



Introduction

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Despite the fact that we are surrounded by works of architecture that require the skills and attention of artists, designers, engineers, historians, environmental scientists and politicians, architecture is rarely introduced as a subject of study in the formative years of education. That omission tends to support the frightening notion that the future development of houses, towns, and cities belongs to a sequestered profession concerned only with complex practical issues beyond those addressed by public education. A separation between an understanding of architecture and public education promises a drab built-environment for the future of a democratic-capitalistic society.

The seminar focused on the symbolic, monumental, and mnemonic properties of architecture that might alert either a general or a specific segment of students to the kinds of meanings that architecture can provide, meanings that without their intelligible presence in buildings would be irreplaceably lost.

One teacher examined the often unknown presence of Muslim symbols in the American mosque while another examined the absence of African symbols and ornaments in the everyday architectural life of African Americans. One curriculum unit proposed that a classroom model of the destroyed Aztec capitol be constructed by elementary school students for the edification of Spanish-speaking families, while another suggested the analysis of fifty-year-old murals and ornaments in a local New Haven public school building as a means of simultaneously appreciating Greek mythology and local pride. Beginning course work in mathematics provided the occasion to study the dimensions of New Haven's most distinguished church. Dance performance provided an activity for interacting with the distinct "personalities" of local architecture. One teacher observed that without playing with carefully designed blocks in the classroom certain cognitive exercises essential to the understanding of spatial phenomenon in architecture, might be delayed if not altogether repressed. All in all the teachers sought means to alert young people to the cultural power of architecture by using the readily available tools of reading, looking, sketching, playing, and dancing and by avoiding the specialized tools and prerequisites normally associated with the profession of architecture.

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