Title: A work in progress: Places and spaces: staff and student perceptions of the experience of the physical spaces for teaching and learning in art and design faculties in higher education institutions

Author: Hilaire Graham

Institution: Robert Gordon University, Scotland, United Kingdom

Abstract
This paper reviews the development of a research inquiry and method. It explores how dialogues with Self and Other are critical in developing both the research question and methodology. It interweaves the formal text of a research proposal with dialogue (in bold italics) to capture the process of designing research. The dialogues reflect the growing realisation that research is a dialogic and critical process: and that reaching out to ‘Other’ enables critical reflection on individual practice.

Introduction
This paper focusses on the initial feedback from readers of a research proposal and the dilemma of how to use such feedback positively. This paper begins with an initial discussion that introduces the characters, Other and Self. It introduces the ’notes to self’ that direct next actions and developments. It then interweaves dialogues to develop and challenge the research inquiry. The realisation that dialogue and critique are essential informs the final proposal development and subsequent resubmission.

Method
This takes the form of a series of discussions that explore the research context, questions theory and methodology to enable the development of the research proposal.

a) First discussion with self: Developing a working title
   
   Self: how detailed does it have to be? How focussed? Maybe indicate scope (intended research sample)?
   
   Other: include ‘art and design’ ….
   
   Self: so develop from:
   Places and spaces: staff and student perceptions of the experience of physical spaces in higher education university facilities
   
   To:
   Places and spaces: staff and student perceptions of the experience of the physical spaces for teaching and learning in art and design faculties in higher education institutions
   
   [Note to self: make title of research more specific about area of research; that is, about art and design not just institutions]

b) Second discussion: developing the research context
   
   Other: ‘What is a university for? is not a research question!
   
   Self: delete this heading! Now just about the context!
   
   Self: it was intended as a heading initially to set the context for exploring universities as a concept...]
**Self: revised statement that more explicitly focuses research:**
The inquiry is about universities and their physical identity. It focuses on specific disciplines of art and design in universities, as faculties or as specialised institutions, to explore how staff and students experience and use the spaces where teaching is delivered and learning is supported. It explores the continuing relevance of the physical environment for supporting learning and the student experience. And this is of interest in an environment of change in the experience of university education, from face to face to alternative experiences of teaching and learning.

**Context: the university?**

*Self: what I want to do is look at what universities are and why they make places - need to define place and space too…but that also comes from literature review - and will then inform approach to research method (observations/ questionnaire etc)?

*So that I can develop the research method including the sample: places and people!*]

This section considers the university as concept and construct to set the scene for considering the physical place of a higher education institution. Firstly, Barnett explores the ‘idea of the university’ that is both institution and idea. He describes many different types of university (including e.g. entrepreneurial, traditional, open) to offer the possibility of the ‘ecological’ university which he suggests is a ‘university for society’ (Barnett, 2013). Such universities are:

- Social institutions;
- Objects of social and political study;
- A set of ideas; and
- Connected with human development, societal development and culture (Barnett, 2013).

Barnett suggests a social construct of a university that can then be made visible or real.

Secondly, the purpose of a university is considered. Collini (2012) asks ‘What are universities for?’

*Note to self: this is about developing a proposition about universities: need to look at ‘proposition’ in research and apply (Flick, 2009 : p103)*

and suggests that they are not simply about funding, impact or access (2012: p xi): shared characteristics specific to individual institutions; but that universities have distinctive roles or functions composed of the following characteristics:

- ‘The provision of post-secondary school education, where ‘education’ signals something more than professional training;
- The furthering of some sort of advanced scholarship or research whose character is not wholly dictated by the need to solve immediate practical problems;
- The pursuit of activities in more than one single discipline or a very tightly defined cluster of disciplines; and
- The enjoyment of some form of institutional autonomy as far as its intellectual activities are concerned’ (Collini, 2012: p7).

Collini goes on to suggest that undergraduates are

‘introduced to modes of inquiry….. to develop not just mastery of a body of information , but the capacity to challenge or extend the received understanding of a particular topic’

(Collini, 2012: p 9).

Collini’s characteristics describe qualities of a university that are not always visible but where the educational purpose is clear.
Thirdly, Britzman explores universities and education as both physical and conceptual. Britzman considers education in a variety of ways, sometimes as institutionalised (physically as schools and training institutes) and conceptually as pedagogical exchange (Britzman, 2009: p17). Britzman conceives of ‘actual teachers in compulsory settings’ (Britzman, 2009: p 36): this may be a concept with which to explore the purposes of university buildings, that is where students and staff must be present. And if staff and students are not there (as for example in distance learning), does the university experience exist? Britzman also describes the classroom as ‘a place that cannot think itself into being without our being there’(Britzman, 2009: p6) when describing how thoughts of education are contained within experiences of education – ‘what has already happened to us’ (Britzman, 2009: p 7).

[Self: I think that this enables me to propose three qualities that can lead the research inquiry]

In this thesis, I consider the visible university: the built place that is visible and touchable, as suggested by Barnett. This place is purposed for learning as per Collini, and that is dependent on participants being there, as suggested by Britzman. And so I propose that buildings can make these qualities (idea, purpose, place) visible; and that university buildings provide backgrounds for staff and students to interact in both compulsory and non-compulsory settings. In phenomenological terms, this is the ‘place’ where inquiry is conducted and individual student work and staff work is produced. The thesis explores how staff and students perceive their experience the physical spaces of the HE learning environment to enable teaching delivery and supports learning and the student experience.

[Self: is this explicit enough- am interested in staff and student experience of the physical university? And staff and students reflect the local - micro? - level of use; there are lots of ideas to be developed further! Define boundaries of the research!]

These buildings are places: collections of purposeful spaces designed to support

- non-visible and non-tangible education purposes (ideas and expectations of learning) and
- visible teaching and learning purposes experienced actually in lecture rooms and workshops

supporting delivery of education opportunities to enable learning.

[Other: you describe physical environments that are open, flexible, responsive, civic communal, functional, networked….but why this list?
Self: perhaps this is a proposition about places/ spaces? so this is what I might explore through the research – staff and students perception of the spaces that might be open, flexible etc?????
Self: so this might be suggesting a hypothesis about what makes successful spaces? So should actually be in the research method!!!! Points to criteria for analysis?]

c) Third discussion: developing a rationale for the research

[Other: is there a problem that you are examining? Is it that spaces are badly designed/ or that teachers do not know how to make best use of spaces? And what about learning that takes place outside the university (home, work etc.)?
Self: I don’t think there is a specific problem per se; we do know that universities build a virtual world (online), and there are assumptions about learning taking place in different environments, but we are not really sure how we know if learning takes place at all: that is
causal links to ‘environments’….I wanted to focus on the physical environment of a
university, where there is a ‘front door’… because there is an assumption that these are
places that support learning (otherwise why would universities spend capital on
buildings!?), where learning takes place….so I guess that is the problem…but learning
itself might be contested…so I wanted to examine initially how staff and students
experience the spaces….]
Physical learning environments are important now in a climate of increased fees, student
expectations, technology (online personal learning environments and the perceived threat of
MOOCs), social learning environments (focus on people: staff/ student experience) and
sustainability (enduring environments). Temple’s review of the literature of learning spaces
(Temple, 2007) highlights the lack of research around university buildings (unlike school
buildings) which clearly suggests a need for research in this area.

Professional and academic concerns
[Self: really I am interested in the spaces: when I walk in to a space that inspires me (for
me: the British Library has that sumptuous feel that makes me feel special); perhaps that’s
why I want to know what spaces have an impact on others?]
Academics are beginning to look at where they teach and how the spaces support the student
learning experience and the teachers’ experience too. There is a substantial body of writing
emerging around the concept of learning spaces, beginning with Savin-Baden (2008) who
suggests that students need space for learning (and includes virtual space). Students
increasingly identify social and informal learning space as important to their university
experience (Taylor, 2010 : p 5) ; the design of spaces for effective learning is described by
JISC (JISC, 2006); the Reinvention CETL explored social learning space (ASKe, 2012);
Neary and colleagues describe ‘learning landscapes’ (Neary et al., 2010). Increasingly online/virtual/open learning spaces are being explored and described (jiscinfonet, 2013). The
appropriateness of the built environment to support learning in specific disciplines, and the
processes of procuring new/ refurbished built environments for the end user is also being
challenged (CHEAD, 2013).
[Note to self: need to develop discussion about space – or the labelling of space: ‘learning’
space, ‘social’ space, ‘functional’ space – may use Werlen’s idea of space as a type of
grammar for orientation in the world (Hubbard & Kitchin, 2011: p 463)]

More globally OECD explores learning environments through the Centre for Effective
Learning Environments (CELE, 2013). The focus initially was on lower secondary education
and
‘examines important aspects of teachers’ professional development; teacher beliefs,
attitudes and practices; teacher appraisal and feedback; and school leadership in the 23
participating countries’ (OECD, 2009).
These are not physical qualities of the learning environment and so there is a need to
investigate ‘the relationship between educational effectiveness and the physical learning
environment’ (OECD, 2013). It is this play between educational effectiveness and the
physical learning environment that is of interest to me when leading education development
activities with colleagues to enhance their teaching practice.
[Other: this has practical applicability! How are you researching ‘effectiveness’? What are
educational development activities?
Self: I think that I want the interviewees to explore ‘effectiveness’ of the spaces in
supporting ‘learning’ with respect of criteria such as effective teacher practice, beliefs,
engagement with feedback…again this may provide more to inform analysis?]
And next discussions about the literature:

**[Self: I started out thinking about the capital value of university buildings as a starting point; but if this is a non-issue then may need to let go...]

**[Other: research questions are needed to address this aspect!]

**[Other: The starting point of the research needs to be made clear...]**

There are several positions/paradigms of inquiry when considering university buildings: for example, Collini’s funding/impact/access characteristics which I map as follows

- funding reflects capital (asset) value;
- impact is the strategic (culture) value and,
- access reflects the facility (use) value of the university’s estate.

This asset/strategy/facility management triumvirate is one that I have used when teaching on the MDesign Science (Facility Management) at the University of Sydney (1997-2001) to reflect on buildings and their purpose. These three categories provide perspectives for considering university buildings as making place, providing space and using space.

**[Self: I am interested in the use of space, the third of these starting points; the proposition is that a) places for learning are made (built!); b) that the institution provides the place and has intentions about it supporting learning (teaching and research!); but c) the users have diverse experiences of the spaces made/provided......]

The pressure is on higher education institutions

*for those responsible for managing the facilities [asset]...to find more efficient ways of meeting the needs of learning teaching and research [strategy], while enabling the institution to meet the needs [use] of the greater numbers of students’ (Blyth, 2011).

This thesis uses Watson’s third order of engagement: the relationship between the university and its members (in Temple, 2012: 197-211), to explore how university buildings are perceived through the lens of the following stakeholders: those (leaders and managers) who champion particular buildings/campuses (making place); and those (staff and students) who use the building (using space) for teaching and learning activities.

**[Other: which stakeholders you include will depend on the research questions; are you exploring conceptual or practical aspects of space?]

**[Self: I think I am expecting (hypothesising?!) that both conceptual and practical aspects will emerge from the interviewees, that their experience of the spaces will have a range of qualities that may inform the future making/ providing of spaces...so that suggests that the interviewees will be staff and students - narrows focus of research????]

A theoretical framework for considering places and spaces can be developed from de Certeau (de Certeau, 1984). De Certeau distinguishes between place and space: he proposes that place is stable, that it is the ‘order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence’; and that space is ‘composed of intersections of mobile elements’ (de Certeau, 1984: p117). Space is ‘practised place’: it is transformed by activity such as the users, in HE staff and students. There is an opposition between places and spaces that is reducible to ‘being there’ (place) and to operations and actions (spaces) (de Certeau, 1984: p 118).

**[Note to self: exploring de Certeau has opened a rich vein of discussion that informs both the research area and methods: in developing this further the literature review needs to explore:]

a) *philosophic discussions about space*

b) *architectural space descriptions*

c) *learning spaces*
that actually helps to focus research questions on the people who use the spaces and make them ‘live’, who ‘make do’ and adapt the spaces to suit their needs. The approach that these sources take to walking informs the research methods to be implements - the walking interview!

Other: it brings together architecture and pedagogy very convincingly. I would have expected a bit more direct reference to the application of critical theory alongside the clear methodologies in relation to architecture and pedagogy. In other words how Auge and de Certeau etc. will inform the notion of place and space in relation to your research question. But that's a minor criticism as I am sure that you would have established very carefully the emphasis that they require........

Note to self: make sure that in developing view of space and place the emphasis needed for this inquiry is prioritised ]

Definitions and limitations
[Note to self: place and space – need to inform individual perspective with other views using literature more specifically!]

d) The fourth discussion: developing methodological perspectives
[Self: need to write research questions! Here goes...]

Hypotheses:
That staff and students (users) perceive and use purposed spaces distinctively.
That staff and students ‘make do’ with purposed (labelled?) spaces to support their own work.
[Note to self: are these specific predictions? are these precise about relationships (between user/agent and space? Can I gather data to evidence the hypotheses? Refer to Flick to structure research questions (Flick, 2009 : p 99))]

Questions:
How do staff and students perceive the spaces where teaching is delivered and learning is supported?
Note to self: hygiene factors; physical factors; ‘feel good’ factors;
How do staff and students experience the spaces where teaching is delivered and learning is supported?
Note to self: emotional (feeling) factors; social (interaction) factors; classroom climate factors; space as ‘lived grassroots experience’, enabling ‘open’ analysis, where space may have multi-dimensional properties (Lefebvre, 1991: p 23)?
How do staff and students use the spaces where teaching is delivered and learning is supported? Sub- question: Do the spaces work for them?
Note to self: function, purpose factors, access factors; resource factors; time factors; effectiveness factors (fit for purpose?);
Do students and staff perceive the spaces as supporting learning? Sub- question: How?

e) And the research strategy dialogue:
My interest in staff and students’ perceptions of their experience of the physical built places suggests that this research ontologically takes a social constructivist position: such that ‘subjective accounts and perceptions that explain how the world is experienced and constructed by the people who live in it’ (Opie & Sikes, 2004, p19-20) will be collected to form the key data. The focus on individual experience reflects my view that knowledge is constructed through experience, and that knowledge is hence subjective.
[Self: and I am discovering that this (experience) is an approach that might be based in the writings of others such as Giddens and other social anthropologists (see Hubbard &
Kitchin, 2011 for further references) who suggest that space is not just a time/space structure, but that space requires human interactions to make it real, not a void – to have social logic.

The overall approach to the research methodology is to capture and analyse different staff and student views: individual experiences and narratives.

[Other: views about what? What are the research questions? Are there ethical issues about the responses that you may uncover- various moanings and groanings for example? Self: views/perceptions of their experiences of using the spaces; understanding what criteria they use (functional/emotional – another hypothesis?!) I DON’T KNOW- THAT IS WHAT I WANT TO FIND OUT!!!!!!! Maybe the research question is: ‘What makes the spaces work for them?’
Note to self: add to questions...
Further note to self: may need then to focus any interview questions on the spaces..]

These are complex: there are different stakeholders as previously suggested, and each group will have their own views, opinions and experiences. The contribution of different stakeholder groups enables consideration of individual expectations and experiences of the physical built places to develop a better understanding of the experiences themselves.

[Other: How will different stakeholder groups be selected? Self: from starting off with a range of stakeholders (designers, client, institutional managers to mention a few) this process of reflecting on comments from Other has refined and reduced scope of inquiry to staff and students – users!]

This approach is phenomenological: that is, it focuses on how life [the staff and student university life] is personally experienced and it enables me to understand things [buildings] ‘through the eyes of someone else’ (Denscombe, 2010, p6).

[Note to self: analysis – of staff and student experiences of the spaces!]
And may reflect the relationships of teacher (staff) and student in constructing learning

[Note to self: Yes - the social factors! See research questions!!!]
and suggests the possibilities that different stakeholders may see things differently (Denscombe, 2010, p96-97).

f) And the final dialogue: developing the design of the study

Creating a sample: case studies of staff and students in institutions
Because ‘universities are increasingly centres of the creative and performing arts’ (Collini, 2012: p 6) often due to the amalgamation of local Art and Design Institutes within existing and new universities, there has been substantial capital expenditure on buildings for art and design faculties in universities (examples deleted for this paper).

[Other: provide some consideration of buildings for art and design faculties and the kinds of activities that take place in them; that is, describe them as a case.
Note to self: include a review in literature review: ‘precedent’: built examples of what came before to develop a timeline of developments in the past ten years]

Three cases will be selected:
A: a small specialist institution;
B: a post 92 institution, and
C: an existing School on existing campus in multi-faculty institution (pre 92).

Other: Why 3 cases?
Self: these cases represent clear typologies of art and design institutions as described in the text; one case of each supports an approach that builds theory from the data collected and suggests areas for further inquiry.

The interviews will focus on stakeholder groups: ..........; staff member (actively teaching one of PG and UG students); student (undergraduate/ postgraduate).

[Other: Why these groups?
Self: groups were originally hypothesised as having relevant perspectives; however, in critiquing the research inquiry, the focus has now narrowed to the actual users, staff and students; And this may help in the delivery of the research outcome by managing the scope of the inquiry!

Other: How will staff and students be selected?
Self: This can be done by approaching colleagues in the institutions directly; advertising an ‘expressions of interest’; having a criterion of being full-time for both staff and students]

Proposed research methods of data collection
A phenomenological approach suggests a data collection method of interview, recorded on a digital voice recorder (audio): ‘their experiences and reasonings can be described and explained to the researcher [me] in a way that allows the researcher to see things from the member’s point of view’ (Denscombe, 2010, p99).

Interviews with stakeholder groups: staff and students
Semi-structured questionnaires will be developed to explore intentions, aspirations and actualities of space at the sample institutions for use with the interviewees to support them in describing their experiences: gathering information about people’s opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences (Denscombe, 2010, p173). The key interview method proposed is the ‘walking interview’ which may enable the interviewee to develop ideas and speak more widely (Denscombe, 2010, p175).

[Self: there is a clear body of work in geography that uses walking (mostly in the city) as a way of analysing; for example, Lynch (1960) reports on the methods used to investigate perceptions of the city]

Walking interview: recorded and filmed with semi-structured questions [digitally recorded]
Walking interviews have been used to explore large-scale spatial areas,: Birmingham city centre and Bristol Harbourside (Clark & Emmel, 2010; Jones et al., 2008) and various outdoor urban settings for Connected Lives (Clark & Emmel, 2010). Jones (2008) suggests that walking interviews are ideal for exploring issues around people’s relationship with space, that creates the opportunity to consider what people say about space with where they say it. The walking interview is a hybrid of interviewing and participant observation and has the advantage of empowering and building rapport with participants (Carpiano in Jones et al., 2008: p3). ....This technique also means that the environment acts as a prompt (Anderson in Jones et al., 2008: p3) for the participant to offer their perceptions, stories and experiences. This can be supported by recording conversations and filming the journey.

[Other: this will provide data on the interviewee’s perception of learning in the spaces and this may not be the same as learning in practice! Do you need observations of learning activities taking place….
Self: I think that the data will be perceptions of the space itself rather than of learning, and how it is experienced which may enable a perception of supporting learning; I do propose that the researcher does their own walking observations - -this may identify how spaces are being used, when and by whom – I think we can suggest/ observe that learning activities
are taking place (and maybe only ‘structured/ timetabled learning activities’!)- but one can’t say ‘learning’ is taking place just because a learning activity is happening!

In this research project participants will

- decide where to go on the walk;

[Other: they may all choose very different routes!
Self: and isn’t that this is about: how each individual uses spaces; I can compare these by overlaying on building plans – that may indicate well-used versus less used spaces or just that everyone develops their familiar spaces to be in the building. The individual choice of journey is significant in itself.

Note to self: refer to theories of space here from literature review!]

- show the environments to the interviewer, not just describe the places/ spaces that are significant to them and their learning; and
- record the spaces on the walk with a digital camera.

Being in the spatial context can help the participant to articulate their thoughts about the experiences of the space and add detail to the ideas being explored by the researcher......

Specific walks from each participant will be important: journeys that identify the spaces that the participant frequents, seeks out and is drawn to will be determined by the participant. Each journey will be mapped onto the building plans rather than the GPS/GIS used by Clark (2010) for urban journeys. The outputs of each walking interview will be:

- Digital audio recording, with prompts (space name/ building floor): linking location (photograph) with comment by participant;
- Notes by researcher;
- Digital photographic record from disposable camera: physical appearance and location; and
- Map of walk: sequence of movement and individual walks.

The data gathered will be analysed to consider:

- Individual responses of place and spaces: stories and experiences
- Categories (identified from literature review): including function; use; condition; hygiene of spaces; resources; accessibility.
- Ways of negotiating the spaces of everyday life

[Note to self: the concept of everyday life is recurrent in writings about space and its use; this has to be an underpinning theme of the research inquiry and methodology!]

Walking observation: by researcher

I will also carry out a walking observation of each campus: this will enable me (....) to explore how a knowledgeable visitor experiences the spaces, how they are being used at appoint in time, and how the spaces feel to me.

[Self: Lynch (1960) also uses visual surveys carried out by trained (expert?) observers]

The walk will be recorded as the participant’s walks:

- Digital audio recording, with prompts (space name/ building floor): linking location (photograph) with comment by researcher;
- Notes by researcher;
- Digital photographic record from disposable camera: physical appearance and location; and
- Map of walk: sequence of movement and individual walks.

This introduces a specific issue of researcher identity (Denscombe, 2010, p273) that enables possible triangulation of staff/ student researcher experiences. This process encourages
observation of people and interactions between people, events taking place and how they occupy space....(Muller, 2001: p 11).

Individual stories: staff and students
Participants will be asked to make their own photographic/ voice record of experiences using ‘flip’ camera to take photographs of being in the university buildings as a follow up activity to the walking interview. This will encourage further development of ideas about the experiences of the spaces.

Proposed methods of analysis
The data collected from a variety of research methods will be qualitative including: spoken words (interviews); transcribed text (interviews); images (photographs accompanying interviews); observations (researcher walking observations: audio/ images and notes); and maps

[Self: these can be used to map the path of each interviewee]
describing the physical layouts and other documents. The analysis will be inductive: that is, it will work from the particular (individual stories) to the general (propositions about experience of physical spaces), that may offer abstract or generalised statements about spaces (Denscombe, 2010, p273).

The use of image-based research in small scale research occupies a niche position (Denscombe, 2010, p279) and is critical in this research method. Denscombe (2010, p292) identifies three elements:
- The image itself: in this case, of what (content) and where
- The producer: in this case the interviewee’s intentions and context: by whom , when, why, their intention in taking this image
- The viewer: the researcher’s own interpretation of the ‘producer’s’ decisions.

Three approaches to the analysis of the interview data (effectively coded for analysis) exist:
- Content analysis: identification of key things spoken about; frequency of occurrence of key things; surface content;
- Grounded theory: emerging concepts of theory; implying things; meaning of content; interpretation of text;
- Narrative analysis: personal identities/ social worlds; structure/ meaning of text; structure/social implications of text
(based on Table 14.2 Denscombe, 2010, p280).

Content analysis (Denscombe, 2010, p282; Bryman 2008, p529) can disclose what is relevant (Bell, 2007, p134); priorities; values (positive and negative views); and relationship of ideas (which in this case is useful if considering the impact of spaces on experience). The grounded theory (Denscombe, 2010, p283) approach seeks to develop concepts and theories.... Narrative analysis (Denscombe, 2010, p291) would enable analysis of the individual stories in terms of how participants ‘construct the social world’.

[Note to self: need to consider the levels of coding as set out by Strauss and Corbin (1998): open coding (interviewee’s experience); axial coding (relationships between emergent categories; selective coding (theorising a case)].
Findings

Key findings of this approach to reviewing a research proposal design:

- The challenges of informal dialogue and formal academic writing reveal the issue of ‘voice’ and writing style.
- The need to let go of ‘cherished’ ideas and even paragraphs of text to refine the project scope to becoming achievable.
- The value of interrogating iteratively to write a research proposal.

This paper makes the process of reflection public, to share the experience of designing research, both personal and professional. The outcome of taking this dialogic approach to developing the research is to explicitly record the voices of Self and Other, and ensure that challenges issued can be met and addressed as the research project is implemented.

This paper suggests a way of interrogating research proposals that can build from a dialogic encounter to structuring the development of a research inquiry and direct next steps. It reflects the need for the view of the ‘Other’, which takes place through various opportunities of supervision, collaborations and refereeing of research proposals and outcomes in finessing research inquiry and methodology.

NB. Word count 5000 (including titles to Abstract but not paper title/author/affiliation)

References


Denscombe, M. (2010). The good research guide: for small scale social research projects


