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Recovering lost histories of educational design: a case study in contemporary participatory strategies

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ABSTRACT

Past practices shape and limit the design imagination of teachers, pupils, parents, governors, and others concerned with designing modern schools. Bringing histories of education to the table in the participatory design process of new school buildings and curricula is necessary. Schools having an extraordinary past have the potential to draw from that prefigurative practice. This paper reports a case study on how the Kees Boeke School in The Netherlands recently has returned to its own history in addressing the needs of its current and future learners in a redesign project. Through addressing the question of how the redesign might reflect a reconnection with the original vision of education espoused by Boeke—learning in relative freedom, with awareness of responsibilities for own and community's well-being—the school management, architects, teachers, and students took part in a participatory design process. That process and the resulting school design is discussed. From this case study we argue that past adventures in education can inspire current redesign. Past experiences as well as concerns and beliefs about the future are an inevitable influence on initiatives to realise schools for the future, both for schools with experimental and those with traditional histories.

KEYWORDS

History of education; participatory design; educational design; school building; Kees Boeke; co-design; student voice

Introduction

Our capacity to interrogate the present with any degree of wisdom or any likelihood of creating a more fulfilling future rests significantly on our knowledge and engagement with the past and with the establishment of continuities that contemporary culture denies. (Fielding, 2005, pp. 61–62)

Over recent years, in a variety of research initiatives and publications, the nature of the relationship between past, present, and future in school design has been explored (Burke, 2013; Burke & Dudek, 2010; Burke & Grosvenor, 2008; Woolner, 2010). Society ever more expects that schools are sites for teaching and learning that are largely productive and generative of new knowledge and learning relationships rather than entirely didactic and oriented around the distribution of established knowledge (Facer, 2011). When different stakeholders cooperate in a participatory design process of educational innovations (Könings, Brand-Gruwel, & Van Merriënboer, 2011; Könings, Seidel, & Van Merriënboer, 2014), their

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past experiences in education are inherently part of the design process. Drawing from the work of Schatzki (2002), Stephen Kemmis recognises this phenomenon in his observation that

what education means (thinking, saying) to a teacher is always already shaped by ideas that pre-exist in various discourses of education; how education is done (doing) is always already shaped by the material and economic resources made available for the task; and how people will relate to one another in educational settings and situations (relating) is always already shaped by previously-established patterns of social relationships and power. (Kemmis, 2009, p. 466)

In the context of imagining a school for the future, the past is always present in these various elements.

In this paper we argue that bringing histories of education to the table in the process of the participatory design of new school buildings and curricula is necessary as doing so invites and builds potential to expand the scope of the contemporary design imagination and enables the power of past experience to be recognised as itself an active force in the process of bringing about change. This draws attention to the ways that past practices, experiences, and mythologies shape and limit the design imagination of teachers, pupils, parents, governors, and others concerned with designing schools for the future. A school's origin can be a source of inspiration for developing a future vision of education, but can also hinder the design process, in effect limiting the potential of facilitating innovative education, especially in the case of a more traditional school history. Schools that have experienced a visionary or experimental past, even if only in short phases of their existence, have the potential to draw from that 'prefigurative practice' as it connects with current contexts and future planning. This paper is focused on a specific educational environment and the use of its historical narrative in a recent redesign of the school building. A case study of the school *De Werkplaats Kindergemeenschap* (Children's Workshop Community) situated at Bilthoven in The Netherlands seeks to illuminate the influences of historical narratives of the past and explore the ways that those narratives can be recognised as a positive active agent in the design process. There is a temporal dimension to this case study, as it addresses the past from the point of view of current efforts to alter teaching and learning relationships through building renewal, and utilises a concept concerned with the future.

De Werkplaats was originally established by Kees Boeke (1884–1966) as a radical experiment in 'sociocracy' outside of and in resistance to the state where it was intended that children might learn in an atmosphere of relative freedom, but with an awareness of responsibilities for their own and their community's well-being (Kuipers, 1992). *De Werkplaats* originally began in the 1920s as one room in a friend's house near Boeke's own home as an alternative democratic environment for learning and has since steadily grown into a school with currently about 1800 pupils. The school is rather well-known in The Netherlands owing to the fact that the Royal Family sent their daughter Beatrix to be educated there. Others who attended the school after the Second World War included the son of the first post-war Prime Minister, Schermerhorn. Today the site contains a kindergarden, a primary school, and a secondary school.

During the 1990s, the contemporary secondary school management saw the opportunity to bring aspects of the original ideas about education, promoted by its founder Kees Boeke, into play as a key element in the design process of imagining a new building for the secondary school. They argued that those past principles and values underpinning the pedagogy were particularly relevant in the 21st century context. *De Werkplaats* was founded through

a rejection of dominant modes of educational theory and practice, which regarded the pupil as the passive receiver of knowledge, always dependent on the authoritative teacher. Its alternative vision was one where knowledge was created together in a process of communal living, where discipline was brought about through an atmosphere of self-direction and social responsibility, and where cooperation was the guiding principle of educational relationships. In the 21st century, these characteristics were consistent with progressive educational theory and practice which has argued that traditional forms of instruction are unlikely to equip young people to meet the challenges of life now and in the future. The authors of this paper visited *De Werkplaats* accompanied by the architect who had designed the new school buildings and interviewed Mr Jos Heuer, Director Operational Management and vice-principal of *De Werkplaats*, about the process of realising and recovering past educational principles and values in the redesign of the school. Heuer had been a key member of the school management alongside the school principal in the process of redesign. The paper reports on the findings from examining the process of design undertaken by the *De Werkplaats* management, which conducted a reorientation with its own past in designing a school building and educational pedagogy for the future.

Participatory design of contemporary schools

School is something that is invented and reinvented by successive school communities through enabling essential relationships around the transmission of knowledge, the development of skills, and the healthy development of individuals and communities (Facer, 2010, 2011). Facer employs the notion of the 'future-building school' to capture the dynamic of this concept. However, history is ever present when we imagine future possibilities: an image of school pervades our imaginations from the very earliest encounters with the representation of its form through infants' picture books and wider popular culture. So while each generation renews the form, the template, in cultural terms, is already given. Facer's notion of the 'future-building' school is reminiscent of John Dewey's argument that democracy is never complete and by its very nature will always be an unfinished product of communities constructing their own identities together through dialogue and action (Dewey, 1916). According to Dewey, at the heart of the project of building democracies is the educational process and the modern school, whose boundaries should become ever more porous as it becomes recognised as a resource for the whole community. In the present time, certain educationalists and architects have begun to work, rather optimistically, with the notion that school is something that is not necessarily a given but can be reinvented through redesign. For example, the German architect Peter Hubner, who specialises in participatory methods of school design, sees school as emerging from engaging whole communities in modelling and building. In his projects children begin by creating scaled (to the power of 10) 1:10 models of themselves, models of classroom furniture, and finally the walls and roof (Blundell-Jones, 2007). Like the educationalist Carla Rinaldi (advocate of the philosophy and practice of the early childhood institutions of Reggio Emilia, Italy), Hubner argues that school is something that can and should be invented anew by each successive generation of teachers and pupils (Blundell-Jones, 2007). Schools can be active agents in determining what a school is while building sustainable futures, locally and globally, and in that sense it extends the notion of participation well beyond the initial design process towards meeting future global needs and priorities (Facer, 2011). According to Facer, the seeds of such

'future-building' schools are already present in schools operating today and we need therefore to identify what these are and nurture them carefully and positively.

Seeds of future possibilities are found in the consistent re-emergence over time of efforts to build democratic and cooperative school communities, linked to a vision of a healthier more democratic world. It is such a re-emergence of principles and values associated with its early history that has become the vehicle effecting change at our case study secondary school in The Netherlands. Over recent years, *De Werkplaats* in Bilthoven has replaced its secondary school buildings with a new structure that supports a radical change in curriculum and pedagogy which together consciously strives to realise once again some of the educational and pedagogical principles, values, and beliefs expressed by its founder in the 1920s. In the UK we see a not dissimilar emergence of interest in schools rooted in a values-based curriculum.¹

The role of prefigurative practice in participation for sustainable futures

Schools can be seen as prefigurative spaces, 'environments in which communities can model today how they might want to live with each other in the future' (Facer, 2011, p. 104). The notion that through radical redesign a school might realise life in microcosm of the world one would wish to create has its origins in the efforts of progressive educators in the past. During the last decades of the 19th century, W.F. Sanderson (1857–1922), principal of Oundel School in England, set out to radically alter the built environment, replacing classrooms with workshops, galleries, and laboratories as, he believed, such arrangements were needed to engage the curiosity, imagination, and criticality necessary for contemporary modern life (Wells, 1924). A somewhat different meaning of prefigurative practice is central to the arguments put forward by Michael Fielding and Peter Moss in their book *Radical Education and the Common School: A Democratic Alternative* (Fielding & Moss, 2010). Here the authors have argued that it is necessary, if we are to progress 'social alternatives' in education, to construct micro-histories of schools that have, for short periods of time and usually under the guiding influence of an enlightened leading figure, developed as 'real utopias' through radically revising their practice. They call these micro-histories 'critical case studies of possibilities'.

De Werkplaats was not an isolated experiment but part of an international movement that sought to challenge traditional ideas about teaching and learning by means of altering the curriculum and the material environment. During the inter-war period in England, similar adventures in education were underway at A.S. Neill's Summerhill as well as in unlikely environments such as Prestolee Elementary School in Lancashire under the inspired headship of Edward F. O'Neill (Burke, 2005; Burke & Dudek, 2010). Common to these experiments in education was a solid resistance to the dominant competitive worldview that accepted the inevitability of societal inequalities alongside a vision of an alternative way of relating to knowledge and one another. The pioneers of such schools also recognised that the implications of new forms of relationships were also spatial and material, and could be strongly suggested through the design or redesign of the built environment.

Connecting with the past: the example of the Kees Boeke School

Having experienced the tragic conflict and outcomes of the First World War, Kees Boeke, who was a pacifist, believed that the modern state was responsible for all of the problems

for humanity associated with international competition and conflict, and through his life sought to promote alternative modes of cooperative living and learning. His refusal to pay taxes, removing himself and his family from any contact with institutions financed by the state, had consequences for the education of his children, when in January 1926 the government decided to draw the cost of schools via the tax system. Boeke resisted and as a consequence started a private school for his own children: *De Werkplaats*. Beginning as a way to build a new society and a form of civil resistance to capitalism, the school soon attracted other parents who were interested in its radical alternative education. Becoming ever more popular, by 1950, 370 pupils attended *De Werkplaats*. The original building, designed by Frans Röntgen, took a modernist form that was repeated in later buildings designed for small children such as the nursery and children's centre that formed part of the later semi-circular Kensal House in London (designed by Maxwell Fry and opened in 1937): a quarter circle building with a flat roof containing five classrooms. There were classrooms but neither were children divided by age nor subject from subject. These rooms were connected by a curved corridor, which housed the library. In the centre of the quarter circle, the headmaster's office was placed. Besides the five classrooms in the quarter circle, two other classrooms were located on the ground floor. An eighth classroom was situated on the first floor. The classrooms were relatively small, because Boeke noticed 'children like small spaces; they like to sit and read under a table or in a cupboard or in holes they make' (Algemeen Handelsblad, 1932). In 1934, an extra wing was added because of the growing numbers of pupils, containing an auditorium and classrooms for arts, drawing, handicrafts, and gymnastics (Kuipers, 1992). Only when the school grew, was a division made on the basis of age. The different groups were given names of colours: purple for the youngest, blue, green, and yellow for older ages. This was done purposely because Boeke disliked the idea of numbers, since according to him it always suggests that the older group is more important than the younger, instead of merely different (Rawson, 1956).

The feeling of belonging, domesticity, and the experience of mutuality were generated in several ways through the design of the original building at *De Werkplaats*. Glass was used in the walls to emphasise transparency and facilitate a sense of connectedness. The pupils could see each other working and they could see and be seen by the headmaster, which would—it was thought—promote a sense of security and belonging and a better understanding of the pupils by the supervisors. Boeke did not approve of the title head, or leader. He believed that in a quiet and orderly work space, children would learn to discipline themselves and learn that each member of the community had the same responsibility to create the required calmness and order of the school (Boeke-Cadbury, 1971).

At *De Werkplaats*, besides traditional school subjects, children fulfilled house-keeping tasks such as cleaning, repairing and making furniture, cooking, and garden-keeping. Boeke saw this as a necessary condition to keep the school running and to promote the sense of belonging he thought so important. In naming the school *De Werkplaats* (the workplace), Boeke meant to give children the opportunity to develop themselves by carrying out socially necessary tasks. But such active engagement with the whole environment was characteristic of progressive independent schools associated at the time with New Education.² Besides the work, the pupils had daily exercise, took lessons outside in the garden and walked in the woods. From 1931, work camps were organised every year to develop the sense of community and further strengthen close relationships between pupils and supervisors (Boeke-Cadbury, 1971).

A marked example of the 'sociocracy' established at *De Werkplaats*, was the weekly assembly. These assemblies were led by one of the pupils and decisions were made about the division of tasks, external contacts, and disciplinary problems. In this assembly, every member—pupil and supervisor—had a vote and decisions were only made *when everyone agreed*. When no unanimity was achieved, no decision was made and the question would be repeated in the next assembly. Boeke called this a 'sociocracy', to distinguish it from a democracy, where decisions are made by majority of votes (Kuipers, 1992). Boeke was a life-long critic of contemporary interpretations and practices of democracy defined as majority rule and urged individuals to think critically through the process of decision making in elections that produced what he saw as a travesty of democracy.³ In the context of the case study, Boeke would have found fuel for his argument about the inherent weakness of democracy in the experience of the contemporary school leadership intent on radical change. The vice principal of the current secondary school and director of operations, Jos Heuer, discovered that applying the simple method of popular voting for changing the school environment proved to be insufficient in bringing about an educational practice shaped by the principles and values of cooperation, mutuality, and self-reliance that he wished to recover as a foundation for the school.

For Boeke in the 1920s and Heuer and his colleagues in the early 2000s, it was found necessary to employ an educational vision intimately and directly connected to the everyday work of school but scaled up, as it were, to suggest a coherent and functional environment where the smallest parts related to the whole: a vision of the planet and universe offered by Boeke's *Cosmic View* (1957/1973). This is probably Boeke's best-known book. It originated from texts and drawings which were used by children at *De Werkplaats* to aid their mathematical and scientific learning through an exercise in magnification. The book goes on to graphically demonstrate a view of the same object magnified repeatedly by the power of 10 and then the reverse. The notion of scaling up (and down) employed in the book continues to have its influence at the school as it implies the necessity of employing a vision beyond the immediate realm and expanding what we are able to imagine. The rationale for the necessity of employing a scaled up vision is that when one is close to the everyday, as a teacher or a pupil, one fails to see how the familiar and reassuring aspects of the designed environment work against necessary change. In other words, the familiar everyday close encounter with school limits the imagination and inhibits the possibilities of effecting radical change in line with changes in the wider world.

Returning to *De Werkplaats*: 'a special duty'

De Werkplaats was the school, at the beginning, of choice, of initiative, of working with head and hands and with heart ... With this inheritance, what should be our aim, goal for the future? (Jos Heuer⁴ [JH], March 2013)

The present *De Werkplaats* in the small Dutch town of Bilthoven includes a primary school, gardens including animals, ample grounds with natural boundaries, and a secondary school. Both schools were originally founded by Kees Boeke and web-based publicity about the newly built secondary school declares that they work with an educational concept based on his ideals but adapted for the 21st century.⁵

In 1996, the secondary school, originally built in 1951 and extended with a 'new building' in 1968, embarked on a radical redesign. The kindergarten and primary school stayed then

unchanged, but since that time have also followed the same process of reorientation and rebuilding. The reconsideration of how the secondary school building was being used was stimulated by a government initiative, which had financed schools according to the space consumed and changed that into a system based on payment per student. The school had more space than it needed. At first the decision was made by the then school board and management, together with the local government, to make a large-scale renovation including only partly a new building. When, in 1999, the opportunity arose to build a new secondary school in place of the old, the management and school board picked up that chance. It offered the opportunity to develop something really new.

The school had continued to be recognised as an extraordinary school, associated with the principles of its founder, but some of those same principles and values characteristic of the original concept of education in the course of time had faded. Because of a fast increase in numbers of students *De Werkplaats* had to attract many new teachers, who were not trained in the spirit of Kees Boeke. Furthermore, the introduction of national exams pushed the school toward more traditional ways of teaching. The school had reverted to a 'normal' good and popular secondary school.⁶

In the fifties and sixties and also seventies and eighties, the school came in the normal system, exams et cetera, school went from 300 to 900 students secondary school. There were teachers who were very traditional and classical anyway because they came in in the fifties when *De Werkplaats* got exams and we had to have good university teachers and because there was not one point of view for the future so it went in this direction. Kees Boeke did not make a system of education, like Maria Montessori. She made a system with rules about you do it like this. Kees Boeke, he gave his values, he gave his principles, what is good, but not: 'You do it like this'. (JH)

Recognising that in practice the pedagogy had reverted to a rather traditional model, the school management embarked on a process envisaging a new build that embraced the significance of the school's history while thinking hard about the future and the kind of world one might want to inhabit. Kees Boeke's ideas about education were perceived to have special value in the school's role in building such a future.

There's still an idea that these principles, cooperation and choice and responsibility, were part of the idea of what kind of future we want and what kind of future citizen we want to produce so there still is connection between the future and the past. (JH)

It was in fact a former pupil of the school, Cor van Tol, who several years earlier had helped the notion of returning to the past in order to build for the future.

In 2001–02 there was a guy, a former student of the school, and he started the 'Stichting De Bron' ['The Source'] about the cultural inheritance of *De Werkplaats* and Kees Boeke. And he brought us together with the three daughters of Boeke in a meeting because we had also told him: 'Okay, we go building a new school, but where do we come from?' Because we have a special duty ... we have to do something special in this school, we are not normal. So what had been the meaning of Kees Boeke with his school? So we started then to look back, as an inspiration for the future. (JH)

The redesign offered an opportunity to renew the fundamental educational philosophy and pedagogy. This proved to be more of a challenge than originally thought and finally relied on a firm vision and leadership that overcame some strong resistance on the part of some currently serving teachers.⁷

The question at the start of the design process was 'how can we bring into the design process for the future past knowledge of democratic schooling?' (JH). When children were invited to comment on the school they would like, they would

... often talk about many of these sort of principles of egalitarianism, (a) democratic working environment which doesn't suggest a kind of prison-like structure, (one that) suggests movement and suggests integration of subjects and so on. (JH)

After an initial period of consultation with Professor Luc Stevens from the University of Utrecht and some others in the educational field and with a relation with *De Werkplaats*, there was organised in 2001 a schoolboard conference (for primary and secondary teachers and a representation of parents) with the theme 'The school which gives responsibility', as a starting point for the thinking about the relationship between ideas of future education and building.

Although the conference was inspiring, the secondary school management could not over time bring the teachers to consider any change that disturbed their traditional views and practices. A turning point came when the management came into contact with Gert Jan Meijer of the bureau M3V, who introduced the 'Design Down Process'. This is a process of involving users and others concerned with a new school design, which allows them to begin from the learning expectations and processes that they wish to place at the heart of the design (Jilk, 2002). In this case, an initial 'progressive' group of teachers were chosen by management to plan (to begin with, without thinking about the building) via the Design Down process before all the teachers were invited to follow the same process at a venue outside of the school environment.

Yes, designing down. You have to think first about: 'What's happening with society in the future? And what is that asking from students in the future? And what's our school? So what brings that in?' And then: 'Okay, what will that mean when we see our education especially here and what kind of size of working groups, activities and ways of working?' (JH)

The daughters of Kees Boeke were consulted in 2001 and they argued that for Boeke education should be planned according to the ever changing context, to fit and be appropriate to that context while establishing consistent values that were necessary for humanity in a sustainable future. In this case 'the future' meant more than 10 years.

Think about what you can see in ten, twenty, thirty years? Then it was 'Okay, what kind of education will be needed for that future?' (JH)

In designing a school fit for the 21st century it was apparent, to the director at least, that many of the ideas about education set out originally by Kees Boeke were directly applicable and necessary in the changed and changing contemporary world of education. Over the past 20 years there has been an emphasis in The Netherlands (as elsewhere) on the importance of students becoming self-directed learners (Könings, Brand-Gruwel, & Van Merriënboer, 2005). Wijnen (2000) signals four important trends for future education: from teaching to learning; from individual to cooperative learning; from learning content to learning methods; and from summative to formative evaluation. To attain this, teachers, he argues, have to stop teaching in traditional ways but rather encourage learning by providing information and varying the contexts in which learning takes place. The focus needs to be on self-regulation and metacognition, self-responsible learning, learning in an authentic place, learning as social activity, learning with the help of ICT, and establishing new methods of assessment (Blok, Oostdam, & Peetsma, 2006). In this view, consequently, school buildings need to contain a variety of different spaces for different modes of activities. In such future schools you are likely to find variety of spaces within classrooms: individual working stations, small rooms for small groups, classrooms for presentations, and

silent spaces to read or study alone (Studulski, 2007). Children should also engage more in real-life learning. To attain this, it is important to integrate school and real life requiring a flexible use of classrooms (Van Oenen & Valkestijn, 2004). This is reminiscent of Boeke's ideals of children as a collective of workers engaged in practical activities in building their community. Schools designed to embrace the potential of learning technologies and recognise the fundamentally altered relationship between learners, teachers, and knowledge will permit or encourage individual, small group, and large group learning; integrate learners of different ages; involve students in managing their learning, teaching them to take responsibility to plan, organise, and maintain their environment; and involve teachers working together and being trained in new teaching methods (Hampson, Patton, & Shanks, 2013). A similar set of principles allowed *De Werkplaats* to reconnect with its history and some consistent and compelling ideas about the education process that had become lost through decades of practice.

The traditional system is you have classroom with four walls, one teacher, one entity of time, one book and some material. So what kind of choice do the students have? Yes, when they are ready after quarter of an hour, they can't do anything else because they only have that. (JH)

Teaching styles needed to be changed and the individual teacher's ownership of classroom space challenged in order to enhance choice, variety, and flexibility. It was felt necessary to have,

more teachers in that space and more choices in the space also because you have more variety possibilities. And you can also bring the material, the computers et cetera, in the space. So at the end, that is the schedule for our building. (JH)

This participatory design process continued when the building was already in the hands of the architect and contractor.⁸

The design of the school building

The openness of the school was one of the most important things. So get rid of all the historic ideas of borders within the school, open up things and try to mix the landscape with the building actually. ... Transparency, openness, movement, freedom, connection. I think these were and of course still are the key words in this building. Actually, what you see, I guess, in the Kees Boeke designs. (M. Snelder, architect, interview March 2013)

The final design of the new secondary school at *De Werkplaats* at Bilthoven contains familiar elements that one might find in any secondary school, such as a library, dining room, and auxiliary rooms for the arts and sciences, while the hegemony of the classroom is challenged. The two-storey building contains seven '*domeinen*' or learning domains that are large spaces containing a variety of smaller spaces (including a traditional classroom 'box') suggesting different kinds of teaching and learning dispositions. Two groups of 75 pupils share a domain and each group works with a team of at least three teachers who cover all of the subjects. These pupils learn together in large open spaces that facilitate a range of possible dispositions for teachers and students. Each domain contains within it facilities for individual, group, or traditional didactic instruction and there are teams of teachers working with large numbers of pupils. In the opinion of Heuer, the popularity of the school continues and standards of achievement have—in the long run—remained steady.

Learning from the past in participatory design for the future

It is our contention that historical narratives of the past are always and inevitably present in discourses and practices of designing schools for the future. As Stephen Kemmis has argued, 'The conditions that shape practices ... are formed through larger, longer collective histories of thought and action' (Kemmis, 2009). History of education and related government policies remind us of a tendency over time for schools to revert to the traditional model of education (Lowe, 2010; Peacock, 2003). With this case study we have illuminated the influences of the past on present redesign of education, especially realised in the relationship between curriculum and building design, and have explored ways that they can be recognised as a positive active agent in the design process. The redesign of *De Werkplaats* shows that the power of past experience and the vision of its founder can be recognised as a powerful force in the participatory design process of the new building, which revitalises the educational principles that the school strives for.

However, it is important to acknowledge that not all schools have an extraordinary, visionary past that can be supportive in formulating a vision for future education. Most schools originate from more traditional teaching methods, which are not inspiring for the design process of innovative curricula and school building. In such cases, consciously considering the origins and history of a school is still relevant, as past experience might limit the design process in which architects, teachers, and learners try to envision their future school. Awareness of historical narratives is essential in the struggle to imagine and eventually realise a design solution that is fitting for the present and offers new possibilities for the future.

So where does this lead us and what does this one case study suggest to school communities engaged in redesigning school environments for the present and the future? The concept of learning from the past in designing for the future suggests at least the following possibilities that we might pursue: first, we might research and develop micro-histories of schools that have operated over a period of time as case studies of possible learning environments in what Michael Fielding and Peter Moss call 'prefigurative practice' (Fielding & Moss, 2010). In other words, that the histories we make are shaped by the concerns of the present and anxieties or hopes about the future. Additionally, we might explore more fully how past experiences of schooling, realised in the present as the conscious or sub-conscious memories of past pupils, teachers, and others, influence the design imagination in the process of renovation, reform, or rebuild of school environments. It is important to understand how past practices in the design of schooling, including the design of the built environment, have reflected contemporary concerns, knowledge, beliefs, and anxieties about the state of childhood and the needs of society so as to illuminate the same complex contextual dimensions in the present. This case study of *De Werkplaats* has shown that narratives of what we might call 'past adventures in education' have the potential to inform or are informing current redesign and rebuilding of schools.

Notes

1. See article about Oxfordshire primary school in *The Guardian*, 6 August 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/aug/06/rise-values-based-learning-schools>
2. Boeke was a member of the New Education Fellowship and formed the Dutch branch. He would have been familiar with such contemporary progressive establishments through the publications and activities of the NEF.

3. See Boeke's speech to the New Education Fellowship Conference, Perth, Australia, October 1946. Retrieved from <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/page/7779642>
4. The quotes in this paper represent the original quotes by J. Heuer during the interview. As he is not a native English speaker, language use is imperfect.
5. <http://m3v.nl/bilthoven-werkplaats-kindergemeenschap-huisvestingsconcept>
6. The school grew in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s from 350 to 900 pupils.
7. Five teachers left the school voluntarily during the process (from a total of 80).
8. <http://m3v.nl/bilthoven-werkplaats-kindergemeenschap-huisvestingsconcept>

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