

Connecting Global and Local Culture in Architectural Education

SHIRL BUSS; Ph.D.
San Francisco State University

PATRICIA GRACIELA ALARCÓN
California College of the Arts

This paper/presentation explores questions and theoretical issues associated with global culture as a potentially unifying force and language. We investigate how issues of identity and community can be productively addressed in an educational context. We examine how architecture and design students from disparate cultural, geographical and ethnic backgrounds can proudly validate their culturally unique values, while developing a deeper understanding of and connection to each other, and to the local urban community.

We present two case studies in San Francisco, California, to illustrate how design educators can create a framework for students to experience a heightened degree of interaction with the immediate urban context, and how they can infuse that experience with their own cultural perspective. The case studies show how culturally relevant pedagogy can be situated within the context of the global community.

At California College of Arts and Crafts, architecture students explored personal design values and contributed to their

surrounding community by engaging local eighth grade students in project-based learning through design. At San Francisco State University, design students investigated theory, pedagogical approaches and ethnographic research methodologies as they explored what it means to be “inclusive by design.” Each model encourages students to teach and develop leadership skills as part of their academic learning experience. Each model also promotes environmental learning and activism, honoring the diverse cultural background of all participants, and respect and understanding of local community.

In the tradition of the 1996 report, “Building Community: A New Future for Architecture Education and Practice” (commonly known as the Boyer Report), these case studies demonstrate how to provide a vehicle for students to express ideas about personal identity and cultural specificity, while they gain an increased sense of social responsibility and participate in meaningful civic engagement.