

DESIGN EDUCATION 3.0

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An interesting video concerning Design Education can be seen on the web. It's called 'Design and Democracy' and was given by Alistair Parvin, co-founder of WikiHouse, an organization that promotes open-source construction. It's well worth watching, as he brings the threads of modern architecture and market economics together, and you can see it [here](#).

Trained as an architect it's enlightening to hear his views on design education in the Q&A following the talk. In the UK, architectural education is regulated by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) who set out the basic requirements for curriculum. Becoming a qualified architect takes six years. Part 1 involves 3 years of study at a University, there then follows a year of working in architectural practice, and finally Part 2 involves a further 2 years of study. At the end of all that you can just about call yourself an architect.

Parvin remarked that, for his peer group, coming back to study for Part 2, following working for a year, was a strange experience. The general view was that the world that they thought they were being prepared for in their Part 1 qualification didn't really exist. The commercial business of architecture had completely overridden their fledgling theoretical and ideological concerns. Architecture, as they had been taught it, seemed like a figment of imagination; a flight of fancy.

What has changed? Like many creative professions there is a paradox at the heart of architecture. While espousing free-thinking, and indeed helping to create large scale changes in society, the institutions that educate and regulate creative professions are themselves deeply resistant to change. The institutions are institutionalised! Old and established traditions and methods are rehearsed and repeated year after year as wide-eyed graduates emerge, blinking, into a wired and weird world.

So the web has changed the world; in terms of information, communication, connectivity, global consciousness, social mores, you name it the web has changed it.

The real question is how has design education changed? The answer is, not much at all. The design-tutor-sitting-across-the-table-from-the-student-and-critiquing-their-work model is alive and mostly well, albeit played out in slightly different environments – at the computer rather than the drawing board, though, even now, often still at the drawing board.

There are signs of wear and tear. Expertise, it seems to me, is so distributed now, and insight so available, that design tutors are fast becoming institutional ciphers; the necessary but increasingly ignorant gatekeepers to qualifications. If, for example, I wanted to teach you about democratic design, why would I not

direct you to Parvin's video and ask you to critically examine the concepts he talks about? We could talk about that thing about ethics at the end – who is responsible if an open-source structure falls down? Or his idea that democracy is problematic – does that hold water? And is democracy an unalloyed good thing anyway? Or I might ask you if the commercial business model he sketches at the beginning is reasonable and viable?

In short, Parvin has already done a lot of my teaching work, there on the web. My task as a modern teacher is more curatorial – to select, explain, criticise, and interpret – rather than to attempt to transfer knowledge (my out-of-date knowledge!) from my head to yours. Design education, rather than teaching technique, is finally free to think about larger issues of value, connectedness, system, responsibility, or maybe just how the wired world is such a weird place. Perhaps design education is scared of the freedom?