Design-build teaching in American architecture education emerged from a nineteen-sixties’ social, political and educational environment – one in which the perceived elitism of architects and universities was being challenged. At the outset of the longest lasting design-build project at the Yale School of Architecture, Dean Charles Moore set out the goals teaching social responsibility and demystifying the construction process for students.

The first live projects in British architecture education emerged in the nineteen-fifties at the Birmingham School of Architecture with the design and construction of a number of small public buildings. (Brown, 2012) These experiments in construction were an anomaly. When live projects re-emerged in number in British architecture education in the nineties, their focus had shifted from a critique of architectural production to the promotion of social responsibility. (ibid)

Live projects in British architecture education were informed by the study of the teaching method of design build projects in the United States. The unintended consequence is that on occasion the acritical reading of design-build as a pedagogical approach has led to a conflation of their origin and intention. The result is a muddying of the conceptual understanding of the benefits of design-build as a pedagogical model. We now find the awkward terminology of live-build disguising a confusion of pedagogy and method. The unasked question is why build? What unseen benefits are there for architecture students
and partners in design build studios? How specifically does a design-build studio differ from a live project studio, and what the hell is a live-build anyway?

This paper is an exercise in collaborative writing between two architecture educators, one raised in the American tradition of design-build and one in the British tradition of live projects. We argue that the intense hands-on nature of the problem-solving situations in a design-build studio amplify the problem-based learning aspired to in most normative architecture design education. By untangling these terminologies, we argue that the design-build approach has the potential to re-centre designers as generalists, producing graduates with experience in surveying, engineering, costing, finance, project management, and (importantly) first aid.

References

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