

TET 'Dialogues' Webinar Launch - 14 April 2021

Launch of monthly TET Dialogues exploring practitioners' ideas, experience and questions in relation to built environment education.



The April TET Dialogues were shared with individuals and organisations including Aquinas CoE Education Trust, Architecture Edge, Dorset Council, Matt+Fiona, Fundación Aldea, Giant Dolls House Project, HomeGrownPlus, House of Imagination, Irish Architecture Foundation, Placed, Queen University Belfast, RIBA, The Bartlett, The Glasshouse, RIBA, Urban Learners and facilitated by Victoria Thornton.

The panel and audience comprising 30 practitioners explored:

How do young people (children, students, emerging practitioners) benefit from learning about the built environment both formally and informally, and participating in placemaking and community engagement? What are the barriers and challenges to participation? How can we change mindsets and provide better solutions?

Barriers and challenges

- Formal education: the emphasis is very much on rigorous testing and assessing young people, with markers of progress moving forward in a linear way from what is seen as one achievement to the next, 'setting moulds that young people need to fit' by them achieving academic grades
- Teachers are under immense stress and time-poor; it's very difficult, if not impossible, to fit extracurricular activities into day-to-day learning for children in schools
- Architecture can sometimes be a risk-averse industry: 'we want to know what the outcome will be when we start on the journey rather than seeing where it will take us'

How do young people benefit in terms of personal development? And young professionals?

- Developing curiosity and opening up young minds to think about spaces in a completely different way
- Appreciating how exciting the process of putting together a building can be
- Realising that they will be listened to and that their observations, intuitions and lived experience are relevant and can help make the world a better place for everyone
- Understanding that whatever their choices, they can follow their passions and the lines of enquiry that they are curious about: 'there are no performance indicators for passion'
- Young people are citizens but have very little (and no democratic) agency to shape places. Projects where young people have had opportunities to input views and opinions on how their towns and cities are shaped have been shown to be very powerful in terms of their personal development

How do we challenge existing mindsets in education and provide better solutions?

- Understand that creativity is the base for all learning
- Value lived experience and who children and young people are now – not who and what they will become; giving them the power to value that experience themselves, and not just information that will help them to pass examinations and tests
- Give young people choice and the power to recognise uncertainty
- Teach children and young people to have pride in who they are and follow what their instincts tell them in terms of career choices; to have confidence not to be swayed by others
- Underline the value to education stakeholders of children's creative and self-directed enquiry and finding intrinsic motivation
- Champion the integration of creativity and the importance of allowing creative freedom at every stage in the school curriculum; allow young people to test and experiment
- Recognise that children can have a role as creative placemakers in cities

What are the potential solutions and opportunities to develop, adopt and/or support?

1. Enable creative practitioners to develop programmes that provide direct benefits to teachers, e.g. via continuing professional development (CPD), rather than just one-off events
2. Use architecture and the built environment as a framework to teach skills and standard parts of the curriculum, e.g. maths, geography, history, recognising that schools have varying levels of resourcing and ability (and not least, time) to engage with built environment activities when it is not part of the formal curriculum
3. Initiatives such as Open House London provide a cultural activity where people and families from very different backgrounds and professions come together to enjoy exploring buildings and provide opportunities for children/students to engage with education outside formal learning – there are no silos
4. Explore and experiment with other subjects such as music and institutions outside school such as youth centres to help engage young people who will not usually come to e.g. after-school clubs or holiday projects.
5. Map the existing connections between schools, universities, practices and architectural initiatives and then build on these to help move forward: ‘small to big to small’
6. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Art, Craft and Design in education has architecture as part of its remit; there is a proposal to write a new education plan which presents opportunities to bring architecture into the curriculum at this time of ‘cultural reset’
7. Bring parents and decision-makers, especially school governors, and other professionals into the conversation and into activities with young people, so that they can see the value; this can create a non-hierarchical community of practice that can be quite subversive in terms of moving forward discussions; if governors are convinced of the value, they will give teachers more flexibility and agency to take on collaborative projects
8. A focus on climate change can be an advantage when seeking to engage schools
9. The pandemic recovery provides a real opportunity for personal enrichment and to improve wellbeing and social and academic recovery when children have missed out on so much owing to Covid

How do we take this forward this discussion?

Capacity building is a key goal of TET. TET Dialogues encourages practitioners to encourage others to join the monthly conversations, to connect people in their own networks, to share knowledge and resources, and to contribute their thoughts and ideas about how they can make change happen. TET is intended to be a platform to signpost best practice and show the value of architecture education initiatives to stakeholders and come up with solutions that can be actioned at one level or another and come up with solutions that can be actioned at one level or another.

Project examples included in the discussion:

Forest of the Imagination: <https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/projects/forest-of-imagination/>

My City Too: <https://open-city.org.uk/my-city-too>

Giant Dolls House Project <https://www.giantdollshouse.org/>

How to get involved:

- We are growing our network of founding associates and founding partners to help develop our programmes and take us to the next stage
- We are looking for speakers and participants in the TET Dialogue series- there will be one each month in general. They will dig deeper into the issues covered today. We want to know from everyone here, the issues that you'd like these to address coming out of what has been discussed today
- We will be announcing the Inspire Future Generations awards in mid June and open for applications. Winners announced in Sept. We would love to know your ideas for great organisations/individuals that should be applying
- We will be looking to develop an online resource including examples and resources from those working in this area - link to send info on the support page of our website
- We will also host regular TET Dialogues to stay connected in a deeper way/share knowledge – which will become a regular diary date.

Finally, stay up to date join our linkedin page

Thornton Education Trust <https://www.linkedin.com/company/71700217/>

What next?

For more information and to get involved with TET contact to sign up to our mailing list:

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<https://www.thorntoneducationtrust.org/>

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