

CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS RESEARCH BURSARY: RESEARCHING CREATIVE SPACE

BACKGROUND

This research has grown out of ongoing work with the Nottingham Creative Partnerships Creative Space Theme Group through 2004/2005. This group has taken a broad view of what 'creative space' might mean – exploring a variety of things that are important in creating a 'climate' or 'space' to facilitate creativity and learning, including:

- Physical space – location, qualities of the space, size, configuration, movement within the space etc, also sensory responses to space(s)
- Social space – who you are with, relationships within the group, group dynamics etc.
- Emotional space – individual support, trust, safety, challenge etc (both for the participants/ learners and for the learning/ creative facilitator)
- Cognitive space – activities/ programmes that accommodate (preferably celebrate) different people's learning styles, intelligences, creative preferences, ways of working etc (starting from an understanding of how different people learn, create etc).
- Time/ process – when activities happen, how long, over what period etc, and opportunities for doing, reflecting, making sense, practicing etc within the process (both for participants/ learners and practitioners)

'Creative Space' is seen as arising in and through the complex interrelationships between these (and quite possibly other) various aspects of 'space' – as mediated by facilitator(s), teacher(s), learners, practitioners etc.

Within this broader understanding of 'creative space', my research has focused on the role played by physical space in creating appropriate 'climates' for learning and creativity. In particular, it has focused on simple, effective and practical ways to work with existing spaces – simple, everyday ways to transform spaces in ways appropriate to the proposed activities.

My research 'question' is still evolving.

PROCESS

Initial exploration:

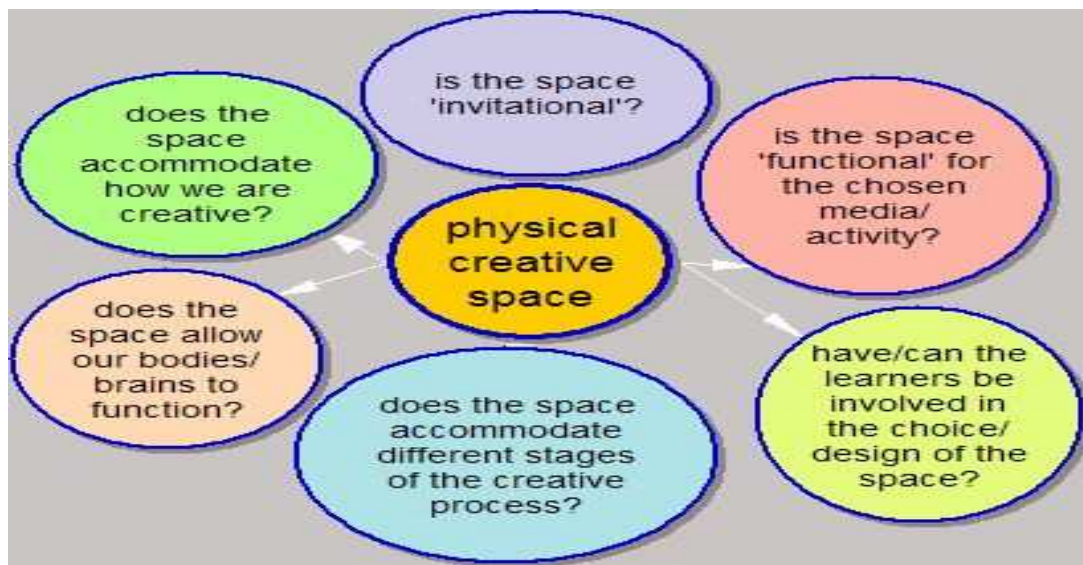
- A literature search of published books, journals and articles (paper and internet) relevant to the research topic
- Personal reflection on my own use of physical space in the facilitation of learning and creativity (working both with children and adults)
- Encouraging and facilitating teachers and creative practitioners within the 'creative space' theme group to reflect on the role of physical creative space in their work

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- Encouraging and facilitating teachers and creative practitioners within the 'creative space' theme group to consider different ways to use space in developing projects
- Somewhat sporadic use of a research diary
- Regular participation in an action learning set (which has proved very helpful in addressing blockages and resistances at certain stages of the research project)

Making sense:

I worked with the information and understandings developed through this initial exploration to try to scope and make sense of the complexity of the question – the dense web of interrelationships making up a holistic view of creative space. This produced an initial 'map', with different aspects affecting physical creative space which were grouped under the six main headings below (see APPENDIX 1 for full map).



Evaluation and further exploration

The next stage of the process involved exploring the value of this 'map', both for making sense of 'creative space', and as a tool for considering the practical creation/ modification of effective learning and creative environments. The map was explored:

- Through a workshop with teachers and creative practitioners at a creative space theme group
- With a teacher and creative practitioner to think about the modification of a primary classroom for a creative writing activity at Seagrave School

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- With teachers to develop a new classroom layout – involving the children in the process – for a key stage 1 cross curriculum project at Glenbrook School
- To think about creative modifications of space to suit different circumstances in a variety of my own projects, working primarily with adults

I prepared a process diagram for this phase of the project (APPENDIX 2). This process was followed in the planning and preparation stages, but it has proved very difficult to find the time – and to give sufficient priority – to properly carry out the reflection stage.

EVALUATION

Understanding creative space

The 'map' has proved very helpful in starting to make sense of the complexities of creative space, and for keeping a holistic sense of the interrelationships between the many things which affect creative space.

It has proved useful as a starting point for workshop activities with teachers and creative practitioners, to promote discussion and reflection on creative space (the format of the 'map' is particularly effective for visual thinkers – and helps give something of the 'all at once' big picture view which is often difficult to capture in other ways)

It also provides a useful summary or 'snapshot' of our current understanding/ thinking about creative space. The current 'map' (APPENDIX 3) has already been modified from the original 'map' (APPENDIX 1), as it became obvious in use that it needed a clearer focus on social and emotional space.

Making creative space

The 'map' has proved useful as a tool for thinking about adapting and modifying spaces for specific activities.

For the Seagrave project, the map was used in two ways:

- By myself, to think about where I met with the teacher and creative practitioner to plan and reflect on the sessions, and how to modify these spaces to facilitate more productive meetings, and
- By the teacher and creative practitioner, to think about which key things they needed to focus on in considering the use of the classroom to suit the proposed activity (see APPENDIX 4), and then to think about ways in which they might address these issues through the planning and arrangement of physical space.

To the best of my knowledge, however, the 'map' has not been taken up by teachers or creative practitioners as an everyday tool for thinking about effective



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use of space when planning activities. It would be interesting (but beyond the scope of this current research) to explore why.

NEXT STEPS

Through carrying out this research, and reflecting on the process, I have become increasingly interested in shifting the focus of creative space making from teachers/ practitioners/ facilitators to learners/ participants. This offers opportunities:

- For learners to reflect on their own learning needs and preferences, develop self knowledge about themselves as learners and develop the skills to make informed choices to facilitate their learning and creativity.
- For learners to become more critically aware of the built environment, and more able to participate in building and open space related projects, both in school (eg Building Schools for the Future) and in community and City wide regeneration projects.
- To address the diversity of individual needs and preferences in making creative spaces– there is no such thing as a creative space which will suit all learners, nor even a creative space which will suit an individual learner for all activities and moods.
- To link work around creative space with work around personalized learning.

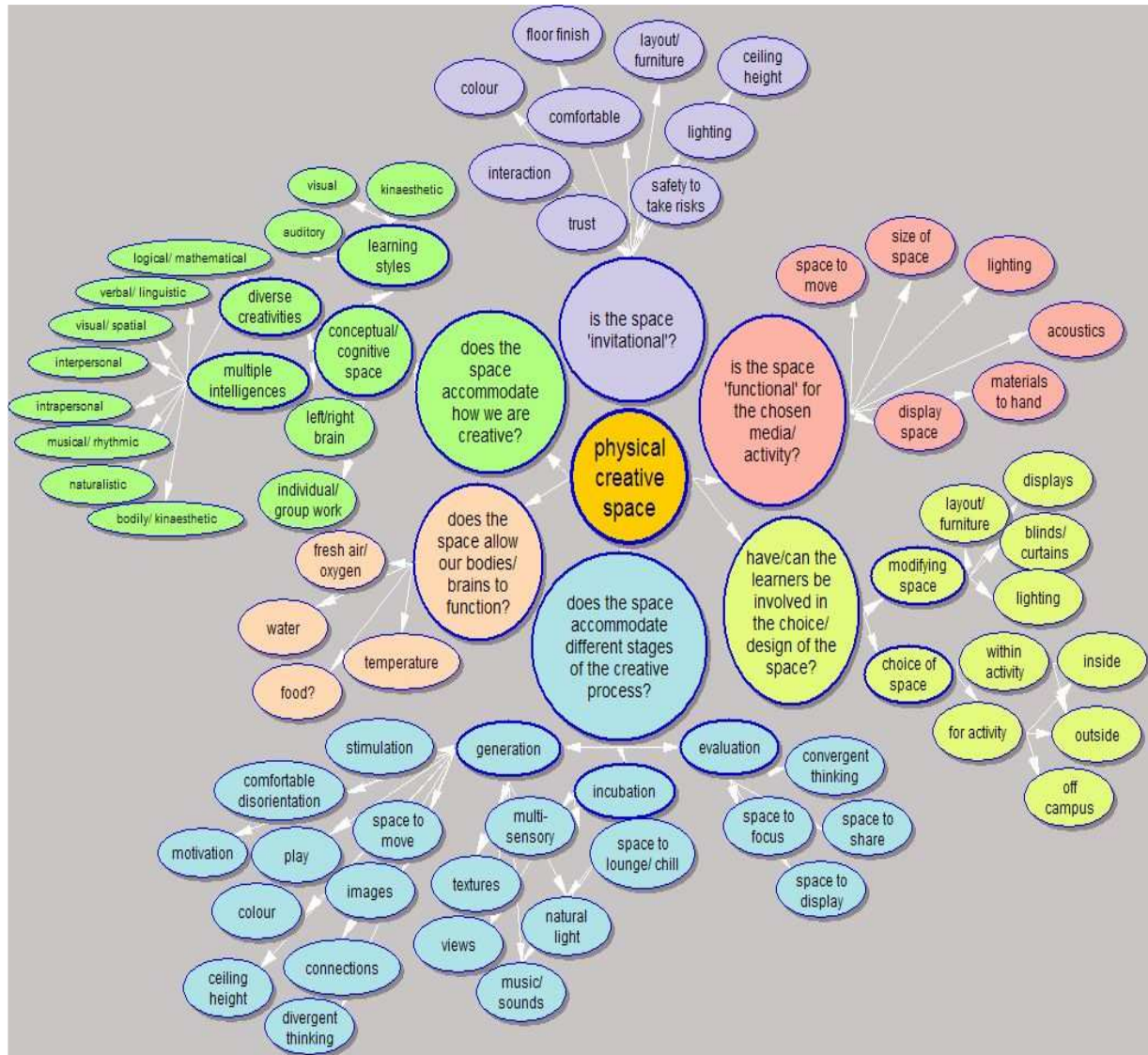


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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

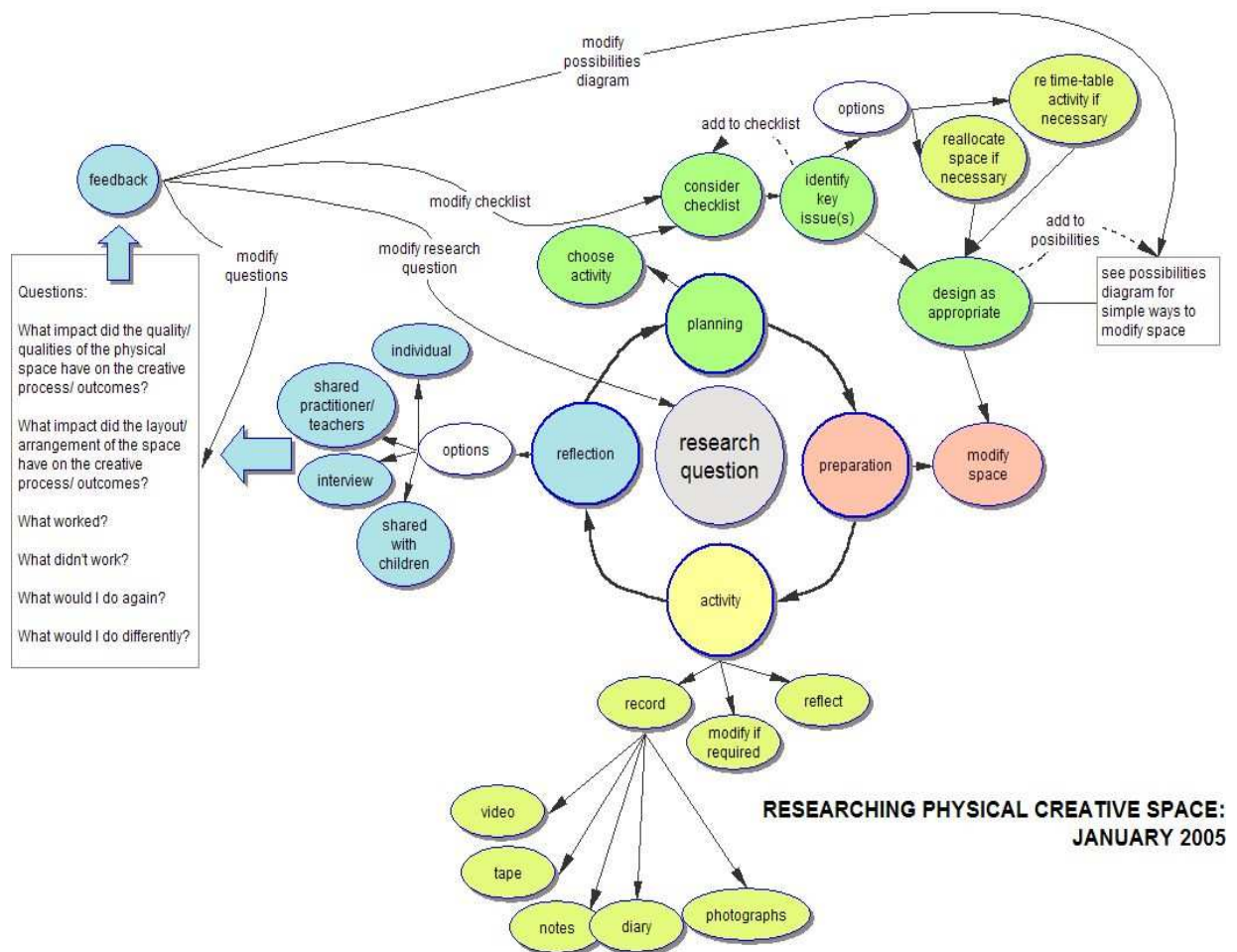
Initial 'map' of aspects to consider in preparing or modifying a 'creative space'



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APPENDIX 2

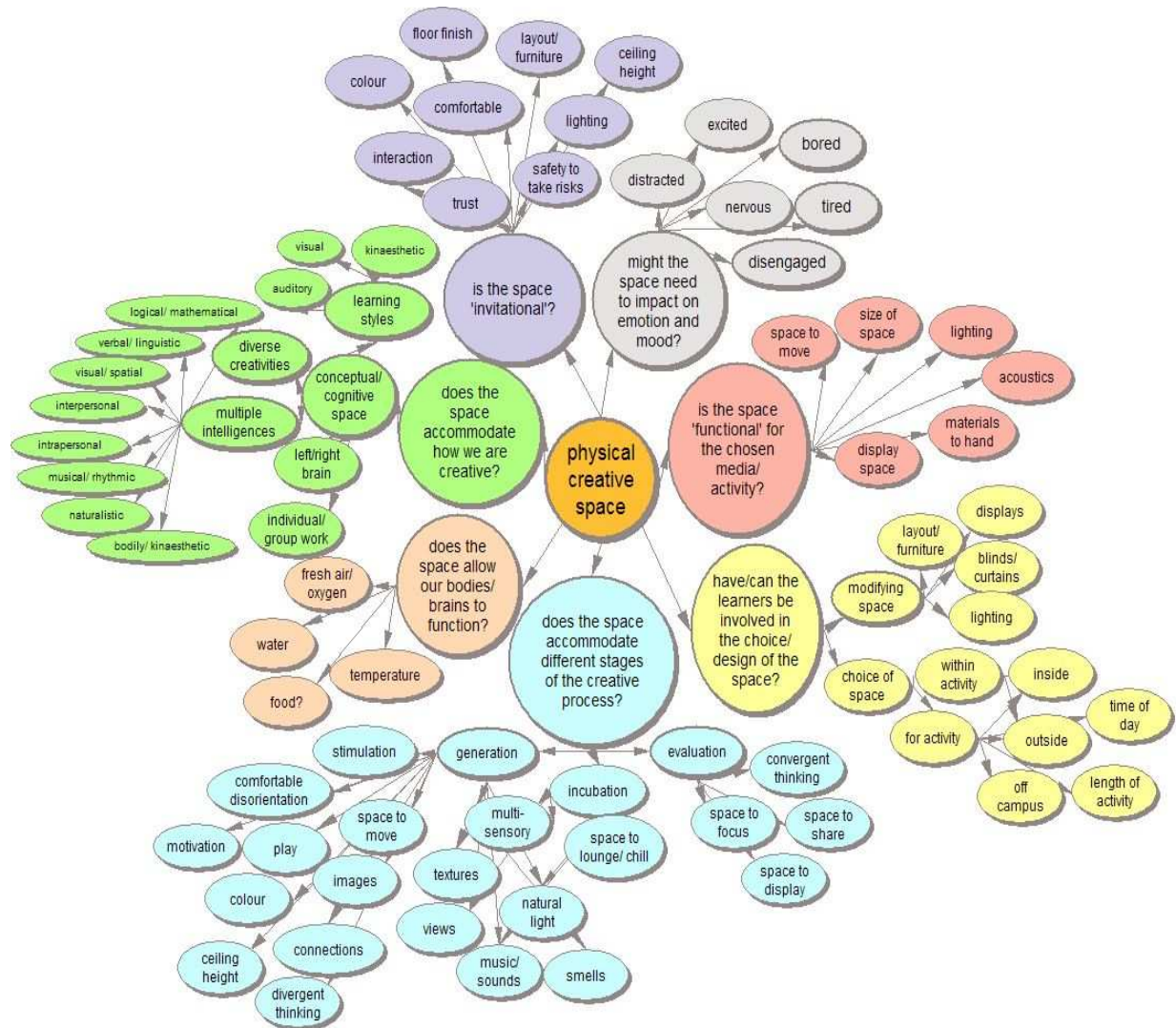
Proposed research process using the initial 'map' and a framework of questions to review outcomes



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APPENDIX 3

Current 'map' of aspects to consider in preparing or modifying a 'creative space'



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APPENDIX 4

'Map' showing areas of focus for creative writing project at Seagrave

