

A Beginner's Mind

PROCEEDINGS

**21st National Conference
on the Beginning Design Student**

Stephen Temple, editor

**Conference held at the
College of Architecture
The University of Texas at San Antonio
24-26 February 2005**

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Situating Beginnings
Questioning Representation
Alternative Educations
Abstractions and Conceptions
Developing Beginnings
Pedagogical Constructions
Primary Contexts
Informing Beginnings
Educational Pedagogies
Analog / Digital Beginnings
Curriculum and Continuity
Interdisciplinary Curricula
Beginnings
Design / Build
Cultural Pluralities
Contentions
Revisions
Projections

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WORKSHOP:

Beginner's *Praxis* Workshop
A Social Constructivist Approach to Learning Through *Scaffolding*

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Praxis is from the Greek *prattein* = act and designates the actual execution of an activity (contrary to theory)
.Put another way, it is *putting theoretical knowledge into practice*.

Scaffolding as educational theory refers to Russian Developmental Psychologist LEV Vygotsky's (1896-1934)
Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) = The intellectual development of A Beginner's Mind
is a function of human communities, rather than individuals.

The study unit for understanding the human condition cannot be the individual person or organism alone or its behavior or experience, but should be a complex including the individual and the *social*, the biological and the *cultural*, and this complex needs to be seen in its *historical* nature. The Beginner's *Praxis* Workshop will guide freshmen students through *scaffolding* figuratively and literally, navigating both educational theory framing the student within the social, extended community outside of the classroom, and putting that theoretical knowledge into *praxis* by construction of a temporary, lightweight installation within and about the physical *scaffolding* ringing the Downtown University of Texas at San Antonio Campus where the Conference is to be held.

This Beginner's *Praxis* Workshop will focus on extending the freshmen students' abstract instruction to "first-hand experiences with actual materials", sites and "full-scale design-build". As *iterative* extensions of theory into direct practice, the project will demonstrate the innovative workshop format that focuses the beginning student on the elusive phenomena of the contemporary metropolis and their implications for possible architectures. The purpose is to have the beginning student critically *discuss/investigate/document* a specific physical *scaffolding* location towards the discovery of new ways of *seeing/thinking/acting* on it through the collaborative construction of a temporary installation.

There are three (3) objectives to the Beginner's *Praxis* Workshop:

Day 1) to expose the beginning students and Conference attendees to the writings of Vygotsky which lead to his "**scaffolding** of instruction" and an awareness of **praxis**;

Day 2) to guide students to investigate and critically document one specific **scaffolding** condition on the Campus;

Day 3) to develop and construct a temporary, collaborative architectural installation on the chosen **scaffolding** site. Using the existing **scaffolding**, the students will use as their biological model the *epiphyte*, an organism that grows on a host without damaging it but rather benefits it. The intervention, being temporary, lightweight, and easily demountable, would be non-invasive to the environment - a "soft" interaction with the site for the last day of the Conference.

If it is true, as LEV Vygotsky theorized, that "learning is a constructivist activity", then his *Zone of Proximal Development* includes all the functions and activities that a beginning student can perform only with the assistance of this **scaffolding** process. Knowledge within the discipline of architecture is important, but solving problems that encourage the beginning student to go beyond their current individual skill and knowledge level into their social communities further development of higher functions beyond the discipline. By implication, new knowledge *can be built*.