BOOK REVIEW:
TOWARD AN IDEAL CURRICULUM TO REFORM ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION:
Windsor Forum on Design Education

Authors: Stephanie E. Bothwell, Andres M. Duany, Peter J. Hetzel, Steven W. Hurtt, and Dhiru A. Thadani


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The book is a forum on architectural education by stakeholders – views and opinions of different contributors on ways and methods to improve architectural design education and architectural education in general held in April 2002, Florida, USA and declaration of a conference by European Urbanists held in May 2004, Viseu- Porta. The book gives provocative expressions, word to word of each speaker and non-attending presenters at the forum in a debate format.

Areas of improvement on the ways and methods of training architects are arguably emphasized by some speakers to the agreement of most of the other participants. For example that, health should be an inevitable byproduct of excellent architecture and community planning. Also, architects should be well broadly groomed in their education and be able to handle whatever building designs may come their ways – being modernist or historical buildings. In addition, that their learning should be city focused. As stressing the issues of health, safety and welfare and hard research as laid out in the Boyer Report, this should be a good paradigm shift toward a more civic and community-minded architectural education and practice. Agreed by all
that architects and urbanists as professional form givers should be engaged with citizens in creating forms that satisfy human aspirations, needs and improvement of their environments. As for the curriculum of training architects, they agreed on these five sections – Arts and Sciences, History and Theory, Technology, Skills, and Design for its broad education and practice. That architecture should foster collaboration with other disciplines and professions. Real places are interdisciplinary, so architecture students need to be taught to work with others in a collaborative fashion emphasizes Kate Kraft: 227. Interdisciplinary approach will foster the cooperation of diverse professions who are informed, led by the hopes, needs, and concerns for creating and maintaining livable communities.

The participants are passionate about creativity in architectural design education, which should also be sustainable by focusing on real-world situations – the peoples’ values, ways of living and preservation and enrichment of the environment. Diversity in educating architects is acknowledged and praised and should be expanded to accommodate all including the art talented students, who must also learn and master fact as fashion alone is not enough. Also, that the design studio should continue to be the melting spot of training architects in schools. A balance of individual and collaborative effort should be the ideal studio experience (for example, at the University of Miami, design studios are conducted with architects and engineers). Also, universities should be the main schools for training architects and as teamwork simulates the contemporary design office, teamwork in training architects will better prepare them for the realities of practice.

As suggested that the issue of education and practice in architecture be taken as revolutionary as exemplified by Walter Gropius in Harvard University (architecture without typology) and his counterpart, Le Corbusier's call to revolution versus connection with the past (history) being a better way to think of architecture by most presenters was not well resolved due to their enthusiasm. There is claim to the importance of history by some participants that architecture is built on existing ideas and formal precedents seen in other architecture, other domains, or in nature, as we are connected and beholden to our past more than we realize or care to admit.

It is a user-friendly book and organized as the candid expressions of the various participants were presented in a debated manner and it is a thing of interest to read, just like one watching a hot debate on an interesting topic via the television. One has the feeling of the live participants as they progress with the presentation, and you would not want to stop until the end of the book when all the contributors would have empty all they have to say. Photographs of important events are shown and individual photographs and autobiographies of participants are well related, and the names of the speakers are printed at the top of any statement or opinion made. Topics are raised, introduced and asked for contributions from the participants. This is done by any of the four organizers, namely – Stephanie E. Bothwell, Andres M. Duany, Steven W. Hurtt and Dhiru A. Thadani. Also the sponsored representatives and thier institutional texts are well related. The sponsors were the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Community of Windsor, The J. M. Kaplan Fund and the University of Miami, School of Architecture. The types of models and education are chaptered with the names of the presenter printed at the top. The types of models are related as – Arts and Crafts, Technical, Cornell, Beaux Arts, Current European, Caribbean, Latin American, Planning and Vernacular, while the education types are just only two - Classical and the Modernist.

The book focuses on echoing the experience and candid comments, lectures and statements of the participants on ways and methods to improving the education of architects for creativity as well as for sustainability. Creativity is a life thing, should be motivated by providing the stimulated learning environments and its potentials attained with other competences later through apprenticeship, through practice, and through technical training. Architecture has to do with style and also has to do with standards too. Therefore, sustainability prompts our market economy to think more about appropriate design. On the triple bottom line of sustainability – Environment, Economy, and Equity – should belong the fourth “E” of Esthetic. As indeed, if a
building, landscape, or city is not beautiful, it will not be loved, and if it is not loved, it won’t be
cared for. Thus, the love of esthetics in design culture is inextricably joined with the love of the
environmentally sustainable. This connection, long in coming, is the key to greening the culture of
both architectural education and practice.

The challenge in the book is that any point or comment raised by any one, is accepted by
majority of the participants and this they acknowledge as good, diversity in training. The book will
particularly interest architects, both in training and practice and their educators, other
stakeholders – the related professions, the users, public institutions, faculties, organizations and
general readers as architecture affects every human being and the environments we live in.

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