

Chapter 4

Design of Outdoor and Environmentally Integrated Learning Spaces

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the environmentally sensitive design characteristics of Charles Sturt University's Albury Wodonga campus and the outdoor learning spaces it provides. Attention will be given to exploring how the holistic and integrated nature of the campus and the environmental functionality of the site provide unique opportunities for learning within learning spaces. Examples are provided of how the natural and built environments of the campus are used as learning spaces to promote social interactions, conversations, and experiences that enhance student learning. The chapter highlights the value of outdoor environments as legitimate and critical spaces for learning within higher education. The chapter explores the benefits of designing teaching space based on strategies that are defined by personal pedagogic repertoires and practical wisdom. By enacting such strategies, it is argued that universities can develop diverse, locally appropriate, and inclusive pedagogies.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to extend discussion about learning space design, particularly in relation to spaces without walls and ceilings. In particular the chapter demonstrates and promotes

the validity of outdoor and environmentally integrated environments as learning space. This chapter is structured into several sections. The first section provides the background to the chapter by highlighting the tensions that exist between the managerial and ecological discourses that com-

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pete within the university campus environment. The second section presents the main focus of the chapter and begins by explaining the environmentally sensitive characteristics of Charles Sturt University's Albury Wodonga campus. The section then examines the development of existing learning space design guidelines from an ecological discourse perspective. The chapter then reports on the engagement of learningscapes and hears from students who participated in outdoor multi-sensory mobile learning experiences. The final section considers how learning space design benefits from engaging with the tensions encountered particularly when competing discourses are engaged. The conclusions are a practical reflection on the role of the competing discourses in learning space design and the role of the University as a space for higher education. The need to counter the assumptions shaped by managerial discourses within learning space design concludes the chapter.

BACKGROUND

Ball (1994) argues that 'discourses are about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority' (p. 21). The Albury Wodonga campus of Charles Sturt University (CSU) is a deliberate attempt to construct critical educational and social responses to ecological issues. At the time of planning the campus ecological discourse had great currency within University management at CSU. Ecological discourse, according to Jørgensen and Philips (2002) is a discourse that stresses the importance of protecting the environment on the basis of a holistic understanding of the world. The discourse ascribes individuals and organisations with a 'green identity' whereby they should be actively engaged in environmental problems and recognize their role as an integrated part of nature. According to this discourse engagement, protecting the environment is a moral necessity and lack of engagement is illegitimate (p. 166). The Albury

Wodonga campus has developed a 'green' identity within higher education in Australia. However, the capacity of the ecological discourse to influence University management has diminished as managerial discourse increasingly sets the agenda of higher education.

University management has long been dominated by the business-like accountability discourses (Etzkowitz, 2004; Clark, 2004; Rosenzweig, 2001; Soley, 1995; Steck, 2003). These business-like discourses are referred to as the discourse of accountability or managerial discourse. It is argued that managerial discourse reflects the neoliberal ideology that dominates government policy and the educational landscape of countries with advanced economies (Marginson, 1997). Managerial discourse holds firmly to the notion that the practices of private enterprise can be applied to the public sector, especially education. Universities are, as Clegg, Hudson and Steel (2003) contend, "exhorted to open up for business in order to play their role in the knowledge economy" (p. 41). The managerial discourse ascribes individuals and organisations an entrepreneurial identity (Sachs, 2001). According to Ball (1995), from a policy perspective, the

...entrepreneur is committed to the application of certain technical solutions [to] organizations and contexts which are taken a priori to be in need of structural and/or cultural change (p. 265).

Managerial discourse points to the efficient, responsible and accountable management practices (Gay, Salaman, & Rees, 1996). Reducing education issues and dilemmas into their simplest definition and engineering precise solutions based on models of efficiency and accountability are intrinsic characteristics of managerial discourse (Rafferty, 2007). In many ways, University education is now understood and known in terms consistent with the language of the market and business and can be regarded as a commodity (Allen, 1998). Within this commodification of

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