CHAPTER 7

A Cross-Disciplinary Trailblazer: Creative Village Studio

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Between 1992 and 2006 the University of New South Wales ran a cross-disciplinary and cross-faculty studio known as Creative Village. Initiated by the Arts Council of New South Wales, the model enabled community representatives to collaborate with professional artists, designers, architects and landscape architects to develop proposals for environmental and amenity improvements to small regional towns. On the ACNSW’s panel of experts were specialists from two universities. Those from UNSW’s Faculty of the Built Environment and the College of Fine Arts determined to develop a cross-faculty studio with interdisciplinary student teams operating in parallel with the professionals. When funding for the ACNSW program ceased, university staff familiar with the studio continued to develop the model when approached by community groups to assist with ideas development.

This case study reflects on some of the ways the teaching team developed skills for cross-disciplinary collaboration within the Creative Village studio. We re-examine how the studio setting fostered meaningful knowledge exchange within the multi-disciplinary teams, and look at skills they developed to communicate ideas to each other, the community, and their peers. Students were encouraged to think across concepts of community, collaboration, environmental sustainability and place as they listened to community members talk about needs and opportunities before developing integrated proposals for town discussion and implementation. This paper is a reflection on a pioneering model of cross-disciplinary teaching between art, landscape architecture, architecture and design at UNSW, and its legacy today.

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s the Arts Council of New South Wales (ACNSW, now Regional Arts NSW) sought to develop a model for regional town improvements by encouraging community collaboration with professional artists, designers, architects and landscape architects. Named Creative Village, the program was intended to address the social, economic and design concerns of each town selected for the program, and provide it with design solutions to specific needs. Local people took responsibility for implementing any proposed changes for their town. Included on the panel of experts were staff from the Faculty of the Built Environment (now BE) and the College of Fine Arts (COFA, now UNSW Art & Design), University of New
South Wales (UNSW), who sought to develop a cross-faculty studio with interdisciplinary teams of students operating in parallel with the professionals. When funding for the ACNSW program ceased, university staff familiar with the studio continued to develop the model when approached by community groups to assist with ideas development. Always marginal, or certainly alternative, to the core disciplines involved, the Creative Village studio was nonetheless something of a trailblazer for the participating staff and students who, but for this studio, would have had little contact with the needs of diverse communities in Sydney and regional NSW. The studio, which ran from 1991-2006, had a number of consistent attributes, yet it is also true that it demonstrated remarkable flexibility as it evolved over time.

**METHODOLOGY**

We begin our analysis with an historiographic analysis of the development of the Creative Village model and its links with shifting national and international trends. This is followed by a closer examination of institutional forces that enabled the development of the studio. Attention is then given to explaining how cross-disciplinary collaboration and innovation were enabled. We draw on archival documents relating to the project as a whole as well as student-centred components. To illustrate how the core values of the project played out in the classroom, we look at how one student team worked at developing visual tools that enabled them to work together meaningfully, and to communicate their ideas back to the community. We contacted former students from one team, now established mid-career professionals, to capture their long term reflections and identify any legacies from the Creative Village experience. We also accessed a 1997 questionnaire to pre-1996 students, professionals and town representatives, which gauged critical feedback and perceived benefits within their early professional careers. Finally we evaluate the legacy of the project in relevant literature and critically reflect on the challenges faced by staff and students.

**BACKGROUND TO CREATIVE VILLAGE**

The Creative Village studio was developed in response to regional and national debates within the design and community arts sectors. In the 1980s a series of developments within the Australia Council saw specialised cross-disciplinary programs, such as Art & Working Life in 1982 and the Community Cultural Development Unit in 1987, designed to enable artist-community collaboration. Then in September 1989 the Victorian Ministries for the Arts and for Planning and Environment, Melbourne City Council, the Australia Council, the Commission for the Future and the Australian National Commission for UNESCO teamed up to run The Creative City symposium in Melbourne. National and international experts from various cultural and design disciplines showed how cities and precincts could be revitalised through coordinated and incremental design interventions. Evidently, when cross-disciplinary art and design teams worked with a community to understand the local histories, environment, places that mattered to people, social tensions, needs and
opportunities, they were more likely to develop proposals that were seen to be grounded, realisable, and distinctive (see Yenken et al, 1988: 597-667). Sue Clifford from the UK’s Common Ground insisted that ‘you can make your places from whatever is there’ (in ibid: 626). Robert McNulty, from the US-based Partners for Liveable Places, outlined his model for an ‘economics of amenity’ whereby the skills of cultural planners, artists, architects, landscape architects and the local communities feed into innovative designs (ibid: 614-624). Joan Winch, an Aboriginal health worker, urged Australian design teams to consult Aboriginal communities, not least because ‘we always take a holistic approach to living’ (ibid: 656). It was a heady cocktail of ideas for transforming cities by thinking creatively about public space.

Together these ideas challenged the familiar models of town interventions, which were often centred on the refurbishment of a heritage building, a makeover for the main street, or a community arts mural in a public space. The ACNSW seized the opportunity to radically rethink how it could service the cultural needs of people in non-metropolitan NSW. In late 1990 it established a Creative Village Committee to devise a model for enabling community-informed cross-disciplinary design teams to look at the needs of the town as a whole. Mindful of the economic and time constraints facing rural communities, the design model aimed to be consultative, collaborative and responsive to the built and natural environment (Colman & Zanetti, 1994, p.14). Unlike the Main Street program, which targeted the commercial revitalisation of town centres, usually delivered by city-based architects, Creative Village offered multi-disciplinary teams to work with the community in addressing ‘the local environment and opportunities to improve it’ (Dickinson, 1993). Additionally, artists were seen as an important part of the mix since many had experience liaising with others in community and public art projects, and they could look afresh at the problem-solving imperatives of designers. Over the next year the Committee devised a system that began with selecting towns, establishing art and design teams, running workshops for all participants, and helping organise town visits for the team to hear concerns, observe the lie of the land, and develop a brief to be ratified by the community. Roughly six weeks later the team would return to present their proposals and advise on priorities and implementation. Proposals were to be ‘owned’ as much by the community as by the design team. As seen in the submission to the twin towns of Harden Murrumburrah (see Figure 7.1), many schemes had both precision and flair that captured the imagination and contributed in measured ways to design solutions.
At exactly the same time the Australia Council developed CEAD – Community, Environment, Art and Design – in order to stimulate integrated and innovative approaches to designs in the built and natural environments. There was also a burgeoning literature on new modes of public art and urban and environmental design that were distinctive because their responsiveness to social and environmental issues encapsulated a sense of place (Winnikoff 1992; LM Communication Pty Ltd 1996; Kins 1998; De Lorenzo 2000).

One other element emerged as vitally important to the Creative Village program. Because the Committee had trouble finding sufficient design practitioners with community experience, it was decided to run a studio for students in architecture, landscape architecture, design and art so that a new generation would have some skills in community consultation and cross-disciplinary design. The Committee included academics from two universities. Those from architecture at the University of Sydney were proactive in developing courses that moved ‘beyond a narrow perception of aesthetics to socially responsible design processes’ (Fotheringham et al, 1994, pp. 32-3). But it was those from the University of New South Wales, especially in the first instance Helen Armstrong in Landscape Architecture, who took up the challenge to develop a cross faculty studio that worked alongside the ACNSW Creative Village teams. Prior to Creative Village, students in art, architecture, landscape and design were used to single-discipline studios with an emphasis on individualistic design. The opportunity to work in multi-disciplinary teams, learn techniques of community consultation and gain a deeper understanding of both rural and complex urban cultures, was appealing.
A CONDUCIVE UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT

The early 1990s at the UNSW provided a propitious environment for the Creative Village program. Although the university was originally established with an emphasis on science and engineering, over time it also had developed creative arts areas such as music, drama and film studies. In addition, inspired by C.P. Snow’s theories of The Two Cultures (Snow, 1959), namely art and science, the university had a reputation for its General Studies program that required undergraduate students to take elective subjects outside their discipline-based faculties. With the entry of the faculty of art and design in 1990 the university increased its encouragement of the creative arts, setting up a reference group linking academics across the university interested in the potential benefits of collaboration (Beck, 1996). The early 1990s also saw UNSW, through the efforts of COFA, acquire a studio at the Cité des Arts in Paris, an internationally-recognised gesture by the university to embrace the arts.

This was a time of relative freedom in the development of initiatives in the content and delivery of subjects. With the support of the Heads of Architecture (John Ballinger) and Landscape Architecture (James Weirick) and the Dean of COFA (Professor Ken Reinhard), a combined subject available to eligible students across both faculties was established. An unusual component was the cross-disciplinary team work that put the needs and opportunities of the community at the very centre of the project. Although a mixture of individual and group projects was common in design and architecture, individual submissions were usually required of art students. The really radical departure from the norm in the Creative Village studio was that no one could guarantee that an architecture student would design a structure or a painting student present a painting. Although there were some bureaucratic challenges, such as the very diverse program structures and timetables, there was never any doubt that approval for this innovative subject suggested a level of institutional trust given to the team of academics supporting the program.

Fortunately for the development of the Creative Village studio, staff involved took responsibility for its operation unconstrained by more recent changes in the institutional culture which require a multi-tiered approach to the signing off of safeguards within Occupational Health and Safety. It would now be extremely difficult to informally transport groups of students into remote country towns and billet them with willing, but not previously scrutinised, residents. Current ethical requirements for preliminary disclosure of any interaction with individuals outside the university, if rigidly applied, would cripple the kind of extensive (and often unplanned and unstructured) consultation with townspeople that took place during site visits. All participants were expected to exercise mutual care and responsibility and, as perhaps luck would have it, there were no problems or complaints. Of course, as time went on and ethics approval procedures were introduced, the studio staff had the wherewithal to meet those requirements.

For the first four years of the studio, the university partnered with the ACNSW and, with the exception of the first year, when students were incorporated into the professional teams, student-only teams typically ran parallel to those of professional artists and designers. One professional and one student team was sent to each town, with typically five towns being addressed by the studio in a year. Students, along with
the professionals and community representatives from the towns, attended workshops run by the ACNSW. They then travelled to the town to consult with people, observed the town and the wider environment, and assisted in drawing up a community brief and having it ratified. Back at the university they developed design proposals before returning to the towns to present and defend their ideas. Meanwhile the teaching staff set various assessable tasks, some individual others necessarily shared, concluding with a team-based presentation to a panel of experts. After the ACNSW ceased to be involved, the studio only ran at the invitation of a community or interest group. Most of the subsequent studios were in the wider Sydney region.

The significance of student involvement was important. Communities had the benefit of enthusiastic students learning to listen to real needs so as to come up with creative ideas for consideration. Students were given an experience approximating a real life scenario where they had to help refine the brief and work alongside others with complementary skills. The studio also brought together teaching staff across faculties, thus establishing a model for later refinement and adaptation.

**CROSS-DISCIPLINARY AND INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION**

There was no cross-disciplinary blueprint for those teaching in the subject. Inspired by the projects and believing in the value of educating students for a world in need of integrated designs responsive to cultural and environmental issues, they invented a program that essentially adapted the Creative Village schema to an amalgam of the disciplinary-based studios. Advice was sought from an expert about building productive and happy teams, with a variety of techniques being used allowing students to self-select teams, each with the required number of disciplines. They also kept abreast of national and international currents in urban design, place-making, community arts, environmental art and design, theories of social equity across gender and ethnicity – all of which enabled the studio to shift attention from the ego to the public realm. While the community was always the studio catalyst, the teaching staff was never in any doubt that the studio had to be a rich educational experience, one that expanded the mind and heart with big-picture imperatives. At the same time it had to hone personal (and employable) skills in productive team dynamics, and foster new insights into future professional practice.

The first task of the studio was to form the teams. Each group had members of disparate disciplines and once these were formed and expectations discussed, they were usually sent away to engage in an ice-breaking activity before returning to the studio for a show-and-tell. In those early days the internet was not what it is today, so students were required to collect information on a wide range of issues and instrumentalities likely to be of significance to the town, and they were encouraged to consult this studio resource to help them argue for the viability of their design. For the duration of the studio both academics and students had to negotiate unfamiliar areas implicit in the culture of each discipline. Initially internal tasks were allocated according to the dominant subgroup’s perception of the capabilities of the other members. Students were sometimes surprised to realise the degree of proto-professional enculturation that would assume only architects could design structures,
landscape architects landscapes, and so on. There was little to be gained by harbouring limited concepts of what other practitioners do. Over time, the class came to realise that each individual has different capacities and the potential to contribute to a project as a whole, even if working in unknown territory. Students gained insight into common strengths across the group in areas as diverse as problem solving three-dimensional conceptualisation and representation, and often into the strengths or weaknesses within their own practice.

Appreciation for particular strengths and skills, common to cross-disciplinary teams, meant that many teams were poised to transform into interdisciplinary ones. Lattuca (2002, p. 712) quotes a definition of interdisciplinary learning as: ‘common effort on a common problem with continuous intercommunication among participants from the different disciplines’. There were elements within the structure and rationale for the Creative Village studio that enabled an interdisciplinary process within both the student teams and the staff team.

Creative Village studios were always run in response to an invitation from a community or similar organisation. These invitations never came with an explicit brief; it was always the task of the student teams to consult with stakeholders to find out what the problems were, to think about them in relation to their own site studies and research into a broad but targeted range of literature from scholars and policy makers, and present their proposed design brief to stakeholders for ratification before proceeding with the design development. Another way of putting it is that the design brief could only be realised through the collaboration of the team and the community. Not only did this process engage the students with the project, but the many research tasks needed to get to the starting point of design development meant that teams had to hone skills of initiative, listening, trust, commitment and ownership of the end result, all of which worked in favour of team cohesion. The design propositions were then developed and refined by the teams before presenting them back to the community for further refinement, adaptation and implementation.

Generally, those teams committed to interdisciplinary work were the most productive and happy. Even so, it was made clear from the outset that the final, self-reflection, task, one that required each student to evaluate the strength of their own contribution to the team, would expose the boaster, the laggard and the honest assessor, and would be used, if necessary to vary the group mark. So where necessary, marks were varied within a team and, once again, we recall no complaints.

THE STUDIO EXPERIENCE

Typically, all the students were involved in the entire process – research, analysis, brief development, and design resolution; they understood the issues and were able to devise shared visual tools that were comprehensible to themselves and to others.

Within cross-disciplinary design teams not only is it important to develop a visual language that works for all participants, but the final submission also has to clearly communicate the ideas to a lay clientele. Practically, this often meant that students were encouraged to annotate designs so that the elements and arguments could be grasped by the interested viewer.
Until Creative Village, most students had worked only in studios with their own discipline, occasionally in teams. Of course not all teams jelled, and sometimes students expressed frustration with the parallel professional teams, for one reason or another. In a 1997 survey students from classes in 1992-1995 were asked about the strengths and weaknesses of the studio. Whatever its failings, all found something positive to say about the studio experience. One landscape architect student learnt to “Collaborate with other disciplines; Acknowledge…many approaches; make compromises for a more balanced solution to the design problems; [receive] guidance given by the professionals to the student participants”. An art theory student “enjoyed working with older, more experienced [professionals]. People who had alternative views. The strengths for me were the diversity of knowledge brought together”. And an architecture student enjoyed “the studio’s level of involvement with the full act of design – not the heroic but the process of client consultation, assessing the realities of a situation, preparing a realistic plan of action and then designing a solution to fit this context”.

The results could be seen in the proposals. In Coonabarabran, for example, responses to community needs and those of the nearby Siding Springs Observatory resulted in detailed sketches and scaled drawings within an overarching proposal that captured the complementary skills of the art, landscape architecture, design and architecture students, (refer to Figure: 7.2). Annotated designs and images proved an excellent communication device for all.

Figure 7.2: Students with their annotated and montaged design for Coonabarabran. The design included an Aboriginal-designed path, solar lit roller blade area, a kiosk, a performance area, the retention of old buildings and new plantations.

THE JUNEE STUDIO

From 1991-2006, there were about twenty-five Creative Village sites. Each required teams to collaborate across disciplines and communicate their ideas to each other and the wider community. When the collaboration was successful, innovative ideas were galvanised into bold yet grounded proposals readily understood by the community. The Junee project has been chosen to demonstrate how one team responded to the particularities of the place and the team.

Situated on the south west slopes of NSW and once a vibrant mid-point on the rail link between Sydney and Melbourne, Junee was reeling from massive cut backs to its rail services; the extensive rail precinct in the town centre was all but dead, unemployment was double the national average, and the first private jail in NSW had just opened. Over 150 people surveyed prior to the town visit identified issues and contributed suggestions, so the task of the professional and students teams was to consolidate these and other suggestions into a coherent proposal for town renewal. The town endorsed a brief that prioritised environmental sustainability as the key driver for change in the town centre and the wider region.

Figure 7.3: Junee concept design over map, using sketches, logos, miniature models, photographs and concept images to draw attention to key elements in the town.

The big breakthrough in terms of finding a meaningful visual language for the diverse teams and the community came early during the five day consultation when the teams constructed rudimentary town models. The first of these was a blown-up map of the town, which served as a base for sketches, photos, concept models and graphics that served as a storyboard for the town project (refer to Figure: 7.3). Whipped up in no time and designed to be interactive, it allowed the design teams to understand the town and the townspeople to understand the emerging design issues. The landscape architecture student recalls that “everyone had a notably different approach in terms of appreciation of the issues as well as how to move to design in response to them” (Pers. Corres., 24th June 2016). Whereas the Design students “had a great ability to derive inspiration from a variety of sources (whether it was theatre, sculpture, art, built form) and see how that could trigger ideas”, the architecture students “had a distinct ability with model making and tackling built form ideas in an evocative, yet precise and 3-Dimensional manner” (ibid.) (Refer to Figure: 7.4). The detailed model of the railway station and town centre was augmented by the professional team with a topographic model (refer to Figure: 7.5) situating the town within the wider geographical setting and showing broad landscape proposals. This latter model came back to the town with more developed environmentally-conscious designs, the most significant of which was the serpent, a protective ring of indigenous plantings suggested by Robyn Coughlan, the Aboriginal artist on the professional team, and incorporating a pioneering permaculture proposal for a town setting (Refer to Figure: 7.6).
Figure 7.5: Junee topographical model by professional team. From Junee Report 1993.

Figure 7.6: Masterplan for Junee, showing the proposed protective ‘serpent’ to be realised by community planting, by the professional design team: Steve Kennedy (architect), Robyn Coughlan (artist) and Gavin Wilson (landscape architect). From Junee Report 1993.
LEGACIES

In her critical overview of ‘Learning Interdisciplinarity’, Lisa Lattuca (2002: 736) found that such courses ‘created a facilitating context for interdisciplinary thinking, which later found expression in conference papers, journal articles and books. The interdisciplinary course was not designed to serve as an incubator for interdisciplinary research, but it did’. This is most definitely the case with Creative Village. In the early years of the project, when the ACNSW was involved and made use of long-established networks with rural towns, the rural presses and television stations carried stories about the various town visits by team members to harness data and present ideas. Michael Dickenson in the Sydney Morning Herald and Jim Colman in the Sydney Review also promoted the goals of the ACNSW in particular. Eventually, Jim Colman and Peter Zanetti published Creative Village: Rural Town and Environmental Design Manual (Colman & Zanetti 1994) to assist rural towns wanting to instigate similar programs. However much of the literature generated by the program was presented and published by the academics involved. Analyses of the wider program and the teaching studio in particular were presented to diverse audiences of architects, artists, landscape architects, urban planners, art historians and public artists, throughout Australia and overseas (Armstrong 1993; Armstrong 1999a; De Lorenzo, Ashburn & Armstrong 1994). Much of the literature provided critical histories and evaluations. Theoretical frameworks stretched well beyond pedagogy to embrace contemporary Australian cultural history and theory. Many addressed specific environmental and social issues at the heart of the studio, for example, opportunities for renewal at the adjacent towns Harden Murrumburrah and disadvantage and racism in Bourke and Walgett. Lessons from the varied and innovative solutions for environmental problems developed within Creative Village have even been referenced in a major study on water management in the US (Goldstein et al, 2004: Appendix C). From the mid-1990s the studio model was also adapted for urban precincts in Sydney, including a project for the rethinking of a public precinct near Liverpool station, environmental repair at Manly, cultural recovery and renewal with the Gandangara people at Heathcote, and the rehabilitation and cultural renewal of the heavily polluted Alexandra Canal precinct.

Community and environmentally-informed studios were being developed in other tertiary courses around Australia (Fotheringham 1994; Newmarch, 1997). Helen Armstrong, who transferred to Brisbane in the mid 1990s, continued to be the most pro-active scholar analysing the studio experience in terms of the design studio as research – (Armstrong 1999b; Armstrong 2000; Armstrong 2003) – a persistence that contributed significantly to transformations within universities recognising certain modes of practice and teaching as research. When the Emergent Paradigms in Design Education conference was held in Sydney in 1997, speakers from Canada, Chili, England and Scotland, the United States, New Zealand and most major cities in Australia, pooled their knowledge on issues of sustainability, collaboration and community especially, if not exclusively, within design studios (De Lorenzo, Laurence & Samuels, 1997). It revealed the extent to which so many thinkers and teachers were grappling with ways to address urgent environmental problems through community engagement and collaborative team work.
Of more importance than the literature was the impact on the lives of the participants. Did they enter their profession with an expectation of more collaborative and integrated art and design practice than their peers? From the 1997 student survey we know that the majority of respondents acknowledged the impact of the studio on their own design philosophy, with one adding that it made her “very open to multidisciplinary design”, seeing “the need for excellent communication” and to reflect on “when to be firm or flexible in personal ideas”, with another recognising his “thinking widely and long term [by having] consideration of the end user”.

Well over twenty years later, participants were more articulate and passionate when contacted recently by the authors. One design student, now a professor of urban design and landscape architecture initially responded with the realisation that it is now “very clear that a whole bunch of stuff that I do and the reasons that I do it came out of that studio. It was a cracker” (Mark Jacques, 17 June 2016). Another, who now works as a storyboard artist in Hollywood, remembers the studio as one she “enjoyed immensely …. The ability to work a range of collaborators on creative projects has served me well since… [allowing her to understand ] constraints and work harmoniously amongst these disparate collaborators to create the best realization of the director’s vision” (Nikki Di Falco, 22 June 2016). The landscape architecture student recalls studio as “one of the highlights” of his undergraduate career. “The multidisciplinary student teams were instrumental in this, as everyone had a notably different approach in terms of appreciation of the issues as well as how to move to design in response to them” (Steven Hammond, 24th June 2016). And one of the architecture students, now an academic, recalls that “Creative Village brought us face to face with diverse techniques of representation – of recording, describing, formulating and explaining. It was through the adjacency and combinations of diverse representational techniques that new modes of design thinking and production emerged.” (Maryam Gusheh, 17th June 2016). Mark Jacques’s recollection is probably worth quoting in full because although it cannot be construed as a typical outcome, it encapsulates the goals better than any course outline would have dared suggest:

I blame Junee. That studio was the end of an idea I had about what I was going to do after study (I quite fancied photography since you ask) and the beginning of some other thing. That other thing emerged out of a series of wonderfully uncomfortable Junee experiences that still itch at my career.

The Creative Village studio was the first time that I’d ever worked directly with other disciplines and the first time that I’d met a landscape architect. And it was an underwhelming, Peggy Lee kind of thing - Is that all there is? Is that all there is to landscape architecture? I became preoccupied with the gap between what that particular discipline promised and what its tools actually were to the point where now, I find myself a card-carrying registered landscape architect. The doubt is still there, but now I’m paid to prod it. This was true looking over the fence at the other disciplines too – the grass was
never always greener on their side. Each profession had its limits and its unquestioned orthodoxies. My version of multidisciplinary working is now about ways to describe and invert those orthodoxies – to get them out of the way and to get to an idea.

The CV studio was the first time that I’d worked with a multi-headed, multi-opinionated group of stakeholders and collaborators. It was a deeply annoying experience at the time – people kept getting in the way of the neat resolution. Seeing the work of the different studios and subsequent work of my peers (much of it an ode to the neat resolution) made me realise that in fact, the best parts of the work and the best behaviours of each discipline were brought out by contestation rather than splendid isolation. Pure work, the work without contingency, was thin and anaemic. Work that had been charged through contest, that had a mongrel kind of energy was the work that could hold its own in a messy world.

The third realization was that the Academics in the studio seemed to have more fun. They dressed better, understood coffee and read fiction. The professionals were always a little ruffled and mumbled a lot about billing and insurances. This was a portent to my future life as both fractional academic and owner of a design practice. Negotiating the two roles became an extension of the understandings above - purity is stifling. In breaching the two worlds of practice and the university, there might be something to keep one's mind alive. Indeed, the combination of fiction and insurances is an intoxicating one.

The final and in some ways most tactile souvenir from the CV was the understanding that the convention of the plan had no traction in Junee. The people of the town couldn’t read the plan and you couldn’t win an argument with your team mates by producing one. It was the model that carried the idea, carried the argument and carried the day. Truth be told, I already knew this, but Creative Villages convinced me to turn that knowledge into an operation. My subsequent work habitually deploys the model as a tool. Junee also taught us all that the best and most unified team can come apart on the decision on how to model trees. Trees almost did us in.

In retrospect, it is both a relief and slightly terrifying to say that the single experience of the Creative Village studio utterly transformed my professional life and contained the germs and ashes of ideas, irritations and behaviours that I still engage with on a daily basis. I’m profoundly grateful for the opportunity to have done it. I blame Junee (Personal Correspondence. 1st July, 2016).

Disciplinary silos within the university also began to crack. In the early 1990s both the built environment and art and design faculties were multi-schooled but with
virtually no collaboration between disciplines. Creative Village helped change that, and the staff involved relished a new dimension to collegiality. Before long, Built Environment commenced its multi-disciplinary Masters of Urban Design and Development (MUDD), and later Studio X was launched between BE, COFA and Engineering. Today, many students in each of the now single-schooled faculties of BE and UNSW Art & Design are more exposed to cross-disciplinary teaching experiences. For example, digital media now blurs previous boundaries between photography, video, art, and many design disciplines across both faculties. The spirit of working with outside agencies, such as the City of Sydney, on both design and heritage studies, has also continued.

**CONCLUSION**

Creative Village was not the only cross-disciplinary studio in the country, but the distinctive elements of the studio – usually 4 disciplines, working with the community, developing a design brief, and figuring out ways to return with comprehensive and coherent proposals for the community - was never formulaic and always demanded creative thinking within the teams and the studio as a whole. The question always was: given this unprecedented set of problems and this particular team, what can we do to develop viable and strategic ideas that will assist the community to address the problems and enhance the place? In that sense it was perpetually innovative, for it required the students – and staff – to think beyond their disciplinary borders and engage with a broader context of shared problem-solving. This shared focus allowed cross-disciplinary teams to coalesce into interdisciplinary ones. Quinlan et al (2010, p.1) quote research claiming that interdisciplinary collaborative learning, as opposed to ‘discipline specificity’, equips students for leadership roles in their professions. That may well have been true for Creative Village, but it aspired to exceed even those goals by cultivating a spirit of communitarian entrepreneurship.

**PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Working with outside organisations and in real locations gives a sense of *real politik* to the exercise and drives students to perform to their best.
- Listening to others and exercising initiative consolidates team work.
- Encouraging all team members to propose ideas across the whole project, and not feel constrained to act only within their areas of developing expertise, brings greater cohesion to the exercise.
- Forging relationships with the community is important, but educational goals remain paramount.
- Devising clear and creative visual tools can strengthen the proposal and team dynamics, and ensure communication of the central concepts to wider audiences.
Incorporating digital tools in the mix facilitates communications within the team and with other parties. Diverse community members can readily access design proposals and supporting documentation.

At assessment time, brief colleagues so they appreciate the need for flexible visuals tools that exceed any one discipline’s conventions.

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