Education, Design and Practice – Understanding skills in a Complex World

• Paper / Proposal Title:

From the Beginning: Skills for Bridging Learning Contexts in Beginning Architectural Education

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• Abstract (300 words):

The change between education and the profession of the architect is a change in context. Increasingly, architects at all levels of their career find themselves facing rapidly changing contexts. Just as we teach the technical skills that lead to successful architecture, shouldn’t we also teach the critical skills required to leap between different contexts? And, given the contemporary speed of change, shouldn’t we teach this from the very beginning of an architect’s education?

This paper examines the role of multimodal learning in beginning architectural education and proposes integrating informal and formal writing assignments into the architecture studio as a means of bridging different learning contexts (i.e., as a means of bridging distinct assignments, projects, or semesters). Beginning architecture students are very willing and quite capable at learning within the limits of a context; the problem, as the author sees it, is their inability to transfer things learned between different contexts. Just as we teach certain architectural abilities within the confines of
an assignment or project, shouldn’t we also teach the basic skills required to abstract and transfer things learned beyond these confines?

This paper proposes that the most robust mechanism of abstraction and transposition exists in a student’s use of language, and that teaching students how to improve their ability to manipulate language through writing provides a concrete opportunity for them to reflect on the connections beyond otherwise distinct learning contexts.

For the last two years, the author has included informal writing assignments (i.e., in class formative writing prompts) and formal writing assignments (i.e., more elaborate take-home writing prompts) as 30% of the first-year architecture studio grade (categorized on the syllabus and rubric under the heading of “critical thinking”). Last summer, this initiative was further guided by a faculty development grant and workshop at ___ University to integrate writing into courses that traditionally do not require it. This paper presents the first report on this initiative in an architecture studio. Using examples from three separate semesters that shared the same five projects, this paper demystifies the process of integrating critical writing into the syllabus of the first semester of a beginning architecture studio, and—on the basis of student works and evaluations—argues that writing can play a foundational role in critical thinking, a role that may make it even more foundational than drawing.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Dr. Tripp is an architectural designer and historian with an expertise in twentieth-century architectural theory and practice in the US and UK. He holds degrees in Architecture History and Theory from the University of Pennsylvania (Ph.D., 2017) and Architecture from the Cooper Union (B.Arch., 2002). He has practiced in Buffalo and New York City, where he specialized in educational, residential, and exhibition design. He has taught at the Cooper Union, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of the Arts, and Mississippi State University before joining Texas A&M University, where he currently teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in architectural design as well as architectural history and theory.

Dr. Tripp’s research focuses on issues of cultural sustainability in contemporary architectural theory and practice. His current projects focus on the relationship between architecture, education, and the unique experiences of Modernity in the Southeastern United States. An abridged list of his interests include:

- Cultural Sustainability in Architectural Practice
- History and Theory of Modern Architecture
- Historic Preservation of Recent Architecture
- Design Theory and Pedagogy
- School Building Design
- Southern Modernism