issue because in art and design, visual language is more important than verbal language. Table 7 illustrates the disagreements regarding language.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE IS AN ISSUE

- Students lack English vocabulary
- Students unable to understand context fully in English
- English is a business language but also a second language for students
- Students needed preparation before presentation
- Students misunderstood translated language in context

ENGLISH LANGUAGE IS NOT AN ISSUE

- Satisfied with limited knowledge of English
- Critiques in design are more visual than verbal or written
- Teachers give allowance to language
- Student should not prepare
- English can be translated by students

Table 7 Agreement and disagreement on language issues

As illustrated, students acknowledged their own lack of English vocabulary while faculty also claimed that students should increase their level of English because it is the global business language. While some faculty thought English was important, some faculty acknowledged that Hong Kong was a colonial leftover and made allowance for English as second language. Some faculty thought that language was not the main issue in a critique because art and design are more visual than verbal or written.

[D]esign is luckily very visual, um... yes of course it's verbal. First of all, it's visual, probably second verbal, and only third sort of written. I think the writing skills are by far the weakest of the three of the students, and I think um... design students by nature are visual thinkers, that, they are also quite good verbally, that is their second language. (Faculty: 3D4)

DEFINITION OF CRITIQUE

Although most faculty members and students agreed upon the definition of critique as a two-way communication and a learning process, faculty members and students varied in their answers when teasing out differences between critiques and tutorials. Some faculty thought tutorials were equal to critiques, but critiques were different from final presentations.

[A] critique is one type of tutorial...I've been in panels where the teachers, western ones and eastern ones, don't know what a critique is, and don't know the difference [between] a critique and a final exam....you know, [in a final exam] you just fill in the gaps and you go away and you give them a grade, but what happens is some of these teachers, they don't understand the difference. (Faculty: 3F3)

One faculty claimed that critiques were totally different within art and design, but can be similar outside of art and design.

Most of the time, [critique is] more like a tutorial group, but with the students already [having] written something, right? It's a little bit different. It's true, outside of that. But I have taught a lot of [non art and design classes], but not critiques. [Tutorials and critiques] sort of have two totally different functions, right? Tutorial is, uh... a lecture, a broader lecture for a larger group. (Faculty: 1E9)

While some faculty thought they were totally different with tutorial more like a lecture, a one-way communication, critique was a two-way communication that was public.

I think um... a critique has to be something... different than a tutorial. A tutorial is one on one, a critique is something public. (Faculty: 1D6)

However, one faculty member and students agreed upon the difference between a tutorial and a critique. They thought critique happened only in final presentations and involved grading, while tutorials happened during interim presentations and involved sharing. While this was very unclear and contradictory, both faculty members and students thought final critiques were meaningless because there were no opportunities to improve and they agreed that final critiques came too late in the stage of development.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As illustrated in the results of this study, critiques played an important role in design classes. While the design discipline is becoming more interdisciplinary, critiques are becoming more and more critical for today's design education engaged with training designers to become interdisciplinary professionals and communicators (Anthony, 1991). From a design pedagogy point of view, it is important that we understand the expectation of a critique from both the students' and the faculty members' points of view (Deay and Saab, 1994). Starting from an insider perspective (Patton, 2002), this paper lays the groundwork for future design students and faculty participating in a critique by providing an in-depth analysis of the elements of critiques. Although the research was conducted in a very specific context, the implications of this research were significant to provide inquiry on current critique sessions held in design classes and a reflection on critique practices across multiple disciplines.

First, the results showed students and faculty mostly agreed upon the elements that contributed to construct a good or a bad critique. There were a few disagreements towards the results because critique elements were interrelated. Some participants thought one element was more important than the other, and therefore took another approach because he or she thought that approach was better in Hong Kong design education practice. It is important to identify the different strategies that faculty members used to construct a better atmosphere for students, especially in the cross-cultural context of Hong Kong design education as presented in this study, as most students were reluctant to speak up in critiques because of the face-saving nature of Asian culture.

Second, results showed that language plays a part in critiques especially in the context of English as a second language for students. As communication is central to critiques in today's design education, it is critical for students to be able to reflect upon their communication competencies (Dannels et al, 2008). Yet often the students struggle with their self-perceived lack of English training and incapability to understand others' comments and express their own thoughts. Moreover, critique has not gained much attention in literature, and scholars have viewed critiques as responses to messages, rather than as a process (Cusella, 1987). This notion was also reflected in this research as some participants thought a basic knowledge of English would be sufficient for school and design is more about creativity rather than verbal and writing skills. If students were trained to be professional designers, the ability to be able to understand key vocabularies and communicate to different stakeholders, i.e., clients and colleagues from other industries in a compelling way are essential. Therefore, it is important for students to learn how to use words to "animate" rather than to "diminish" designs (Forty, 2000). Communication happens in various channels (visual, verbal and written), future research would benefit from exploring students' understanding of key vocabularies in design education and the ability to embody these words in their critiques. Based on the result of this proposed further research, schools could possibly come up with a design education focused dictionary for students to provide a common understanding of the design vocabulary in play. This would also support inter-faculty understanding in situations in which faculty cross cultural, language and disciplinary boundaries.

Finally, the results showed that there was no clear understanding upon the different definitions of critique and tutorial. It is important to note that although participants had an agreement on the definition of critiques, they got confused when they were asked to tease out the differences between the two. Most of the students talked on the surface and they defined tutorials based on their experience in the context of School of Design rather than on their own interpretations and understandings of tutorials. Some practice-based faculty thought critiques and tutorials were largely the same. The different understandings of tutorials and critiques among the faculty might lead to the confusion for the students. Tutorial is a one-way communication with the tutors clarifying misunderstandings in the lecture while critique is a two-way communication with the critics giving feedback to the students' work as well as training students' critical thinking and presentation skills.

CONCLUSION

Critique is central to design education and to the communicative process of understanding how to think and talk like a design professional. Results of this research provide insight into current critique practices in design education at one school of design and into ways in which feedback from participants, both faculty and students, help to construct a communicative identity in critiques. In this setting, elements are relational and different expectations for critiques from student and faculty can help shape critique into a preferred, desired and mutually understandable form. The results of this study provide an insider's view of how communication alters the effectiveness and affectiveness of critiques between Western faculty and Asian students. A design education vocabulary dictionary with a common understanding to key words among students and faculty members could alleviate unnecessary emotional upheaval and conflicting perceptions during a critique thereby smoothing the way to better communication and design.

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