

Tool: Pedagogical Walk-Through

Range of contexts of use

Over the course of the CoReD project, Pedagogical walk-throughs have been used in Sweden and Iceland, in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools (students aged 6-16). The schools ranged from recently built to over a hundred years old, with additions and renovations, and were located in urban and suburban areas.

The tool was used successfully across a broad variety of participants, including students from all grades, teachers, management, assistants, support staff and special educators in order to reflect on the current spaces and their use.

Range of schools: older buildings in Sweden and the new build in Iceland



Rationale for activities and tool adopted

In all schools, the tool was chosen and applied to facilitate post occupancy evaluation, but the intentions behind these evaluations were quite different. One of the Swedish schools was planned to undergo renovations in the near future. Here the tool was used to evaluate the pedagogical qualities of present facilities in order to support scheduling, overall reflection and discussions regarding present strengths and weaknesses. In the other schools, the tool was used after a period of inhabitation (between one and five years), allowing different groups inhabiting the school building to review and discuss its' strengths and weaknesses, as well as inform decisions regarding present and future changes in the learning spaces. Across the cases, there was a concern to increase the match between pedagogical practice, organizing and learning spaces. The walk-throughs were led by researchers, on one occasion via a laptop computer due to Covid visiting restrictions.

Nature of starting environments

One school, in Iceland, was newly constructed, having been built very recently in a expanding neighbourhood and was not yet at full capacity. In contrast, both the Swedish schools were considerably older buildings. One was renovated seven years earlier, but the last one was in great need of repair with only partial refurbishments. Thus, the tool is possible to apply to a great variety of settings.



What happened?

Participants ranged from students to teachers, leaders and assisting staff. They walked in small groups of participants with similar roles (e.g. in one school, two groups of teachers, a group of assisting staff and a group of 13 students did walk-throughs) and the tours took around two hours. Typically, four to five stops were selected beforehand, and a researcher facilitated the tours. The stops represented a variety of spaces, and the participants used protocols for individual evaluation, whereafter group discussions about the spaces took place. Data consisted of photos, protocols and a discussion summary from each group.

The tool was easy to use and participants were surprised to discover new perspectives on familiar environments. It seems that the tool can serve to un-familiarize participants with their own environments, make them discover new features in their schools and give visiting participants new ideas about their own spaces. For example, in the unrenovated, older school, the corridors were evaluated more negatively than the classrooms, but the participants were able to think of a greater variety of possible activities including those connected to learning, such as exhibitions and group work.

In the new building, the walks and discussions served to raise the awareness of a noteworthy school building and the opportunities it offers for new ways of teaching and learning. Teachers and students agreed that the variety of spaces and furniture, enabling students some choice about where they learn, could be considered the greatest strength of their new learning environment.

Outcomes?

Generally, participants were able to give numerous accounts of detailed and rich feedback on the evaluated spaces, regarding both strengths and weaknesses. It is also possible to confirm that the walks and discussions served to raise the awareness of the present school building.

The participants also, by being asked about and listening to suggestions for possible activities, expanded their repertoire of teaching and learning activities. At one of the schools, the management decided to use this tool yearly with the teaching staff before scheduling work.

Another outcome is the numerous suggestions being made in order to improve the spaces, such as new or moved furniture, changing flows or removing features causing disturbance. These ranged from minor to major changes, which entails that the method can be used for both short and longer term evaluation and planning of space use and content.

Conclusions

Who should use this tool and when?

The tool has shown to be suitable for teachers, but also for other staff and management. It can also be used with students, enabling them to see possibilities for learning as the teachers see possibilities for teaching. In a Swedish evaluation project, participants included other groups such as policy makers, property managers and local politicians participated in walk-throughs of school buildings, and this method proved particularly useful in order to facilitate interprofessional discussions of school buildings. It seems that careful preparation of space selection and a facilitator that keeps time and distributes the word among the participants contributes to a fruitful discussion.

Although the most common use for this tool is post-occupancy evaluation, it can be used in all phases in order to reflect on spaces and space change. It encourages participants to **start where they are**, and to expand their view of the present spaces by looking anew at their environments and having guided discussions about them with others. The insights made can contribute to participants developing common understandings of **the intertwining of physical, organisational and social aspects of school environment**.

A further use is for participants to perform pedagogical walk-throughs in schools that are unfamiliar, and perhaps innovatively built, in order to prepare participants for a move into a new environment or as part of a participatory design process. This would be done in order to **facilitate the exploration of ideas and possibilities**. Gaining insight into others' perception and use of educational spaces and the complexity of pedagogical practice may also make decision makers who are not daily users of school spaces to **appreciate the complex lengthy process that is change**.