

**EFFECTS OF PREJUDICE IN FIRST YEAR
ARCHITECTURAL BASIC DESIGN STUDIO**

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Abstract

Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to discuss how prejudice, both in students and tutors mind, effects the design education, particularly architectural education. In addition, we try to identify the channels that create prejudice and search the tracks and evidences of prejudice in design environment. In the final phase, solutions for the identified problems are sought.

Method

It is a socio-psychological fact that everyone gets some prejudice while growing up. Probably this is a necessity, as everyone is in need to simplify the environmental data that he\she gets and foresees the unfamiliar events of the life. So, the prejudices are created in someone's mind as "stamps of thoughts".

In the first part of our research we tried defining how these stamps of thoughts, prejudice and effect students' works. We assigned different practices to students, which have concrete subjects and some abstract and fuzzy subjects.

Prejudice and visual codes given by the design education at school or university are also subject to this research. Examining about the curriculum and the courses given in schools and universities especially over architectural history courses is also another main topic of this research.

Result

This approach helped students to open up their minds and gain new perspectives and horizons. They learned questioning and searching for the new; also they learned how abstract forms can give birth to new and more improved forms. They also became more suspicious and started asking more questions. Design should start just with questioning even gained knowledge and information.

Key Words: basic design, prejudice, history of architecture, questioning, abstract idea

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The effect of prejudice in design/architecture education can be examined in two ways: firstly, prejudices and the images that were coded in students before their design education; secondly, the prejudicial approach of the educators and the prejudice that are given in the schools of design/architecture.

1. Coded Visual Images and Imagination in Students' Mind

Our elementary and high school education system corrupts the students' minds by encouraging them to memorize information (Teymur,2000). So when they come to a design school they almost forget questioning and wait everything to be served. In the first year of design education students are eager to learn new things but they do not know "how to learn", they seem to be oriented to memorize. Main hypothesis of this paper is that students are blocked with their coded visual images in their minds about some concepts. These concepts are mostly the concepts which they are used to see, hear or face too much in their daily life, such as house, home, weather, family, country, technology, music..etc. When some basic design works related with these subjects are demanded from students, they can't use their potentials. They, mostly, make compositions which are more ordinary. On the other hand, when they are asked to make a design of more complex, freaky, extraordinary or unusual subject they are obliged to think of different solutions.

To emphasize this phenomenon some examples of basic design courses are chosen to prove this hypothesis. In the first practice the subject was to design some chess stones in two dimensions. The subject was given as: "In your mind, try to invent some chess stones composed of three dimensional geometrical forms."

In the second practice the subject was more abstract. This time the subject was given as: “Design a four dimensional balanced dynamic composition by using one of the archaic time concepts that reveals the following event: When a lemon and an apple superpose over one another, they form a fruit.”



Figure 1. Student Works using First Approach

The two subjects described above were given to the same students in consecutive weeks with same time intervals. Subjects were given to the students in a written format and described in the same manner. But they differ in their imagination format. The first subject had an image from the beginning it was given to the students because of its design element: Chesstones. Everything was so clear in the students' mind and that was to design a chesstone, which had an image of appearance in the mind: bishop as an elephant, knight as a horse, castle rock as a fortress and so on. So it was hard to remove those images from the students' minds. And mostly their work had a very strong influence from their imagination and image map that was coded before.



Figure 2. Student Works using Second Approach

On the contrary, in the second practice, the subject was much more abstractly oriented, even though it had two main simple elements, namely an apple and a lemon. The motto pushed students to think and to get rid of the main shapes of the fruits and coded them as a metaphor and to think in a different way. The art works designed by the students also prove our thesis that the subjects given to the students should be much more neutral and should not inherit elements of their general image map coding. When the subjects become much more abstract, students start to think and start to leave their general image map and start generating their own image map, which has to be the main aim of first year design education.

2. The Prejudice given by Design Education: History of Architecture Courses

This approach has another face, the prejudices of the tutors. The prejudices of the tutors are probably much more dangerous than that of the students. Even in primary schools, children have been educated to draw “good” pictures not to paint the sun in purple. Picasso said that, after visiting a painting exhibition of kindergarten

students, “Excellent paintings! I used to paint as Rafael when I was a kid; it took me 40 years to forget everything given by painting education and to be able to draw like these children”. Architecture, as an art, needs freedom. It is possible to say that the limitations given by the formal education dominate the imagination and the artistic character of the children. In history of architecture there are many architects who did not get formal architectural education. The most famous ones are Le Corbusier, Kenzo Tange. They educated themselves by traveling, observing and learning by doing.

So, is the curriculum of architectural education, itself a prejudice? Are the students an empty bowl that are to be filled? Are they huge marble blocks to sculpt? Is the aim of the architectural education to give students new prejudice for their professional life or to open their horizons and give new perspectives and let them question the every day life and start each design without prejudice? Architectural design and architectural history sometimes seem as an undetectable duo and sometimes as a dangerous combination. And the role of the history courses in architectural education is always a contradictory issue. We have to re-consider the architectural history and then its place in architectural education and practice.

Why does history of architecture find an essential place in, almost, all curriculums in architecture schools? Architectural History is part of architectural curriculum in many ways, and answers/reasons can vary...*because every architect has to learn the classical architecture and its proportions; because every architect has to learn his/her national architecture; because history gives the student a general idea of art culture, because students have to learn the old grand masters and their buildings etc...* If architectural history education is intended to justify these reasons, such a situation can be considered as a mistake. So History of Architecture should give students the ability to evaluate built environment and architectural works. It must not set rules; nor teach clichés of “old and beautiful” buildings. While examining architectural history, the main elements of architecture (buildings, cities and every artificial environment designed by humans) should be examined and discussed. Students should then try to understand the reasons/background of them. So the history of architecture courses help to interpret the present and forecast the future. But it is hard to call listing the buildings and memorizing them “history of

architecture”. What makes the architectural history is criticizing architectural subjects, establishing the relations between them and understanding the realities underneath.

Another matter in architectural history education that causes irreversible misconceptions in students’ minds is presenting architectural history in compartments. As we know, students in architectural schools learn only limited geographies and periods in history of architecture. Europeans learn European architecture, Asians learn Asian architecture, and ignore all others. Every nation has to examine and learn its own treasures, but this should not mean ignoring others. In some programs, history of architecture begins with Egypt. In others, it begins with Neolithic caves in Asia. Sometimes it ends in 1960, sometimes in 1999. History of architecture education should be open-minded (Alsac,1990). If we consider the history as a laboratory, the chemicals that are used are not so important; the important thing is the principle of the reaction. Subjects can change, but students should learn the way of thinking, they have to get the ability of criticizing and being an inquirer. There are millions of existing and ruined buildings in the world. And all buildings are subject to examine; including all recent projects. Of course not all of them are the subject of architectural history, but the ones that have “Architectural Value” are also so many for someone to learn. But selecting the building to work on is the job of the historians. History itself is nothing but an interpretation, and selecting the buildings that are worth criticizing is an interpretation all by itself. But history of architecture education almost always forgets to mention about this.

Conclusion

These examples show us that, involved in design education or not, everyone has a design intuition. But with time, we take some information from the environment we live in or the education we have. And with all these information, our prejudice starts to take shape. Unfortunately, in many cases prejudice takes control over intuition. The way the practices are given effects students’ minds and provoke them to think in different ways. The practices given should help them to open their mental locks, and provide them to think in a more open-minded mode. But one question arises at that point: “Is it possible for someone to get rid of all the prejudice he has, and are there any ways to do it?” It seems impossible, and it is

not needed to do this “utopist practice” in design education. The main point is to be aware of the prejudice, and to learn how to control them. The first year education of architecture should consider this, and should keep this in mind and establish new ways of first year design education. The responsibilities of tutors of the first year are crucial. The courses in the first year should be examined all together as a whole. While each unit represents itself they have to match and complete each other. To open the students’ minds, there are other possibilities beside courses. First of all, the image gallery of the student has to be developed. Excursions in the city or abroad, slide shows, exercises improving visual map, improving five senses can be very helpful. These activities should be regarded as an inseparable unit of the curriculum.

As a result from an architectural history point of view, if we speak with provocative terms, architectural history has no useful role in architectural practice. Of course old masterpieces of architecture are still masterpieces and we have many things to learn from them. But, for so long and still, history of architecture (i.e. old buildings) has been seen as a source of imitation. A Doric column represented the classic age of Greece, regardless of its function, in Britain or in China. Today, this usage seems to be changed, but it is still being used as a thematic source. If history of architecture education is considered as series of slides of plans and elevations, the use of them in practice, without judging, is nothing so surprising. But if we get rid of “architectural history education” and replace it with “architectural critic education”, this new approach eliminates the common practice of memorizing in architectural history courses and encourages students to criticize the building and man-made environment. We think that the important thing is not movements but thoughts, not buildings but their social background.

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