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Title: Absence to presence: visualising innovative learning environments in 21st century Australian classrooms

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Current initiatives by governments in redesigning schools raise questions about the relationships between new innovative spaces and student learning. The nature of this as a productive relationship was problematised in a recent Australian research project located in 'innovative built environments' (Blackmore et al. 2011). The authors use Aoki's curriculum theorizing of 'ands and between's' (Pinar and Irwin, 2005 p.403) as a conceptual framework to explore the questions: What does the reproductive and productive exchange between objects, places and bodies look like; and what might these exchanges have to say about pedagogy? Drawing upon data from a recent study for the OECD 'Innovative Learning Environment' project in 12 schools from Victoria Australia (Blackmore et al 2011) the authors of this paper use visual methodology to explore relational pedagogy (Bibby 2009) through the intersections of place and space. Once populated with objects and bodies, learning spaces are illustrative of meaningful or significant relationships constituted by place.

This paper takes up what Roland Barthes in "Camera Lucida" (1980) considers as the twin concepts of *studium* and *punctum* (*stadium*: denoting the cultural, linguistic, and political interpretation of a photograph: *punctum* denoting the wounding, personally touching detail which establishes a direct relationship with the object or person within it), to convey how what has been learnt for this large research project can be put to work in envisaging how the seductive metaphor of an Australian Curriculum could work outside of the parametric design principles, even if we take up a tiny portion of the universe of possibilities.

The stories from these innovative built environments speak of the spaces between teacher/learner and teaching/learning. As the shape of the Australian Curriculum is being reformed, this apparent morphing raises a few uncomfortable questions: could it be that the spectre of Modernism is coming back to haunt us? How can what we have learnt about learning spaces be put to work? Are we ironically despite the radical change in fabrication of sites of learning been misdirected in our assumptions about teachers, students and their perspectives? Rather than leading to more heterogeneity the architectural components of the Australian Curriculum appear to have led paradoxically, to further standardisation and uniformity, in keeping with the reductive ideology of programs of national assessment.

References

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