



EDITORIAL

Perspectives on Spaces for Teaching and Learning

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26203/x4sk-f136>

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To cite this article: Kyriakou, A. and Shanks, R., (2018). Perspectives on Spaces for Teaching and Learning. *Education in the North*, 25(3), pp. 1-6.



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Perspectives on Spaces for Teaching and Learning

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... I believe that the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt a great deal more than with time. (Foucault, 1984, p.2)

This special issue focuses on a wide range of *Perspectives on Spaces for Teaching and Learning*. Discussion on this theme began in a series of questions following a PhD Conference at the University of Aberdeen in 2017 on 'Perspectives on Space(s) in Our Research Contexts'. What spaces are offered or used for when teaching and learning *take place* today is worth further investigation locally as well as universally. As we all encounter different educational contexts, cultures, societal needs and technological achievements, it is not possible to conceptually limit spaces offered for teaching and learning into what they represent for each individual practitioner or researcher. Instead, different arguments can broaden individual perspectives and benefit all, while leading to self-reflection for one's own research perspectives.



Figure 1: The beach in Aberdeen during the 4th Annual PhD Conference, School of Education, University of Aberdeen, December 2017.

Readers may wish to take a closer look at what different authors present as their own perspectives on spaces separately or in comparison as an effort to look across different overarching themes. The suggested themes for the current issue were:

- Natural learning environments
- Educational and societal impact of digital spaces
- Embodied presence and connectivity

These themes were designed as an effort not to exclude potential micro or macro spaces used during ongoing educational practices. As Gruenewald and Smith (2010, p.1) underline “all education prior to the invention of the common school was place-based”. It is worthwhile to additionally note that all education prior to the widespread use of the internet was place-based too, in the physical sense of the term “space”. Therefore, what has been offered as natural learning environments, before and after the institutionalisation of the modern school, as well as the increasing educational and societal impact of digital spaces, should allow researchers to locate their perspectives, one way or another. In case the aforementioned may be considered as externally directed spaces, towards the surroundings, the environment or anything external to the body, the theme of embodied presence and connectivity offer an alternative. In Foucauldian terms, this would be an attempt to be inclusive to pursuits of internal spaces – that is qualities that seem intrinsic, as well as of external spaces – that is the space we live in, where time and history occurs (Foucault, 1984, p.23).

The embodied presence and connectivity are advocated by many authors as a direction towards ecological awareness and ethical action (Colucci-Gray, 2017; Sternberg, 2000). As described, in this context the realisation of the term space would be an organic process of following up people’s very first surrounding - literally embodied. In order to show the contrast of what organically this sensorial connectivity would be and how formal education rather enforces it to be, Colucci-Gray (2017, p.540) describes:

What we first experienced as the world, since our time in the womb and throughout our childhood- is ‘inverted’, and turned upon itself: textual descriptions and numerical accounts overrule the primal feeling of connection to a warm body.

In fact, Sternberg (2000, p.133) goes on to explain how brains carry a map of our relationships, since the way to connect with the social world is through our senses: vision, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. For example in natural learning environments such as in our first article from Finland ‘Hiking in the wilderness: Interplay between teachers and students agencies in outdoor learning’ by Marjaana Kangas, Hanna Vuojärvi and Pirkko Siklander and

in the second article entitled 'Making Room: cultural resistance through *Pilimmaksarniq*' by Kathy Snow and Heather Ochalski. We then move to the space for civic engagement in the third article 'Students' Perceptions of Citizenship and Civic Engagement at Higher Education Institutions in Germany' by Javid Jafarov while the next article entitled 'Opening Spaces for Indigenous Teaching and Learning through Community-Based Teacher Education' by Shelley Tulloch and Sylvia Moore covers the spaces for teaching in higher education. Our final article is also from Finland and looks at the space for difference, 'Embodied Knowledge Construction in Writing' by Satu-Maarit Frangou.

The Features Section contains the feature 'A significant moment...? University Television Aberdeen' by Michael Steele which provides an historical overview of the use of television for teaching at the University of Aberdeen while 'Studio-Based Higher Education for T-shaped Knowledge Workers: A Summary of a Doctoral Thesis' by Kari-Pekka Heikkinen considers higher education outside university walls and ivory towers. 'Opening up in the classroom: Enabling and interrupting digital media practices in School' returns us to digital technologies and is by Annekatrin Bock and Larissa Probst. The final feature is entitled 'Mental Health promotion for young people - the case for yoga in schools' and is by Jane Hartley and Marion Henderson and it refers to the space for embodied experience in schools.

The two books reviewed for this issue cover very different spaces, first Michael Menser's 'We Decide! Theories and Cases in Participatory Democracy, Temple University Press' looks at democratic participation and Beth Cross' review provides many reasons to read this book. The second book review looks at digital spaces and is 'Digital Storytelling in Higher Education: International Perspectives' edited by Grete Jamissen, Pip Hardy, Yngve Nordkvelle, Heather Pleasants and is reviewed by Kevin Stelfox.

There are many spatial perspectives covered in this special issue, some see natural learning environments, embodied presence and connectivity pathways aligning to Sternberg's (2000) spatial perspectives, however, other authors like Nespor (2008, p.481) take an opposite position:

Globalizing practices ... do not destroy 'place' or create 'placelessness', nor do the displacements of people make them placeless. Rather the creation of translocal networks implies an intensification or thickening of 'interdependencies among places' and times.

Within this different realm of perspectives on space, digital spaces may be seen as the infinite space of the future. Alongside other daily changes people experience through using digital spaces or 'inhabiting' them, digital technologies are offered new educational areas full of opportunities and services. Starting from this point, there is no surprise in the rising number of

people who advocate that curriculum designs should be based upon new technologies (Roblyer 2015; Newby et al. 2006). There are other perspectives on spaces for teaching and learning that cut across the above suggestions, for example Gray's description, when it comes to the question of 'where do we go?' (2018, p.73), suggesting that we should let nature be the teacher by ensuring 'its presence as the natural environment in which our mind develops and learning takes place'. This suggestion entails direct experience to start with, an active learning body, a body that moves and acts; that is a body that explores, discovers and builds through experience. During all this activity, Gray (ibid) believes technology should be used wisely, considering, of course, the human value schemes and various socio-economic interests which are involved in this development.

As inhabitants of a world we perceive in as space, it is fundamental that there is reflection of what we consider as such during our educational practices. That will, after all, inform the practices of the next generations in regard to using what spaces they perceive as important and how they treat them. In other words, the ways in which educators realise spaces and their perspectives on them may move teaching and learning towards this or that direction. In the most positive scenario, this direction could be informed by environmental-friendly practices and an ecological ethos of what it means for all creatures of the planet to (re)create spaces in a respectful and sustainable way. Towards what directions will educational practitioners and scholars shed light on? And what will that mean for the development of ongoing educational policies and their impact on the lives of children, youth and adults? The current special issue of *Education in the North* will give a mere idea regarding the first question and there will still be space for addressing the second part in a future issue.

Place-conscious education provides one strategy for developing in people the capacity to reclaim the inventiveness, imagination, and courage that over millennia allowed our predecessors to make use of the possibilities provided by the planet wherever they found themselves. (Gruenewald and Smith 2010, p.xxii)

Even though research may have been conducted into the education of children and young people, post-compulsory education, vocational education, community and/or adult learning, and professional learning, these conversations cannot be only limited to an understanding of such perspectives on spaces. On the contrary, interdisciplinary methodologies and methods we encourage rely on this realisation of the need to broaden what teaching and learning environments can be brought in, what other ways educative spaces have been seen, what other perspectival spaces are, inside or outside buildings, in our bodies and/or our minds, in relation to and with others, at one time and over time. Therefore, it is in this issue that one may well understand in a meta-analytical extent that the present trend of assuming that teachers' leadership is limited to what takes place in the classroom or the school (Gruenewald and Smith 2010, p.351) is also a spatial trap of one's own thoughts that only this

is the space used in teaching and learning. Let us not forget to mention, before closing the editorial notes that, increasingly problematic acts such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 are inherently concerned with how we perceive our movement in spaces: what is then *behind*, *front*, *left* and *right* and how these spatial determinations relate to our impressions on justice, should be something which concerns everyone in our world. It is this fragile balance between social justice and environmental safety that determine our common future. Thus, 'stepping wise' in a world of transformation is conceived as a way of being, as Colucci-Gray (2017, p.540) puts it, and we shall step wise into this journal issue in order to approach a 'where' a little bit readier to see things anew.

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