

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:

Making Something: The Power of Limits” & the Pitfall of Assumptions

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Portland State University

A deceptively simple yet telling first-day experiment was performed by the two instructors for second-year design studio at ___ University to begin the Fall 2004 term. The students were asked, in the absence of any other directions or requirements, to “*make something*”. They were asked, after completing this task, to open an envelope that contained the second half of the initial task; the enclosed assignment asked them to “*make something*” but this time something that possessed relationships with both a particular descriptive-and-poetic narrative and with the “something made” in the first half of the assignment. They were then asked, as a carefully considered follow-up, to consciously reflect upon what they had both *thought* and *did* to make those two things come into existence; i.e. to “*reflect on the process of your making*”. Their reflections took the form of both a written statement and a prepared spoken explanation. Our analysis of our students’ work has led us to desire to perform a reactive experiment over the course of the conference.

The experiment would involve taking a group of 1st-year architecture students from the University of Texas-San Antonio (on Thursday afternoon), split into three groups of approximately 10 students each. Each would be asked to complete the two “making something” assignments; they would be given a day to complete them. The first sub-group would operate under exactly the same set of directions as the group here at ___ University. The second group will read and discuss Doug Kelbaugh’s article entitled “The Power of Limits” prior to beginning the two assignments. The third group will be given a List of Assumptions *not* to make, followed by a discussion period, prior to beginning the two assignments. We will then (on Friday afternoon), ask the students to self-consciously “reflect on the process of your making”. We will analyze all the students’ work (on Friday night/Saturday morning), followed by making some working observations and conclusions of the three sets of work relative to each other and to the previous work by our students.

Our theory is that the latter two groups will benefit greatly by our placing the assignments in an effective context; therefore, a better learning experience will result. Our theory is broadly based on prior studio instruction experiences but, more particularly, on the understanding and application of the work of the co-authors of a book entitled *Deep Smarts: How to Cultivate and Transfer Enduring Business Wisdom*. This useful business-oriented book suggests that a sink-or-swim strategy is inefficient and, more important, ineffective. It claims that it is far better to deliberately create receptors for learning by providing frameworks and/or tools and/or other types of mental structures to which experience can be tied. The Kelbaugh article and the List of Assumptions will serve as, hopefully, two possible effective forms of those frameworks/tools/structures, and perhaps others can be suggested from the resulting dialogue.

Our final presentation will involve both showing the work and our own analysis and tentative conclusions, as well as public interaction with chosen student participants in terms of the particular nature of their individual learning experiences and of the differences in learning experiences amongst the three groups.

“The foolish reject what they see, not what they think; the wise reject what they think, not what they see”. [Huang Po]