



STUDIO TEACHING EXPERIMENTS – SPATIAL TRANSITIONING FOR AUTISM SCHOOLS

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION STATEMENT

Sensory issues surrounding spatial transitioning between environments for people with autism are well established, yet the design of transitioning spaces is neglected. This research questions how the design of such spaces is best evaluated, within the context of autism schools, and taught to interior architecture students. An experimental studio project was run over 5 years and resulted in the innovative creation of 'Ten Spatial Transitioning Platforms'.

The grounded theory methodology revealed various concerns which emerged from interviewing experienced autism-specific teachers, whilst investigating the design of eight case study schools. Specific recurring child-centred behavioural issues were identified, framing a series of environmental design problems to be navigated.

Love's paper has been extensively shared internationally through her article on The Conversation: <https://theconversation.com/how-autism-friendly-architecture-can-change-autistic-childrens-lives-120516>. The article has been republished on numerous sites including the highly regarded National Autistic Societies' 'Network Autism'. Dr Scott Alterators' (University of Melbourne) article references the research: <https://theconversation.com/students-with-disabilities-need-inclusive-buildings-we-can-learn-from-whats-already-working-126755>. The article appears in Archnet-IJAR: International Journal of Architectural Research. Prof Ashraf M. Salama, Strathclyde University, stated in his research paper that: 'four papers address the notion of research "through" design whereby aspects relevant to design, production and communication processes become a form of developing new knowledge (Al Khalifa, 2019; Angral 2019; Love, 2019; Landgren et al., 2019);' 'meet the fundamental requirements of architectural research...including rigor, logic and reason, clarity, depth, and breadth of the questions and issues interrogated'. The research has instigated numerous pieces of consultancy from JLL Consulting to Leeds City Council.

Core to the research is the advancement of designing for autism. Significant is the identification of an original 'Co-specialist ASD-educator model' enabling design for autism to be embedded in the university curriculum, assisting future designers to create responsive inclusive environments. Social impact includes helping address The National Autistic Societies public autism awareness campaign, 'Too Much Information'.

ABSTRACT

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to evaluate a teaching model involving an experimental studio project for first-year interior architecture university students.

Design/methodology/approach – Content, process, teaching style and feedback are examined in a project, run over five years, concerning transitioning between environments for people with autism in an attempt to advance design of autism schools. Research methodology, teaching model, outcomes and group dynamics are critiqued.

Findings – Feedback from experienced autism-specific teachers across eight case study schools raise recurring issues framing a series of design problems navigated by students. The teaching model enhances student exploration of how sensory processing difficulties, through spatial transitioning strategies, might be approached, whilst furthering their specialist knowledge as future designers of inclusive spaces.

Research limitations/implications – Each transitioning platform requires deeper research to form a realistic interior typology. A further project to install and evaluate specific “transitioning insertions” into circulation spaces of an autism school is proposed for future research.

Practical implications – The identification of this teaching model illustrates how to embed design for autism in the university curriculum.

Social implications – The project brief helps address the National Autistic Society’s public autism awareness campaign “Too Much Information” highlighting anxieties that “unexpected change” causes. Effective design of transitioning spaces can help people with autism to cope with their environment, reducing behaviours and improving learning.

Originality/value – The creation of the “Co-specialist ASD-educator model” will be of value to universities. “Ten Spatial Transitioning Platforms” were uncovered relating to Transitions. This will be of importance to autism researchers and eventually design practitioners. Keywords Sensory, Spatial, Autism schools, Educator, Studio teaching, Transitioning Paper type Research paper

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