Whose space is it anyway? Learning about space to make space to learn

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Children's Geographies.

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Abstract

The significance of the environment in which children learn has long been recognised as one of the key elements that can have an influence on the experience and success of education. Usually understood from an adult perspective, here children's views are interpreted on the educational space that was designed for them. These perspectives are illustrated through using Lefebvre's Triad model. This includes the perceived, conceived and lived spaces, including the added dimension of time interpreted through an educational lens. The data demonstrates the value of children's renegotiation of functional space through visual narratives. Deeper understanding of the uniqueness of individual children's experiences offers opportunities to re-examine the space in alternate ways, which Lefebvre's model has facilitated. Whilst recognising that the school space needs to be functional, the negotiation of space with children can be approached creatively and still support unique yet diverse pathways to learning. (146 words)

Key Words

Lefebvre

Children's Perspectives

Visual Narratives

Space

Primary School

Belonging

Introduction and background

There is uniqueness in the way children are educated, each adult has their own certain way of

forming relationships with those they work with and have their own particular stamp on their

classroom or learning space. It could be said that a primary school teacher's classroom could be

recognised without their name on the door as their personality shines through in the make-up of

the room. There may be shared targets and goals nationally or indeed internationally as well as a

pressure to conform to recognised standards but each classroom holds a level of

distinctiveness. Similarly, each child has their own way of building relationships, not just with

the adult, but with their peers too and they need to negotiate their way into this busy shared space

where potentially critical learning takes place.

The term *space* is open to multiple meanings and interpretations (Harvey 2009). Here, space is

defined as the primary school classroom. Whilst a space that most are familiar with as a concept

or as a lived reality, the school setting is a unique environment and one which has been referred

to as a space that is in 'isolation from normal life' (Collins and Coleman 2008, 283) or an unauthentic experience (Kraftl 2015). The notion of the experience of being in educational settings is extended and termed by some (e.g. Mayall as quoted in Blundell 2016, 40) as the 'scholarization' of childhood. At the same time, Collins and Coleman (2008) recognise the value of the setting in structuring children's social identities as well as providing a key role in developing health, well-being and personal development beyond academic standards (Plows, Bottrell and Te Riele 2016). Schools are traditionally seen as institutions that reflect the planning and principles of adults (Kraftl 2006). These deliberately planned spaces are specifically intended to 'normalise' children to become effective adult citizens (Holt, Lea and Bowlby 2012, 2192; Blundell 2016). Yet this space, familiar to children and where they spend many waking hours (Kraftl 2014); increasingly for younger children (Blundell 2016) can also be considered to play a significant part in how they perceive their lived experiences within the world (Watkins 2005). In this sense, Blundell acknowledging the work of Soja considers that space can be seen as an 'ingredient for constructing human meaning' (Blundell 2016, 54).

There is much importance attached to the learning space or environment in which children spend time during the school day in a functional way. There are two elements, namely materiality (such as walls, tables, teaching materials) as well as matterings (what is important) (Blundell 2016) and how these elements are brought together (Teather 1999). For example, children often sit at tables or desks and can be grouped according to their level of achievement or best balance of behaviour combinations. There may be wall displays of, say: word blends; children's art; class rules as well as clear organisation and designated areas such as reward charts, literacy corner and the teacher's desk. The room can be zoned, labelled and regimented. On the other

hand, the room may be the opposite of this and appear messy, lived in and free. Each of these unique dimensions can have a profound impact on not only individuals but the whole pedagogical approach and this is often determined by the classroom teacher themselves (Fielding 2000).

So, on a visual level, the classroom can be presented on a spectrum of organised to messy, but there are other issues at stake here. The combination of factors can be referred to as the assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) of classroom encounters created through the processes of interconnections and interactions. Burnett and Merchant (2016) stress the importance of recognising the continually evolving nature of this preferring to use the term assembling. The noise level within classrooms can also be reflected by the nature of the teacher; it can be a calm, gentle space or perhaps more noisy and energetic. The temperature of the room, the atmosphere, the layout and type of furniture and closeness to others are also further points to consider. Many classrooms for older children in primary schools are often so packed with tables there is little space for anything else and can indeed be difficult to navigate (Barrett, Davies, Zhang and Barrett 2015). The primary classroom is an intangible multi-sensory space, yet the space is also to facilitate learning for those within the walls, as relevant and appropriate to their individual needs, including those with Special Education Needs (Holt 2003). How does a classroom adapt to children's various needs or is it tied to traditional socially constructed norms and age-related stages of competence (Holt 2003)? Further, how does this work for individual children and how much say do they have? A child's relationship to this space is critical in terms of developing their identity and negotiating relationships, a phenomenon which can often be

misunderstood. Such miscomprehensions can lead to communities and individual identities being 'undermined' (Ellis 2005, 57).

It is recognised that the quality of the classroom environment can have a significant and positive impact on children's development and learning (Pickett and Fraser 2010; Dotterer and Lowe 2008). Examining alternative educational settings (Kraftl 2014) with potentially less structure and more emphasis on child voice and freedoms can deepen awareness that may support enhanced pedagogical practice. For example, Plows, Bottrell and Te Riele (2016, 2) reflect on Schwartz's work indicating how this supports individual qualities including 'voice, resistance and healing'. Wang and Holcombe (2010) carried out a study with young adolescents in a mainstream secondary school discovering that children were well aware of how various elements of the school environment played a role in their positive engagement. This could include aspects such as seating arrangements, periods of time sat down, who they could work with and who determined the rules. In addition, Titman (1994) and Hart (1997) assert that, in particular relation to the outdoor school space, where children are involved in the design and use of that space, the benefits are numerous. These include positive changes with attitude and behaviour as well as increased confidence which in turn can lead to ameliorated levels of achievement both academically and personally.

As children evolve through primary school, their experiences are particularly important as to how they continue to progress in later years. Dotterer and Lowe (2011) note how around the end of primary school age (11 years) is a time when academic achievement can take a downwards turn. It is essential to pay attention to how children respond in and out of the classroom, between

adults and other children as well as to their various learning demands. A lack of response from children and evidence of resisting rules (Collins and Coleman 2008) demonstrates the need to address how children can be better supported, perhaps by firstly acknowledging that there is room for improvement.

This paper provides an insight into the school space, understood from a child's perspective. The research is based around a group of primary school children in England; through creative and visual methods children reveal their thoughts and feelings about the school space they experience on a daily basis. The data is analysed through the lens of Lefebvre which extends the thinking around taken for granted spatial forces; this will be explored further in the next section. This provides a re-examination of the spaces the children describe and attach value to. Whilst this raises important issues around listening to the children's voices, some of the complexities of enacting this are also addressed.

Understanding the space from a child's perspective

There are many constraints attached to primary school classrooms, chiefly, who designed them and for what purpose. The designers (or producers) of space deliver what is in essence expected whilst the '"users" passively experience whatever was imposed upon them' (Lefebvre 1991, 43). Ofsted (2015) appraise the educational environment from several perspectives including children's, yet the view of the child is missing in publically made reports. Here in this paper, it is argued that with every good intention, classrooms are designed for ultimate learning

experiences, yet the very people it is designed for may have different needs or views as to how this is in reality. How children engage in learning spaces and how they feel about it through a collection of visual narratives is presented. To do this, Lefebvre's Triad will be used to re-examine the school space through children's eyes and consider how this may be of benefit to teachers and those working with children in this kind of environment.

Children's rights along with children's voice are implicit throughout this paper. The voice of the child in considering their own environment is considered not only ethically appropriate but as a fundamental right. Children's voices have become more respected within research in recent history (O'Kane 2008), however, the potential vulnerability still leads to adults taking the agendas forward and pointedly restricting their relationships within appropriate environments (Jones 2008; Youdell and Armstrong 2011). That said, children offer invaluable insights into their own, current lives that differ from adult perspectives (Christensen and James 2008) that are acknowledged and embraced within this paper.

In his work around spatial dialectics (Lefebvre 1991), philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) developed a model of understanding space. This goes beyond understanding the physical space and really unpicks the cultural and everyday 'unthought' uses of such spaces (Jeyasingham 2013, 5). The interconnections of the three dimensions are a key part of Lefebvre's integral work. Whilst his Triad was not originally aimed at understanding the educational space, the *perceived, conceived* and *lived spaces* as well as the concept of *time* can be applied as a conceptual model to allow understanding of the space in a more meaningful way. However, their interconnectedness cannot be lost as all elements are experienced by the 'user' (Lefebvre 1991, 40). In light of this,

the Triad has become increasingly recognised in educational arenas as a pertinent way of understanding space (Middleton 2014).

The Triad can be understood within the field of education through relating each element directly to phenomena specific to primary schools. Here, the authors' interpretation of the Triad demonstrates how they inter-relate. The *perceived space* is related to what happens within the space regarding daily routines and practice. This can go beyond expected routines such as registration, but also the development of relationships in such a time. The second element, the *conceived space*, i.e. the planned space is the primary school classroom that is designed as a communal learning space, including consideration for the layout of equipment and resources. It represents what is assumed the space should be used for. This element usually takes priority in the understanding the functional space for learning. The third element that of the *lived space* attributes different meanings to the space, this can include embodiment, atmosphere and affect. The *lived space* represents how meaning and reflection can also be attached. Lefebvre (1991, 362) also indicates that the *lived space* relates to the 'user' in that it reflects their subjective experience more so than the other two dimensions. In addition to the three elements is the concept of time which has a continual influence. In combining all of these elements and considering their interdependence, it provides a rich multi-layered understanding (Lefebvre 1991) of what it is like to experience the flow of a primary classroom.

Whilst there exists evidence of children's involvement in the design or use of spaces (Hart 2014) in particular areas such as a school garden or children's voices being heard at a school committee; the nature of children's everyday lived experiences of being in the classroom are less

explored. Understanding the mundane, everydayness of being in the classroom and 'embedded ways of being' (Pink 2012, 14) from a child's perspective, is fundamental to this study as well as the understanding that Lefebvre's Triad offers. In reflecting on the above and the complexities involved in understanding the space that children inhabit during the school day, the multi-dimensional nature of this is fascinating, yet as Pink (2012) so poignantly indicates, this constant flow is so very difficult to capture.

The difficulty in adequately articulating these entangled complexities led Soja (1996) to extend Lefebvre's ideas to develop the concept of the *Thirdspace,* understood through the *First* and S*econdspaces*. The *Firstspace* is the real space; that of physical buildings and the things that happen in the space, the routines and practices, relating to Lefebvre's (1991) idea of the *perceived space*. The *Secondspace* is the imagined space, how the space is assumed it should be used for and the meaning attached to them, linking to Lefebvre's (1991) ideas of the *conceived space* and *the lived space*. Encompassing the *First* and *Secondspaces* within the *Thirdspace*, all aspects are equally important and their entanglement is paramount (Soja, 1996). However, this broadness of *Thirdspace* is problematic (Latham, 2011; Barnett, 1997). It is a "slippery term" (Latham, 2011, 384) which in proposing to encompass everything results in generalizations and merely reinforces previously held ideas that time, space and society are mutually co-created (Barnett, 1997). As such, Lefebvre's approach is considered to be a more appropriate lens here, focusing on the individual visual narratives.

There is a certain familiarity with the notion of a classroom (Ellis 2005) but is any school day the same within it? What happens within classrooms does not only evolve from day to day but has continued to do so ever since classrooms existed. On one level, Jarman (2008) argues that despite a plethora of curricular shifts within the past decade, the classroom space itself remains

relatively unchanged to reflect any such initiatives. Titman (1994) writes of the school space

being purpose built to reflect the needs of the lowest possible denominator of functional value,

reflecting the lack of thought applied to the multitude of children's varying educational needs

which remains relatively unchanged.   The intangible aspects of the *lived space* for example

atmosphere from a child's perspective are less explored. It could be argued that careful

consideration has been applied in terms of addressing the United Nations Convention on the

Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989); Jones (2008) indicates how spaces are designed as safe,

colourful and appealing in society's attempt to invest in childhood. What is missing and what

UNCRC also stipulates, is that the child's view and needs are fully incorporated into these

understandings and attempts.

Lefebvre's Triad has been used to demonstrate how children's voices and images can add to the

deeper meaning or understanding of the theoretical framework of the space. The concept of how

spaces may become more valuable with this insight is explored. The benefit of doing this

analysis is that it identifies an enhanced awareness of the *perceived* and *lived* spaces; shifting

emphasis from focussing on the *conceived* space. This opens up consideration of the inter-

relationship between all of the elements including time and respects the child in the space that

was built for them.

Methodology and methods

Evolving from a study of children's well-being in the primary school (Kellock 2011); a small yet rich qualitative case study is presented to ascertain the views of children regarding their educational space. The case study allows for making sense of children's experiences in the school context (Orford 1992) as well as understanding a 'complex social phenomenon' (Yin 2003, 2). Whilst this allows a snap shot in time, it attempts to capture the fluidity of a natural school day through using a range of methods (Pink 2012; Yin 2003). Therefore, a qualitative mixed approach is adopted that encompasses visual methods to present the subsequent visual narratives.

This approach allows as round a picture as possible as to the children's perspectives. This is arrived at through a range of methods which enabled children to be respected as social actors in their own right and to lead the creative process as such, experiencing a sense of empowerment (Änggård 2001). The specific methods allowed for 'multi-modal forms of communication' (Reavey and Johnson 2008, 297).

Pertinent to this research, the children initially took part in some basic training in photography to allow them to experiment and develop confidence in framing pictures. This led to them to carry out photography tours of the school, similar to walking tours (Duckett, Sixsmith and Kagan 2008) in which the children took cameras around the school to freely capture personally significant aspects of their overall school experience. For the photography tours to be as authentic as possible, the children were asked to reflect on their whole school experience as well as the here and now, where possible. They then selected their most important images and

annotated them within the group. This discussion was supported by further activities in which the children explored emotional vocabulary (Kellock 2011).

Ethically, careful consideration was given as to how to approach children to ask them about their school experiences and what was meaningful to them. Philo (2003) suggests that it is wise for the adult working with the children to have an effective relationship with them or already be in situ. It could be considered that a classroom teacher would be well placed as they know the children well; in this case, both authors are experienced classroom teachers and researchers. A relationship was built where the children felt able to share their experiences in a safe place and any potentially distressing situations would have been dealt with sensitively in line with the school policy if necessary. Prior to the research commencing, written consent was sought from the gatekeeper, class teacher, parents and verbally from the children themselves. All parties were advised of their choice to participate, the right to withdraw and implications of anonymity and confidentiality. Indeed, all names have been changed for this paper. It was agreed that no photographs of children's faces (participants or others, or where the school logo would easily be identified) would be visually presented as part of the study.

Eight children aged between 8 and 10 years old, an equal mix of boys and girls from a semi-rural primary school in the north of England took part. The research took place over the period of three months at the beginning of the school year. Activities took place during the school day; the time and day differed to ensure that the children did not consistently miss a particular aspect of the school day. The children took between 8 and 30 photographs each and from these, selected 3 or 4 each as their most significant images. To each photograph, the children provided a short

annotation to describe its key features as evident in the images provided. Further discussions were also transcribed regarding the significance of the chosen photographs and broader meaning to their school experience.

Visual narratives

Following the children's participation in the activities, the photographs, annotations and further discussions are combined to create visual narratives (Pink 2013). These illustrate the children's stories that accompany the image to enable understanding of the complexities of their experiences. From the children's self-selected images, annotations and discussions; three visual narratives are here analysed. Each visual narrative represents aspects of classrooms; tell their own unique stories and; are interpreted using Lefebvre's Triad. It is acknowledged that the data presented is representative of a small number of children from a small study; however, this reveals unique and personal insights from children regarding classroom spaces. A collection of visual narratives from all of the children involved could have been presented to demonstrate the diversity of perspectives within one primary school but key examples have been selected to illustrate the use of the Triad.

The first visual narrative was taken by a Georgina in her final year at the primary school. Several of her visual narratives depicted aspects of school life that brought back memories of happier experiences than she was currently experiencing in year 6 as indicated in further discussions with her. Labelled as gifted and talented by the school, Georgina felt under

enormous pressure to perform and work hard; she frequently recounted stories of when school was fun and less stressful. Gordan's (2006) work relates to this concept in regard to girls in education and the emotions involved in the process of being at school as well as specifically for achievement. Visual narrative one was one of her favourite images selected. The classroom pictured was where she first started school and her annotation 'I like Class 1 because I met Helen for the first time' reflects the importance of friendship to her. In addition to the written annotation, and evident in her other photographs and discussions, the particular classroom held importance to her due to the free and fun learning experiences that she recalled.

Figure One

Visual Narrative One 'I like class 1 *(Reception)* because I met Helen for the first time'. Georgina

Putting Lefebvre's Triad to work with this visual narrative reveals the *perceived space* as a classroom where Georgina referred to engaging in freely chosen play based activities in the reception class with her closest friend, Helen. Drawing on the element, the *conceived space,* this is a reception classroom where children first experience the school learning environment where they have some time for child initiated play activities and some time is allocated to directed learning (Department for Education 2017). It is divided into functional zones and the photograph here shows a wet area and covered sand tray. The third element of *lived space* shows an emotional attachment and memory of making a friendship as well as the narrative which reflects a less stressful experience of school, as Georgina recalls 'when it was fun'. It was particularly poignant as a space where she made friends and the connection with the space is about friendship and enjoyment. The value of people within the space is key to supporting the

interconnected construction of identity of the child and the place (Ellis 2005). The continual influence of time is indicated through Georgina recalling happier periods of her time at the school in contrast to the more stressful time currently experienced.

Figure Two

Visual Narrative Two 'Me and my friends go under the coats' (*Coat pegs at the bottom of the picture in Tom's classroom)*. Tom

Visual narrative two was taken by Tom who was in year 4. The majority of Tom's photographs were of outside the classroom, mainly the playground and in particular, where he played football. Tom explained in one discussion 'I'd just rather be outside'. This particular visual narrative shows the coat pegs at the bottom of the photograph underneath a wall display. The importance of this area was that this was where Tom had made a space for himself and his friends to call their own, in his words 'a den', in what is normally a large, busy shared space. In fact, playing under the coats was not allowed within the school rules as it was not a designated play area. Despite this adult-determined rule and structure, Tom maintained agency (Collins and Coleman 2008). This deconstruction of a space as represented through Tom's photograph (Titman 1994) shows how the *conceived space* can be recreated. Ellis (2005) indicates how children can recreate their identities where place is not fixed in meaning.

In terms of looking at this through a Lefebvrian lens therefore, the *perceived space* is where children hang their coats and bags up in the corner of the classroom each day. It is a space they are not encouraged to loiter, rather the opposite and to move away from the area quickly and

efficiently. The *conceived space* is designed for hanging coats and the third; the *lived space* is more of a clandestine space taken over by a group of boys, claiming some ownership of a corner of the classroom. This notion of marking space is noted by Lefebvre (1991, 142) referring to the 'playful procedures' used by children to claim space. In addition, Lefebvre (1991, 39) relates the *lived space* as experienced by the 'user' as dimension where 'the imagination seeks to change and appropriate'. So instead of its intended function, the space has been recreated by the boys in a rule-breaking scenario. This also reflects that over time, the function of the space changes.

Figure Three

Visual Narrative Three 'This is where I work'. Clare

The third visual narrative was taken by Clare, also in year 4. Clare's other visual narratives included a quiet part of the playground where she liked to talk to a friend, photographs depicting art work around the school and pleasant views from the playground. The visual narrative chosen here is that of her allocated space in the classroom. In further discussions she stated:

> Er, they're all of things that are special to me, that's my seat and like today and yesterday we've had loads and loads of tests (*practice SATs*[1] *papers*) and we sat different so I didn't sit in my place.

Being moved for her SATs practice papers was a distressing experience for Clare as she had stated that her seat made her feel safe. Without prior warning the children were rearranged into

alphabetical order resulting in her having to move seats to take the tests. In her discussions,

Clare revealed that moving seats for testing caused her anxiety; an issue emphasised by Gordan

(2006) who refers to girls' fears around testing and the potential negative consequences.

As Ellis (2005, 58) so eloquently explains, the classroom is beyond 'furniture and walls' but a

more holistic understanding is presented; it is a space inhabited by people which in turn is

influenced by their identities. Disrupting the flow can have detrimental effects to individual

children, as reported by Clare in her discussions. The change in the use of space over time, here,

Clare's seat, has revealed a significant difference in the lived experience. In this case,

the *perceived space* is where she usually sits to do her work as directed by the teacher; *the*

conceived space is her allocated section of a table and her own chair to sit and work as part of a

larger group at that table, whereas the *lived space* is about having a sense of belonging, feeling

safe and ownership. As Tom, being able to call part of the school his, Clare felt comfortable

being able to claim part of this large territory as her own.

Discussion

In using the Triad to interpret the children's perspectives, this has enabled deciphering of the

primary school classroom space on multiple interwoven levels. Key aspects of this have been

illustrated through visual narratives and drawing on these within this section the potential

implications for practice and benefits to all classroom users are identified. It is recognised that

the visual narratives presented are unique to the three children; however, it is felt that the process could be potentially universally applicable.

In the examples provided and through using the Triad, the classroom space has been defined in the subsequent ways. For Georgina, the emphasis is on the *lived space*. She refers specifically to her emotional attachment and social engagement in a space from when she first started school and her current experience of stress and less enjoyment. This presents a series of dilemmas. From Georgina's perspectives this illustrates that she feels unsupported in terms of her current *lived space*. If further attention was paid to this element, the importance of friendship, enjoyment and play; her overall experience could be enriched. How this is achieved however, raises other issues. An emphasis on academic success in the final year of primary school and external constraints such as SATs to meet national targets means that for the teachers, delivering a playful and free curriculum is a challenge. There is a focus on the *perceived space* in that staff make judgements on Georgina's behalf as well as an emphasis on the *conceived space* in terms of what is meant to occur in this educational setting (Plows, Bottrell and Te Riele 2016). The individual child's voice is lost here and there exists a tension between the individual need and what policy dictates.

The scenario of schools focussing on targets and results demonstrates a school space more focused on children as becomings rather than beings (Qvortup, 1991). The children are being exposed to expectations rather than being permitted to be themselves or possess any autonomy over the experiences they have. When children experience stronger autonomy, this can lead to greater engagement and a more robust sense of school identification (Wang and Holcombe

2010). This can be achieved through a wider range of appropriate, tailored activities and decision making opportunities. Can Georgina, have some time to relax and relieve such pressures?

In Tom's case, there is an overwhelming sense of needing space in and outdoors to affirm his sense of identity and ownership. In comparison and contrast to Clare and Georgina, Tom is negotiating his way in to the busy, shared space of the school by claiming the coat peg corner as his den. This reflects Tom's actions and agency within the classroom geography (Fielding 2000). The Triad has supported the understanding that this co-constructed den transforms the *perceived* and *conceived space* by creating the clandestine *lived space.* The reorganisation or creation of this space also relates to Youdell and Armstrong (2011) who refer to a renegotiation of territory and the power dynamics between pupil and teacher.

The question arises as to whether the space could be more flexible in how it meets functional and wider needs. Can ideas about the *lived space,* especially those generated by children, be utilised to make a more accessible, homely and creative space (Collins and Coleman 2008)? Rather than spaces being adult generated and created for children can there be spaces of children (Spencer and Blades 2006)? Indeed, can Tom do some of his work in a den or another location?

In the final example, drawing on Clare, she refers to the negative effect of disruption to the space. As Tom, she emphasises the importance of claiming territory, in her case, a designated place at a table. Further, the concept is extended so that Clare also attaches the label of personal ownership in stating '*my* seat'. The ownership of territory and asserted authority by the teacher over the reallocation of space (Youdell and Armstrong 2011) has a significant impact here. In

addition, she alludes to her sense of security linked to this space which is taken away without prior warning. The interpretation arrived at by using the Triad again illustrates the interweaving of the *perceived, conceived* and *lived spaces* highlighting how the change in routine and order can negatively interrupt a sense of space.

In the everydayness of the primary classroom, this may seem relatively minor, yet evidently to Clare, this triggered her sensitivity and thus may have affected her ability to fulfil her potential. The dilemmas raised by this are twofold. It is recognised that for certain activities, such as tests or art, children may be moved and this is a regular feature of school and indeed real life. This can offer opportunities for developing resilience. However, for children who find such changes challenging, can such changes be managed without affecting their coping strategies and in turn their potential achievements?

Overall the three visual narratives have provided stories that are unique to the children but have wider implications. The value in discovering what is important to individuals has been immeasurable. These stories are unique to the children included in this study and in interpreting the children's views, possibilities that could support diverse pathways to learning more successfully are revealed. The concept of Lefebvre's *conceived space* is one that is normally associated with understanding the primary school classroom. Using the Triad to interpret the children's visual narratives has enhanced this knowledge to recognise the interconnections between the different perceptions of space and in particular, the *lived space*. The individual understanding of a space cannot be underestimated and the micro actions that take place on a daily basis may be the cornerstones of a child's school experience. Thus, this reaffirms the value

in unpicking the assembling (Burnett and Merchant, 2016) or assemblages within the classroom (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

As Holt (2003) has identified, the primary experience is not just about the physical space and the Triad has helped demonstrate this. The concepts presented by the Triad are complex and interpretations can be deemed subjective. For example, articulating the intangible aspects of the *lived space* is challenging and unique to individuals. It is felt that through the methods used the visual narratives have provided a strong sense of understanding the space and that children's voices have been facilitated.

However, whilst the methods are considered to have been successful, unless a proactive stance is adopted this becomes a tokenistic experience. It has been suggested (Christensen and James 2008) that those working with children are ideally placed to carry out similar methods to gauge children's feelings about their classroom experiences and utilise this to ameliorate the overall environment. Cele and van der Burgt (2015) emphasise the potential negative effects of not acting upon children's views can be significant.

On a broader scale, an approach of valuing children's perspectives needs to be incorporated on a whole school level and be developed as part of the philosophy of the setting. If a school ethos is built around acknowledging children's input and respecting their views, in turn the children will respond positively and this will have a beneficial impact on the setting as a whole (Titman 1994).

Conclusion

The experience of being in a busy primary school environment is regarded as one that can have a significant impact of children's well-being and achievement. The nature of such a space is determined by numerous factors, many of which are beyond the control of children. An adult driven agenda operates in many primary schools due to the various demands in and externally; locally and internationally. Children are, however, very aware of their environment and the micro actions that take place day to day. Indeed, Wang and Holcombe (2010) identified how children reflected on their own positive engagement as being connected to for example, length of time sitting on chair or being able to choose where they sit. Through tapping into children's awareness of the space, it is felt that within this study, the value of this data has been acknowledged and realised.

The visual narratives have enabled individual children's stories to be told. On a simple level, listening to children's voices can help those working with children learn about their needs and preferences. Facilitating children's perspectives can be achieved through numerous possibilities of creative methods and should ideally be tailored to suit individual children. Adults working closely with children are well placed to support children in sharing their thoughts about the school environment. Through developing knowledge of children's views, the space to learn can be mutually negotiated to best promote children's experiences.

Lefebvre's Triad has been a valuable lens to scrutinise the visual narratives. Designed as functional spaces, primary school classrooms cater for learning by providing necessary furniture and resources. The *conceived space* is created to deliver the curriculum to large numbers of

children. Teachers bring their own personalities to the layout, design and feel of the classroom so that daily activities and learning can be carried out in a way they deem best. What has transpired from the visual narratives from the children is that the feel of the classroom, the *lived space* is of optimal importance and changes to the *perceived space* need to be managed carefully.

In conclusion, the value of educational spaces is known and recognised from an adult perspective and at times (e.g. Wang and Holcombe 2010) from children too, but this is something that can be expanded upon and developed further. If action is not taken, there can be a negative impact on children's sense of agency thus affecting their identity, well-being and achievement. Indeed if questions are asked and no action is taken, the repercussions can be detrimental.

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[1] Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) are compulsory in the UK are undertaken in the final year of all state primary school in English and Mathematics under formal conditions, results are published nationally.