

Social places and senior pupils' identity in a secondary school environment: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the relationship between the school environment and senior pupils' identity development in a secondary school in Scotland. Semi-structured interviews and Photovoice were used along with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, to explore senior pupils' experience of the social places within their school. The findings reveal the relationship between the places that pupils can access for social interaction and their sense of identity, and their use of territoriality to protect these specific places. The findings are considered in the context of the role of the school environment, pupils' needs and the implications for school design and planning.

Key words: school environment; identity; adolescent development; phenomenology

Introduction

Within the context of education, researchers have investigated the relationship between the school environment and the educational experience of young people. For example, environmental characteristics have been shown to relate to aspects of cognitive performance such as memory and concentration (Bakó-Biró, et al., 2012), problem behaviour such as truancy and drug use (Kumar et al., 2008), and the adoption of more beneficial learning strategies (Edgerton et al., 2011). Whilst, the term ‘school environment’ has been conceptualised in terms of both physical characteristics (Higgins et al., 2005) and social characteristics (Thapa et al., 2013), it is important to recognise that the social and the physical environment are closely connected, and both are related to student academic outcomes (Maxwell, 2016).

Not surprisingly, much of the research in this area has focused on the relationship between the school environment and the academic performance of students (Barrett et al., 2015; Crampton, 2009). However, whilst academic performance is an important outcome within educational systems, it is also recognised that there is a need to explore how the school environment relates to other important aspects of the educational experience for young people (Moore, et al., 2015), such as feelings of being valued (Catling, 2005) and identity development (Brown et al., 2014). Recognising these aspects of the educational experience requires the need to understand how students subjectively perceive their physical learning environment (Zheng Yang et al., 2013).

Within the context of this paper, we concur with these views by adopting a phenomenological approach to explore the relationship between senior students’ perceptions of their school environment and their identity development in a secondary school in Scotland. We begin by highlighting the theoretical underpinning to our study before providing a literature review on the psychosocial processes that are important for the development of identity in young people and how this relates to the school environment. We will then conclude this section by providing a justification for our methodological approach.

Theoretical Underpinning

This study is underpinned by Erikson’s model of psychosocial development, the ‘stage-environment fit’ model and the bioecological model of human development.

Secondary schools in Scotland cover the ages 11 to 18 years and this coincides with Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development, Identity v Role Confusion (Erikson, 1968). During this stage the central crisis is centred on developing a personal identity and successfully completing this stage leads to a strong sense of self that will remain throughout life. However, adolescents who are not allowed to explore and test out different identities might be left with role confusion. In Erikson's theory, the ability to resolve and attain one's own sense of identity is influenced by various factors including friends, family, schoolmates, other social groups, and societal trends.

Based on an ecological systems approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), Eccles and colleagues (1989, 2009) have proposed the stage-environment fit model as a way to conceptualise how well the learning environment fits (or matches) the developmental stages of students. Using this theory they argue that there is often a mismatch between the developmental needs of students and the environment in which they are taught and this is particularly true in adolescence where students' increased readiness and desire for autonomy is not matched by the school environment where they experience fewer opportunities to make choices (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

Drawing on the bioecological model, (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), the interpersonal relationships and direct interactions that the individual has with their surrounding environment make up the microsystem and one important microsystem is the school. Whilst the young person is at school, they engage in interactions with other people and with the physical environment; these interactions are crucial for development and are referred to as proximal processes. One important element that underlies the capacity of proximal processes to operate is the environmental context (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). In school the young person interacts with teachers and other pupils and engages in a variety of activities during the school day throughout the school setting; these social interactions, activities and physical settings are all part of the school as a microsystem.

Drawing on these different but complementary theories, we would argue that young persons' perceptions of their school environment are often overlooked as a contributory factor in terms of their psychosocial development. The current study therefore examines these perceptions in relation to identity development

Literature review: the school environment and identity development

According to Dudek (2000), architects who design schools should be sensitive to the social interactions that occur within them, as aspects of the physical environment such as the amount and arrangement of space can have a direct influence on the success of social relationships. In this context, it is argued that secondary school buildings should be designed to facilitate, promote and nurture meaningful social interactions. Research has shown that interactions with peers can have an impact on pupils' school experience. For example, Wentzel and Watkins (2002) assert that collaborative problem solving encourages social interactions between pupils, which can have a positive impact on motivation and engagement with learning. Similarly, a study by Welsh et al. (2001) supported the idea of a reciprocal model, emphasising the bi-directional relationship between social competence and academic competence. While studies have shown the importance of social interaction in school settings, much of the research focuses on peer relationships and academic performance within classroom environments. However, social interactions between school pupils occur in many places, such as playgrounds, foyers, circulation spaces, toilets, eating areas, libraries, common rooms and cloakrooms. In Scotland, while pupils typically spend seven hours a day in school, approximately a quarter of this time is 'free-time' that is often spent in social areas that are appropriated as places for socialising, relaxing and playing. The amount of time that adolescents spend in school provides the school environment with a considerable opportunity to influence pupils' development.

An important distinction to highlight within the context of school environments is the difference between space and place. Whilst space is something abstract, without any substantial meaning, place refers to how people are aware of, or are attracted to a certain piece of space and assign meanings to that space. For Marcouyeux and Fleury-Bahi (2011), individuals can develop an emotional bond for a place (place attachment) that has a particular meaning to them, which becomes part of their identity. Since adolescents spend a great deal of time in schools, the social interactions that take place within these environments is likely to influence their sense of place. Others have highlighted the importance of the places in which social interactions take place. Rollero and DePiccoli (2010) claim significant social relationships have a key role in the development of place attachment, with the emotional connections between friends being the affective link to a place. When a sense of place attachment grows, one's identity can become inseparable from the meaning attached to a place (Gifford, 2007). In this context, the places where

pupils socially interact with each other within schools could have the potential to influence their sense of identity. Using a social-developmental approach, researchers propose that these places can be thought of as a 'frame' i.e. "*settings that are framed by an institution... made out of implicit and explicit rules and creates duties and mutual expectations... a pre-constrained field of possible interactions, positions, and actions*" (Zittoun & Perret-Clermont, 2009, p.4).

Whilst recognising that identity development is influenced by multiple elements, the preceding literature review has suggested that the physical environment of the school can influence the social context which is in turn important for understanding adolescent identity development (Kia-Keating, et al, 2011; Rusby, et al., 2011). The work of Eccles and Roeser (2011) conceptualises schools as ecological systems composed of various regulatory processes that facilitate our understanding of how adolescent identity develops within the school context both in terms of characteristics at the classroom level (e.g. instructional approaches and classroom climate) and at the organisational level (e.g. peer interactions, sense of community and school layout).

In this paper, we also adopt a bioecological perspective and recognise that the school environment can be a powerful context in which adolescents experience important developmental changes. As has been argued, "*adolescent identity development is reflected through numerous mechanisms embedded in the school setting, including the selection of school-based peers and the ability to make decisions, both academic and non-academic*", (Brown et al., 2014, p.181).

Understanding the student experience of their school environment

The preceding discussion suggests the need for a fuller understanding of the link between specific social places within schools that are important to pupils and how this may influence their non-academic development. Understanding the role of this environment recognises that children's and young people's development "*should include more directly than it has in the past the practice in children's everyday institutions and the conditions the society give children for development and at the same time attempt to grasp the child's perspective*", (Hedegaard, 2009, p.64). Attempts to understand pupils' perspective of their school environment require a phenomenological approach that explores pupils' experiences. Whilst there is an impressive body of research within this tradition that explores and documents the child's perspective within an educational context e.g.

Hedegaard et al (2008), Hviid (2015), much of this is conducted with younger children and does not necessarily focus on physical characteristics of the school environment.

The preceding discussion has highlighted the need to investigate the link between specific social places within schools that are important to pupils and how this may influence their non-academic development. In order, to do this it is necessary to gain an understanding of how pupils use the social places in their school, what they think about them and how they relate to social interactions. To do this, we employed semi-structured, idiographic interviews and Photovoice with senior pupils (aged 16-17) in a secondary school in Scotland, and conducted Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyse the transcripts. Since these pupils were in their final year of secondary school, they could draw upon and reflect on their experiences from every stage of secondary school.

When deciding on the method of analysis, there were three aspects to take into consideration, namely: (i) entering the participants' world in order to examine how they make sense of their lived experiences, (ii) understanding those experiences from the perspective of the participant, and (iii) gaining individual accounts of the phenomenon under investigation. IPA takes all three of these aspects into consideration and its purpose is to examine how the participant makes sense of their lived experiences, from the perspective of the participant. As such, the researcher must try to set aside their own perspectives in order to effectively convey those of their participants. They acknowledge it is impossible to completely set aside their own perspectives, however, *"they believe that their self-reflective attempts to 'bracket' existing theory and their own values allow them to understand and represent their informants' experiences and actions more adequately than would be otherwise possible"* (Elliott et al., 1999, p.216). The IPA researcher also wants to ask critical questions based upon the information the participant supplies, meaning that the interaction between the researcher and the participant is implicated and the resulting analysis will be an interpretation of the participant's experience (Willig, 2008). As the detail is in the particular, an IPA study is not concerned with saturation of themes and therefore lends itself to using small sample sizes. The idiographic underpinning to IPA affords participants the opportunity to provide their own perspectives of their experiences, allowing their opinions, thoughts and feelings to be heard. In a one-to-one interview the researcher is able to enter the participant's world to gain rich, in-depth information which will address the research aims.

By undertaking an IPA approach, researchers are able to explore the complexity of the subject under investigation and are therefore, less likely to make assumptions prior to commencing their research, unlike those who seek to determine cause and effect (Johnson, Burrows & Williamson, 2004). IPA offers researchers the opportunity of going beyond thematic analysis to gain a deeper level of understanding of participants' experiences (Brocki & Warden, 2006). Furthermore, IPA theorists tend to use clear language and straightforward guidelines rather than complicated language that hide meaning, as other approaches have been criticised for, thus making it more accessible than other qualitative methodologies (Brocki & Warden, 2006).

Method

The study reported in this paper was part of a larger project that investigated pupils' perceptions of their physical school environment using a multi-method approach. For the purposes of this paper, we will focus on the study that employed semi-structured interviews and Photovoice along with IPA to address the question of how pupils used the social places in their school, what they thought about them and how they related to social interactions. The school in question was a secondary school in Central Scotland with approximately 1200 pupils. All data collection and analysis was conducted by the primary researcher who is referred to as the 'researcher' for the remainder of this paper.

Semi-structured Interviews

As IPA seeks to capture an in-depth and first-hand account of participants' experiences, the method of data collection needs to be able to facilitate and elicit such information. Smith et al. (2009) advise the use of in-depth, semi-structured, idiographic interviews because this method provides participants with the opportunity to talk freely about their experiences and in their own words. Whilst both the researcher and participant are active in this type of interview, typically, it is participant led with the researcher following an interview schedule. In order to encourage dialogue and to obtain rich data, the types of questions asked are open ended with the aim of encouraging participants to talk at length. The questions were generated from the data gathered from a previous study, which utilised focus groups to gather information on pupils' views, perceptions and

experiences of the social areas in a new school environment (*authors name removed to preserve anonymity, 2017*). In addition to possible questions, the interview schedule contained prompting cues and a very loose agenda of the anticipated order of the interview. However, it is important to be aware that having an interview schedule may aid the researcher to shape the interview but it will not ensure the quality of it. In order to collect the rich, in-depth quality of data required for IPA analysis, the researcher must fully engage with the participant, listen attentively and probe further, as appropriate (Smith et al., 2009). The full interview schedule is provided in appendix 1.

Photovoice

As the participants in this study were adolescents, there was concern about how much dialogue would be exchanged between the researcher and each participant during their individual interview and, whether this dialogue would be sufficient to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences of the social areas. Willig (2001) writes that it is possible to gain an account of participants' experiences under investigation using methods other than through semi-structured interviews and suggests the use of photographs. In conjunction with semi-structured interviews, Photovoice was developed and used as a tool to elicit and enable conversation.

Photovoice was chosen based on a number of attributes relevant for research with young people. Bates et al. (2017) argue that the introduction of participant-generated photographs can help to promote dialogue rather than constrain participant responses, whilst White et al., (2010) claim that it can also help to build a relationship of trust with the researcher. In addition, Wang and Burris (1997) highlight the accessibility of Photovoice and the fact that "*it facilitates the sampling of different behavioural and social settings*" (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 372).

More specifically, previous researchers have argued that Photovoice combined with IPA can provide rich data and detailed experiences of participants' quality of life (Burton, et al, 2017). In addition, this approach provides a visual point of reference, which will help to elicit a deeper understanding of pupils' experience of their school environment.

Participants

Ethical approval was granted by the University's ethics committee prior to contacting the Local Authority or School. The ethical considerations for this study focused on the use of school pupils as participants, carrying out one-to-one interviews with pupils and asking pupils to take photographs of the school environment. All pupils were over 16 years of age and were provided with a Participant Information Sheet, which they were instructed to take home with them to review and discuss with their parent/guardian if they wished however, since they were over 16 years, parental consent was not required. The researcher had Enhanced Disclosure from Disclosure Scotland, which satisfied all legal requirements for interacting with pupils individually and in private. Participants were instructed both verbally and via the consent form, to only take photographs of social spaces when no-one was present and that any photograph containing a person would be destroyed by the researcher as soon as the photographs were developed. All photographs were retained by the researcher and securely stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act.

The selection process began with the Director of Education for the Local Authority putting the researcher in contact with contacting with the Head Teacher of a specific school. The researcher then liaised with the sixth year leader (teacher) to arrange several visits to the school where they were introduced to the pupils and were able to provide information about the study to pupils. Pupils were given a week to read over the information and discuss this if they wished, with parents/guardians or a member of the school staff. At the end of this week, pupils could then contact the year lead to indicate that they wished to volunteer to participate. The researcher then visited the school again to meet with the pupils that had volunteered, to discuss the study and answer any questions about the study or their involvement. At the end of this process, six pupils were selected as participants. Of these participants, five were female and one male, all were sixth year pupils (either 16 or 17 years of age).

Materials

Each participant was provided with a paper notebook and a disposable camera. Once the films from the cameras were developed, each participant's photographs were utilised in their interview. As previously noted an interview schedule was used in each interview and an Olympus Digital Recorder was used and Express Scribe Software was used for transcribing.

Procedure

The disposable camera allowed participants to take up to 36 photographs per pupil (the actual number of photographs taken by each participant is shown in table 1). Participants were instructed to “*take some photographs of the inside and outside social spaces within their school buildings and grounds*”. As the individual interviews were not being carried out immediately after the photographs had been taken, the researcher provided all participants with a paper notebook to allow them to make notes on why they photographed particular areas. The participants were given one week to use the disposable camera before the researcher collected them for developing. The researcher then visited the school to carry out the individual interviews with participants using the photographs and notes that they had produced. Once each interview had been conducted, it was transcribed by the researcher for the process of IPA outlined below. In addition, the researcher made summary notes immediately after each interview and kept self-reflective notes throughout the research project; this allowed for the researcher to consider and reflect upon their role within the interview process.

Table 1: Number of photographs taken by each participant

| Participant | Alison | Harry | Susan | Isobel | Karen | Hannah |
|--------------------|--------|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------|
| No. of Photographs | 10 | 26 | 16 | 16 | 37* | 38* |

* in some instances the camera capacity exceeded 36 photographs

Analysis

The initial analysis began during the transcription of each participant’s interview. Once each interview was transcribed, a table was created for each participant that consisted of one column that contained the original transcription of the dialogue between the participant and the researcher and another column that was used to make preliminary interpretative notes and comments on the participant’s use of language and to note points of interest for future discussion. The next stage involved developing these exploratory comments and notes into more succinct interpretative

terminology, in order to establish emergent themes; these themes were added to a third column on the table. Once this process was completed for all participants, over 500 emergent themes were identified and these were reduced by making connections between them and clustering them together using the approach of Smith et al. (2009). This involved taking the list of emergent themes for each participant, printing these out and cutting them into individual pieces of paper. Each emergent theme was placed on a table in order to determine the relationships between them and then cluster themes together which related to each other. Once this process was complete, each cluster became a sub-ordinate theme. The final stage of analysis involved clustering related sub-ordinate themes together to form super-ordinate themes; this was done by selecting only those sub-ordinate themes that were relevant to answering the research question i.e. *how do secondary school pupils perceive and use the social places in their school and how do these social places meet their needs?* Whilst this analysis resulted in three super-ordinate themes in total, the findings in this paper will focus on the super-ordinate theme of ‘Identity as a sixth year pupil’. For reference, table 2 below details the sub-ordinate themes that formed this super-ordinate theme.

Table 2: Super-Ordinate theme (Identity as a sixth year pupil) and Sub-Ordinate themes

| Identity as a sixth year pupil | Alison | Harry | Susan | Isobel | Karen | Hannah |
|---|--------|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------|
| - The sixth year area | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| - Entitlement and Privileges | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| - Expectations | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| - Perceptions of other pupils | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| - Sense of loss at not having a common room | No | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| - “isolated” in sixth year | No | No | Yes | No | No | No |

Whilst table 2 displays the Super-Ordinate theme (identity as a sixth year pupil) and Sub-Ordinate themes, not all participants generated all of the sub-ordinate themes related to Identity. During their interviews, the participants spoke at varying length on their use of the social spaces, as well as focussing on different social spaces within their school environment. As such, whilst every participant contributed to the super-ordinate theme of Identity, some have contributed more to the other super-ordinate themes which are not the subject of this paper. Therefore, the quotes provided were chosen as they best illustrate the findings for this paper.

Findings

From the outset, participants spoke of physically separating themselves from the rest of the school pupils by going to places that were not used by younger pupils. In this respect, it quickly became evident that being in sixth year had brought about a shift in the participants' behaviour which contributed to a shift in their sense of identity. For example, Karen is reflecting on an outdoor social area that she now avoids as it is used by younger pupils (see images 1 and 2):

It is, kind of, bit nostalgic, it's, kind of, thinking, when we were younger and we used, it just seems a bit, even kind of immature to, sort of, go down there when you see a lot the younger ones, sort of, running around, playing tig or whatever. It's just, it's, sort of, even, sort of, embarrassing that I actually did used to, like, I used to go down there and play things like that. (Karen)

Do you think it is embarrassing? (Researcher)

I don't know, I just think, to be, em, just to play some little games, it just doesn't really, it seems like, em, I don't know, I just need to kind of grow up and actually, maybe, I don't know, em, you could, at that age that is the, kind of, right things you should be doing but I just think, em, I would never think of going there now. It's just, em, I kind of feel as if I'm a bit too old to, sort of, do that and go down and play or act a bit stupid down there, it's just not really something I'd think of doing anymore. (Karen)

Images 1 and 2: Outdoor social areas



Karen's comments highlight the fact that researchers should not view school pupils as a homogenous group. Developmental changes associated with the secondary school years are

significant (Christie & Vinner, 2005) and these changes may underpin Karen's reflection on the behaviours of the younger pupils. Kasali and Dogan (2010) note that the form of dominant activity varies across year groups with older pupils more inclined toward sedentary activity (e.g. talking) in contrast to younger pupils' physical activities. For Karen, whose sense of identity is now that of being 'mature' and 'grown up', the link between specific places and its association with 'immature' behaviour results in her avoidance of that place. The challenge for school environments is that they need to have a variety of places that are capable of meeting multiple needs that emerge as a result of developmental change.

When considering the issue of younger and older pupils socialising together, Hannah also noted the need for separate places, linked to developmental change:

I think it would be really difficult for a school to expect sixth years to socialise with first years well or every day, because others are, like, I've got my little cousins and, like, of course I love them and I can play with them and hang out with them and do things that they do but then I can come away and be with my older friends, who are kind of in the same kind of mindset that I am. (Hannah)

Hannah's comments indicate an awareness that the interests and concerns of younger and older pupils do not coincide and her desire to be with her peers, who share the same 'mindset', reflects her identity as part of a separate group i.e. sixth year pupils. Previous research has argued that in adolescence there is a hierarchy of social cliques, based upon the status of the peer group (Pattiselanno et al., 2015). Within secondary school environments, these cliques are based upon the status of the year groups with the sixth-year pupils at the top of the hierarchy. One way in which such cliques can establish their separateness is in the places they occupy, and this is reflected in Hannah's desire to be able to 'come away' and be with her older peers. What Hannah appears to want is a place that she could share with similarly minded peers of the same developmental stage. Eccles and Midgely (1989) suggest that a synchrony should exist between the changing needs of an individual and the environment, and that an optimal environment is one that is responsive to an individual's developmental phase, which in this regard, is a place where the senior pupils can separate themselves from younger pupils.

Alongside the changes to their sense of identity as senior pupils', participants spoke of changing expectations and the implications for their behaviour. For Karen this focused on her having to adopt a more serious attitude to studying and spending more time in the library (see image 3):

...I just think during free periods you're just, kind of, expected to study or to look over your notes and I think now that university and things coming up... it's just the, sort of, realisation that you need to, sort of, get the finger out and get working, so, I do. I quite often, I spend quite a lot of time in the library this year. (Karen)

Other participants shared Karen's views and developed views reflecting the ability of places to meet their needs. In the case of Harry, it was evident that his use of the library had raised concerns about its suitability (see image 4):

Em, the library is good but, ... you're sitting there on your free period and you've got to do, like, a dissertation or something and you're sitting there and you start writing and then a big first year class comes in and they [staff] say 'aw I'm sorry you can't use the computers' which I don't think's, like, fair on us ... cause we are all doing, like, exams which are gonna, like, kind of, like, decide your life... I don't think it's fair that people who're gonna sit exams gonna have to suffer, like, because, like, a first year class are having to use the library. (Harry)

Images 3 and 4: Library



Both Harry and Karen have clearly adopted the view that ‘studying’ is an indicator of their identity as sixth year pupils and that this should be recognised within the school environment. However, this new focus highlights the constraints on the resources within the school. The library has to serve all pupils, but from Harry’s perspective there should be some acknowledgement that different groups of pupils should be prioritised. In developmental terms adolescence has been linked to a higher level of self-centred thinking which could be associated with a sense of entitlement. Greenberger et al. (2008) argue that since the 1990s, there has been an increase in the sense of self entitlement associated with adolescence, with pupils expecting rewards greater than their efforts have earned and wanting special treatment regardless of the impact this has on others.

Based on the participants’ interviews it became evident that being in sixth year had brought about a change in their behaviour and attitudes, and this in turn had contributed to the change in their sense of identity. Prior to sixth year, the only indoor social place the participants were permitted to use was the main social area (see images 5 and 6), which they shared with the rest of the schools’ pupils. The participants spoke of tensions in this place, particularly at having to share it with younger pupils and tolerate their behaviour, as Hannah states:

...even in fifth year, it was getting difficult to have these ten and eleven year olds running around, running around you and shouting at you and coming up and, em, doing dares with and you’re like, ‘look I’m not, I don’t want to play with you right now’ every day, so I think when it got to fifth year we were ready to come away from that. They’re more than welcome to do that with different peers, like, it doesn’t bother me at all, they can be how they please but I think it got to the point where I don’t want to be surrounded by that all the time... (Hannah)

Images 5 and 6: Main indoor social area



Hannah's comments clearly support the increased sense of group identity that she is experiencing and the desire for some separation between the year groups. Such views resonate with Tarrant's (2002) work on adolescent evaluations of their own peer groups (the 'in-group') and other groups they were not a member of ('out-groups'). In this research Tarrant found that higher levels of identification within the 'in-group' produced more favourable evaluations and, conversely, more negative evaluations of the 'out-groups'. It is clear from Hannah's comments that, over time, the sixth year pupils identified less with the 'out-groups- to the extent that they no longer want to share the same physical place with them.

In this particular school, the sixth year pupils do not have to endure the tensions in the main social area as they are provided with an exclusive designated place, named the 'sixth year area' (see images 7 and 8), which they are permitted to use when not in the classroom. From the outset, each participant spoke at length of their use of this place and it became apparent that this was a pivotal factor in the change in their perceptions of self and identity as a sixth year pupil. All of the participants commented on having a place they could call their own, which also allowed them to be physically separate from the rest of the schools' pupils, as demonstrated by Alison, Hannah and Harry:

before sixth year, em, our, like, group of, like, friends in our year sat right at the front at the doors. And now we are in sixth year we just go straight up to the sixth year bit cause it's like our own little space, which is good, and we've all got our own little spaces up at the sixth year bit. (Alison)

and it's important for us to have a space where we can feel like, we can put our mark on it, em, cause we are a lot older than the first years coming up. (Hannah)

I know we're lucky to have what we have at the moment cause I've seen like, other schools and stuff where they just have, like, a space under a flight of stairs. Em, we've got, like, an actual designated bit, which is, like, still quite good, but, yeah it does make you feel quite privileged to have that bit, if you know what I mean. (Harry)

Images 7 and 8: 'Sixth Year Area'



From these extracts, the importance of having an exclusive place specifically for this year group is evident as the participants speak of ownership and personalisation. Personalisation is a territorial behaviour where a person or a group of people use personal items to decorate and/or alter their surroundings in order to display individual and collective expressions of identity. A number of studies have suggested that personalisation can have a positive impact on pupil's self-esteem. For example, Maxwell and Chmielewski (2008) argued that allowing young pupils to personalise classroom spaces had the potential to influence self-esteem and Horne-Martin (1999) claims that personalisation encourages a sense of ownership of their surroundings which then develops a sense of security and enhances their confidence. Yonezawa et al. (2012) link personalisation to the teacher-pupil relationship and suggest that in this context personalising the social experience within school was associated with improvements in pupil achievement and emotional well-being. In addition, Yonezawa et al. (2012) also advocate the use of small communities within schools as pupils need to be able to form connections with each other in order to provide reciprocal academic, social and emotional support. It could be argued that the creation of the 'sixth year area' is an example of such a 'small community', albeit one that sits outside the formal classroom structures.

The 'sixth year area' is given an additional level of significance when it is considered within the framework of territoriality. Territoriality has been the focus of a number of studies, in part because of the potential benefits that can arise as a result of such behaviour. Costa (2012) notes that the ability to link a group to a specific location introduces a level of predictability into expected behaviours within that group and the forms of social interaction that one can expect to take place. For Costa (2012), the drive to achieve the 'benefits' of territoriality are such that pupils even seek to establish territories within public settings. Other researchers have argued that territoriality allows for the control of the social interactions within that place and for those who control the place to feel secure about any intrusion from others (Kaya & Burgess, 2007).

It could also be argued that the establishment of the 'sixth year area' has an additional significance. It has been noted that where pupils spend their time within the school environment has a significant role to play in their self-perceptions (Maxwell & Chmielewski 2008). The concept of place identity encapsulates this relationship and research suggests that the creation of this 'area' for pupils will result in the co-mingling of place and identity (Marcouyeux & Fleury-Bahi, 2011; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). The comments from the participants indicate that this physical space had become connected with the participants' sense of identity and has influenced the social interactions and social relationships, as stated by Hannah:

Hannah: I think what's quite nice about it is that sixth year isn't spread out, we used to sit at opposite ends of, em, the lunch hall but now we're all, like, kinda together so it's made us mingle a lot more socially, so I think I prefer it that way as well. (Hannah)

Ok. Did you not, did you not mingle socially in this space? (Researcher)

Not as much. It was quite, we were able to separate quite a bit and the friendship groups, not, I don't think it was a conscious decision 'we're gonna stay away from them' but it just kinda worked out that way. We weren't able to have our own area where we, the whole year, could sit together whereas now we do. (Hannah)

Hannah talks of the sixth year area physically bringing her peers together in the same location, thus facilitating more social interaction among them. Pointon (2000), who interviewed secondary school pupils on their preferred learning environments, argues that having a designated area for senior pupils is perceived as a privilege and highly prized, which in this study Hannah has clearly been able to benefit from. As they do not have to share this place with the rest of the school, they

can behave in ways that are more aligned to their stage of adolescent development (Schulman & Ben-Artzi, 2003). There are of course additional benefits that arise from increasing social connections between pupils at similar levels of study. For example, Harry found that having his fellow pupils in the same physical place affords him the opportunity of discussing his school work:

Yeah, and, like, we sit down, like, if we've got homework or, like, it's kinda good though cause if people are off and you're struggling with something and they've already done the subject or have done the same subject as you, you can like, kind of, ask them for help, or like, their advice and stuff on, like, the subject you're studying, which is quite helpful, and em, you know, I think it's a lot better than, like, what it was in fifth year (Harry)

For Harry the sixth year area is not just a place for socialising, it has a functional role of providing an area where pupils can meet to discuss issues relating to their schoolwork. In this regard, the sixth year area is evidence of a physical place where the facilitation of social interactions amongst peers is conducive to learning and this may in turn influence academic achievement and provide pupils with a place in which they can exchange ideas and create opportunities to develop their skills (Wentzel & Watkins 2002). Harry's example also reinforces the applicability of territoriality to explain the functioning of this place. As noted earlier having a defined place brings with it the benefits of a membership that share similar interests and expectations of behaviours. As such Harry is able to benefit from interacting with peers tackling similar problems to the ones that he faces.

Clearly this exclusive place has become the preferred place to go to when not in the classroom, which has resulted in the sixth year pupils not spending much, if any, time in any other social place with the other pupils, as stated by Karen and Hannah:

the first place I would go, if I wanted to be with my friends or was looking for them, that [the sixth year area] would be the first place I would go and would generally would find them there. Like, I wouldn't, if I was looking for them, I would never think to go down here [the main social area] to look for them. (Karen)

I think most of the sixth years would normally go up there, like, there's not very many that would go down and sit downstairs. (Karen)

..... the sixth years have their own area. We have a kinda of a balcony above everywhere else, em, so we don't eat with the younger years in school, we have our

own area and our own cafe, so we don't tend to eat down there with everybody else anymore, we're quite separate. (Hannah)

From Hannah's comments, it is apparent that she intentionally uses this place to separate herself from the schools' younger pupils. Having access to this exclusive place has resulted in the participants only using the sixth year area when not in the classroom. As a result, this place has helped to reinforce their perception of self as distinct from other pupils within the school, physically and psychologically.

However, there were also some tensions regarding the 'exclusive' place. During the interviews it became clear that the place used by sixth years also houses lockers used by other pupils and this was clearly a cause for concern amongst some of the participants (see image 8). For example, when Alison was asked if younger pupils were allowed in this area, she stated:

No, they're not allowed to be up there unless they've got a locker but they're only supposed to go up get the thing and then go but sometimes they hang about, em, and that's why it gets annoying. Cause it's, like, our set space up there. They're allowed to go up as well if they're just passing through to get to a corridor but they're not allowed to sit up here or use the café up there. (Alison)

So how does it make you feel when they are there? (Researcher)

Em, a bit frustrated cause, like, we've been in this school five years and we just want, like, five minutes peace without them... I don't have to go in there but my friends who've got ones [lockers] in there, they have to kinda wait until the first years have gone, which I think they get annoyed about cause they need to get to class or they need to get their lunch out." (Alison)

Clearly, Alison is unhappy and frustrated that the younger pupils are in this area nevertheless, she does acknowledge that some of the younger pupils have a legitimate reason for being there. Alison believes she has earned the right to be in this place as a reward for completing five years of high school, which others have yet to earn. For her, there has been a territorial infringement and as Brown and Robinson (2010) have shown that can evoke anger and can potentially lead to reactionary defences. While studying territoriality within organisations, Brown, et al. (2005) claim that it can have a significant effect on performance, behaviour and well-being, while Altman (1975) demonstrated that territoriality can impact on a sense of belonging to social groups. In this

respect, territoriality within the sixth year area is an important factor in the negative relationship between the sixth year pupils (the ingroup) and the younger pupils (the outgroup) whom they feel are infringing on their place. Karen is also opposed to younger pupils in the sixth year area:

It's where the third years just now, their lockers are right beside the sixth year, their ones in the sixth year area, which I find quite annoying because we don't have a common room, our area is the sixth year area, that's where only sixth years are and I find it quite irritating that they, there is people from younger years about there and I just think when I was in younger years I'd never think to go and stand up in the sixth year area, I always knew that was their area, that was where, somewhere where they were allowed and we weren't and that was, sort of, a privilege of being in sixth year but they now just don't seem to understand that and I do, I do get quite annoyed by it and it's something that I feel like I really just want to say to them, "this is where our area is" but, em. (Karen)

As younger pupils continually use this area, Karen feels that they do not respect it as being exclusive to sixth year pupils. Karen perceives being a sixth year pupil as the pinnacle of secondary school, which is a position that commands an expectation of respect. As their sense of identity has become inextricably linked to being a sixth year pupil, the participants have a strong objection to any other year group gaining a privilege that they perceive as being solely for those in sixth year. This further highlights that since becoming sixth year pupils, they have developed an enhanced sense of entitlement and an expectation of special privileges over others (Raskin & Terry, 1988; Greenberger et al., 2008). In this context, the challenge for the school is one of how to build on the benefits that can be derived from the creation of 'special areas' for senior pupils whilst coping with the practical space constraints within contemporary educational environments.

Summary

The findings from this study revealed that the participants' sense of identity had changed once they became sixth year pupils. They contrasted the experiences they had in the school's social spaces before and after entering sixth year. While noting differences, they also highlighted the positive experiences associated with their sixth year status. This identity shift may be explained by having access to an area which was exclusively for their use. This sixth year area was perceived as a perk and privilege (Pointon, 2000) that only they were entitled to use. It was evident that the pupils had

developed a rich and emotional bond with this area and identified themselves in relation to it, thus they had developed a sense of place attachment and place identity (Dallago et al., 2009; Gifford, 2007). Despite reporting positively on some of the outdoor areas, such as the courtyards, the sixth year pupils tended not to use any other social spaces in their school environment; instead they used this area at every opportunity to spend time with their friends. This space was clearly the most important and valued area for this group of pupils as it provided them with a much coveted physical and psychological space of their own (Pointon, 2000) in which they could separate themselves from the younger pupils.

Conclusions

Research has recognised the role of school settings in influencing adolescents' socio-emotional and behavioural development (Eccles and Roesser, 1999) and that the relationship between school and adolescent development is complex. This study has provided evidence of a link between identity development at this stage and the physical characteristics of the school environment.

Previous research has emphasised the instructional and organisational aspects of school in terms of adolescent development (Brown et al., 2014) but neglected the role of the physical environment in this process. It could be argued that the findings from the present study are not surprising given previous work on place attachment in young people (Jack, 2010). However, what this study demonstrates is the role of territoriality in the establishment of adolescent identity as sixth year pupils (Costa, 2012). This is reflected in the protective views pupils' expressed about 'their' area. While Photovoice was used in this study to facilitate participant engagement in the interview process the photographs produced were also of interest. It was evident from the photos taken by pupils that they identified with specific physical places and these were linked to activity as well as identity.

It should also be noted that the present study has certain limitations. For example, IPA focuses on the use of small sample sizes and the study has explored its research question in one school. Not all schools can provide designated places for specific groups of pupils and where they can, the nature of the place will vary from school to school.

The limitations also suggest areas for further study. In this school, the designated area played a key role in students' identity, however, would we find that different spaces can provide the same outcome in other schools? Would younger students focus on alternative spaces within school reflecting different developmental needs? Would different year groups desire for a specific space impact on overall school cohesiveness? It is clear that the findings from this study provides a starting point in the exploration of school environments and their impact on psychological outcomes.

The findings from this study have a number of implications for architects and educational leaders in secondary schools. While architects should design schools to meet the needs of their users, the present study expands the concept of 'needs' by introducing developmental needs. It could be argued that this would suggest that the planning and consultation stage will require multi-disciplinary input and add another layer of complexity to the competing demands placed on design teams. Similarly, establishing a relationship between the school environment and students' identity creates challenges for the school leaders. For example, how would they prioritise the needs of different year groups? However, there may also be opportunities created by considering the use of the environment to meet the developmental goals of their students.

In considering these issues it is clear that listening to the voices of young people and their experience of the school environment can provide us with insights that may allow us to facilitate a better match between important stages of adolescent development and design aspects of the physical school environment.

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Appendix 1

Semi-structured interview schedule used in the study

Interview starts with a general task:

- Tell me about a typical day for you, outside of your classes, from when you get to school in the morning to going home at the end of the day.

Interview then focuses on the photographs taken by the participant. Possible questions centred around the photographs:

Tell me about this photograph.

- Is this somewhere you go?
- Where in the building/grounds is it?
- When do you go there?
- Why do you go there?
- What do you do there?
- Who else uses this space?
- What do you like about this space?
- What do you think about the design of this space?
- What could be improved, if anything?

Common Rooms:

Do you have access to a common room or space?

If yes:

- Where is it?
- Who uses it?
- What does it have in it?
- How often do you use it?
- What do you do there?
- How does having a common room or designated space make you feel?
- What was it like before you had a common room/designated space?

If no:

- How do you feel about not having a common room?
- Tell me what you think about common rooms?
- Would you like to have access to a common room?
- What difference would it make to you being at school?

Possible general questions on school building design:

- Overall, what do you think about the design of the social spaces within your school buildings and grounds?
- Do you think any of the social spaces are designed well, if so, which spaces?

- Do you think any of the social spaces could be improved upon, if so, which spaces?
- Can you describe any differences between the social spaces in this school and the social spaces in the old school? (If participant attended old school building).
- If you could change anything about the social spaces in your school, inside and/or outside, what would you change and why?
- If you had been asked to design the social spaces in this school, what would you have wanted?
- Is there anything you think this school has that other schools may benefit from?

Minimal probing questions/prompts:

- Can you tell me more about that?
- How did/do you feel about that?
- Can you describe that?
- What do you think about that?