INTRODUCTION TO *DESIGNS FOR LEARNING SPACES*

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The act of designing anything is a messy and complex process. Yet, as Donald Schön remarked in his book *The Reflective Practitioner*, the competence and artistry embedded in applied practice are well worth exploring. To do so places a spotlight on the mechanics of decision-making that seeks to improve the human condition, whether it results an instructional tool, a table, or a building. Second, it tends to provide sometimes fascinating and revealing commentary on its players' culture, values and priorities. Insights on both these points tell us something about ourselves as beings of change and betterment, and also how we interact with the world.

This issue examines the design process that creates places where teaching and learning happen. This sector of architectural design (in its many forms of schools, museums and other spaces) is complex—the clients are not likely not the same as the space's users, which by its nature increases the design process dialogue to three players. Making things more difficult is the high cost of these projects, the politics that can be at play in these high-profile undertakings, and the sometimes changing client leadership. Taken as a whole, an examination of the design process in this swirling miasma can be both interesting and valuable for designer, client or other readers who might someday encounter even a remotely similar situation.

The **Invited Feature Articles** presented here were specially selected for their contribution to this special issue's topic of spaces for learning; as such, they were subjected to close scrutiny by both myself as guest editor and the Journal's editorial leadership with an eye toward content variety and diversity of design approach. The balance of the **Articles** were contributed based on an open call for proposals and were double-blind reviewed by three external critics for their contribution to the issue's topic as well as their relevance, transparency of their design process explanation, and potential for reader interest.

This collection of articles describes in detail the creation stories of eight different architecturally-oriented projects that range in scope from classroom furniture to the design of an entire school campus. Additionally, several articles detail designs that remain entirely in the digital domain, a situation that changes the design procedure in striking ways. While the purpose of design cases is not to draw collective conclusions, my perspective as guest editor has let me see ideas that I have myself taken away from the reading experience:

- Each designer has found value and guidance in a process or series of design steps particular to their own experience. For one project here, the vehicle is persistent hand sketching as a means to make group brainstorming clear and build consensus. For another, exhaustive classroom observation photography becomes the means to determine action. Others find guidance in the verification that supportive documented research provides.

- For all, the design process is about intense listening that precedes response. Design does not just happen. It requires an iterative back-and-forth process with the clients and users of discovery, try-out, recheck, which lead to second—or ninth tries at getting the design "right." These designers illustrate that to ignore this sometimes exhaustive dialogue is to admit further unwanted unknowns into a project already fraught with too many variables. Even with careful checks and rechecks, some projects end much differently than first thought, or conclude less than satisfactorily.

- The act of designing and providing a built product transforms the parties involved. It is likely that this is a primary attractant for designers to be drawn to their craft to begin with. Design forces change.

The author-designers here each document an elusive quest—to find the perfect fit, the ideal solution to a given situation made all the more complicated by its messy, diverse and dynamic human users.

The collection here provides a rich description of the procession of challenges, responses, successes and setbacks that characterize this critically important if sometimes haphazard process. It is a process well worth examining.