Constructing a professional education: a new architecture degree at Unitec 1994

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Abstract: In 1994 Unitec Institute of Technology welcomed its first cohort of enthusiastic students into the new Bachelor of Architecture programme within the School of Architecture and Construction. This new programme, a second architecture programme in Auckland city, was reportedly initiated by professional dissatisfaction with the lack of work preparedness of the graduates from the existing architecture programmes in the country. Little has been written, to date, about the origins of this new programme. Architecture programmes globally are evolving to meet contemporary needs and the discourse surrounding the beginnings of this programme may shed light on current trajectories. Situating the programme within a School of Architecture and Construction was part of a strategy to produce an architectural graduate who was more practice focused. But how was this intention manifest in the programme organisation and what were the distinctive features of this new programme that were designed to meet this objective? This paper will examine the originating documents and the context in which this programme was developed. It argues that, while the proposed curriculum and course structure contain elements that meet this professional, practice focused need, there are other elements embedded within the course that have a more expansive vision.

Keywords: Architecture; education.

1. Introduction

Writing at the turn of the nineteenth century, Arthur Cates, long-time campaigner for formal architectural education described the traditional system of pupillage where apprentices were practically instructed by a skilled master as under pressure from;

> …the stress and struggle of modern life, the wide range of knowledge and acquirements now necessary to ensure success and the changed relationship between master and pupil. (Cates, 1900, p.394)

He stated that the pupil's learning was "limited to what he may 'pick up.' As a result he saw the need for a 'systematic course of strictly professional education.' His views were echoed by William Emerson

(1901, p.1) RIBA President in 1900, who called for a 'better and more methodical system of Education for our students in architecture' to counter what they saw as a potentially piecemeal education in the professional office. While we now have had professional degree programmes in architecture worldwide for almost a century there remains an ever-present tension between constituent elements of architecture as to how a 'methodical, systematic' course might be constructed. Within the New Zealand architectural world there is a persistent narrative that suggests the establishment of the Architecture degree programme at Unitec Institute of Technology in 1994 was a response to the architectural profession's dissatisfaction with the work preparedness of graduates. This paper reviews the development and establishment of the degree (1991-1994) and argues that, while the proposed curriculum and course structure contain elements that meet this professional, practice focused need, there are other elements embedded within the course that have a more expansive vision.

2. draft INTERIM SYNOPSIS

In April 1991 R.F. (Bob) Matthew, Head of the Architectural Studies Department at Carrington Polytechnic delivered a memorandum to the Academic Board requesting their approval to proceed with the further development of a Bachelor of Architecture degree programme. The memorandum, which was one and a half typewritten pages, briefly outlined the proposed (rather optimistic) time frame and noted that it was an opportune time for the start of a new architecture programme as there was;

> …considerable goodwill and support in principle. In particular we have support from Professor Helen Tippett in her role as President of the New Zealand Institute of Architects and as a senior academic at the Victoria School of Architecture. (Matthew, 1991)

The memorandum additionally argued that there was already a cohort of 20 draughting students who annually entered the architecture degree programme at Auckland University and these students could be diverted to this proposed new programme. A 'draft INTERIM SYNOPSIS' of the proposal (Matthew, 1991) was attached to the memorandum and I will return to that shortly.

There are several local factors that background this proposal. The Education Amendment Act of 1989 opened the way for polytechnics to offer degree programmes. This legislation made possible new opportunities for the polytechnic sector but that ever-present tension between architectural practice and the academy was again rising to the surface. The memorandum quoted above refers to the support of the NZIA. Undocumented personal narratives regularly refer to industry dissatisfaction at the time with the work readiness of graduates from available course offerings. Lindsay Wood summarised the particularities of this dissatisfaction.

> There was a perception that the two schools of Architecture (Ak [Auckland] and Vic [Victoria University of Wellington]) were not catering well for practitioners – Ak was seen as having a 'purist' design focus and Vic a building science one. (Wood, 2014)

The view was held that because of Carrington Polytechnic's engagement with industry through the provision of its Bachelor of Building and Bachelor of Quantity Surveying along with an array of Certificate and Diploma courses for the construction industry it would be well placed to offer a Bachelor of Architecture degree that was concerned with the everyday issues that confront architectural practice.

There is another element of influence that may have impacted on this degree proposal and that involves architectural theory. Gevork Hartoonian (2002) has suggested that architectural theory came to prominence in American Schools of Architecture in the 1970s. He argues that the protagonists of the

Whites vs the Greys debate dominated the discourse within the universities and then, through the dispersal of their students by the late 1970s, these same theories and critical practices dominated the work of the profession. While the same processes cannot be directly translated to New Zealand there is a reported narrative or a version of that narrative that identifies staff and students conversant with this new contemporaneous theory and critical practice at the Auckland School during the 1980s. (Austin, 2014) The New Zealand architectural climate is not as receptive to theory as its American counterpart or put more bluntly as David Mitchell pointed out in the same period 'Amongst New Zealand architects pragmatism is still the most morally defensible critical position.' (Mitchell, 1984, p.7) The identification of at least parts of the Auckland school with what were perceived to be deeply theoretical positions may account for Wood's description of Auckland as having a 'purist design focus.' This theoretical bias was another significant factor in opening up a space for a new programme that was perceived to privilege the pragmatism that Mitchell acknowledges.

3. Architectural education is in a sorry state

The draft INTERIM SYNOPSIS (Matthew, 1991) identified seven themes in the 'ongoing debate about the education of Building Professionals generally and Architects in particular.' These themes were supported by a list of references to recent articles and reports on the state of the industry and education. There were three themes that specifically relate to architectural practice. The first was the 'need for increased skills in management and communication.' The academic setting of most schools of architecture has always been a difficult place to practise the kinds of management skills required for the construction industry. The proposal argued that the proximity to existing Construction Management and Quantity Surveying courses and the ability to share elements of these courses with the Architecture degree programme constituted a better environment for significant learning in the management area. The penultimate theme spoke of;

> active integration of professional experience with academic programmes and the reinforcement of the historical notion of Architect as master builder. (Matthew, 1991, p.1)

The first phrase was an appropriate statement of difference for this new programme. The reference to 'the historical notion of Architect as master builder,' however, seems awkwardly tacked on to the first part – an uncomfortable conflation of professional experience with a contested role. This notion may have owed its revival to an article that described the late Sir Ian Athfield's experience of a recently completed, two-year Visiting Professorship at Victoria University of Wellington where he promoted this traditional model. Athfield's quoted statements demonstrated his belief that;

> sound building knowledge… is the key to architects earning the respect and place they expect in today's building industry (Ross, 1989, p23).

Again the setting of an architectural degree programme within a polytechnic already teaching construction seemed to provide the opportunity to strengthen the relationship between design and construction. The master builder notion however has connotations beyond that person being the master of her/his craft and could be construed as romantic yearning for the notion of the architect as leader of the building team. This is perhaps why it sits so awkwardly in a proposal that argues for responsiveness to change.

The final background theme identified on the first page of the SYNOPSIS was 'the "Building Team" approach.' Again we can turn to the above-mentioned reference list that backgrounds these selected

themes. The 1989 *Architectural Review* Education issue contains a damning diatribe by Peter Buchanan titled (on its first page) WHAT IS WRONG WITH ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION? On the second and facing page he replies to his own question ALMOST EVERYTHING. (Buchanan, 1989, p.24-25) Buchanan's article begins with his statement that 'Change of all sorts [list] has been rapidly transforming much of the building industry and its procedures.' He accuses architectural education of not only refusing to take up the challenges brought about by these changes but instead 'they are ignored as being compromising, even distasteful, in an idealistic flight into irrelevancy.' In the changing building industry world of his dystopic vision '...the Architect is being reduced to simply another member of the building team.' Buchanan also laments the lack of attention to the understanding of construction.

Both of these criticisms are echoed by Diane Ghirardo (1989, p.50) in another article in the same magazine. Ghirardo describes the 'number of projects pinned up at the end of term with no reference to materials and structural systems' as 'staggering' and argues for the necessity for architectural education to imbue an understanding of;

> the craft of construction: hands-on experience, learning to work with and understand materials and teams of people to put up a building. (Ghirardo, 1989, p.50)

She expands this last team reference to include the necessity for students to understand;

> architecture as an institutionalised practice set within a network of political, social, economic institutions. (Ghirardo, 1989, p.50)

Both writers are seen to reinforce not only the need for the sound construction knowledge that Athfield speaks of but also an understanding and engagement with broader roles within networks of construction practice, financial management and socio-political aspects of inhabitation and ownership in its broadest sense. The issues articulated by the writers of the SYNOPSIS (Matthew, 1991) are the same issues that permeate the writing in the AR Education issue. While we can identify them in this context as issues of the time we can also see that they are part of the ongoing discourse about how to construct a methodical and systematic course to learn about the discipline.

A similar characterization of 'the crisis in architectural education' occurs in Mark Crinson and Jeremy Lubbock's (1994, pp. 180-183) history of architectural education in Britain. They identify the narrowing role of the architect as, increasingly, property developers and other professionals take over the role as leaders of the building team. They argue for broader access to an architectural design education so people from other disciplines such as civil engineers and traffic engineers might qualify and for a parallel introduction of multi disciplinary projects within the academy which privilege the construction and craft ethic of architecture. The opinions expressed in this publication might suggest that a trend towards the pragmatics of practice is a particularly British phenomenon but as mentioned above the American Ghirardo (1989) also takes this position as does the Australian Rory Spence (1989). The apparently contradictory trend towards an increasingly theorised architectural education is also present in discourse from the period. Templer (1990) and Mayo (1991) identify the pressures, globally, for research and publication to become part of accepted performance within Schools of Architecture. Necdet Teymur (1992, pp.23-31) articulates some of the issues around this new pressure in his chapter "Research in/on architectural education" where he discusses alternative modes of research and the newly evolving discourse on design as research. The overseas influence is complex and often contradictory.

4. Local ambition

But the aim to develop a degree programme was not just driven by overseas influence. As mentioned earlier the ambition arose from the local context with strong support from the local architectural profession. The draft INTERIM SYNOPSIS lists the planned consultation which includes the statement;

> Architectural Advisory Committee to be reconvened and briefed with a view to obtaining both guidance and detailed input over the next 2-3 months. (Matthew, 1991, p.7)

The 16 person Committee was chaired by prominent Auckland Architect Tom Dixon and made up of members of architectural and associated professions in Auckland including John Sutherland (later to head the new programme), Professor R. Aynsley (Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, Property and Planning at Auckland University), Peter Rutland (Dean of the Carrington Faculty of Architecture and Design) and Lindsay Wood. (Supporting Document, 1994, p.26)

Wood seems to be the person who is most strongly associated with the academic development of the course. (If you speak to those around at the time, Lindsay Wood is the name that is the first to be mentioned.) This narrative is borne out by his listing as Programme Director of the Development Team, as joint Study Leader of Integration and his appearance as Strand Leader of Design Theory and Process, Integration and Negotiated Study/Electives. Wood had also been the developer and subsequently Leader of Bachelor of Building and Bachelor of Quantity Surveying Programmes. Academic Board minutes during 1991 and 1992 record his co-option to the Academic Standards Committee to assist with the degree development. His resignation from the Academic Standards Committee was tendered just before the first day of the first term of the new Bachelor of Architecture programme commenced. His role as leader of the Programme Development Team for these three degrees was done. Now came the task of putting those ideas into practice. But that is another story beyond the scope of this paper.

5. The Curriculum concept

5.1. The Drawing

We have already discussed some of the general themes identified in the original SYNOPSIS where the principal aim of the programme is to:

> provide students with an effective academic foundation for Architectural practice and for ongoing personal and professional development. (Matthew, 1991, p.3)

The Curriculum Concept drawing, Figure 1, from the Definitive Document (1994, p.16), explains the intended relationships between the four study areas with the Professional Ideal (the imperative), Discipline Base (the skills and knowledge) and Practice (the processes) all coming together in the Integration Study Area where they are implemented through the application of Creativity, Holistic Design, Special Activities and [Negotiated] Studies, Professional Experience and "Building." It is an art meets construction process list with Special Activities and Studies as the meat in this pedagogical sandwich. The proposal is for an architecture degree so there is a conventional logic that locates the art end of the spectrum above that of processes and pragmatics.

There are tables and charts setting out management structure and course study patterns but this is the only drawing in the Definitive Document. It could be read as a bubble diagram for a plan for a degree. It is the kind of diagramming style that was learnt in architecture schools internationally from

the forties to the seventies where they were considered 'integral to design education' (Eammons, 1998, pp. 420-425).

Figure 1 Curriculum Concept drawing. (Source: Definitive Document, 1994, p.16)

The central Integration bubble is constructed with the heaviest line weight and is punctured and pressured from the outside by the attendant Practice, Discipline Base and Professional Ideal bubbles. The Practice bubble seems to have the most impact distorting the Integration bubble into a kidney shaped vessel. But these walls do not hermetically contain. They are pressured and they leak. The authors of this weak-walled bubble diagram were conscious they wished to avoid the hermetic model that characterized the architectural education of their peers. They understood that to make good work you need strength to resist but, equally, they were inviting pressure and influence as co-habitants.

5.2. Special Activities

The bubble diagram communicates a process where integration of the attendant study areas is realized. Within the central Integration bubble Holistic design that harnesses creativity and engages with Professional Experience and "Building" is enriched by a category called Special Activities and Studies. There is an interesting contradiction in the formal inclusion of the Special Activities part of this category. The Special Activities strand, assessed on participation only and worth 3% of the total course credits, was an optimistic attempt to institutionalize those events that could constitute a rich architectural culture; exhibitions, debates, social events, conferences, seminars… The designers of this new degree structure wanted to;

> Inspire and extend students and enrich their learning through involvement in a diverse range of planned and impromptu activities which are primarily experiential. (Definitive Document, 1994, p.134).

This attempt to formally embed this culture within the course structure could be construed as a failure of ambition or, at the very least, a lack of confidence in the ability of the core course structure itself to produce this kind of fertile architectural atmosphere.

5.3. Negotiated Studies

Negotiated Studies are part of this same grouping (Special Activities and Studies) within the Integration Study area. They could be considered to be the middle of the middle of the diagram. I would argue that this location is significant and that they are pivotal in the new programme structure. Negotiated Studies are identified in the Document as;

> …a distinctive feature of the programme which promotes independent capability and provides scope for considerable flexibility in the development of individual study patterns. (Definitive Document, 1994, p.136)

The words 'independent capability' are crucial here for they reflect an influence that grew out of the English discourse on education during the 1980s. Professor John Stephenson was the director and ardent promoter of Higher Education for Capability at the Royal Society of the Arts in the United Kingdom. Stephenson was in New Zealand in 1990 addressing that years HERDSA (Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia) Conference and was invited to run a half-day seminar at Carrington. The 1991 proposal and the 1993/94 Definitive Document both reference the Education for Capability movement and Stephenson himself. The Definitive Document (1994) specifically includes it in the section 3.0 PHILOSOPHY AND NATURE OF THE PROGRAMME as Part 3.7 Independent Capability.

> The concept of Independent Capability is increasingly recognised as central to effective personal and professional performance. It combines competence with other qualities, such as the ability to work independently or in a team, to cope with uncertainty, and to explain to others what one is doing. ((Definitive Document, 1994, p.23)

The Pattern of Study section that follows reveals that the base-level Negotiated Studies required by the programme comprise 16% of total course credits. But a further 12 of the twenty design credits at levels 300 and 400 (Years 4 and 5) were negotiable giving potentially 28% of the course over to this study method.

It is clear that the trajectory to provide a situation for independent study, a kind of de-institutionalised format within an institution, comes out of the Education for Capability movement. But the large extent to which those principles are embedded in the curriculum indicates strong pedagogical belief in the outcomes possible from this form of study. The need for graduates who could work independently or in teams, could cope with uncertainty and talk convincingly about what they did was established early in the original SYNOPSIS (Matthew 1991) and the Definitive Document (1994, pp.11-14) but the method by which this could be achieved was less clear until the last pages of the Definitive Document which outline the potential extent of negotiated studies within the programme. This belief in this method of (individually, student directed and negotiated) enquiry permeates the proposed Architecture course structure.

Additionally, the Education for Capability campaign had a significant architectural ally in Donald Schon. His 1985 book The Design Studio, referenced in the original 1991 SYNOPSIS, was commisssioned and published by the RIBA Building Industry Trust. The book strongly links the design studio approach outlined by Schon with the development of capability. In the preface Trust Chairman Keith Ingram advocates the wider use of the design studio teaching model to avoid the 'polarisation of the arts and the the sciences.' He goes on to state;

> Such an education produces young people with much greater all round capability, of great
> value to them and society. Such people are also just the kind that a diverse industry such
> as building needs in all its facets. (Schon, 1985, preface)

While the provenance of the Negotiated Study may be traced back to the influence of the Education for Capability movement, its real significance was that because of its extent it provided the potential for enormously diverse areas of study. Judicious and responsive negotiation between staff and student could have resulted in graduate cohorts with architecture degrees of widely differing composition. The principle of large areas of study available for negotiated enquiry introduces a component of uncertainty in the course. This degree of openness potentially moves the course away from being described as vocational (systematic, methodical, practice focused) and more towards that end of the spectrum usually characterised as broad, innovative and exploratory.

6. Conclusion

In 1991 two major local factors supported the establishment of a new degree in architecture in Auckland; the ability for polytechnics to offer degree programmes as a result of the 1989 Education Act and an architectural profession in search of a more practice focused graduate. The support from the NZ Institute of Architects and the issues raised in that original 1991 proposal, canvassed earlier in the paper, all point to the primacy of architectural practice. The principal aim stated in that proposal is;

> …to provide students with an effective academic foundation for Architectural Practice and
> for ongoing personal and professional development. (draft INTERIM SYNOPSIS, 1991, p.3)

However, in March 1994 when the programme greets its first cohort of enthusiastic students the equivalent section in the Definitive Document records that:

> The Primary Aim of the Bachelor of Architecture at Carrington Polytechnic is to provide
> society with accomplished graduates capable of ongoing effectiveness and adaptability
> both personally **and** (author's emphasis) in the discipline and practice of architecture.
> (Definitive Document, 1994, p.11)

This change, this reversal in order evident between these two documents (draft INTERIM SYNOPSIS 1991 and Definitive Document 1994) is, I believe, a result of the development of the Negotiated Study, in this period. The Negotiated Study was seen as a means to provide opportunities for students to independently develop a personal and particular relationship with the discipline driven by their own interests; 'students are encouraged to assemble distinctive individual patterns of negotiated study" (Definitive Document, 1994, p.137). The list of six aims for the Negotiated Study area in the Document link it to the acquisition of skills of initiative, negotiation and critical enquiry. But embedded in this list there is a more powerful idea of the impact of Negotiated Study upon the course. Number 5 aimed;

> To enrich the academic programme generally though direct and indirect feedback from
> the diversity of negotiated studies. (Definitive Document, 1994, p.136)

It is clear that the developers of this programme saw the Negotiated Study as that course element most capable of producing both individual and collective benefits. They saw it as a means not only of developing individual capability to enquire, act and reflect but also that it contributed to a broadened, a diversified programme of architecture study. Hence in the 1994 Definitive Document we have the Primary Aim locating those core skills in the foreground.

The Primary Aim of the Bachelor of Architecture at Carrington Polytechnic is to provide society with accomplished graduates capable of ongoing effectiveness and adaptability both personally **and** (author's emphasis) in the discipline and practice of architecture. (Definitive Document, 1994, p.11)

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