

Creating a healthier design studio culture through a new approach to critique

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Alternative approaches to understanding critique in the field of design studio teaching are discussed in the *Journal of Design Research*. Jason McDonald of Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah and Esther

Michela of the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee, U.S., suggest that rather than viewing critique as being primarily about educational outcomes, such as accumulating design knowledge, or socializing students to a particular profession, they hope their insights will help students move forward as individuals.

In design education the term "critique" is flexible, the researchers explain it is just as likely to refer to a range of activities in which students receive feedback on their work as being a formal "jury evaluation" of their output. It can also simply be an in-class discussion among instructors and students or even informal, out-of-class help among students themselves. Unfortunately, it is well recognized that critique can be harmful, dominating, and oppressive, in many ways rather than a valuable educational and learning tool.

While the teaching and socializing aspects of critique remain important, their new perspective is not so much about facilitating the management of the students' education but more about helping students take up specific ways of life that are made available through studio participation. The incentive for finding a new approach in this context is that the conventional critique approach exists in a high-stakes form and can have a [detrimental effect](#) on a [student's](#) wellbeing rather than a positive one. There is a definite need to create healthier studio culture that provides education in a more positive environment. Critique acts upon students and can change them not necessarily for the better.

The team recognizes that the pros and cons of critique may well be understood by many educators already. "Our intent," they write, "has not been to propose wholly unprecedented ideas about how critiques can take place." They add that rather, "Our aim was to develop a way of speaking about critiques that considers their foremost purpose to be supporting students who are pressing into forms of the self that are opened up through [studio](#) participation."

More information: Jason K. McDonald et al. 'This is my vision': how students depict critiques along with themselves during critiques, *J. of Design Research* (2020). [DOI: 10.1504/JDR.2020.112057](https://doi.org/10.1504/JDR.2020.112057)

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