9. VOICES OF EXPERIENCE

*Opportunities to Influence Creatively the Designing of School Libraries*

INTRODUCTION

The *voices of experience* study considered school libraries as social and cultural entities within the contexts of school life and of wider society, such that school library designing becomes a social interaction of concern to those influenced by its practices and outcomes. School library designing is therefore regarded as significant primarily to users such as educators and students, as well as to those with professionally accredited involvement, such as designers/architects and education facility planners. The study contends that current approaches to educational space designing, including school libraries, work to amplify the voices of accredited designers and diminish or silence the voices of users.

DIMENSIONS OF THE STORY

The *voices of experience* research story began, and has continued, as one of ‘enthusiasms, puzzles and connections’ (Chambers, 1985, p. 138). As a researcher, my entry point to the study followed many years of enthusiasm associated with school libraries: my own, those of educator colleagues, those of students in primary and secondary schools and those of teacher-educators undertaking post graduate study in education, particularly in the professional branch of teacher-librarianship. Added to this was the enthusiasm, sometimes of a different order, of the accredited designers/architects and education facility planners involved in school library designing projects.

While some projects of my experience involved degrees of designer/architect collaboration with long-term users, a majority of projects assumed understandings of user groups, which served to limit educator and student involvement and to ignore opportunities to explore the capacities of educators and students to participate in designing the spaces of their lives and work.

In my experience, and at the time of the study, projects were most often directed by accredited designers, architects, education facility planners and financial controllers. Within the broad Australian school-system context of the study, designing practices appeared to prioritise layers of policy, funding and financial governance and to be
driven in large part by building project time schedules. Subsumed under the weight and direction of these aspects and agents, references to dimensions such as visionary prospects for learning and teaching; key informing educational mandates; research evidence related to social, cultural and pedagogical dimensions and contemporary technologies, often appeared to be overshadowed or diminished.

With these circumstances in mind, the research examined the puzzles and mired complexity of educational space designing contexts, brought about by competing agents and influences. Questions arose for me, out of these prevailing conditions, about who and what is valued in the scope, participation, influences and research foundations of school library designing practices and processes. The chief concern of the study was to investigate these matters as they were raised in the literature and most particularly as they emerged in the small stories of the voices of experience, of those who have close and vested interests in school libraries (Sen, 2004; Geogakopoulu, 2007). Small stories can be understood to include a range of under-represented narrative activities, ‘tellings of ongoing events; future or hypothetical events; allusions to tellings; deferrals of tellings and refusals to tell’ (Geogakopoulu, 2007, p. vii).

Thus the study explored school library designing through the voices of those most closely involved. By engaging with four participant groups, the study presented the perspectives of those with a long-term interest, educators and students who interact daily with school libraries and information services, and of those with a short-term interest but with long-acting effects, accredited designers/architects and education facility planners, who have been traditionally and contractually engaged in the designing of new and renewed school libraries.

**CONCEPTS AND INFORMING THEORIES**

Key conceptualising sources for the study were Tom Heath’s (1989, 2010) understanding of designing as creative processes of discovery and Christopher Day’s (2003) consensus designing and biography of place approach. Heath’s concept constitutes designing as a specialised kind of problem solving, as a discovery-focused, cyclic, interconnected and integrated set of learning processes. Heath’s (1989, 2010) designing cycle is achieved in creative, strategic and tactical activities of focusing, imagining, venturing and backtracking. These process guide-points to designing activity enable engagement with the circumstances we confront in designing, working to unfold, to feel our way, and to work our way gradually in order to unravel complexity: see Figure 1.

Heath’s (1989, 2010) evidence-gathering, research-focused process, the VAST Heuristic (Figure 2), invites participants into designing partnerships to create and customise the evidence-base for the designing of spaces for life and work. Concerned as it is with the lives and work of people who are closely impacted by built space projects, this conceptual and practical framework enabled the social nature of the
voices of experience research and the exploration of the human interests and actions of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Janesick, 2003).

The VAST heuristic draws on the work of John Zeisel (1984). Heath (1989) proposes the underpinning thesis of VAST as: ‘people have Values, in relation to aspects [Activities] of buildings [Site/System] which must be expressed in built form [Technology]’. Thus the VAST elements scaffold the exploration of systems of human relationships and human activity, which are then enabled by surrounding systems which support human activity within built spaces.

Heath understands designing as a ‘specialised kind of problem solving’ involving strategic and tactical approaches. Designers are encouraged to apply the VAST heuristic critically and with a certain amount of ‘free floating anxiety’ (Heath 1989: 17). Applied to the VAST elements, the interrogative frame of the critical theorist’s question: ‘who and what is valued here?’ (Popkewitz & Fendler, 1999) prompts exploration of other questions concerned with potentially influential participant relationships and activity: Who designs these spaces and what agendas are fulfilled through designer roles? How are learners imagined in the design process? How are participants influenced in the design process? How do design elements work to prohibit, permit, locate and order the ways in which learners and teachers are positioned and the ways in which learning takes place? (Foucault, 1967; Jamieson et al., 2000).

In Christopher Day’s Consensus designing: Biography of place approach (Figure 3), spaces are considered to have a ‘layered biography’ expressed in
dimensions of physicality, habitation through time, evocative of moods and feelings and with ‘spirit of place identity’ (Day & Parnell, 2003, p. 51).

Identity with place emerges through a mix of affective, sensory and cognitive experiences and in responses which comprise proprietary feelings (Day & Parnell, 2003). Thus aspects of place identity are best understood through the insights

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<th>Values</th>
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<td>Location - in context Context - relationships Access - main; limits Aspect - compass orient Prospect - outlook Climate - seasonal Micro-climate - local site Character - site, context Services</td>
<td>Structure Skin Climate Control Subdivision - internal Services Finishes</td>
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<td>Feelings - personal, subjective, senses</td>
<td>Record/represent in: Adjacency matrices Connections Flow chart - linear, recursive Bubble diagram - relationships Room data sheet - equip &amp; space requirements Time-lapse photo Video - action Computer graphics - dynamics</td>
<td>Record/represent in: Location Plan - relationships Photography - qualitative Annotated site plan - integration of aspects Overlay plan - transparency &amp; rendition aspects Model - 3D Computer graphics - dynamic of all above</td>
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Figure 2. VAST designing heuristic (Heath, 1989, 2010)
Adapted by Elliott Burns (2011)
and clarity of ‘the people who live there’, for example students and educators, converging in dialogue with ‘the people who don’t’, such as accredited designers (Day & Parnell, 2003, p. 11).

Day and Parnell (2003) promote participative or mediated consensus approaches to designing in which participants work towards agreement, relying on respect, the building of trust and the moderation of entrenched personal positions, involving both vernacular and specialist knowledge. The *biography of place* process incorporates values-focused designing in which people foster and evolve social cohesion through their practices of living and working in spaces and places. Designing and redesigning involves continuing processes of negotiation and construction to unfold, for example, *what could this place say?* and *what values does this imply?*

As a process of designing, a *biography of place* approach begins with the synergy of people, of places and people’s relationship with places and of qualities of being and becoming. In these terms it could be said to begin from experiential-existential conceptions of designing and to incorporate practical-functional and structural-instrumental conceptions to facilitate the expression of the built spaces on the values foundations of those who will live and work in the spaces (Franz, 1998).
In conjunction with these informing theories, the literature and the small stories of participants’ understandings and experiences, the research questions and the study objectives set out on a creative process of discovery (Heath, 1989, 2010), to unravel complexities of understandings about libraries, to focus on the impacts of framing research, contexts and practices and on the influences of those with interests in the designing of school libraries. The prospect, implications and impact of the study have been in identifying and venturing ways in which the processes and practices of school library designing are open to creative possibilities (Boyce, 2006) and the potential for voices of experience to exert creative influence (Harvey, 1996).

THE SCOPE OF STORIES

The voices of experience study examined understandings about libraries as evolving and influential ideas, as time-spaces in the social, cultural and political lives of people. Historical vignettes demonstrated the ways in which libraries across time have been used to facilitate social and political purposes and projects. It can be argued that the library as an idea might be traced from beyond 50,000 years ago, when human experiences and memories were inscribed on rock walls or symbolised in artefacts kept and passed between generations of people and accompanied by narrative traditions (Manguel, 1996).

The libraries of classical antiquity, Mesopotamia, China, Islam, Middle Egypt, and some in the more immediate past, suffered the destructive fates of their rulers and nation-groups. Kern (as cited in Battles, 2003) describes these dramatic disasters as biblioclasms. Such episodes litter the human story, their shards and remnants sometimes gathered and added to the artefact collections of descendant libraries. While the deepest intentions of the founders remain open to speculation, the practices associated with the establishment of early libraries, their material traces, serve to illustrate their sometimes visionary foundations along with the fraught and embattled scope of their social, cultural and political contexts.

However the current literature, commentary and research data supports the potential of a continuing significance for diverse library-guises as persistent, emerging sites for innovating and for reworking human experience; as ‘things’:

the thing and the space it inscribes and produces … Differentiated perceptually and conceptually … distinct, repeatable in principle … located in space only because time is implicated. (Grosz, 2001, p. 170)

The key dimension of change related to school libraries, and to learners and educators in the study, was the dynamic of the pedagogy-technology nexus, which emerged as a dominant source, impetus and vehicle being brought to bear on learning and teaching in schools. In terms of influence, Fairclough (2009) draws our attention to the status of normalisation which is achieved as technologies of information and communication are projected, in government, economic, education and popular
media discourses, as the preferred globally connecting, universally beneficial catalysts for learning, teaching, communicating and belonging in the world at global, regional and personal levels.

Some courage is needed to persist in questioning and evaluating the effects of these assumptions, in the face of the ways in which living and learning in the world, including the worlds of schools, is so mediated by a pedagogy-technology dynamic. Physical-digital spatial connections loosen; spaces become technology-infused; space designing is re-ordered, or as Mitchell suggests, architecture becomes ‘recombinant’ (Mitchell, 1996, 2000, 2003).

While the impacts of these aspects on the spaces and places of school libraries is raised repeatedly in the literature and in the study participants’ discussions, manifestations of change in the physical and virtual dimensions of school libraries can continue to be seen as evolving, as works in progress, as part of focusing, venturing and working our way towards creative possibilities of designing to deal with such persistent incursions and realities.

On this basis it seems reasonable to suggest that ideas of a design template or generic model of a school library would deny the potential for the being and becoming of learners in individual school contexts, and inhibit understandings of school libraries as responsive and creative places for learners in diverse communities and learning in diverse contexts.

METHODOLOGY AND WAYS OF TELLING

The study aimed to convey an ‘interpretive portrayal of the studied world’ (Charmaz, 2003, p. 314). Through a focus on the designing of school libraries as a social problem with a semiotic aspect, the study used the data analytical processes of critical discourse analysis (CDA) specifically through Bhaskar’s framework of explanatory critique (Fairclough, 2001). The study identified dimensions of what is problematic and how it is problematic through an examination of ‘who’ and ‘what’ appeared to be valued in relation to school library designing, of who was included and who was excluded in taken-for-granted designing processes and practices.

Ethnographic, participant-observer research strategies facilitated the exploration of the contexts, understandings, values, sources of influence and actions of those participating in the study (Denzin, 2000). These phenomena were addressed and investigated in real-world settings with emphasis on the complex of dynamics among the sources, relationships and consequences impacting on participant understandings and actions in relation to school library designing.

Data were gathered in semi-structured interviews undertaken with individuals and small groups, in site observations and through document analysis. Through participant statements and language, the data analytical discussion examined the circumstances and obstacles related to the problem of school library designing, and considered the prospects of what might be, of what could change, with respect to the functioning of the problem as it operated to sustain existing and often contentious
social arrangements. The analysis incorporated positive critique in terms of possible ways to address the obstacles, particularly with respect to discursive opportunities, and reflected critically on the effectiveness of the analysis as it was undertaken by a participant observer researcher (Fairclough, 2001, p. 125).

Of particular value in the study has been the foregrounding of the kinds of language linked to groups, professions and identities, for example the language dimensions of professional dispositions (habitus) in fields such as architecture and education (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, pp. 116–118; Bourdieu, 2005, p. 47), and the potential impact of the language of professions on moments of designing. In this respect I sought discursive opportunities for participants to act together, engaging in dialogue, not in order to suppress difference in false compromise/consensus, but to engage and emerge ‘as voices in common on particular issues’ (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 6), on the basis of which designing participants may act to make and remake their lives (Calhoun, 1995, cited in Fairclough, 1999, p. 4).

Pervasive across the study, in the research literature and in the participant data have been themes of change. Discourses of change represent libraries as evolving entities shaped by multiple influences; by historical and contemporary dimensions of culture, tradition and ethos; subject to the diverse projects and purposes of human activity; and more recently, caught in the burgeoning flow of digital and online information and media, to become multiple contemporary-immediate ‘library’ versions and entities. Discourses can work in a range of ways: to objectify and convey information as fact; to rhetorically project particular views and justify policies and strategies; to constitute and reproduce particular relations of power and to generate imaginary representations of possible futures (Fairclough, 2009, p. 321).

In these terms the ‘ethnographic sensibility’ (Pader, 2006, p. 163) and quality of the study might be evaluated by the degree to which readers are able to see a similar cultural picture to that communicated by the researcher (Glesne, 2006). Thus my hope has been that readers of the study might recognise the impacts of the evidence and the integration of the knowledge and experience forms which contribute to the study. For example, the local knowledge and experiences of the study participants, the expert knowledge from the literature and the researcher’s knowledge and experience, as these meet the readers’ own knowledge and experiences.

**VOICES OF EXPERIENCE IN CONVERSATION**

The study participants told the most pertinent stories to illustrate the challenges to and the potential for creative possibility and creative influence. It could also be noted that the participants’ voices signalled a significant capacity to contribute to the evidence base for the designing of school learning spaces. In the *small stories* discussion which follows the participant voices speak (*in italics*) to illustrate the overall spirit of the data gathered in semi-structured interviews and field
observations. These small stories are available more fulsomely in the doctoral thesis transcripts (Elliott Burns, 2011).

*Educator Voices*

Educators’ *small stories* represented school libraries as multi-dimensional synergies of learners, learning and social relationships as well as spaces and places of material dimension. Cues to the significance of school libraries were represented in figurative, symbolic-conceptual representations of the school library as a *statement of beliefs about learning and a reflection of values, mission and vision*, and as such, an embodiment of community ideals. Metaphors of *marketplace, bridge and neighbourhood* were associated with dimensions of human activity and interaction to produce an impression of a school library as a dynamic, people focused entity with reach and influence (Elliott Burns, 2011, p. 151).

These understandings were connected to discourses of learning constituted in collaborative, individual, formal and informal activity, and closely coupled with the work of educators, particularly teacher librarians, through discourses of professional knowledge and pedagogical practice. Human dimensions emerged in educators’ references to the being and becoming of students as learners and in the opportunities for the expression of student identities, supported through the multi-dimensional milieu of school libraries.

Transformative influences of a school’s beliefs about learning on the creation of school library spaces emerged in the relational connections made between the school’s *philosophy of total learner development*, as a purposeful foundation for a school library which was *designed with the learners in mind*, and with an extended scope of *extra curriculum and community overlaid*. These interdependent aspects were expressed in the transforming ideal of a *community of learners* (Elliott Burns, 2011, p. 154).

Discursive opportunities and relationships achieved key significance in educators’ discussions as pivots for both designing possibilities and limitations. Designing was constituted and diversely expressed by educators, in terms of vision, leadership, relationships and communication.

In some situations, discourses of constraint were evident in competing knowledge and varied understandings about experience/expertise and roles in designing endeavours. For educators this was most particularly a concern in coming to terms with the roles and responsibilities of accredited designers / architects. Some educators speculated on whether accredited designers believed educators had any role in informing designing activities.

One teacher suggested that the architect’s own views about the designing of the space would prevail *given that they’re very much into their own designing and putting their mark on it.* These circumstances created a puzzling emotional conundrum. *I mean we, you feel so privileged to be in something so new and so wonderful and then you think ‘why didn’t they listen to the people?’* (Elliott Burns, 2011, p. 174).
Such limitations were seen by some educators to be influenced by established policy and status quo processes, to produce communication difficulties and to inhibit designing relationships. The weight of these influences often required resourceful responses and sometimes resignation and compromise by educators to accept less desired built-space options.

In other circumstances, discourses of creativity connected the dispositions of education and architecture in circumstances of negotiated, productive designing engagement between educators, communities and architects/designers. In one school, the library re-design went through several transitions. Opportunities for dialogue included a curriculum council, a conference and staff engagement with discussions about pedagogies, to produce a dove-tailing effect, so that the spaces actually came out of the thinking that everyone was doing (Elliott Burns, 2001, p. 168). Across the discussions educators’ rich pedagogical knowledge and small story experiences as dweller-designers signalled their considerable capacities to inform designing activity in company with school communities and accredited designers.

**Student Voices**

Students’ small stories conveyed interpretations of their beliefs and philosophy, vision, values and desires about school libraries. Dimensions and attributes of culture, experiences and practices, conceptual and material organisation and social relationships and processes emerged in students’ discussions about the characteristics of school libraries: it’s sort of like an education playground (Elliott Burns, 2011, p. 185).

In some of the students’ small stories, school libraries were discussed in discourses of creativity, such that the spaces were understood as specific to them and customised particularly for them, as young people.

*Our library speaks of young people. The colours and the furniture are sort of young – not like the old library that was brick inside and had sort of old furniture. You feel like it (the new library) was made for you because of the colours and things* (Elliott Burns, 2011, p. 192).

In other renditions, school libraries were seen to constrain the desired expression of student identities through the use of particular spatial configurations and materials, and in spatial design outcomes which kept them under surveillance. A particular and repeated example was student commentary on the use of glass as a building material.

*All the rooms in the library have glass, so it’s hard to be private to work by yourself. The glass is a distraction, it feels as if you are being watched* (Elliott Burns, 2011, p. 192).

Thus, interpretations of glass as ‘transparency, visibility and light’ can also be read as ‘supervision, surveillance and privacy-intrusion’. Student discussions included pleas for the inclusion of private spaces for learning as an alternative among current predominantly collaborative, group-based learning space options. This dimension of
concern for students calls to mind a *multitude-solitude* balance, ‘the existential state in which I keep myself company’ (Arendt, in Mudie, p. 32), offering opportunities for inner dialogue and the nurturing of identity.

To design for solitude is not to create spaces for self-indulgence, but rather to give ample consideration to what the self might need for the full realisation of our potential as thinking, conscious individuals. (Mudie, 2012, p. 34)

Students’ discussions were also connected to discourses of change, education, learning, social relationships and spatiality, as ways to explain and evaluate the potential for them to participate in the designing of the spaces and places of their lives and work as learners. Students’ *small stories* demonstrated capacities for conceptualising, description, evaluation, questioning and critique. Their capacities to reflect on matters of learning spaces and designing, and their familiarity as prime users of school libraries, suggests that students can be adept and creative participants in designing dialogues.

*Designer/Architect Voices*

Only one of the three participant designers/architects was able to draw on discourses of learning and teaching to exemplify understandings about learners’ relationships with school libraries and to reflect on broader matters of education. In this circumstance school libraries were represented as *sites of re-invention*, changing and evolving to give effect to a *transformational shift* in resources, access and operations (Elliott Burns, 2011, p. 203). It is worth noting that this participant had undertaken a cross-disciplinary, architecture-education post-graduate research project.

Historical perspectives characterised one architect’s position: *libraries are very different to our day in the sixties or seventies, there’s a lot more going on. It is a week-to-week moveable feast in the IT area. It’s important to stay in touch with that. You have to get the bones of cabling right* (Elliott Burns, 2011, p. 206). In this regard, knowledge and experience gaps could be said to constitute voids in understandings and to inhibit capacities to imagine the designed outcomes of school libraries from the standpoints of those most closely associated with learning endeavours in these spaces and places.

In the remaining discussions, the designers/architects’ limited pedagogical knowledge, absence of references to a research focus and partial understandings about relationships among learners, learning and school libraries were the most significant elements.

Discourses of constraint appeared to predominate as designers/architects conveyed their understandings and described their practices related to the designing of school libraries and other school learning spaces.

Responsibility for the *sometimes far too institutional and far too segregated features of schools* was viewed as a result of expressions of designing which produced
an almost prison-like functionality and appearance. A lot of the environments we design for students are far too austere. Making libraries and whole school precincts as nice places to be would improve the experience of what it’s like to be at school (Elliott Burns, 2011, p. 222).

In these renditions relations of power can be seen to produce, and to reproduce, status quo processes through the implementation of policies, stages and standards of built-space practices, and the imposition of time schedules and accountability requirements of governments and school systems.

Thus status quo processes can work to constrain opportunities for designing partnerships with educators and students as the users of educational spaces, and to confine participation to reactive responses or in some cases to mediate actively against participation.

Education Facility Planner Voices

In a similar unfolding, only one of the three participant education facility planners (an earlier career teacher) was able to draw on discourses and experiences of education to convey resonant understandings of school libraries, learners and learning. School libraries were regarded as model sites where the epitome of learning examples in the school should be. School libraries were sites being transformed, as vanguard IT sites in the school and as sites for the modelling of inquiry learning (Elliott Burns, 2011, p. 230).

The two remaining educational facility planners resisted comment, disclaiming the field of education as one in which they needed or had experience/expertise, consigning concerns about matters of education to others. In relation to the designing and building of a school library in a newly developed site, one participant stated, I’m just one of the cogs in the wheel; somewhere between the demographics and the appointment of the Principal (Elliott Burns, 2011, p. 235).

In the cases of two of the education facility planners their comments on matters of education, learning and teaching were limited to illustrative, narrative scenarios of recent experience to connect these dimensions.

For the education facility planners in the study much of their designing activity appeared to be framed within discourses of constraint, characterised by system and governance processes, and by particular understandings about designing roles and participation. Education facility planner responsibilities were framed and evaluated in statements such as, the delivery and provision is what I’m most concerned about. We’re constrained, as I said by delivering a building, so that’s what my job is about. It’s about built environment, the delivery of the provision. Square metres are set by Canberra and the dollars are effectively set by the BGA (Grant Authority), so that’ll be a dollar rate for building a so called library resource centre (Elliott Burns, 2011, p. 243).

Even for the participant with teaching experience, system processes and governance had assumed a priority position in the practices and implementation of
the role of education facility planner, *I’ve got to massage everything so it comes out the right way* (Elliott Burns, 2011, p. 235).

Across this group, variations and limitations in pedagogical knowledge and experiences suggest that there is unrealised potential for this role to build knowledge about learners, learning and libraries and to engage with relevant research, to inform more productively the processes of designing.

**KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE GAPS**

Variations in language and dispositional foci are noted by Mayes (2010, p. 194) as asymmetries which operate at *levels of participation, interaction, institutional know-how, knowledge and rights of access to knowledge*. Mayes (2010) suggests that asymmetries can be seen to signal gaps and silences across participant groups with respect to knowledge about particular matters and can be understood as dimensions of power, in omission or commission, which arise through interactions across groups.

In these respects, competing discourses of creativity and constraint could be suggested as catalysts for creative tension. Even within current conditions, the potential fluidity of some system conditions characterised in certain participants’ *small stories*, presents opportunities to explore and unravel creative possibilities and to suggest potential for creative influence (Harvey, 1996).

However, knowledge and experience gaps can constitute discursive barriers in designing relationships as participants from different fields of practice meet in, or indeed are absent from, shared designing endeavours. The implications for communication and for designing outcomes may be considerable, if for example, designer/architects, education facility planners and financial project managers assume, misunderstand, overlook or ignore users of educational spaces and the elements which are of significance to them and in which accredited designers exert customarily dominant designing roles and project leadership.

**CREATING EVIDENCE-BASED DESIGNING OPPORTUNITIES**

The strength and richness of participant discussion in the *voices* study supports the potential for evidence-based designing opportunities to emerge in dialogic, interrogative designing approaches which create and reference a foundation in contemporary learning space design research and which invite the inclusion of both user learning communities and accredited design professionals (Elliott Burns, 2011).

To achieve an emphasis on designing as dialogic, cyclic, renewing and reflective processes, I have chosen to use the descriptor ‘evidence-based *designing*’ rather than ‘evidence-based design’. As noted in the *voices* study, Heath’s (1989) designing cycle of venturing and refinement, involves a mix of excitement and discipline in creative processes of learning and discovery. My emphasis on *designing* is further underpinned by a perspective that the designing of spaces for learning and teaching is
not a once-for-all activity, and that social, pedagogical and technological dimensions are among the quotidian and evolving influences on the learning spaces of schools in particular. This suggests continuing proactive and responsive agency in designing by those who live and work in the spaces of schools.

The earlier reference to asymmetries at levels of participation, interaction, institutional know-how, knowledge, and rights of access to knowledge (Mayes, 2010, p. 194), suggests avenues to address potential knowledge and experience gaps and to bridge disciplinary-related understandings between the fields of practice of education and architecture, around matters of educational space designing. Newton and Fisher’s (2009) glossary of architectural and educational terms addresses one possibility of bridge-building across knowledge gaps with respect to terminology-as-discourse and for enhanced, collaborative meaning-making in designing contexts.

Discursive opportunities of a more systematic order, exemplified in the evidence-based practices of translational research and planning roles in the health sector, could offer more focused opportunities for role-specific, mediated engagement between accredited designers and educators, bringing to bear a diversity of specialised cultural, social, conceptual and linguistic resources in designing dialogue (Fisher, 2013). A particular example is the 8-step Evidence-Based Design process and planning cycle outlined by Malkin (2008, p. 17) and the Centre of Health Design www.healthdesign.org/chd.

The health sector Evidence-Based Design process referenced by Fisher (2013, p. 141) develops systematic precursors to built space projects through organisational readiness; defining goals and objectives; sourcing and critical evaluation of relevant research; innovation on evidence-based concepts and development of baseline performance measures. These pre-construction concentrations provide significant data/evidence to inform the designing of built spaces and the evaluation of post-occupancy performance.

In a similar way for example, Heath’s (1989, 2010) qualitative, discovery-focused, evidence-gathering framework, the VAST heuristic, pays attention to a scope of evidence as a foundation for built space design decision-making. Heath’s process was explored at some length in the voices study and can be regarded as a way of connecting and translating the values and relationships of users and their desire for capacity to enact a particular range of human activities, with practical considerations about the sites and systems required to support their endeavours and the technologies required to produce the most effective and satisfying built space forms. Each of the VAST elements and their issuing synergistic relationships implies a data-information-knowledge-wisdom flow and an evidence-cycle of imagining-visioning, of research through the literature and in the field, of monitored implementation and of post occupancy evaluation.

Recognition of diversity in designing endeavours invites foundation consideration of experiential-existential questions of: ‘who are you?’, ‘how are you?’, ‘what does/might this place mean to/for you?’ balanced with those
practical-instrumental matters of activity and ‘doing’ concerned with functional and structural questions about ‘what do you want to do here?’ Thus experiential-existential interrogative exploration leads to more instrumental questions of ‘and so then, how would you like to live and work here?’

Taken together, Day’s consensus designing approach (2003), Heath’s VAST heuristic (1989, 2010), and the Evidence-Based Designing model cited by Fisher (2013), share a heavy reliance on dialogue and negotiation, and on the inclusion of the voices of dwellers and users as designers in partnership with accredited designers. Designing approaches which grow out of users’ contexts may be more difficult courses of action in circumstances where status quo approaches are ingrained, assumed and unquestioned, or when system processes override wider involvement beyond accredited designer roles.

In the developing of shared understandings attention needs to be paid to diversity of perspectives, and variations of needs and desires. As continuing processes of designing, these examples have potential to inform the daily, ongoing adaptations, flows of people, interactions and information which have become characteristic of school learning environments. Such adaptations extend beyond the inauguration of new built space projects or substantial refurbishments and into the realm of everyday reworking in response to changing requirements. Such evolving processes invite users to come as you are with your values, contexts and desires; to make and remake the places and spaces of their lives and work.

CAPACITY-BUILDING TO FOSTER EVIDENCE-BASED DESIGNING

Pursuant to these possibilities, the voices research highlighted the unit of study ‘Designing spaces for learning’ in the Master of Education (MEd) at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), as an example of an opportunity for discursive and creative positioning of educators to motivate and inspire learning space designing participation. The MEd study program concentrates on knowledge and experience building with educators, for whom there has been previously no prospect in their pre-service and post-graduate programs, to consider matters of space, place and designing related to the influence of educational spaces on student learning and on their own pedagogical practices.

The MEd study program operates in something of an intermediary position, inviting educator and designer / architect participation in forums and site visits and offering accredited designers opportunities for engagement with educators away from the pressured schedules of ‘live/real’ built space projects. Such collaboration presents opportunities to foster educators’ and designer / architects’ understandings and to apply these within the contexts of conceptual and professional work.

The intermediary position has the potential to foster the ‘knowledge partnerships’ referenced by Fisher (2013) and integrated within the health sector Evidence-Based Design exemplar noted earlier in the chapter. It could be argued that recognition of the value in ‘knowledges’ from different disciplines might enable respectful balance
in partnerships at the tables of design decision-making for the spaces of learning and teaching.

At the research level, particular examples of capacity building include projects through research centres such as the Learning Environments Applied Research Network (LEARN) at the University of Melbourne (Victoria, Australia) http://learnetwork.edu.au/ At the Queensland University of Technology, the Children and Youth Research Centre’s program ‘Environments for Work and Play’ supports innovative and high-impact research in this area, with a particular focus on children and youth, their families, and communities. http://cryc.qut.edu.au/

Studies such as ‘Reimagining learning spaces’ (Bland, Hughes, & Willis, 2013) undertaken by Queensland University of Technology researchers and funded by the Queensland Council for Social Science Innovation, gathered educator and student perspectives as an evidence-base to inform the designing and use of school facilities and to examine the relationship between school building construction and pedagogy.

The reimagining study focused on new school libraries established during the period of the Australian National Government initiative ‘Building the Education Revolution’ and integrated themes of imagining, transitioning, experiencing and re-imagining. Recommendations from the study overlap a range of encouragements and outcomes of a number of studies including those of the voices of experience research. These include encouragements to user participation in designing and creating spaces customised for individual communities; encouragements to communication and collaboration among those with accredited professional and user investment in learning spaces and encouragements to evaluation of process, practice and facility-experiences through post-occupancy reflection.

Most pertinently these encouragements include the investment of time – ‘lead time’ for learning space project preparation (Bland, Hughes, & Willis, 2013, p. 144); time for ‘organisational readiness’ (Fisher, 2013, p. 141); time to evaluate and build on aspects of evidence through critical analysis of research; time to understand the values-foundation of the educational organisation or school/s involved; time to challenge and negotiate pressured time schedules imposed by system and governance requirements and project deadlines (Elliott Burns, 2011).

Continuing discursive opportunities through interdisciplinary research would usefully involve connections among professional associations of education, architecture and design, universities and research centres. Learning space designing research has built a more intense international profile since Lackney’s (1996, 2001) early influential foundation studies. Australia does not have a long history of research in learning space designing.

However, with partnerships established through university-based research centres, generative funding opportunities and key programs in progress, Australian educators, architects and designers are well placed to engage in long-term, in-situ, cycles of research, implementation and reflection. Interdisciplinary research offers collaborative opportunities for the ‘capacity building’ commended by Parnell, Cave and Torrington (2008, p. 218).
References


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Title:
Voices of Experience: Opportunities to Influence Creatively the Designing of School Libraries

Date:
2016

Citation:

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/191889

File Description:
Published version