Review of Teaching Practice

Session/artefact to be observed/reviewed: Stage 1, Studio 8 First Design Studio session for Unit 4, the final design unit of the year.
Size of student group: 13 students, hopefully there will be a full-house
Reviewee: Gaia Crocella
Reviewer: Kwame Baah

Note: This record is solely for exchanging developmental feedback between colleagues. Its reflective aspect informs PgCert and Fellowship assessment, but it is not an official evaluation of teaching and is not intended for other internal or legal applications such as probation or disciplinary action.

Part One
Reviewee to complete in brief and send to reviewer prior to the review

What is the context of this session/artefact within the curriculum?

After last week's introduction delivered by the stage leader, this session officially marks the beginning of Unit 4, the final Design Studio of the year. It is their first opportunity to reconnect with the students after their U2 submission and assessment. In preparation to this session, students have spent the previous week on a self-directed site visit to their site along the canal, working in groups to document spatial, environmental, material, and social characteristics of the site. Alongside this collective research, each student has undertaken an individual Deep Dive into a chosen craft, gathering historical, visual, technical, and spatial material that reveals the processes, tools, and cultural relevance of that craft. Tomorrow the session will focus on the presentation of these investigations in the form of a small, curated exhibition, which each student will assemble and present in the studio. This exhibition becomes the first tangible artefact of their Unit 4 project. It also represents the moment when students begin to translate their early investigations into the core foundation that will support the development of their major architectural project for the year.

How long have you been working with this group and in what capacity?

Since October 2025, 4 months.

What are the intended or expected learning outcomes?

The session is focused on ***Enquiry, Knowledge, Process and Communication,*** supporting students as they initiate the research- driven foundations for unit 4. The objective of the curation and presentation of their 'mini-exhibition' / research exercise is for students to:

1. Demonstrate an awareness of how research and analysis support the development of design ideas and proposals, based on a specific subject of focus. (Enquiry)

2. Employ iterative drawing, model-making or other forms of three-dimensional representation as methods of experimentation and creative risk-taking in support of developing design ideas. (Process)

3. Familiarise with practical, theoretical and/or technical knowledge connected to the site and their chosen craft. (Knowledge)

4. Clearly communicate their research, analysis and core interests around the site and the chosen craft. (Communication)

These specific learning outcomes feed into four of the five Learning Outcomes (AS) relevant to this unit, which all students will be assessed against at the end of the year. These are:
AC Enquiry: Engagement in practice informed by analysis and evaluation of relevant practices and ideas
AC Knowledge: Foundational practical, theoretical and/or technical knowledge of the subject
AC Process: Experiment and review methods and results
AC Communication: Setting out intentions, contexts, sources and arguments appropriate to your audiences

What are the anticipated outputs (anything students will make/do)?
A mini exhibition/ group pin-up which will be presented both in groups and individually, depending on how the class has organised this week.

Are there potential difficulties or specific areas of concern?
Generally, with this group there is lack of attendance and active/critical engagement with the subject of focus. Fear of feedback/ judgement and difficulty in receiving feedback. Sometimes I struggle to engage them as a group and find a way to make them feel passionate about what they are doing.

How will students be informed of the observation/review?
I will let them know in advance of the session, both via email, as well as in person at 11am, as they start pinning up for the exhibition. I will let them know that Kwame is my tutor and he will be joining the session to observe my teaching.

What would you particularly like feedback on?
Any feedback or suggestion would be greatly appreciated.
While this will depend in part on tomorrow's level of participation in the session, I would be interested in exploring strategies to address lack of attendance.
It would also be interesting to reflect upon the pin-ups/ exhibition/ crit format and explore ideas on how these formats might be adapted and re-tested. I would also welcome feedback on approaches to enhancing student engagement more broadly, both individually and as a group. This includes methods to help students feel more connected to their chosen subject of focus, more invested in the studio culture, and more motivated or passionate about their work. Suggestions for building stronger group dynamics, fostering ownership of the design process, and creating environments where students feel confident contributing and actively participating would be especially useful.

How will feedback be exchanged?
Written in this form and verbally, after the session during tutorial.

Part Two
Reviewer to note down observations, suggestions and questions.

It was useful to experience you engaged in managing student display of architecture project work progress visuals, for those who had made physical sketches. As part of that process,

you made sure they had considered key stages of their project, which lent itself to a good level of critique scaffolding. Your approach to checking up with student pairing was useful for establishing the level of engagement that had happened and who was missing without being explicit about absence. It may be of important to hold each student accountable for their presence at different points in the future.

I was impressed at how you used pedagogy to support feedback, which was in in the context of inclusion. This was expressed through asking students about their experience of the location their project was based on, and this offers individualised interpretations of embodied spaces. Your teaching approach is empathetic yet maintains critical observations to make sure students develop technical appreciation of their projects. The crit format was very successful in making students think about their project requirements and process mapping, especially as those who failed to create sketches became aware of their importance.

The questions I have for you are:

1. Are there opportunities for students who were absent to catch up with the session I attended?
2. Do you think that the studios are a good reflection of architectural industry/ professional working spaces?

El-Latif, M.A., Al-Hagla, K.S. and Hasan, A., 2020. Overview on the criticism process in architecture pedagogy. Alexandria Engineering Journal, 59(2), pp.753-762. Overview on the criticism process in architecture pedagogy

Ceylan, S. and Soygenis, S., 2022. Improving architecture students' design skills: A studio experience. International Journal of Art & Design Education, 41(2), pp.320-340.

Part Three

Reviewee to reflect on the reviewer's comments and describe how they will act on the feedback exchanged. Reviewee should return this to the reviewer once complete.

Thank you for the thorough and insightful feedback, Kwame.

In response to your first question, I would say that there is currently no real way for students who missed the exhibition/pin-up to "catch up" on the insights that emerged through the live conversation and collective discussion in the studio, which is where much of the learning happens. The value of the session lies not only in what is pinned-up on the wall, but in the shared meaning-making that happens around it. This is why attendance feels so fundamental: one learns by being in the classroom (although attendance is not mandatory in BA Architecture).

Recording the session or using a hybrid set-up so students can join online could be valuable alternatives. Despite this, since COVID, we are not allowed to offer online tutorials to replace in-person engagement, partly to re-incentivise participation and studio presence. When hybrid teaching was tested post-COVID, it became clear that it significantly weakened studio culture, as maintaining collective focus while ensuring equal engagement was very difficult.

That said, some elements of the session exist online: the material students produced ahead of the exhibition/pin-up (including their site and activity mapping) alongside the peer feedback using the PMI method are available on Padlet. Yet the most formative aspect of the session - the spontaneous reflection and critique, shared insights and collective problem-solving - were not recorded.

In your first suggested reference, El-Latif, Al-Hagla & Hasan (2020) emphasise that critique is the primary method of assessment and feedback in the design studio, and that this is tied to specific moments of the design process. Their article highlights how architectural criticism is inherently relational and iterative; learning emerges through the live, dialogic exchange, where students reinterpret their own work in real time. This is exactly what absent students cannot access retrospectively.

While digital documentation and hybrid learning can support students who miss sessions due to financial pressures, work, or access needs, they cannot replace the embodied experience of being physically present. Learning in the studio depends on listening, responding, and participating with others in the same space, where all the senses are engaged; this type of interaction cannot be replicated in a purely digital space.

Regarding your second question, in many ways the studio environment does echo aspects of professional architectural practice, especially the iterative, feedback-driven nature of the work. In the studio, students are introduced to workflows where design concepts and ideas evolve through dialogue with peers and tutors. This mirrors much of contemporary architecture practice, where projects evolve through constant dialogue with teams, consultants, clients and communities on the ground. In this sense, the studio prepares them for the collaborative, process-based realities of the profession.

At the same time, I believe the studio can replicate some of the more problematic legacies of the profession: overproduction, meritocracy and a lingering narrative that success is tied to hard work, constant outputs and personal sacrifice. These echoes of patriarchal and capitalist structures in the industry, where hierarchy and continuous (over)production influence who is heard, whose decisions count and how value is assigned.

In the studio and in my own pedagogy I am actively working to transform this. Through the briefs I set and the way I approach critique in the studio, I draw from the values of the Spatial Practices manifesto: fostering collaboration, critical inquiry, mutual support, and participatory modes of working. Here, your suggested references offer constructive reflections for my practice. El-Latif, Al-Hagla & Hasan (2020) point out that the traditional crit format can reproduce hierarchy, power dynamics and performance-based judgement. I am conscious of how easily this dynamic can appear, and I attempt to cultivate a more inclusive, dialogic form of critique that aligns with their call for less hierarchical feedback culture.

In parallel, Ceylan & Soygeniş (2022) highlight the value of studios that encourage experimentation, peer learning, and collaborative making. I really value their insights on integrating small, structured checkpoints to supports students iterative work through multiple channels to demonstrate design thinking. These ideas are shaping the way I structure group-work, collaborative sessions, pin-ups and iterative design tasks in and outside the studio. My intention is to help students to build confidence, take risks, and develop design agency through collective rather than competitive, individualistic modes of working.

So, while the studio inevitably reflects certain problematic realities of architectural practice, including its pressures and hierarchies, I will continue shaping the studio environment to foreground collaboration, criticality, and shared authorship. This also aligns with how many contemporary offices operate: team-based, iterative designs that often engage consultants, communities and clients. Here design is never the product of

one hand. Following this approach offers a healthier, more future-oriented model of practice than the traditional, competitive studio.

References:

Ceylan, S. and Soygenis, S., 2022. Improving architecture students' design skills: A studio experience. International Journal of Art & Design Education, 41(2), pp.320-340.

El-Latif, M.A., Al-Hagla, K.S. and Hasan, A., 2020. Overview on the criticism process in architecture pedagogy. Alexandria Engineering Journal, 59(2), pp.753-762. Overview on the criticism process in architecture pedagogy