

THE PEDAGOGICAL ROLE OF CRITIQUE PRACTICES IN ENHANCING CREATIVE CONFIDENCE AMONG DESIGN STUDENTS

Dr. Aditi Jha

Associate Professor

Rachna Sansad College of Applied

Art and Craft

Email: aditij@rachanasansad.edu.in

Abstract

Critique practices form a central component of design education, functioning as both evaluative and developmental tools. This paper examines the pedagogical role of critiques in shaping and enhancing creative confidence among design students. Through a review of existing literature and qualitative analysis of critique practices in studio-based learning environments, the study highlights how structured, constructive, and dialogic feedback fosters resilience, risk-taking, and self-efficacy in design learners. The findings reveal that while critiques may initially provoke anxiety, when facilitated effectively, they enhance reflective thinking, creativity, and confidence. The paper concludes by suggesting pedagogical strategies to optimize critique culture within design education.

Keywords

Ddesign education, critique practices, creative confidence, pedagogy, feedback

Reference to this paper
should be made as follows:

Received: 22.08.2023

Approved: 18.09.2023

Dr. Aditi Jha

**THE PEDAGOGICAL ROLE OF
CRITIQUE PRACTICES IN
ENHANCING CREATIVE
CONFIDENCE AMONG DESIGN
STUDENTS**

Article No. 56

RJPSS Apr.-Sep. 2023,

Vol. XLVIII No. 2,

pp. 458-468

Online available at:

[https://anubooks.com/
view?file=3349&session_id=rjpss-
2023-vol-xlviii-no2-sept-2023](https://anubooks.com/view?file=3349&session_id=rjpss-2023-vol-xlviii-no2-sept-2023)

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.31995/
rjpss.2023.v48i02.056](https://doi.org/10.31995/rjpss.2023.v48i02.056)

Introduction

Design education is built upon the foundation of iterative exploration, experimentation, and reflection. Central to this process is the practice of critique, wherein students present their work for evaluation and feedback by peers and faculty. Critiques not only assess student progress but also serve as pedagogical interventions that can shape students' creative identity and confidence (Blair, 2016).

The concept of **creative confidence**, popularized by Kelley and Kelley (2013), refers to an individual's belief in their ability to generate creative ideas and solutions. For design students, creative confidence is particularly significant as it empowers them to take intellectual risks, embrace ambiguity, and persist through failures. However, the culture of critique in design schools often elicits mixed responses: while it can foster growth, it may also generate anxiety and self-doubt (Roberts, 2019).

This study investigates how critique practices—when structured pedagogically—contribute to building creative confidence in design students. It explores the dual nature of critique as both a site of vulnerability and an opportunity for empowerment, proposing ways educators can facilitate feedback that strengthens students' creative resilience.

Literature Review

Critique Practices in Design Education

Critiques, or “crits,” are central to design education, enabling students to present, reflect, and receive feedback (Anthony, 1991). Schön (1985) highlights critiques as part of the “reflective practitioner” model, where learning occurs through dialogue and iteration. Formats range from informal desk crits to formal juries, offering peer learning but sometimes reinforcing hierarchical dynamics (Blythman, Orr, & Blair, 2007; Webster, 2006). Their effectiveness depends heavily on facilitation and feedback culture.

Feedback as Pedagogy

Feedback in critiques is not only evaluative but generative, shaping how students perceive creative ability. Effective feedback is specific, actionable, and dialogic (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Carless, 2015). Peer critiques often feel less intimidating and foster collaborative learning (Nicol, Thomson, & Breslin, 2014). When structured dialogically, critiques become growth-oriented spaces rather than judgmental evaluations (Sadler, 2010).

Creative Confidence and Self-Efficacy

Creative confidence, linked to Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, refers to belief in one's creative potential. It develops through experimentation, risk-taking,

and reflective feedback (Kelley & Kelley, 2013). Constructive critiques reinforce this confidence, while negative or vague feedback can undermine it (Amabile, 1996; Blair, 2016).

Critique Culture: Anxiety vs. Empowerment

Critiques often trigger performance anxiety, particularly in public settings like juries (Webster, 2006; Roberts, 2019). Students report stress when feedback is vague or harsh, though repeated exposure builds resilience. Constructive critique prepares students for professional practice, where responding to feedback is essential (Gray, 2013; Dannels & Martin, 2008).

Pedagogical Strategies

Research suggests balancing praise with critique (Blythman et al., 2007), scaffolding peer-to-faculty critiques (Nicol et al., 2014), and embedding reflective practices (Sadler, 2010). Cennamo and Brandt (2012) emphasize guiding without prescribing, supporting student agency. Contemporary models stress dialogic, student-centered critiques to enhance confidence and adaptability (Carless, 2015).

Synthesis

Critiques play a paradoxical role—building or eroding confidence depending on structure. Literature suggests that student-centered, constructive critique practices strengthen resilience, self-efficacy, and creative confidence, positioning them as vital pedagogical tools in design education.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a **qualitative research approach**, appropriate for exploring subjective experiences and meaning-making processes in educational contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since the aim was to understand how critique practices influence design students' creative confidence, a combination of **literature synthesis, interviews, and thematic analysis** was employed. This design allowed both theoretical grounding and empirical exploration.

Literature Synthesis

A targeted review of scholarly articles was conducted to establish the conceptual framework. The review focused on critique practices, feedback in design education, and theories of creative confidence. Sources were drawn from peer-reviewed journals, academic books, and conference proceedings within design education, pedagogy, and psychology. This synthesis helped situate the study within existing discourse and informed the development of interview questions.

Participants

The empirical component involved **60 undergraduate students** enrolled in a leading design institution. Participants were purposively sampled to ensure diversity in year of study, specialization (communication design, product design, spatial design, etc.), and prior experience with critiques. This variation allowed for a broader understanding of critique culture across different contexts within design education.

Data Collection

Data were collected through **semi-structured interviews**, as this method balances structure with flexibility, enabling participants to articulate their personal experiences while allowing the researcher to probe deeper when necessary (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Each interview lasted 30–45 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on participants' availability. The interview guide covered:

- Students' general perceptions of critiques.
- Memorable positive and negative critique experiences.
- The role of feedback in shaping creative confidence.
- Coping strategies for critique-related anxiety.

Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

The transcripts were analyzed using **thematic analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2006), a widely used method for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. The process involved:

1. Familiarization with data through repeated reading.
2. Generating initial codes relating to confidence, resilience, anxiety, and growth.
3. Collating codes into broader themes, such as “confidence building,” “feedback tone,” and “critique anxiety.”
4. Reviewing and refining themes to ensure coherence with both data and research objectives.

This systematic process provided a nuanced understanding of how critique practices influenced students' creative confidence.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, their

right to withdraw at any stage, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used in transcripts and reporting to protect identities. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored and accessible only to the research team.

Findings

The analysis of interviews revealed four central themes related to the role of critique practices in shaping creative confidence among design students: **(1) critiques as confidence builders, (2) critiques as sources of anxiety, (3) the importance of constructive language, and (4) differences between peer and faculty critiques.** Together, these themes illustrate the paradoxical nature of critique culture—simultaneously a site of vulnerability and empowerment.

1. Critiques as Confidence Builders

A majority of students expressed that critiques provided validation and clarity in their design process. Constructive comments helped them recognize the strengths of their work, while suggestions for improvement encouraged them to refine ideas. Several participants described critiques as “confidence boosters” when facilitators emphasized progress rather than shortcomings.

One student noted:

“When my professor pointed out what was working well in my design before giving suggestions, it made me feel I was on the right track. I felt more motivated to improve instead of discouraged.”

This finding aligns with Bandura’s (1997) concept of **mastery experiences**, where positive reinforcement strengthens self-efficacy. Students emphasized that critiques framed as opportunities for growth, rather than judgment, directly contributed to their sense of creative confidence.

2. Critiques as Sources of Anxiety

While critiques were often valuable, nearly all participants admitted experiencing stress and nervousness before or during formal sessions. The fear of being judged, especially in front of peers or external jurors, often caused anxiety that overshadowed the learning experience.

As one participant explained:

“Before critiques, I always feel a knot in my stomach. I worry that I might not be able to explain my work properly or that the feedback will be too harsh.”

However, many reported that **repeated exposure** reduced this anxiety over time. Students noted that once they became familiar with critique formats and expectations, the experience felt less intimidating. This reflects earlier studies that

critique-related anxiety, while initially inhibiting, can transform into resilience when critiques are frequent and normalized (Roberts, 2019).

3. Importance of Constructive Language

The tone and delivery of feedback emerged as a crucial factor influencing student confidence. Supportive, specific, and actionable feedback encouraged students to take risks and explore new directions. In contrast, vague or overly critical comments left them feeling deflated.

One student emphasized:

“Sometimes, even if my design was not good, I felt encouraged when the feedback was phrased in a way that guided me. But if it was just ‘this doesn’t work,’ I left feeling stuck and less confident.”

Students valued **balanced critiques**—those that acknowledged strengths before pointing out weaknesses. The findings suggest that the *language of critique* plays a significant role in whether students internalize feedback positively or negatively.

4. Peer Critiques vs. Faculty Critiques

Students distinguished between peer and faculty critiques, describing them as complementary but different in impact. Peer critiques were perceived as more conversational, less intimidating, and helpful in building collaborative learning environments. Faculty critiques, however, carried greater weight due to authority and expertise.

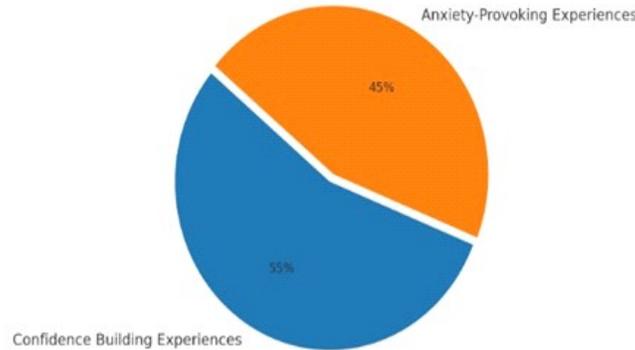
As one participant stated:

“Peer feedback feels more like a discussion—we’re all figuring things out together. Faculty feedback feels more serious, and it can either build confidence or completely shake it, depending on how it’s given.”

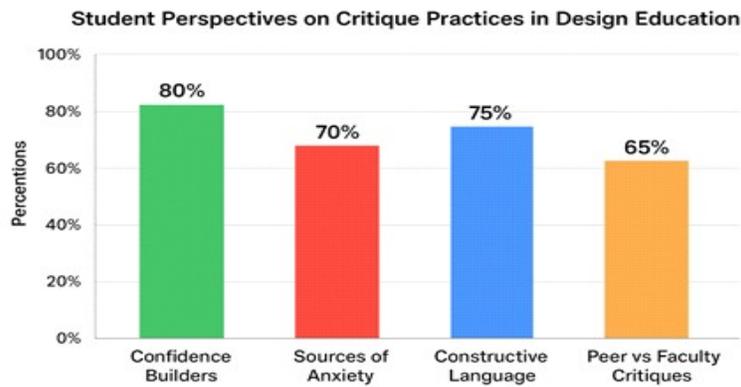
This finding highlights the **dual role of critique sources**: peers help normalize the critique process and reduce fear, while faculty feedback strongly influences confidence because of its perceived authority.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the study found that critiques play a **dual role** in students’ creative journeys. They can serve as powerful **confidence-building tools** when delivered constructively, or as sources of **anxiety and doubt** when handled poorly. The effectiveness of critiques depends largely on **tone, structure, and facilitation**, as well as the balance between peer and faculty contributions. These findings underscore the need for educators to consciously design critique practices that emphasize encouragement, clarity, and reflective dialogue to cultivate creative confidence in students.



Pie Chart – contrasting the overall balance between **confidence-building experiences** and **anxiety-provoking experiences** in critiques.



Bar Chart – showing the percentage of students (from interviews) who mentioned each major theme

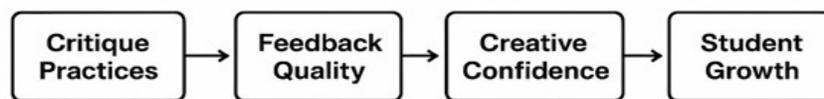
Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the central role of critique practices in shaping design students' creative confidence. Students consistently reported that feedback, when framed constructively, functioned as a catalyst for growth, while poorly delivered critique often resulted in anxiety and self-doubt. This duality resonates with **Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy**, which emphasizes the role of mastery experiences and verbal persuasion in building confidence. In the design education context, critiques act as moments of persuasion and reinforcement, directly influencing students' belief in their creative capabilities.

A notable outcome of this research is the connection between **feedback quality and resilience**. Students described that when feedback was specific, respectful, and solution-oriented, they felt encouraged to iterate and experiment further. Conversely, overly negative or vague criticism diminished their motivation. This supports **Schön's (1983) concept of reflective practice**, where constructive critique enables learners to reflect-in-action, refine their ideas, and develop a reflective mindset crucial for creative growth.

The role of **peer critique** emerged as particularly significant. Several participants indicated that peer feedback felt less intimidating and more empathetic compared to faculty critique, which sometimes carried hierarchical overtones. This aligns with prior studies (Blair, 2016; McDonnell, 2011) that suggest peer-led critiques foster a sense of shared learning, collaboration, and co-construction of knowledge. However, students also acknowledged the authority and expertise that faculty feedback carries, positioning it as a vital driver of professional readiness. Hence, a **hybrid critique culture**, combining peer and faculty perspectives, appears most effective in sustaining creative confidence.

The conceptual framework developed in this study—**Critique Practices '!' Feedback Quality '!' Creative Confidence '!' Student Growth**—contributes to existing scholarship by offering a structured understanding of how critique processes mediate confidence development. It demonstrates that critique is not a mere evaluative mechanism, but a pedagogical tool with transformative potential. In this sense, the findings extend **Kelley and Kelley's (2012) notion of creative confidence**, highlighting that the classroom critique environment significantly influences whether students internalize creativity as a renewable resource or view it as a fragile trait.



conceptual model diagram (a framework showing how *critique practices* *feedback quality* '!' *creative confidence* '!' *student growth*)

Moreover, the study underscores the importance of **language and tone** in critiques. Constructive language, even when addressing shortcomings, reinforced a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), encouraging students to view challenges as opportunities for learning. Conversely, critiques perceived as dismissive triggered defensive responses, suggesting that critique delivery is as important as critique content.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the findings call for a **reframing of critique culture** in design education. Educators must be intentional about structuring critique sessions, ensuring that they balance rigor with empathy, and evaluation with encouragement. Workshops on giving and receiving feedback, as suggested by recent pedagogical studies, could cultivate a more supportive critique environment. Furthermore, embedding reflective exercises after critique sessions could help students process feedback constructively and strengthen resilience.

Finally, the study opens avenues for further exploration. While this research relied on qualitative insights, future studies could adopt mixed-methods approaches to quantify the relationship between critique experiences and measurable changes in creative confidence. Additionally, cross-cultural investigations may reveal how cultural norms around feedback and authority influence critique dynamics in diverse educational settings.

Conclusion

Critiques remain indispensable in design education, not merely as evaluative tools but as pedagogical practices that shape creative confidence. This study highlights that when critiques are structured, constructive, and dialogic, they foster resilience, self-efficacy, and creative growth among design students. Educators must be mindful of the emotional dimensions of critique, ensuring feedback practices cultivate confidence rather than inhibit it.

Future research may extend this study through cross-cultural comparisons of critique practices or by examining the long-term impact of critique culture on professional design practice.

References

1. Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: W.H. Freeman. Foundational work on self-efficacy theory, central to understanding confidence-building through feedback.
2. Blair, B. (2016). *The critique: Essential pedagogy for student learning in art and design*. *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education*, 15(2), Pg. 151–163. https://doi.org/10.1386/adch.15.2.151_1 Highlights critique as a cornerstone of art and design pedagogy.
3. Boud, D., & Molloy, E. (2013). *Feedback in higher and professional education: Understanding it and doing it well*. London: Routledge. Focuses on feedback literacy and its role in learning and student empowerment.
4. Brookhart, S. M. (2017). *How to give effective feedback to your students*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. Offers practical strategies for constructive critique and language use.

5. Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Random House. Explains the growth vs. fixed mindset framework, vital for interpreting critique responses.
6. Elbow, P. (1993). *Ranking, evaluating, and liking: Sorting out three forms of judgment*. *College English*, 55(2), Pg. 187–206. <https://doi.org/10.2307/378503> Classic essay differentiating between evaluative critique and supportive feedback.
7. Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). *The power of feedback*. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), Pg. 81–112. <https://doi.org/10.3102/003465430298487> Landmark meta-analysis establishing feedback as one of the most influential factors on student achievement.
8. Kelley, T., & Kelley, D. (2012). *Creative confidence: Unleashing the creative potential within us all*. New York: Crown Business. Core reference for framing “creative confidence” as an educational outcome.
9. Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. Foundational framework for experiential and reflective learning, aligning with design critique practices.
10. McDonnell, J. (2011). *Accommodating disagreement: The invitation to rethink in design reviews*. *Design Studies*, 32(1), Pg. 68–91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2010.09.001>. Empirical study showing how critique fosters rethinking and creative resilience.
11. Nicol, D., & Macfarlane Dick, D. (2006). *Formative assessment and self regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice*. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(2), Pg. 199–218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070600572090>. Explores feedback’s role in self-regulated learning, directly relevant to student growth in design.
12. Sadler, D. R. (2010). *Beyond feedback: Developing student capability in complex appraisal*. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35(5), Pg. 535–550. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930903541015>. Argues for moving feedback beyond judgment toward developmental critique.
13. Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books. Essential text on reflective practice, highly influential in design pedagogy.
14. Shulman, L. S. (2005). *Signature pedagogies in the professions*. *Daedalus*, 134(3), Pg. 52–59. <https://doi.org/10.1162/0011526054622015>. Highlights distinctive pedagogical approaches—critique being one for design education.

15. Topping, K. J. (2018). *Peer assessment: Learning by judging and discussing the work of other learners*. *Interdisciplinary Education and Psychology*, 2(1), Pg. 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.31532/InterdiscipEducPsychol.2.1.007>. Demonstrates how peer critique promotes learning, confidence, and reflective skills.
16. Winstone, N. E., & Carless, D. (2020). *Designing effective feedback processes in higher education: A learning-focused approach*. London: Routledge. Focuses on structuring feedback for long-term learning benefits.