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Built pedagogy and educational citizenship in an Australian alternative learning environment

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Built pedagogy and educational citizenship in an Australian alternative learning environment

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The impact of built pedagogy has received increased focus within educational research, however to date there has not been a sustained focus on alternative learning environments. The research reported in this paper explored the experiences of young people enroled in a Flexible Learning Options (FLO) programme in South Australia. Interviews with 30 young people were undertaken both at the beginning and end of the school year in 2021, and ethnographic observations of the learning space were also undertaken. Thematic analysis identified four key aspects of the built pedagogy in the programme space, with a specific focus on safety and educational citizenship. The space allowed young people to take time out for themselves, helping them to feel they were in a safe place. The space also facilitated a sense of place through its open plan, though aspects of the built pedagogy potentially introduced an emphasis upon normative understandings of educational citizenship. The paper concludes by considering recommendations for how FLO programmes may, through their built pedagogy, better meet the needs of all students.

1. Introduction

The role of built pedagogy has been increasingly recognized as making an important contribution to student outcomes in educational contexts (Wooler et al., 2017). Monahan (2002, np) defines built pedagogy as "architectural embodiments of educational philosophies", reflecting how buildings, the layout of classrooms, the furnishings used, as well as the lighting and noise levels all reflect broader beliefs about the role of education in training students to be good citizens (Mills and Kraftl, 2014). While the training of students in citizenship through built pedagogy is true for all students, it is arguably especially true for students with complex needs and/or students who are at risk of school disengagement. This paper focuses on the built pedagogy of a learning space for students who are unable to attend mainstream schooling, and how the design of the space potentially helped to facilitate, while in some specific instances potentially limited, their engagement.

In terms of built pedagogy, Ellis and Goodyear (2016) distinguish between space and place. In their account, they first follow Turnbull (2002) in distinguishing between discursive, cognitive, existential, and material spaces. Discursive spaces are those in which socialization occurs, cognitive spaces are those in which processing or learning occurs,

existential spaces are those in which people can simply be, and material spaces are those that allow things to happen (such as having the necessary tools and materials to undertake a task). Spaces, then, are areas that either facilitate or prohibit certain actions, including in terms of learning. Places, by contrast, are endowed with meaning or value: they can be safe or unsafe, they can foster or inhibit growth, and they reflect the worth of individuals. Spaces thus make *doing* things possible, while places make *being* in certain ways possible (Painter et al., 2013).

Of course, space and place are intertwined in terms of built pedagogy. Without the necessary space, materials, and inputs, students are likely unable to learn. A classroom with no books, visual aids, technology or other such resources, adequate lighting and ventilation, or even a teacher, are likely to be experienced as providing a less than ideal learning space. But similarly, a classroom in which students do not feel safe, cannot express themselves, and are not supported in their learning at an ontological level is unlikely to be a place in which students feel comfortable to learn. Yet while feeling a sense of place in the classroom can potentially lead to positive learning outcomes even if some aspects of the space are missing (i.e., if a caring engaged teacher is present but no learning materials are available), it is less certain that a well-resourced learning space that creates no sense of being a safe place for

students is likely to be conducive to learning.

In terms of the literature on what Franz (2019) terms the 'spatiality of wellbeing', learning spaces that are flexible have been found to encourage student autonomy, allowing students to feel more comfortable, and helping to foster collaborations (Kariippanon et al., 2017). Systematic reviews of flexible learning spaces suggest that freedom of movement within spaces means that students are more likely to be more physically active, providing a positive impact on their physical health (Kariippanon et al., 2021). Post-occupancy evaluations of flexible learning spaces suggest that students are positively impacted by the breadth of choice they have in how and where they learn (Sigurõardóttir et al., 2021). However, some research has suggested that flexible learning spaces, and in particular open designs, can lead to students feeling more exposed to the observations of other people (Niemi and Katila, 2022).

The role of place alongside space is likely to be particularly pressing for students who are unable to attend mainstream schooling. This may be due to experiences of trauma, school disengagement, home instability, and other specific learning needs. In Australia, where the research reported in this paper was undertaken, alternative school arrangements are offered in the form of distance education, Montessori schools, and as is the focus of this paper, Flexible Learning Options (FLOs). FLOs are different to other forms of alternative education in that they eschew the traditional classroom model, instead focusing on promoting an understanding of students as requiring additional engagement and flexibility to ensure attendance and successful outcomes. The development of FLO programmes within Australia has largely focused on addressing reducing rates of high school incompletion, particularly amongst socially marginalized communities (Bills et al., 2020). In a sense, then, it can be argued that such programmes potentially facilitate the entrance of students into a specifically normative sense of citizenship, namely one marked by participation and societal contribution. This is an issue expanded upon below. It has been estimated that over 70, 000 students are enroled in FLO programmes across Australia each year (Bills et al., 2020).

Previous research on FLO programmes suggests that key to successful outcomes is the unconditional acceptance of young people who are otherwise unable to attend mainstream schooling (Myconos et al., 2016). For many young people attending FLO programs, sense of safety is a key issue, with FLO programmes providing a safe base not otherwise available in mainstream schooling. Such safety is achieved in FLO programmes through the enactment of flexibility in multiple ways (Willems, 2005). Students are given the necessary time to engage in the classroom, absent of the time pressures typically evident in mainstream schools. Students are given relative freedom of movement, again different to the pressures of classroom attendance within mainstream schools. And students are able to a large extent determine the pace of their learning.

In terms of outcomes, and as Thomas et al. (2017) note, FLO programmes typically focus on 'distance travelled', rather than having a specific outcome that students must meet. While FLO programmes aim to increase the number of high school completions, other benchmarks are valued, such as classroom engagement, career direction settings, and the creation of positive relationships. Research on FLO programme outcomes suggests that for many students what is most valued is the sense of connection and care engendered within FLO programmes, an outcome being that the self-esteem and self-efficacy of young people increases (McGinty et al., 2018). Research also suggests that students develop a sense of pride in themselves as learners, and that while the educational aspects of FLO programmes may not be inherently more interesting than they are in a mainstream schooling context, the modes of delivery and flexibility inherent to them makes the learning process itself more enjoyable (Msapenda and Hudson, 2013).

More broadly, and while not explicitly addressed in the literature on FLO programmes to date, educational citizenship is likely a core issue at stake when it comes to alternative education. As mentioned above, training for citizenship is often unintentionally part of the built pedagogy, and in FLO programmes it may take the form of shaping students to see themselves as future employees and active citizens. How classrooms are designed teaches students about how they are expected to move and interact with the world around them. As Olson et al. (2015) note, often centred in pedagogy is the idea of the 'active citizen', one who is knowledgeable about citizenship, one who is responsive to others, and one who is self-responsible. Drawing on the work of Foucault (e.g., 1980), Olson et al. suggest that while *citizenship education* is often explicitly taught in terms of topics covered for students, coverage of *educational citizenship* as a mode of being is often implicit, and this is particularly true when it comes to built pedagogy. Emphases upon self-direction, or making a contribution, or achieving one's goals are arguably all forms of educational (and broader) citizenship valued within countries such as Australia. This is not to suggest that these attributes may indeed not be valuable to students, but rather to suggest that they may be implicitly shaped via built pedagogy, rather than being openly discussed.

The study reported in the present paper explored the experiences of a cohort of students enroled in one FLO programme (hereafter 'the programme') run in South Australia. The pedagogical philosophy of the programme emphasizes values of belonging, diversity, respect, and learning (Relationships Australia South, Australia, 2021). The study aimed to explore how students experienced the programme, what they hoped to achieve from attendance, and how they experienced the built space of the programme. Students enroled in the programme were interviewed both at the beginning of the school year in 2021, and at the end of the school year in 2021. As per the previous literature outlined above, our interest was specifically in how the students we spoke with experienced the built pedagogy in terms of both space and place, and to extrapolate from this what both contributed in terms of implicit messaging about citizenship. We conclude the paper by exploring what our findings suggest in terms of recommendations for best practice in FLO programmes, focusing specifically on policies and practices related to built pedagogy and educational citizenship.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Participants

Approval for the research was granted by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Commiteee. Eligible participants were young people enroled in the Relationships Australia South Australia *Schools, Community, Innovations and Learning Service* at the commencement of the programme for 2021. The third author, having spent time in the programme in the weeks leading up to data collection, developed rapport with young people enroled in the programme, and approached young people individually to ask if they might be willing to participate in the research. Staff members also approached young people and provided a brief overview of the research and directed young people to engage with the third author if they wished to participate. Young people were informed that participation was not mandatory, and that declining to participate would not impact upon their enrolment in the programme. All of the researchers were not part of the programme, and were instead external parties funded by an independent body to undertake this research. This meant that both programme staff and young people were informed that the research was neither a programme evaluation, nor an evaluation of individual people. Rather, the emphasis was placed upon conducting research that examined what works for young people within the programme. Young people who agreed to participate in the research were provided with an information sheet and were asked to sign a consent form. For young people where literacy was a concern, the third author was available to read the information sheet and young people could provide verbal assent to participate.

2.2. Materials

Two interview schedules were developed by the authors, following guidelines provided by Clarke and Braun (2013). Each interview commenced by asking basic demographic information. For the first interview, participants were then asked questions about their experiences in mainstream schooling, what they hoped to gain from attendance in the programme, how they were experiencing the space, and what barriers they perceived to attendance at the programme. For the second interview participants were asked questions that invited them to reflect on their time in the programme, to comment on what they enjoyed (including in terms of the teaching space) and what they found challenging, and to discuss their plans for the future.

While in attendance at the programme, the third author also took ethnographic notes, following principles outlined by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983). The ethnographic observations were undertaken over a three-month period, between May and August 2021. In taking the notes, the third author focused on movement within the physical space of the programme, the layout of the space, noise levels and lighting within the space, and any other aspects of the physical space that appeared salient to the research. The third author also created maps of the physical space, and took photographs (when young people were not present) of the space. These maps were used to mark movement within the programme space during each visit, and the third author also made notes about their own sensory responses to being in the space. These included detailed notes about how differing events happening within the programme impacted their own experience of the space, and the types of both implicit and explicit messaging they perceived as being inherent to the space. Both young people and staff were informed that the third author would be in attendance at regular interviews during the ethnographic period, but that they could choose to opt out of being part of notes taken. No staff or young people opted out.

2.3. Procedure

All interviews were carried out while young people were in attendance at the programme, at a time convenient to the young people, in a private space within the programme. Interviews were conducted by the third author. Initial interviews were undertaken in April 2021, and follow up interviews were undertaken in November 2021. Interviews lasted on average for 17 min (range 12–25 min). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by a professional service.

Following Braun and Clarke (2023), the analysis reported in this paper adopts a Big Q approach, referring to our interest in meaning-making practices amongst our participants in collaboration with us as researchers (and the third author as interviewer in particular), rather than simply seeing interviews as a means to an end to collect a certain type of data (what Braun and Clark refer to as 'small q' approaches to qualitative research). In terms of our rationale for using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to reflexive thematic analysis, again we echo Braun and Clarke (2023) in suggesting that the theoretical flexibility inherent to their approach was well suited to our interest in writing this paper. Specifically, our interest was to adopt a critical realist approach: one in which we could take as given our participants' views, whilst also examining the broader social structures within which their narratives are located, including us as authors.

All transcribed interviews in addition to the ethnographic notes were coded by the first author according to the approach to thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step in this process involves familiarization with the data set through repeated readings. The second author read all materials three times, looking for repeated topics or codes. Having developed codes based on repeated readings of the transcripts, the second author then shared these codes with the other authors, who confirmed the codes as representative of the data set in terms of core topics. Of these codes, the topic of the physical space of the programme was a salient code across both interview time points, as well

as obviously being a focus of the ethnographic data. Focusing solely on codes relating to built design, the second author then developed themes based on the codes. While codes encompass broad salient topics repeated across the data set, themes by comparison organize codes into logical and coherent sets of information. Themes developed are indicative of topics seen as salient by researchers, rather than being exhaustive of all possible readings of the dataset.

For this paper, two main themes were developed through a process of repeated readings of the initial coded data related to built design, and developing codes into coherent thematic groupings. Of these themes, the first constituted a stand-alone theme, while the second was comprised of three sub-themes. Having developed these themes and sub-themes, the second author again shared them with the other authors, who confirmed the thematic structure. The secondauthor then identified and collated representative quotations for each theme. As such, the quotations included in the results are indicative but not exhaustive of each theme. Having identified representative quotations for each theme, the second author then compiled the thematic groupings and developed the results reported below.

3. Results

3.1. Participants

A total of 30 young people participated in an interview at both time points. Of the 30 young people interviewed, the average age was 16 years (range 13–19 years). In terms of gender, 15 were male, 13 were female, and 2 were unsure. In terms of cultural identity, 27 participants described their cultural background as Australian, with 1 describing their cultural background as Greek, 1 as Māori and 1 as Aboriginal Australian. In terms of parental cohabitation, 15 participants shared that they lived with their mother, 8 with both their mother and father, 5 with mother and stepfather, and 2 lived with a grandparent, with 17 of the participants also living with at least one sibling.

3.2. Theme 1: The built space allows young people to take time out for themselves

In this first theme, which was primarily developed from the interviews, young people spoke about the ways in which the built space allowed them to have flexibility in terms of engagement with other people. For many young people, the design of the space allowed them freedom of movement, and in particular that they could opt to have time to themselves:

Interviewer: What do you actually like about how this is set up, and the area?

Respondent: I like the fact that there is lots of different spaces for you to be able to actually go to. If you just want to chill out and go and do your work by yourself, like you can. You don't have to sit with everyone and just like stay there and just like the same sort of head space, and the same sort of train of thought. Like, you can actually go outside and do your work if you want to. (female, 15)

In this first extract we would suggest that educational citizenship is a key feature. As Olson et al. (2015) note, a core feature of educational citizenship is self-responsibility: the student who knows what they need and are responsible for having their needs met. As the young person in the quote above suggests, having the flexibility to work alone, including outside, meant that they were not stuck 'in the same sort of head space'. For young people for whom mainstream schooling may bring with it particular forms of regulation arising from the design of the space, the programme by contrast allowed young people freedom to determine what spaces worked for them, a key form of self-responsibility. While the programme primarily ran from one large space within the building, there were also smaller spaces that young people could use, and which

appealed to some:

> Respondent: I like the workspace here. It's small, so not many people can sit in there and annoy you. It has to kind of stay quiet. School was okay, it was bigger, it was all right, um but I definitely prefer coming here for sure. (male, 16)

In contrast to being in a large classroom that can be noisy, for this young person the smaller spaces available to him within the programme meant that he could take time out from classes to focus on his work in a quiet space, again enacting a form of educational citizenship whereby he was responsible for identifying and meeting his own needs through the built space. Another young person too noted the value of having both larger and smaller spaces:

> Respondent: School was okay. You could go into the little break out space if you really needed to. But this is definitely better because there's just one big space but you can also just sit away from everyone if you need to. And not everyone's looking at you and making a big deal that you're sitting alone. (male, 15)

While acknowledging that a previous school had offered break out spaces, this young person felt that perhaps the use of these singled people out. By contrast, in the programme the big spaces were supplemented by spaces where people could sit alone (as opposed to designated break out spaces), meaning that no one was singled out for needing time on their own. Echoing Ellis and Goodyear (2016), we might suggest that such discussions of the utility of particular spaces appeared to emphasise both cognitive and existential spaces. Breakout spaces, as per the extract above, and smaller spaces, as per the preceding extract, speak to the need both for spaces in which young people can simply be (existential spaces), as well as spaces that offer room to learn (cognitive spaces). Finally, another student too noted that the 'chill' nature of the built space provided flexibility for everyone:

> Interviewer: What did you think of it when you first came to the programme?
> Respondent: I was comfortable, I wasn't really afraid of being around that area because everyone was chill and then there's a lot less people and it's really spaced out. It's not like a small classroom there's one big building, so you can go wherever you want to work. There's couches as well. (male, 17)

For this young person it would seem that the capacity to 'chill' is a product of there being less people and more space. Indeed, in sum in this first theme we might suggest, and as we outlined in the introduction to this paper, that there was a sense in which the programme offered a 'place' as much as a 'space'. That young people felt safe, they didn't feel singled out, and that 'everyone was chill', would seem to suggest that the programme very much provided a place for students to be: more than simply a space for learning, it was also a place where they felt comfortable. This, we would suggest, highlights a key feature of the built pedagogy. As a programme designed for young people who had disengaged from mainstream education, the spaces in which the programme runs were intended to reflect a pedagogy that emphasised self-determination. That the young people we interviewed felt the space allowed them to enact educational citizenship by being responsible for their own needs would suggest that in many ways the built pedagogy was fit for purpose. As we explore in the following theme, however, some aspects of the built design may impact either positively or negatively upon whether or not young people experience it as simply a learning space, or also as a place that is their own.

3.3. Theme 2: Aspects of the built space that positively or negatively impact sense of place

This second theme draws on the ethnographic notes, and explores three aspects of the built space that potentially contributed to positive or negative impacts upon a sense of place within the programme. The three sub-themes are not surprising, given they predominate in the literature and as such were a purposive focus of the ethnographic observations. What is of interest in the three sub-themes below, however, is how the built pedagogy potentially impacted upon sense of place and educational citizenship, rather than simply being a commentary on the space itself (as has been the primary focus of the previous literature summarised in the introduction to this paper).

3.3.1. Sub-Theme 1: open design creates a safe place

A common note across the observation period pertained to the open design of the spaces within which the programme runs. As is evident in the following extract, the openness of the space appeared to facilitate a sense of place by allowing for social and physical connections:

> Common area is set up with chairs and couches in a U-shape formation, which leaves the space open and inviting to others. All students and staff members can see each other in the space and there are no tables/desks or any other objects which block the social and physical connections with the students and teachers in the class. (Ethnographic notes, 11/5/21)

As can be seen in Fig. 1, the layout of furniture likely helped to facilitate connectedness between staff and students, or at least made this a possibility. Here the built pedagogy of ensuring accessibility and inclusion for all is evident in the design of the space that allows for freedom of movement and the capacity for young people to make connections. Yet at the same time, we might suggest that this particular form of built pedagogy also engenders a specific form of educational citizenship, namely one in which visibility is equated with accountability, a point we explore further below.

Other aspects of the space design also potentially leant themselves to a safe sense of place for young people, as well as evoking particular aspects of the built pedagogy that might be especially suited to young people who bring with them negative experiences of mainstream schooling:

> Within the space itself, the workspaces are separated with bookcases, which aren't enclosed at the back – again having an open feel to the space. This allows young people to see into the other spaces and see what is going on: no surprises. Everyone can be seen/ heard, including case managers, teachers/tutors, and other staff or visitors to the space. (Ethnographic notes, 25/5/21)

As is noted in this extract, two aspects of the built pedagogy are potentially conducive to the programme creating a place of safety. First, being able to see what is going on at all times may help young people to feel there are 'no surprises'. Second, being able to hear or see other people means that young people do not feel left out, and that they could

Fig. 1. Central learning area which allows for movement around the space as well as comfort during learning.

monitor what was going on. While, as noted in the previous theme, being able to have time out was important for some young people, equally important may be the capacity of the space to allow young people to be aware of what is going on. Here the built pedagogy would appear to take into account the often complex, and for some young people trauma-related, needs that shape their position within the programme. In other words, the built pedagogy is one that is mindful of complex needs, including those that relate to (hyper)awareness and the importance of being aware of one's surroundings.

Importantly, however, we also noted that the openness of the space may also play a monitoring role, one that evokes particular understandings of educational citizenship:

> The space is very open in the way it has been set up. Many of the 'walls' are composed of windows which provide a view either into other rooms within the space or to the outside of the building, giving the space an open feel. I suppose the windows not only make the space feel less closed in, but also serve a practical purpose for the staff and case managers to keep track of where the young people are, within the building. (Ethnographic notes, 25/5/21)

Here it is noted that the open space allows staff to monitor young people. On the one side, this type of monitoring may be antithetical to the creation of a sense of place: it may repeat the forms of monitoring that occur in mainstream schools (Niemi and Katila, 2022). Here we potentially see a normative sense of educational citizenship, namely that young people should expect surveillance within the programme, and more broadly to accept that surveillance is part of everyday life. On the other side, some young people may feel that a space in which they are watched over and cared for – as opposed to punitively monitored – may help to create a safe place in which to learn. Here the built pedagogy thus potentially fulfils dual requirements: to monitor young people, but also through that monitoring to help young people to feel safe. Indeed, it may well be that as both cognitive and existential spaces (Ellis and Goodyear, 2016), the built pedagogy is reliant upon safety as a mechanism through which students can both learn and simply exist.

3.3.2. Sub-Theme 2: Lighting and windows regulate affect

Taking up the point about windows and walls raised in the final extract of the previous sub-theme, in this sub-theme we explore the role of windows, specifically in terms of lighting. A repeated note across the ethnographic period pertained to the use of artificial lighting within the programme space:

> Noticing the lighting in the space, much of the space is lit with artificial light. Although most of the wall space is a series of windows, the windows are more often looking into other rooms. The windows in the staff and case manager area look into a boxing/gym area which is off-limits (with some exceptions). The boxing/gym area has windows facing the other side of the building which bring in some natural light. The only source of natural light which isn't being filtered in from another room, is by the computers in the literacy and numeracy teaching space. These windows overlook the drop-off site, which allows case managers to see who is being picked up from the site and when. (Ethnographic notes, 8/6/21)

Certainly, it may be the case that for some young people the largely internal location of the programme space helped to create a sense of a safe place: a place regulated from the world outside, and relatively well monitored in terms of being viewed by people outside the space. Yet at the same time, the lack of natural lighting may exacerbate any sense that it is an institutional space, rather than a safe place for learning. This may be further exacerbated by the fact that some of the windows in the space look into areas that are off-limits, highlighting the regulation of the space to young people. Here there is the potential that aspects of the built pedagogy were, at least for some young people, less than conducive to the space functioning as a material or cognitive space conducive to learning. The following extract also emphasises the reliance upon artificial lighting:

> Most of the lighting within the space is artificial. Even with the light from the boxing/gym room – the light is filtering in through a second set of windows into the space. Artificial lighting filters in from the offices used by other NGO's. (Ethnographic notes, 15/6/21)

The sense of being a space within a shared internal space may create for some young people a sense of restriction or containment, as much as for others it may create a sense of safety. Further, that artificial lighting also filters into the programme space from other nearby offices may serve to indicate to students that they are in an office environment, one not necessarily conducive to a safe place for learning. The role of light in the built pedagogy, while likely out of the control of the programme, also speaks to aspects of educational citizenship. There is a sense in which while certain aspects of the built design were flexible, other aspects were less flexible. The use of design features such as lamps or other forms of lighting that might feel more homely and less institutional was not evident. Here there is a sense, then, in which the built pedagogy implicitly emphasises modes of citizenship that are involve reconciling oneself to the status quo, rather than being able to shape one's environment to meet one's needs. It was also noted that some of the internal windows were frosted, which potentially brought with it positive and negative effects:

> Internal windows are frosted from the waist down. Only the windows with a view outside are not-frosted. Windows are permeable, so young people are able to see whether or not a person is sitting in the office, but would not be able to tell who it is, and/or read conversations (Ethnographic notes, 2/8/21)

As noted in the previous sub-theme, the open space means that young people may feel that it is safe place because they can monitor what is going on (and feel that they are being watched over for their own safety). The use of frosting on internal windows may similarly mean that if young people need a space to themselves – as per the first theme – they can do so without their actions of conversations being easily readable by those on the other side of the frosting. Yet at the same time, it is possible that for some young people the opaqueness of the frosting may lead them to feel that they cannot easily monitor what is going on in the space. These potentially conflicting readings of the frosted windows speak to the role of the built pedagogy in educational citizenship. There is again a sense of having to be reconciled to a built design that may be conducive to learning for some, but for others may be less than conducive. It is difficult to centre a focus on educational citizenship as self-responsibility if there are limits imposed upon self-determination.

3.3.3. Sub-Theme 3: Noise levels as familiar or unwanted distraction

In this final sub-theme we explore noise within the space of the programme. Certainly, we would begin by acknowledging that noise is often omnipresent for those who are able to hear. There is ambient noise in the world around us. There is often ambient noise in our homes, as well as noise from people talking to us. And in mainstream schools there are often high levels of noise. Creating a silent environment in the programme is thus unlikely to be a specific indicator or facilitator of a sense of a safe place for all students (though certainly for students with specific sensory needs it may be an important factor). Nonetheless, the particular noises and their volume that were observed during the ethnographic work may not necessarily be conducive to a sense of place that emphasises learning:

> Throughout the wellbeing class, a baby can be heard crying (assuming from the downstairs child-care centre). Students were periodically distracted and annoyed by the crying noise, but the teacher would bring their attention back by acknowledging the distraction and encouraging the class to focus for little while longer. (Ethnographic notes, 11/5/21)

As is evident in this note, a baby crying (likely from another service

run in the same building) was a distraction for young people. Certainly, it may be the case that for some young people this was a welcome distraction, and for young people where there is a baby at home, it might be a familiar distraction that lends the space a sense of homely place. Nonetheless, it is likely that for other students a baby crying would be an unwelcomed distraction that reminds them they are in a space that is not their own: it is shared. Noise levels in the space were commonly noted as a problem for young people who needed a quiet space:

> Noise is carried throughout the space – not much noise control. The literacy and numeracy lesson can be heard from the other side of the room. Students wishing for a quiet space to do their work may not necessarily get that from the space. I am told that many students come in for case management ONLY and do their work at home as a result. (Ethnographic notes, 15/6/21, emphasis in original)

For some young people, home may not be a space conducive to learning. It may be too noisy. A learning space such as the programme thus needs to provide a place away from noise, at least for some students. As a result, and as this extract suggests, some students may resort to working from home, a less than desirable outcome given the aim of the programme to focus on student retention and outcomes. While we might suggest, from the standpoint of educational citizenship, that opting to work from home constitutes a form of self-responsibility, we would also suggest that it is likely for some young people a choice made in the context of limited options. This is, then, a constraining form of educational citizenship, rather than one that is liberatory. It was also noted that noise levels varied, depending on what was taking place on the day:

> The space is extremely noisy today and seems to be packed with students. Turns out that the programme has brought in a teacher to help students to get the driver's license. As I'm sitting in the space, I can hear a class going for literacy and numeracy, and the driver's class is taking place in the common area – noise is being carried all throughout the floor. Also noted a humming noise throughout the floor – not sure if this is the air-con or something else. (Ethnographic notes, 10/8/21)

On this particular day the space was very noisy, with multiple classes occurring at the same time, with noise from each overlapping. Added to this was the ambient noise coming potentially from an air-conditioning unit. Again, noise is something young people who hear are exposed to all the time. Nonetheless, the extracts included in this final sub-theme raise the question of what noises are acceptable in a given space, what noises might help create a sense of place for young people, and which noises (and their levels) might make the space feel less like a safe place for learning. A consistent level of noise might for one student make them feel safe and comforted, while for another might make them feel overwhelmed. While as noted in terms of light in the previous sub-themes, aspects of the noise levels are likely (and reasonably) beyond the control of the programme. Yet at the same time we would emphasise that certain aspects of the built pedagogy – aspects that potentially are not actively considered by programme managers, such as noise and light – are less than conducive of cognitive and existential spaces that are welcoming for all young people.

4. Discussion

The findings reported in this paper make a substantive contribution to the literature on the impact of built pedagogy on students by exploring the specificities of the built design and space in the context of a Flexible Learning Options (FLOs) programme. Building on the work of Ellis and Goodyear (2016), the findings reported in this paper indicate that both the design of the space itself, and its capacity to serve as both cognitive and existential spaces specifically, are particularly strong in some areas (e.g., in terms of flexibility of movement), and potentially less functional in other areas (e.g., in terms of lighting and noise). This finding adds weight to previous research on FLOs, which has suggested

that freedom of movement is vital (McGinty et al., 2018; Willems, 2005). That the built pedagogy of the programme examined in this paper appeared to lend itself well to creating a sense of a safe place, and allowing relative freedom of movement, highlights the successful aspects of the built design of the built pedagogy, and which are in alignment with the programme philosophy of belonging, diversity, respect, and learning, as well as broader research on flexible learning spaces (e. g., Kariippanon et al., 2017).

However, and as noted above, other aspects of the findings suggest room for improvement. Specifically, and echoing the findings of Neimi and Katila (2022), being a largely internal space located in a building shared with other services, the programme space faces limitations in terms of the extent in which it can potentially be a safe place for all. The high volume of traffic in the building (and subsequent high noise levels), the reliance upon artificial lighting, and the use of furniture to divide up spaces may have, at least for some students, negatively impacted upon the safety of the space. Certainly, for some students these same factors may have played an important role in creating a sense of safety, such as by being surrounded by familiar sounds, being able to see where other people are, and feeling that to a sense they are cocooned from the external world. But in an alternative learning environment intended for a diversity of students, it is vital that the needs of all students are accommodated. We might suggest that the built pedagogy, where it was successful, was likely the product of purposive deliberations about safety and inclusion. However where it was less than successful, it was likely that implicit factors such as lighting and noise levels were given less consideration, highlighting that a holistic approach to built pedagogy, rather than one that focuses only on a limited number of factors, is needed.

In terms of educational citizenship, the findings presented in this paper also suggest areas of success in terms of the built pedagogy, but also areas that were likely less than successful. In terms of positive features, the open spaces that were conducive of free movement appeared to emphasise an understanding of educational citizenship that focused on self-responsibility and self-determination. By contrast, however, the less successful areas – namely the lighting and noise levels – potentially (and implicitly) emphasized the idea that to a certain extent young people must learn to reconcile themselves to less than conducive environments. While this is likely a realistic appraisal of the world we all live in, it nonetheless potentially emphasizes a form of citizenship that rests on compliance or tolerance, rather than active and purposive inclusion.

The findings summarized above thus suggest to us a number of recommendations for the built design of FLO programmes. As was true for the programme that was the focus of the research reported in this paper, the space itself was not purpose built. Rather, it was adapted for this role, and on a modest budget. This means that the space itself could not necessarily accommodate best design principles for learning. Most salient here is the relative lack of natural light, and the relatively high noise levels. The future design of FLO spaces will thus be well served by undertaking consultations with young people likely to use the service, as well as drawing on the literature on design for educational environments. While the spaces that FLO programmes occupy may seem a secondary (or less) concern, the research reported in this paper would suggest that the design of the space must be seen as a primary concern. Such consultations should also specifically address educational citizenship, encouraging young people to speak about their needs through the lens of active and purposive inclusion, rather than compliance or tolerance. Speaking explicitly about educational citizenship is vital, so that young people are aware of the implicit expectations that are likely to be evident in all spaces they move in, but also the capacity for resistance to normative citizenship expectations.

Further, it is likely to be the case that students with specific sensory needs will require specific accommodations, although we would suggest that such accommodations are likely to be beneficial for all students, rather than being seen as a marginal concern. Certainly, disability

inclusion is vital, but the fact that such inclusion may be useful for all students in FLO programmes may constitute one mechanism through which attention to the built pedagogy is ensured. Such attention may usefully focus on the areas already covered above (specifically noise levels and lighting), but can also extend to consider the importance of break out spaces offering sensory activities and being designed to take into account the sensory needs of all students. Even if the main learning space is often likely to be noisy, for example, sound proofed break out spaces may be a welcomed alternative for many students. Whether or not such spaces are fully private (i.e., with opaque partitioned walls), or are semi-private (as is the case in the current programme, where frosting covers part of the internal windows that serve to break up the space), requires consultation with young people in order to ensure that outcomes meet their needs.

There are of course limitations to the research reported in this paper. While the interviews focused on the design of the space, closer attention via additional interview questions could have explored in more detail aspects of the built design that were primarily addressed via the ethnographic observations (i.e., noise and light). Additionally, further purposive questions about the interplays of space and place would have usefully extended the interview data. It is also the case that we did not specifically ask participants about accommodations for differing abilities and needs, and asking about this might have helped to better identify aspects of diversity within the interview cohort in terms of needs relating to space and place. All of these limitations suggest rich areas for further investigation in future research.

In sum, the findings reported in this paper provide an important initial scoping of some of the likely needs of students in FLO programmes in terms of the built pedagogy and educational citizenship. Even in a space that was not purpose built for the programme, it was clear that the way the space is used, furnished, and experienced has clear implications for the importance of the built pedagogy in terms of the wellbeing of students. That the space allowed students relative freedom of movement, allowed them to feel safe, and helped them to be agentic in determining their learning and safety needs is an important finding. Yet we must wonder how much more beneficial a purpose-built space might be for students in alternative education, or at least a well-funded space using an existing location that can be further adapted to meet the diverse needs of the student cohort. To be able to truly experience a space as a welcoming and safe place for their learning, it is vital that the built space is capable of responding to as well as pre-empting the likely diverse needs of students who seek to learn within the space.

Declaration of Competing Interest

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