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# Space to Develop: How Architecture Can Play a Vital Role in Young Children's Lives

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*Space to develop: how architecture can play a vital role in young children's lives*
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# Space to develop: How architecture can play a vital role in young children's lives

**By Bronwen Cohen, Children in Scotland, United Kingdom**

*As Scotland moves ahead with both an ambitious school building programme and forward-thinking educational reforms, Bronwen Cohen explores the background to "Making Space 2010", an exciting design programme which aims to focus international vision on the importance of space.*

Where we learn can determine how and what we learn, which is why the "Making Space 2010" international programme to promote innovation, creativity and sustainability in the design of space for children and young people is both timely and significant.

Run by Children in Scotland, in partnership with the Scottish Government and Architecture + Design Scotland, as well as CELE and *Children in Europe* magazine, this year-long programme includes an international award and conference, and is intended to both encourage debate and offer inspiration on how we can provide places and spaces in which children can learn and develop.

The first international Making Space award, held in 2005, focused on buildings and spaces for those aged 0-10. "Making Space 2010" extends the age range to cover 0-18 years. Taking its cue from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2009) it will again highlight the process as well as the product: designing with – as well as for – children and young people. The award will recognise both practical and imaginative elements of design, encouraging entries not only for buildings but also for smaller spaces such as bus and play shelters. The judging panel will be chaired by the Director of Glasgow's iconic College of Art – designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh – and include representation from Portugal and Norway, from CELE and from students.

The conference will be held in Edinburgh in October. It will allow for international discussion, giving delegates and students a chance to debate the issues and take part in study visits across Scotland.

## MAKING SPACE 2010: ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

An international award and conference promoting innovation, creativity and sustainability in design for children and young people aged 0-18.

**Award**

"Making Space 2010" is an international award supported by the Scottish Government and OECD Centre for Effective Learning Environments. Submissions are invited from across the world for the most successful building or space (indoor or outdoor) for children and young people aged 0-18 (inclusive), completed between January 2005 and December 2010.

Entries are welcomed for ***any*** building or space that is designed for children and young people, ranging from schools to street furnishings, recreational or educational, rural or urban. Entries should exemplify innovation and creativity in design as well as demonstrate a strong process of user participation and involvement. Entries are encouraged from anyone involved in the creation and use of a building or space, *e.g.* architects, designers, structural engineers, urban designers, landscape designers, teachers, educators, users, children and young people, commercial developers, community groups, design consultancies.

**Conference**

Award winners will be announced and showcased at a major international conference to be held in Edinburgh, with supporting events in Glasgow and Stirling, on 7-8 October 2010.

The "Making Space 2010" programme will culminate in two days of presentations from world-renowned architects, academics and practitioners and study visits to centres of excellence across Scotland. It will encourage debate on the promotion of innovative design, allowing architects, planners and those working with young people in a variety of settings to share ideas and challenge conventional architectural approaches.

To register your intention to make a submission, to register as a participant and benefit from early bird delegate and exhibitor rates, or to be added to the "Making Space 2010" mailing list for regular updates, visit *www.childreninscotland.org.uk/makingspace* or contact Hannah Goodrum, *hgoodrum@childreninscotland.org.uk*.



Across the world, an emphasis on lifelong learning has focused attention on early childhood and integrated approaches to learning and care, as well as how to best meet the needs of young people. They now spend more time than ever before in school and other learning environments, and if they are to engage with lifelong learning, this must be fostered at an early age. How best do we encourage children and young people to become the protagonists of their own learning throughout their lives and what role can spaces and places play in this? How do we design space which supports inclusive approaches to education enabling all children to learn together? How do we reflect the importance now given to families and communities as key partners in the learning process? How do we increase the contribution that buildings can make to the environment – and children's understanding of the impact of their activities on the environment? And, above all, how can we offer buildings and design which inspire us all?

For Scotland, these are pressing questions. The country is engaged on a major school building programme, and on developing a curriculum for children from the age of 3 to 18 which encourages positive and lifelong engagement with learning and citizenship. This forms part of a legislative framework which entitles all children to inclusive education, championed by a government which is also committed to higher environmental standards. With this is mind, it is apparent that the bar for innovative spaces has been set high.

### SCOTLAND'S VISION FOR ITS SCHOOL ESTATES STRATEGY

*"Our vision is for schools which signal the high value we place on learning; which people and communities can enjoy using and can be proud of; which are well designed, maintained and managed and which encourage continuous engagement with learning; which are far more than just 'educational establishments' whose quality of environment supports an accessible range of services and opportunities and which enrich the communities they serve and the lives of learners and families".*

*Building Better Schools: Investing in Scotland's Future,* September 2009.
*www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/09/22154600/0*



Schools are now regarded as an intrinsic part of their communities, contributing, together with child welfare and health services, to the general wellbeing of children and young people. There is also growing recognition that more resources need to be directed towards the first five years of life and more attention paid to nurturing.

Scotland has encouraged its local authorities to think and act independently, within the framework of its new Curriculum for Excellence and inclusive Additional Support for Learning legislation. Its aim is to achieve the best educational models – both in terms of curricula and learning spaces. It is seeking to realise this via the design of space – and the processes associated with it.

### NEW WAYS TO MAKE USE OF SPACE

Cultivating a relationship with the local community and environment involves thinking about new ways to make use of space, in order to expand and enhance young people's learning experiences.

In Glasgow, pupils' ideas have been used to create an innovative outdoor, flexible space which aims to foster respect for nature and the environment. Merrylee Primary School has developed a natural play site within the school grounds. The "Urban Jungle" was designed by the school pupils with the help of a parent who is a landscape architect. The 1 700 square foot plot features grassy hills and valleys, a willow maze, wooden rope bridge, a natural grass-covered amphitheatre, trees to climb, fruit trees, shrubs and wild flowers; all with a view over the school and surrounding area. It is an oasis amidst the urban landscape, where innovative design and eco-friendly building has been used to transform a previously unused sports pitch. Original proposals for a tarmac playground did not inspire the parents, staff and pupils in the least so, after much discussion amongst the community and with the school's partners, it was decided to create a natural space which:

- Offers the potential for creative play.
- Encourages the children to be more naturally active.
- Offers a flexible natural environment for exploring and learning and for enjoyment by children of all ages.
- Provides an environment where children can learn to assess risk and make informed choices.
- Encourages wildlife habitation.
- Has social spaces for better interaction.

© Glasow City Council

**Pupils enjoying the outdoors in the urban jungle** **Pupils tackling the rope bridge during a break**

The natural space created addresses the physical, social, emotional and educational needs of the pupils. It was undertaken through close partnership between the school, the parent council, Glasgow City Council and the Forestry Commission Scotland. This latter agency advised on the environmental aspects of the project, whilst Glasgow City Council supports the development of outdoor learning within its schools and provided funding and help in respect to health, safety and practical arrangements.

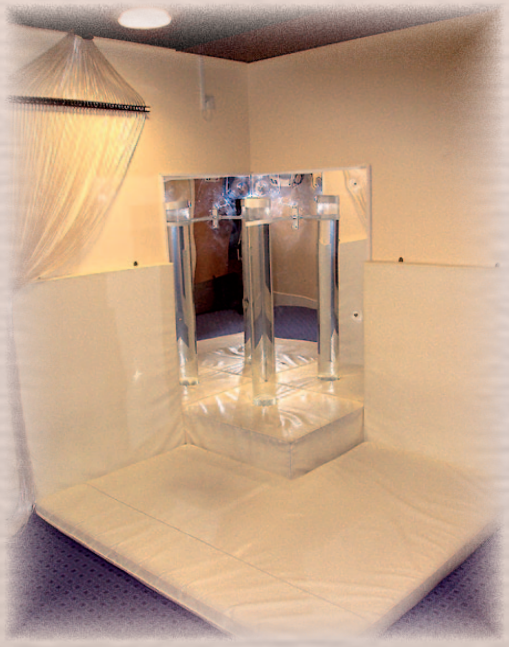
The adults involved in the project helped the children with their research by taking them to visit various sites and teaching them about design, whilst respecting their abilities and capabilities. The children were part of the process at every stage, working with all the professionals involved and their decision was the final one. The whole school is extremely proud of their achievement. Their aspiration is that when the "jungle" has had time to grow it will be a community resource open to all throughout the year.

The Merrylee Urban Jungle is the result of adults listening to children and helping them realise their aspirations. Kirsty (aged 10) said: "It's usually adults who design things but sometimes what we want is the opposite of what they want. I think children can be more imaginative than adults and it was good that the teachers and everyone involved took our ideas seriously."

## ADAPTING SPACES TO PUPILS WITH ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS

Scotland's Additional Support for Learning legislation highlights the need to develop flexible learning spaces able to accommodate young people with additional needs, and integrate them into mainstream schools.

A refurbishment of the Department of Special Education located within the mainstream Woodmill High School, in Fife, enabled a number of pupils to be transferred from a nearby special needs school which was closed. The new department, now known as the Department of Additional Support, educates around 50 pupils with moderate to severe learning difficulties. In addition to classrooms, it contains a number of specialist rooms, a life skills room, multi-purpose "quiet" areas and a sensory room.



© Fife Council

**Specially adapted sensory room, combining mirrors, light and textures**

The department's extension and refurbishment has resulted not only in more space for these additional pupils, but has also allowed the school to continue to support an integrative approach. Senior pupils have the opportunity to be appointed as prefects; pupils from the department sit on the School Council and are part of the school's Eco Committee. The school's registration system means that register classes are comprised of around 20 pupils from the age of 12-18 years including pupils from the Additional Support department, with teachers from the department acting as register teachers and classrooms in the department used for registration. Many mainstream pupils, therefore, register in the Additional Support department – which has helped to build a sense of inclusion.

The curriculum in the department focuses on each pupil's personal and social development. Class sizes vary from 5 to 10 depending on the pupils' needs, and a team of Pupil Support Assistants supports each class teacher in the delivery of the core curriculum. Vocational programmes and post-school preparation are also priority areas, and there are well-developed further education links with the nearby Carnegie College. Work experience and a range of other experiences are designed to ensure that pupils attain the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence. Where appropriate, pupils from the Additional Support department are taught in mainstream classes.

## SPACE FOR CHILDCARE SERVICES

Scotland has too few school-age childcare services and there is a growing expectation that schools should be playing a more substantial role in meeting the demand for these services. This can be done by providing space for services run by other organisations or as part of what they can offer themselves.

Services offered within schools often lack their own dedicated, permanent space, but the rural community served by Drumlanrig Out of School Club took an innovative approach to this problem, and the service is now housed in a purpose-built building in the grounds of St Cuthbert's Primary School in the Scottish Borders. An unused bike shed was turned into a custom-built play setting for the children. The project benefited from partnership working between the Scottish Borders Council, the school, club and the local community, including the children, at every stage. This innovative solution to creating quality space for out of school care within school grounds has given the service a sense of permanence.

Drumlanrig Out of School Service has gained the Scottish Out of School Care Network's quality assurance award "Aiming High Scotland", for its commitment to the children of its community. The children are encouraged to take ownership of what they regard as "their club", which has the very apt motto, "We thrive on fun!"



*For more information about "Making Space 2010", and to register entries for the international award, visit www.childreninscotland.org.uk/makingspace*

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