

# WHY START A SCHOOL?

Krabstadt Education Center  
Ewa Einhorn, Jeuno JE Kim &  
Karolin Meunier

---

KRABSTADT EDUCATION CENTER (KEC) IS A FICTIONAL  
SCHOOL BY ARTISTS EWA EINHORN, JEUNO JE KIM AND  
KAROLIN MEUNIER.



1. Think about your own education spaces.

What rooms did you know well and which less well?  
What do you remember?  
What do you forget?

How did you move through the different spaces?  
Which parts of the school did you not see, or didn't  
have access to, or weren't aware of previously, and  
who had access to those places?  
What role did power and hierarchy play?  
What were the written and unwritten rules of the  
school building?

2. Write and/or sketch the spaces you remember from your own education where you had a positive or productive learning experience. It can be the building as a whole or a specific detail inside. (15-18 mins)

Describe the space, its physical attributes, location,  
etc.

Describe the activity that took place in the space.  
Describe the context.

3. Divide into groups of three and share in the group what you have written/sketched. Try to collectively identify what are similar/dissimilar aspects of what makes a good/productive learning environment and find common ground. (18 mins)

4. Come back together into one big group. Present to everyone a summary of what was discussed and the experience of doing the exercise/reflection. Listen to each other.
5. Select one of the KEC spaces listed below and take over/define that space with elements from the first two exercises. (20 mins)

Stuck Cafeteria—for break-centered learning

No-Gravity Room

Worry Room

The Dean's Office—near the pool since she is half-seal, half-human

Admin Floor of Dead-End Corridors

6. Reconvene in the big group and put up/share the results. (15 mins)

---

Krabstadt is a transmedia project by Ewa Einhorn & Jeuno JE Kim occupying positions in popular media. It consists of animated films, digital games, online and onsite performances, public art works, printed matter, academic texts, and an art school. The Krabstadt Education Center (KEC) was founded in collaboration with Karolin Meunier. KEC participated in Jakarta Biennale 2021: ESOK, Changwon Sculpture Biennial 2024: The Silent Apple; guest-edited an issue of PARSE Journal in 2022, held »Open House« performances at Charlottenborg Kunsthall, Oslo Kunstforening among others.

The workshop was part of Field School Berlin: Educational Architecture: Questions for Learning Spaces organized by Maximiliane Baumgartner and Karina Nimmerfall (University of Cologne), and Anja Steidinger (Hochschule für Bildende Künste Hamburg) on June 1, 2022 at feldfünf in Berlin.

The drawing exercise is closely linked to the narrative of Krabstadt Education Center (KEC). We developed it for a 2-hour workshop with a group of 18 students. We started the class with an introduction to our own collaboration and some of its actual activities. It was important for us to invite the participants to reflect on their own experiences with learning spaces but to also embed the exercise within the fictional KEC universe: the school's ideas, its building and learning facilities, its staff and students. Our text contribution will provide some insights into the project and can either be seen as additional source material to the exercise or as an account of how we try to approach unresolved questions and feelings related to education at KEC.





Krabstadt is a small town located somewhere in the Arctic where all the Nordic countries have sent their unwanted problems, people, and creatures. The town is populated by the long-term unemployed, asylum seekers, immigrants, feminists, those with too many overdue bills. Recently, Krabstadt has absorbed an influx of unemployed artists with PhD's, burnt-out artist-teachers/teacher-artists, and institutionally stuck creatures. The local Krabstadt government seized this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and opened an Education Center to push Krabstadt to the forefront of education.

## The Knot in the Form of a Pretzel

The decision to become part of a school within a fictional framework, the animated city of Krabstadt, means that every activity and every report is already compromised by its fantastical elements. The moment one enters the narrative, different characters and customs ask for attention. The ways one usually does or explains or doesn't do things turn into unstable and insufficient tools. In some moments Krabstadt is the appropriate place to deliberately get stuck. How did I end up there?

267 The reflection of educational issues has repeatedly caused my thoughts to take the shape of a complicated knot. Whether this is triggered by the situated seriousness, the organizational impulses or the good intentions that can be connected to both institutionalized as well as self-organized learning environments, any of my attempts to spell out teaching concepts, a guideline, or even just a wish list for the school that is yet to come always seems to appear as entwined diagrams. They want to make sense yet turn into an inaccessible cluster of arrows and keywords. Nothing is in order, nothing is moving, none of their loose ends manage to hold the many-folded expectations.

It feels like standing in front of one of the closed doors in the dead-end corridor on the 6th floor, where KEC's administration is located and most students are prohibited from entry due to virus control; where you learn that the best way to reach the admin is to first call, follow up via email, and then text them. You think, how annoying! And you think this is all because of your incapacity to envision the broader mission of a school nor handle its architecture. But then it is also a good opportunity to talk with others who hang out in the corridor and hear about their experiences. You find out that it's never easy to enter a building in Krabstadt, you need to be of a certain age, speak a particular language, be the right kind of feminist, recite a poem, or find other clues before the doors open. From this hallway chatter you learn that you've apparently got to cross a mountain of anger, boredom, and exhaustion before you find out what kind of school would be desired. There was even a plan to set up a sort of monastery with a garden for post-teaching teachers on the undeveloped patch of land next to the main building of KEC. These conversations can go on forever, or at least until the coffee is lukewarm. They don't help to unravel the knot but give it a new twist: seen through the lens of urban development and architecture, each complaint demands a new room that mirrors the problem it doesn't solve.

The KEC logo shows the building complex from the outside. It's the kind of architecture that seems to change its shape each time you look at it. It was designed through a process of remembering different kinds of learning environments. Some details are clearly recognizable while others are fantasies or black holes. There is one student who regularly gives tours of the school and explains the function of its various rooms. The first stop is the No-Gravity Room, a space for online classes located on the 6th floor. The room is a calibrated pressure chamber and the screens are based on e-ink technology. Because the light and temperature are adjusted for distant and multi-locational learning, students never experience online fatigue there. The Borges Library has a collection of rare dictionaries such as the Volcanish dictionary, which helps you communicate with volcanoes who do not speak English. It also contains dictionaries for Danish, Treeish, Snowish, Stoneish, and Riverish so that everyone can communicate with nature. The Borges Library is a central place for discussions because the dean of the school applied a program to actively recruit nature, both flora and fauna, to teach and study at KEC. The tour includes a meeting with her, a kind and funny person who always has a joke at hand. She explains her concept: »The systemic failures of Nordic institutions to walk the walk and not just talk in regards to diversity, difference, and inclusion has led me to refocus our efforts to assemble the most non-humanly diverse teaching body in the history of the Nordic region.« The dean is herself half-seal, half-human and her office is by the gym so she can get to the pool easily. The last stop is the Worry Room on the 2nd floor, apparently the student guide's favorite place: »We go there regularly to worry so that we don't worry when we're learning or doing homework. The more people that worry in the Worry Room, the easier and more time effective it is to worry there. It takes some time to learn to worry only in the Worry Room, but once you get the hang of it, you basically only worry in that room. It is emotionally unhygienic if you worry outside of the Worry Room



269 and is equivalent to peeing outside the toilet.« And off she goes into that room!

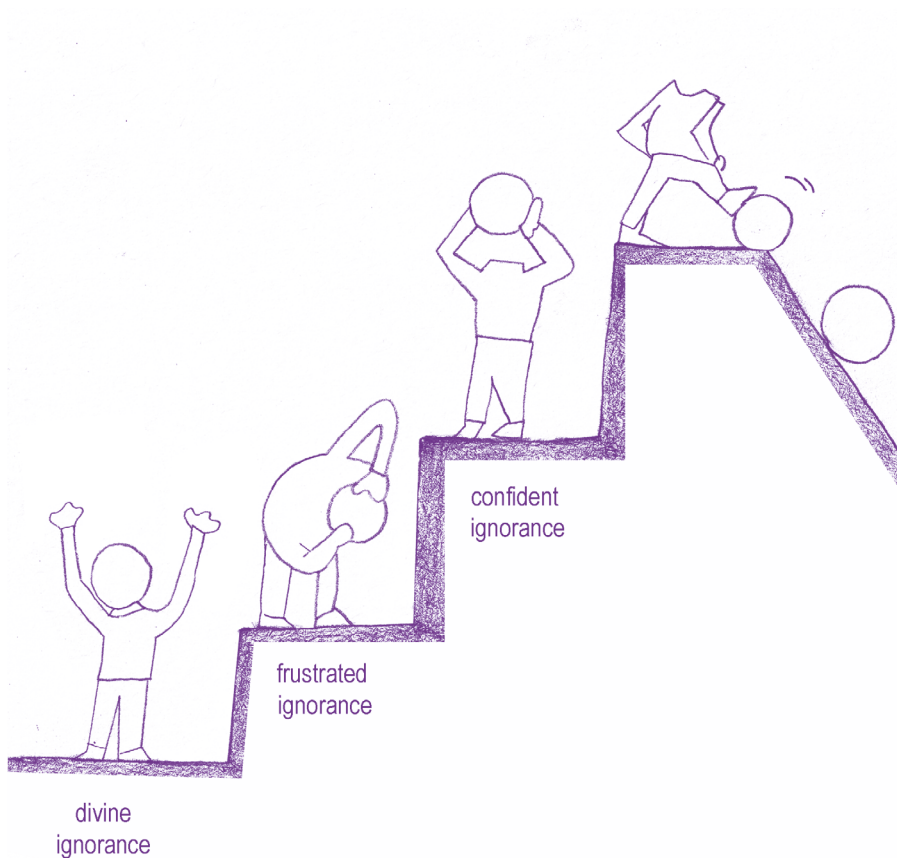
For me, the best place to gather my thoughts is the Stuck Cafeteria, the hangout area close to the entrance. It was designed as an environment for break-centered learning. At KEC all teaching is aimed to make students stuck so that they can train to become unstuck. The teachers get everyone stuck by fully exhausting a problem so that they feel as though they've run out of ideas and can't make a move. Hanging out on the Recall & Retell mats installed in the Stuck Cafeteria helps both students and teachers with finding solutions. This creates a constant humming and mumbling, a noise that shifts from pink to gray to brown depending on the time of the day and that is very comforting. The most surprising impact, however, is the arrangement of the furniture. The half-round benches, the mats, and the multicolored paper backdrops meander through the room in the shape of a pretzel. You can rearrange everything for specific events or to map out a problem with the help of the furniture, but the next day it will be readjusted in its original pastry form. The realization that the pretzel is like a knot, and more so is an edible knot that can be untied, reorganized, or eaten up suddenly made educational thinking more tasty.

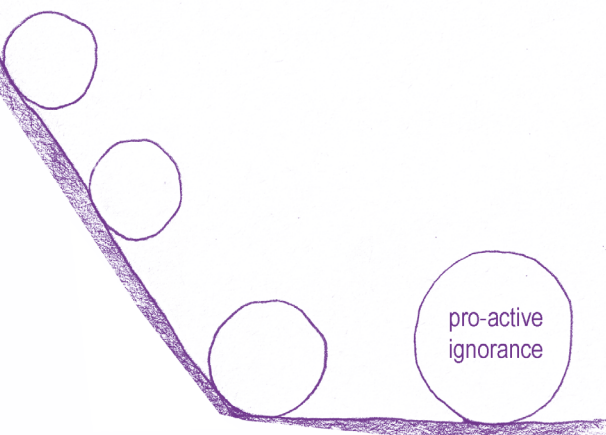
At times KEC projects itself into an alternate-reality of being a non-degree school, but facing many of the real challenges of teaching seems more bearable in the imaginary sphere. Fiction allows us to make little mental jumps and go to very different places. Why was there a need to open yet another non-degree school? Did the unwanted beings even want one? And, if they come to KEC, would they want to attend as students, or teachers, or support staff, or workshop managers? What would they expect to be taught or to teach to each other? When imagining the needs of those attending the school in the future, we had to acknowledge the anger and anxiety that is related to working institutionally. Because in order to be ironic or to funny about education systems, one has to know the insanity of these real institutions very well. In the

planning of KEC, we now discuss how to draft a fictitious curriculum that still has an impact.

270

We all meet once a year and negotiate how to organize time and space in the following months. Each time there are different participants and they are invited to sketch out their visions by means of drawings and diagrams. Before the launch of the semester program, we ask our staff and guest lecturers to outline a course description that reflects their special interest and research.





I don't remember anything about an academic quarter or how the room would be set up before the class would begin. I don't remember if the teacher was early, on time, or late to the class. I don't remember if I was early, on time or late to the class. I don't remember if I brought drinks or food to the class. I don't remember what I wore to class nor whether I carried around a portfolio case and if I had a pencil case, or if I would leave my things in the classroom. I doubt that we were able to leave things in the classroom, since it was a classroom used by many different classes and teachers. I don't remember how or who the other students were except for the other Korean international student that I befriended by the end of the semester. She was technically advanced in a way undergraduate students from Korea would know how to draw perspective and nudes and still lifes. I remember trying to sit near her bench so I could see how she solved the »problem of seeing« and representing what she saw onto 2-D surfaces.

The school was in downtown Chicago, not amid the fancy part of downtown where the Art Institute is located by the lake, but in the central industrial part of the city, by an old gray and beige cement factory. The art building was located by an overpass. It was an old brick building, where parts of it were always being torn down. The whole university campus was built in a brutalist style driven by an industrial logic that manifested in cement. Specific considerations were made as to how the bodies should move through the urban campus, and given the extremities of the weather, there were many tunnels, underpasses, and overpasses that connected different organs of the school.

There were very few trees planted in the semi-industrial sprawl of Chicago, so the journey to the art building was through a radius of concrete jungle, with screeching cars, buses, the L, amid the treeless flat landscape where the cement factory would occasionally spew out smoke and steam from the many valves. It wasn't bleak like Upton Sinclair's Chicago, but it was definitely far from the »picturesque« in the sense of tree-lined boulevards.

**273** yards formed by quaint architecture and arcades in reminiscence of the old continent.

Inside the University's art building, one would take the elevator up to a floor of corridors where there were endless doors, leading into windowless rooms. All the classrooms in the hallway were windowless boxes, except for rooms at the far end of the corridor—those rooms had wall to wall windows that would open up to a vista of the Chicago skyline on one side, and the sprawl of Southeast Chicago on the other.

The windowless classroom was a gray box with a row of fluorescent lighting and some spotlights. There was a central ventilation system that disappeared into ceilings and walls. All the walls were slightly scuffed or spotted or punctured from being an art classroom. On one side there were rows of easels, stacks of stools, wooden art horse benches, boxes of A2 newsprint, and another box of thicker drawing paper. Some mark making tools like charcoal or graphite were handed out, but it was up to the student to purchase more.

Here is what I remember from the Intermediate Drawing course I attended 22 years ago.

1. Looking

The course was centered around three ways of »looking.« The first was drawing from still lifes, the second from a live model, and the third from pictorial analysis, identifying shapes and flow of composition in printed images/pictures.

2. Warm-up

The class would begin with a short introduction where the teacher would outline the day's assignment, and the technical and theoretical principles to be explored. If there was homework, it would be reviewed in the beginning, otherwise we would stand at the drawing easels and »warm up« based on the teacher's prompts. I don't remember how long the warming up lasted, but I remember it now as a good way of land-

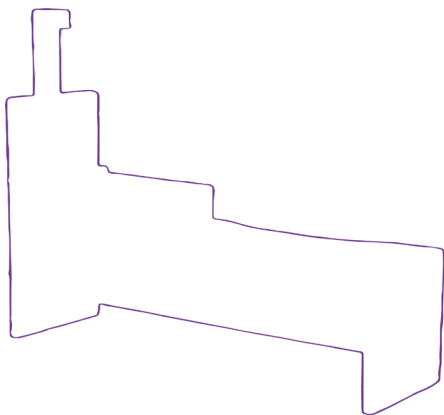
ing into the class and creating a collective focused energy that was established not only by focusing the mind, but also in the collective activity of the bodies that were focused on drawing.

3. Body

Standing or sitting straddled on art horse benches was important because it challenged the body to assume another pose from sitting by a desk in other classrooms. It was a relief to not just sit but sit straddled on the bench and to get the hands blackened from charcoal and other mark making tools. It was a relief to work on pieces of paper that were slightly too big and cumbersome that forced me to move my shoulders and arms in different ways.

4. The Teacher is Neither a Cockroach nor a Rodent

The teacher would insist that it didn't matter what the artist had intended, that the most important thing was to observe the world carefully in geometric shapes and forms and to learn how to make dynamic compositions. Somehow sitting on that wooden art horse, I could merge the cement industrial landscape outside to the insides of the concrete brutalist architecture, becoming a rodent or a cockroach, an insect, that would observe the world from different angles and heights and learn how to represent it through lines, shadows, shapes, and other marks. And it was by becoming a rodent or a cockroach that I could enter my own classroom years later.



Resisting the Rat Race

I couldn't enter it as an artist because I was still in the process of trying to understand what that was, and I certainly couldn't enter as a teacher, because that felt even more alien. But the fiction of me being a giant rat or a cockroach scurrying through the brutalist halls was an image I could identify with, and so I made up an image of a giant bespeckled cock-rat totally focused on understanding the world through drawing. Nerding out on the medium specificity of drawing as a rat-roach allowed me to somehow stand in front of 30 students and be stupid enough to share with them my own quandary and need for acquiring this particular skill of thinking through mark making and of wanting to understand the world through visual observation.

Sometimes I take out the cockroach-rat figure in my box of tools and costumes. It's not so often that I get to wear this figure, but I think about Krabstadt and whether I would be able to become that rodent-roach again, and if so, where I would be placed in the school. I'm not sure it would be as a teacher of all the unwanted students, but maybe I would be allowed to work as an admin? I'm not

very good at working with Excel, but it would be amazing if I could be proficient enough to attend the Excel Olympics as a representative from the Krabstadt Education Center.

I feel at home at KEC because the school building reminds me of the brutalist school campus in Chicago. I don't have to go outside at all if I don't want to, I can just scurry through the different pipes.

