Can an online studio promote peer learning and increase academic achievement in interior architecture students? The development of an online peer learning platform for Griffith University design students.

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In spatial design and architecture education, the nature of studio-based learning is inherently feedback rich due to its dialogic nature. Schön regarded the conversational exchange between tutor and student and student to student in a formal and informal learning setting of high pedagogic value. Developing a learning setting with a rich social dynamic in which peer interactions and socialised learning can be developed, is a central part of studio-based pedagogy for architecture and design students. The learning and teaching environment at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia has changed significantly over the past 15 years. Formal direct student contact in a class environment has halved from 70 contact hours per semester in 2002 to 36 hours in 2018. Further, peer interactions and socialised learning outside the classroom have almost totally disappeared in the 21st century due to the changing nature of tertiary educational practices in a dynamic market. Evidence suggests however, that students in fields traditionally depending on studio-based pedagogy, struggle to master diverse
skill sets, deal with confrontational formative feedback and heavy and often complex workloads. There is not enough time in the classroom to actively engage with problems and learn through debating, discussing and prototyping. A recent Griffith University student survey revealed that students want to feel connected to their peers, to their academics and teachers and to the place where they learn. This project seeks to investigate the effects on learning in the absence of a peer to peer learning culture outside the formal design studio. In addition, this project will design and develop an online peer to peer learning environment for design and architecture students, using existing applications already available on Blackboard. This will help students to construct and negotiate their own meaning and understanding of often complex concepts, create safe and supporting learning environments and encourage interaction, engagement and self-directed learning.

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Petra Perolini is a Lecturer and majors convener in Interior Design and Environments at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia. In her current position as Program convenor for Interior Design and Environments, she is responsible for the direction and overall pedagogy of the Interior Design Program. Petra is currently completing a PhD at Griffith University on the creation of viable, sustainable design practices using Design Futures methods and theories. Petra is also the co-founder and convenor of LiveSpace, a vibrant collaborative studio for socially and environmentally responsible design, based within the Griffith University Design Department. LiveSpace projects provide opportunities for students to work on real projects within the broader community, where they are challenged beyond the limitations of a typical studio environment. Current projects explore contemporary urbanisation in globalising contexts and adaptive reuse projects.