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## The Role of Student Experience in the Language Activities of the EAP Course for Architecture Students

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This paper presents illustrations from a learning unit in a course of English for academic purposes for second year students at the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University. Pragmatic criteria were taken into consideration on text selection and the organization of the unit. The students' experience and needs are the primary concern. The student assessment of the unit in comparison with non Faculty-specific materials was undertaken when the unit was first used in 1983. A set of rating scales was used as the instrument. The results of the evaluation revealed a positive response towards the unit represented by a significant increase of percentage from 63.54 for non Faculty-specific materials to 79.84 for this unit.

### **Introduction**

Chulalongkorn University Language Institute (CULI), with the aim to provide service to all Chulalongkorn University students, has offered a variety of courses at different levels from Foundation to Graduate English. Among these courses are the courses of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) offered to second year students in several Faculties. The objectives of the EAP-Reading and EAP-Writing courses, presently called EAP I and EAP II, are to develop and to strengthen the ability of students to use English as a tool to handle selections or texts which are based on academic or semi-academic sources and are related to the students' field of study. Practice in reading and writing skills is the main emphasis of the courses, with practice in speaking and listening as reinforcement.

Each EAP course is divided into 2 main parts. The first part consists of 3 units which are studied by all students taking the courses regardless of their fields of study. The conceptual content of these common core units are of general interest and are not specifically related to any discipline. The second part comprises 3 Faculty-specific units. In this part, students from different Faculties study different topics related to their fields of study.

### **Rationale**

The Faculty of Architecture is one, among many faculties, which requires its students to take one EAP course. Prior to 1983, the materials used for the second part of the course for Architecture students were not Faculty-specific in any real sense. Their content covered science, technology, environment and society in general. The students found the materials rather dull and their motivation to learn was low. As a result, changes were made in 1983 when a team of teachers at CULI were assigned to develop a new set of materials for Architecture students. At first, only 2 new units were tried out.

Realizing that student interest in the subject matter was a factor contributing to the success of the learning unit, we, as teachers responsible for the production of this set of materials, took special care in our selection of the subject matter of the units. Also, based on pragmatic views, the following criteria were taken into consideration while writing and preparing our materials :-

- The text must be relevant to the needs of students, i.e. to handle academic or semi-academic texts related to their fields of study.
- The interest and motivation of students will be enhanced if the text is related to their own experience. The text must be comprehensible to them by means of context.
- The language activities must have purpose and must be meaningful to students.
- The texts should be structured in logical, meaningful sequence from easier, more manageable parts to more complex ones.

It should be noted here that in this paper we will focus on the texts and exercises taken from one unit only. The topic of the unit is "Frank Lloyd Wright, the Master of Modern Architecture". This topic was deemed a suitable choice as Wright, though no longer alive, was an internationally known American architect. His concepts in architecture have been influential and his works widely acclaimed. His name should be known and his concepts understood by any would-be architect. Therefore, just mentioning his name should capture the interest of students and the study of his views and works should be relevant to their needs. Besides, the subtleties of the target language should be easily understood and acquired since the text revolves around student experience.

After the selection of the text, the organization of the unit was then planned. The unit was subdivided into 4 episodes which were sequenced according to the complexity of ideas and language as follows :

- I. Biographical outline
- II. The Taliesin Fellowship
- III. Wright's views on architecture
- IV. Wright's works

Language activities were also written to make them relate to their experience as much as possible, i.e. the use of pictures and drawings. A variety of exercise types are used, for example, ordering, paraphrasing, matching, note making, question-answer, completion and summary.

### **Illustrations**

The emphasis of the EAP course for Architecture students is on reading, with writing as secondary, and is reinforced by speaking. Thus, many of the exercises in each unit aim at comprehension, practice in reading skills such as the ability to extract specific information and main ideas from the text, as well as practice in writing at both sentence and paragraph levels.

In "Frank Lloyd Wright", language points are neither focused on nor explicitly stated. Comprehension, it is believed, can occur through the use of meaningful contexts. Discussion of any language points will take place only when they appear in the text.

To demonstrate how the whole unit is developed, we will briefly discuss the first three episodes before we present the exercises<sup>1</sup> in the last episode on Wright's works.

Episode I, a biographical outline, is the least complex both in language and content. The reason we included Wright's interesting life story was that it would be a good way to start the unit and to arouse student interest; the unit would seem incomplete without this part. In the second episode, students are to read a text about the Taliesin Fellowship, a foundation based on Wright's philosophy in educating an architect.

Wright's views on architecture are presented in the third episode. By this time, students should have become fairly familiar with Wright, his life and ideas on architectural education. The first part of the episode consists of short extracts of Wright's views on the design of dwellings. In the second part, students are exposed to a more complex text, a further development of Wright's ideas. His architectural views are compared with British architects'. Though the text is authentic and quite complex in concept--an input which is a little beyond students' present level of capability, students are psychologically motivated to read the text because they are interested in the message the text conveys : Wright's concepts in architecture. Also, the gradual progress from the easier part to the more difficult one combined with the help of the teacher enable students to work through the episode without much difficulty.

The text in this part is also a good example of a discourse of comparison and contrast. At this point, the teacher can point out to them the language used in the text, how the writer expresses logical relationships between parts through markers.

For Architecture students, visual presentation: drawings, pictures or graphic presentation, play an important part in their studies. In the last episode, two exercises in which pictures become an important aid to comprehension have been developed. The following illustrates the lesson which focuses on episode IV--Wright's works.

Structure of the lesson : Part I (Activities A and B) and Part II

Objectives of the lesson :

- To enable students to match linguistic information with visual information
- To practice extracting specific information from a given text
- To enable them to reason and express opinions on topics related to their area of study
- To enable them to transfer linguistic information to visual presentation

Skills included : reading and speaking

Exercise type : matching, completion, question-answer

**Part I.** This part consists of two activities. In activity A, a text including descriptions of several buildings designed by Wright is given to all students to read. When they finish reading, a worksheet and a set of pictures of several buildings are distributed. There are more pictures than the descriptions of the buildings. Students then match the descriptions with the corresponding pictures. While the linguistic information enables them to identify the picture, the visual presentation facilitates the comprehension of the written forms. After the matching exercise, students work on the rest of activity A by filling in other details such as name, location, year built and type of construction materials, etc. of each building. Finally, five students are randomly selected to give answers about the five buildings to the class.

The aim of the activity is to introduce Wright's most acclaimed works to students. After the general information about each building is provided, the teacher can proceed to activity B, a follow-up activity in which the text is further explored. The questions in this question-answer exercise can be used as points for class discussion. To be able to answer the questions, students must have an understanding of the text, of Wright's concepts already presented and discussed in episode three and the ability to think critically. Throughout the unit, the previously acquired body of knowledge is reinforced as students work through each episode. This activity provides a situation in which they can express their opinions about the architect's works, i.e. to communicate in the context of their experience. (See Part I, Appendix A.)

**Part II.** The exercise in this part makes use of the students' ability in drawing, their creativity and imagination in transferring linguistic information to visual presentation. The teacher distributes the text which includes descriptions of the interior of one building and the exterior of another to all students. They are to draw a perspective of each building according to the descrip-

tion provided. Students are allowed to work individually or in groups. How well they understand the texts will be reflected in their perspective drawings. The original pictures of the two buildings are then distributed as an answer key when they finish. (See Part II, Appendix A.)

It should be noted that in this exercise comprehension is visually aided. With the pictures available, the linguistic information can be more easily comprehended, thus reducing the teacher's work in explaining the text. Surprisingly, most students have found the exercise challenging and have done fairly well in their interpretation of the text. Their experience and body of knowledge in the field of architecture together with their aptitude in drawing have all contributed to the success of this exercise.

## Evaluation

Student evaluation was conducted informally in 1983, the first year this set of materials was introduced. At the conclusion of the course, students were asked to fill out a questionnaire as part of course evaluation. The questionnaire was designed to obtain their opinions on both Part I (the common core units) and Part II or the new materials which include the unit on Frank Lloyd Wright. Each unit in Part II was separately assessed.

The points asked in the questionnaire were evaluated on a seven-point rating scale. The points rated were clarity, usefulness, interest, level of difficulty, length and applicability of the materials. The last section of the questionnaire was for student suggestions and comments. (See Appendix B for the form of the questionnaire.)

From a total number of 45 second year Architecture students who responded to the questionnaire, it was found that when comparing the common core units to "Frank Lloyd Wright", students liked the latter better. This was represented by the percentage of 63.54 for the common core units as against 79.84 for "Frank Lloyd Wright".

The table below summarizes the results of the students' assessment of Part I (common core units) and the unit on Frank Lloyd Wright.

Students' Assessment

points assessed	Part I (Common Core Units) percentage	Frank Lloyd Wright unit percentage
1. clarity	63.17	82.54
2. usefulness	67.62	84.76
3. interest	59.37	87.62
4. appropriate level of difficulty	65.08	72.38
5. appropriate length	66.98	67.62
6. applicability	59.05	84.13
total	63.54	79.84

The results from the table indicates that there is an obvious increase in the students' interest in the materials, an increase from 59.37 per cent in Part I to 87.62 per cent in "Frank Lloyd Wright". This means that the students found the topic related to their field of study much more interesting than the topics of general interest. The students also showed strong approval for the usefulness and the applicability of the Frank Lloyd Wright unit, represented by the percentage

of 84.76 for its usefulness and 84.13 for its applicability as opposed to 67.62 and 59.05, respectively, for the common core units. This may be an indication that the unit on Frank Lloyd Wright, in comparison to the common core units, fulfills their needs to study English as a tool to handle academic or semi-academic texts better. The sequentiality of the unit into episodes may partly attribute to the high rating (82.54%) on clarity. Nevertheless, there are slight differences in both the rating of the level of difficulty and the length of the unit. The reason the students found "Frank Lloyd Wright" somewhat difficult may be due to the authenticity of many texts. But, with the teacher as facilitator, they did not think the Frank Lloyd Wright unit was as difficult as the texts in the common core. The point which received the lowest rating on "Frank Lloyd Wright" is the length of the unit (67.62%).

Considering all these figures, we can still conclude that the unit on Frank Lloyd Wright has met with a positive response and the results of this informal evaluation seem to suggest that in learning a target language, if there is a link between texts and the learners' experience and if the texts are relevant to their needs, the learners will be highly motivated and as a result comprehension will be more easily achieved and benefits gained from that learning experience.

### Acknowledgements

The teachers involved in the development of the new EAP materials which include the Frank Lloyd Wright unit are Passorn Singkalwanij, Suppawan Lilavivat and Melvyn Sharman. Those responsible for the revised version in 1984 are Passorn Singkalwanij, Prakaikaew Opanon-Amata and Sawitree Prasertkul.

### Note

<sup>1</sup> The exercises discussed in this paper are taken from the revised version of the Frank Lloyd Wright unit written in 1984. The texts for the 1983 and the 1984 versions remain essentially the same; improvements on some language activities were made in the 1984 version.

### The Author

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## Appendix A

### Wright's works

#### Part I

1. At Bear Run, Pennsylvania, Wright found a beautiful site for building a house for his client, Mr. Kaufmann. The site was in a beautiful forest where there was solid high rock-ledge rising beside a waterfall. So Wright decided to cantilever the house from that rock-bank over the falling water.

Built in 1936, the building known as "Fallingwater" is composed of many rectangles, some vertical, some horizontal. These rectangular parts, ranging in size, extend outward in various directions. The house appears wall-less because the interior spaces open through large glass areas to terraces. Floors and terraces of concrete as horizontal parts are cantilevered out over the waterfall, while vertical stone walls project upward into the air.

ledge : a raised edge from a wall of rock  
to cantilever : project with support at only one end

2. Solomon R. Guggenheim commissioned Wright to design a museum in New York City for his collection of paintings. Wright made his first sketches in 1943, but the construction of the building was not completed until the year 1959.

The Guggenheim Museum is a building of monolithic concrete where the floors, wall and roof or ceiling are blended into one unit. In nature Wright found his inspiration for this concept in the shell structures of the sea. He created a continuous spiral ramp as exhibition space. The spiral ramp makes five complete turns around the central open space between the top of the building and the ground, making the building resemble a sliced cone.

monolithic : massively solid, single and uniform

3. In 1938 Wright purchased 800 acres of land, 25 miles northeast of Phoenix, Arizona and began to build a new Taliesin, Taliesin West. The building became a winter home, office and a winter headquarters of the Taliesin Fellowship.

The site of the building was a gradual slope against the foothills of the McDowell Mountains. Wright conceived a building that expressed the spirit of the mountains--with terraces, broad steps bringing one level to another.

Wright sought the indigenous stone of Arizona. Boulders and stones which had been carefully chosen with regard to color, size and texture were held together by poured concrete. This "desert concrete", forming long sloping walls, was the basic substructure of the building. Huge redwood trusses were the superstructure, with panels of clear white canvas set between them.

indigenous : native to particular place or environment.

4. Wright was commissioned to design the administration building for the Johnson Wax Company in Racine, Wisconsin in 1936. He also built another structure to house the company's research laboratories in 1944.

Wright designed both buildings as circular units. The office building is compact and mostly contained within windowless brick walls. The research laboratories are housed in a single tower. As with the office building, the corners of the research tower are rounded and its outer structure consists of alternating bands of brick and glass tubing.

tubing : material in the form of a tube

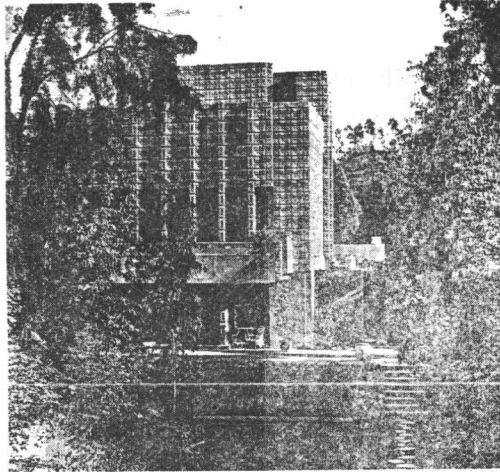
5. In 1911 Wright decided to establish himself in the country rather than in a city. He chose to build his home and studio, Taliesin, along the brow of a low hill in a valley near Spring Green, Wisconsin.

Taliesin is a complex built of local rough-textured stone. Stone walls, steps, terraces and gardens reach along the brow of the hill blending Taliesin structurally and aesthetically into its surroundings.

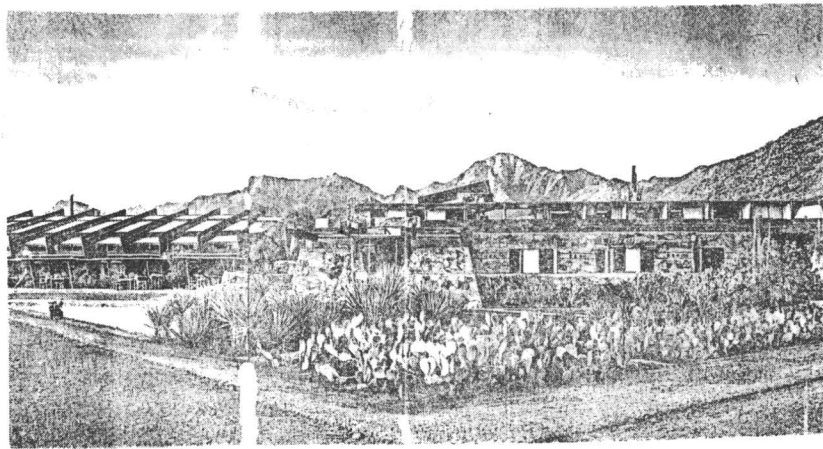
Wright once wrote “No house should ever be ‘on’ any hill or ‘on’ anything. It should be ‘of’ the hill belonging to it, so hill and house should live together each the happier for the other”. This was Taliesin, a house ‘of’ the brow of a hill, with views outward, far over the landscape.

brow : top

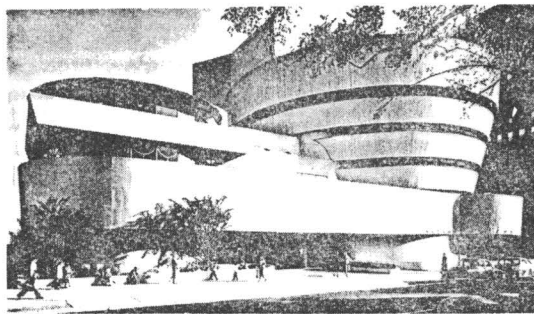
A.



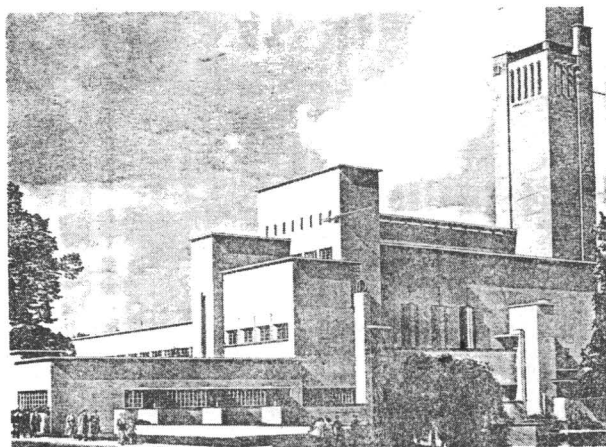
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C.

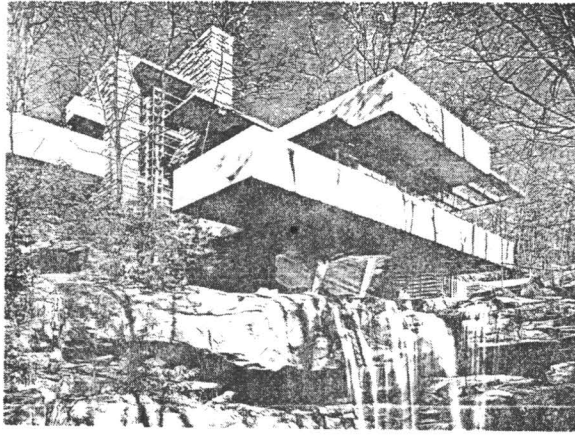


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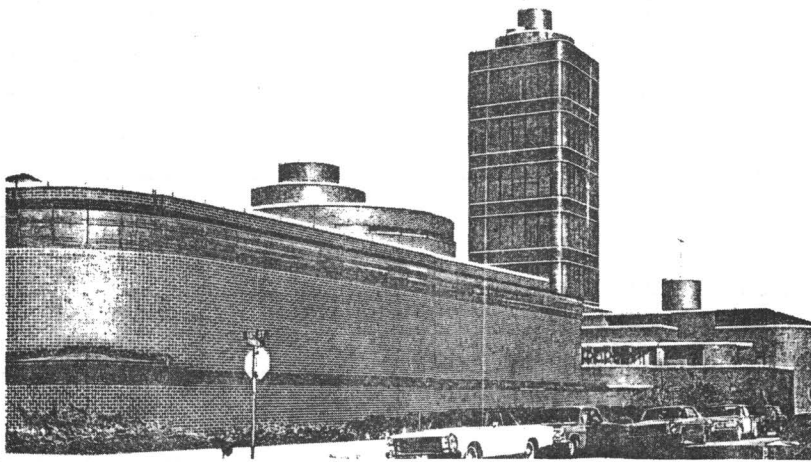




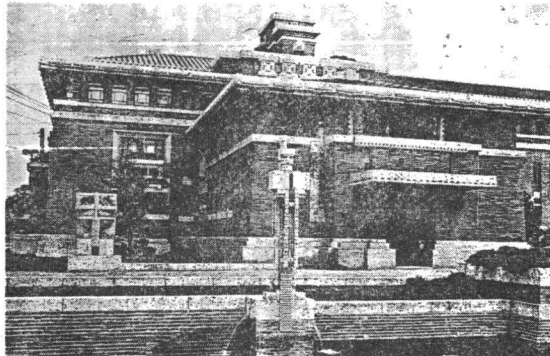
E.



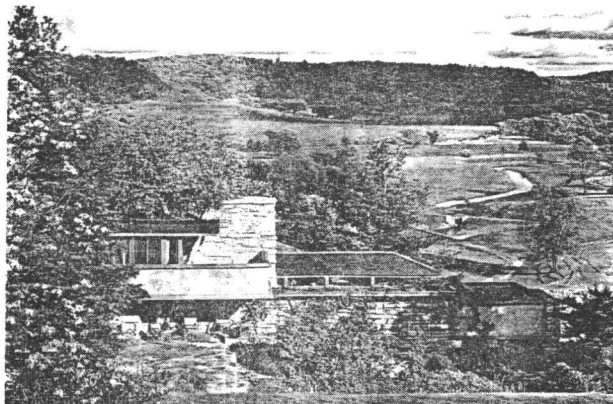
F.



G.



H.



**A. Match the description of a building in each passage with a picture. Then fill in the blanks with information provided in the passage.**

- 1. picture : \_\_\_\_\_  
name of the building : \_\_\_\_\_  
client : \_\_\_\_\_  
place : \_\_\_\_\_  
year built or completed : \_\_\_\_\_  
use : \_\_\_\_\_  
major construction material (s) : \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. picture : \_\_\_\_\_  
name of the building : \_\_\_\_\_  
client : \_\_\_\_\_  
place : \_\_\_\_\_  
year built or completed : \_\_\_\_\_  
use : \_\_\_\_\_  
major construction material (s) : \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. picture : \_\_\_\_\_  
name of the building : \_\_\_\_\_  
client : \_\_\_\_\_  
place : \_\_\_\_\_  
year built or completed : \_\_\_\_\_  
use : \_\_\_\_\_  
major construction material (s) : \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. picture : \_\_\_\_\_  
name of the building : \_\_\_\_\_  
client : \_\_\_\_\_  
place : \_\_\_\_\_  
year built or completed : \_\_\_\_\_  
use : \_\_\_\_\_  
major construction material (s) : \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. picture : \_\_\_\_\_  
name of the building : \_\_\_\_\_  
client : \_\_\_\_\_  
place : \_\_\_\_\_  
year built or completed : \_\_\_\_\_  
use : \_\_\_\_\_  
major construction material (s) : \_\_\_\_\_

**B. questions**

- 1. Why do you think Mr. Kaufmann's house was called 'Fallingwater'?
- 2. What gave Wright the idea for the exterior structure of the Guggenheim Museum?
- 3. In the description of Taliesin West, what does the writer mean by 'desert concrete'?
- 4. The passage describes Taliesin as a "rural retreat 'of' the brow of a gentle hill," why does the writer use the unusual word 'of' instead of the more common 'on'?
- 5. Discuss how each building represents Wright's concepts on architecture.
- 6. Which building do you think best represents Wright's views? State your reasons.

## Part II

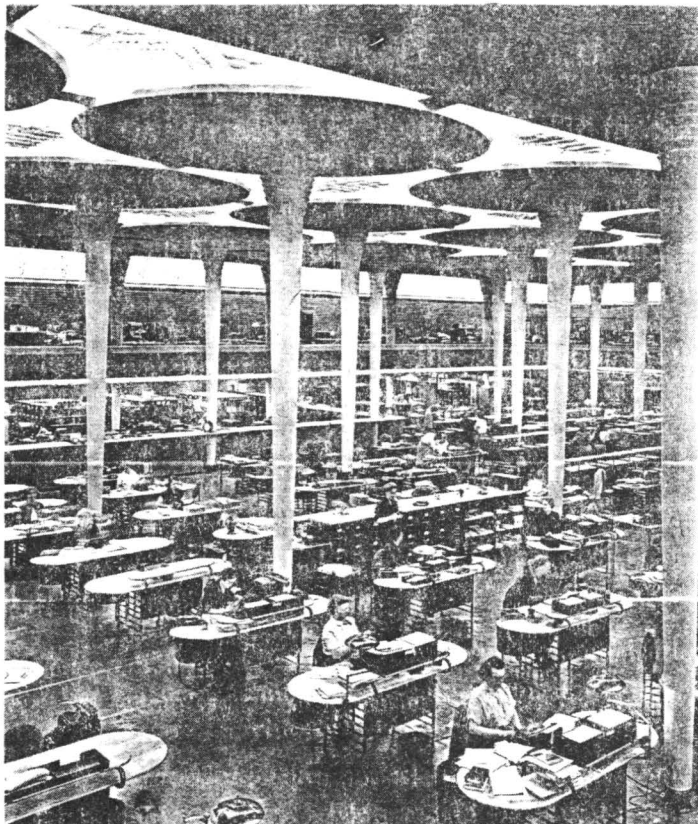
Draw a perspective of each building according to the description provided.

1. The main element of the Johnson Wax Building is the large workroom for typists and stenographers. Rising from the floor are slender white concrete columns only 9 inches in diameter at the base. These columns go up 24 feet high until they reach the ceiling where they spread at the top into eighteen-foot disks. Thus they are made the part of the ceiling. Between these mushroom-shaped columns comes natural light for the room through patterned glass-tube skylights.
2. The Price Tower is a tall building. It consists of both offices and apartments. The ground floor, forming the base of the tower (podium), is about two storeys in height. On each floor there are suites of offices and an apartment unit. However, the section of the tower used for apartments is 16 storeys high whereas the section used for offices has only 14 storeys. The office and the apartment sections are linked by a service core (for rooms such as kitchen, toilet or staircase). This part slightly projects from the exterior wall of the tower. From one particular angle, an outside observer can see the offices, the service core and the apartments. The tower differentiates the offices from the apartments by using louvers. Horizontal louvers are used for offices and vertical louvers for residential areas. Each apartment unit is duplex, i.e. having two floors, and so fits into the same height as two office floors.

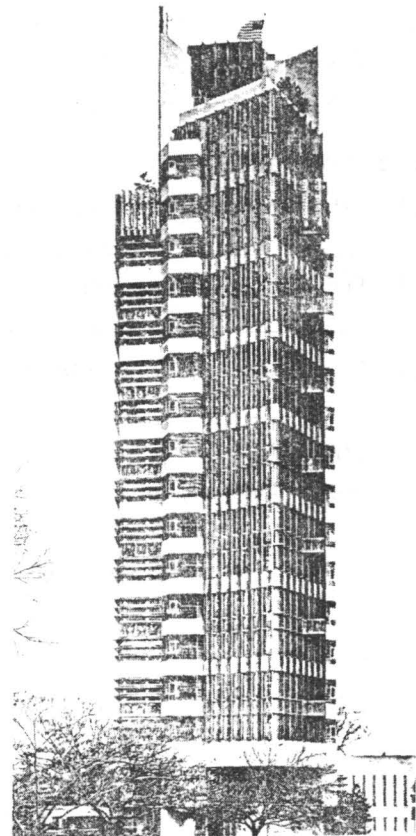
louver: an opening in a wall fitted with fixed or movable fins.

Answer key

1.



2.



## Appendix B

### Student Questionnaire on EAP Course for Architecture (1983)

1. Circle the number that most closely reflects your opinion.

**Part I (Common Core Units)**

	disagree						agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
a) clarity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b) usefulness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c) interest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d) appropriate level of difficulty	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e) appropriate length	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f) applicability	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Part II**

*A. Unit on Frank Lloyd Wright*

a) clarity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b) usefulness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c) interest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d) appropriate level of difficulty	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e) appropriate length	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f) applicability	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

*B. Unit on the Japanese House and Garden*

a) clarity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b) usefulness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c) interest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d) appropriate level of difficulty	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e) appropriate length	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f) applicability	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. Suggestions and Comments

2.1 Other topics you would like to study in this course

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2.2 The length of the unit

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2.3 Types of classroom activity (individual work, groupwork)

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2.4 Others

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