



## Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

**Title:** The Education Debate - Year 3 Mackintosh School of Architecture

**Transition(s) the practice supports:** *Discipline related & professional practice:* 'Being alert to ones surroundings' as a professional characteristic of being an architect. *Learning related:* Making students more aware of their own learning.

**Abstract:** The education debate was a two-hour event for level 3 students that took place at the start of Term 1 as part of a brief where students were asked to design an 'Institute for Creative Learning'. For this event a range of speakers offered provocations on the topic of education and learning. The project came about in response to what the staff team perceived to be the growing 'institutionalisation' and grade-orientated nature of students. The event, in the context of the brief, aimed to get the students to reflect on their own learning practices and become critically aware of the context of their own learning environment so that they might use this to inform their own designs.

### **Description:**

The education debate took place for the first time in September 2015. This two hour event sat in the context of a third year term 1 brief entitled 'Percipio – a place of creative learning' where students were asked to consider what it means to learn and ultimately design an 'Institute for Creative Learning'. The education debate provided the students with an opportunity to listen to and discuss a variety of viewpoints on the topic of education and learning. Guests ranged from a parent who schools their children at home, a philosopher, an architect who has designed schools, and an academic in learning and teaching. Taking place at the start of term, the aim of the event was to galvanise students' critical thinking, research, and own opinions about what it means to learn and learn creatively, the influence that institutions have on framing learning, and where and how else learning might take place. It also aimed to get students thinking about how learning is something that could happen outside of the confines of a university or school.

### *Background/ Context:*

The wider brief, in which the education debate was a part, was conceived of and introduced in response to what the staff team perceived to be the growing 'institutionalisation' of students. Staff noted that the students coming to the course directly from school were increasingly expectant and unquestioning of a certain type of desk-based and grade-orientated learning that they had previously been used to. Staff said that students found it hard to take risks and often asked for examples of previous years work and how they might get graded with a first. Students also demonstrated behaviours such as arriving to an empty crit room and automatically setting up chairs as though a lecture was about to happen and being alarmed when the degree show format was altered (because of the assumption that the format was 'set').

*Aspiration/ key points/ principles:*

A professional characteristic of being an architect is the need to be alert to and critically aware of ones surroundings – and also to think beyond the obvious. The education debate in the context of the whole brief encouraged students to develop these characteristics by asking them to be alert to and critically aware of the context of their own learning environment so that they might use this to inform their own designs.

In addition, the project aimed to evoke the agency of students, making them more aware of the way they learn and why. It aimed to develop a deeper approach to learning where students came up with their own questions and felt free to experiment- rather than just working towards a grade.

*Observations/ challenges:*

Staff noted that during the education debate students seemed to respond most to the person who was home schooled as this challenged their traditional concept of learning and where it might take place. However, they were surprised that even after the debate students found it hard to move away from what they knew when it came to designing their institute for creative learning. Students did seem to respond well and invest more time and be more committed in the open brief where they were designing something they'd come up with, however, many chose to look at schools or universities and added in lecture theatres and desks rather than considering alternatives. Staff are intrigued why this is and speculate that despite issuing a brief that encouraged questioning of the parameters of learning, they were reinforcing a certain type of learning through their studio set up and assessment structure.

*How would staff change if doing it again?*

The staff would like to seek feedback after the education debate and throughout the term where they ask students to reflect on what they have learned with a view to improving the briefing next year. Not gaining feedback after the education debate was viewed as a missed opportunity.

Next year staff are considering showing more examples from outside of the institution and pointing more to alternative education and people who have written in this area.

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**All examples provided will be posted to the Enhancement Themes website with the intention of including them in the National Transitions map.**