CoReD Collaborative Redesign with schools

Staff and students review their school building, one year after moving in

Context:

School location	Stapaskoli, Dalshverfi, Reykjanesbaer, Iceland.
Details about students	6 to 15 year olds, grades 1 to 10. The number of students had grown to just over 280 in spring 2021.
School premises	A compulsory school building for 520 students. Sport and preschool extensions will be built at later stages.
School context	The school was inaugurated in 2020 and serves a new neighbourhood in a coastal town of around 20.000 inhabitants. The instructional language is Icelandic.
Type of activity	Walks and recorded discussions with focus groups of teachers, other staff and students reviewing four to five locations representing the school as a whole.
Stage in design process:	Post-occupancy evaluation after first year of practice.

Tool used

Pedagogical walk-throughs (https://www.ncl.ac.uk/cored/tools/walk-through/)

Rationale for activity and tool adopted

Walk-throughs have been used in different contexts with multi-professional teams and with children of different ages. A pedagogical walk-through is primarily a tool for teachers in different types of school to become more aware of the role of the physical environment for teaching and learning and how it can best be developed." (CoRed, n. d., see https://www.ncl.ac.uk/cored/tools/walk-through/)

The tool was chosen and applied to facilitate a post occupancy evaluation after the first year of school practice, allowing different groups inhabiting the new school building to review and discuss its´ strengths and weaknesses, as well as bring forth ideas about how teaching and learning environments included in the study might be improved. The tool was considered an appropriate and straightforward

method to allow participants to reflect upon the school premises and its´ pedagogical potential and limitations. Four types of data informed our study, data derived from documents, photography, interviews, and pedagogical walk-throughs. A follow up study might include the application of tools such as diamond ranking, a survey on students' school spaces or a cartographic study of movement in the learning environment.

Case study description: Process

Four focus groups did a walk-through the same day, supervised by one researcher each group: two groups of nine teachers in all, a group of assisting staff, made up of the housekeeper and five teaching assistants assigned to different grade levels, and finally a group of 13 students representing all grade levels accompanied by one teacher. Each group made stops in four or five selected locations, including a double classroom as-signed to two grade levels, classroom or workshop area for art and crafts, the library, the assembly hall, and the corridors. Each member had a paper with forms to fill at each stop. Recorded discussions, lasting from 15 to 60 minutes, were conducted right after the walk-through and took place in a meeting room within administrative facilities of the school building. Some notions about staff facilities and the school play-ground were also recorded and reviewed.

Interviews and focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed up to a point deemed necessary for thorough analysis of their content. Thematic analyses of the data were then used to illuminate ideas and intentions behind the new building, as well as review conceived strengths and weaknesses of areas visited in the school. Photographs were used to recall perceived features of the building and examine them in more detail.

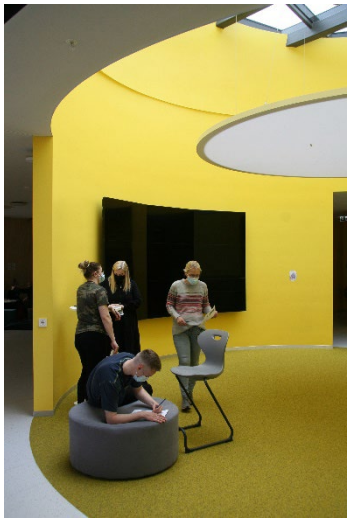
Outcomes

The results served to show strengths and weaknesses of the design, as perceived by participants, as well as commend the methodology applied. Conceived strengths and weaknesses of the learning environment were many, which seems to commend pedagogical walk-throughs as a research method. We are also able to confirm that the walks and discussions served to raise the awareness of a noteworthy school building offering opportunities for new ways of teaching and learning. Teachers and students agreed that the variety of spaces and furniture allowing student to choose for themselves their learning conditions, could be considered the greatest strength of their new learning environment. Students valued the level of freedom in their new school, as they were not only allowed, but rather expected, to regulate to some degree the conditions and subject matter of their learning.

The weaknesses had often to do with technical difficulties to be expected at initial stages and likely to be eliminated to some extent over time, while other weaknesses had more to do with disturbances

likely to get worse as the number of students in-creases over the next few years. A comparative study in a few years´ time might prove interesting in that regard.

A sense of empowerment and the will to grasp opportunities to try out different things based on teacher relationships, collaboration, and reflection was sometimes detected. We were also able to identify physical constraints, making it hard for staff members to fall back to conventional ways of working. Certain ties to familiar procedures and surroundings were also detected.



Participants in the pedagogical walk-throughs were generally pleased with their new school, fascinated, even, with the spaciousness, natural light, bright colours, transparency, and dynamic flow among staff and students alike. They were able to articulate opportunities that would come with the whole building complex fully built and proudly pointed out many details or more substantial features of design, such as small indoor windows between spaces, windows and gaps bringing in natural light through the roof or upper floor, grand views through extensive windows or transparent indoor walls, an exceptionally furnished playground, restrooms within classrooms, excellent acoustics in crowded spaces, a shared classroom for art and crafts, giant steps in the assembly hall, indoor balconies along corridors, as well as small spaces assigned to individual assistance, learning how to play musical instruments, studying in quiet, team work, or technical tasks, such as recording and editing media. Mobile podium stands and large displays on wheels were commended as practical novelties, as were oval spaces, oval benches, and round tables or desks, resonating trough out the whole building. Original details such as having a living tree and a wall for climbing on the lower floor of an abundance of seats in windows were also celebrated.

The design of the school building, both in broad and more specific terms, appeared to fit open and varied pedagogical approaches based on teamwork and collaboration.

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