INFORMAL EDUCATION EXPERIENCE FOR ARCHITECTURE STUDENTS THROUGH ARTWORKS

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The gap between idea and design outcomes can be accepted as a major problem in design education. This gap can be defined as the problem of transforming knowledge into the design. There are many different formulas and supporting ways in this process such as extracurricular activities: workshops, exhibitions, reading and research groups, conferences, seminars, cultural tours, etc... Students gain valuable experience from these improvisation exercises and more importantly, these experiences may help them to attain their personal professional viewpoints different from the general frame. Therefore, the main focus of these extra activities is not only the acquisition of information but also its transformation. This transformation process by experiencing becomes the first step of a new and original design. This study is based on a workshop which proposes one and improves it by observing the outcomes. It aims to help the students to discover their own ways of transforming the ideas into design. The workshop consists of three modules: 1. Analyzes, 2. Filter, 3. Model. During the workshop, students discuss the elements and principles of design in their works and comprehend the way of creative thinking. By using basic principles of design as a vehicle, this study stands in the intersection of art and architecture.

Keywords: Abstraction, Informal education, Design education, Art, and Architecture.

1. Introduction and Literature Review

Architecture involves not only pure vision or classical five senses but also has a big experiential zone that interacts and unites with each part of them (Pallasmaa, 2011). With this multi-component pattern, architecture and its education are located in an unidentifiable space which has a relation with everything concerning human being. This situation which is the essence of architecture gives a sort of freedom to it. But this freedom is restricted with an analytic education process which is formed on accuracy and sometimes it can be squeezed in defined blocks by students or instructors. Nowadays, this limited process named as “formal education”, tend to be supported with extra works (workshops, seminars, exhibitions etc.) in order to fill the gap of transferring knowledge. Therefore, it can be said that formal education serves knowledge to students while informal education gives them thinking skills to be used in different relations. In this context, the main gap in the architectural design education can be accepted as lack of transforming knowledge into the design in the first years. This study is considered to be a key tool for searching design inspiration in an informal way. For this, a short-term study which could be called as informal was conducted. Standing in the intersection of art and architectural design, this study chose abstract art painting as a working area and used common principles of art and architectural design as tools.
2. Art and Architectural Design

Architecture can't be thought without art or any other disciplines which related to people. And both of them have a design process and composition. In design process, there are some materials to express the idea. Architectural design is a process that is hard to systematize or typologize. Designs are the result of different approaches, influences, and a trial-and-error process, especially when students are taking their first steps in the world of concept generation and design. They try something out and often discover that its potential is limited, yet their idea usually leads to new alternatives and interesting paths. This combination of inspiration and joy, of setbacks and frustration, sharpens their understanding of design assignment, and a design finally takes shape. (Bielefeld, 2013)

Steven Holl describes the architecture, “while artists work from the real to the abstract, architects must work from the abstract to the real” (1). So abstract-concrete transition and gaining interpretation skills among them are seen very important.

Art and architecture are close branches of art, which are feeding on each other to improve. Primarily, both of the branches use basic principles of art, although changing paradigms evolve them over time. Hence, they have intersections in education; both of them deals with forms and shapes, social paradigms, the environment, perception and any other abstract issues etc. Therefore, two branches have common courses in basic education. Secondly, looking from the real life, even there are specific interdisciplinary examples which prove two art branches can work with each other. Michelangelo; painter, sculptor, architect, has special paintings. Leonardo De Vinci was contemporary of Michelangelo, also especially known artworks. Le Corbusier, a modernist architect, has famous paintings, Steven Holl from recent times known as American architect and watercolorist. In addition to this, Art Museums in The UK have a special collection of drawings by hand from Frank Ghery, Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind, Rem Koolhaas, and other distinguished architects (2).

3. Informal Education as a Tool

The main common grounds between design and education issues are the pedagogical ones. The design is a free occasion. It happens by heart, introduces you to you. In addition, you cannot exhibit yourself without being free. While an artwork is exhibited, you try to understand what is being expressed. To think about an artwork means, you are analyzing, interpreting and synthesizing all the items used. While thinking, time passes and you forget yourself in design. Education has to be just the same. Education has to be a ghost habit, in which pupil can forget themselves during learning.

Workshops, exhibitions, reading and research groups, conferences, seminars, cultural tours, etc... can be supporting ways in transformation of knowledge into the design in design education.

The definition of the workshop as an educational tool may well be made like “an educational meeting where a small group explore some subject, develop a skill or technique; carry out a creative project, etc.” Workshops are one of the most important informal learning organizations which provide a practical, intensive, short-term training method that can be used with a lot of number of topics (Brooks-Harris & Stock-Ward, 1999).

Besides formal education, especially in architectural education the informal studies are supportive activities in terms of improving students’ individual and collective learning techniques and also achieving the design thinking techniques and practices. (Polatoğlu and Vural, 2014)

From this point of view integrated studios—collaboration of formal and informal organizations—in architectural design education will provide a multi-dimensional and dynamic construction by creating a participatory and interactive study environment with the help of increasing the communication between the candidate, lecturer, other actors of profession and other disciplines. (Polatoğlu and Vural, 2014)

In design education, a student acquires to experience the design by his/her own and this is the only way to learn how to design. In this respect, it is possible to talk about three stages in architectural education. First stage is gaining knowledge and skill for establishing fundamental; second stage is using
the gained knowledge and skill and the third stage is focused on producing new knowledge from the gained ones (Polatoğlu and Vural, 2012).

4. Study Design

**Aim:** Aim of the study is to improve unique methodologies for the transformation of knowledge into the design by using abstract paintings. Participants were expected to use design principles and concepts which are common denominators of fine arts and architecture both.

**Participants:** First year on architectural design education is so important to get rid of standardization. Due to this study needs participants who haven’t so much technical knowledge yet, first-year architectural education students participated in this workshop. It was conducted at the 7th week of a semester which was nearly half of semester. So, all students were taking Basic Design course at the same semester and they had a background for abstraction and design principles.

**Tools:** Abstract artworks were used in this study because it supports creative thinking for architectural design education. “Abstract art uses a visual language of shape, form, color and line to create a composition which may exist with a degree of independence from visual references in the world” (3). Students analyzed the paintings by using Basic Design Elements (dots, lines, shapes, form, color) and Principles (Symmetry, contrast, hierarchy, balance, etc).

**Process:** The process of the study can be divided into three parts: Analyze Filter and Model. In the part of Analyze; each participant chooses several paintings (as signifiers) first. Next, they had a literature review about their art trends, artworks, painters and their lives. After research presentations, artworks were chosen by the instructors. In this part, they also deeply analyzed their chosen artwork, and separated them into their layers. They sketched and separate the artworks into layers according to their shapes, lines, colors or anything they noticed. This part can also be named as “interiorizing” part because participants

![Figure 1. Process of the study](image-url)
deeply examined the artworks and in order to understand the art they gained new potentials to see contexts. They created new thinking ways to understand a design. At the second part (Filter), students interpreted their chosen artwork, and they produced a new one which was still two-dimensional. The new designs were expected to be reached by their own analyzes and thinking ways. After the first part, this one was a mediator part to reach the final work. They were free for using different kinds of tools (colored pens, sketching pencils, crayons, newspaper, string etc.) The way of expression was also free for participants, so some of them used collage methods to express him/her work. The last part of the study is the model part. All new designs were expected to be transformed into 3-dimensional models. Synthesis of all data from artworks (signifiers) and new knowledge were used for reification. Finally, students transformed their abstractions into three-dimensional forms.

**Table 1. Outcomes of the students’ works**
Outcomes of the study: Students enjoyed during the study because of dealing with subjects like abstract art that is distinct from a theoretical architectural course. Besides they learned how to do a research in a holistic way. They both had technical and theoretical analyzes in the same time. This study also showed that students had enough basic knowledge for analyzing. They could use theory from supporting courses. But they couldn’t systematize the knowledge. Especially in the synthesis part (between filter and model) they tended to be stuck in the first image, they had difficulties in improving new images or models.

Furthermore, this workshop contributed the development of some important skills such as design thinking skills, pre-design investigation skills, problem-solving skills, creative thinking skills, teamwork and interdisciplinary experiences, collaborative working skills, integrated communication skills, visual communication skills (Karshl, U. T. and Özker, S., 2014).

Table 2. Outcomes of the students’ works (continued)

5. Conclusion

These types of informal studies propose a way for the design process. Their mission of being a lighthouse helps to light the road of design. While the variability of the design process emphasis on individuality provides to discover a unique way for the designer. In spite of the fact that the study has a structure drawn
by the lecturer, the limits can be stretched by participants. The “process” -the most important point- can even go to a completely different direction. Therefore, the steps taken in the informal education of design process have to be described as if they are not a place to arrive from somewhere, as a flow chart without end, containing continuity on the contrary. What is important here is that; the method in this journey is formed collectively, not by dictation. Consequently with this kind of exercises, the students learn to interrogate, find new ways, new thinking skills, improve their critical thinking skills and find individual analyzing ways, look out of the box in order to make process comprehensible.

References


