

# **“PRESS AND RELEASE” A CONTINUOUS WORKING PROCESS FOR DESIGN WORKSHOP**

**Duangkamol Limwongse, Pronyos Chattarakul**

Interior Architecture Program  
School of Architecture and Design, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Thailand

## **Abstract**

Studying design, in general curriculum, is very difficult to deliver some experiences such as, collaboration with outside school, or professional practice. Many design schools usually provides students a short period of workshops with focused content. Generally, students are forced to learn and complete every task in working process but, because of limited time they cannot continuously learn. From the observation at School of Architecture and Design, (SoA+D) KMUTT, the evidences showed that students gained knowledge from mentors leading workshop but they did not experience much each tasks. To improve the performance of workshop, the process called “Press and Release” was introduced to International Furniture Design Workshop, NAFA-KMUTT in 2013 and 2014, cross-cultural collaboration. The main idea of “Press and Release” is to encourage students to work continuously and deeply experience in tasks. “Press” is designed to support students to focus on what they should do, while workshop gives them more conditions. It could be considered as sub-activity where students are able to work closely with mentors. “Release” phase allows students to work on their own and encourages students to get more information resources and explorations on their works. It would be better if time for “Release” is longer than “Press”. The case study, International Furniture Design Workshop, NAFA-KMUTT was designed to switch in between, 2 of “Press” and 2 of “Release”. The result shows that “Press” helped students to realize their focuses and ways to develop the works. Time and new information in “Release” phase made their focuses to be more focus. With “Press and Release”, students are able to get a chance to experience and do trial and error as well as to embed the idea of continuous learning.

*Keywords: Continuous learning, Design workshop, Student involvement*

## **Introduction**

The International Furniture Design Workshop, 2013 and 2014 were a cross-cultural collaboration between Industrial Design (ID) program and Interior Architecture (INA) Program, SoA+D, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), Thailand and 3 Dimensional Design (3DD) Department, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), Singapore. The objectives of this workshop were to buildup network between Thai and Singaporean students, to develop student's collaborative skills and fundamental of design profession and entrepreneurship in international level. It also led to a collaborative network of academic platform and industrial platform of Thai and Singapore.

Two outstanding characters of this workshop are first, providing 6 months-workshop which is longer than typical one and second, a cross-cultural collaboration of different student's backgrounds through the whole process. Therefore, workshop mentors needed to well prepare regarding workshop time and long distance communication among students. Researchers studied previous school workshops as case studied to explore advantage and disadvantage of workshop management, workshop's characters and patterns. The concern is to develop the process year by year for highest benefit of students.

## **Research Question**

Workshop, is broadly used to provide students experience of collaborating with mentors and workshop contents. With typical one, students cannot experience much in each tasks. How workshop can deliver the experience of continuous learning to students, is very important to be studied.

## **Situation Analysis**

Many design schools usually provide design workshop to encourage students to experience special contents which are normally not included in classes. SoA+D, KMUTT spends around five hundred thousand THB per year for design workshops. The core benefit of these academic activities is for students to learn special contents from external mentors.

Students are very interested in joining workshop. New experience is basically essential reason. The contents of workshop are designed to be different from normal classes and always related to particular issues. Number of applicants is basically much more than number of participants. Each workshop has its own solutions to select participants, such as interview, portfolio, or statement of purpose.

### **Design workshop at SoA+D**

At SoA+D, there are around 8 design workshops per year. The average workshop time is around 3 days. Collaboration in design has become a geographically and culturally dispersed activity. Increasingly, design educators see the need to prepare students' skills not only for design, but also for intercultural communication and distributed collaboration (Sheldon, Bharwani, Mitchell, & Williams, 1995, Cheng, 2003, Bennett & Dziekan, 2005 cited by Schadewitz 2009). More than 50 % of them are international workshops, inbound and outbound and depend on international mentors, architects, practicing designers or professors. However, with a few days of workshop, the results are normally ended with idea's diagrams, sketch designs, or mock-up.

The workshop process is mostly relied on general design process, research, ideation, interpretation, experimentation and evaluation. In Design thinking for educator, (IDEO, 2011) mentioned that inspiration can be generated from simple conversation. Ideation is related to lots of idea generation and the interpretation to be design outcome is needed time. It shows that during design process, students need enough time to crystallize and carefully synthesize the idea.

Community Development Workshop in 2011, it was 4-day YU-POR-DEE workshop at Bang-Kra-Dee community. 50 INA students from various schools were recruited to develop public facilities for community. Workshop's schedule showed a day for community survey, a day for programing, 2 days for idea development, and presentation in a week later. It could be noted that 4-day workshop was full with typical design process, which is generally same as one taught in classes.

Mentors were assigned to be on schedule. With the contents and limited time, students were leaded to touch every tasks but not to deeply study in each task. Comments from mentors showed that students' works would be much better if they were able to pay more attention to the details of each tasks.

In 2011, 4 ID Students attended "Design Camp", furniture design workshop. Workshop was divided into 2 phases. First was 3-days workshop at factory. Second was a month of individual works at students' places.

At the first phase, students visited the factory and got all project's conditions. Students were forced to complete 3 tasks, information review, concept generation, and idea development. The result was that all works did not reach quality. Students had to fix and resubmit all works in 2 weeks later. Mentors considered this 3-day workshop as trial and error. It might be understood that this workshop was not only aimed to complete the tasks but it also drove students to achieve professional standard. That is why quality was highly concerned and appropriate workshop time was significant for trial and error process.

### **More Doing More Experience**

The observation during many workshops showed, with limited time, students could not perform continuously. For example, students actually wanted to deeply understand and try processes, mentors recommended. However, in fact, they were not able to participate those processes within limited time. The insight, from students' in-depth interviews, presented that listening mentors' lectures is not the key point of attending workshop but involving in details of each tasks is needed. *"Class mainly provides knowledge so workshop should provide participatory activity for students to experience what classes could not deliver"*, furniture companies who sponsored the "Design Camp 2011" confirmed.

### **Trial and Error**

According to design process, trial and error is very important to improve quality of works. Students, at workshop, always reflect that *"The results could be better if we get trial"*. In 2013, at Samchuke 100 years-Market, at the end of, The Third International Student Workshop, Sugiyama University–Sripatum University–SoA+D, KMUTT, one of students explained that *"Our group got very good comments from mentors but we did not have chance to develop our designs. We actually wanted to prove those comments"*. The 4-day workshop, YU-POR-DEE, IAIDAC, in 2011, encouraged students to involve with community to create solutions for environmental development project. Students got significant points to make the design possible at the final presentation but they had no more time to develop to be real.

### **Deep in process, not just to complete process**

Dalsgaard (2014) suggested that, in design processes, problems and solutions co-evolve as the designer acts not only to resolve known issues, but also to explore the nature of the problem. The complication of collaborative process is needed time and communication. Students reflected that they did not deep in each tasks according to limitation of time. Normally, workshop introduces design processes, tools, techniques, etc. but there is not enough time for students to try deeply in details. In 2012, the 5-day workshop called, The Sustainable for Design for All at HUA-TA-KEA, IAIDAC, mentors taught students how to interview users. As limited time, students were allowed to finish interview within a day. During data analysis, 2 groups of students requested more field works. The requests were denied, according to the schedule. Mentors also presented that actually students should get a chance to deeply study in tasks. This kind of situation is usually happened in typical workshops.

### **Case Study Development**

The discussion, among mentors at SoA+D, suggested an idea of weekly or monthly workshop for longer time of collaboration. Students are able to find their convenient time during weekdays to explore each tasks. Mentors can help students to narrow down all ideas at the workshop day. The idea of Spool (2012) recommended that workshops should tackle more difficult problems at greater detail. It should be fast and efficient to work through a design challenge and generate great solutions. This experience, in this case, should be highly concerned when planning workshop. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the ideas of workshop plan and create, hypothesis of appropriated approach and character of workshop, creating

experiences of continuous learning to SoA+D students. To explore an idea of continuous learning, a case study was considered to be a workshop with participants who experienced a typical design workshop.

In July 2013, the representative of SoA+D visited Singapore Furniture Industry, SFIC and NAFA, Singapore. The purpose was to design the collaboration workshop for students, KMUTT and NAFA and furniture industry in Thailand. The meeting came up with the International Furniture Design Workshop. This workshop was selected to be case study of this research. Participants of workshop were 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students, 4 students from ID program, 4 students from INA program, SoA+D and 8 students from 3DD program, NAFA. All participants from SoA+D were students attending typical workshops at soA+D before.

Design workshop, communication may be a serious problem as each design profession uses different terminology, languages, and thought processes (Dean, 1997, Wagenknecht-Harte, 1989 cited by Russ, 1999). To avoid problems, due to cross-cultural issues, communication in workshop needs to be well prepared. SoA+D instructors were assigned to observe the workshop processes' problems and students' development. Student interview was selected to understand changes of perspectives and attitudes. Ensuring a result, the study was planned to implement in the workshop, 2013 and develop hypothesis of continuous learning workshop in 2014.

## Case Study I

The idea of case study was "series activities to create continuous working". The key activities could be divided into 2 types of activities. First was "Focus", a 4-day activity with mentors. Second was "Free", 30-day remote working away from mentors. Finally the 1<sup>st</sup> International Furniture Design Workshop, 2013 was contained with 4 main activities, Focus1, Free1, Focus2, and Free2, respectively.

At the Focus1 in September 2013, KMUTT-NAFA students were together at NAFA, under the advice from the Singaporean designer. The assignment and design conditions were gave to students. They were encouraged to follow the workshop tasks. At the end of Focus1, they presented research result, design concept, and idea sketches. Around 80% of works, were rejected. Works needed to be fixed the early of Free1.

Free phase was a group works of Thai and Singaporean students. Email and social network were borrowed to be communication channels. According to Augustin (2014) suggestion, face-to-face communication is important and people can collaborate in a single physical location or virtually. VDO conference was introduced for students to discuss and work as well. Students had to finalize the designs presented at Focus1. At Free1, students set their own methodologies and schedules. To let the students free, mentors were assigned to just observe but not encouraged to give any advice to students.

The works from Focus1 and Free1 were presented to mentors and factory at Focus2, 3-day activity in November, 2013. It could be noted that the big ideas of all projects were 80% different from ones at Focus1. They were significantly improved. After trial and error at Focus1, they fixed their works at Free1. Having more times and new information resources, they went deeply in details of each tasks. A student explained that *"We applied knowledge and experience from Focus1 for creating the way to work for Free1, Having more time, we can explore more ideas and considerations. We learned a lot at Focus1 and fix a lot at Free1."* However, at Focus2, students got additional conditions from mentors and factory. *"We thought that our ideas are good enough and our works are ready to be produced but we have totally forgot about furniture size, transportation, installation, and cost as well."* one group reflected after factory review session.

At Free2, students explored more information according to factory's comments. All new information affected to their works. Designs were developed to fit to all conditions and benefit to stakeholder. One student who has never directly contacted to factory, mentioned that *"We thought we did all requirements and got the best we can but it was not. However, finally, it could be developed. We have got the final one."* The factory mentioned that this kind of workshop process gives students opportunity to realize real world working. Students could deeply involve in every processes for more understanding product development.

The workshop ended in March 2014. All designed furniture were exhibited in Thailand International Furniture Fair 2014 (TIFF 2014) and International Furniture Fair Singapore 2014 (IFFS 2014). The opinion from NAFA and KMUTT instructors showed that the series activities, encouraged students to keep working. Focus1,2 controlled project directions and remind students to focus on what they are doing while Free1,2 gave students opportunities to be deep in each tasks, access more resources and explore more solution. Students gave opinion, *"We had kept working for 6 months. We learned knowledge from mentors and deeply applied knowledge. 4 activities in 6 months, gave us different experience from typical workshop."* However, conflicts of class schedule and academic calendars, were found carefully considered by NAFA and KMUTT instructors in a year later.

## Case Study II

The 2<sup>nd</sup> International Furniture Design Workshop 2014 was started with workshop planning. The idea, "series activities to create continuous working" was maintained. Key activities, Focus and Free were developed in details, such as schedule, times, and tasks. Discussion among instructors, suggested that knowledge and project conditions, would be introduced in only Focus. Workshop opened online-floor, "group" in Facebook for students to share and discuss. Instructors and mentors were assigned to observe these online activities.

The numbers of Focus and Free were maintained as in 2013 but activity's time were different. Dates of Focus phases were slightly increased while dates of Free phases were not much different. Students were assigned to discuss and show research material, analysis and other works to the "group" in Facebook. Workshop plan suggested that Focus activities would be leaded by rational approach while Free activities would be naturally more creativity approach.

Focus1 was started at NAFA. It aimed to provide tools and techniques for students to understand, classifying, and identifying users. Students spent all 5 days to research, analyze, and conclude all data as well as generate design concepts and designs. At the presentation, mentors, recommended all students to ix some methodology and study more case studies. As the prediction, students completed all tasks but they were not deep in details.

At Free1, students got 75 days to fix their works, explore information resources and creativities. The observation at "group" in Facebook, showed that students fixed research by getting more user interview, increasing case study developments, generating more solution and alternatives. *"We tried to follow the methodology and technique from Focus1. With 75 days, we did a lot of trial and error, and discussed in many aspects. After getting more information and tried more solutions, the final design from Focus1 was big improved."* One of Students reflected.

Focus2, 7-day workshop, provided students 4 days to work at factories, comparing to 1-day factory visit in 2013. After students presented their works to the factories, many comments were returned from factories. Factories explained them with rational approach of why their design must be developed. Factories allowed them to keep design concepts and assigned R&D staff to involve in development task.

One of opinion from students was *“We learned a lot with R&D staff. For example, we spent a month to solve the structure problem but experience of factory help us to complete it within 2 hours.”* and another opinion was *“Production information help us to narrow down the choices we created. The factory owner also remind us to focus on understanding user instead of directly following needs from user interviews.”*.

At Free2, students were encouraged to combine knowledge, information and ideas from previous phases. The conversations on “group” were mainly to finalize designs. The observation showed that students concerned more comments from others and created more numbers of solutions, comparing from Free1. *“It is very difficult to satisfy stakeholder. We have tried many solutions. Some solution fitted to user need but did not work for factory. We have done a lot of 1:1 paper mock-ups. Finally we got it.”*, students were trying to satisfy stakeholder. Solutions and alternatives were created and continuously developed via many media until reaching standard.

As workshop in 2013, all students’ works were exhibited in IFFS 2014 and TIFF 2014. This was the result from 4 activities within 6 months workshop. Students reflected that *“The workshop allowed us to learn with mentors how to focus on what we are doing and then encouraged us to explore more in detail designs. Every times, when we finalize our design, we think that is the best now it is better.”*. This is very important experience for students to learn how to keep continuously working and its benefit.

## **Discussion**

The important pattern, focus – explore – focus – explore, grounded from the study created dynamic of learning, while typical workshop perform as only “focus” completing contents, such as design processes, tools, techniques, etc. Typical one allows students to experience just skin of contents. Case studies in 2013 and 2014 leaded students to do many trials and errors and deeply involve in each tasks. Workshops gave students conditions at “Focus” and allowed them to develop on their own at “Free”. It is coherent to what Tim Brown (2009) presented, the idea of design thinking, 1) divergence, the implementation of decision making, and 2) convergence, the implementation of alternative making. Divergence & convergence approach is broadly taught in many schools.

In classes, students cannot get a chance for trial and error. Experience from trial and error directly affects to process of improving students’ learning ability (Susan and Others ,2010). “Free” in this case, allows students to practice. It directly helps students to improve their learning skills while knowledge is basically able be delivered by instructor and mentors at “Focus” phase.

Parker (2010) presented that integrated learning is relied on ability to manage the conflict of student oriented and methodology oriented approaches. Approach conducted in case studies, encouraged students to explore on their own. In this case, to control the schedule and discipline is still needed. At “Focus”, mentors evaluated their works and gave them conditions. Therefore, students felt some pressure. However, the observation showed that discontinuous pressure benefited to students. They can release this pressure at “Free” and they also were able to realize concrete experience. Then at “Focus” mentors could explain reason and impact concrete experience. This process is broadly called reflection-on-action (Moon, 2002, cited by Prachayapruit, 2012).

## **Press and Release**

After developing workshops in 2013 and 2014, the result showed that students were able to continuously work. “Focus and Free” was later developed to be “Press and Release” (PR). Press is an activity

delivering 1) Focus, 2) Conditions. To cut unimportant parts out from the project, is very difficult for inexperienced designer. Understanding condition can create knowledge and help students to focus on what they are doing. Mentors also can reflect their concrete experience. Oppositely, Release provides 1) Exploration, 2) Trial and Error. Students can explore their designs on their own without any pressure from mentors. Concrete experience would be grounded when they are free to do trial and error.

PR is also efficient to create dynamic for workshop while typical workshop cannot do. “Press” is mainly “Focus” while “Release” encourages students to “Explore”. However, PR actually requests well-plan in time management. The case study suggested that one workshop should be contained with at least 2 Press and 1 Release. Press might be similar to typical workshop but contents and purpose are different. Release is an alternative. It requests time much more than typical one. Students in semester are able to spend their free time for activities in Release. With this idea, workshop time could be long enough for students to experience continuous working. PR could be considered as “Long Term Involvement Workshop” to delivering experience and encouraging students to work continuously.

The study has resulted with “Press and Release” approach. It could be considered as a solution to keep students work continuously and deeply experience in workshop. However, the aim of this study was not originally to compare to the typical one. To confirm the benefit and advantage from PR, comparative study might be needed. The characteristics of workshop would be included into the future study. Contents and purposes appropriated to PR approach are very important to be further clarified then it will be concrete direction for providing PR approach.

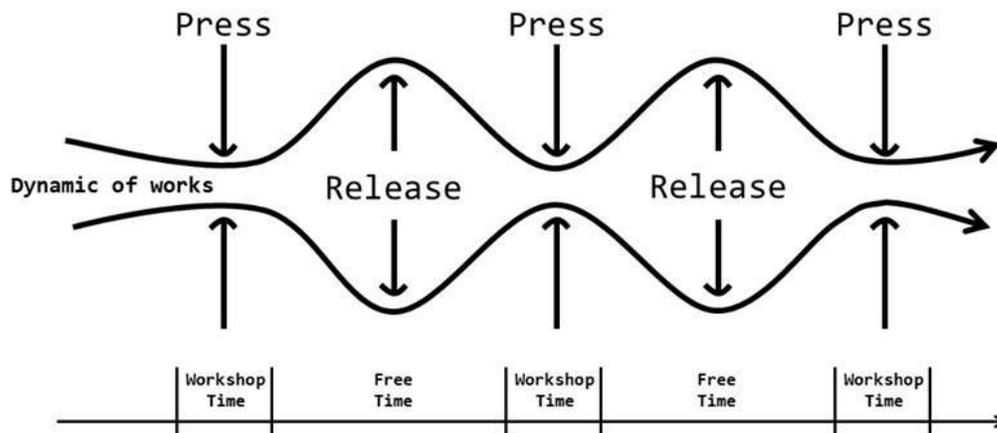


Figure 1. Press and Release diagram for design workshop

## References

IDEO (2012) *Design Thinking for Educators*, Citation <http://designthinkingforeducators.com/> Date 09092015

Schadewitz Nicole (2009) *Design Patterns for Cross-cultural Collaboration*, International Journal of Design Vol.3 No.3, pp. 37-53

Dalsgaard Peter (2014) *Pragmatism and Design Thinking*, International Journal of Design Vol.8, No.1, pp.

143-155.

Sandersa Elizabeth B.-N., Stappersb Pieter Jan (2007) *Co-creation and the new landscapes of design*, CoDesign, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 5–18, Tayler and Francis Group

Augustin Sally (2014) *Designing for Collaboration and Collaborating for Design*, Journal of Interior Design ix *Journal of Interior Design* 39(1)

Russ Randell. et al (1999) *Collaborative Design: Forming, Storming, and Norming*, Journal of Interior Design Vol.25, No.2, pp 52-58

Spool J.M. (2012) *Design Studio Workshop: Adding Up the Benefits*,  
Citation [http://www.uie.com/articles/design\\_studio\\_workshop/](http://www.uie.com/articles/design_studio_workshop/) Date 18092015

Tim Brown (2009) *Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation*, Translated by นุชจรี นาคเจริญวารี (2010), Matichon Publishing House

Susan A. Ambrose and Others (2010) *How learning woks: Seven Research – Based Principles for Smart Teaching*, Translated by วันวิสาข์ เตน (2013), Open Worlds Publishing House

Prachayapruit, A, (2012) *Curriculum and Instruction in Higher Education: Paradigm and Practice*, pp. 520, 2012, Intapas Publishing House