

The Architecture in the Schools Program Helps to Create the Ideal Client

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SUMMARY

The best architecture results from the interaction of a knowledgeable client and a creative architect.

In the pursuit of our profession, too often we do not devote the necessary time to educate the public about the importance of architecture and the built environment so that they as clients can contribute their talents and understanding to creating better projects. However, there is a growing movement in which employees and owners of architecture firms invest a relatively small amount of time to helping future clients become more knowledgeable and as a result our world becomes a better place. At the same time we learn quite a bit ourselves.

SOWING THE SEEDS

If you have been in practice for some time you must have come to the realization that all "clients" are unique. They can range from individuals who may require small projects to corporations whose requirements and understanding of our profession are much more developed. But when you realize that the common denominator of all clients is that they are human beings like yourself, the equation becomes much simpler. All you have to do is to educate them about what you do, and what their part in the "doing" is, and you have a better chance of creating a more successful project.

Another way to look at it is to imagine that the world out there is like a garden and you and your fellow practitioners are the gardeners, raising the magnificent plants (the built environment) with the help of the plot owners (clients). If they truly understand how and why the built environment is created, your chances of ending up with a more productive, beautiful project is much greater—and you will likely be rewarded with greater spiritual and financial rewards.

It is important that more architects become sowers of the seeds of good architecture in the most fertile fields: students in elementary through high school when these future clients are in their most formative stages. They become the building users, owners, developers, and architects of the future. The potential benefits to the profession (and to mankind) of having more people aware of their physical environment and the important contribution that architects make to its betterment are enormous.

WHAT TRAINING DO YOU NEED?

If you are a person with an understanding of how architecture affects the built environment, and are aware of how the environment affects people, and you enjoy working with youngsters in any aspect of the creative process, and have some free time (or can get your employer to allow you to you have some free time) to spend in a program, then you qualify to start teaching in an Architecture In The Schools program. What is needed is a motivated architect to connect with the children and describe what you and your fellow professionals do to improve their world.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Throughout the country there are many existing programs, some developed by AIA components, (see page 3) devoted to educating young people about architecture and the built environment. If you are interested in becoming part of this experience first contact your local AIA component and ask what resources are available. Even if your local component does not have a standing program, materials are available, which will help you to not only understand the process, but also provide specific teaching aids and curriculum guides.

Many architecture firms are involved in this valuable educational enterprise. They see it as a chance to contribute worthwhile services to their communities and as good public relations. Employers often allow employees to participate as individuals or as part of company teaching teams. The amount of "out of office" time is minimal (maybe 2 to 3 hours per week for 9 weeks). Volunteers' compensation for this time varies with office policy, some include it as overhead cost; others allow volunteers to make up the time separately. For intern architects, the time can count



as community service credits for the Intern Development Program.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The main purpose of the program is for students to experience and understand their built environment, how it is created, and the contributions that architects and others make to its original design and later improvement. However, the specific requirements for each class will vary widely and must be flexible to meet many variables, including:

Student grade level: K-12

School location—Varies from inner city to rural since the students' surroundings are their "classrooms"

Subject area—Social Studies, Language Arts, Science, Math, Fine Arts

Students' backgrounds—Their own experiences form the background of the learning process.

Teachers' priorities—Emphasis should relate to their subject area. The teacher's understanding of architecture is often just as basic as their students.

Volunteers' experience—It is best when volunteers are able to talk from personal experience and knowledge.

Some Teaching Techniques

The approach to conveying knowledge about the built environment is as varied as the subject itself and may include

- Examining or drawing a map of the neighborhood and discussing street patterns, parks, pedestrian circulation, zoning, and other restrictions.
- Learning about materials, measurements, scale, and shapes.
- Taking field trips to learn about utilities, infrastructure, street furniture, etc.
- Learning the vocabulary of building elements.
- Learning basic structural principles and engineering systems.
- Understanding plan, elevation, and section views.
- Learning some architectural history and how building forms have evolved.
- Understanding the concepts of environmental preservation and green building.

- Learning how architecture is the responsive art, by discussing with parents and siblings a functional program for designing their new house.
- Working together to design and build an architectural model.
- Visits to your office, construction sites, etc.
- And much more, limited only by your imagination.

GETTING STARTED

The AIA component will contact a local school and ask whether they would like to participate in the program. The school should submit information about the classroom teacher as to what he/she would like to see accomplished during the course. The component then requests volunteers from its membership for each specific school program. A short orientation meeting should be held to make sure that the teachers and volunteers are in tune with each other as to their goals.

A class syllabus showing the objectives of each of the class sessions is developed through discussions by the volunteer and the teacher. The classes are held usually once a week for nine weeks. The course ends with a final project, usually a model, which is then displayed in the school and/or other public place.

Your Rewards

Volunteers have described many different *rewards* they have gained from their teaching experience, including

- The pride of accomplishment on the students' faces as they demonstrate their projects at the end of the course.
- The pride/joy when a student is able to resolve open-ended problems on their own using the 'design tools' that were discussed in class.
- Watching young children see the built environment from a different perspective.
- Showing off just how much fun it is to be an architect ... and seeing the students starting to consider architecture as their future profession.
- Learning how architecture is contagious as they watch the students tell their family and friends about the built environment.

... and knowing that this process will contribute to a more beautiful, functional, and healthy world.



Architecture in the Schools Programs

The following is a list of AIA/AIS programs. They include many helpful suggestions in graphic and written form.

AIA Cincinnati

www.architecturebychildren.org

Built Environment Education Program Architectural Foundation of Santa Barbara, CA

www.afsb.org

Washington Architectural Foundation

www.wafonline.org

Learning by Design in Massachusetts

www.architects.org/lbd

American Architectural Foundation

www.archfoundation.org

Chicago Architectural Foundation

www.architecture.org

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

David R. Dibner, FAIA, has spent more than 50 years as a private practitioner, a government official in charge of design and construction, and a teacher. Throughout his professional life he has emphasized the human side of architecture as an art in response to the needs of people. His teaching has ranged from university students to elementary and middle school students, always in an effort to educate them about the impact of architecture and the built environment and most importantly, how they can contribute toward its betterment.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic

01.05.01 The Boyer Report: Building Community

Through Education

01.05.03 Firms Benefit When They Charrette with

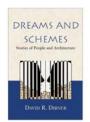
Design Students

22.08.04 Kids in Architecture: A Grade 5

Curriculum

For More Information

See Dreams and Schemes: Stories of People and



Architecture, by David R. Dibner, FAIA. Dreams and Schemes can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by sending an e-mail to bookstore@aia.org.

Feedback

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Key Terms

- Leadership
- Disciplines
- Design disciplines
- Architectural disciplines
- Architectural education
- Community involvement