

## **Supporting Intercultural Learner Relationships in Higher Education**

### **Architecture of Multiple Authorship – teaching global citizenship**

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*Architecture of Multiple Authorship* is an initiative that offers an alternative model of teaching and learning beyond the classroom to architecture students. It bridges the relationship between speculative, studio-based reflections and professional practice, enabling experimentation within the context of the needs of communities. The curriculum is designed to engage different student groups to work on a specific project in one place over several academic years. There are two points of engagements (November and February) which are credit bearing, an additional summer workshop is voluntary. Students at different stages of their academic studies ranging from undergraduate to PhD come together in a vertical studio to share critical learning approaches and knowledge.

Universities can provide an education beyond the chosen subject area of architecture and offer to shape society by teaching citizenship. The proposition is that effective learning consists not only of the course curriculum, but includes active engagement with communities, too. In contrast to the 'model of master and student' (Crowther, 2013), the tutor takes the role of an arbiter and joins the co-learning experience.

Our students form part of the ongoing community-led architecture project *Crossing Cultures* in Italy, integrating asylum seekers arriving on the coast into the fabric of depopulated villages. The students become 'agents for change' making a difference in the village and gaining experience for their long-term learning. This inclusive learning environment invites students to establish intercultural relationships with their peers and new communities. It instructs them how to engage with their future world, building more tolerant and integrated societies.

*Crossing Cultures* was introduced in 2016 when London-based students organised a summer workshop to explore the boundaries of practice and education, and it has since become a

university platform outside of the academic environment for students to collaborate with a growing number of stakeholders.

The curriculum brings three separate groups to the village in November, February and July, with different student cohorts contributing to a growing body of work. Choosing a small village in Italy places students in an environment where they can immerse themselves into the project and the necessary collaboration creates positive relationships with each other outside of university, creating an international and inclusive educational environment to develop global competences. As we discovered during interviews:

*Here we are all confronted with each other. There is a density of working in the same place and then meeting in the same bar in the evening and again for breakfast.*

Working closely together creates a safe working and learning environment amongst all participants, we call it a 'common ground', which differentiates it from conventional academia. Students, locals and migrants develop empathy, a sense of equality and respect for each other, build lasting emotional relationships which in turn 'impacts on better learning' (Brooks, 2019, p. 23). "Here in Italy we are all migrants...." (Unpublished Internal Report, 17 July 2019). This citation expresses the feeling of an international architecture student who participated in the Workshop in Italy that she felt the same as the other participating students, refugees and locals.

Our students are taught to value working with people of different backgrounds as all participants are integrated and feel accepted:

*I learned to appreciate that other people have much more to contribute ... The more I do this [work], the more I appreciate that people can contribute to things that, at first, I didn't recognise.*

They acknowledge there is "no vibe of hierarchy" and emphasise the "equal importance of all contributors". They combine academic knowledge with hands-on understanding and develop positive emotional dialogues with peers and new communities.

We conducted 23 interviews with students, refugees and locals, who participated in the last Summer Workshop (Denicke-Polcher, Haenschel, & Giacco, 2019).

Our own observations indicate that the project helps develop intercultural awareness, and an understanding of global issues, and shapes a sense of social justice amongst our students, equipping them with values and attitudes that are essential for a well-functioning society. We see students putting extra effort into their work in response to stimulating feedback from effecting change through hands-on engagement, and they feel a duty of care as their learning and achievements in a real context gives legitimacy to their work.

Observing that positive change takes a long time in which the students develop the vital skill to persevere and be resilient:

*Seeing this [project] grow from the last years to this year and knowing it carries on, is really important. The community is growing, developing, creating a positive change over time.*

Unpublished Internal Report, international student (17 July 2019)

Moreover, the work-based learning of *Crossing Cultures* moves away from simply viewing students as university “customers”. Learning about collaboration and teamwork is important for students’ profession as architects. Students benefit from the ethical and social impact they have on communities in a globally inter-connected world with an increasing prospect of mass-migration.

Concluding, we question the sole focus on academic performance alone, as it might matter more to students to experience their ability to make an impact and create positive change. This boosts the student’s confidence and forms a basis to become energetic professionals, and it may also benefit their mental health and encourage volunteering beyond their studies.

References

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