

Teaching For Art Criticism: Incorporating Feldman's Critical Analysis Learning Model In Students' Studio Practice

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ABSTRACT

This study adopted 30 first year graphic design students' artwork, with critical analysis using Feldman's model of art criticism. Data were analyzed quantitatively; descriptive statistical techniques were employed. The scores were viewed in the form of mean score and frequencies to determine students' performances in their critical ability. Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to find out the correlation between students' studio practice and art critical ability scores. The findings showed most students performed slightly better than average in the critical analyses and performed best in selecting analysis among the four dimensions assessed. In the context of the students' studio practice and critical ability, findings showed there are some connections between the students' art critical ability and studio practice.

Keywords: *Art Criticism, Feldman, Critical Analyses, Learning Model, Studio Practice*

INTRODUCTION

In current practices of art education, artistic knowledge refers to the ability of art students to handle production issues of art, comprising practical studio work and critical knowledge. From the teaching perspective, the learning of studio practice is delivered through practical subjects dealing directly with disciplines such as drawing, painting, photography, architecture, graphic design, interior design and many more. As for the learning of critical knowledge it is delivered through theoretical subjects such as art history, art appreciation, art criticism and aesthetics. Students reaching proficiency in art should be able to display not only mastery of contents of each component, but also integration of the two components. In other word, apart from being skilful in making art, the students must also be knowledgeable in talking or writing about art.

One of the common approaches to art learning in enhancing students' critical knowledge is to teach them art criticism. In such an approach, students are not only taught to study the appropriate steps of making criticism but also to apply the proper strategies of making criticism that they can carry directly into their studio practices. As a term, *art criticism* refers to the process of exercising a serious and objective examination on a work of art and making systematic judgment of it. The art criticism process seeks to inform and educate people (including artists) about art by providing insights into the meaning and significance of artworks. Through art criticism, one is aided in increasing one's understanding about art, and thus, building a better sense of appreciation toward art by being illuminated with the cultural and societal values, according to what an art work proffers. Although art criticism is still a philosophically contested concept (Geahigan,

1983), it is in a practical sense a linguistic exploration of art works, or a talk about art (Feldman, 1982) in which we discover a deeper meaning of art and clarify our ways of observation when reacting to it. Seeing the virtues of art criticism, especially in the current system of art training, art educators are strongly proposing instruction in art history and art criticism in art classes, in addition to studio practice (Hamblen, 1985).

To be sure art criticism addresses the meaning and significance of works of art. It deals with art in the form of spoken or written discussion in the context relevant to the present necessity (Greer, 1984). The exercise of art criticism by analyzing works of visual art enhances one's perception and appreciation, deepens one's feelings for other human beings, and elevates one's level of humanity. The elements of art criticism, when combined with those of aesthetics, support the development of a commonly known notion called aesthetic experience. This tripartite focus of viewing, understanding and experiencing has a history in the literature of art education dating back more than two decades. Given such an orientation, art criticism is commended in art education literature as a more successful strategy of art teaching than those traditionally used by studio art instructors. For this reason, Barrett (1988), for example, suggests engaging students in descriptive analysis and interpretive argumentation to arrive at more carefully reasoned and more fully argued judgments on a work of art, in a process that can be realized through art criticism. This he contends will give both the teacher and students more to consider and more to talk about visual arts (Barrett, 1988).

In a NAEA Advisory Publication, Tollifson (1990) summarized that writing responses in art criticism provides students with greater depth in learning, allowing them to refine their verbal and perceptual abilities. Besides that, students' written criticism allows the teacher to provide more detailed guidance, better management and evaluation of critical activities, and assessment of student growth in the art critical process (Johnson and Cooper, 1994, p. 22). The pedagogical function of art criticism, according to a leading art theorist, is to help students participate in [the] chain of looking, seeing, and experiencing, and later to transfer what they have learned to do with art to the world at large (Eisner, 1988, p. 19). Art criticism is important because it provides students with opportunities to learn to perceive, explore and describe their visual world in a highly individual and unique way. Such a process and encounter will inevitably be based on aesthetics (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990), the branch of philosophy that deals with the study of beauty.

Art criticism is a vital assessment tool for development and growth in the arts. Art critics analyze, evaluate, interpret and study works of art, translate or articulate the intangible to tangible. Art criticism formats have in common a more or less linear step-by-step approach in which steps build upon each other. Undoubtedly, Feldman's method consisting of (1) description, (2) formal analysis, (3) interpretation, and (4) judgment has been the most prominent and thoroughly examined art criticism format in art education (Hamblen, 1985). Students of all ages can learn the main concepts of art criticism and apply them when they make oral or written statements about art. They observe, describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate (Barrett, 1988; Chapman, 1978; Feldman, 1982). They can learn the concepts used in discussing works of art, beginning with descriptions of the sensory properties (line, color, shape, texture, and value), moving to an analysis of the formal properties of the work (balance, rhythm, theme, and variation), interpretation (intrinsic and extrinsic meaning), and finally looking at judgements

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feldman model (1970)

The study of art appreciation in art education textbooks designed for art teachers revealed that there are very few theoretical statements about art criticism and evaluation. The inclusion of criteria or standards for evaluating works of art was very brief (Clark and Hurwitz, 1975). Before 1970, only the Feldman text, *Becoming Human Through Art*, presented a method for the criticism and evaluation of works of art. A thorough reading of his theory shows that he believes the student first examines the art object for thematic and utilitarian values prior to description (Feldman, 1982). The student looks for the "pervasive quality," or style, of the artwork. Immediately the student begins to search for cues to categorize information about the art object. Feldman's philosophy includes four areas of style: objective accuracy, formal order, emotion and fantasy. The student strongly begins to associate the work with one of the four styles, although these areas of style are not included as portions of Feldman's model, per se.

The Feldman system of criticism is an inductive process for inferring conclusions (generalities) from the available evidence (particulars). His model of criticism has served as a model in four stages for making statements about a work of art. It has been used by teachers of art appreciation with the underlying premise that students who master this method are able to think and talk intelligently about art. Feldman believes that if students can think and talk intelligently about art they will know and like it better (Feldman, 1982).

Discussing art is considered integral to the critical experience, as well as interpretation of the work of art. Feldman emphasizes the importance of interpretation in explaining the artwork. Feldman states, "Interpretation is tremendously challenging; it is certainly the most important part of the critical enterprise. Explaining a work of art involves discovering its meanings and also stating the relevance of these meanings to our lives and to the human situation in general" (Feldman, 1982, p. 476). He positions this act in step three of his model. The following is Feldman's method of criticism model for the students to use in art-critical performance:

a) Description

Description is the first step in the process of critiquing art (Feldman, 1994). During the description process critics make observations about what they see. These observations must be objective with no inferences or expressions of personal opinion, listing only what is seen without using value words such as 'beautiful' or 'ugly'. What is the written description on the label or in the program about the work? What is the title and who is (are) the artist(s)? When and where was the work created? Describe the elements of the work (i.e., line movement, light, space). Describe the technical qualities of the work (i.e., tools, materials, instruments). Describe the subject matter. What is it all about? Are there recognizable images? (Jones, 2008)

b) Analysis

Analysis is the second step in art critiquing process (Feldman, 1994). At this point the critics express their thoughts about the message of the artwork. Analysis relies heavily on the critic's knowledge of the elements of art and principles of design to articulate in knowledgeable style the information seen in a work of art. To describe how the work is organized as a complete composition the critic should ask the following questions: How is the work constructed or planned (i.e., acts, movements, lines)? Identify some of the similarities throughout the work (i.e., repetition of lines, two songs in each act). Identify some of the points of emphasis in the work (i.e., specific scene, figure, movement). If the work has subjects or characters, what are the relationships between or among them?" (Jones, 2008)

c) Interpretation

Interpretation is the third step of the critiquing process (Feldman, 1994). The critics express their opinion about what they think the artist is trying to say by describing what it means to them, how it makes them feel or what expressive qualities the piece has. The critic should ask the following questions: What expressive language would you use to describe the qualities (i.e., tragic, ugly, funny)? Does the work remind you of other things you have experienced (i.e., analogy or metaphor)? How does the work relate to other ideas or events in the world and/or in your other studies? (Jones, 2008)

d) Judgment

Judgment or theory is the final step in the art critique process (Feldman, 1994). During the judgment the critics state their own opinion about the work of art. The artwork assessed whether the piece is a success or failure by asking the following questions: What qualities of the work make you feel it is a success or failure? What criteria can you list to help others judge this work? How original is the work? Why do you feel this work is original or not original? (Jones, 2008)

Studio practice

Studio practice dominates art education practice at the elementary, middle, and high school levels and also in the higher learning institutions. If art education practice is to reflect a concern for teaching for understanding, it is imperative that studio instruction receive attention. A studio practice involves a group of students engaging in art making as if they are artists in a particular field of art (e.g., ceramic artist; urban and regional designer; graphic designer; product designer; media designer). They engage in real world problems-

-not exercises, use tools of the artist, and produce art objects. Professionals are models for students. Whatever the student needs to know in terms of technique, use of materials, and problem-solving skills is presented as the student needs it, through small teaching or learning episodes as the unit unfolds. Student artwork is accompanied by artistic statements and displayed as a design process, with preliminary work leading up to the final product.

A number of qualitative studies have been undertaken which investigated some of the complexities of learning and teaching studio practice in higher education, such as the influence of art world beliefs on departmental, instructional, and student beliefs and behaviors (Adler, 1979; Madge and Weinberger, 1973); relationships among student personalities, beliefs, and goals (Strauss, 1970); and how students engage in creative processes (Cornock, 1984; Getzels & Csikszentmahalyi, 1976). Other researchers have explored interpersonal interactions and the relationship of an instructor's philosophy to curriculum and instruction (Dinham, 1987; Janesick, 1982) and the social, philosophical, environmental, and pedagogical dimensions of a ceramics class. With rapid changes taking place in student populations, art world practices, art technologies, and educational institutions, continued research about actual studio classrooms is necessary so that we may understand the nature of studio practice in various contexts.

In practice, the critique in the studio classroom is inextricably linked to the evaluation of art made by student artists. Chapman (1978) also advocates the study and practice of criticism so that children gain the ability to respond to works of art and the environment, becoming familiar with subtle forms of feeling and more challenging images than they are likely to examine by themselves, and learn how experts examine works of art. In learning how experts examine works of art, children need to learn procedures of criticism, and Chapman offers several approaches to criticism including those she refers to as deductive, inductive, and empathic. She details each one of these approaches and stresses the critical procedure of interpretation more than the procedure of evaluation, excluding evaluation totally from the empathic approach.

Through studio practice in relation to art criticism activities in the classroom, students interpret and judge individual works of art. The work of art itself should guide the approach to inquiry. For example, a non-objective painting initially may be approached through description, while a highly-detailed, symbol-filled realistic painting probably would be best approached first through possible interpretations of meaning. Written art criticism can be thought of as persuasive writing, with interpretations of meaning supported by reasoned judgments. Critics' descriptions are lively. Critics write to be read, and they must capture their readers' attention and engage their readers' imaginations. Critics want to persuade their readers to see a work of art as they do. If they are enthused, they try to communicate their enthusiasm through their choice of descriptors and how they put them together in a sentence, a paragraph, and an article (Barret, 1994). Similarly, words are virtually indispensable for communicating a critic's understanding; words enable us to build bridges between sensory impressions, prior experience, logical inferences, and the tasks of interpretation and explanation (Feldman, 1994).

Art education students may well be more influenced by their participation in studio critiques than by reading about criticism in art education texts or occasionally practicing criticism in art education courses or perhaps even by taking a course in criticism. Studio critiques are likely to be very influential in a student's education because of the sheer accumulation of critiques students participate in throughout studio courses in several media over several years. Studio practice involving criticism is also likely to be an influential experience because of the students' acute and vested interest in the critiques since it is their own work which is the subject of critiques. Harmony between studio practice and art education curricula in the practice of art criticism would enhance the chance of success in achieving art education goals for the teaching of art and criticism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The experimental research, the one shot case study discussed follows a standard form: the purpose of an experiment and the rationale for its selection for the proposed study, sample, instrumentation, variables in the study and data analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2011).

This study utilized a sample comprising 30 ($n = 30$) students who enrolled as the first year graphic design students. The sample was selected using purposive sampling technique (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The one-shot case study design was used, where this single group of students were exposed to a treatment in order to assess the effect of the treatment. Because the study was still exploratory in nature, the sample was treated as a case, and not as a representation of a population to which the findings can be inferred. As for this study, the methodology was planned to involve two major activities. The two activities were aimed at organizing procedures to gather data.

By the assistance of two lecturers from the university, the researcher managed to complete the tasks of monitoring and collecting students' artworks with their critical analyses according to the planned procedures. The students' studio production and critical analyses were assessed by 5 assessors to prevent possible bias in marking student work. This research employed a design that helped to interpret research data by means of quantitative technique. The descriptive statistics made use of frequency counts, percentages and mean scores to determine students' performances and comparisons of means to determine the differences in contributing factors. The Pearson correlation coefficient was employed to make simple prediction as to what possible dimensions of art criticism may affect students' studio practice scores. The level was set at alpha .05.

FINDINGS

The result of students' overall performance in art critical ability is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Scores Achieved by Students in the Art Critical Ability Assessment

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
30	44.00	77.00	62.267	7.830

Based on the total score of 100, the mean score of students' level of knowledge is 62.27. This shows that, by general standards of the university's score, the students' acquisition of knowledge in art criticism is good, that is falling within grade B-. Although it is not a superior score, students are generally knowledgeable about art criticism. However, the big range between the highest score of 77 and the lowest score of 44 seems to indicate that the students' ability is quite varied.

In order to provide a better picture of students' score, the details of score distribution are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Grade Percentage Obtained by Students in the Art Critical Ability Assessment

Grade	Percentage (%)
A	0
A-	6.7
B+	13.3
B	23.3
B-	20.0
C+	20.0
C	13.3
D	3.3
F	0

Table 2 shows the distribution of students' scores in their assessment of art criticism. The distribution is observed on the basis of percentage of students' getting grades from grade A (Superior) to grade F (Inferior). From a total of 30 students, none scored grade A, only 6.7% scored A-. Most students achieved grades B with the highest percentage of 23.3%. While 20% of the students scored B- and C+ respectively and 13.3% scored grade B. The remaining, 3.3% were students with grade D.

Having seen the general students' performance in their art criticism, it is of interest to examine this performance with respect to the four dimensions, according to Feldman's Model of Art Criticism, namely: description, analysis, interpretation and judgment. Figure 1 shows the mean score of students' critical analyses exercise using the bar graphs on dimensions. The total score of each dimension is 20.

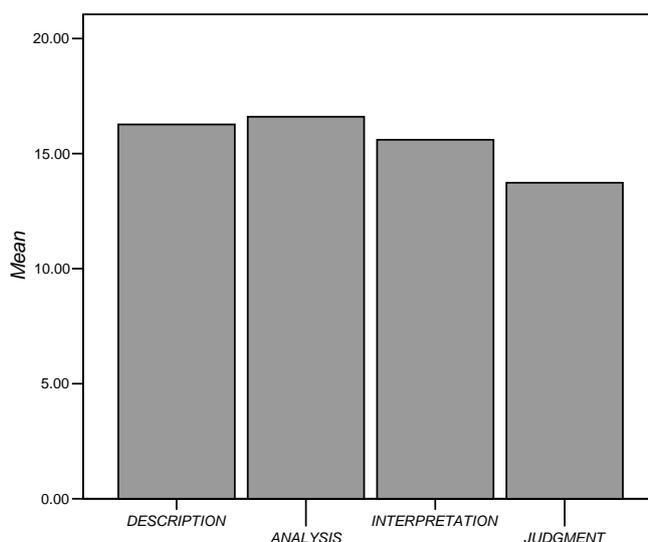


Figure 1. Bar chart of the students' mean score in critical performance with reference to the four critical dimensions of Feldman's model of art criticism.

As the figure shows, students have demonstrated a fairly equal ability across the four dimensions. However, upon closer scrutiny, the students show the highest ability in analysis with a mean score of 16.6. Quite predictably, the students seemed to have the poorest showing in making judgement with a mean score of 13.73. Meanwhile, their scores on the other two dimensions were: description, Feldman's highest dimension with a mean score 16.27 and interpretation with a mean score 15.6. Needless to mention, this is the highest dimension to measure critical ability shown in Figure 1. From the findings, it is concluded that students excelled in the area of analysis and description dimensions. On the other hand, students appear to have not developed well in interpretation and judgment dimensions.

Having examined student performance in their critical ability, it is now a question of how good is this showing to indicate connection to their studio practice? The following results are presented to answer this question. Table 3 shows the results of test for correlation using Pearson's method to determine whether or not such connection exists. The score for studio practice was obtained to correlate with the score of the art critical ability.

Table 3: Results obtained between students' studio practice and art critical ability scores

N	Studio Practice Score		Art Critical Ability Score			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	r	p
30	65.2	17.509	62.27	7.830	.436	<.05

* $p < .05$

As Table 3 shows, students scored more in studio practice ($M = 65.2, SD = 17.509$) than critical ability ($M = 62.27, SD = 7.83$), $r(28) = .436, p < .05$. However, it is interesting to note that there appears to be some form of connection between students' level of critical knowledge and their studio practice. This is evident by the fact that the Pearson's correlation matrix of $r(28) = .436, p < .05$ shows a positive one. What we can believe from the reading this statistic is that students' good knowledge in criticism would have a good performance in their studio practice and there is a positive linear relationship between the scores at alpha .05.

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to examine students' ability to connect art critical knowledge to their studio practice. The researcher has drawn several conclusions from the experiences researching art criticism with the students that directed the future research in art education. Art criticism offers students the opportunity to better understand themselves, their culture, and the culture of others thus bringing understanding and enjoyment.

Once the students completed their part of the research study, their work was assessed by five tertiary art educators. The sums of the scores were then used in comparing the students' written critical analysis based on their given assignment against the four elements of Feldman's model. At the conclusion of this study, the researcher found that the students only covered two of the four elements to a standard that would have been expected if actually completing Feldman's model itself. In the area of description and analysis, the students excelled and indeed met the standard of what would be expected if they were given Feldman's model to complete. Through their artwork, most of the students described what the subject matter of their work meant to them. Some of the students even used art terms to help them describe what they were looking at. Also, most of their interpretations were well thought out, personal, and showed a deep connection to the work of art.

Unfortunately, the other areas of interpretation and judgment were not as well developed. This researcher found that although their critical analysis described certain elements of art, there was no further explanation as to how the artist used these elements and principles of design to further emphasize an idea, theme, or meaning in the work of art. This means that the students are not making the connection between

what they are interpreting the work of art to mean, and what role the artist played in creating the work of art to emulate those interpretations. Finally, the students would only offer a personal judgment of the work of art if they were asked to do so. As a result every student happened to omit such an opinion from his or her written response.

Based on this study, one can conclude that it was not a natural reaction for university students to include their own judgment views without being specifically asked to do so. In conclusion, giving the classroom activity only successfully covered two of the four principles of Feldman's model; without further prompts from the researcher, the interpretation and judgment areas would not be fully explored.

The activities conducted in the school, college or university have to be consistent such as visiting the art galleries/museums, workshops and talks given by artists/designers. These activities need support from teachers, parents, artists, art critics, curators and the community so that the visual arts can be developed and have a better future. The researcher believes in future research it is important to triangulate data through both quantitative and qualitative means directly through student artwork, student opinions, and experience as an art educator.

Students must have the knowledge in looking at the beauty of art, identifying both local and international artists and appreciating art (expressions and emotions) when viewing a work of art. This research is conducted with the hope that it could offer guidance to school teachers or university lecturers. Teaching art in schools and institutions of higher learning requires teachers and lecturers to have good foundation of understanding of art, so that pedagogically, they can effectively employ different approaches to deliver art to their students. Art criticism should be emphasized in the teaching and learning process of Visual Arts Education.

RECOMMENDATION

Future art teachers should emerge from such a course with a solid theoretical grounding in art criticism and appropriate practical strategies for its implementation in the context of general education. The following recommendations are made to enhance the use of art criticism:

Art criticism as a compulsory subject in schools and universities

Looking at the current curriculum taught in the schools, the art criticism subject is not offered in the program. It also happens in tertiary education. This subject is only taught within other topics in the visual arts. By offering the art criticism subject it helps students develop their critical thinking. Developing critical thinking skills and dispositions in young people affords them the means to make thoughtful choices. Aesthetic, critical, and creative inquiry can help facilitate development of these skills and dispositions in art students.

Critical thinking teaches students to raise vital questions and problems, formulate them clearly and precisely; gather and assess relevant information, use abstract ideas to interpret it effectively and come to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards; think open-mindedly within alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing, as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences; and communicate effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems.

Creating art encourages students to consider many solutions to resolve artistic problems, and during classroom art critiques they are confronted with divergent points of view from classmates who have solved the same problem in a different way. The Ministry of Education should look into the visual art education curriculum and should introduce art criticism as a new subject apart from art history. Art criticism, with its inherent opportunities to help students create and derive meaning from visual art, is still in need of a firm foundation alongside other areas of the school curriculum. It deserves our attention.

Combining the use of art criticism as a part of students' daily sketchbook

First, for art educators, combining the use of art criticism as a part of students' daily sketchbook procedures successfully engages students in critical thinking about their art, and impacts their ability to

articulate their ideas in a more meaningful way, improve their journaling performance and develop their ability to think and write critically about their art. Because art teachers are continually describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating works of art during the process of instruction, implementation of the four actions of art criticism into the curriculum proved to be a natural step not only for the students, but for the researcher as an art educator.

By cultivating an atmosphere that encourages artistic risk taking, art teachers can empower their students with the skills to advance to higher cognitive levels. Such exercise has the potential to make art lessons more enjoyable and culturally relevant, and to sharpen students' perceptual skills and heighten their appreciation of the visual world around them. Such a superior power of perception is more conducive to responding appropriately to the visual stimuli around them and appreciating the creative work of others. The systematic introduction of students into the elegance of the world of art criticism would open up many possibilities for better appreciating their environment and the creative work of others.

Art criticism through storytelling

Storytelling can be used as a means of critically looking at a work of art. Storytelling will enable the student to naturally describe, analyze, interpret and judge a work of art without being prompted to do so. In many circumstances, a story will represent an individual's or a group's interpretations of a series of events. A story can be told visually, orally, or through written expression. Storytelling is one of the oldest art forms, and is a classical way to communicate morals, histories and feelings. By using storytelling as the means of communicating art criticism, the students will be able to make an individualized connection to a work of art.

The only conclusion that could be made is that the more opportunities we give our students to express themselves, whether it be verbal, written, or visual, the better. The importance of art criticism in how we view and interpret artworks and the world around us, should lead to further research and inquiry into how to best formulate a critique with the tertiary level background student in mind.

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