Reshaping Our Learning Landscape

A Collection of Provocation Papers

Acknowledgements

Introduction
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'Building Schools for the Future' (BSF) is an ambitious programme which aims to produce far reaching change. It offers local authorities and schools in England a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform educational provision and to significantly improve educational outcomes and life chances of children, young people and families.

The capital investment is intended to act as a catalyst for change, but is not itself the change. Through the investment, schools will be able to make the organisational and cultural changes needed and provide 21st century facilities for new, and tried and tested methods of learning and teaching. This will enable every young person to unlock their skills and talents, giving them the opportunity to be fully engaged in meaningful learning and to achieve their best, regardless of background. Young people will have the knowledge, capability and values required to become successful participants in, and contributors to, 21st century society and the global economy.

The Transforming Croydon Schools team is dedicated to delivering a step change in service provision through capital investment programmes such as BSF. Each school has established their own School Transformation Team, representing the views of a wide range of stakeholders and providing a communication route to each member's respective stakeholder group. It is essential that this group is given opportunity to challenge and debate current and future thinking about schools and learning, as well as looking beyond the school for inspiration.

To this end we are committed to creating a programme of activity that will provide participants with the opportunity to expand their experience of:

• Inspirational People and Inspirational Places
• New ways of working
• Alternatives approaches to school organisation
• New models of leadership
• Innovative use of ICT
• Global challenges facing educationalists
• 21st Century Learning Strategies
• Best practice examples from BSF projects
• Next generation learning spaces
• Lateral thinking
• Creative problem solving
• Large scale capital investment programmes e.g. BSF

This programme will offer participants a significant chance to develop their thinking about the future of schools and learning. The programme will enable participants to widen their networks, drawing on the leading thinkers from the sectors of education, design, leadership, business and technology. The programme has been designed to stimulate thinking; challenge expectations; offer practical examples of implementation and generate shared points of reference for leading a journey of transformation.

What follows is a collection of papers written to stimulate thinking and provoke the reader as part of this developmental programme.

The views contained in this publication are those of the authors and do not represent the views of either London Borough. They are provided as part of a transformation journey to encourage deep thinking about education and learning ahead of design considerations. Consider your horizons broadened.

Themes Explained

What makes a good school?
This is our overarching question with all stakeholders. In our exploration with many people we expect to profile the characteristics of what learners, parents teachers and others all think makes a good school. Each of the themes below is an area of research and potential profiling and represents considerations to people and process change.

Learning Experience
The TCS team has been considering how the learning experience might change to best meet the needs of children and young people in the 21st Century. This includes reflections on personalised, collaborative, project based, enquiry based and skills based learning to name but a few.

Teaching Experience
The TCS team has been examining how pedagogy and the teaching profession has changed in recent years. This has involved looking at new models of leadership; new roles for teachers in the classroom, as well as across the school; and collaborative practice.

Social Experience
We have asked young people in particular about their social experience in school. We have questioned the role of informal learning and the power of developing social, emotional aspects of learning.

Dining Experience
Schools have number of conventions that have continued pervasively into the 21st Century, one of these is the dining experience young people have. We are questioning the validity, particularly in the context of Every Child Matter, of regimented, whole school lunchtimes.

Professional Working
As a team we recognise that on other large scale capital programmes the spaces that adults often use (staff room, offices, meeting spaces) are poorly considered. We have begun to explore the nature of working spaces for adults in schools and in particular how space might support new ways of working, especially collaborative work.

Extended Learning
we have give considerable thought to how a school might offer a wider range of learning services, both during school hours and also beyond the school day. As a resource, a school as immense potential for acting as a hub for both community learning and for engaging local young people.

Accelerating Progress
Our schools talk extensively about the challenges associated with assessment, both formatively in respect to the changing frequency and scale of examinations and also formatively with regards to assessment for learning. We have already begun to test ideas associated with peer mentoring and coaching.

Relationships and Partnerships
we are working more cooperatively as a result of the multi-disciplinary teams we have formed to transform our schools. Some of these relationships are formal and have governance changes connected to them. Others capitalise on common areas of development and relative strengths of schools.

Life Between Classrooms Applying Public Space Theory to Learning Environments

Prakash Nair and Annalise Gehling, Fielding Nair International

This is a response to the TCS theme: *"The Spaces Between Classrooms"* In this paper we discuss Jan Gehl's theory of public space and how it might apply to learning environments today, using the examples of school and university campuses, and exploring the emerging role of informal learning in the 21st Century.

Background:
The Theory of Public Space

Danish architect Jan Gehl's widely renowned book 'Life Between Buildings' was first published in 1971 and translated into English in 1987. The book was a critique of the modernist focus on city buildings and roads at the expense of multifunctional public space; space which in the modernist movement had been neglected. People were expected to use their cars to travel between home, shops and a workplace that were all situated in different city zones.

The modernists thought of cities as being organs for economic production: people would go to work to produce goods, they would buy goods in shops, and they would consume goods in their homes. It was a simple model that reduced people to producers and consumers, and not one that acknowledged our human nature and motivation very well.

Gehl noted that public space had been neglected in the rush to separate commercial, residential and industrial zones, and that the spaces between buildings had become in many cases a car-dominated wasteland, in contrast to the traditional European town square with its cafes spilling out of buildings, and people going about their business and leisure in the quiet company of the city.

Gehl's thesis is important because it acknowledges our social nature as human beings. We are motivated by social experiences: we enjoy watching other people, looking out for people we know, and some of us enjoy being watched! All of us appreciate the way space feels safer (and it actually is safer) when there are other people around – we keep each other's behaviour in-check because we all want to be socially acceptable. Jane Jacobs wrote about this in her book The Death and Life of Great American Cities.

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Gehl has more recently summarised the three main features of good public space: all the space between buildings (self-contained destinations) in a city.

Marketplace
'Marketplace' can refer to shops and stalls, but also to any place at which a transaction of ideas or performance might occur. In schools this might include learning studios, lecture theatres, libraries, cafes and specialist facilities.

Thoroughfare
Public space needs to encourage people to move through it by foot or on bike, so it needs to have destinations at either end as well as along the route. In a school setting this means that the space is used to access a number of different semi-private rooms or facilities.
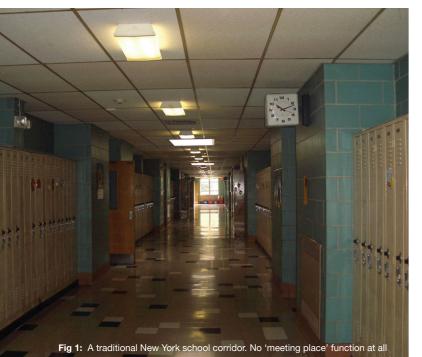
Meeting place
'Meeting place' means that there are furnishings that encourage people to stop and chat with each other. In urban settings this means benches and tables to sit at, pillars to gather around and lean things against, and trees to provide shade. In indoor school settings this might mean small, round tables to gather at, 'edge' seats in windowsills or booths, and floor cushions.

Applying this theory to school design

Why this is important for schools? Put simply, in the same way as the modernists reduced their concept of human beings to producers and consumers so that they would fit neatly into their city model, schools for many years were designed around a very simple notion of students. Students were empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, which was thought to be possible by grouping them together by age, and delivering content to them. It was a factory model, in much the same way as the modernists saw the city as one big money-making factory.

Another parallel is that much in the same way as modernist city planners tended to build with cars in mind, instead of people, 19th and 20th Century school design tended to build for exclusively for classes instead of individuals. This can be seen in the form of the classroom and corridor ('cells and bells') school design that assumes all students will be doing the same thing at the same time using the same resources.

The good news is that in the same way that cities are now being designed to enhance and build social capital, schools are also being designed around these acknowledgements of our human nature. Understanding why this change is important helps teachers and students to be able to use it effectively – in a sense to 'un-train' themselves after years of modifying their behaviour to fit or rebel against the traditional 'cells' (classrooms) of factory model schools.

Corridors:
the clogged freeways of school

Corridors are the most obvious example of public space in a school but they only provide two of the three functions: thoroughfare and (not very convincingly in most cases) marketplace. Typically unfurnished and without any nooks or crannies, they don't offer anywhere for meeting or quiet observation and reflection.

This means they aren't nice places to spend time in: you are inclined to hurry off and find another space for meeting.

Without the passive supervision of a range of students and adults 'hanging out' in the space between classrooms, corridors often become a site for bullying and rough behaviour. It is important to understand that a school can exist without corridors. A classic example of a school where corridors are replaced by public space is at Millennium High School in New York City (figure 2). Beyond its ability to connect various elements of the school more effectively than a corridor, it also serves as the school's much-needed 'meeting place'. By adding suitable furniture it encourages use of the space for productive social and academic behaviour.

In addition, having windows between the semi-private spaces (meeting rooms, classrooms, specialist spaces, offices) and what has then become the 'commons' further improves that space in the same way as house and shop windows make a streetscape safer and more lively.

Fig 1: A traditional New York school corridor. No 'meeting place' function at all

Fig 2: Indoor public space at Millennium High School, New York

Classrooms and Formal Learning Spaces:
what is their role in a 21st Century Learning Environment?

Classrooms and other formal learning spaces such as laboratories, studios, theatres and small group tutorial or discussion rooms are very important parts of a school, and they are necessarily enclosed in many cases. Wherever the learning modality involves some kind of presentation it is important that the space be oriented to that focal point.

However, the proportion of a student's time spent sitting and listening to a lecture or presentation is ideally small in comparison to the time spent on problem solving, hands-on learning, independent study, working in teams and other project-based learning. Dissemination of information can be entirely personalised and globalised in the broadband age and beyond, and students are well aware of this. For this reason we need to reconsider the proportion of our schools' indoor spaces that privilege a stand-and-deliver modality.

Indoor Public Space in Schools:
purposes, key features and a rationale

If we stop expecting schools to consist of corridors and classrooms, and instead expect them to offer a range of formal and informal learning environments, we almost never end up with corridors, as they simply don't make for good quality public space.

Instead, the spaces between formal learning areas are designed specifically for the purpose of informal learning: learning from peers, learning by application, and learning a range of highly sought-after 'soft' skills that are increasingly demanded by the business community as well as anyone with a desire for safer neighbourhoods.

In these indoor public spaces, often referred to as 'Learning Commons', or in some cases 'Einstein Studios', students are not forced into a particular way of behaving, as they are in a classroom, "Sit down and wait for some spoon feeding," or a corridor, "Get out of here and into a nicer, lighter place with a spot to sit." Instead, there are subtle cues offering an invitation to learn, each of them contributing to its marketplace/thoroughfare/meeting place qualities:

There are interesting things happening: people you know are walking past (thoroughfare-meeting place), conversations are happening (meeting place), special events are being set-up or are in progress (meeting place/marketplace).

There are invitations to participate: Art is on display everywhere to be appreciated (marketplace). There are computers, books and other resources readily available (marketplace).

There are places to meet: Most importantly, there are places to meet with others in personal, small and large groupings. Soft seating and small, round tables offer themselves as meeting places for pairs and small groups. This kind of space is referred to in The Language of School Design as 'Watering Hole' space, drawing on one of Dr. David Thornburg's three Primordial Learning Metaphors. It's space in which people can learn from each other in a peer setting.

There are places for solitude and reflection: Another of the Primordial Learning Metaphors noted by Dr. Thornburg is the 'Cave': a space for solitude and quiet reflection. Human beings like this kind of space to face the action: when you are by yourself at an airport gate you generally choose the seat that gives the best vantage point for viewing other people, and which has your back to a wall. Incorporating seating in windowsills and other nooks and crannies in these kinds of spaces makes it OK for students to be by themselves, since they are in a sense 'invited' by the space.

Fig 3 - Above: Indoor public space, the 'Café/Commons' at Duke School, North Carolina, USA. Each of the school's Small Learning Communities has its own Café/Commons.

Outdoor Public Space in Schools: purposes, key features and a rationale

There are many good reasons for encouraging students to spend time outside during the formal breaks of recess and lunch, and most schools do encourage this as long as the weather is not inclement. In many schools students do not have the option of staying inside – though quite often this is because there is no suitable place for them to play indoors – as discussed under the previous heading isolated classrooms and barren corridors do not make for good student-directed space.

Either way, if we expect students to spend time outside socialising, we need to provide them with spaces that support the kinds of social development we're seeking for them: places to sit and chat and eat in small groups, under cover if the climate requires. Large undifferentiated spaces can encourage a bit of a mob – it is better to have smaller groupings scattered informally.

The Amphitheatre at Scotch Oakburn College's Middle School (Fig 4) is located right at the building's front door and incorporates elements of thoroughfare, meeting place and marketplace. Compare this to the poor quality outdoor space at a UK school (Fig 5). Thoroughfare is the only aspect of public space that this example supports, somewhat by default Outdoors, many schoolyards provide only basic equipment for primary school students and no amenities at all for secondary students. Let's consider each provision in terms of Gehl's theory of public space. Where is the thoroughfare? Besides travel

between different facilities on the school campus, school grounds typically have no thoroughfare qualities. Universities, on the other hand, usually do, mixing in many cases seamlessly with the urban surrounds. Wherever possible, senior secondary schools should embody the same principles so that learning becomes a regular part of the streetscape, providing a positive platform that supports teenagers' eagerness to engage with the wider community.
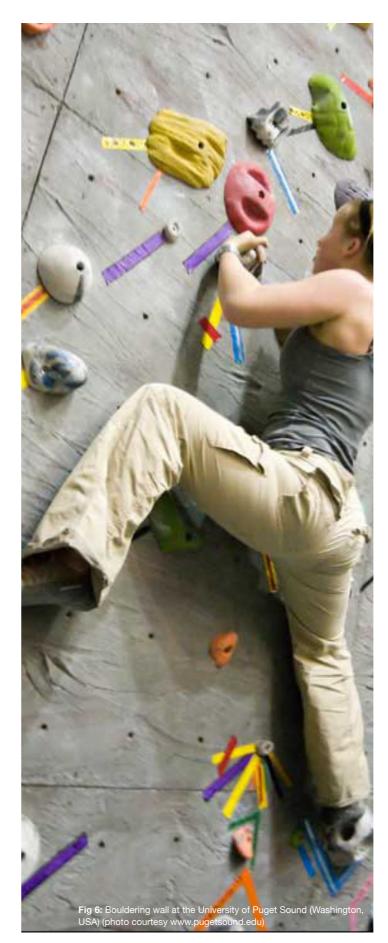
Within regular school campuses, the principle of thoroughfare should still be embraced: where are the most heavily used pedestrian routes on the campus? Identify these and build up the 'marketplace' and 'meeting place' functions around them.

'Meeting place' space should be relatively simple to create. Small outdoor table groupings, reminiscent of café-type settings, and amphitheatre-type/ multi-level terrace spaces provide natural locations for informal small-group discussion or socialising. In Australia, Scotch Oakburn College's new Middle School campus (figure 4) gives students a range of different meeting place options. Importantly, the tables and chairs, and amphitheatre, are both located right in the middle of the main thoroughfare from the rest of the campus to the Middle School building. This is by far the most heavily trafficked area, meaning there are plenty of opportunities for people-watching and incidental meet-ups.

'Marketplace' is also relevant in the case of this important public space at Scotch Oakburn College. Immediately adjacent the Amphitheatre is a student-run café (Café Eight), a Da Vinci Studio containing readily accessible tools for art and science projects and facilities for any kind of messy construction

Fig 4

Fig 5

work, an Einstein Studio (indoor Public Space) offering a large number of computers and displays, and metres away is the school's Health and Physical Education Centre. Sculptures created by local artists are purposefully located in amongst the immediate indoor and outdoor spaces. Each of these facilities is an invitation to engage in learning in the same way as shops engage passers-by.

Worth mentioning here, though it isn't a focal point of the public space discussion, is the quality of outdoor play facilities for students of all ages. This is a key part of the outdoor 'marketplace' of activities available on a school site. Younger students are usually provided with some form of play equipment, which can prescribe play to a greater or lesser extent. Equipment that provides children with a range of possibilities is always the best kind for play-based learning. Older students should also be given opportunities for climbing as well as the hard play surfaces that usually dominate secondary school yards – bouldering walls are one example of a suitable climbing structure that can be used by a wide variety of ages (see Figure 6).

An essential resource for any school developing its outdoor play areas is www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk.

Small Learning Communities: Making Indoor Public Space Work

Small Learning Communities (SLCs) are self-contained 'schools within schools' that support interdisciplinary learning and strong teacher-student relationships in a series of formal and informal learning spaces. Figure 3, of Duke School, NC, shows part of the informal learning area/indoor public space that is 'owned' by a group of around 100 students and their teachers, and is surrounded by a variety of different larger and smaller learning studios. In this space it is perfectly acceptable to work or to socialise without fear of admonishment or retribution.

SLCs have emerged as a new building block for schools over the past five years. The old building block: the classroom, was for many schools increasingly inadequate for the wide range of 21st century learning opportunities teachers wanted for their students. It was also recognised as counterintuitive to the schools' pastoral care aims. SLCs have been developed in many different culturally and climatically sensitive forms in the UK as wells as the USA, Australia, Cayman Islands, New Zealand and Indonesia.

For a comprehensive discussion of the different types of SLC and the features common to all of them, we recommend reading Chapter 1 of The Language of School Design (Second Edition, 2009) by Nair, Fielding and Lackney.

Fig 6: Bouldering wall at the University of Puget Sound (Washington, USA) (photo courtesy www.pugetsound.edu)

Space Beyond School: Using urban public space for learning

It is in schools' best interest to campaign for high quality public space in their towns and cities. Urban public space, if designed specifically to cater for the thoroughfare/meeting place/marketplace functions, is safe space for older students to conduct independent research and effective space for younger students to conduct supervised research. This is because good public space attracts people, who when surrounded by others are naturally inclined to keep their own behaviour in check. Jane Jacobs' book The Death and Life of Great American Cities explains this concept in some detail.

School campuses need to also consider their own public space – indoor and outdoor – and work to ensure it is productive, safe and inviting.

In Melbourne, Australia, Federation Square has since 2001 provided visitors and residents of the city with a natural meeting place for a wide range of informal cultural events. It also functions much as the city's lounge room. Many local schools now use the city as a living textbook, and Federation Square as a base, sending middle and high school students out in small study teams to investigate various aspects of city life and function. This is only possible thanks to the 'life on the street' that developments such as Federation Square and the city's network of pedestrian-dominated laneways have enabled.

Conclusion

High quality public space, the 'space between buildings', is extremely important for encouraging positive social behaviours, and this is increasingly recognised in the designs of towns and cities. School campuses need to also consider their own public space – indoor and outdoor – and work to ensure it is productive, safe and inviting. The checks of 'thoroughfare, meeting place and marketplace' are useful indicators of a space's effectiveness at supporting a wide range of formal and informal learning activities for teachers and students, and indeed supporting life between classrooms.

Unfortunately security concerns mean implementing this philosophy in primary and junior secondary schools is far more difficult, but whatever the security concern schools should never be built as isolated fortresses.