

**Young people voice and choice in learning environments**

**Voice to Choice Part 2**

**23.06.2018**

Scotland is represented as a collateral event at the 16th International Architecture Exhibition at the Biennale di Venezia. This showcases innovation in design from across the world. To celebrate Scotland’s Year of Young People (YOYP), the Scottish contribution includes an exploration of how young people in Scotland respond to the theme of the Biennale: Freespace.

As part of The Happenstance programme, Voice to Choice is a colloquium that explores designing for wellbeing in learning places based on the voice and choices of young people. It is a partnership between Scotland and Denmark, to share issues and inform practice.

This event will draw together those who are connected to, worked with and have designed for young people to discuss and reflect on what makes a good learning journey and environment. A key focus will be learning and wellbeing from the young person’s perspective. Themes to be explored will range from wellbeing and attainment to outdoor learning, from settings for learning to life-long learning, from creativity in the curriculum to having a voice. *Freespace is* the lens to examine these issues.

The outcome of the in Venice will be used to inform the next part of Voice to Choice Scotland in Autumn 2018 between young people and stakeholders shaping learning environments. The final outcomes will be shared at the Education Buildings Scotland conference in November 2018.

**The right to space**

Education Scotland have published a guide to learner participation in education setting out expectations and approaches to giving young people more voice, and more choice in their learning experiences. At the heart of this work is a reflection on rights:

*“Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.”*

 *- Eleanor Roosevelt*

For 21st century learning, the focus is to put the learner at the heart of decision making. This is about the process of learner participation, active involvement in shaping decisions. It is also about the process of collaboration, the direction of joined up decision making by others around the needs of learners based on their insights. For both processes, it is essential that space is made for the learner, to give them voice to exercise choices. This is a fundamental right under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and cuts across the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It is a global imperative.

In the run up to agreeing the New Urban Agenda, U.N. Habitat’s statement on urban futures, the idea of the ‘right to the city’ re-emerged. This idea was developed by Henri Lefebvre, and developed further by Professor David Harvey around the role of rights to enable, to shape, to afford.

“The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to [change](https://newleftreview.org/II/53/david-harvey-the-right-to-the-city) ourselves by changing the city…the freedom to make and remake our cities.”(Harvey, 2008)

The original definition of the right to the city goes beyond basic human rights and access to resources. It is a “renewed access to urban life,” one that empowers city dwellers’ to shape the city as they see fit through rights to participation and active civil engagement. [Habitat III](http://unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Habitat-III-Issue-Paper-10_Urban-Rural-Linkages.pdf) stress urban inclusivity through by commitments to address inequalities.

But as Eleanor Roosevelt highlighted, rights begin in small places. Although we promote voice and choice for young people, the experience of learning spaces is often that there are little spaces that young people can call their own, can shape, can be. Social space is often the space under a stairs or outside a toilet or nook spaces in hidden places. Young people don’t feel they have a right to space, and too often space isn’t provided. The lack of space to grow, physical space, space in the curriculum, space in timetables, space in relationships directly affects wellbeing.

Well-ness is about a sense of coherence, within the internal world of the individual and in the individuals capacity to deal with the outside world. Wellness needs space to be.

Personalisation

It is important to recognise that the needs of learners are different. Young people share youth in common, but the experience of youth varies enormously. Some need social contact, some need space to be, some need support, some need time to be alone. Sometimes everyone adds a mix of all these things. So we should be deliberate in designing for the complexity of needs and the personal nature of the experience of an individual.

Equity

Pasi Sahlberg is a teacher from Finland. His practice is built on the relationship with children, their needs, and shaping the conditions around children to be the best they can be. Sahlberg is a member of the International Education Advisors to Scottish Government, and is an expert advisor on the Finnish Education system, and education systems globally. In looking forward to the future of learning, Sahlberg highlights two major issues for young people:

* First, young people are experiencing more and more complex mental challenges. A major 21st century focus is wellbeing
* Second, we are losing focus on the value of play – space to be, social space, free space.

Recently, Sahlberg set out his views on three transformations for learning in Scotland:

* From focusing on ‘the child being ready for school’ to the ‘school being ready for the child’
* From ‘how good is our school’ to ‘how is our school good’
* From ‘Curriculum for Excellence’ to ‘Curriculum for Equity’

Design

Meeting these challenges requires the voice and choice of young people as an insight to shaping leadership practices, curriculum, teaching practice and the settings that learning happens in. It requires deliberate action around, and deliberate design for well eing. And this means as much focus on repurposing spaces we already have to reconnect learners with the right to space to enhance well-being as it does for new build. And it means choices on priorities to extend equity of experience to all learners to be the best they can be.

So, what does designing learning spaces and settings for wellbeing mean, and how do we achieve it? That is the focus of the Venice Colloquium.

**Voice to Choice: timetable**

13.30 – 14.00 / arrival

14.00 – 14.10 / Welcome Jim MacDonald, CEO, Architecture and Design Scotland

14.10 – 14.20 / ‘Voice to Choice’ Diarmaid Lawlor Director of Place, Architecture and Design Scotland

**Learning by Listening**

14.20 –15.50 / Presentation of young voices x 20 - 10 images x 20 seconds

The purpose of this session is to reflect on the views and insights of young people on wellbeing. The session will consider how wellbeing influences young people perception of what a good place for learning is, and how this in turn, influences their hopes for their futures. Through conversation, the aim is to begin to draw out a series of issues and principles for design, and the role of FREESPACE.

15. 50 – 16.10 / break

**Learning by Connecting**

16.10 – 17.40 / world café X 4

The purpose of this session is to develop the emerging principles and use them to respond to the well-being needs of young people, and their right to space. The format of this session is discursive, inviting participants to share experiences and learning across sectors, practices and nations focused on young people need.

**Learning by Doing**

The purpose of this session is to draw out a hit list of opportunities and priorities to develop, and focus who to engage to translate ideas to action. This will take the form of co-producing visual story between participants and the design teams presenting at the colloquium.

17.40 – 18.20 - summary and next steps

**Evening meal**

18.20 - onward / garden for pizza and prosecco

19.00 / gospel singers in the garden

**Film Screenings**

21.30 – 23.00

Screening of The Happenstance films and a selection of others relevant to the event.