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Learning Space Renovation:  
The Change Agent for Creative Learning Environment  
Case of School of Architecture and Design,  
King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi, Bangkok, Thailand  
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Abstract  
The design school is where creativity takes place, and the space that hosts it should provide  
an ambience of learning in creative ways. The space should encourage and challenge the activities of not  
only learning by thinking, but also by making. Learning through making cannot occur without a learner-centric pedagogy and coherent spatial design. This research intends to study the relationship between  
learning and space design. It is hoped that these relationships would inform and suggest how spatial design can form a creative learning environment in the design school. The research discusses three  
actors, which are: the ‘tangible’ space, the ‘abstract’ learning quality, and the learning pedagogy that  
informs effective learning and how it impacts the learning outcome. Regarding the existing learning spaces of the School of Architecture and Design (SoA+D), King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), they no longer respond to the contemporary learning pedagogy. It is clear that to  
bring back life to this building, a renovation is needed. This paper is a part of ongoing research that focuses on the process of creative learning space renovation at the School of Architecture and Design, and employs analysis of both theoretical research and schemes invented for new creative spaces.  
The paper illustrates the lessons learnt from post-occupancy analysis and emphasises the issue of creativity obtained by practicing within interactive social space.  

Keywords: School Renovation, Creative Environment, Learning Pedagogy, Learning Space Design  

1. Relationship between Learning Pedagogy and Learning Spaces  
As early as 400 BC it was the Greek philosopher Sophocles, who advised “One must learn by  
doing the thing, for though you think you know it, you have no certainty until you try.” Jos Boys in her book Towards Creative Learning Spaces (2011) explains that the relation between learning and the built space is that of constructing communities of practice. Jos Boys’ research also debates the concepts of learning spaces with an adaption of Lefebvres (1991) work, which reasons that in order to create and to construct such a creative learning space, we need to analyse the experience of space positioning in relation to both spaces and practices.  
As the existing building of the design school was built more than a decade ago, it no longer responds to the post learning pedagogy which has shifted from a formal to an informal model of teaching. As a consequence, the renovation of the building and its spaces can become a new platform to interrelate activities, creativity and associated space of the current learning situation.
Approaches to learning in educational settings are changing. Traditional teacher-centered models, where good teaching is conceptualized as the passing on of sound academic, practical or vocational knowledge, are being replaced with student-centered approaches which emphasize the construction of knowledge through shared situations. (Harrison and Cairns 2009)

To renovate is not merely a facelift of existing spaces and should not be undertaken for the purpose of redecorating with fancy interior designs, but to assess the building performance and respond to the current and future learning situations. From this starting point we need to ask - how can the setting best influence and encourage learning?

The word learning is related to knowledge and knowhow, and is connected with research into environmental behaviour. As a starting point for this research behaviourist methodologies and Lennie Scott-Webber’s Learning Space Design in Higher Education (2014) on the design of learning spaces is used. In the case of this research, the definition of learning is concerned with the process rather than outcome. As well as the spatial design for learning, the essential focus is the process, not the product. To renovate the SoA+D building, therefore, the design team needs to unfold the learning structure as the description of the processes of activities related to their associated space.

The chart (Fig.1) shows the relationship between spaces and expected learning activities. The spaces are being specifically used by learners in a range of activities from casual areas to formal classrooms, and knowledge exchange occurs in all spaces. Levels of learning are categorised into four types: delivering knowledge, applying knowledge, creating knowledge, and exchanging knowledge as detailed:

**Level 1 Environments for Delivering Knowledge** (formal learning / lecture based setting / one teaching to many learning / one way communication)

**Level 2 Environments for Applying Knowledge** (formal learning and informal learning / practice based setting / one guiding to many learning / two way communication)

**Level 3 Environments for Creating Knowledge** (informal learning / interpret and invent based setting / one to one encouragement or encouragement of many / two way communication)

**Level 4 Environments for Communicating and Exchanging Knowledge** (interactive learning / sharing based setting / many learners interacting together / multiple way communication)

![Fig 1: Space and learning process chart (Graeeart, 2016)](image)
Referring to the chart (Fig.1), the multi-use space shows the greatest potential for encouraging the types of knowledge exchange that can take place in all aspects of learning activities. To understand how this prototype of spatial characteristics impacts or suggests learning behaviour, it is essential to support integrated pedagogies within SoA+D. Then, this knowledge can lead to an effective model for learning space development, and we can understand which spaces and activities should be central to the design of the building, and thread all of the learning clusters together in a holistic way. The central learning area takes the role of an open space for social gathering to offer informal learning within an ambience as suggested by Boys (2011) of communities of practice.

The Brain and Cognitive Sciences Complex (BCSC) at MIT was chosen as an example of how environments, architectures and interiors play an important role in learning and creativity, especially with reference to multi-use spaces where a gathering of activities occurs to provide various types of learning experiences. MIT's BCSC, designed by Charles Correa and completed in 2005, contains three major research institutes, and is the largest neuroscience complex in the world. The main goal of these institutions is to promote working among multidisciplinary practices. To achieve this goal, facilities and shared spaces such as the research laboratories, conference spaces and collaborative areas are spread within an eight-story building connecting with central atrium (Fig.2 and 3).

![Diagram of MIT's Brain and Cognitive Sciences Complex]

Fig 2. Plan of third floor of MIT's the Brain and Cognitive Sciences Complex (Source: http://www.charlescorrea.net)

The BCSC's structure and interior systems allow different activities to occur. The central atrium was not only designed to be the heart of the building but also serves as pedestrian thoroughfare for the campus. This atrium space also functions as a flexible social gathering area enabling conferences and meeting places, café, large dinners, and performance spaces. Knowledge exchange is also facilitated by a well-integrated technology strategy, the flexible spaces are proved with multiple LCD monitors.
that can used to project dissections or show other lab material. A racetrack-like space configuration is an effective starting point for layout planning, providing a circulation loop, which links all facilities of three different institutions together and increases social interaction. Staircases are also designed to encourage social interaction by connecting various floor levels, in conjunction with open terraces. In summary, the complex creates a community atmosphere that responds to learning pedagogy.

![Diagram of the complex with section A-A](http://www.charlescoore.com)

Fig 3. Section of MIT's the Brain and Cognitive Sciences Complex (Source: http://www.charlescoore.com)

2. Theory of Learning Spaces

The action of learning is usually regarded as a thought process that occurs within the brain. This mental process generates learning with the transfer of new information, knowledge or a new set of skills into the long-term memory, imprinting it as an experience. Importantly, this learning process when viewed as a theory of cognition is influenced by both intrinsic (individual) factors and extrinsic factors.

"Cognition" is a word that dates back to the 15th century when it meant "thinking and awareness". (Cognition: Theory and Practice by Russell Revin). Attention to the cognitive process came about more than twenty-three centuries ago, beginning with Aristotle and his interest in the inner workings of the mind and how they affect the human experience. Aristotle focused on cognitive areas pertaining to memory, perception, and mental imagery. The Greek philosopher found great importance in ensuring that his studies were based on empirical evidence; scientific information that is gathered through observation and conscientious experimentation (Mallin, 2009).

Using thinking to learn, as influenced by processing and interpretation within the brain network is the key point of cognition theory by Pajares (2002) (Fig 4). As a consequence, to renovate the SoA+D building, this theory can be applied as an approach to the learning processes and factors that relate to the associated space.
Cognitive Learning Theory implies that the different learning processes can be explained by analyzing the internal mental processes first. To understand the users' individual way of learning, the researchers need to observe, interview and brainstorm to investigate those requirements. The Cognitive Learning Theory can be considered as a guideline to achieve an effective learning environment. Therefore, the research and design team should consider the creative learning area, which provides social interaction by encouraging active learning behavior and positive collaboration. Especially in the connectivity of multi-use spaces, in which these spaces not only provide different types of learning, but also invite a flexible range of learning activities.

3. Learning from Case Studies: Philosophy of the Design School and its Spatial Design

There are various approaches to how one could be trained and educated as a professional. Training and learning activities cannot take place without space, which leads us to question whether – should the space of a school reflect its philosophy? Or should the philosophy of the school be manifested in its spatial design? This section discusses how the philosophy of the school has guided its spatial design and the organisation of its spaces, by looking at the evolution of prominent architectural and design schools from the eighteenth century onwards.

Traditionally, architects were trained by facsimile and reproduction of original work in order to develop their aesthetic taste. The École des Beaux-Arts (School of Fine Arts), the famous eighteenth century art school of Paris, adopted the same manner of such practice. The philosophy of the École des Beaux-Arts lies in the characteristics of the Classical period – manifested as a Neo-Classical aesthetic, which features on the façade and the symmetrical layout of buildings. The school has the stylistic reflection of classical building elements and monastery-like space constellation to include – a chapel, a cloister, and a garden (Fig 5). The education was treated as a ritual rather than learning. This philosophy was carried across continents, from France to the United States, as many alumni of the École des Beaux-Arts are American. The group returned to the United States and established architectural schools that are identical to the École des Beaux-Arts, for example, the School of Architecture of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Columbia University, and the University of Pennsylvania.
Fig 5. Plan of École des Beaux-Arts, in Paris before redesign. (Source: http://urbanscape.richmondvirginia.blogspot.com)

In 1832, one of the buildings of the École des Beaux-Arts, the Palais d'Études (Fig. 6) was redesigned and converted from an open garden courtyard to a covered court with a glass and iron structure. The new programming consisted of a library, ceremonial amphitheatre, museum of casts, and exhibition area for student's work. It shows that the École des Beaux-Arts has changed its learning space design and programming to respond to the change in its philosophy. This redesign process later also occurred in the mentioned schools in the United States.

Fig 6. Plan of Palais d'Études building after redesigned in 1832. (Source: http://www.artandarchitecture.org.uk)
Another radical development of architectural school philosophy that occurred against the École des Beaux-Arts is the Architectural Association, founded in London in 1847. In the beginning, the development of education at the Architectural Association is based on conversations and debates rather than seeing and making. The Architectural Association started as a club for architects to discuss and critique on the everyday issues of culture, economics, and society involved with architecture. Education at the Architectural Association was cultivated in a small row house and gradually expanded to eight row houses over the next one hundred fifty years (Fig. 7).

Fig. 7. Ground floor and basement plans of Architectural Association building in London (Source: https://www.aaschool.ac.uk)
The organisation of space at the Architectural Association differs from the previous case study. There is a limitation of spatial connections due to the fixed structure of the row house. Floors and small grids of walls divide the space inside the school horizontally. To enhance the chance of encounters among students and teachers, the public spaces located outside the classrooms (studios) became the most important spots for knowledge exchanges. Thus, various public programs — bar, café, gallery, cinema, and lecture hall, at the Architectural Association are located in different areas of the building. These public spaces act as small pausing pockets for leisure activities, casual discussion, studio juries, and places where people gather.

In the late nineteenth century, the education system and learning pedagogy for architects were structurally formed as a consequence of the new ideology towards Modernism. Spaces inside school were not merely for training or reproducing particular architectural styles but to enhance learner's creativity. The Bauhaus best represents the new ethos of “multidisciplinary design school” curriculum. Walter Gropius founded the school in 1919 in Weimar, and later moved to it Dessau and Berlin. The Bauhaus during the Dessau period (1925-1932) flourished, and the school produced many notable alumni who became the pioneers of the Modern movement. It was started with Gropius's design philosophy to create a Gesamtkunstwerk (total work of art) in which all kind of arts, including architecture, were materialised as one. In the building design, Gropius wove together different programs such as working studios, classrooms, café, workshops and student dormitory together with circulation and satellite planning (Fig.8). Such integration causes vigorous physical and visual connections between programs. After the Bauhaus, Gropius migrated to the United States and carried on the Bauhaus philosophy at Harvard University.

Fig 8. Plan of Bauhaus building in Dessau  
(Source: http://www.archdaily.com/37723/ad-classics-dessau-bauhaus-walter-gropius)
Apart from constructing a completely new building or reconstructing an existing space to match with school philosophy, another approach is to reinvent abandoned buildings and convert them to become a design school. The Central Saint Martin's, in London, is an interdisciplinary school that recently moved from its few scattered locations in the city into one big campus, for the reason of school management.

The Central Saint Martin's new King’s Cross campus, designs by Stanton Williams (2011), reoccupies the abandon granary barn and office space by preserving the main features of the building and adds on new space connections (bridges) between two sides of the existing building. The design intends to magnify the interactions between people from different departments by connecting spaces in the building vertically and horizontally. The additional corridor space is generously wide so it allows some informal learning activities to occur (Fig.9). The new connections and vast corridors enhance the way people interact physically and visually. The building entrance also plays an important role in connecting the interior spaces of the school to the exterior spaces of the neighbouring area (Fig.10). The renovation responds very well to both the philosophy of school and the use of the existing structure.

Fig 9. Plan of Central Saint Martin's King’s Cross campus building in London (Source: https://www.stantonwilliams.com)

Fig 10. Section of Central Saint Martins King’s Cross campus building in London (Source: https://www.stantonwilliams.com)

All case studies show that learning can take place outside the classroom and the new possible learning spaces can occur in many forms and situations. Different settings and different philosophies of the schools have informed the way that space has been designed and modified. The new learning spaces in design school might adapt to certain factors, whether to align with building limitations or a change of learning pedagogy. We can learn that space directly influences the behaviour of its occupants. Thus, the creative learning setting would encourage creative learning behaviour.
4. The Critique on the Current Learning Space Quality of the School of Architecture and Design, King Mungkut’s University of Technology Thonburi

In Bangkok, the development of creative learning spaces inside the school and university is not yet crystalised as a main concern when one designs a campus building. The philosophy of the school is often detached from its spatial design. However, there is a trend of new creative learning spaces that take place outside the school, such as Too Fast to Sleep, TK Park, Thailand Creative & Design Center (TCDC) and others. This type of space is often situated in the city, and serves the new behaviors of learners in the form of mixed-use programming between learning and leisure activities. In fact, both learning and leisure activities already exist inside the school but they stay separated from each other.

At SoA+D, K MUTT, like most of other schools in Thailand, the building was built with no relationship to the current learning philosophy and pedagogy. The critique is not to look at current situation in a negative way, but to find possibilities of how to make the building perform better. School renovation might be the answer, but the real question is: Where to start the renovation and how to evaluate the current situation? From the previous discussion over the case studies, it suggests that public space outside classroom (studio) is significant for the creative learning environment.

*It is especially in ‘public’ areas that you come into contact with others, who are doing different things, and it is there that you are confronted with a larger world than that of your classroom or school* (Hertzberger, 2013).

In the book The Schools of Herman Hertzberger (2013), Hertzberger emphasises the design of public space inside the school building, as it is a place where students from different ages, genders, backgrounds and disciplines meet. Such exposure to diversity is important to develop the way students interact and learn.

Post-occupancy analysis was carried out through the building in order to understand the existing situations. The ground floor was the first area of the SoA+D building to be selected for renovation, as it hosts many informal activities – working area, display hall, gallery, two multi-purpose areas, stationary shop, café, wood workshop, plastic workshop, metal workshop and public toilet, but the existing space planning does not efficiently facilitate the flow and connection between different programs (Fig.11). There are several blind spots and under used spaces, in addition, the building itself is totally disengaged with its surrounding. Post-occupancy research (Fig.12) showed that the design of the central outdoor courtyard is the main element that separates the left and right sides of the building. Especially in the rainy season the two sides become totally disconnected because there is no access to the workshop from the outdoor courtyard, and students are forced to walk around the whole perimeter. To achieve a better learning environment on the ground floor, the physical and visual connections need to be enhanced.
5. The Change Agent for Creative Learning Environment at School of Architecture and Design, King Mungkut's University of Technology Thonburi

The new creative learning space needs to reflect the university’s policy and goal. However, in many cases those guidelines are too general. Therefore, the design team needs to unfold learning structure as a description of the processes and activities related to their associated space concerning the users, function and environment. The school’s most recent curriculum issued in 2012 focuses on project-based learning, and therefore the teaching methods should focus on the ability to analyse and synthesis information with rational thinking and practice.
The project based learning of SoA+D has already become established in design related laboratories for various expert groups consisting of researchers and lecturers. Each department also has their own studio spaces. However, those clusters are hardly connected by activities and by space quality. To create a link between these spaces, the new renovation should seek to encourage and enhance physical and visual connections.

The renovation project at SoA+D is not only involved with renovating the physical appearance of the design school but to also completely reconsider learning and the experience of learning. To achieve the goal, the team needs to understand the cognitive space by questioning how the space drives and unfolds experience? And how the SoA+D learning space renovation project can result in being a change agent of learning. To generate a new design, cognition processes must be represented as an important consequence to understand the users’ inner minds and environmental factors that reflect the users’ behaviour. And it is in this approach that ‘spaces are themselves agents for change. Changed spaces will change practice’ (Joint Information Systems Committee, 2006).

The new design began its first phase of construction in the summer 2016. As a first priority the ground floor was renovated, as the school understood the potential to transform this multi-use space into a neighbourhood of creativity. Two possible schemes were considered for the zoning rearrangement (Fig.13 and 14) and they both focused on creating a multi-use space where all levels of learning can take place. The two schemes responded to the issue of dugged circulation and cramped space on the left side of the building.

Fig.13. Zoning rearrangement (scheme 1 with minor modification) of the ground floor, the SoA+D building (Lunthawespaisal, 2016)
Fig 14. Zoning rearrangement (scheme 2 with new extension) of the ground floor, the SoA+D building (Grunert, 2016)

Scheme 1 proposes several minor modifications; (1) small extension of working space at foyer, (2) removal of the wall of the multi-purpose area to connect with the outdoor garden, (3) added outdoor terrace next to the multi-purpose area, (4) relocation of the stationary shop next to print shop, (5) replacement of the stationary shop area with a mini exhibition space, (6) the insertion of mezzanine floor as an outdoor café terrace, (7) use of the café terrace as a covered walkway for new entrance to the fabrication shop that also provides a covered path to the existing woodshop and metal shop.

Scheme 2 works by overlaying further spatial elements to the first scheme with three major extensions; (1) outdoor extension of working space at foyer, (2) removal of the wall of multi-purpose area and the insertion of a circulation loop around the toilet facility, (3) extension of the café space into the garden area at the back of building.

From the two zoning plans, both schemes presented a comparable effect on the visual and circulation flow of the space. Scheme 1 was favoured since it responded better to the timeframe and school budget, whereas scheme 2 proposed a larger scope of building alterations that exceeded the limits of transferred to REDEK designlab team, and researchers and designers further discussed about these possibilities.

The new space planning for the ground floor focuses on the flow of circulation of both the interior and exterior spaces, and the relationship between programs. It is important that this neighbourhood of creativity offers a new spatial experience (Fig.15), when people are in the space they will connect either visually or physically with their friends, colleagues, and peers. These connections between seeing and interacting aims to enhance the way students learn.
Fig 15. Proposed design of the ground floor renovation (1st phase), the SoA+D building (REDEK, 2016)

The design of a new café area and the mezzanine outdoor balcony (Fig 15) creates a shaded area for the ground level and makes a new experience of visual connections among different programs including – a café, workshop, and outdoor courtyard (normally used for student activity area). The mezzanine indoor café area offers an enclosed area, which provides an enclosed air-conditioned area, that can also be used as an informal tutorial space, casual lecture session, and after hours study area (Fig. 17 and 18).

Fig 16. The new balcony extension (1st phase) to connect café area and outdoor courtyard to Fabrication workshop and Wood workshop, the SoA+D building (REDEK, 2016)
Fig 17. New space for creative learning environment (1st phase), air-conditioned café area, the mezzanine floor linked with existing café space on the ground floor, the SoA+D building (REDEK, 2016)

Fig 18. New space for creative learning environment (1st phase), air-conditioned café area, the mezzanine floor, the SoA+D building (Lunehansisal, 2016)

Another significant space of SoA+D’s neighbourhood of creativity is the multi-purpose area at the left side of the building. This space is the student activities area, but the post-occupancy research informed that this space is not as active as expected. Since the area is a dead end with low-quality lighting and ventilation. As scheme 1 suggests the removal of the problematic wall that blocked the light and wind (Fig.19, 20, and 21), the design proposes a new terrace that connects the interior space to the outdoor area (Fig.22 and 23).
Fig 19. New space for creative learning environment (1st phase), the multi-purpose area, the ground floor, the SaA+D building (REDEK, 2016)

Fig 20. Diagram shows the usage of the new indoor and outdoor multi-purpose area, the ground floor, the SaA+D building (REDEK, 2016)

Fig 21. Design proposed for the creative learning environment (1st phase), the outdoor multi-purpose area on the ground floor, the SaA+D building (REDEK, 2016)
The ground-floor renovation, as a pilot project, intends to transform the out-dated plan and architectural design to complement the needs of the current users and the latest learning pedagogy. Furthermore, this post-occupancy research and design process can be useful for other phases of renovation in the future and to consider the neighbourhood of creativity ethos in different areas of the building. In this way, learning is no longer limited to the classroom but can take place everywhere inside the school.
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----- Paper length
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