INTRODUCTION

This chapter will illustrate the five propositions outlined in the previous chapter for the design and use of innovative learning environments. If, as claimed by Hertzberger (2008, p. 204), “learning … has broken out of its traditional cage”; then it becomes necessary to envision new forms and connections between space, teaching and learning.

The density of modern schools and classrooms includes community narratives of the past, current and future classroom experiences and expectations. We have tried to avoid formulaic or deterministic forms in our consideration of spatiality, form, intentionality, and purpose in relation to the mutuality of educator and learner activity. To achieve this we have drawn a functional balance of institutional convention and imaginative forms of the teacher, student, and spatial interaction. We offer practical, functional insights, and a justification for productive interactions between space and pedagogy.

Innovative learning environments are an influential factor on the relationship between teaching and learning. Drawing on the thinking of Rißler, Bossen, and Blasse (2014) and others who identify the reciprocal interplay of space and pedagogy, we contribute a critical framing of participatory learning processes that arise from this relativity (Robertson, 2010).

FUNCTION AS MEDIATOR OF COMPLEXITY

Although schools are often characterised using the metaphor of an industrial production-line, this chapter outlines a range of different and dynamic spaces that may appear to be “more like a medical system, in which you get what you need” (Reville, 2017). The implication is a turn towards spaces that are configurable in multiple ways, with capacity for spaces within spaces. A range of flexible educative spaces are emerging to form part of the contextual narrative of the modern school and classroom.

This complex conceptualisation is mediated by the idea of function, and this has been an important part of our discussion of concepts and their representation. That is, the reality of the classroom relationships and interactions, traditions and routines,
structures, resources and rules. Classroom are high-pressure, complex environments (Clark, 2005), characterised by a high level of practice demands and potential for conflict and stress. Teachers manage learning environments through the exercise of authority, practice knowledge and expertise. A concern for functionality means due consideration to the central relationship between teacher activity, student learning, and contextual possibility as well as systemic focus and restraint.

The form and prompts of each space represented here symbolises and grounds its functionality and potential experience (Gislason, 2007; Halpin, 2007; Upitis, 2004). The functional intentions of a space go beyond abstraction and may shape or prompt the practical actions and thinking of the occupants (Halpin, 2007). Function is important to educators and learners, emerging from the routines and convention that are the basis for day-to-day teaching and learning processes.

The spaces represented here afford a shift from institutional convention, routines towards uncertainty and symbolic divergence from tradition. This requires the active experimentation, participatory practice, and adaptation. Breaking the classroom box leads to different action possibilities. This requires elaboration of rich pedagogical concepts that draw on dimensions of spatiality and allows exploration of interplay between teaching, learning and space (Jessop, Brenner, & Jones, 2008).

THE PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF VISUAL REPRESENTATION

The visual representations in this chapter are of spaces being used by teachers and students. Each space used in the teaching and learning process is complexly constructed of “ensembles of material objects, workers and firms, and systems of social relations embodying distinct cultures and multiple meanings, identities and practices” (Hudson, 2001, p. 255). Education spaces are situated within and afford processes that make up teaching and learning.

Each represented space is part of a larger multi-dimensional, composite ecosystem characterisation of contemporary school environments. The interpretive possibilities in the drawings have emerged from ongoing conversations between the authors. Each representation tries to capture the depth, dimensions of time, concepts of place and tradition; and can be considered in terms of these dimensions as they occur and interact in a particular context and moment. This conceptualisation of space and in particular how it relates to the collective and individual teachers and learners becomes more complex (Hertzberger, 2008).

Indeed, the concept of space has become so infused with ideas that it is almost too complex to be subject to any clear analysis or conceptual framing. Some of these ideas are “intoxicating in the excitement and dynamism that they evoke” (Malpas, 2012, p. 228). To pin down these conceptualisations of space, one approach is to look at the activity taking place within, around and beyond the immediate space and time (Malpas, 2012). This forces attention to the limits, tensions and transformation of space, spatiality and activity – a critical sense of pedagogical and spatial engagement.