

# Experimental Learning Approach in Architectural Education

## Studio Focus Resources & Co-creation within the Built Environment

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PROCESS / CO-CREATION

### KEYWORDS

sustainability, interdisciplinary approach, experiential learning,  
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*I would like to share my knowledge, experience and reflection on experiential learning by designing, making and co-creating, 'the design built', within the architectural education. The specific case Upcycle Pavilion is a 'design built' pavilion of today's building waste by students in collaboration with the local community in Vejle, Denmark within the topic 'better use of today's building waste'.*

Architectural education has two opposite perspectives and goals, architecture as a historical, cultural, technical, professional and disciplinary practice. On the other hand, the sense self and identity of the architect. Educational curricula tend to focus on the external phenomenon of architecture and undervalue the significance of the individual, however it is important to acknowledge that architecture must be confronted and experienced as an internalized personal encounter also.

Since my main experiences and interests are deeply rooted within a practice-based approach to architecture, this will also be the focus of my contribution to the discussion about the 'the hidden school'. My contribution to the discussion will be about substance and quality of architectural education with a focus on 'design built'. In the education this will often go beyond the stated curricula and yet embody the culture of the school.

*'Aarhus School of Architecture offers an academic education centered around three approaches to architecture: an artistic, a scientific, and a practice-based'*

Through my teaching in design studios I have been initiating experiential learning by doing within the frames of sustainability, focusing on materials and tectonics. This is mainly realized in a broader collaboration with municipalities, farmers, producers, developers, craftsmen and users. I would like to challenge the students' ability to learn within the space of 'design built' as well as the necessity of an interdisciplinary collaboration. The interdisciplinary approach in the particular case of The Upcycle Pavilion, which is the studio project that I would like to present, is crucial, since it's a public project with many stakeholders. The 'problem' or rather challenge was to create a collaborative environment among all participants (craftsmen, municipality, users, students) and at the same time developing architecture 1:1 based on today's building waste as a future material. The project also challenges the historical term 'spolia' in new ways, designing with reuse in a process of developing more sustainable strategies. Experiential learning is an interesting format of learning within sustainable architecture, the definitions here by Lewis and Williams (1994, p. 5) explain very well some of the findings:

*'In its simplest form, experiential learning means learning from experience or learning by doing. Experiential education first immerses learners in an experience and then encourages reflection about the experience to develop new skills, new attitudes, or new ways of thinking.'*

*'Experiential learning is also built upon a foundation of interdisciplinary and constructivist learning. Experiential methodology doesn't treat each subject as being walled off in its own room, unconnected to any other subjects. Compartmentalized learning doesn't reflect the real world, while as the experiential classroom works to create an interdisciplinary learning experience that mimics real world learning' (Wurdinger, 2005, Using Experiential Learning in the Classroom, p. 24).*

It is also my experience that projects of 'design built' and co-creation depend on the individual tutor and a personal approach, complementing learning as experienced personal outcome. 'Design built' projects are not something we implicit would include in teaching and are not included in the curricula. Therefore, it is a challenge to keep practicing in educational learning for many good reasons; work load, less time, more tools/skills demanded and perhaps also the uncertainty of the outcome / learning goals.

The findings or reflection of the studio project 'upcycle pavilion' are many. First of all, I believe the learning outcome depends on the teacher as well as the students. In this project it was my aim to let students direct the process and collaboration. My role was defined by to facilitate and motivate, as much as being a part of the whole, not just supervising.

Some of my reflections from The Upcycle Pavilion is first of all that we must ensure that the level of artistic expression is present in the co-creation process. Therefore, we need to make time and room enough for artistic experimental learning outcome. This leads to another question, when we do 'design built' projects. The process should not be compromised by other parts in the curricula, meaning we must also expect another outcome in the overall result of the academic year. Can we then accept a more practice-based outcome, going beyond the curricula, in an education environment that becomes more and more academic? If we aim for both, it seems like we compromise the quality, not only on the experiential learning, but also the more external phenomenon of architecture. Another question is why it's crucial with experiential methodology in an architectural education and what is the role of the teacher? Is this just an unspoken language or culture among architectural teachers?

*'Education and learning in any creative field have to address the student individual and unique self, and the meaningful content of education needs to be more existential then factual, related with experiences and values — not just information.'*  
(Pallasmaa, *Learning and Unlearning*, p. 299)





