

Project Title : Making the Architect

Leading University : The University of Hong Kong

Participating UGC-funded Nil
University(ies) :

Project Leader(s) : Mr John LIN, Associate Professor, Department of
Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, The University of
Hong Kong

Summary of Proposal

The making of architecture is a physical act and the architect is responsible for the coordination, design and specification of numerous construction systems. However, despite this truism, the education of the architect is highly academic and students rarely if ever have the chance to gain firsthand insight into the limits and potentials offered by interaction with material techniques. This is driven and compounded by a primary education system, which is heavily focused on abstract learning. As a result, potential students of architecture and emerging professionals are often held back, slow to develop and later ill equipped to engage with architecture as a broad discipline.

It is also the case that a sophisticated understanding of the process of construction is necessary for those who wish to engage fully with various crafts and trades working within the industry, and to take advantage of new developments in the fields of material science and fabrication technologies. This issue is highlighted in the current disarray of the profession. Architects have become sidelined – often seen at best as an additional expense justified only in prestige projects or at worst as unnecessary or irrelevant to the building process.

The proposal outlined seeks to challenge both the way in which architects learn about making and to equip them with the tools to critically challenge the way in which the built environment is made. The mechanism for this is a series of material workshops, integrated within the current architectural design curriculum, which add an element of kinesthetic learning. By giving students the opportunity to explore in detail some of the primary modes of construction, and to engage with both industrial partners and master craftsmen, this project aims to expedite core structural and material literacy, to bridge the gap between the academy and the profession, and to develop a network of

knowledge exchange. This is of particular relevance in Hong Kong, a post-industrial city, where incoming students display a very low level of competence in the areas of practical knowledge relating to construction.

Summary of Final Report

Making the architect was a series of short courses which aimed to provide undergraduate students of architecture with the opportunity to explore in detail some of the primary modes of construction, to engage with master craftsmen and with real building materials, with the aims of expediting core structural and material literacy, bridging the gap between the academy and the profession, and developing a network of knowledge exchange. Despite uncertainty and challenges in the form of restrictions to gathering and school and laboratory closures due to Covid-19 and protests, the project was successful in its aims. The funding generously provided by the UGC enabled students to experiment with real construction materials, to visit “live” building sites and craftspeople’s workshops.

The outcomes of this project have enabled a series of successful grant applications to the Construction Innovation and Technology Fund with over HK\$ 700 000 secured in order to sustain the continuing development and evolution of this programme. These workshops, in collaboration with others, has also been strongly influential in transforming the Introduction to Architectural Design course which it was designed to enhance, and which now takes the form of a series of material workshops led by both expert makers and architects - each embedded in a material and theoretical context.

Over the project period, the courses evolved and capitalised on connections made and opportunities to collaborate with universities, and on projects with students in new ways, becoming more flexible and intrinsic to the design studio. Students responded positively to the opportunity to engage with building culture and the issues the course raised. This is reflected in student feedback which improved consistently from the inception of the project.