

More School

Integrating School, Life & City

In, out and around, this studio will explore the school as a more active and integrated part of the public realm. Given their critical role and physical presence in the cities, schools have the potential to evolve from isolated educational silos into more porous environments to interact, learn, and generate meaningful connections in the city for all.

SHARED GROUND

In cities across the U.S. public schools are among the largest landowners with only a fraction of them providing access to a wider public to their schoolyards and facilities, remaining locked and under-used when school is out. This represents a latent potential for school grounds to serve as an urban resource for free, safe, close-to-home places to interact indoors and out in a city that increasingly lacks them. A form of social infrastructure we sorely need, not only to provide basic services, but to further improve the quality of life, access to nature, health, and well-being of a broader urban community.

UNCERTAINTY & CHANGE

Demographic shifts in the postwar years of the 20th century lead to a rapid expansion of educational infrastructure and experimentation with building form and pedagogical models. Decades later, a reversal of these pressures followed, resulting in school closures and disinvestment that are still at play in many regions and cities across the country. Future economic, demographic and social shifts are inevitable – they are the only certainty we can count on. If we are to invest resources to build, this reality reveals the need for an architectural response that allows for future change and reinvention.

We will look on ways to do this over time. Can schools be designed to both expand and contract, or be repurposed entirely? Can a hybridized public facility allow for organic evolution and to better address the needs of children as well as a wider urban community? What design strategies can transform educational facilities into a more resilient, flexible and ultimately more lively social infrastructure?



Montessori School, Delft - Herman Hertzberger, 1960

SCHOOL COMMONS

This studio will focus on designing for a new type of educational facility that extends its program to double as a community hub for the neighborhood. Revisiting, reinventing and expanding on historical examples such as the Impington Village Colleges, Frank Manley's community schools, and John Dewey's lab schools, students will devise contemporary alternatives for learning and civic life. Inside and out, environments designed for this community school will embrace the rhythms of the daily life of the neighborhood by providing spaces for the broader community to meet, work, gather, play, socialize as well as learn. A model for urban infrastructure that can become a place of true social and cultural synthesis in the city.

If schools evolve to encompass an ever wider range of circumstances, they must develop strategies that allow a programmatic mix not only to work but to thrive. To this end, the studio will explore form and structure at various scales, and against the measure of our different senses, as a means to deliver spaces able to recast the school as a place of community and exchange.

Inherent conflicts and contradictions will immediately arise. Issues between the public and the private, between young and old, between silence and noise, between safety and control, and between the communal and the individual, are all concerns among many to be negotiated and addressed. In this spirit, students will design multivalent structures that deliver a wide range of spatial qualities and scales, from the very open to fully enclosed, from light to dark, from loud to quiet, from small to large. Working extensively through physical models, photographs, and drawings, students will devise a new spatial ecology for the school.