

Redesigning the school environment – Students as clients

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Abstract:

This paper examines an initiative that was one that would fulfill two complementary purposes: to enable 2nd year architecture students to understand the discipline of landscape architecture; and to enable senior school students to have a voice in developing a critique of their outdoor environment. Through lectures, research, short and longer design exercises, the unit of study for the architecture students started at the macro level with an understanding of the Sydney Basin as both a natural system within a local, national and global context, and then zoomed in to the specific south western Sydney area. The client for the project has been a comprehensive secondary school, G. Boys High School (GBHS). Architecture students worked collaboratively with GBHS students to develop landscape and design proposals that would improve their experience of school life- and learning, as well as contributing to social and environmental sustainability.

Early weeks primarily focused on providing architecture students with a new way of seeing, making and understanding place, the disciplinary knowledge for them to understand the importance of landscape design as well as the tools of site analysis and master planning. They met their clients (i.e year 11 and 12 students at GBHS) to gather some essential information, and returned again to develop the design project. Within this client centred unit of study the project explored an overall landscape approach to the development of the school's open spaces, and the design of appropriate new structures integral with the landscape. With some areas of heritage gardens intact, a number of under-developed spaces, as well as a scattered approach to tree planting in recent years, the school provided an opportunity for the exploration of master planning and landscape design principles. The multi-cultural profile of the school opened up possibilities for cultural interpretations through design. Some potential landscape/architecture design areas were canvassed in preliminary discussions: for example, the development of outside learning areas, greater interaction with the community through weekend markets, or a community sporting facility.

As the architecture students worked through their brief, school students were consulted regarding their responses to the ways in which various proposals were evolving. Year 11 and 12 students provided feedback at key points in the design process, when university students were on site, and a design and technology class was identified as one that would act as the representative group who would be more substantially engaged.

In the presentation we shall not only outline the order of events, and the ways in which these were documented, but also a number of issues that presented themselves as the University and School students grappled with the many concerns that arose regarding, in particular, overcrowding in some areas,

underuse of other spaces, student safety, dilemmas of control and a quite frequently expressed opinion that the school was like a 'jail'. The project highlighted the importance of the environment for school students and the value of a university – school collaboration for all participants.

The Project

In brief the project was designed to enable school students to act as 'clients' advising architecture students of their beliefs and desires regarding their school environment. Its reciprocal purpose was to bring to architecture students an authentic challenge whereby they would be engaged in a form of respectful inquiry that would enable them to learn about design that supports social and environmental sustainability.

Young people in schools are rarely consulted about the nature of the environment in which they function, even at a time when there is an increasing understanding that there needs to be a transformation of school environs as an essential component of re-imagining education in the 21st Century. As Burke (2007:363) has observed children and young people are steeped in a "visual cultural world from their earliest years through to adolescence [but] may be considered to be a poorly understood and under-used resource in envisaging the possibilities of the school of the future".

While this project was limited to the outdoor areas of the school it provides us with evidence that when the young people are taken seriously they can make a significant contribution to issues related to design and architecture.

School students as clients – A form of active citizenship

Identifying a building, or cluster of buildings as an Australian High School is not a difficult test. They are designed spaces whose purpose is to contain young people who, in the main, have little choice in the matter as to whether they should there, how they should behave, what they should learn and with whom they should learn. Innovations in communication and digital technologies may mean that within the walls of the school there may be modern interactive classrooms but for most young people schools themselves remain as fixed buildings with their corridors, and their subject departments based upon the separation of forms of knowledge and experience, that had been historically determined.

Many schools were built in Australia during a particular era when there was a surge in the need to provide for universal, compulsory education through various colonial education acts in the 1880s. For example, it is reported that within five years of being appointed in 1873 as Victoria's architect and surveyor of its state schools Henry Bastow designed and oversaw the building and opening of 615 schools around Victoria (Milburn, 2010). Similar building programs, on a massive scale, occurred as a result of the 'baby boom' following World War II. Consequently the much of the school stock in states such as NSW were built between sixty and one hundred years ago to fulfill functions that may now be considered as inimical with current education practices.

Considering the school environment for very young people Loris Malaguzzi recognized the role of the educational institution with its interiors, exteriors, textures, colours and dynamics as 'the third teacher' after the family and school staff. The question we need to ask ourselves is what is the building and its grounds 'teaching' students attending

GBHS? If their environment is to appeal to the heart as well as the head and the mind as required by Freire (2003:97) is it teaching them that they are valued and respected?

GBHS, built in the 1930s is a classic example of what Burke & Grosvenor (2008:111) have characterized as “The New Brutalism” with its bare brick walls, pre-cast concrete floors, exposed pipes and conduits, enclosed stair wells, steel bars, doors with their ubiquitous surveillance panels and scarcely a soft surface to be found. Built to a template and like the current Building the Education Revolution scheme the school attracts a deal of criticism. The interior space is inflexible, too hot in the summer, too cold in the winter. Making changes of any magnitude would be a challenging task indeed.

However, there has been room to reconceptualise the surrounding outdoor spaces. The school is fronted by a garden that was designed and planted out some years ago; it has a number of asphalted spaces and grassed areas used for games, outdoor events and assemblies of one kind or another. Much of this outdoor space is appropriated by given groups who claim it on the basis of their power among their peers.

Thus a project was developed that would enable senior students from GBHS to act as clients and citizens who would advise second year architecture and design students regarding their perceptions of the current outdoor arrangements, how they work and how they might be improved. The project was seen by the school as one that would engage the senior boys as active citizens who might have a voice in considering their outdoor environment and whose views and preferences in all of their diversity *would* be respected and honoured. As Lawson (2001) has observed, if citizenship education is to nurture a sense of belonging in the community and connection to the school, then it needs to address issues of diversity and identity. This is of particular consequence for students from GBHS. Suburb demographics offered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) indicate a significant proportion of the population was born overseas in: Lebanon, China, India, and the South Pacific. More recently the area has seen an influx of people from Iraq and Somalia. For over 90% of the students English functions as a second language.

Importantly, the project enabled students who were less confident and articulate to be included in the consultative process – they would be engaging directly with the university students and the interactions would not be open to the kind of adult manipulation that can make such activities little more than tokenistic (Hill, Davis, Prout and Tisdall, 2004).

The model could be seen to cohere with the first three levels of participation that have been put forward by Shier (2001:110) where young people are listened to, supported in expressing their views and seeing these taken into account. Shier’s model is particularly useful in considering the project because it embodies the nature of commitment required for a project to be successful, namely that there is an opening created, that an opportunity occurs and that there is an obligation to provide conditions that are built into the system. The *opening* created conditions where the young people could express their views regarding their outdoor environment; the *opportunity* enabled a range of views to be expressed; and the obligations were that due weight would be given to the concerns that the students expressed. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that the GBHS students were not able to participate in later stages where there would be ongoing decision making that would result in tangible change. From the beginning it was made clear that they were acting as clients in a design exercise.

The challenge

How then was the exercise constructed? Before this question can be addressed architectural education and its methods must be described. The centerpiece of architectural education is the design studio, and it is through the studio that students find their architectural 'voice', moderated as it is by learning in other areas such as history, theory and technologies. The design studio as a pedagogical approach is project based and involves 'learning by doing'. Thus, the student builds his/her understanding of, and skills in, architecture. Projects are often inflected with theoretical questions, which prompt a discourse about meaning and interpretation, and the role of architecture in creating the 'cultural imaginary'. These questions, beyond the pragmatic and technical, absorb architects can lead to a focus on the building at the expense of its setting, or the aesthetic expression at the expense of the building's users. This project introduced second year students to the discipline of landscape architecture and to actively engaging with users, or 'clients'. The educational objectives were to focus on fostering an experience of engaged inquiry, and learning about design that supports social and environmental sustainability.

While these might sound quite simple objectives they are not. The reason is that they step outside some firmly held beliefs, even at this stage of the student's development. "Why" asked some students in their end of semester feedback 'should we have to study landscape architecture? We want to be architects?' And, so pervasive, is the view of the architect-creator, the idea of working with 'clients', of listening to them and taking note of what they say, may not be obvious to the student architect. Participatory planning and design, however, is a long established concept (see Arnstein's 'Ladder of Citizen participation' 1969), and the benefit of student-teacher-architect collaborations in providing better and more creative learning environments has been well documented Newton and Fisher (2009).

The project had to be designed so that the architecture students, as well as the design practitioners teaching it, would become engaged with the subject matter (landscape architecture) and the client group (GBHS), and the GBHS community would similarly feel engaged. With 140 architecture students and ten studio teachers, and (at times) a similar number of GBHS students (and a small number of teachers), the first challenge was to establish a dialogue between individuals. A set of lectures and required readings introduced architecture students to the concepts of landscape architecture as landscape and to client focused design. Studio exercises and interactions with GBHS students were used to develop school and university students' sense of engagement through relating to individuals or to students in pairs. These interactions took place at GBHS and at the University, thus bringing equality to the exchange. Architecture students understood the GBHS environment, and GBHS students gained an insight into a University environment and into design thinking. At a later point in this paper we shall discuss these encounters more fully. As collaborators each group was able to learn something new, and to become expert in that knowledge. This, as we note in the conclusion, was a powerful experience for many university and GBHS students.

The design exercise, or project, was constructed as a sequence of events and activities with required outcomes over the semester. A number of stages were undertaken, and woven in with a weekly program:

Week 1: Visit to GBHS, meetings with GBHS students and mapping exercise

Week 2- 7: Development of group landscape master plans based on GBHS and architecture students' understandings and research, plus an abstract conceptual exercise to encourage 'out of the box' thinking, an x factor that in combination with the client view would help each student to develop his/her design proposal for one part of the site. All students returned to GBHS during this period. During this time GBHS feedback from their sessions at school were passed on to the students.

Week 7-10: Students worked on their own design proposals for one part of the site, and returned to GBHS in Week 10 to get feedback (around 20 minutes per student) from GBHS students on their proposals.

Week 10-13: Students developed drawings and models, with a final review on Week 13 with visiting critics, which included architects, landscape architects and GBHS students.

Week 15: Students submitted their semester's work for final marking, plus a bound A4 Executive Summary of their project drawings and models, which included a letter to the GBHS principal saying how their proposals would improve the lives of the school's students. Following feedback to each student by their studio teacher, student mounted an exhibition of selected projects and models, and set out the 140 Executive Summaries. The exhibition opening was attended by architecture students and parents, academics, and GBHS staff and students, and remained up for one week. Students provided a copy of their Executive Summary for GBHS.

Encounters and their outcomes

Phase 1 – The initial visit and follow up

Of special note here with regard to the engaged inquiry objectives were the introductory exercises, and the steps taken to capture student interest- from both groups. For the school visit on the first day of university classes, the architecture students were given plan drawings of the school, and advised as to how they should approach this first meeting with GBHS students and how they should go about a mapping exercise. As a guide, and using words, graphics and photos, they were asked to map:

- How does the student come to school- walk, train car, bicycle, bus etc. if bicycle where does he leave it?
- Where does he enter the school?
- Where does he spend his time: at recess and lunch?
- What places does he like, dislike and why?
- Are there any parts of the natural landscape he especially likes and why?
- Which places he likes are out of bounds?
- Are some places: too hot, too cold, too windy, too exposed to weather, smell good or bad?
- Are there places which encourage or support bullying behaviour?
- What changes to the outdoor spaces might improve the student's life at school as well as his learning?

- If the student were principal for a day, what would he do to improve the outdoor spaces?

The meeting of some 250 students in the GBHS gym was full of lively conversation, but soon they started to move out of the hall in pairs or threesomes to show the architecture students the school. GBHS students left at the end of afternoon classes, and the architecture students remained to make their own mappings, and consider what they had heard. Over the next week, they were asked to do a similar exercise for the high school they had attended, an exercise with a phenomenological intent, i.e. to revive their own experience of school, and to thus connect them emotionally as well as 'professionally' with GBHS. Much of the week 2 day long design session was spent in sharing these different mappings, and through this they developed an accelerated understanding of GBHS, from multiple points of view. Issues of overcrowding, containment, poor circulation, lack of choice during recess and lunch hours, sun and shading, lack of seating, and the desire for better sporting facilities as well as spaces for quiet activities and outdoor learning or study came up often. The social construction of the school's spaces (what was in bounds and out of bounds) played a significant role in the students' perceptions, and the school fence evoked the use of the word 'jail'. Not all the mappings yielded good results, and there were complaints about 'inarticulate' GBHS students, but this opened up another line of questioning. Was there something you might have done differently that would have led to a more productive outcome? What skills do you need to work with people?

These mappings, in conjunction with further research, provided the basis for the students' group masterplans, and contributed also to students defining a small area of the school they would like to design in more detail- a 'design intervention'. Each student wrote their own design brief for the second part of the project, which led to a large number of different proposals. One student wrote in her brief, " In order for a student to learn, one must create a suitable environment which will not only stimulate but also encourage, but most importantly an environment in which the student is comfortable. ... I propose firstly to break down the school into different spaces whereby each may cater for the individual needs and comforts of the student..My design intervention...will be six platforms. ..and I aim to create organically inspired shelters..using the branches of trees so that they arch and intertwine..filter and dapple the harsh summer sun". Another proposed outdoor seating and study areas on the basis that 'outdoor learning will help motivate students and improve their mental, physical and spiritual health'. Another saw the need to link to the community, with shared spaces for sports and structures for weekend markets that could also be used for outdoor learning. Another saw the potential for ecological learning and proposed a natural wetland with associated kitchen garden and learning spaces for school, and community use. Others focused on opportunities the existing library offered for opening to unused open spaces. Some designers acknowledged the high number of Muslim students and designed spaces that could be used for prayer. All of these design objectives were to improve the boys' experience of school.

As it has been noted students from the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning – Design Studio 2 visited the school and were matched with small groups of students from Years 11 and 12. After some initial discussions they escorted their newfound partners around the grounds commenting on places that they liked and disliked and what their characteristics were. They also discussed what needed to be changed and why. Following this consultation a visit was made to the Faculty by the project's academic

partner whose background was in education. The design studio was observed and photographed in action. The observer was able to join one group for their discussion where issues were raised regarding: the security fencing surrounding the school; the concept of spaces in the school being “out of bounds”; and, access to the front area of the school. Subsequently a short powerpoint presentation was developed to be shown and discussed with the Year 11 D&T class, who have been targeted as one for the purposes of documenting the stages of the project from the perspective of the school. In effect, the academic partner acted as an intermediary between the two institutions, the school and the university.

At the school each slide of the ppt was addressed and students given opportunities to ask questions. Although there were few of these it was clear that the GBHS students were quite unfamiliar with the precinct of the University of Sydney and surprised that it was accessible and not fenced in, as was their own school. A significant issue for the GBHS students as expressed to the Architecture and Design students was the provision of the security fence. In order to elicit responses to student perspectives on the security fence they were presented with five images: The best defence; You choose; Spooky; Inside/Out; and Emergency. Students each selected one image and explained why they had made this choice.

Six students selected “Spooky”:

- Because like, we’re in a detention centre or jail when we’re locked in school for six hours.
- (It’s) so you cannot jig or truant class or school, it feels like you’re in jail.
- Because it’s like we’re in jail.
- Because it’s like we’re in jail. It blocks us off from the outside world.
- Because if you need to jump over you can hurt yourself.
- Because it is sharp at the top and it’s dark green and it’s sharp.

Five students chose “The best defense”:

- The best defense is the most appropriate solution to why the fence is there because students will not have access to leave the school at any time for whatever reason, students can’t interact with people outside the school and people cannot enter the school unless they enter from the front gate.
- Because the fence defends our school.
- To protect us from other people.
- Because it is high and no bad criminal can come in and for your safety.
- Because it is very high and sharp and no-one comes in.

Two students focused upon “You choose”:

- It’s there to choose people who enter and exit the school.
- The school has chosen that because of the amount of jiggling that used to happen.

Two more selected “Emergency”

- I chose this image because the fence is bigger and no stranger can come in and it’s safe because no school students can get out.

- The fence is there for the safety of the students from trespassers and they can't get out from school and hurt themselves.

Finally, one student chose "Inside/out"

- They keep us in when we're looking out.

In a short, general discussion several boys also commented that by keeping students within the school, during school hours, meant that the community also felt safer.

Since the term "out of bounds" had been employed it was decided to discover the ways in which it was understood by the boys who were again interviewed. Students wrote:

- It means a place in a school where you're not allowed to go because it might be dangerous and it's for your own safety. (10 similar responses)
- A particular area in the school where you cannot be seen by teachers – an unsafe area.
- Where you can't hang out and talk or it's permitted for you to stand there.
- The term 'out of bounds' means a no go zone in the school. But in my opinion most no go zones in the school are inappropriate and should not be out of bounds for example the area in front of the school is a good area to relax and just hang out with your mates until class time.
- The bottom of the oval because teachers cannot see us. They should allow us to be there and put a teacher on duty there.
- There shouldn't be any out of bounds areas because there should be useage of all areas in the school, because it's a waste of space.
- It means places where it is useful to get out of school, easy to hide or smoke.

Students documented their thoughts regarding the front area of the school:

- The area in front of the school is very dirty and I recommend they cut the long trees down and make a garden so it'll look decent and the students can use it for agriculture.
- It's a waste of land and space the flowers are old and ugly. They should fix it up.
- I think it's a waste of space because it's out of bounds.
- It's bushy and it looks creepy.
- It's good.
- It's a good place to hang out.
- The area in front of the school is a good area for students to relax, read a book or even study until class time and should not be out of bounds.
- It's nice.
- Should only be for seniors to relax their minds from stress and hang out.
- We are not allowed to step there because they have blocked it and it's not permitted for any person, but I would like to be there.
- We are not allowed to go in the front of the school and I would like to use it.
- The area out front of the school should only be for senior students to relax from all the stress and hang out on the breaks.
- The area in front of the school is a good place to hang out and it is a good area to go by yourself if you feel like calming down from something and should be allowed to be a hang out and let you enter.

- I think it's better that it is blocked off because no student or stranger can talk to each other at the front.
- The area in the front of the school is beautiful and quiet and a place to hang out with fellow students. The place should only be for Year 12 students to get away from little kids.
- I think it's peaceful.

Because the matter of the security fence preoccupied both tertiary and school students it was seen as appropriate to interview the Principal regarding the history of the installation of the security fencing. She indicated that the order of priority for installing the fencing followed a risk assessment. Several violent incidents (including a shooting) in the streets adjacent to the school led to the fence being erected. Generally, schools with such "diplomat fencing" have reported a drop in criminal activity and vandalism in school grounds.

The front office of the school is able to maintain continuous surveillance, via cctv cameras, of the front gate that can only be opened by remote control from that office. The buzzing at the gate is often referred to as "beaming me up" and it is seen as a means of observing "who is coming up the runway".

Although the gate was seen as having these surveillance characteristics it also acted as a funnel in the mornings and afternoons when it was opened and was the only means for students to enter or leave the school at the beginning or end of the day. Entry and exit of students, via the gate, is seen as an opportunity for staff to greet and farewell students, commend them and remind them of various responsibilities.

In a third meeting with school students further issues were discussed. The first of these related to issues around design in that it was believed to be important that design was a central concept being employed in the project.

Please name an object that you are familiar with that you think has been well designed and what qualities that design has that makes it appealing to you. Students understood the purpose of the icebreaker and named a range of objects from cars (Ferrari, the aerodynamic design makes it hugely appealing", to i-phones "it's a one step zone, it's got the lot", to flat screen televisions "slim, good capabilities", to wheel rims and could name various desirable attributes such as versatility, portability, attractiveness "they (wheel rims) look good, people notice you, you can choose ones that fit the personality of your car".

- *Good school grounds* were seen as those that are spacious, with safe and varying surfaces ranging from asphalt to grass (perhaps even some tiled areas).
- *Places in the school grounds that you most like to be and why?* Boys suggested they like to be around the toilets area because it's where they can hang out with their friends and escape surveillance, "teachers seem to have a birds' eye view of almost everything." Generally, being with friends was seen as important protection.
- *Feeling safe at school* is a mixed blessing – it's good to know that the school is fenced and gated, but that also acts to make students feel as if "you are in jail". Also the enclosed space means that the school can be easily locked down in an emergency, but equally it is hard to get out if students have to evacuate.
- *Advice the students could give to the Architecture and Design Students.* The students should pay attention to the need for different kinds of shaded and

sheltered areas, including trees, shade cloths, and covered walkways. They should think about how the surfaces could be made safer and more attractive, provide more places to sit, open up the front area, improve the basket ball courts and ensure that all steel poles are covered with some kind of buffering material to head height.

- *Talking to the university students and how people felt.* Students reported that it was an enjoyable experience, they felt comfortable, it was good to be able to bring concerns out into the open, to meet new people, “it was a unique experience”.

After each session at the school notes were collated and passed on to the Faculty of Architecture and Design. As well, there were brief, general discussions regarding the ongoing processes. Mainly the students would have liked to have addressed issues in relation to the interior of the school, although they were regularly advised that this was not the purpose of the project. One student suggested that the Sydney U students fund the project so that it can happen. Most thanked the students for their interest and their interactions “Thankyou for your help and I hope that some of my ideas can help the improvements.” One suggested that they do “an exemplary job” so that the ideas can be taken up. Several cryptically suggested that they “do not over imagine”. Finally, they were enjoined to have fun.

Phase 2 Revisiting the school

Since their initial consultation with the Years 11 and 12 students at GBHS the 2nd Year architecture students, working in teams, had been designing aspects of the outdoor school environment such that they will be more amenable and attractive to the young people who had acted as their clients. This occasion was one where the teams had been able to present their penultimate plans to the GBHS students such that they would be finalised by the end of the month. Consequently teams, taking advantage of the warm sunny weather, met Year 11 and 12 students in small groups, in the front area of the school.

The observations that follow are necessarily only partial as only snatches of conversation were noted over the period by the academic partner. Going from group to group it was apparent that early questions tended to be of a closed nature as the architecture students sought for some overall confirmation of their plans:

- Do you think you could live with this?
- Do you reckon this could free up the space?
- Would it be something you could use?
- Do you think it's better or would you prefer something more traditional?
- Do you like the idea that ...?

Responses, necessarily, tended to be monosyllabic with the interactions being somewhat unidirectional. However, as each party gained in confidence the conversations began to open up. Architecture students began to explain their designs and models, “I’ve made two new entries that open up the view of the school”, “I’ve shifted and elevated the library so you can see straight through the grass area? Would that appeal to you?” “I’m trying to break up the space so that people don’t go rushing through. Do you want that or would it interfere with anything?” “I’ve flattened the area around the oval and set up tiers (of seating) would that work?”

The Architecture teams also had some prepared questions, designed to assist them in their investigation:

- Where do you usually hang out?
- If your friends haven't arrived at school in the morning, what would you do, where would you go?
- Do you walk to school or travel to school alone or with friends?

Reciprocally, the boys began to ask more questions and to challenge the designs, "What happens after an architect has designed something? Is it passed on to an engineer?" "Could this really be done, is it going to be done?" This latter question indicated that some of the boys still held to the belief that they were not merely involved in a design exercise, but hoped for some kind of tangible outcome. There was some discussion regarding the fact that parts of the proposals were 'doable' without having access to a significant budget, "We can make the space more friendly by having things like a barbecue area"

Some GBHS students were encouraged to annotate the plans and make further suggestions. "We are problem solving together, if you were doing this (designing) then what would it look like?" There was an interesting discussion regarding the creation of a prayer space and the need for washing facilities¹. The architecture student noted that he had been researching the needs for Islamic students to be able to have appropriate arrangements made for their prayer requirements.

As the boys expressed any concerns and reservations these appeared to be taken up by the architecture students who summed up the issue and sought to clarify it, "You say you don't like being in small spaces and you reckon it makes for chaos, what kind of chaos exactly?"

Altogether, as students from both sites began to pack up and disperse there was a sense that the interactions had been both positive and productive. As one student observed, he had designed in a water feature that they all knew would not be built, but it was great to be able to imagine it!

Phase 3 Developing the final presentations

The logistics of bringing the school students to the University for the final presentation were such that only a small group of boys attended. They regarded this as a privilege, but were disappointed that more students could not be involved as the project had been "such a motivator". They reported that they saw the benefits of the project and that they had been given an opportunity to express themselves regarding their school environment "people could see the viewpoint of us and use it in their designs". They appreciated being able to experience the ways in which the architecture and design students made decisions and felt that they had been able to develop a rapport with

¹ In a brief discussion with a group of the GBHS students, who had been members of this group, following the meeting the academic partner asked a little more about the praying facilities. They pointed out that they used the end of the gym and the existing washing arrangements. One observed that he very much appreciated the way in which the school respected his religious beliefs and provided means for him to engage in his religious observances.

them. They were impressed by the presentations, “It was the way they could take our ideas and use them!”

During the ‘showcase’ session they felt that they had a real sense of what the finished products looked like and the immense design efforts that had gone into them. They emphasised what they saw to be the openness of the university compared to the school. “It’s accessible, wow is it accessible, it gives you permission to explore and try things and ideas!”

Finally, they hoped that there might be some tangible outcomes to the project in terms of changing the outdoor environment. They hoped the idea of the prayer room would “take off”. As one put it “it doesn’t just cater to student needs, it gives a sense of belonging”.

While there were only a few boys able to attend the presentation of the work of the architecture students it was a major event at the University. In ten groups they presented their proposals to their classmates, the studio teacher, as well as a visiting architect, landscape architect and small number of GBHS students. GBHS staff moved between the groups. Students had 20 minutes each during which time they presented the key elements of their proposal and engage in discussion with the audience. In addition they were provided with feedback sheets and asked to note, ‘what did they think of the masterplan and the overall concept; the landscape and architecture proposals? Was the idea clear, and did the verbal and visual presentation help communicate the ideas?’

While the architecture student complained that some GBHS students were not very engaged they may not have taken into account the unfamiliarity of the context for these boys. However, as indicated above, there was some very thoughtful GBHS feedback to students. In response to the redesign of the library and its adjoining spaces, GBHS written comments included: “excellent presentation. The idea of opening up the library space is great because it is perhaps the most under utilized space in the school. You also had solutions to cater for the noises from the traffic”; “Good masterplan. Very clear. Good use of area. Interesting ideas. Great overall, good content”.

Conclusion

Working with young people, school students and university students is both challenging and rewarding. Each had to recognise and affirm the others’ strengths and reciprocally those things that constrained them. Each had to recognise that they assigned meaning to the project in different ways given the different stakes that they had as investments in what was planned and what was undertaken. Each had limitations placed upon their control of the project in terms of time and resources.

School students learned that being an informed client is not a passive role but requires the capacity to formulate ideas and concerns and adequately communicate them. Many of the University students learned that special skills are required if they are to draw out the shy ‘client’ or one who appears less persuaded by the process. For the University students it added a layer of complexity to their design learning, which is after all, at an early stage. The question might be asked whether the client as actor in the design process might not be more suitably introduced to senior students who have already mastered more of their discipline rather than second year students. On the other hand, there is an argument to be put that framing the act of design as a social act is an important foundation, and orientation. For some students the interaction with a client and real site were the best aspects of the project, ‘getting to speak to students at G. was

great'. However, one of the difficulties of being open to the client was that students found the project offered too few constraints, with some complaining that the requirements of the course (that is a detailed brief for what is to be designed) were not set out in sufficient detail at the outset. The project challenges combined with course changes introduced this year (the design course was only 6 credit points whereas in past years it had been 12) meant that many students felt overloaded. A less open agenda with respect to each student's individual projects would have reduced choice, and presumably associated responsibility for the separate design briefs.

In many ways this was a problematic project in that it crossed a number of different boundaries and disciplines (Beale, 2008). It required careful steering to account for the framing of the school students, but the university students, academic staff and partners and school leaders. New research, such as that in the 2009 *Learning Spaces* by Newton and Fisher (2009) offers evidence that the principle explored in this University of Sydney in relation to GBHS is a powerful one. Progressive and transformative learning environments will only emerge out of partnerships between the various actors. This ability to take a role in undertakings of this kind grows out of empowering experiences such as this collaboration. Having had a focus on external spaces, and hence considerable effort applied to outdoor learning opens up an opportunity for GBHS to consider how, with even quite minor interventions, it may take advantage of what is perhaps the next wave in transforming school environments. While this paper has also revealed the problems with this ambitious collaboration – in terms of numbers and scope of ideas, it reveals that there is mutual learning to be had, and most importantly for less advantaged schools, positive outcomes for student self esteem and perhaps the raising of a bar- with respect to the possibilities of becoming first generation University students. From the perspective of the University of Sydney, collaboration such as this becomes an exemplar in relation to its direction to become more inclusive, and to deal respectfully with clients who may struggle to express their ideas, but whose ideas are nonetheless potent and valid.

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