



get involved

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architectural & built environment education for young people
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Perspective

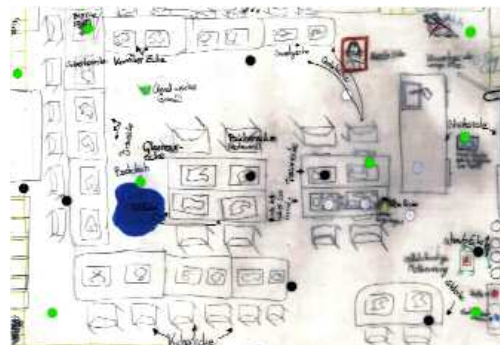
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Knowledge-transfer between architecture and art education studies

While the job descriptions of art teachers and architects are each focused on different aspects of cultural activity, they are also integrative in nature: a large field of the curriculum of art education is concerned with architecture, the built environment and space in general, and apart from an architect needing to communicate architecture to non-professionals, he/she is also concerned with the needs of (educational) institutions as clients. Teaching teachers architecture means talking about space and atmosphere, about cliché and representation. Teaching architects education involves a discussion in regard to the influence of space on teaching methods as well as knowledge about school routines and the power of "the institution".

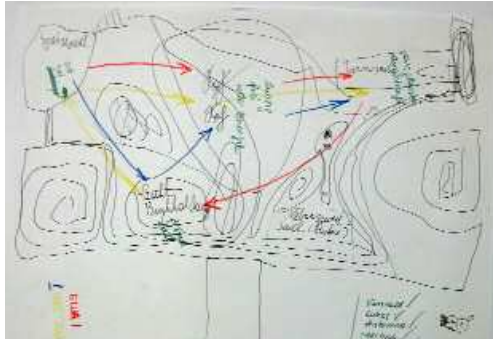
Our questions discussed through our recent projects are: How to deal with "communicating architecture" in the education of teachers and architects? How to achieve knowledge transfer between the field of architecture and art education for the benefit of both groups? And above all how do you introduce the subject of architecture as (multidisciplinary) content to school classes? According to our experience the school building itself is an obvious field of research as kids spend a major part of their time in the institution and usually have quite strong opinions about school spaces and classrooms.

Teaching at the same university, i.e. the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, gives us a unique framework to invite students of both study courses, Education in the Arts and Architecture to participate in a class where they can work with pupils on issues related to architecture and space.



We start with an introduction giving expertise and experience from both professions and setting a thematic framework for the university students within which they develop a teaching concept. From this initial idea they independently produce a project related to the school as a built and social space, which then is developed further in groups of pupils and consequently carried out with their own means of expression. To anchor this project in teaching routines students work in the class on a regular basis during a period of two months.

The thematic frame sets the boundaries for the enormous possibilities provided by the topic of architecture; visual examples or a short lecture help the students to specify their thoughts and initiate new thinking. We introduce artistic positions concerned with acting in space (such as Franz Erhard Walther, William Kentridge, Gordon Matta Clark) to question spatial conventions and/or to make a start in experimenting with design methods. On a similar level, the materials provided for the practical realisation support the specific theme; a reduction of the means is on the one hand meant to open various ways for the school kids and at the same time promises the delivery of formally comparable results.



The specific forms of representation are being developed with the students during the whole project. They usually have a wide scope from drawings, collages, models to built realisations on a 1:1 scale. However, within all these set parameters it is important for us to work without prejudging the outcome when engaging with the university students as well as with the school pupils. The pupils' social motivation in respect to their direct involvement within the micro-cosmos school and the questioning of routines in the school space often awakens a disposition to actively be part in a redesigning process. Productive curiosity and openness bring about interventions with a focus on action in the space, that are made available to the whole school at the end of the project through an exhibition or other forms of presentation. The recorded processes and results often contain quite specific recommendations that can be reverted to when talking about improving the learning environment.

To exemplify the process and results according to our method, we chose one specific project for this lecture that was realised in a course with students of Art Education in winter term 2009/10 in cooperation with middle school pupils in HIB III, Boerhaavgasse 15 /Vienna. This project took place with the participation of 5th year school children (1st form of middle school) and the two art education students Florentine Prath and Cornelia Zobl.

Under the title of Mapping out Invisible Spaces we started out with an introduction about perception and representation of space through a range of examples from prehistoric cave drawings to modern artistic maps (e.g. of Guy Debord) questioning contemporary mapping conventions. The main interest in the resulting project named „Hörbilder“ (Audio Pictures) was to focus on sound spaces and space sounds. This discussion of maps and musical scores examples allowed the students to re-interpret maps as a representation of space and (personal) narrative. On this basis we started to develop three short exercises for space experience with the pupils to start the project in class.



After the exploration of boundaries with all senses in their own classroom, the pupils set out to experience and record different passages through their school building. Challenging the topography of first the classroom and then the whole school happened in stages: experiencing space, discovering territories, describing space, manipulating space and finally creating their own (virtual) space. They searched for and identified sounds, which were first verbally described and discussed and then digitally recorded. The pupils found a great variety of external sounds that could be allocated to specific rooms and typical activities, on the other hand, an internal sound space - i.e. sounds evoking feelings - was perceived. Along self-written storyboards the groups developed a chronological sound map and finally designed an audio image on the computer by combining self-made sounds of spaces and feelings that followed very personal paths through the school building. The sound maps and the audio pictures were finally presented and exhibited in the school's library.