

# Integrating the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Paradigm into a Lecture-Based Class in Architecture

## Overview

### Summary

This optional class *AB 966 Cultural and Behavioural Factors in Architecture and Urbanism* is offered to year 5 PgDipl in Advanced Architectural Design and Year 2 MSc in Advanced Architectural Studies. The class is premised on the view that the built environment is not simply a background against which human actions take place, but it regards it as it reflects and shapes human assumptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours.

Coupled with typical format of delivery of a series of lectures, I provided a series of in-class and out of class exercises and assignments that employ active, experiential, and inquiry-based learning as forms of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and learning from reality. The exercises involved group and individual work and varied in time from 10 minutes in-class exercises in teams of two students, to two-hours collaborative design game of teams of four students, to a structured learning experience out of classroom (contemplating settings exercise), and to finally a group research project.

### Context

Department of Architecture

Faculty of Engineering

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### Themes

Themes

## Rationale

Architecture students are typically encouraged to engage in site visits and walkthroughs in a building or city spaces in order to observe different phenomena. Yet, these visits and exercises are not necessarily structured in any form of rigorous investigation or critical inquiry. Moreover, in large classes or studios, the proposition of a site visit is often met with logistical difficulties, and with little opportunity for individual student mentoring. Two major critical points can be envisaged in this context. They continue to characterize teaching practices of lecture based modules in architecture, and can be labelled under the headings of: a) *learning theories about the phenomena versus getting the feel of the behaviour of the phenomena*, and b) *the real versus the hypothetical*.

Advancing a learning environment that cultivates exploration and critical thinking should be underscored. Inquiry based learning (IBL), research led teaching continue to be viewed as approaches integral to emerging pedagogies in architecture and urbanism. In order to take full advantage of the unique opportunities these approaches may offer, this initiative attempts to overcome the above critical points and argues for the need to strengthen professional education through exposing students to various forms of research processes. It proposes such an exposure to primary source materials leading to the production and reproduction of different types of knowledge in order to complement traditional teaching practices that emphasize secondary sources information and the consumption of knowledge. Contrary to problem-solving techniques where the primary focus is on what is wrong or broken, Appreciative Inquiry is utilized in this initiative (AI) to focus attention on what works well in the physical environment and the way in which it can be enhanced.

## Successes

After conducting each of the **in-class exercises** students were asked to elaborate on what benefits they have gained out of their engagement and reflect on their experience. Discussions with students reveal that they were able to comprehend the crux of each exercise, to make judgments and develop critical thinking abilities by offering reasons for those judgments.

Students reported that they were excited during the discussions; the majority felt that their experience of the buildings in a structured manner invigorated their understanding of many of the concepts typically delivered in a lecture format without exposure to generating discussions or debates in the classroom. As well, writing and presenting were felt as important skills they need to further develop. As well discussions corroborate the value of introducing in-class inquiry-based learning mechanisms while creating an atmosphere amenable to responsive reflection and critical thinking.

The structured **learning experience out of classroom** in the form of '**contemplating settings**' exercise reveal that the majority of students were able to observe, document, and interpret the information, and to phrase concise statements that describe each setting.

One student group reported on the **collaborative design game** "*Our approach to the design game was to ensure that we came together as a team and listened and respect each other's opinions. When discussing the various elements of the assignment we all had differing opinions to the various scenarios but with thorough discussion we were able to come a reasonable and justified response to each of them. As an exercise it enabled us understand each other's opinions. We all worked very well together and we were all more than happy with the results we achieved in this assignment.*"

## Lessons Learnt

1. Integrating a wide spectrum of exercises that vary in context (in or out of class), scale, range of time, and mode of communication offer multiple learning opportunities.
2. Introducing similar initiatives in other classes would require awareness of the time needed to prepare for the exercises in a structured manner.
3. Assessment of the activities would require clear criteria and possibly detailed rubrics.
4. Group exercises and projects require clarity of the essence and objective of the task, how the task can be decomposed into activities and events, what is the role of each student as a member of the team, and what and how collaboration will be undertaken.

## Challenges

1. At the content level, there were no major challenges. However, some students felt that the amount of exercises and assignments are relatively high when compared to other classes of the same nature.
2. The class was delivered in a typical seminar space with rows of chairs placed following the typical delivery mode. While this works in some cases, the nature of group exercises requires easily adaptable classroom sittings that allow for group interactions.
3. The time needed to prepare for the exercises and for assessment across the academic session represent a challenge if the class size exceeds 40 students.

## Scalability

- The total number of students enrolled from two programs was 32. Certainly, this initiative was scalable in that I was able to successfully implement it in a class of this size. Yes, as stated above, an easily adaptable learning space would increase efficiency and efficacy of the delivery of this approach.

## Suggestions for Transferability

- I would certainly encourage integrating active and experiential learning tools and modes of delivery of instruction. I find the development of similar tools in other classes that are "lecture-based" amenable to students learning and creating excitement in the classroom.
- The amount of information retained by students declines substantially after 10 or 15 minutes of lecturing. Students do not learn much by sitting in class, listening to staff, memorizing pre-packaged and ready-made interpretations. The implementation of this initiative in other similar classes would offer students sufficient opportunities to talk about what they are learning, write about it, and relate it to past experiences.
- A consideration of the class size/students numbers in relation to the type and nature of exercises and projects is important when embarking upon similar approaches.

## References

- References: Salama, A. M. (2015). Spatial Design Education: New Directions for Pedagogy in Architecture and Beyond. Farnham Surrey, United Kingdom. <http://www.ashgate.com/isbn/9781472422897>

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