

Design studio for teaching creative and artistic disciplines

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ABSTRACT: The basis of teaching arts and creative disciplines is the world-wide recognised method of studio work that features the individual teaching of students. This method is widely practised in architectural schools at both the Bachelor's and Master's level of study. However, this approach to teaching poses several serious issues, and these include the optimal size of student groups in studio work; the suitability of teaching space for individual teaching; options for assigning projects; project assessment; internationalisation, and the inclusion of foreign students. Based on the experience in teaching architecture at the Technical University of Ostrava (VŠB) in the Czech Republic, and professional visits within the EU Erasmus programmes, the author outlines and discusses these issues, and then identifies optimal solutions, so that the best outcomes of studio work can be achieved for students, academic teachers and the institution.

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of arts and creative disciplines must be based on a form of individual assignments. Such assignments must then be discussed with the teachers, either in groups or separately by educators and their assistants. It is also important for students to have the opportunity to observe the work done by their colleagues or even work on the same or similar, assignments in a different format and in a different way. This often results in the subject-matter being covered from many different angles, and may lead to the discovery of ever better solutions.

Studio teaching is the basic method of teaching all artistic disciplines, including architecture. It is the fundamental pillar of all artistic and architectural study programmes taught throughout the world. It is precisely for this reason that it is so important to look at how studio teaching is carried out and what produces the best results,

...How to teach architecture? This topic appears often and it may sound like a cliché, but confrontation is important. It is equally important that each school learns in a different way and is therefore specific [1].

The study plan for the Architecture and Construction programme taught in the Faculty of Civil Engineering at the Technical University of Ostrava (VŠB) - was modified for the second accreditation period, valid from 2006, so as to conform to the requirements of organisations, such as the Česká komora architektů (Czech Chamber of Architects), the Ministry of Education and the corresponding bodies of the European Union,

...The fundamental requirement was to begin teaching studio work using an individual form of consultation from the very first semester of study. This resulted in The Fundamentals of Architectural Design I and II, being introduced as a subject in the first year, with four academic hours per semester. Students therefore analyse well-known buildings of high architectural quality in the very first semester and in this way familiarise themselves with designing structures. In the second semester, students are led towards creating something small of their own, based on the layout designs of specific typological assignments, which in turn form the base of future teaching of now-traditional studio work of eight academic hours a week from the third semester onwards.

Structures of a simpler character are progressively assigned, meaning small single-family homes and later the same sorts of homes, but with more demanding layout. Students design less demanding civic structures within urban contexts from the fifth semester onwards. The fourth year and the Bachelor's dissertation thereafter deal with a project focusing on the next level of project documentation, meaning a project for the issue of a building permit and in part a project for the execution of construction work, again in studios. This brings the teaching of studio work to a culmination for the Bachelor's level of study [2].

The two-year Master's level of study is thereafter essentially built on teaching studio work, accompanied by the corresponding lectures. Studies are completed with the corresponding dissertation and by taking state examinations.

HOW LARGE CAN GROUPS OF STUDENTS BE FOR STUDIO WORK?

The standard number in a study group of students is 24 following on from lectures. These groups are then usually divided in half for teaching in specialised classrooms or for teaching art subjects. The increase in the number of teachers understandably also increases the cost of studies and for this reason study programmes are, in terms of financing, provided with the so-called study demand coefficient designed to take this into account. It is, therefore, necessary to think about the financing in relation to the effectiveness of teaching. In particular, fluctuating numbers of students, due to the peaks and troughs of the demographic cycle, have the capacity to significantly burden school budgets. Also important is the number of academic hours allocated to studio work since it is then understandably possible to better manage the time set aside for consultation.

Based on the experience of the author, who has long worked providing instruction in studio work, it can be said that at the Bachelor's level, quality teaching can be provided over eight academic hours a week with 12 students per teacher. Since an academic hour lasts 45 minutes and so eight hours is 360 minutes, there are 30 minutes of consultation per student per week. Instruction is preceded by the corresponding lectures and practice, meaning that a certain level of knowledge is expected. However, excellent organisation and, above all, the consistent participation of all those involved are vital to success.

At Master's level studies in architecture at the Faculty of Civil Engineering in Ostrava more attention must be paid to students, because upon graduation they will earn the title of *ingerum architectus* and become actual, practising architects, with the results of their work influencing the opinion and perceptions of the general public. For this reason the number of students per teacher is reduced to a maximum of six, with 12 academic hours a week. There are certain differences depending on whether the studio is an architecture studio, a planning studio or an interior design studio, but the Faculty essentially operates within these bounds throughout the Masters' studies.

The author visited several universities within the European Union, as part of the Erasmus programmes, and the arrangements are similar across the visited countries. Only at the Faculty of Architecture in Timișoara (Romania) was the number of students per teacher surprisingly high, with 70 students for three teachers. After examining the teaching methods, it was found that students work in groups of three or four on the same assignment, thus creating a joint result. Only in this way can the desired result be achieved. However, it is difficult to make sure that all students in the group work apply themselves to the same level.

WHAT TEACHING SPACE IS SUITABLE FOR INDIVIDUAL TEACHING?

The author distinguishes between three basic types of space in which individual consultation between the student and teacher occurs. All of these are found at most art schools and are used in line with the requirements of the schools, and where teachers establish the arrangement after careful consideration and according to the teaching method.

The most common rooms are large classrooms, where several groups can be taught at the one time; a system which has many pluses and minuses. It is important for students that they have the opportunity to compare and are able to work together, discuss matters together and share new knowledge, experiences and activities. It is also common for teaching to be allocated to studios, when there is a lead teacher, most commonly a professor or associate professor, together with other teachers. The lead teacher needs to have an overview of the work of all colleagues and students, who value this attention, and it is, therefore, appropriate to work in groups in one place.

A required discipline is that the students do not disturb each other during the teaching and are able to work to the full. Nevertheless, it would appear that this is the most appropriate form of teaching studio work, in spite of the negatives involved.

Large classrooms generally are accompanied by normal classrooms for around 24 students, usually to accommodate a given capacity. In this case, the acoustics of the classroom are important, because it is not possible to teach more than 12 students in such rooms and the teaching cannot be revised there as part of the overall studio work of the year. However, the entire teaching process is calmer and the work of the group more compact, which might produce excellent results for students. In general, however, this is a supplementary teaching space for teaching studio work.

Teachers, and sometimes students, often like discussing matters with each other in their offices and common rooms. Confrontation with other groups, teachers and others involved in the teaching process might be stressful and undesirable. Sometimes, at the end of the semester or during the examination period, it is no longer possible to discuss matters in groups outside the regular timetable, and for this reason using offices is the only option.

However, it is appropriate, mainly at the initial stages of working on projects, for teaching to proceed in the traditional way, and for students to engage in team work with co-operation, respect for themselves and the work of others.



Figure 1: Large classroom for teaching design studio, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Technical University of Ostrava.

WHAT OPTIONS ARE THERE FOR ASSIGNING PROJECTS?

The most difficult form of assignment is to give each student an entirely different assignment, meaning a different place and a different type of building. Teaching in such assignments is only possible when there is a very low number of students, because no co-operation is possible, inspections of sites must be done separately, and both the teacher and student must have an excellent knowledge of the assignment.

Primarily, however, the students have no opportunity to compare results among themselves. They are unable to work together and do not encounter alternative solutions to their assignments, which is undesirable. The assignment of projects in a different way is preferred at normal architecture schools, for all the reasons specified above.

Sometimes, dealing with a specific type of structure of similar parameters is acceptable. To make sure that the results of work differ, however, students are assigned a different lot. It can be opined that this form of work is very similar to the method of assignment mentioned above, and for this reason is not overly common.

More common is work on the same place and, best of all, the same lots, but involving a different type of building. Study of the place, city and other contexts can be done in a group, which is very effective and enriching. The fact that the building designs then draw on different typological requirements is not therefore limiting, because work is preceded by study within the bounds of the corresponding subjects. Students working towards the Master's degree, and some towards the Bachelor's degree, are able to add to their knowledge by studying other standards, regulations and references more or less on their own.

The most common form of assignment in studio work considers the same location and the same type of building, but requires different architecture and planning of the design itself. In this case, collective study of the site, assignment, typological documents, references and other contexts are possible. Students are also able to enrich each other, but must be attentive in the sense that they cannot have the same projects or even similar projects, which is not always easy.

However, this method makes it possible to thoroughly study and cover the relevant topic. It is clear that a significant number of results means that almost all possible options are examined. Discussion thereafter clarifies the best approach to the problem.

...Proper communication creates, in a democratic way, a shared, objective opinion, which respects individual points of view as a lasting value of the creativity process [3].

ASSESSING THE RESULTS OF STUDIO WORK

Students must prove their ability to present the results of their work in a form, which clearly demonstrates their readiness to move on to the next level of studies or for their future career as an architect. The final version of the project is usually handed in on paper in A3 format, on posters, in models and in digital format.

During the semester, students individually present their projects and must face criticism and remarks from teachers and their classmates. Sometimes work is projected digitally, sometimes it is presented on posters. In this way, students are trained in presenting the results of their work, clarifying them and offering a defence of them. This is a very important part of their studies and is absolutely essential for university graduates. They must be capable of working on their own in their future careers, and must be able to present and justify their work. The art of selling their vision is the foundation on which their future success will be built.

Exhibitions of the results of studio work are held at all schools of architecture, on the university premises themselves, and the best are usually displayed in galleries and exhibitions. Nowadays, presentation on Web sites and other forms of digital publication are also commonplace.

THE INTERNATIONAL TEACHING OF STUDIO WORK

The increasing number of students from abroad would seem to favour teaching studio work in more than one language. It is surprising that students do not welcome this form of instruction, which instead arouses fear in them. By contrast, foreign students try to integrate themselves into groups of local students. After all, this is why they went to a different country, to study the culture, the architecture and the language. These trends must be consistently supported and students motivated to engage in international co-operation, without compromise.

...The universities' reputation is particularly reflected in international communication at two levels: academic exchange and research. The educational process may be highly enriched by the integration of foreign groups of students and teachers with domestic groups. Working on common projects allows for both groups to compare their countries' differences and generates a more objective point of view on solved problems. Co-operation between local and foreign teachers then supports the creation of new exchanges and workshops [3].

...International studies have gained a certain kind of equality dimension in our country. In principle our students study abroad in English, German, French and foreign students are educated in our country in the same languages. That's one of the things that we have to somehow swallow, the Slovak language will never be lingua franca, but architectural communication doesn't depend only on its verbal form [4].

CONCLUSIONS

Study in the form of studio work is the pillar of teaching artistic disciplines and architecture alike. Having knowledge, studying and passing on experience in this field are essential, since the success of future artists and architects is based on this and, in turn, the effects of their impact on society as a whole. Hence, there are many aspects that affect the teaching of studio work. The personality of the teacher and their professional and teaching experience are irreplaceable. It is absolutely essential that teachers be provided with considerable freedom in the way they work in such creative disciplines, since only then can they freely shape their charges.

...An integral part of the cultural environment is a public space, which enables communication between people and greatly affects their behaviour and conditions for social, cultural and economic activity. The first study approach analyses international co-operation with foreign universities in Brno, Ostrava, Gliwice, Lisbon and Vienna, in the field of education (workshops, exhibitions) and research (conferences, publications); thus, creating an important basis for gaining new pedagogical knowledge. Supporting student mobility, organising exchange exhibitions of students' projects and contemporary architectural excursions, all have a significant impact on the motivation and open - mindedness of students [3].

...It can be said in general that students are guided towards independent, creative work over time, both individually and within a group of colleagues, which is very important for their future practice. We must accept the fact that the work of the architect is to a considerable extent a steering and co-ordinating function, meaning working with people and within a group of colleagues. Students must learn visionary and creative work which must be taken to the set conclusion at a particular moment in time [2].

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