

# Introduction to Part IV: Teacher Practices



Wesley Imms and Kenn Fisher

**Abstract** This final section of *Transitions* focuses on arguably the most important element of 'successful' ILEs—the teacher. Within educational research alone, and when looking at a hundred years or more of research into quality schooling, most arguments attract a counter-perspective. Interestingly, on one factor virtually everyone agrees; the teacher has the greatest positive impact on the quality of student learning. For this reason, we use the preceding sections to lead us into discussions about how teachers occupy and use the educational space.

This section of *Transitions* purposefully comes as the final section of this book; it brings the previous conversations together using as the focus, the critical factor of *the instructor*. Teacher practices lie at the heart of the ILETC project; this is because the evidence from years of educational research show that their actions have the most direct effect on improving the quality of student learning. This book makes the case that good use of ILEs can make good teaching even better. The four chapters scoped below explore this concept in some depth, separately and forensically examining: how the 'we' and the 'I' can be integrated into the ILE; how teachers in training can be inducted into the concept; how two distinct disciplinary pedagogical approaches can be supported by ILEs and finally how often inflexible state imposed regulations can be 'hacked' to insert ILE prototypes to illustrate alternatives to the mandated rigid traditional classroom model. These present explicit examples of a more general issue—deconstruction of decades of practice that has largely ignored the physical. These selected chapters show that the issues to be addressed take on a myriad of forms, and that there is no one 'big mistake' to fix and therefore no one solution.

Vicky Leighton's chapter signposts the beginning of a challenging journey, one that continues excellent thinking from previous generations but remains unresolved. It concerns the very essence of a teacher's inhabitation of an ILE—their

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so-called ‘spatial competency’. Lackney and others emerged themselves in this concept decades ago, and Leighton revisits their work with an eye to the 2020s. She extends this thinking using cognitive psychology and ecological psychology theories to reconceptualise the concept as ‘situational environmental imagination’. This well-considered positioning places Leighton on the cusp of major advancements in our understanding of how teachers use ILEs. The chapter represents the theoretical framework for a PhD that has, since writing this text, further problematised teachers’ abilities to ‘use’ a space and has used that foundation to design methods to ‘observe’ and understand these skills in action in classrooms.

Anat Mor-Avi, a practising architect and artist, embraces the ‘spirit of we’ in ILE’s, where ‘we learn’. The school should be a space for both students and teachers to ‘become’. Having designed schools in both the USA and Israel, she has brought her artistic thinking to the built fabric in—perhaps—modelling school on the Kibbutz concept. This concept clearly balances the ‘we’ with the ‘I’, as Mor-Avi uses as a case study an ‘academic park’ being designed in Israel. As an artist, she also focusses on creative pedagogies and spaces that support this approach. In particular she adopts the concept of ‘participatory creativity’, surely a significantly relevant teacher-learner practice in this age of the entrepreneur, incubator, startup and pop-up culture our graduating school students will experience. This chapter is an aspirational and inspirational vision for progressive teacher practice and transition to ILE’s.

Emily Nelson and Leigh Johnson tackle the pre-service teaching undergraduate programs and the perceived barriers to transition to ILE’s in New Zealand. They view ILE’s through the lens of socio-spatial entanglements for practice. They point out ‘the reality that approximately 75% of teaching and learning in schools continues within single cell learning spaces with teacher-led pedagogies’. This would also be true in Australia’s existing school building stock, and most probably in most countries across the world to varying degrees. With the advent of pressure to transition to ILE’s, they liken this disruption as an entanglement. In unpacking this, they adopt concepts from Lefebvre (1991) and Monahan (2002) to focus on spatial consciousness/discourse, embodiment and materiality. Through focus groups with pre-service teacher trainees, the authors grapple with ‘messy materiality’ and offer a rich array of ethnographic comments as to how these adult students learn the teaching profession in practicums. They argue for a ‘head-on’ engagement with ‘material disruption’ and ‘messy materialities’, as these trainees ‘generate adaptive practices in these spaces for practicum’.

Silvia Sasot and Esther Belvis take a zeitgeist approach to transformation and transition exploring opportunities through ‘hacking the school’. They worked towards a school transformative toolkit using emergent principles which included: welcome, belonging, communication, cooperation, diversity, movement and transduction. These principles afford a dialogic space between teachers, administrators and designers to ‘disrupt’ the out-of-date regulatory environment in Spain. Their approach also sought to consider wellbeing, pedagogy and community along with engagement with the stakeholders. This was achieved through prototype micro-projects sponsored by the JF Foundation, where schools were invited to ‘pitch’ their ‘hack’ of traditional spaces to secure funding for these exemplars. The toolkit was

used to assist this process of design through four stages: starting, discovery, co-creation and assessment. The authors assert that some 30 schools were able to ‘hack their schools’ and work around the regulatory framework and in so doing form a community of practice for future project developments.

An architect and artist speak of creative and affective school pedagogies; two academics learn from their students’ learning; an artist/teacher and an architect collaborate on deconstruction and reconstruction of spaces; this is the currency of knowledge generation typical of our new age of professionals working on re-designing teaching in innovative learning spaces. These chapters illustrate the array, complexity and challenges of systematic spatial school rebirth across international borders, disciplines and professions. In many ways, they typify ILETCS evolving methodology.

## References

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**Wesley Imms (Australia)** comes to learning environments research from a long period as a teacher, then through a Ph.D. in Curriculum Studies from the University of British Columbia in Canada. His teaching spanned art and design education, his practice for decades has included designing and building ‘crafted’ homes, and his art works have focused on bespoke purposeful furniture construction, which he exhibits annually. For the last decade these interests have conflated into applied research programs, where he specialises in assisting schools to conceptualise, inhabit, refine and evaluate learning environments. This work has focused extensively on large-scale collaborative projects that draw heavily on international industry participation, and with an emphasis on Ph.D. and Masters level input to this knowledge generation. He is a co-Director of the LEARN group, manages LEARN@MGSE, and through selected consultancies he works closely with schools in the Asia-Pacific region on improving the use of innovative learning environments. Wesley is currently an Associate Professor at The University of Melbourne, Australia.

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