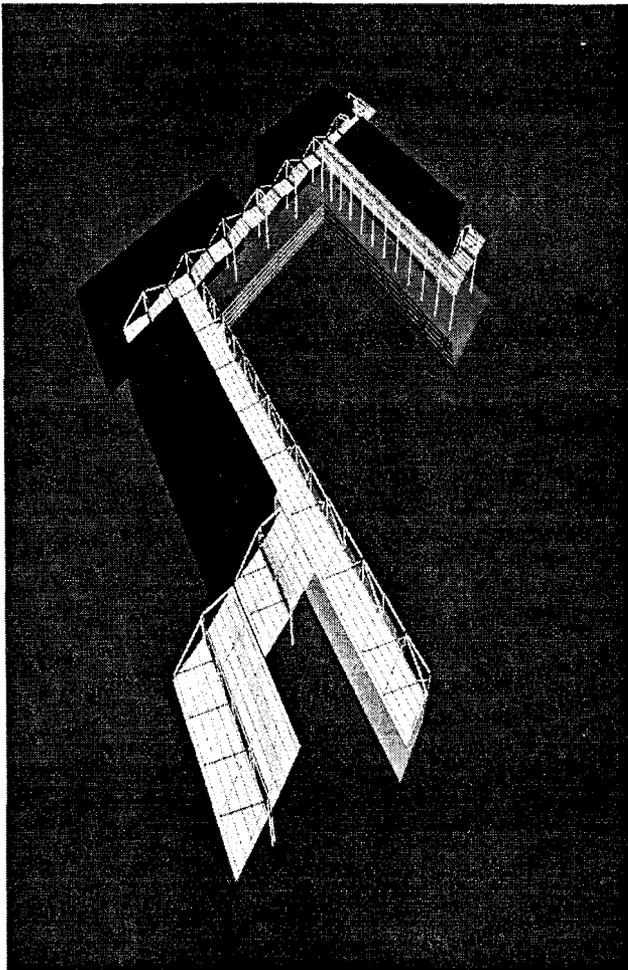


Off the Shelf and into Play

Poe Elementary School

1998 ACSA Collaborative Practice Award

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This project responds to an almost universal condition within contemporary public education environments. Due to the economic inability of the existing educational infrastructure to keep pace with continuing demographic shifts, there is an increasing reliance on the use of temporary prefabricated building units as classrooms. In Houston, these buildings are built on a lowest bidder basis from a set of written specifications and are deposited on site in an expedient and ill-considered manner.

It is possible, however, to arrange these structures in a manner which makes a virtue of what has proven to be a fiscal necessity. Working with a local elementary school, a student/faculty team developed a strategy which utilizes four temporary classrooms as elements in the creation of an outdoor assembly area. In order to link the buildings, a prototypical system of off-the-shelf components was developed which consists of a series of yellow columns supporting a canopy of standard galvanized fence posts joined by catalog ordered couplers and clad with translucent corrugated fiberglass. The assembly wraps the inside face of the buildings, formalizing the inner court as a public room for the community while simultaneously allowing the bays to branch off the walkway in order to accommodate various external conditions. This extended threshold both unifies and masks the temporary buildings while simultaneously highlighting the court as the dominant spatial element.

As part of the Rice Building Workshop, a full-scale mock-up was constructed at the university to aid in the design process. Specific details were tested in this setting after initial schematic development. The project is currently under construction and will be completed by May 1998. The completion of the project is part of the design/build component of the Workshop with a large part of the construction being executed through a joint effort of students, faculty and parents.

