

TransARK – Rethinking Architecture and the Education of Architecture.

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In this paper we present the TranARK project, a proposal to a rethinking of architecture and a threshold concept centered methodology for curriculum design for the education of architects.

In architecture leading voices call for *a big rethink* to develop new ways of thinking and practicing in the discipline, and also in the education of future architects (Buchanan 2012).

Architecture is a highly interdisciplinary field. At its base is the need to deal with complexity; to oscillate between details and “the big picture”, and to move across discipline borders in search of patterns and intersections. Among the challenges for the education of architects is now to prepare students for multiple frameworks and competing values, ill-defined problems and openended situations (Barnett 2000). Architecture is a knowledge domain where aesthetic, tactile experience is crucial, and creative practice is a way of thinking and a way of understanding. These perspectives align well with the threshold concept framework, and it has been suggested that architecture “engage with liminality, the threshold between “old” paradigms and values and the “new” which are not yet clear (Meyer & Land, 2005). It is the period of indeterminacy prior to the crossing of the threshold (Cousins, 2006; Kiley & Wisker, 2009)” (Quinlan, Farrell, and Hogben, 2010).

The TransARK project reorganizes its educational trajectory into four components as follows:

Making is thinking: Acknowledging that Architecture belongs to the “Making disciplines” (Sennet, 2008, Pallasma, 2009) and the connection between mind and body, we emphasize to give the students an embodied experience by working in full scale from the very beginning of the study. Full-scale building projects continue in several assignments throughout the curriculum as a result of an intentional priority area especially on wood as a building material the last 10-12 years. By working full scale, they will gain a knowledge that not only cover professional and academic skills, but also acquire “confidence to challenge” and tacit knowledge (Polyani,1966).

Live Studios, a PBL based methodology, are conducted to challenge the students; to bring them out of the “academy” and into real-world situations that enable them to gain insights, skills and understandings that cannot be academically “taught”. By “being in the situation”, they acquire a much wider understanding of what architecture is and what it does. The problems students confront are embedded in real-world constraints, social and material, that trigger ingenuity, innovation and creativity all according to the principles of problem-based-learning.

Complexity and change: The overall context of the design - and building processes are developing into still higher levels of complexity, and also continually changing. The Integral Approach provides a possible map and a method (Integral Methodological Pluralism) that can be used as a tool of orientation in complex matters (Wilber, 2007). As an interdisciplinary field, the architectural perspective in itself is a kind of integral approach. In a time where specialization and fragmentation is a main trend, it is crucial to develop understanding of the relationship between the details of things and the whole picture.

Threshold concepts: the components listed above challenge the learners considerably and position the learner in an unpleasant liminal stage, yet necessary for grasping “underlying game” (Perkins, 2006). The TransARK project intends to frame the challenges in the redesign within the lens of the threshold concept framework, and will focus on how liminality is expressed and experienced among

students, how patterns and integration may be made possible for the students, and how to make “the underlying game” accessible for the learners (Perkins 2006). The paper will provide existing examples of this.

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