The role of peer critique in design portfolio development education

Diane M. Bender

Arizona State University

This presentation on the pedagogical technique of peer critique focuses on a graduate level design portfolio class. The critique is a method of instruction and feedback commonly used in art and design schools. Within the design studio, students learn to present their work in informal group settings, plus formal critical reviews. An important yet often overlooked element in the assessment process is that of involving students in their own assessment. A peer critique can be part of a formal assessment method (Strivens, Baume, Owen, Grant, Ward & Nicol, 2009) or simply an informal sounding board (Hetland, Winner, Veenema & Sheridan, 2007).

A peer critique can assist the next generation of designers to interact and critically evaluate the work of others, as well as themselves. However, it is unclear how students feel about assessing the work of others. The purpose of this study is to investigate how students perceived their participation in critiquing and assessing the work of their peers in a graduate level portfolio and career development class. Descriptive and comparative survey research are used in this study.

Students evaluated the peer critique on its benefits for communication, learning, reflection, better design, and professionalism. Feedback was also requested from
students to identify the most and least helpful of the seven in-class peer critique exercises. An explanation of how the instructor developed the in-class exercises, and how students were guided through the critique process, will be provided. By ascertaining the perceptions of peer critique participants, effective guidelines for the use of peer assessment in any curriculum will be suggested and presented to the audience.


• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Diane M. Bender, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor in the Interior Design program at Arizona State University. Her teaching and research combines her education and practical experience from multiple design disciplines. Dr. Bender’s research focuses on the use of technology in design practice and education, with findings published in the Journal of Interior Design and Journal of Educators Online, among others. A recent publication is a textbook entitled Design portfolios (3rd ed.). Current projects include the integration of online and studio education, the addition of Building Information Modeling into the design process, career development and the design internship, and the effective assessment of the digital design portfolio.