A Protest Against Academic Taylorism: A New Approach to Interior Design Education

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ABSTRACT: The design education helps to emcompass many learning, synthesis opportunities and it has an interdisciplinary approach. However, even today, traditional educational models are developed in regard to academic taylorism, which are far away from an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach. In the present paper, we investigate the following questions; why a new approach is necessary for the structure of thinking and practice in interior design education? How can we restructure knowledge and design education in the interdisciplinary arena? Further, the paper presents a case study, discussing an educational model in interior design with a protest against “academic taylorism”. The proposed model and the educational approach has been actively used in the last six years. Some of the outcomes of the present model are; almost all students seem to be quite happy to gain an interdisciplinary view. They are also very productive since they have been working with the students in the program of cinema, painting, communication and also graphic design, this leads them to develop a common language. They also take part in national and international student competitions as a team.

KEYWORDS: academic taylorism, interior design, interdisciplinary study, multidisciplinary study, Bauhaus

INTRODUCTION: Definition of the Problem and Taylorism

In traditional educational models, even today, academic taylorism uses a management approach which is far away from providing an interdisciplinary and technically competent professional education. In these models, the curriculum is divided into a series of courses each having its own outcomes. It is aimed to organize the content of each course “at the upper most level, highly productive”, however neither the students, nor the instructors are aware of the program outcomes. These mechanisms lead to piles of paperwork that often have little or no connection to teaching or what really takes place in the essence of the profession. However, one of the most frustrating aspects of academic taylorism has been the lack of “quality control” that are implemented from year to year, semester to semester basis. In Figure 1, the schematic view for education models which are structured in regard to “academic taylorism” are visible. In these models, each course is completed in itself, there is no connection, or a little connection with the course contents. There can be equal weight in disciplines (model 1), or unequal weight in disciplines (model 2) as seen in the figure below. However, there is no holistic approach in the lateral and/or the vertical structures.

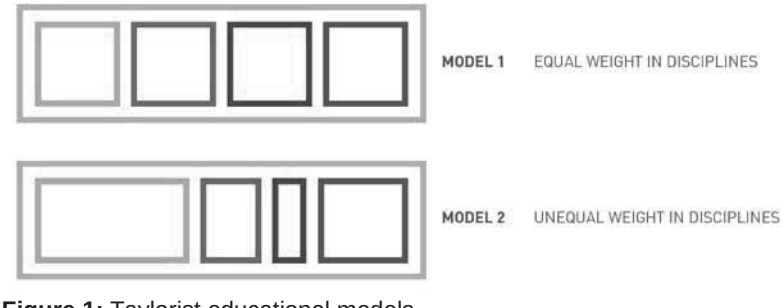

Figure 1: Taylorist educational models

Hence, the “design” education offers a holistic view to art, design and science by means of visual studies, computer skills, technology, history and art-crafts. The collaborative

interdisciplinary design studies augmented by lectures, seminars, workshops form the core of the program which offers the opportunity to integrate and synthesis what is being studied. (Figure 2). For interior design education, its unification with other disciplines are important. The interdisciplinary structure brings flexibility and supports creativity. In today's approach, boundaries between disciplines are moderated which leads to produce interdisciplinary projects. In other words, an interior architect can work with an electrical engineer and an industrial designer in order to design a lighting fixture. A design team can have an architect, an interior architect, an industrial designer who are specialized in their own professions and also they can create a project together as well. This approach is illustrated in Figure 3. The professional practice is essential for each discipline, however the forcefulness depends on the project topic and the content.

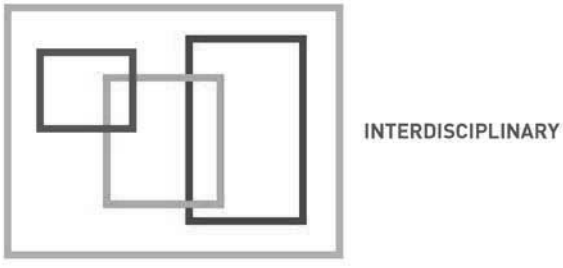

Figure 2: Interdisciplinary approach

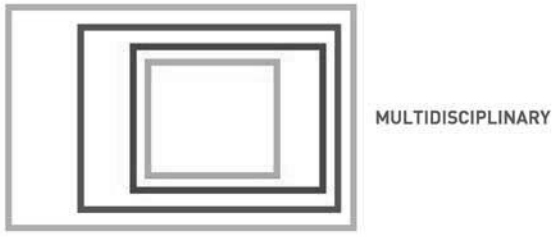

Figure 3: Multidisciplinary approach

The proposed model highlights the importance of the unificiation of the various disciplines. The project team is composed of members from various disciplines (as similar to the multidisciplinary view). Their strength in the project is similar to each other, and each member should be equipped with a "designer background".

In this approach, "the design studio is the core of the whole system, it is a platform where students start to acquire the sense of decisions". At the most general level, the design education helps to emcompass many learning and synthesis opportunities.

The present paper investigates why a new approach is necessary for the structure of thinking and practice in interior design education? How can we restructure knowledge and design education in the multidisciplinary arena? This paper presents a case study, discussing an interdisciplinary education model in interior design with a protest against "academic taylorism". The proposed model and the educational approach has been used actively in the last six years.

1. Basic Structure of the New Curriculum

A multi-disciplined model is offerred for art and design education, with a special emphasis on project making ability. Today, more than ever, art and design education is an interdisciplinary practice without clear boundaries. Expanding on this point of view, the characteristics of traditional interior design education is turned into a holistic studio program into which all the compulsory and elective courses are incorporated (Rowe,1987).

The core of the model offers opportunity to integrate and synthesis the technical, artistic, theoretical and historical design-related issues. The goal of this program is to reveal the potential talents, as opposed to teach certain lectures to them the program helps students to explore their potential and therefore, find their own individual direction. The issues which are studied are as follows;

- the terminology related to basic design,
- the built environment at macro and micro scale,
- principles of construction,
- history of art and interior design,
- environmental sciences such as lighting, HVAC,
- material property and detailing,
- art / cinema, art / painting
- graphic design
- industrial design
- critical thinking and theory
- reuse of interiors / restoration and renovation

1.1 The Academic Staff Profile

The role of the academic staff in this model is being involved in the design practice actively. The general principles of the forming staff profile are as follows;

- Basically every staff should be a designer such as an interior architect, architect, industrial designer, graphical designer, furniture designer.

- Each staff should take part in the studio work.

As a designer, to set-up a link between theoretical information and design education is essential. Such staff who is merely specialize in “architectural history” without having a “design” background can hardly be an advisor at studio classes and critics. It is expected to create a sort of informative link between a specific design problem with its historical background. The same approach is expected to be applied in the case of environmental sciences –lighting, acoustics, sanitary systems, as well as restoration, re-use and adaptability, and elective courses. The academic staff encourage students to be involved in design practice by exhibitions, competitions and sectoral coordination as well.

1.2 Cardinal Principles in New Approaches

The undergraduate curriculum is redesigned and analyzed systematically where the education system is flexible and varies according to the individual talents; there is not a specific formula for all students, each student’s program is individualized in relation to his/her own field of interest and potential (Lawson,2008).

As Gharaati (2006) suggested, although the courses taught in architecture schools around the world vary between schools, they can be divided into two general categories. The first is the design studio and the second is the lectures or seminars, which are basically theory-oriented. In the proposed model, this philosophy is the main objective which is supported by a horizontal and vertical structure.

The horizontal structure links the courses given in a semester to each other by means of the content and the method of education. The vertical structure on the other hand suggests a continuity in the education philosophy by means of suggesting pre-requisite courses such as “the interior design studio”. All the other courses tend to be complementary or auxiliary to the design studio.

The proposed model is put in a context in which there is a challenge and a main theme for each year. Figure 4 illustrates these themes for the undergraduate curriculum. In the first year, “creativity” is the main theme, followed by “technology” in the second year. The third year, “history” is the core of the educational approach and the fourth year courses are designed with the main topic “synthesis”.

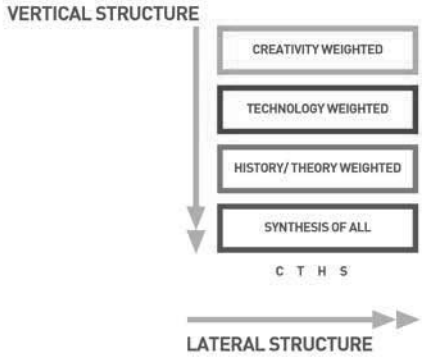

Figure 4: The structure of the proposed model

The structural system offers to design the following year's curriculum and the main theme in regard to the "main theme and the outcomes" of the previous year. Therefore, "technology" comprises "creativity", "history" involves "creativity and technology", and "synthesis" includes all the three themes.

The educational approach in the proposed model is based on the principles which have been developed during Bauhaus and it can be summed up as follows;

Learning by doing
Students learn by doing, it is an interactive process, supplied by various elective courses

Learn how to learn
Students are encouraged to learn different research methods. The program is "student-centered", hence it is aimed to increase the instructor's awareness of students' learning styles. Equipped with a well-rounded curriculum, students are qualified to build interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary relations throughout their educational life.

Applying multi disciplined learning models
Project making ability (an interior design Project with history, theory and space planning and furniture design issues, related to an art exhibition planning, brand image study for a big company etc) is practiced with a specific approach of the related discipline. The boundaries between disciplines are broken down which leads flexibility in teaching and collaboration between the professions.

Applying productive evaluation techniques rather than controversial examination methods
Paper presentation, take-home exam, presentation and discussion panels have been used instead of controversial methods. Also combined systems have been developed, that means, all those new examining techniques would cover all the subjects which have been dealt with during the term. Therefore, instead of several separate examinations, combined papers and/or projects would be applied.

Team working ability-encouraging team work
Students are encouraged to study in groups, take responsibilities and present as a team

2.Application of the Curriculum/ The Case Study

The undergraduate curriculum of the Interior Design Department was re-designed and a multi-disciplined education model was proposed in 2007. The curriculum is designed in respect to the "program outcomes" which are determined beforehand. The objectives can be listed as follows;

- Is within the architectural discipline, has local, regional, national and international knowledge regarding different space planning issues related to interior architectural design and planning.
- Sets up a substructure for design proposals which are people and community orientated , culturally and environmentally sensitive.
- Improves skill in developing design concept and planning. Acquaint with defining and investigating special problems on different space planning and design issues.
- Develops creative, novel, aesthetical and unique problem solving alternatives related to different space planning issues in the light of abstract and concrete concepts.
- Makes valuation on knowledge and skill in the relevant field by critical thinking and by dialectic decision method.
- Has self confidence and competence while carrying on with work in the relevant field, plans research projects within this period, takes part in application projects, takes mutual and individual responsibilities in interdisciplinary projects.
- Expresses oneself in writing, verbally and visually to be in collaboration with the related corporation in the relevant field.
- Has competence in using at least one computer aided drawing program as required by the relevant field.
- Has multidimensional line of sight for economical, environmental and communal sustainability norms and standards in the relevant field.
- Within human-environment relationship has respect to social and cultural rights, has conscious competence in making decisions on the protection of cultural heritage and natural property.
- Recognizes national and international values in art and design.
- Recognizes ethics and aesthetics in art and design.
- Knowing the duties and authorities of the profession, has competence in the protection of natural and cultural values, pays attention to occupational health and safety, offers solution to increase space quality.
- Has knowledge of norms, standards, laws and regulations of the profession.

Secondly, a matrix was developed in respect to each course in the curriculum. The logic of the matrix is parallel to the "likert scale" with a four level evaluation criteria; no support, low level support, moderate support and high level support. Figure 5 illustrates the matrix, the evaluation of the undergraduate curriculum in respect to the program outcomes.

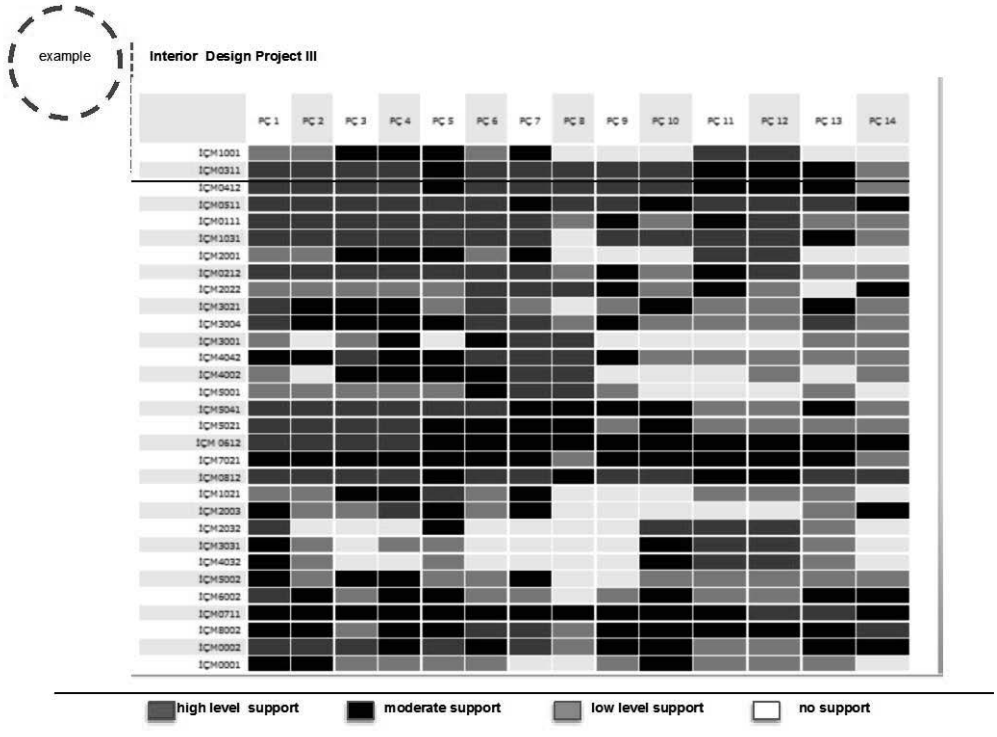

Figure 5: The breakdown of the matrix and evaluation of the undergraduate curriculum (İKU Interior Architecture and Environmental Design Undergraduate curriculum, (http://www.iku.edu.tr/EN/108-2-48-82-1259-598-1-1-1/Course-Program-Outcomes-Matrix)

The courses which are well integrated with most of the program outcomes are the interior design project courses. This supports the main principle of the curriculum; it is a project-based system and the curriculum shall be designed accordingly; the whole system shall support the Interior Design Project courses mainly by the technology based courses, the art and design history courses, elective courses on various topics as well as the building science courses. This approach is schematized in Figure 6 where the Interior Design Project III course is taken as an example and the lateral integrity of the structure is emphasized.

The proposed model encourages team work which brings flexibility and creativity in design problem solving practice. The student is in contact with different parties to gain project solving ability, to improve her/his presentation techniques, to unify building science issues and human comfort into the interior design project and also to learn how to express himself verbally and graphically in front of the professionals.

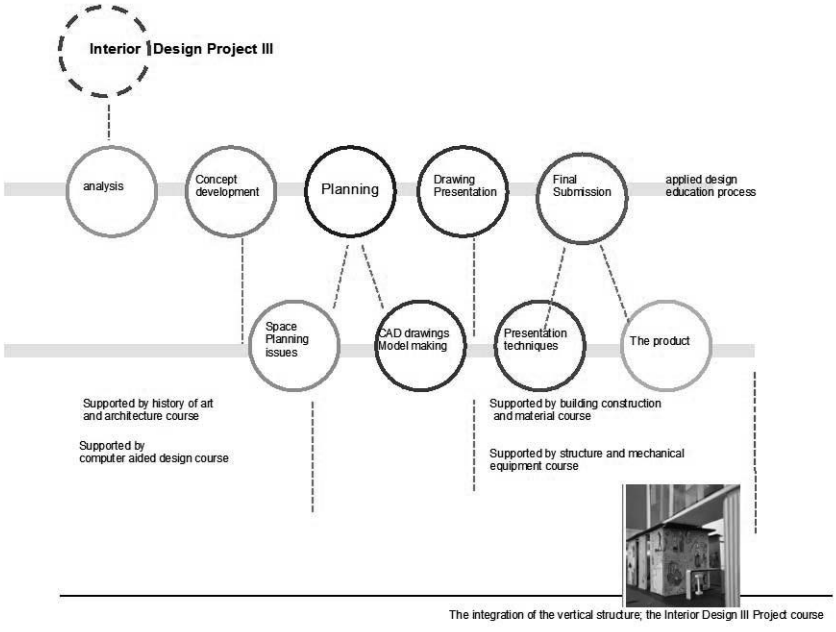

Figure 6: Integration of the Interior Design Project III course to the lateral structure

3. Evaluation of the Curriculum

A case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case. It can be defined as the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances. Though the case study seems a poor generalization because of studying only a single case, these sample studies can be studied in length. In the present paper, only a unique experiment is observed. Hence, there are various factors some of which can be included to enlarge the study. Sometimes, the uncontrolled factors in case studies make long term observations more difficult. Therefore, generalization might not be possible in our specific experimental study, only some proposals might be forwarded for future studies (Linda and David, 2002).

The only way of evaluating the new curriculum is the feedback from students, graduates and also from the staff. In particular, in the present system, students seem to be more satisfied from the staff who have a “design” background. A systematic approach has been established in order to collect different sides taking part in the application of the new system by means of buzz meetings. In these meetings, people from different sides are asked to be completely free to express their real expressions. In this approach, students and their families seem to be quite happy since the number of the new applications have increased in the recent years. On the other hand, at the end of each term, panel discussions are organized in order to make clear the problems which arise during the term.

4. Early Outcomes / Proposals for the Future

The idea of collaboration in architectural education is not a new trend as pointed out in Elnimeiri et al (2006). Two principles constitute the success of collaboration; first the importance of the holistic approach and understanding the role of each parties such as the town planner, the architect, the interior architect and the industrial designer. The architect needs to acknowledge that the industrial design is as much a design discipline as architecture, meanwhile industrial designers need to share the views of the architects in their technical solutions. This point of view reflects all parties involved in all issues of the building design and construction.

The presented approach and the curriculum has been actively used and developed in the last six years. The basic aim of the curriculum is to establish a link between all lecture courses and design studios. It is believed that the improvement in the ability of students is strongly based

on the collaborative work of the educational team, and also it is accepted that the team work of the educators would be affective on the performance of the students. The basic asumption is that, educators do not work separately, that means they are not free to act separately.

Another important point of the new approach is to estalish a working environment in which not only design students, but also other art students are educated together in a unified system. At the end of each term, a type of buzz meeting has been organized in order to reveal different problems and unseen, unspoken points of the curriculum.

The points listed below have been noticed during the last three meetings;

- Today, various presentation methods shall be used in interior design education such as film making, advertisement et cetera. This approach leads to work with different professional groups which demolishes “academic taylorism” and improves creativity and flexibility.
- This new approach in interior design education enhance students to be productive in the field of cinema, painting, communication, as well as graphic design since most of them will have started to develop a common project. Traditional education methods did not encourage students to study at an inter-disciplinary arena.
- Almost all students seem to be quite happy being in co-operation with art students. This helped them to develop a common language in the field of art and design.
- They also take part in national and international student competitions as a team
- Since the university encourages team working, the quality of the products increased and also the number of the awards have increased. This success is supported by the university as well.

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