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

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Writing for Resilience: Reflective Writing as a Tool for Tackling Challenges in the Design Process

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• Abstract (300 words):
When design students encounter the ambiguity inherent in the design process, it can cause stress, anguish, and feelings of inadequacy. However, these difficult experiences of failure, dead-ends, and “stuckness” are often the ones in which students learn the most about design-ing. Learning how to effectively work through design challenges is vital and should be a primary objective of the design studio. By prompting regular reflection on encountered challenges, students can reframe their attention, not on simply designing projects, but on learning how to design projects.

The presentation will discuss and compare reflective writing assignments and their effects in two contexts; a first-semester design studio and a final-semester architecture studio. These assignments seek to place the metacognitive processes necessary for independent design work (monitoring, evaluating, and planning) on more equal footing with the cognitive and physical work produced in the studio classroom. To achieve this, the mental work behind the physical work is regularly recorded and discussed as part of the projects. Journals serve as a record of design intent and of
instructor and peer feedback, of responses to feedback, and of personal growth. Furthermore, they provide a platform for dialogue about design work through which students can begin to see challenges differently. “Stuckness,” for example, is often perceived as a private, personal problem indicating a lack of talent. By discussing experiences of “stuckness” with others, it is reframed as a common experience that designers share, and furthermore, one which can be overcome (perhaps through identifying the cause, exploring possibilities, taking a break, etc.)

Metacognitive writing can have powerful effects; in comparison with students from past years, students who completed the newly introduced reflective writing assignment were more likely to discuss their learning experiences, develop critical friendships with their peers, and face design challenges with more confidence and resilience.

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

Sarah Michele Young is an Assistant Professor at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette School of Architecture and Design, where she has taught since 2012. Sarah has taught architecture and design studios at every year level from foundations to graduate school. She also teaches graduate architecture history and theory, undergraduate design survey, and a freshman seminar introducing students of all majors to the transformative potential of design. Her research interests include design pedagogy as it pertains to design communications in graphic representation, writing, and storytelling. She was the 2018 recipient of the AIA Louisiana Associates Award and one of ten national recipients of the 2018 Jason Pettigrew Memorial ARE Scholarship. Her design work has also been recognized in international design competitions as a partner of the emC&young design team and in professional practice as a project designer at emerymmcclure architecture.