Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Activating Community Psychology Values to Promote Inclusive Academic Spaces for Diverse Populations

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• Abstract (300 words):
The built environment conveys socio-cultural assumptions (Hauge, 2007) to college students in higher education settings. The physical environment can set the tone for how students interact and engage (Clauson & McKnight, 2018), contributing to the overall experience on a college campus. Through a community psychology (CP) lens, we can consider how the design of physical space may promote and foster social justice. To create an inclusive and supportive learning environment, physical spaces should be thoughtfully designed to remove oppressive social conditions for marginalized people while supporting individuals and communities. Three main values and principles from CP, respect diversity, engage in active collaboration and support wellbeing (Elias, Neigher,
& Johnson-Hankin, 2015; SCRA, 2018), are commonly reflected in accessible, functional, and equitable physical spaces that are centered around individuals and communities with diverse needs (e.g. access, cultural). When planning spaces, it’s essential that diverse people can interact with the physical environment in a way that supports their various needs. When engaging communities in active collaboration, it’s important to create physical environments that harness the community’s strengths and promote collective goals. At an institutional level, design opportunities can be leveraged to reduce the power imbalance between systems and people that occupy the space. This paradigm shift in the practice of the built environment is necessary and attainable by centering the design process around the community voice to authentically create places that are for the community by the community. The promotion of thriving and well-being within the design of the physical learning environment can build resilience in individuals and communities (Sanoff, 2000) and considers what spaces exclude people for the promotion of equitably designed physical spaces. This conceptual framework will be presented to explore how we might create inclusive spaces for diverse populations as researchers, practitioners, and educators.

References

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Kevin Bonnell is a male-identified student of colour who is currently in a Masters of Community Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, Canada and has previously received an Honours B.Sc. in Health Science. Kevin uses an interdisciplinary lens to support social change at a community level. Kevin’s passion for social justice and systems change has led to using engaged research methods to explore mechanisms that facilitate and inhibit individuals and communities from diverse backgrounds to flourish and thrive in various ecological settings. His current research interests are using qualitative research methods like photovoice, walking interviews and narratives to center the research process around diverse student’s strengths and needs, to better inform the planning and design of inclusive campuses that promote positive wellbeing. He is
interested in elevating the student voice in environmental design practices and community-driven research methodology while drawing on positive wellbeing, social justice and community engagement in higher education settings.

Renae Mantooth is a design researcher with a multi-disciplinary background. Renae’s passion for design research and scholarship is centered around people through inclusive practices. She works to expand the breadth of knowledge that explores human behavior in post-secondary educational settings. Her research is rooted in the practice of environmental design in that she seeks to leverage academic scholarship to inform evidence-based design. Renae is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Ph.D. in Design program at North Carolina State University. She received her M.S. in Educational Psychology and B.A. in Interior Design. Broadly, Renae is interested in how the physical environment influences behavior and psychological processes through systemic and societal influences. Specifically, she investigates how perceptions of environmental factors in educational settings influence well-being, learning, and motivation of undergraduate students.

Rebekah Radtke is an Assistant Professor in the University of Kentucky, College of Design-School of Interiors. She earned a Master of Architecture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Interiors: Planning / Strategy / Design at the University of Kentucky. Her research investigates how interior design enables social change by applying boundary-spanning pedagogical approaches rather than discipline-specific processes. Since 2011, her transdisciplinary multi-scalar projects produced better living and learning environments and healthy communities in national and international venues. Her collaborative work has been funded by national entities and include preservation projects in rural China, design-build projects in Brazil, community-activated art interventions in Appalachia and education-based design initiatives in Lexington, KY.