

Monitoring Architectural  
Design Education  
**A Critical Reading**

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It has been a real privilege to share the process of synthesising the texts gathered to monitor architectural design education across Europe. It was a daunting but illuminating task to read the forty-one contributions and it was immediately clear that many fundamental differences were being demonstrated between the papers in terms of architectural philosophy and position and in educational philosophy and method as well as in those not insignificant pragmatics of funding, staffing and timescale. This critical reading will attempt to articulate a few of those differences as well as identify a few underlying themes.

## **A structure**

The monitoring process has been structured by the beguilingly simple questions to which the editor asked all the contributors to make a response and this reading will also rely for its structure on those questions. However it will, for the most part ignore the issues concerned with the practical management of the teaching and of the students' learning 'What design exercises do I run and why?' and 'How satisfied am I? How could I improve?' These issues are crucial to the running of successful design projects but are often very much shaped by the idiosyncrasies of a particular culture, place and coincidence of staff and students and because of that it is difficult to draw general lessons.

The papers have also been gathered into three categories reflecting three broad phases in architectural education: initiations, articulations and advancements. These categories also serve to structure the monitoring process suggesting a logical progression from initiations to articulations and finally to advancements. An alternative reading is to begin by considering advancements, the end phase of architectural education, to see if there are shared expectations across Europe. All architecture courses also have to deal with the transition into an education based around the design studio and in looking at that process we might see shared assumptions, expectations and methods. The articulation phase then has the function of bridging the gap set by a course's response to the problems of initiation and advancement. We might expect to see a wide variety of starting locations but rather fewer finishing points. Indeed the biggest group of papers, seventeen, were concerned with advancement and this reflection remains, for the most part, focussed on the issues of that final stage.

## **Urban Architecture and Integrated Architecture**

It was possible to see two broad categories within these seventeen papers. There were projects that saw architecture essentially in an urban setting and here the papers described an architecture that was very concerned with its public face and its public space. Those projects were directed towards the response that the architecture should make to its setting and were not concerned with seeing the architecture as some kind of personal expression by the architect. The second kind of project was focussed on an integrated architecture that was engaged with the resolution of the many functional, technical, social and cultural factors that architecture must address. This integrated architecture was as interested in the interior as in the exterior, there was a concern for the role of the detail and there was generally an expectation that the students' personal expression of their own vision would be a part of their architecture. This kind of architecture seemed to be trying to engage with the breadth of architecture as well as deal with the detailed resolution of the pragmatics of practice and raises as a question the extent to which this may ever be possible in a design studio environment.

## **Questions**

In developing the reading using the four remaining questions they can be reduced, in effect to three. How?, What? and Why? The questions that will be the pre-occupation of the reading will be first 'How do I teach?' which subsumes its parallel question 'Why do I teach in this way?'; second will be 'What do I teach?' and finally there will be 'Why do I teach?' with the notion of 'in this

way' somewhat lost in the background. However the questions make an assumption about the focus of architectural education that it is no longer easy to make, namely that education is about teaching. Much of our recent experience as University teachers has been concerned with the efforts of our institutions to focus on the student as the key player in education and to see learning as the fundamental activity. In this sense the questions then become 'How do students learn?', 'What do students learn?' and 'Why do students learn?' The design studio offers a wonderful setting for learning but it has not always been a site that was organised and structured to maximise the opportunities for students to learn in a wide variety of ways by doing, listening and reflecting by themselves, with staff and with fellow students.

## **Learning and teaching**

If we consider the questions within the framework of 'learning and teaching' we can identify at least three issues that emerge from the papers. First, is there a body of knowledge that is transferred from the staff to students? Second, if the primary process is one of learning which is implicitly under the control of the students how do staff control their acquisition of knowledge and understanding? Third, how do students learn to be creative?

## **Bodies of knowledge**

It was clear that both the urban and the integrated architecture approaches could be viewed as having a central concern with the identification and acquisition of a particular body of knowledge although in each of those cases the nature of the body of knowledge was quite different. Some national regulatory bodies, for example in the UK, have attempted to set out a written and articulated version of a body of knowledge which for the Architects Registration Board currently contains over a hundred separate and identifiable fragments at the advancements stage. A body of knowledge in architecture clearly covers both information and know-how. A great attraction both for the teacher and, it might be supposed, for the student, is that a body of knowledge can be structured, organised and coherent. This makes it teachable and if not learnable, certainly memorizable.

If we consider how the transfer of knowledge can occur we can see in the papers a number of different approaches. The body can be dissected and revealed piece by piece without exposing it as a whole. This is how some papers dealt with aesthetic issues in proportion and scale. One or two papers illustrated an attempt to map out the whole framework in the absence of details and examples and then gradually to fill in the detail. Others attempted to explain the body of knowledge by a process of immersion, sometimes in an extreme situation away from the familiar surroundings of the studio, sometimes in an intense studio activity. It becomes clear that the process for the teacher becomes one of deciding on the method by which the body of knowledge will be revealed.

## **Control of learning**

In those papers that described a student oriented learning environment the question raised is how does the teacher control the acquisition of knowledge and understanding? It could be argued, of course, that a wish to control the learning is a wish to undermine the very notion of student centred learning itself. However our Universities have not yet given up examinations so there is an expectation that something valuable will be learnt. It would seem that teachers exercise two forms of control. First they create a pedagogic environment that supports their intentions. They may create a studio based on radical discussion that is tolerant of many different ideas or they may encourage structured discussion, set clear norms for student output and use the crit to control the range of solutions that are explored. The physical organisation of the studio as a setting for learning is also an important tool. In the second kind of control teachers generally set the design tasks that the students will undertake and these normally represent a

structured, organised and coherent set that allow the acquisition of a particular stratum of knowledge and understanding. These tasks are commonly structured from the small and simple, sometimes abstract, in initiations to the large and complex in advancements.

### **Learning creativity**

There was some discussion in the papers about the idea of the student as someone who was expected to be creative. One or two papers, generally from the urban architecture tradition, seemed to suggest that the development of creativity in the student was not what was required. This raises the question of how we distinguish between the 'original' and the 'good'. Several papers seemed to regard creativity as innate and that all that was required was an opportunity for the student to exercise this facility.

### **How do I teach?**

Questions about the creative role of students also raised the issue of whether the personalities of the staff were important in architectural education. There was some discussion in the papers about the extent to which the design style of the teacher was the knowledge to be transmitted or whether the design style of the teacher needed to be concealed from the student in order to allow the student the intellectual space to find their own style (Patestos, p. 316). That discussion seemed to arise in situations where the design studio was a place where a group of students were taught by just one teacher. Other papers described a studio where there were several teachers and here the question that was sometimes discussed was whether the members of that staff team all needed to deal with the same issues in the same way (Lokce & Yesilkaya, p. 221). The management of the staff team, in this reading, becomes a major part of the way in which a course is perceived by students. These questions also raise the issue as to whether studio teaching is, in itself, a creative activity for the staff involved.

### **What do I teach?**

Within the forty-one papers there were clearly many design projects that were teaching about a particular design product - the house, housing, the street - and particularly in the advancements stage were focussed on the representation of a convincing, well-resolved building solution. However, some of the other papers described teaching that was about the process of design itself. Here there were at least three different models of that process that were articulated.

In the first there were projects that assumed that a plan of work for a project consisted of a number of identifiable stages and that students progressed from one stage to the next in an ordered way (see for example Balogh, p. 321). This method might be assumed to mirror the process that is alleged to take place in a professional architectural practice. Designing was described as proceeding from an initial stage where the programme received its definition to a stage in which its formal resolution was achieved and this was then followed by a final stage in which the technical resolution of the building was described. This articulation of designing into clearly defined packages both structures the teaching process and suggests the way in which design proceeds in practice.

The second model of the design process assumes that design in professional practice is almost always carried out in a team and that, therefore, the design studio should operate on a team basis (see for example Yegenoglu, p. 239). This work, clearly focussed in the 'real world', also often involves an engagement with builders, planners, community groups and city officials. Design is projected as the resolution of conflicting demands and needs and the designer is characterised as an arbitrator.

The third model, in almost direct opposition to the second, sees design as a reflective process in which the designer is in a 'private dialogue with oneself' (Domenico, p. 303). In this model creating the mental and physical conditions in which this dialogue can occur becomes a key ele-

ment in constructing a design project and organising a design studio. In this model architecture is seen primarily as the revelation of a poetic truth.

## **Drawing**

Each of these models also makes very different demands on a student's representational skills and places drawing and three dimensional model making in different relationships to the design process itself. Where design is seen as a staged process the project needs drawings and models at the end of each stage that summarise the work executed in that stage. They are formal, unambiguous and complete. In a project concerned with team work drawings and models need to be primarily concerned with communication between the members of the team and have to be targeted at the recipient's skills and preoccupations rather than those of the maker. These drawings need to be clear, targeted and unambiguous. Where a poetic revelation is the key design objective the drawings need to be personal, rich, intuitive and may well be informal, ambiguous and incomplete. Providing students with the opportunity to develop the representational skills that a particular design process requires, in this reading, also becomes a key way in which a course defines itself. Students will not develop rich, intuitive drawing skills in a team work environment and so cannot easily transfer from one process model to another and in this way a course's representational mode will define the design processes that it teaches.

## **Design studio is not design practice**

In the final stages of most architecture courses the demands of the projects attempt to closely match the demands of a project in an architect's professional practice. But the design studio is not an architectural practice, so what is it? I remain convinced that the real requirement in an architectural course is to equip students to operate in architectural practice with integrity: that is to remain creative in the face of the pragmatics of practice. There is a natural logic, therefore, in supposing that it is essential that the design studio in the advancement phase simulates, as best it can, the pragmatics of planning, building codes, environmental performance, structural efficiency, cost and constructional discipline. However, Kucina suggested that there could be a kind of 'teaching and learning that is closer to sport training than to academic examination' (Kucina, p. 340). Such an idea addresses directly the issue that the studio, like sport training, is not the event itself but that performance in the event, in practice, is crucially dependent on the quality of the training. It may well be that an architectural course does not need to simulate closely the process of design in practice but may instead need to develop the range of skills, the attitudes and the rigour needed to function successfully in practice.

## **Why do I teach?**

This question for the authors of the papers was very personal and it remains so in providing a reading of them. The design studio is a very demanding environment that calls upon my reserves of concentration, energy and enthusiasm. I share with the students the requirement to observe, to look, to see and to reflect. It is also an environment that is richly rewarding because what happens within it is unexpected, creative and challenging. It is the environment in which I learn.

This reading has not attempted to draw many conclusions or to wrap issues up into tidy bundles. The art of studio design teaching does not allow it. The forty-one papers are a testimony to the nature of the design studio, a snapshot of its diversity and an indication of its continuing development.

