

The experience of the city as transformative knowledge: an evaluation of the use of a mobile approach for enhancing learning and teaching in urban design

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This paper reviews the learning and teaching transformative effects of the project 'The Power of Experience' which was first implemented in 2011 in urban design modules at Oxford Brookes University. The Power of Experience project (www.urbandesignexperience.com) was funded by the Innovation in Teaching Grant by the Higher Education Academy and focused on the use of mobile technologies to encourage students to learn outside the classroom. It developed from a realisation that although one of the aims in urban design is to improve the sensory experience of the urban environment, its teaching mostly takes place indoors, fully insulated from outside. It proposed that the move from a 'recipient' approach to a 'critical thinking' approach to learning can be facilitated if students are given the opportunity to appraise urban design principles through a flexible situated experience where they are active participants rather than inactive recipients in the knowledge building process. The mobile learning approach at Oxford Brookes University is now in its fourth year and has been evaluated through in-depth interviews with students and staff who participated in the experiment in the first and subsequent runs.

A brief discussion of the background, the development and implementation of the project is initially presented before results of the interviews are discussed against a framework of the power of experiential learning as transformative knowledge in urban design. The paper ends with a series of recommendations that would encourage and facilitate the development of projects with a similar focus on learning and teaching urban design outside the classroom.