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

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Developing architecture studio culture: peer-peer learning

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• Abstract (300 words):
The architectural studio environment is unique in many ways, and is both a physical space but also a pedagogical and cultural space where learning and teaching happens. Traditionally, architecture teaching is centered around the architectural design studio, which generally takes place once or twice weekly between the individual student and their tutor. Teaching is further punctuated by regular pin-ups, where students present their design work and process to tutors and external guests or ‘critics’ and the wider peer group. Students spend a substantial amount of time working on their design project in preparation for the next tutorial or presentation.

Pedagogically, the studio is based on project-based learning and offers a great potential for both reflective practice and integration of abstract knowledge into projects. It is sometimes described as ‘reflection in action’ supported by a master/apprentice approach with regular feedback on the student’s design development. Studio culture also supports peer-peer learning, which happens in formalized group work as well as informally in the absence of tutors. Studio culture can
also lead to unhealthy practices such as peer-peer pressure and competition, long hours, isolation from other studios and activities outside studio, but also contains potential learning advantages because peers’ working process and progress is made visible. Additionally, students can experience stress when they are exposed to negative ‘public evaluation’ of their work. While there is space for group work and peer-peer learning in studio, at present studio culture tends to focus and reward individual progress and independent work; this is counter to team spirit and collaborative practices, as encountered in the reality of architectural practice.

Through experimental case studies at different levels, this paper illustrates ways to develop the unique and positive aspects of studio culture by fostering student-student learning to underpin and support tutor-student learning activities in studio.

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

Dr Sofie Pelsmakers is a chartered architect who trained in Belgium and the UK and has been teaching environmental design and sustainable architectural design for over 15 years, in the UK, Denmark and Finland at both undergraduate, Masters and postgraduate level. Dr Pelsmakers authored ‘The Environmental Design Pocketbook’ (RIBA Publishing), a comprehensive publication which distils environmental science, legislation and guidance into one easy to use single source. Her book was commended for outstanding practice based research (RIBA presidents research Medal, 2012) and commended by the UKGBC Rising Star 2013 award. She was selected as a UCL Bartlett PhD Alumni Role Model (2017), an RIBA UK Architecture Role Model (2015), and one of 20 ‘Women influencing Sustainable Architecture’ in the UK by the Architects Journal (2013). She undertook pedagogical training at Aarhus University in Denmark and also holds recognition from the UK Higher Education Academy (SFHEA). In day-day teaching, she has been investigating how to embed sustainability in architectural design studio.

Dr Elizabeth Donovan is an assistant professor at Aarhus School of Architecture where she teaches within the bachelor’s programme - sustainability. She is educated from New Zealand, USA, Sweden, UK and Denmark. Her PhD research focused on a holistic understanding of the disconnect between sustainable architecture discourse and practice and her subsequent teaching is also interested in how to further connect these two paradigms with a desire for integration and embeddedness at the forefront of activities.

Kari Moseng is a teaching assistant professor at the Aarhus School of Architecture, Denmark. She has a master in architecture (2001). Between 2001-2010 she worked in the office of Friis & Moltke Architects in Aarhus as a leader of the Department of learning and education, developing various schemes related to elementary schools. Between 2010 - 2013 she was teaching in the candidate programme at Aarhus School of architecture and also worked as a lab-manager in “Laboratory of Design and
Architecture” at project Kids’n’tweens Lifestyle”, financed by the EU-regional fund. Since 2014 Kari has been teaching in the bachelor-programme at the Aarhus School of Architecture. In 2018, Kari carried out the pedagogical training course for teachers of architecture and design at Aarhus University.

Dr. Birgitte Tanderup Eybye is an assistant professor at the Aarhus School of Architecture, Denmark. She has a master in architectural conservation and did her doctoral thesis within the field of preindustrial vernacular architecture and sustainability. Her special field of interest is connections between sustainability and existing (heritage) buildings such as vernacular architecture, earthen building and values-assessments in the aim of promoting circularity within the existing building stock. Two of her research papers have received awards at the VerSus II conference in 2014 and at the SOStierra 2017 conference. She has been teaching at undergraduate level and now teaches at master’s level in the field of architectural conservation, which includes a methodology of five steps: building survey, documentation, values-assessments, conservation strategies and architectural design. In 2018, she carried out the pedagogical training course for teachers of architecture and design at Aarhus University.