

Student as producer of individual, collective, and global knowledge in the MA Interior Architecture and Design studio, University of Lincoln

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Abstract

This paper reflects on a teaching exercise implemented in the MA Interior Architecture and Design Programme at the University of Lincoln that responds to the concept of Student as Producer. The exercise required each student to create a visual collage and written statement reflecting on the theme of the International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers (IFI) World Interiors Day 2022, 'Pride of the Past, an Incentive for the Future' and situate it within their individual treatise. The students' projects were compiled in a physical and digital book that was co-created by staff and students and shared online during the IFI World Interiors Day celebration.

The exercise took a pluralistic approach to the concept of Student as Producer, by empowering students to develop distinct responses to the open-ended brief, promoting individual reflection, while also validating their outputs collectively and globally platforming their ideas. The book symbolised staff and students as co-producers of knowledge within the institution and highlighted the voices of students as online knowledge contributors alongside a wider global community. The exercise successfully engaged students as knowledge producers and promoted collaboration and co-creation within the institution and beyond.

Keywords: Design education, global knowledge producer, Student as Producer, co-producers of knowledge

Summary

This paper reflects on a teaching and learning exercise conducted in the MA Interior Architecture and Design (MAIAD) studio at University of Lincoln. The exercise was a response to the unique nature of the programme. The MAIAD contains a largely international student base, students can select between a practice or research-driven treatise, and students are taught as two separate cohorts in a combined studio environment. The ethos, 'Student as Producer', is embedded into the curriculum as students are considered active contributors to knowledge production (Neary, 2019). This is applied in the interiors field through self-directed design and research processes (Strudwick, 2017; van der Wath & Königk, 2019). The teaching and learning exercise discussed in this paper applies the principle of 'student as producer' on individual, collective, and global levels.

The teaching and learning project was conducted as a charrette, a short exercise, aimed at both cohorts at different phases of their studies. The project required students to reflect on their individual treatises in relation to a global professional celebration – the International Federation of Interior Architects / Designers' (IFI) World Interiors Day in 2022. The IFI World Interiors Day celebration surrounded the theme of 'Pride of the past, an incentive for the future'. The outcome of the exercise was a co-produced book of individual student work collectively containing the work of students and physically and digitally assembled by staff of the MAIAD programme in the year, 2022.

The book showcases knowledge production on an individual level (through the individual reflective collages and statements produced by each student), collective level (through co-production of the book by both staff and students), and global level (as the project engages with a call issued by the global profession, the IFI).

Project Background

This paper discusses a design studio exercise, hosted during the 2022-23 academic year in the MA Interior Architecture and Design (MAIAD) at the College of Arts, University of Lincoln. The exercise involved staff and students co-producing a book to celebrate the International Federation of Interior Architects / Designers (IFI) World Interiors Day (IFI, 2022). The exercise prompted students' individual, collective, and global knowledge production. Staff curated and collated the individual student outputs in the final object (a physical and digital book).

The project responds to key identifiers of the MAIAD programme. These pose unique teaching and learning opportunities:

1. The programme ethos is influenced by the principles of 'Student as Producer', applied as the foundational organising principle of the University of Lincoln in the programmes (Neary, 2019). However, 'Student as Producer' is mitigated and contextualised within the programme's objectives and its specific identifiers.
2. During the twelve months of full-time study of 180 credits, each student produces an individual interior treatise. This treatise can be completed on one of two pathways:
OPTION A: The treatise by Practice – is aimed at advanced employment in interior design; while OPTION B: The treatise by Research – is aimed at further academic study or alternative forms of employment in the interior design industry.
3. The programme provides a shared studio across two cohorts that are producing treatises concurrently. The interior treatise is the major individual output of students and is completed cumulatively and iteratively over three stages. The programme has two start dates, in October and February. The two cohorts of students share space and some contact time, but each cohort following their own linear programme. The opportunity for cohort collaboration is identified through the shared studio space and timetabled hours in which students work concurrently on their design projects.
4. The programme is one of the most popular courses in the University of Lincoln for international students. We continue to attract students from across the globe. Past cohorts have included students from Belgium; China; Egypt; Ecuador; France; Greece; India; Japan; Jordan; Hong Kong; Kuwait; Malta; Nigeria; Pakistan; Poland; Slovenia; South Africa; Sudan; Thailand; United Kingdom; United States; Vietnam; and Zimbabwe.
5. In the 'Student as Producer' ethos, we consider the students' past knowledge and experience as unique contributions that they bring to the studio to the benefit of themselves, each other, and the institution at large. This provides a potential frame of reference which exceeds that of the academic staff. Our student body, with their global knowledge and experience offers us a unique advantage through which we can mitigate the contradictions of individual and collective authorship.

This offers the programme unique administrative and teaching challenges, but it also allows us to develop institutional memory through which learning can be shared from one cohort to another, as one group is always accompanied by either a 'junior' or 'senior' cohort of peers depending on their study stage.

Discussion

Our course has a global impact due to our diverse student cohorts with varied professional ambitions. Engaging with the global profession situates our MAIAD program internationally, preparing students for success in a culturally diverse and globalized world. As part of this global conversation, the programme participated in the IFI World Interior's Day Celebration (IFI WID). The IFI is the only globally federated professional body, representing national interior design professional organisations.

IFI WID is an annual opportunity for all designers and enthusiasts to globally unite through themed provocations. In 2022 the theme was, 'Pride of the Past. An Incentive for the Future'.

After taking our programme's focus on heritage as a resource for development and the global nature of our studio in mind, we considered this event as an ideal opportunity to enrich the student experience by conducting a design exercise (charrette) to celebrate IFI WID. A 'charrette' is a fast-paced project that required students to exercise creativity and respond with a conceptual output within a limited time frame. It required students to respond to the theme through the consideration of their individual treatises. They were required to represent this as individual digital collages accompanied by reflective statements.

Students produced collective, individual, and global knowledge at different phases of the project. Several modes were exercised throughout the project phases and some included staff co-production. These are outlined and described below.

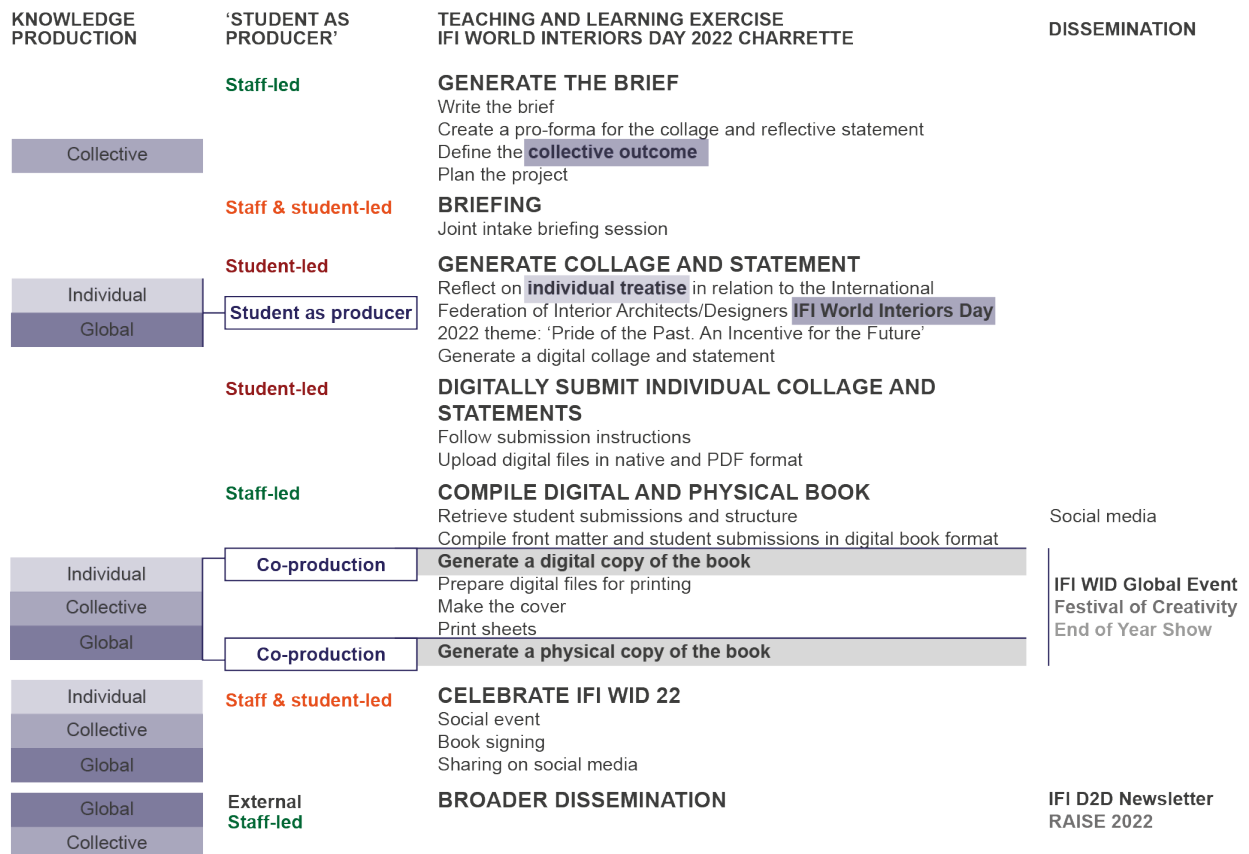


Figure 1 Summary of Project Phases, Production, and Dissemination

- Generate the brief

The project commenced with the academic staff conceptualising the brief in response to IFI WID. Since the output, a book, required the coherent assembly of a range of individual outputs, this collective project had to be defined and planned.

- Briefing

The brief and process were presented to the students. The brief was made available in written format and explained verbally. This was supported with supervised work in the studio. To manage and promote coherent documentation, the programme makes use of documentation standards and templates throughout its production. These range from PowerPoints for presentations, MS Word for reports, and Adobe InDesign for layouts. For this exercise an existing template for the assembly of an image board based on a rapid evidence assessment was adapted to manage visual sources and to control academic convention.

- Generate collage and statement

The second phase was student-led. During this period students had to consider their individual interior treatise and how it may offer insights on IFI WID. Using reflective practice, which is a standard form of design production in the programme, students had to compile a statement to support the collage.

- Digitally submit individual collage and statements
- These were submitted digitally to allow the academic team to curate and collate the book.



Figure 2 Selection of collages in the book: digital compilation

- Compile digital and physical book
- The penultimate phase was led by the academic staff. The staff collected, curated, and collated the student submissions and generated the front matter and list of references for a digital book. A large-format physical book was made in the College of Arts Book Arts Space where technical staff made significant design contributions to the artefact. One prototype was made and after design improvements, the final book was manufactured, printed, and assembled. The book was made over several days, using traditional book craft techniques. Each page is approximately 600mm wide, which means that the book itself is over 1,2 meter wide when open.

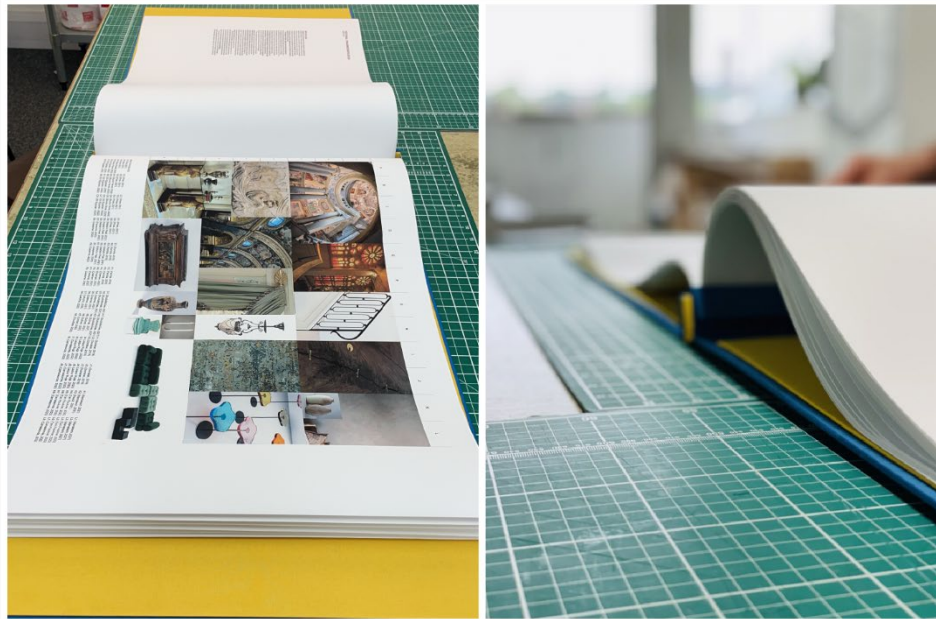


Figure 3 The MAIAD IFI World Interiors Day book

- Broader dissemination

The book making process was disseminated on social media, through participation with IFI, and as part of the College of Arts Festival of Creativity.

- Celebrate IFI WID 22

The final phase was to celebrate IFI World Interiors Day. Academic staff organised a small social event for students to reveal the book and to allow students who participated the opportunity to sign the book.



Figure 4 MAIAD Students pictured signing the IFI World Interiors Day book



Figure 5 MAIAD Students pictured with IFI World Interiors Day book (Yat Chun Johnny Chan, Aditi Saxena, Kam Kwong Joseph Marie Wong, Sushma Depa, Sana Riaz, Sruthi Vinayakamurthi, Vishruti Mohan Raja)

Outcomes and Impact

As a programme that hosts predominantly international students studying at two different stages of their treatises concurrently, the MAIAD holds unique characteristics. Through this charrette, we intended to leverage the global nature of knowledge production inherent to individual students and to reflect their projects in a collective output. Using the principle of Student as Producer, we designed a student exercise that reflected the individual, collective, and global nature of knowledge production in the MAIAD studio. This exercise culminated students and staff co-producing a physical and digital book in celebration of the 2022 IFI World Interiors Day. The teaching exercise aimed to:

- Provide a reflective moment for MAIAD students to situate their treatise within a topic of global relevance to the field,
- Generate a collective output of a physical and digital book,
- Unite two cohorts of predominantly international students, and
- Showcase and celebrate the students while enhancing their programme experience.

We regard the project as having successfully met these goals and provided the following benefits to the MAIAD students and programme:

- The project supported our studio culture and fostered social cohesion between two cohorts at different stages of study.
 - The exercise was celebrated by students who enjoyed the interactive experiences of self-expression and celebration alongside their peers. The collective actions of signing the book and seeing the final product awarded students a sense of accomplishment and pride in their projects.
 - The book remains as physical and digital knowledge artefacts co-produced by students and staff of the MAIAD programme at the University of Lincoln.
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- The IFI shared the project in its monthly newsletter (IFI D2D, 2022). This was sent out to professional members in 27 countries and 97 institutional members which includes universities, corporate members, and international observers. This assigns prestige and spotlights the MAIAD programme globally.
 - The programme team presented the exercise as a paper at the 2022 RAISE Conference in Lincoln. This project generated scholarship activity leading to this publication.

Conclusion

This project undertook a pluralistic approach to 'Student as Producer'. On an individual level, the open-ended exercise, although under measures of control, allowed each student to develop an individual and reflective response. The brief prompted a synthesised expression of self, theme, and study, through the medium of collage and writing. On a collective level, the use of design templates and the

production of the book, both digital and physical was a managed process. The book was a co-created, tangible object as the result of staff and students co-producing knowledge within the institution, and by extension producing the institution itself. This is coherent with the spirit of learning through student engagement with real-world projects founded on collaboration between staff and students (Neary et al, 2014). This shifts the conventional role of student and academic relationships from hierarchical to a partnership (Strudwick, 2017).

On a global level, the exercise was contextualised within the IFI WID celebration. IFI's digital resource platformed the voices of students as knowledge contributors in a wider global professional community. This design exercise engaged MAIAD students as knowledge producers by promoting individual reflection, collectively validating their outputs, and globally platforming their ideas. In this process, the Student as Producer of knowledge through research-engaged learning took place (Strudwick, 2017). This extends the learning landscape beyond the University studio and into the global space (Neary et al, 2014).

Currently, the MAIAD programme continues to attract international students. The potential of knowledge production from our students reinforces the need for educators to platform students as producers of knowledge. This mitigates the preconditions and inherent bias of a British educational context in overriding the innate knowledge that students may hold as potential to advance the programme outputs. We found that the IFI WID charrette was successful in accomplishing this by uniting students through a collective output across two groups in a single output co-produced by students and staff. This fostered an appreciation of the diversity inherent to the Student Voice. The range of students' subjective creative expressions became a valued outcome of the learning process (Neary et al, 2014).

As the MAIAD has been revalidated with a new curriculum (commencing academic year 23/24), we view new modules as creating opportunities to facilitate students to express their global ambitions through the programme. A collective studio for two intakes remains as a key identifier of the MAIAD programme. While this may be viewed as an operational challenge, the collaborative and peer-exchange opportunities exist to promote knowledge transfer across cohorts, engaging with the profession, and going global. This supports the promotion of students in the context of the global profession, showcasing their outputs and enhancing employability (Neary et al, 2014).

As the IFI World Interiors Day is an annual event, the provocation provides timely, global, and industry-led conversation that may be engaged in. Academic participation with this event is an opportunity for positioning our students, providing an outward-looking perspective on any academic project they may currently be working on, or to generate a student-led response to the provocation without a staff-directed brief.

To advance this teaching and learning exercise in the broader context of pedagogic practice, we view opportunities for similar creative exercises to be executed at

varying scales. These may be expanded to facilitate collaborative outputs between different programmes, years, schools, disciplines, industry partners, and institutions. These would require identifying uniting and distinctive characteristics between the participating groups. The teaching and learning engagements could be designed to collectively promote individual reflection of the student position in relation to the profession and the globe.

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