A New Village in Sri Lanka: Learning Lessons There, Sharing Lessons Here

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Abstract

When the Indian Ocean tsunami hit Sri Lanka, it destroyed the 190-person village of Kalametiya. Eleven people were killed and every building was ruined.

In March 2005, the first two authors helped to “catalyze” the reconstruction of the town under the direction of Sri Lankan architect Madhura Prematilleke and with Ball State University faculty colleague Nihal Perera and 21 students from the U.S. These efforts, along with those of many local citizens and relief workers, built one of the country’s first post-tsunami permanent villages, known today as Minsiripura.

Responding to such extreme local circumstances can challenge existing knowledge, if one is prepared and open. For example, when building with no electricity on-site, participating in auspicious moments, sharing tea with adults, and playing with children, the need to respond to local conditions becomes magnified, especially to an outsider. When working with limited resources under an unyielding sun, it is immediately obvious that buildings, builders, and architects must be “smart” regarding the climate, available materials, and culture. And when heeding the plans and advice of others, one comes to understand that letting go—believing that a good way to change the world is to be open to changing yourself—can reveal something wonderful that was previously unimaginable. Such circumstances provide a test, of sorts, regarding what is known and what needs to be known, and represent a classic epistemologic reordering, what Maxine Greene refers to as ‘wide-awareness’ in contrast to sheer attentiveness, in which a person is fully present in the contextualized moment before him or her.

This paper reflects on our shared experiences in Kalametiya and discusses how lessons learned there have influenced recent works completed by the authors and their students, including a construction in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada and deconstructions in Flint, Michigan, USA. Both projects question conventional 1-2-3 sensibilities (which assume that knowledge flows
primarily if not exclusively from the First World to the Third World) and instead promote a 3-2-1 awareness—that there is much to be learned in the developing world.

**Keywords:** Kalametiya, CapAsia, Autoethnography, Local Knowledge, Bottom-up

*There is great need here . . . and . . . I should say, the locals are well on their way to making their own futures, to finding their own way in their new worlds, lives, houses and occupations.*

*It is an amazing opportunity for us, the fullest of moments to be alive, to be contributing and to be understanding the decency and compassion that exists in the world, and in our students.*

Wes Janz email sent from Tangalle, Sri Lanka to the Ball State University community on March 7, 2005 [1]

### 1. Background

When the Indian Ocean tsunami hit Sri Lanka on December 26, 2004, more than 40,000 lives were lost and another 2.5 million were displaced. Among these large numbers of people directly impacted by this natural disaster was the 190-person village of Kalametiya. Eleven people were killed and every building was ruined.

Four months later, in March 2005, under the direction of Sri Lankan architect Madhura Prematilleke and with our Ball State University faculty colleague Nihal Perera and 21 students from the U.S., the first two authors helped “catalyze” reconstruction of a new village. [2] These efforts, along with those of relief agencies, relief workers, many local citizens, and the Kalametiyans themselves, built one of the country’s first post-tsunami permanent villages, known today as Minsiripura.

With this paper the co-authors Wes and Tim reflect upon the lessons we learned in Sri Lanka and suggest how our experiences there effected and continue to effect the lessons we share with students and colleagues here in the U.S. and North America. The involvement of Thalia, a Ball State University faculty colleague in our university’s Department of Education Studies, is an effort to add depth to this consideration of our immersive and/or active learning experiences as part of a postcolonial pedagogy.

Reflexivity is a process in which a researcher continuously reflects on how the action research process changes his or her perspectives. Autoethnography adds a critical dimension to the process. There are two different understandings of autoethnography. In the first and most common approach, “autoethnography is understood as ‘the process by which the researcher chooses to make explicit use of [their] own positionality, involvements and experiences as an integral part of ethnographic research.’” In the second approach, autoethnography “is not something researchers do that they may want to study. . . The intent is to strategically alter the
way an audience of dominant outsiders understands the subordinate group, and beyond that, to push back to some extent, against the shove of domination.” [3]

What follows are some examples of how we have approached the process of reflexivity and our current efforts at reconsidering a specific Sri Lankan experience in early 2005 now, nearly three years later. While we will rely on self-reflection which, by definition, places us at the center of the stories that we are constructing, we will also offer instances in which the locals “pushed back” against the outsiders, even as the Kalametiyans welcomed us into their village, lives, and futures. By displacing ourselves, we seek to complicate conventional 1-2-3 sensibilities (which assume that knowledge flows primarily if not exclusively from the First World to the Third World) and instead offer our early insights into a 3-2-1 view that argues that there is much for the developed world to learn from the developing world.

2. Prior Knowledge

Sri Lanka was not an unfamiliar place to us. Our faculty colleague, Nihal Perera, is a native Sri Lankan. He is also the originator and director of CapAsia, a unique field study program that brings U.S. students to south Asia every other spring semester for eleven weeks of study. [4] Wes is the co-director of CapAsia and had visited Sri Lanka in 2001, 2002, and 2003. In 2003, on CapAsia III, Nihal and Wes collaborated with Madhura, Vijitha Basnayake, and Varuna de Silva and led sixty Sri Lankan and CapAsia students in the design and construction of two pavilions on the Moratuwa campus. With the successful completion of this project and the growth of our friendships, trust grew in each other. [5] Nihal and Wes had some, admittedly limited, experience with a natural disaster in south Asia. Both were in Delhi with students in 2001 when the Bhuj earthquake hit. And in 2005, before bringing the CapAsians to Sri Lanka, Nihal took the students to Bhuj, where they visited some of the areas devastated in 2001, in order to see what developments had occurred since the earthquake.

The tsunami struck as CapAsia IV was about to depart for south Asia. We anticipated a planned construction program with the architect Laurie Baker in Thiruvananthapuram. The day after the tsunami, Nihal and Wes spoke of the need to change the field study’s itinerary, based on the belief that with our active knowledge of Sri Lanka we might be among the best positioned U.S.-based university programs to offer our services to those effected by the great wave. Using our local connections in Sri Lanka, we diverted our students away from the pre-arranged building project in India and towards the fishing village of Kalametiya.

3. CapAsia IV, 2005, Kalametiya

Pre-tsunami, Madhura was planning a resort near the village of Kalametiya, approximately twenty kilometers east of Tangalle and just south of Hungama. Not wanting to overwhelm the lives of the villagers with the new facility, he took the time to get to know the people believing this could help mediate the resort’s impact on the lives and livelihoods.
Post-tsunami, Madhura volunteered his services and time to the village’s reconstruction. The original village had been situated along the coast in a beautiful palm grove. The site for the new village, as ordered by the national government, was moved four kilometers inland on a sun-baked site to the north of the Kalametiya Bird Sanctuary.

Madhura encouraged us to help in any of four areas: 1) permanent house construction, 2) restoration of livelihoods, i.e., repairing fishing boats, 3) cleaning up house debris, and 4) social engagement. In particular, he wrote, “The frustration among [the villagers] is growing under these very difficult circumstances and social engagement with groups at different levels will be very useful to ease some of this frustration. Opportunities include play activities with the young kids, sport with the young men – volleyball or cricket, or even board games; cook-outs with the women, camp-fires etc.”

Once we arrived, our plans to begin constructing immediately were derailed: in keeping with charts that were done of the stars, the village’s auspicious moment would occur two days after our arrival. We had to wait. We had to set aside our schedule and, for the moment, our ambitions and take time to get to known the people and place.

As a result, our group spent part of one day assisting locals in cleaning up the remnants of the village swept into a lagoon by the tsunami, making neat piles of the torn remains: coconut wood framing members and tree branch posts, corrugated tin sheets tumbled into misshapen globes by the water wall, and aluminum cabling. Household items too--lamp bases, plastic chairs, insulated coolers, curtains, and tablecloths--the stuff of people’s lives. Fishing nets, floats, and a boat hull tossed by the vengeful water. Pile after pile. And Wes found a passport in the sand, number K0538847, and imagined its owner before, during, and after the tsunami.

We then visited the temporary village, a U-shaped arrangement of approximately thirty 3-meter by 3-meter shelters constructed by Oxfam. The fishing families, who lived their entire lives under palm trees on a beach washed by ocean water and breezes, found themselves living in wood boxes sealed with corrugated tin roofs, all baking in the hot equatorial sun. A local woman named Rasika said to Nihal and Wes: “Now we are the dried fish.”

At the auspicious moment--shortly after 8:00 AM on March 6, 2005--three young monks chanted as milk was boiled and a foundation stone set. As work began on the foundation trench for the first house, the leaders of CapAsia intended to complete one “demonstration” house that the villagers and builders could use as a model in completing the other twenty-nine houses. We came to a somewhat painful realization that this would be impossible. The hard-packed earth and hand tools slowed our progress.

In keeping with something Madhura said in an earlier conversation, we began to rethink our role as one that could provide great energy to begin the entire rebuilding of the village—to “catalyze” the construction of houses for everyone. We could get the big work going. And as we had come in “under the radar”—not associated with any large funding or supervisory
agencies—we might be able to push forward even if some official permissions were missing or on the way.

We decided to spread the student group across the site, staking out foundations for the entire village, and beginning their trenches too. When we departed one week later, all the house foundations were dug, the majority of the trenches had a concrete pad poured in them on which the granite foundation would be built, and the first house had its granite foundation completed.

While on-site in Sri Lanka, flying back to the United States together, and teaching at Ball State University, Wes and Tim spoke of their shared experiences in Kalametiya, sometimes in direct reference to the project—“Could you figure out who was managing the construction site?”—sometimes more abstractly—“I’m more and more interested in simple tools” and “Maybe it’s time to do a project in which you’re not afraid to fail.” These questions, found or addressed while in Sri Lanka, provided us with a number of lessons that came and continue to influence our teaching.

4. Lessons

4.1 Lesson 1: Waking up

The CapAsia participants were time travelers, moving through air, space, and countryside at different speeds and in different orbits, to a place destroyed in an instant, where the survivors lived disjointed lives even as they waited patiently for a new beginning and a new rhythm for their days.

Our experiences on the ground brought a rawness, an immediacy, and a heightened awareness of how long a simple task might take to begin or complete, a feeling that one’s strong young body was being underutilized, a sense of wonder at the different rituals and beliefs that framed our efforts, and a desire to do something immediately for people whose lives had been completely upended, if not nearly ended.

Among the most notable comments on this aspect of the project was one by Tim, who arrived in Sri Lanka several days after the other CapAsians. Wes met Tim at the Negombo airport (after a long series of pan-Pacific flights) and escorted him to Kalametiya through a long night’s drive along the Coastal Highway, arriving at the construction site just as the auspicious moment rituals began. In a state of both exhaustion and euphoria—tired from the long trip and ready to help in whatever way he could—days later Tim said he “woke up in Sri Lanka with a pick in his hands.” For the students, this “waking up” was an especially difficult negotiation between their desire to make a difference and the anxiety they felt as they were awakened from their long middle class sleep by new challenges, insights, and pains they did not know and could not anticipate.

Locals “pushed back” at our plans. We had to wait for the auspicious moment. Many of the village men and some of the local villagers paid by relief organizations to work did no work.
Instead, they sat in the shade, watching. Persons who had lost a family or family member in the tsunami remained in a state of shock. In a sense, our “waking up” was tied to their “waking up.” A local European provided alcohol to the village’s men and kept them occupied, for reasons we could not determine. In this, there was a multi-layered local “sleep” as well, one we could not shake. [6]

4.2 Lesson 2: Not knowing

We adopted a way of working that not only took cues from the locals, but looked to them to provide leadership. While the plans gave us some sense that we knew where the project was headed, still, there was a great deal we did not know. From another vantage point, it can be said that we had no choice in the roles we assumed. Wes and Tim did not speak one word of Sinhalese (the local language), had never swung mamotties (the local hand tools used for digging), and were not expected to be in-charge of the building site. We came to understand the need to trust the others to know what to do and what was best. We followed the lead of men working on the construction site often in sandals and sarongs, and of women on the site as well whose intimate understanding of the local tools and conditions allowed them, at times, to outwork even our strongest CapAsian men.

While we had some knowledge, still, we did not know. For example, once the granite foundation wall was completed, we knew from the drawings that a concrete bond beam would be built to rest on top of it. We did not know, exactly, how it would be constructed on site. We didn’t know how they planned to build the frame to hold the wet concrete of the bond beam until it was built. What wood was to be used? How was it to be assembled? How would it to be connected to the granite? There were many such moments when our existing knowledge gave us some notions, but provided limited insight.

At the same time, on a site where agents of various international, national, and local agencies and funding sources had their own interests, one could see that our inability to find logic within the system of construction was caused not only because we were foreigners. We got the sense that the Sri Lankans themselves did not understand how to organize the site—truckloads of granite blocks were being dumped with no on-site direction, masons were working without any direct supervision by the architect, water tanks were being placed without any consultation.
We could not direct, only respond. Letting go provided the chance to see the limits and relevance of our cultural and architectural knowledge. Was what we knew or learned about construction in North America even relevant on this piece of land in southern Sri Lanka, and if not, WHY? What did it feel like to let go, to work for others, and in not knowing, find even greater success? We could help, but it was, in the end, their job site and in a very positive sense, their village.

4.3 Lesson 3: Living now

We had no choice but to connect to the place and people. The ground in and on which the village was to be built was stubborn and did us no favors. We came to know its color, texture, and taste. The sun was hot and relentless. We sweated profusely, drank great amounts of water, and longed for the coolness of the ocean breezes. Our bodies were fully engaged—hands blistered immediately, we had grit in our teeth, and our backs ached. Still, with bandaged hands and smiling faces, we continued to work.

Even as we were caught in the immediacy of the moment, some of the Kalametiyans sought to extend friendship and connections into the future. They kept us in the “now” even as their engagements with us—working and playing with us, inviting into their homes, for example—suggest their efforts to break the immediacy of our involvement. Months later, one family sent Tim a Christmas card, and some of our students also remained in communication with the villagers. In the “now,” they joined us in attempting to extend our bonds into the future. They “pushed back” at us by offering their friendship and thanks.

4.4 Defining success

Our week in Kalametiya was just that—seven days. Maybe the villagers saw us as an ephemeral presence—we were there for a short time, they enjoyed and appreciated our efforts, and then we were gone, too soon.

We had come to Kalametiya expecting to complete a “model” for others to follow, to impart our knowledge and expertise. In short time, we had to shift our expectations and follow the fluid course of events. There was little coordination on site. There was not any obvious animosity
or anger, but no shared understanding of the project either. The masons kept to themselves and to their own pace. We never worked in the cool of the evening. In this, there was little urgency and not much big energy, except among some of the villagers themselves.

We came to a different understanding of the successes of the project. Our building site was among the first to begin reconstruction, four months after the disaster. Visitors told us that this was the only reconstruction site in the area that had Sri Lankan locals working alongside westerners. By the time of our departure all thirty houses had been started. We came to appreciate this accomplishment as a greater success than completing just one. As we departed among hugs, tears and glasses of thick, sweet tea, we saw our role as that of a catalyst for both healing and reconstruction, and with that altered perspective understood our involvement as a great success.

We departed, of course, with much work left to do, from a construction site where we contributed little knowledge, had almost no input, and did not understand even the most basic of tasks, intervening in lives that had been through tragedies we couldn’t imagine. We didn’t get to start the project when we wanted to, didn’t accomplish our objective, and stopped with just a small percentage of the work completed. And we left behind friends and a place we had grown close to and had been a part of, a place with which future contact would be difficult (it was out of the range of mobile phone service and the mailing address was a city several kilometers away).

It was, we came to understand, enough to help begin, enough to complete one house foundation, and more than enough to be very sad when we departed.

4.5 Lesson 5: Shifting innovation

The architect Sheila Kennedy speaks of the “shifting geography of innovation.” In this, she challenges the widespread belief that we, in the developed West, innovate and give to or share our technology with those in developing economies and settings. She argues that a 1-2-3 (first world to third world) exchange fails because the innovation often cannot adapt to the local culture. [7]

Working alongside the masons, the local citizenry, and the Kalametiyyans shifted our perspectives. We learned by participating in their means and methods, which grew directly out of the place. We watched a mason lay out a foundation plan in twenty minutes with one piece of string—an assignment that two of our graduate students took two hours and numerous pieces of string to complete. We checked to make sure the top of the foundation was of a uniform height not with a laser or even a level, but with a simple garden hose filled with water. And our young, strong students did their best to match the digging skills of local men and women, but could not.
In this, we learned practical and technical lessons related to technique and local intelligence. Maybe more importantly, we learned humility, that “our” way is just one way, and might not always be the best way. In this, we found that a 3-2-1 flow of knowledge, from third world to first world, has much to offer. We learned, again, the need to listen. [8]

In one of our small architectural contributions, Tim suggested that a construction detail of the foundation needed further attention. Specifically, a metal “tie” was needed to mechanically join the granite blocks to the beam that rested on top of them. This was a detail not shown in the architect’s drawing and not being constructed by the masons. We telephoned the architect who said his office had forgotten to show the “tie.” Then, Wes instructed the masons on-site, without a word of shared language, to include such a “tie” in the future. In a sense, our “push back” improved the constructed quality of the houses. More importantly, it established the relevance of shared knowledge, of both following and questioning within the project.

5. Case Studies

Two recent projects suggest the ways in which our experiences in Kalametiya inform both our practices with students and our attempts to alter the ways in which we, the dominant group, understand the subordinate group.

5.1 Project 1: Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

Each summer the Department of Architecture at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia (Canada) runs a series of FreeLAB studios that must result in a full scale built construction of some type. As the name implies, the projects are largely determined by individual instructors who are invited from around the country and the world. Tim was invited to lead a FreeLAB in the summer of 2006, two years after participating in the reconstruction of Kalametiya.

The Light Sail Installation was intended to reveal the unique qualities of its site, located adjacent to the historic grain silos at the Halifax waterfront. The piece is composed of a grid of light reflectors salvaged from the site. In this, the work invests both the reflectors and the silos with a new life and reveals the beauty of the site itself. The reflectors are suspended from a custom fabricated steel frame and when activated by the breeze they pivot independently, creating a brilliant dance of light. The work is interactive--participants are able to both rotate the assembly and affect the projection of light through the screens and onto the massive wall of the grain silos.
Tim considers the result of the short (15-day) FreeLAB among the most successful of his design-build efforts with students, of which there are many. He found himself reflecting on how his experiences in Kalametiya might have influenced his approach to the project in Halifax:

On the long drive out to Halifax I “woke up” to the fact that I had no idea what I was going to build or where I was going to build it. I had a familiar tool—a 120-volt welder—in the back of the truck and a fair assortment of my own tools, something I could count on. I had never gone into a project feeling quite this exposed. I needed to lead but I also needed to be open to the flow of events. I needed to let go and follow. Had my experience in Kalametiya prepared me for this?

Prior to leaving for Canada I had discussed my work with Wes in a friendly conversation and he suggested I needed to have a “grand failure,” a comment I took in jest at the time but found myself thinking about often on the long drive to Nova Scotia. A grand failure? Letting go of control? Pushing boundaries? What exactly was he getting at?

Upon my arrival in Halifax (after a three-day drive) I found myself having dinner at the home of my hosts and meeting some of the other FreeLAB instructors (six labs run concurrently) for the first time. This dinner was my first stop in Halifax and the FreeLAB was to begin the following morning, lasting for just over two weeks. This is an ambitious schedule for a construction project of any kind. I intended to do a site-specific installation but had no idea what to build or where to build it. I had very little money for the construction. And I wanted to do something derivative of a place that I was visiting for the first time.

Over dinner I discovered that the other instructors did have specific ideas of what they would build. Most had external funding and some were familiar with the place. A grand failure? I thought to myself that Wes would be very pleased as I felt I had set myself up for just that.

To “not know” Halifax and FreeLAB was to see both the workshop and my work with the clarity of fresh eyes, new people, and a new place experienced for the first time. The short deadline, very limited funding, and negotiating within the bureaucracy of a new university created their own anxious pressure. Complementing these concerns were the luxury of complete focus and no distractions. There was just the project, the students, and the place. The temporary nature of the work intensified the experience and focus of the moment. In this sense,
to speak of “living now” is to understand that the completed project had a life of exactly one day. There was an opening, an event, and a bright short life full of magic, energy and pride. I left town the next day on a journey toward home over 1500 miles away. The Light Sail was dismantled and put into storage.

Had placing myself in that uncomfortable situation of not knowing, not planning, contributed to the project’s success? Does organizing a project to guarantee a good result in some ways constrain the potential for a great one? Could I have taken this chance prior to “letting go” in Kalametiya?

Finally, to write of the shifting geography of innovation, the Light Sail took its cues from the leftover, the derelict, the industrial backyard of the city, and in that ragged mix found beauty and elegance. The project began with an inventory of the discarded contents of an old warehouse, finding inspiration in the unlikely, in the “rubbish” of the place itself. We approached the project with a willingness to quietly listen and to learn from this unlikely place as well as a willingness to let the investigation and the process define the response. Shop technicians were consulted and became participants in the design of the project, even as they worked as enthusiastic facilitators from separate (competing) departments.

In retrospect, listening, including, and enabling were central to the success of the project. Were these lessons I had learned while sweating alongside the local masons in the dusty red earth under the hot sun of Kalametiya? One is never sure where prior knowledge ends and new knowledge begins, or where one may find beauty in the unexpected. The temporary nature of the project and the abstraction of distance and time allow one to be open in ways he or she might normally be closed. It’s hard to define what one takes from such events, but in the end I’ve discovered perhaps that the true magic lies in letting go.

5.2 Project 2: Flint, Michigan, USA

General Motors was founded in Flint one hundred years ago. The city and its worker-citizens rode the company’s rise to a position of global primacy. At its peak in the 1960s, Flint was home to 190,000 persons and 80,000 General Motors’ jobs, and prepared for a population of 250,000. Today, with the U.S. auto industry in free-fall, Flint’s population is at 120,000 and 17,000 GM jobs remain. No one is sure if the bottom has been reached or is even in sight.

As Flint shrinks, houses are abandoned. Comprehensive numbers are difficult to establish, but a demolition crew chief told Wes that 4,000 houses need to be torn down “today” and another 10,000 will need to be torn down in the future. Crews tear down two to seven houses every working day. The quantity of demolition waste produced in Flint is significant: 200 cubic yards of waste/house x 5 houses/day (+/-) x 5 work days/week x 52 weeks = 260,000 cubic yards/year. That’s equivalent to a 15-story building the size of a soccer field. Every year.
In 2006 Wes was commissioned to determine if it is possible to deconstruct houses in Flint so as to reduce, even slightly, the amount of waste produced when a house is torn down. Ultimately, in this radically extreme setting, three recommendations were made. The first, “soft strip,” suggested the need to pull elements off and out of the houses that were most easily removed—gutters, downspouts, handrails, aluminum siding, and more. [9]

Waking up in Flint is to be in a place with almost no hope—you’re a time traveler with no sense of time as there is no movement forward. To work in Flint, you have to let go of much of what was and is known. Living now, in Flint, is to acknowledge that the bottom has not been reached, that there are problems that can’t be solved, that one needs to be humble in order to understand the depth and breadth of the distress. Living now in Flint is also to engage house teardown processes that are well-practiced—thousands of houses have been torn down using essentially the same backhoes, fire hoses, large dump trucks, bulldozers, landfill, and people. Living in Flint today is also to run into untold numbers of liquor stores, squatters, unemployed persons, and others in distress. This is the “now” of a shrinking city. To work in Flint, today, as an architect is to have to redefine one’s sense of success. How does one “succeed” in such a setting? Can you find a place for your architectural knowledge? And Flint is not alone. Cities are shrinking throughout the Rust Belt in the United States, in the former Soviet Union, and in the older societies in Europe. In shifting to these places of innovation, issues arise that challenge our sense of responsibility and knowledge.

There was tremendous “push back” by the various actors. Too many abandoned houses, a well practiced and rough teardown process, limited funding to support teardown efforts, a desire to reduce landfill deliveries, scavengers and squatters, a lack of support from the State of Michigan, thousands of lost jobs, and more. Each, essentially, is part of a setting in which their combined “shove” overwhelms the efforts of any others.

6. Conclusions: New Modes of Practice and Design

To address the title of her own article “Can Architects be Socially Responsible?” Margaret Crawford replied: “[A]s the profession is presently constituted, no. Both the restricted practices and discourse of the profession have reduced the scope of architecture to two equally unpromising polarities: compromised practice or esoteric philosophies of inaction.” However, Crawford offered two avenues for further exploration: “existing material conditions rather than . . . idealistic projections of future technical capabilities” and “compelling stories about social needs” (such as the homeless, communities threatened by decay; elderly, poor, minority groups, and more). [10]
The projects profiled herein evidence significant overlap among Crawford’s proposals and the authors’ interests. “Existing material conditions” were central aspects of the works. “Compelling stories” were engaged both in the ways in which Wes and Tim, as Maxine Greene might say, were “wide-awake” and fully present themselves, and in the ways that local people assumed, expected, and demanded participation and presence. [11]

In this version of immersive learning, constructional projects are grounded in local building cultures, immediate settings, and real lives; these moments are conceived as learning venues for all.

That said, basic questions arise. Who is the building educator? Who is the building student? Who is the building community? Absent “answers,” even as old and new concerns for power and position swirl around us, our search for new modes of practice and design will continue.

References

[1] For the complete email, see “Email from Co-director CAPAsia Wes Janz,” http://www.bsu.edu/up/article/0,1370,185723-13030-31137,00.html

[2] The authors thank Nihal Perera for his contributions to this paper.


[4] For more on CapAsia, see: http://www.capasia.net/


