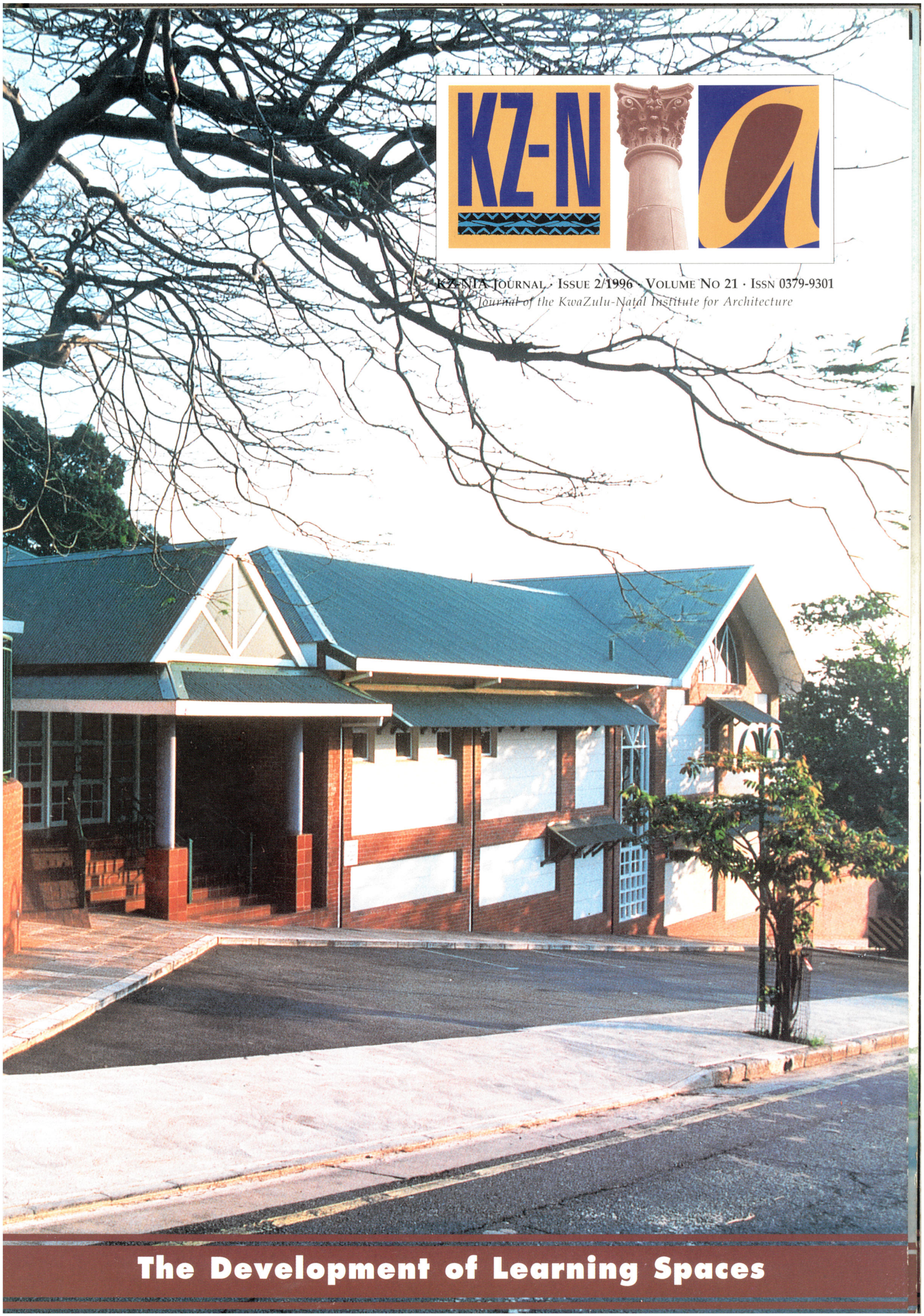

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The Development of Learning Spaces

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Patron of Architecture Award

With Issue 1/1996 "Glories of Brick" this *Journal* turned 21 and thus "came of age." To mark that occasion and to acknowledge its generous sponsorship over 21 continuous years, the KwaZulu-Natal Institute for Architecture presented to *Corobrik* the Patron of Architecture Award at a function held on 19 July in the NSA Gallery.

As the citation acknowledges, such sponsorship "has provided the profession with an opportunity for reflecting on the art, science and practice of architecture; and the Institute with a means of promoting a wider public understanding of the built environment in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal".

ABOVE:
Holding the Award are from left: Errol Rutherford, Executive Chairman of *Corobrik;* Walter Peters, Editor of the Journal; Rodney Harber, KZ-NIA President; and Brian Johnson, Chairman of the Editorial Board.

COVER:
Durban Girls' College Junior Primary School, Guildford Place, Berea, Durban.
Architects: *Interarc*
Project Architect: *John Frost*
Supervising Architect: *Patricia Emmett*
Constructed 1992/3
***Corobrik* products: Horizon Satin bricks. Specials: plinth headers, plinth stops, plinth stretchers, single cant, double cant, and cant stops.**
Photograph: Tony Smith

To celebrate the occasion, Port Elizabeth colleague John Rushmere spoke on "Architecture in the Nature of Clay Brickwork".

Summer Studio at Natal

At the initiative of John Hoal, graduate of the Natal School of Architecture and Assistant Professor at Washington University in St Louis, USA, 10 students of that University spent eight weeks in South Africa earning credits towards their American qualifications. The students registered at the University of Natal for a "Summer Studio" consisting of a special lecture course on South African architecture and settlement, and a special studio course in developmental architecture. Before leaving for USA, Jo Noero, now on a 2-year contract as Visiting Professor at Washington University, travelled from Johannesburg to accredit the work.

1996 Des Baker Awards

This year's *Murray & Roberts* Des Baker Design Competition for architectural students, the brief for which was to challenge the "non-place urban realm" and hence to address the "search for a green space", was adjudicated at the University of Port Elizabeth at the end of July, where the Annual Conference of Architectural Students took place. First prize went to students of the University of the Witwatersrand, second to UPE, and third to Natal. The Natal entry was submitted by Jan Badenhorst, Graeme Everitt, Chris Reardon, Geoff Ford and Steve Gardner.

OBITUARY
Jack Barnett 1924 - 1996

Although it is not customary to publish obituaries of non-KZ-NIA members in our Journal, Cape Town colleague Jack Barnett was well known and highly respected in our Province and an external examiner and good friend of the Natal School of Architecture.

Jack Barnett's winning entry in the 1964 competition for the Municipal Building in Pietermaritzburg (in association with F Lamont Sturrock) brought his work and his sensitivity to our immediate attention. In his acknowledgement of the building within the civic and historical context of central Pietermaritzburg, and his consequent insistence on face-bricks to match the salmon-hued bricks of the City Hall, he provided us with a role model.

Another of his numerous premiated design competition entries was also for a Pietermaritzburg building: he was awarded second prize for the competition for the Cathedral of the Holy Nativity in 1976.

We were aware of his skills as a writer by way of his being Architectural Critic for the *Cape Times*, and extremely honoured when he described this *Journal* as" always a pithy pleasure to read" (*NIAJ* 1–1985). But first and foremost, Jack Barnett was an indefatigable fighter for quality architecture and the ISAA Gold Medal of Honour he received in 1982 was a just vindication. We share with his family in this great loss. *Editor*

Editing a journal and writing for architects is very intimidating for someone who is at the periphery of architecture. I am no different. What you will find is that the projects I have chosen and my discussion will give you a glimpse of the educational client's perspective.

When I think about school architecture or the design of any learning space (classrooms, museums, libraries, community halls) I realise the traditional classroom and traditional teaching has constrained and seduced us (architects, planners and educators) from considering more appropriate and effective spaces and arrangements for learning.

I often tell students and clients about an incident which occurred a few years ago at a school in northern KwaZulu-Natal.

The school, which is bursting at the seams, always has one class which finds itself without a classroom. This class has to go out to the dusty playing field for its lesson. You might expect – as I did -- that the teacher and class would seek out one of the few shady trees. Instead of this, the class filed out to an area in the middle of the playground, marked out with stones to neatly resemble the floor plan of a classroom – including a break in the wall for a doorway.

The children stood along the wall of their "classroom", which they had created as the next best thing to a real classroom, while the teacher waited patiently for them to get into a straight line before she gave the command to "go in". The class didn't walk through the virtual concrete block wall but instead turned in deftly through the doorway and made their way to their neatly arranged rows of virtual desks. By this time, the teacher was in the front of the room alongside the small blackboard which was supported on a rickety easel. She greeted the children and they responded with a jarring chorus as they sat down on the dusty floor. The les-

Learning Spaces: WARNING – Brief may be Unreliable

Editorial: Costas Criticos

son then proceeded in much the same way as those in the school's real classrooms.

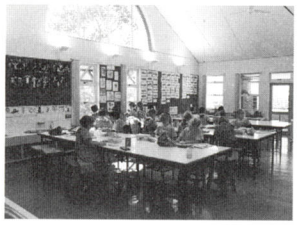
The traditional teacher-centred classroom is the basic unit of currency in education - a unit which is overvalued and in need of examination. While such a scrutiny ought initially to come from educational planners it should also involve architects as their designs can either facilitate or subvert progressive visions of education.

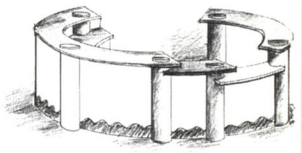
So, if good architecture is architecture which facilitates progressive visions of education, what happens in cases where the client's vision is locked into a traditional teacher-centred paradigm of education? In these cases the process of consultation and preparing a brief becomes especially important. Usually the brief enables a client's vision to mature into a design protocol but in some cases the process can help to review and refine the vision. The role of the brief in educational projects is very rarely given sufficient attention.

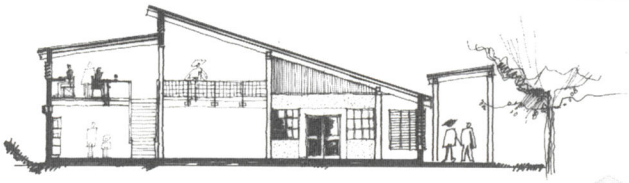
I describe the brief as a rear-view mirror – a device that we consult to help us negotiate a complex road-journey. But briefs, like rear-view mirrors, give us only partial information. In the USA, where legal suits against car manufacturers abound, rear-view mirrors have a message etched on the glass "Warning – objects in the mirror are closer than they appear". The accessory industry has exploited this limitation by producing small self-adhesive convex mirrors which are applied to the mirror to give the driver a wide-angle view of the road.

If we stick to the metaphor of the rear-view mirror – the brief should give us a wide-angle view which goes beyond telling us about the project – it should enable us (architect and client) to see ourselves in the reflection. Our assumptions about education, architecture, the design process and learning should be subjected to scrutiny. This scrutiny was missing in the brief which led to the first design of the School for Paediatric Patients (featured in this edition) because the teachers were allowed to get away with simply replicating their traditional views of education. In particular, the education of young patients was not questioned and they consequently misdirected the architects.

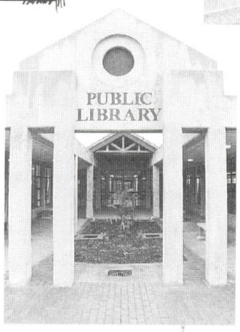
The learning space projects featured in this edition are all excellent examples of what most educationists would regard as good architecture.



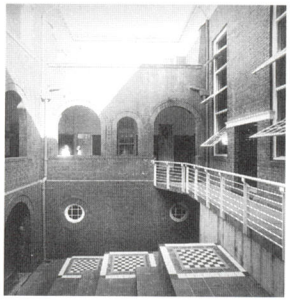


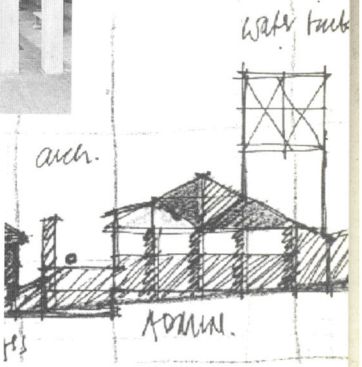


In each case, the designers have found ways responding to educational challenges and thus enabled the clients to feel an authentic "ownership" of the project.



The themes of contextual architecture and clustering of schools which featured at the recent Learning Spaces Development Conference are found in Rob Johnson's design. In this project and others it is pleasing to note that some PWD commissioned designs are departing from the regular and linear treatment of public buildings which demonstrate a disregard for the context and the people who live and work in these buildings.





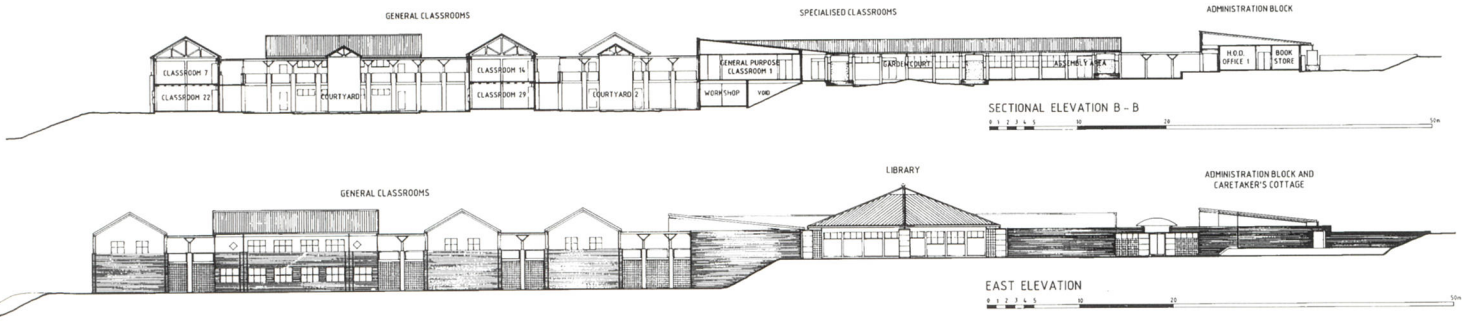
The School for Paediatric Patients and the Glenwood High School Information Technology Centre are clear examples of the important role the built environment has in facilitating progressive views of education. In the case of Durban Girls' College we see evidence of a serious attempt to unify a number of disconnected school components into a more coherent school campus through the design of the Junior Primary School.

Thendela School and the Thembalithle Early Learning Centre are excellent examples of contextual design of learning spaces and they also demonstrate an active community involvement in the project. Finally, the inclusion of two libraries in this collection is no mistake - libraries are being redefined in terms of their broader educational and social role in the community – Tholulwazi Community Library and the Umlazi Public Library are designs which are a testimony of this new role.

I am most grateful to all the contributors of the collection and to Ivor Daniel, Director of Stauch Vorster Architects, who assisted in the early stages of this edition.

Costas Criticos is no architect – but he does have a strong interest in the improvement of learning spaces – spaces in which learners and teachers feel at home and in which their teaching and learning is energised.
Alongside his work as a Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Natal he has fashioned a narrow area of specialisation in the nexus of education and architecture. This specialisation is concerned with the efficacy and manner of brief construction for educational projects.
He is a graduate of the University of Natal and Syracuse University (New York) and he was a British Council Fellow and Fulbright Scholar.
He is presently editing the proceedings of the *Learning Spaces Development Conference* which was held in Durban in September 1995.

Robert Johnson Architect & Associates



KwaMathanda High School is one of the first schools commissioned by the former KZ Department of Works to break from the traditional "Bantu Education" designs. The brief called for a new design approach and anticipated that the design would foster greater integration between school and community.

Rob Johnson's design has interpreted the school as a walled village with some of the key functional areas acting as town hall, village square and shops.

Rob takes us on a tour of the village he has designed which he describes as follows:

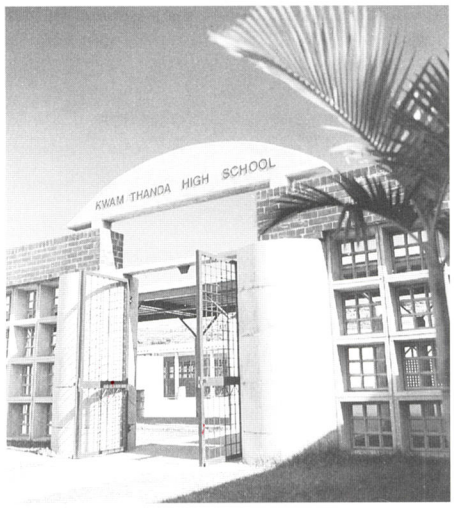
"The library belongs to the village but also steps outside the wall to engage the community – this is a space intended to be used for extra-curricular and community gatherings. Entrance is via the village gates and the classrooms function as the shops of the village.

"The garden court is a cool oasis for weary shoppers and a place to access specialised knowledge. The classrooms, located around the village square, are easily accessible to the public for extra-curricular teaching activities."

We catch up with Rob's tour of the village just as he is about to pass through the village gate: "The villagers spend most of their time in the classrooms. There are groups of large classrooms clustered around parks of differing sizes organised on an orthogonal grid.

"Externally the classrooms 'speak' to their suburban neighbours through their similar (pitched roof) form, but recognise themselves as being school buildings through their chalkboard green colour.

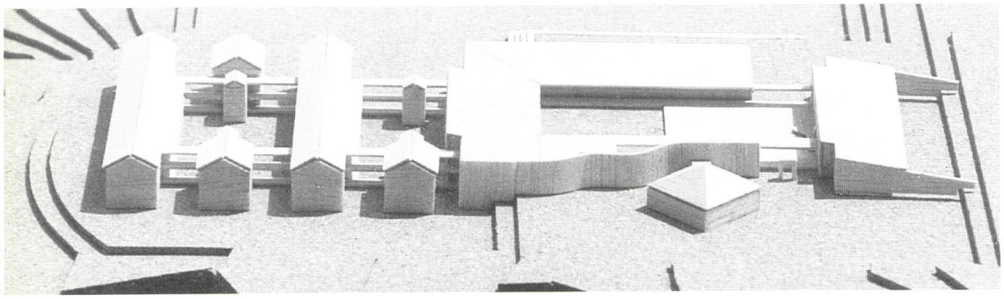
"The choice of material, texture and finishes

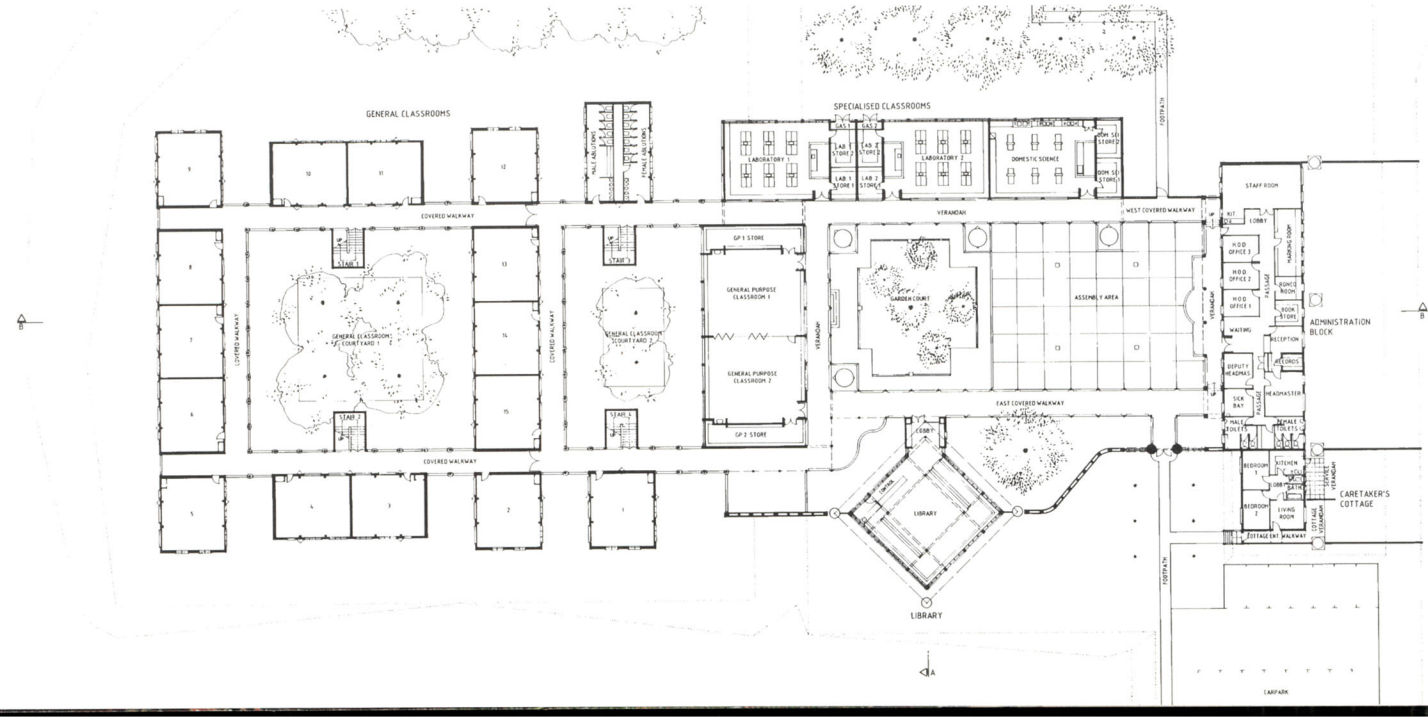


Peter Ergotlom

and structural system is based as much on practical considerations as to convey messages about the concept and a device to talk about architecture. Bricks and clay blocks are used in areas requiring low maintenance, concrete is unpainted, coffers are expressed as are roof trusses in the general classrooms and library."

Rob's attempts to break the "Bantu Education" mould is realised in the way he has "de-institutionalised the educational institution" and created an appealing and workable school.



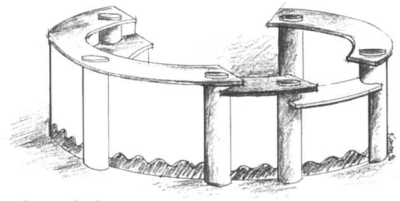


Learning Spaces: "The New Plan is a Good Thing"

FGG Architects

The political argument over priorities in health delivery has finally abated and the new **Durban Academic Hospital** will be built. With King Edward hospital bursting at the seams, a new hospital dedicated to medical education is long overdue.

The paediatric wing of the hospital incorporates a school. In constructing its brief, FGG Architects was directed to interview the two teachers at the school for paediatric patients at King Edward Hospital. Based on their guidance and expectations, FGG produced a first plan which satisfied the traditional expectations of these teachers.



Teacher's desk

As a final check before proceeding to working drawings, an educational consultant was asked to comment on the plans. His report was sharply critical of the 3-classroom school which was modelled on a school for healthy children. He rejected the need for a principal's office and a staff room for a staff of two – these spaces had been determined on the basis of facilities in regular schools rather than the learning activities which would take place in the paediatric school.

The consultant's report made the following observations:

- children's ages would span a wide range
- medical condition and mobility would vary considerably
- educational needs would be broad
- period of stay would range from a few days to a few months

Education for these enormously diverse needs could not be addressed by simply equating education with schooling. The traditional school was an inappropriate model.

Given that there would be only two teachers to meet these varied demands the architects were advised to develop a learning centre which could cope with a range of individual and group activities – a centre which could provide educational enrichment and educational support rather than schooling.

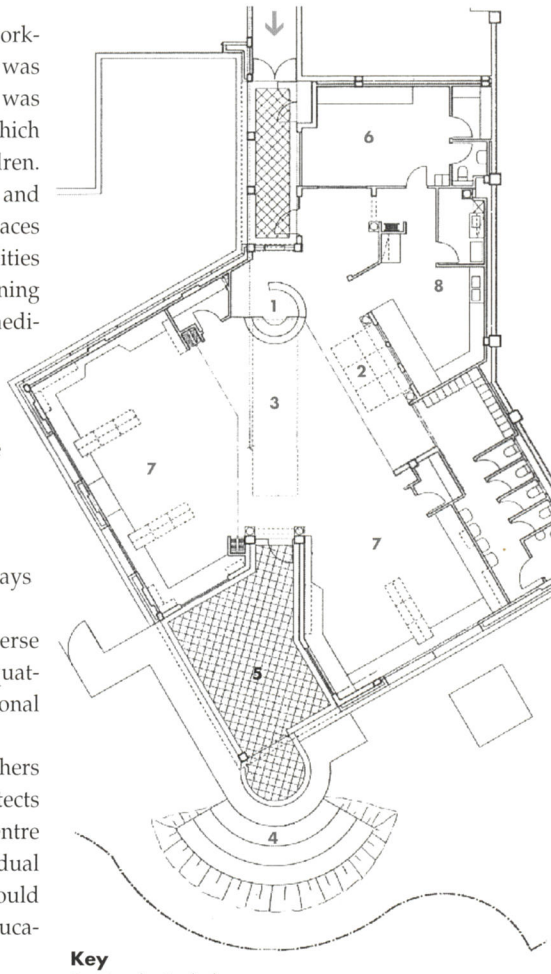
Children who were in hospital for extended periods could be given a programme from their home school which would be supported at the hospital while patients who visited the school for a few days would be involved in educational enrichment using radio, theatre, reading, play and the newer interactive computer-based educational games.

Kathy Houison of FGG Architects took the consultant's report as her brief and has interpreted it into a wonderful design.

The large open plan area can be monitored by a teacher at a central desk while the second teacher attends to individual needs of children or to administrative tasks. A stage platform can be created by using the rostrum boxes which are stored under a work surface.

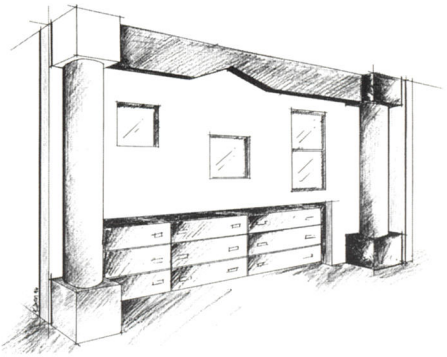
The stage area is a playful assembly of geometric shapes which make up a dramatic frame for theatrical productions, story-time and video projection. The column and pediment treatment to dramatically frame the stage area is complemented by similar treatment of the entrance lobby.

In place of the three classrooms in the first design the new design has a large multipurpose area in which large groups can watch films or a theatrical production. On the perimeter of the open space, which is flooded with natural light through a skylight and windows, is a series of workspaces and activity areas. The open space leads out to an open-air theatre and play area.



Key

1 Teacher's desk
2 Stage area
3 Roof light over
4 Outdoor "theatre"
5 Veranda
6 Staff office
7 Work space
8 Wet area



Stage area

When the two teachers who were responsible for briefing FGG were presented with the new design they were horrified. Their original concept of a series of classrooms modelled on a conventional school had been challenged. For them the only model of education was the traditional school and these schools consisted of teacher-centred classrooms in which the learners had homogenous needs and abilities.

Mrs M, one of the teachers, said "How can you teach them in one room? Because we do the teaching that is being done in the ordinary school." During the briefing process these teachers had not stopped to consider that they did not have "ordinary learners". Notwithstanding that they had learners with diverse needs, the "ordinary" school had been the overriding model.

After the shock of the new design had subsided the teachers slowly became excited about the prospect of what it could offer. Mrs Z, the other teacher, said:

"I think the new plan is a good thing because our children, they just come and go. We don't really have a standard class, like Standard 5, for a long time – it's only for three days or three weeks so I think this will help them. It will help a lot to keep these children doing something"

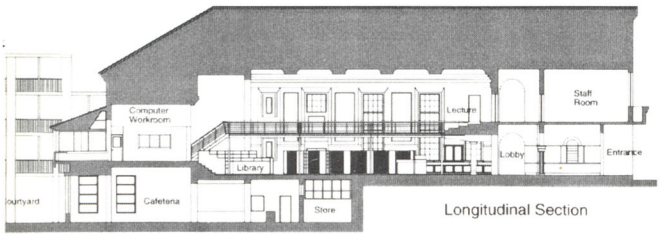
To encourage her colleague that they would be able to cope with a new learner-centred approach Mrs M recounted her initial shock of being transferred to a hospital school.

"I don't think there will be any difficulty because when they said to me 'We are transferring you to a hospital school' I said 'Oh my God! How I am going to teach in a hospital, I've never done it' but I managed."

She and Mrs Z had taken their traditional paradigm of education to a new context (the hospital). Now, the FGG design would enable them to explore a new paradigm of education.

Architects Collaborative

Cross Section



Longitudinal Section

The staff of **Glenwood High School**, one of South Africa's oldest schools, was eager to find the right environment to develop its vision of resource-based learning. It was felt that a transformation of the existing school library, housed in the old school hall, might be such an environment.

This vision expected students to progress towards independence and self-directed learning. Their skills should include an ability to access information from a variety of sources, including the new information technologies.

The School took the uncommon route of extensive consultation with students and teachers in which all the users of the library expressed their views on the transformation to a resource centre. They compiled their views and long "wish lists" for the Resource Centre Development Committee.

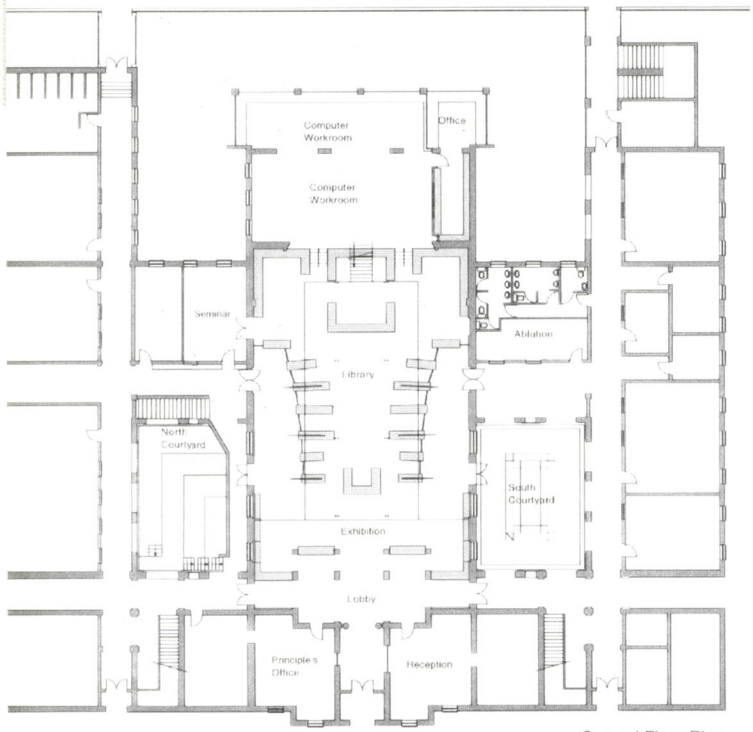
A "briefing consultant" who served on the committee facilitated a process of documenting the school's vision and architectural brief. The brief described the vision and listed the anticipated learning activities.

The architects were also asked to extend the reception area and to integrate the resource centre visually and functionally with the school. The reception area was to become a "window on the school" in which visitors and students would have a glimpse of the school at work. This notion of showcasing the resource centre was to promote an atmosphere of learning. As far as possible students walking through the school should have a constant visual reminder of a working and busy resource centre. Teachers and students using the centre should become role models and invite fellow teachers and students to increase their use of the Centre.

At the official opening of the Centre (now called the Information & Technology Centre) Kevin MacGarry of Architects Collaborative expressed the designer's interpretation of the school's vision with a medical metaphor.

This an extract from his speech: "Glenwood's heart is located where the school is broadest and strongest flanked by powerful multi-storey masonry structures and clearly defined circulation systems, with direct links to the Head and other parts. We find it encased in a strong structural double-volume cage of the former school hall with oxygen-providing courtyards reached on both sides through huge pivot windows and double doors.

"Each courtyard now has its own personality: generous, level, relaxed and green to the south; cascading, cubic and hard to the north."



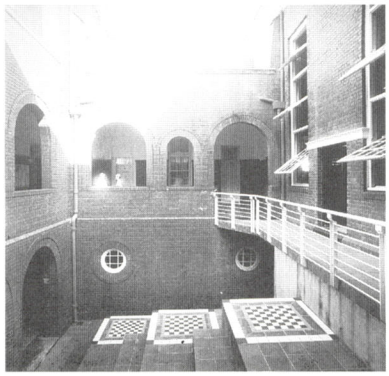
Ground Floor Plan

Photographs: Angela Buckland

The new centre is without doubt an attractive and well designed building - after all it survived the collective and critical scrutiny of over 100 delegates from the Conference on Learning Spaces. International and local delegates visited the centre just before its official opening to examine how architectural design has responded to some of the contemporary challenges in education.

From the School's point of view these blessings from the design and planning intelligentsia were welcome but not sufficient to still their anxiety as to whether the investment and design was an appropriate response to the School's vision.

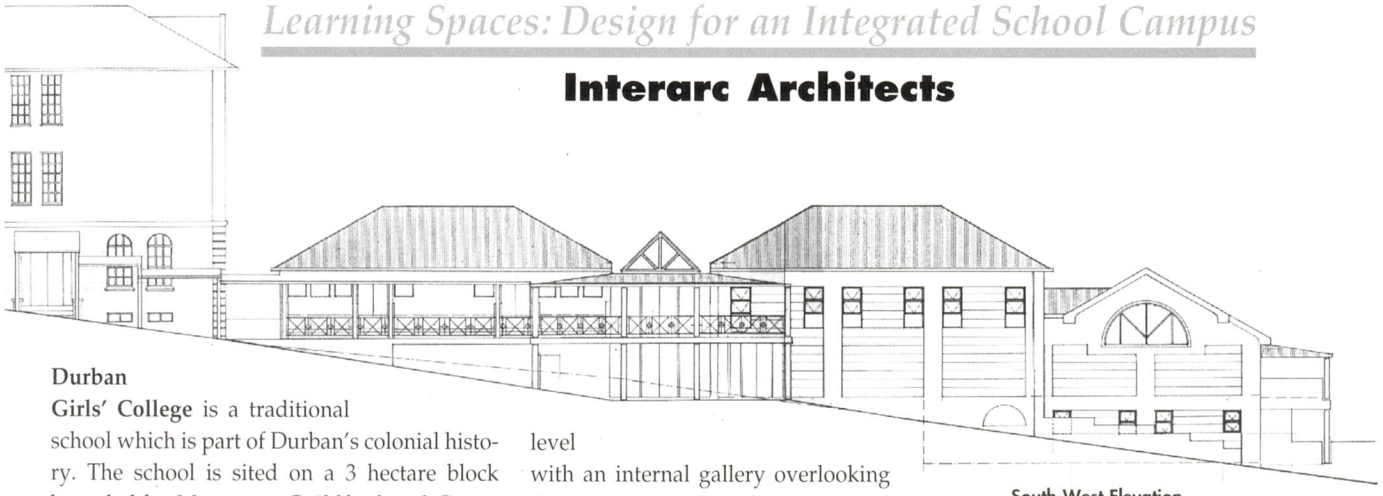
Their anxiety was short-lived – before the librarian could announce the official opening the word got out and long queues snaked through the library until all 1200 boys received their new user cards.



Six months after the opening the novelty has not worn off – the Centre is now open on Saturday mornings and until 5pm on weekdays to cope with the student demand. This is the users' ultimate stamp of approval.

Learning Spaces: Design for an Integrated School Campus

Interarc Architects



South-West Elevation

Durban Girls' College is a traditional school which is part of Durban's colonial history. The school is sited on a 3 hectare block bounded by Musgrave, Guildford and Currie Roads. The site was donated by a pioneering "city father" – Sir Benjamin Greenacre.

The master plan located the site of the primary school on a pedestrian axis between the Musgrave Road entrance and College House boarding establishment. The Junior Primary School now has it entrance in Guildford Road and a vehicle lay-by at the entrance helps to reduce the limitations of the very narrow Guildford Road.

Interarc describe their project:

"Due to the sloping nature of the site the major functions occur on three levels. To the east, Class 1 and Class 2 occupy the lowest level with classrooms opening onto verandas and a dedicated playground area.

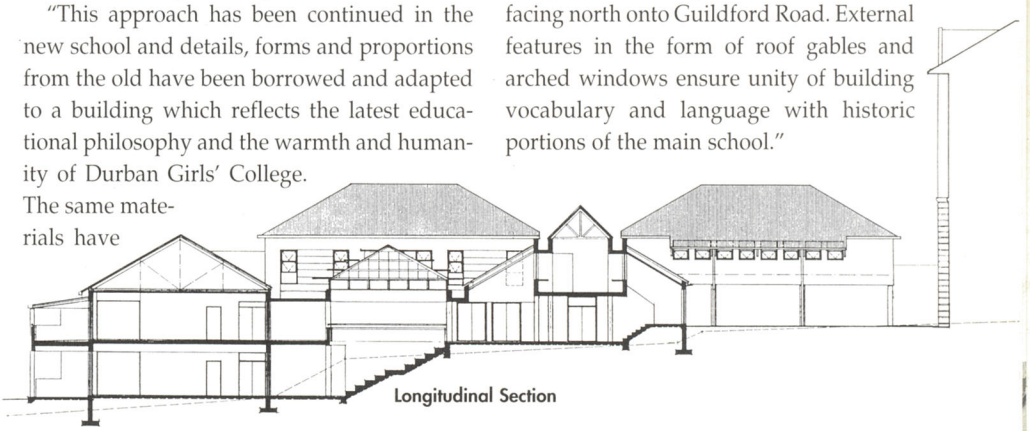
"The main entrance level accommodates Standard 1 together with shared facilities such as the Junior Art School, Computer and Resource Centre and the Activity Hall. The main entrance foyer at this level is a major activity area. It is linked to the main school by means of a grassed courtyard and to the hockey field and pedestrian spine. It also incorporates an internal tiered atrium where many activities take place.

"Standard 2 accommodation is at an upper level with an internal gallery overlooking the activity hall and an external access way with an elevated viewing platform to the hockey field. This external access connects to the Standard 3 classrooms in the main school thereby giving the Standard 2 pupils a sense of attachment to the senior school. The sense of hierarchy in the physical allocation of accommodation is an important element in the bid to integrate the Junior School into the spirit and activities of the College.

"Materials for construction and finishes were chosen to ensure low maintenance costs, to provide a bright and stimulating environment and to create connection and continuity with the existing buildings.

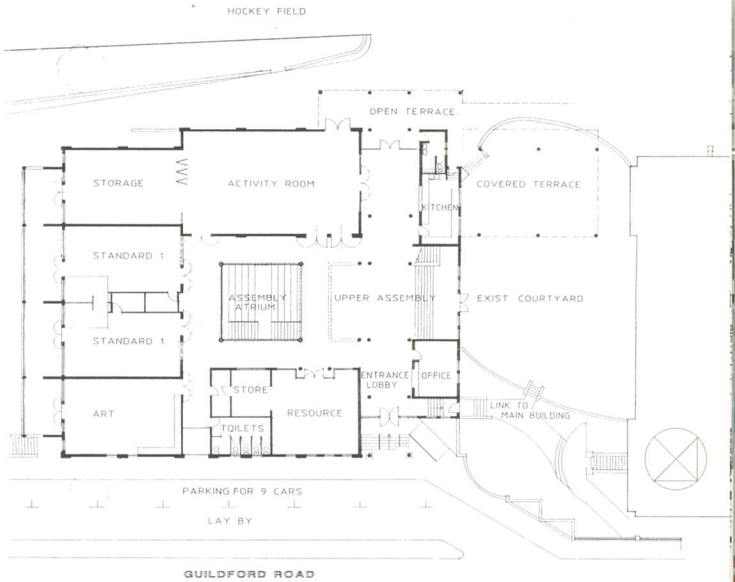
"This approach has been continued in the new school and details, forms and proportions from the old have been borrowed and adapted to a building which reflects the latest educational philosophy and the warmth and humanity of Durban Girls' College. The same materials have been used internally, which together with bright colours, extensive fixtures, equipment and lighting, create a warm and positive atmosphere as an introduction to formal education.

"The view of the School down Guildford Road chronicles the history of its development, the robust Victorian detailing of the tall institutional buildings creating a dialogue with the neighbouring, more modest terrace of houses across the road. The Junior Primary school is of a more domestic scale as befits its function, corrugated aluminium roofing in "school green" being used as canopies to shield the windows facing north onto Guildford Road. External features in the form of roof gables and arched windows ensure unity of building vocabulary and language with historic portions of the main school."



Longitudinal Section

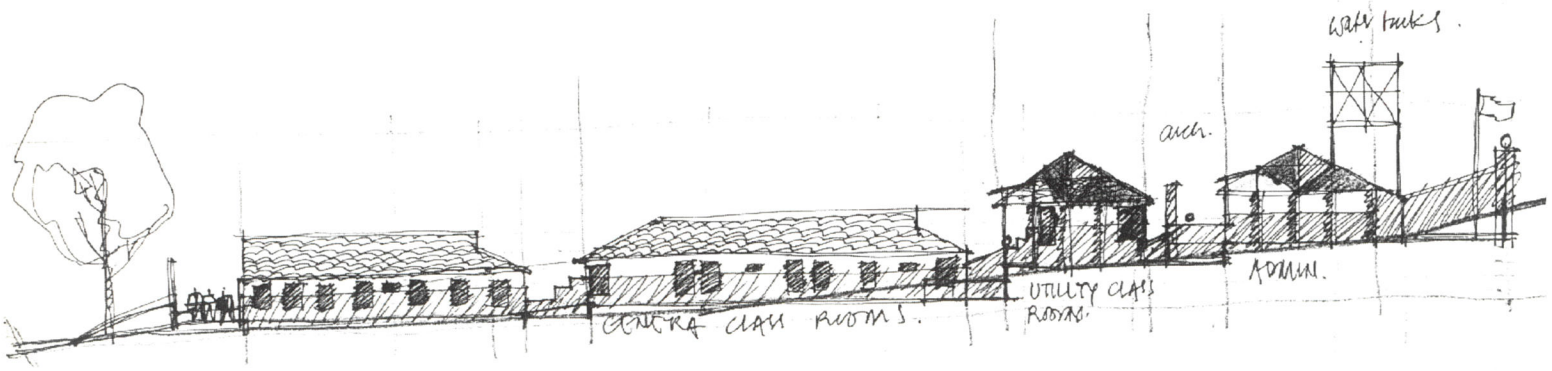
Tony Smith

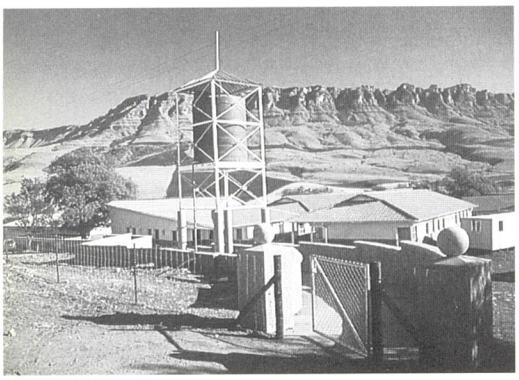


Ground Floor Elevation

Learning Spaces: From Farm School to Community School

Hughes, Bryan, Birss Architects





The provision of educational facilities in the commercial farming districts of South Africa has traditionally been the responsibility of the individual landowner. This has resulted in the ad hoc development of small, unco-ordinated, poorly built and ill-equipped 1 to 3-classroom schools. The State provides the teachers, books and some furniture. Strict enrolment rules, isolation and the lack of public transport means that these small schools can provide only primary education to the children from one or two farms. The quality of education is in many cases substandard because the poor teaching facilities and rural living conditions make it difficult to recruit good teachers and the very existence of the school depends on the benevolence of the farmer.

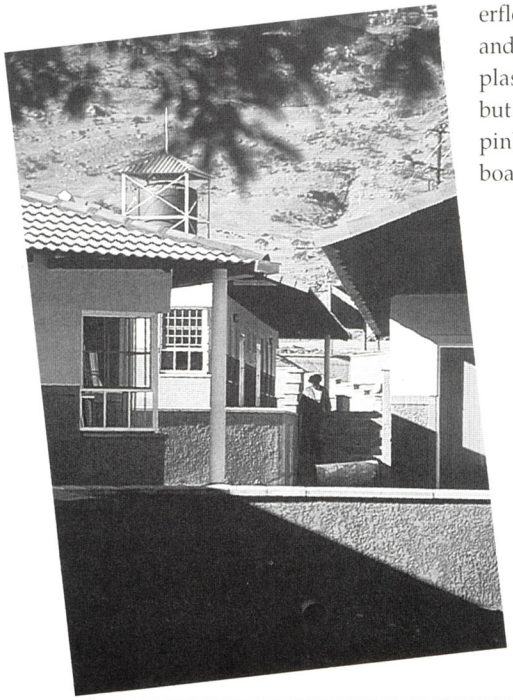
The Midlands Education Trust, however, represents an attempt by the communities in three of the commercial farming districts of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands to address the problem of providing quality education in the region. It is a broad community-based Trust built upon the long-standing mutually beneficial relationships that exist between the various elements present in any rural society.

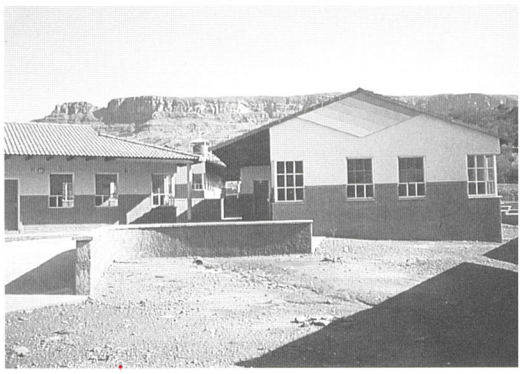
The local farmers have donated the land to the Trust and contributed financial and practical assistance. **Thendela School** is one of three schools recently built by the Trust in the Midlands.

Set in the magnificent Kamberg Valley of the Drakensburg, the architects were faced with the daunting task of designing the school to fit into these majestic surroundings.

The site falls from the main road down to the Little Mooi River in the north. Inspired by the mountains surrounding the site, the design incorporates a vertical definition – a tall water-tower stands at the main road defining the entrance to the school. From this a variety of spaces cascade down the slope to an intimate tree-dominated space at the end of the primary and secondary school.

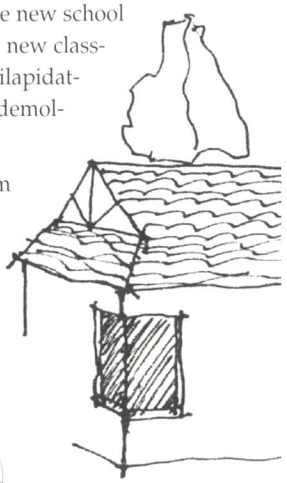
The first two schools were built with a face concrete block plinth and a smooth plastered and painted wall above. After experiencing problems with the face concrete block the Thendela project used a "Tyrolean" plaster plinth and a bagged and painted wall above the plinth. This has created interesting textured effects which are further accentuated by the use of vibrant colours. Internally, only the basics were provided – these included a powerfloated slab, plaster and painted walls and plasterboard ceiling; but necessities such as pinboards, blackboards and storage were not compromised.

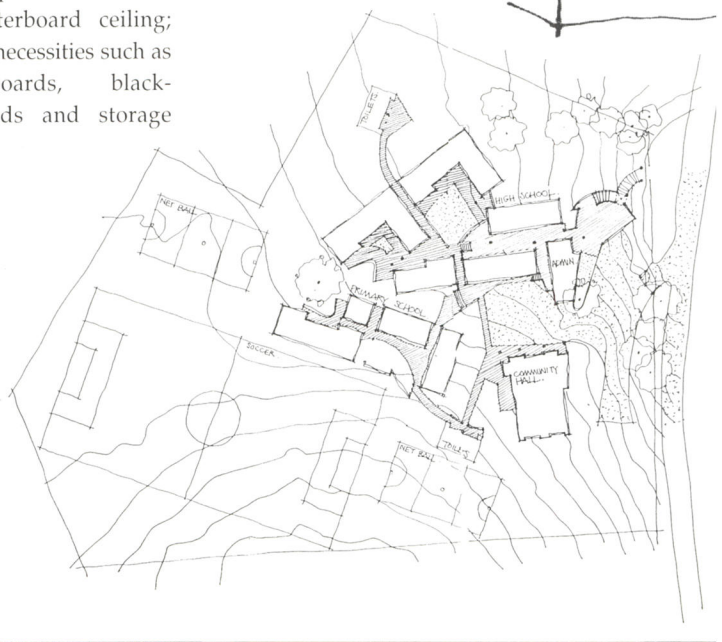




Architect Llew Bryan writes that: "What may not be completely obvious is that the existing school, though dilapidated, was kept operating whilst the new school went into operation and new classrooms were built. The dilapidated buildings were then demolished."

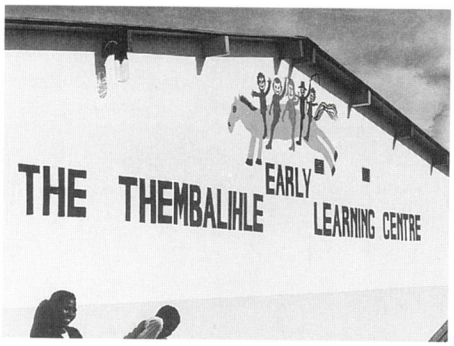
(Article constructed from reports written by architect Llew Bryan and M Johnson, Chairman of the Midlands Educational Trust.)





Learning Spaces: Public Responsibility and Community Schools

Harber Masson & Associates



Mbazwane is little more than a series of service functions scattered around an intersection of dirt roads on the sandflats north of St Lucia. A State forest and sawmill are part of the composition.

The community, recognising the need to broaden education to stimulate their young children, approached African Child Care Projects with the concept of the **Thembalithle Early Learning Centre**. The Institute for Natural Resources at the University of Natal agreed to implement this development project.

After negotiating a land allocation, an immediate start was made by setting up a block-making workshop to take advantage of the abundant sand. This free service by the Portland Cement Institute included an introduction to various moulds, testing of local sand and demonstrating the process, including the importance of curing. Soon 500 blocks were being cast a day.

Design proceeded concurrently. The elected committee placed great emphasis on facilities for teachers so as to attract good staff. These included a flatlet for visitors who would help upgrade teaching methods.

Interestingly, construction is equally generated by what is not available. Crushed stone would have to be transported across the sandflats from the Ubombo mountains and supplied at six times the usual urban cost. To save expensive concrete, foundations were designed as a series of pads with U-block groundbeams spanning between them and reinforced with a Y-12 bar for spans less than 3m. For longer spans, or where a doorway weakened a panel, a Y-16 bar was used.

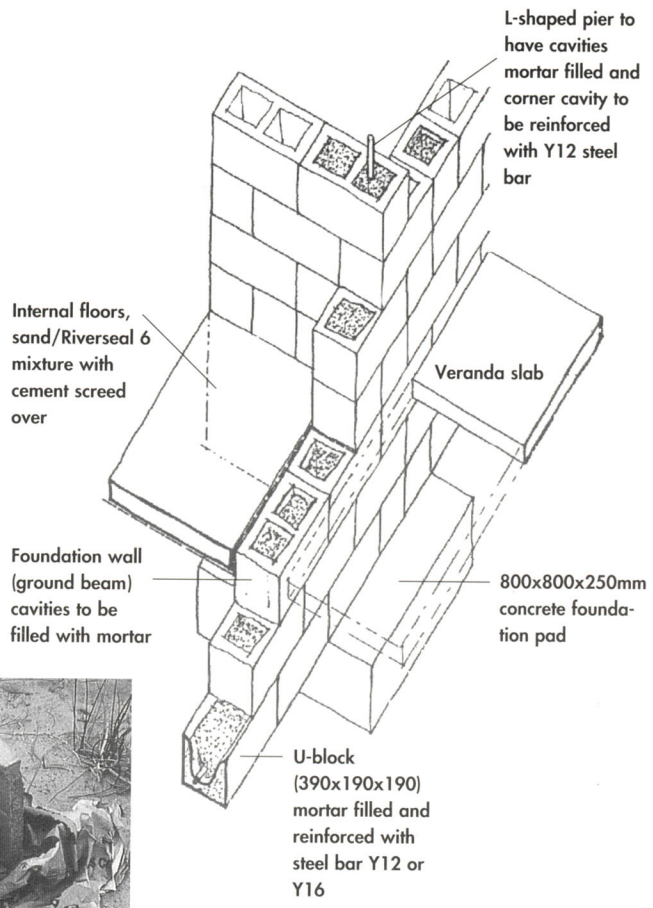
Another innovation to save concrete was the use of a chemical polymer to create firm, waterproof, sand floors which were finally screeded. Special holding-down precautions had to be taken because the site is on the edge of the cyclone belt of 27°. One such precaution involved wrapping the end purlins with galvanised hoop iron straps.

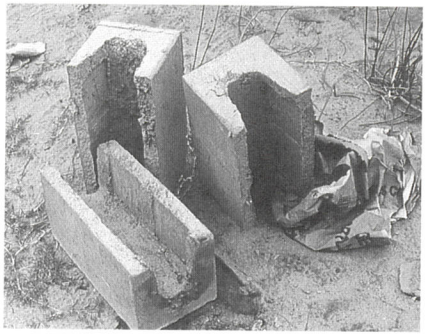
The flow of knowledge was by no means unidirectional. No U-block mould was needed as a result of grassroots wisdom. Uncured blocks were deftly cut with a trowel and the excess material was tamped into the bottom of the cavity to sculpt a perfect U-block.

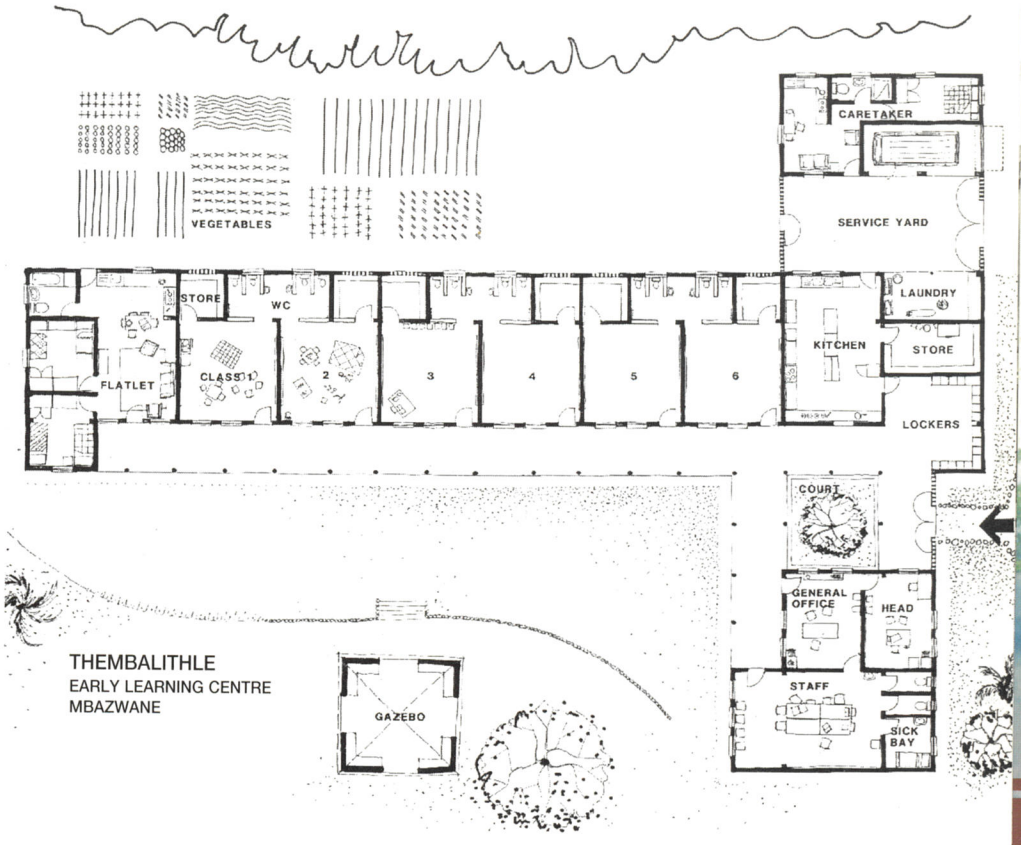
Like all community projects it took much longer than anticipated. Queries from long distances turned architectural staff into amateur quantity surveyors and the committee made constant changes.

The extended process of community participation must be more actively pursued because public buildings clearly foster public responsibility.

Rodney Harber







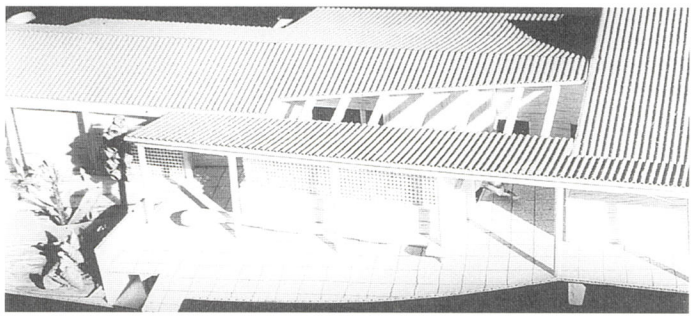
ACCESS — Liebenberg Masojada Architectural Projects

One of the features of educational provision in post-apartheid South Africa is a comprehensive plan for articulation between formal and non-formal education. The chain of supply in education now includes libraries, museums, adult learning centres and schools. In addition, each of these links in the chain is expected to provide support and collaboration with the other links.

Libraries and other educational services are more than links – they also provide a learning environment in which the other elements can function in an optimal manner. In **Besters Camp Library** project, we also see the principle of multiple function and multiple users advocated by authorities and trusts which finance such projects.

Janina Masojada, the project architect, gives an account of how the design has responded to the brief to create a learning centre: "The library environment is intended to encourage a range of levels of use, from traditional library borrowing services, to study zones, audio-visual facilities, casual reading 'lounges', informal gatherings, and community meetings.

"The requirement of an internalised building due to security concerns resulted in the establishment of a planted courtyard as an intermediate zone of entrance and circulation between the different activity rooms.



"The library and study hall have been planned to accommodate future mezzanine levels into their double volumes as community use increases.

"The north elevation of the building with a covered veranda and seating space faces the playing field. This is part of the entrance route, and is to encourage an informal relationship between the library functions, and the general playing, watching, waiting and meeting activities of the larger site."

Notti Ngcobo, General Manager of the Inanda Community Development Trust, feels that the establishment of the library is a vital service to people and especially school children in Besters Camp area.

"The area, being an informal settlement with almost no recreational facilities, relies on the library to fulfil a major role in this respect. The library also acts as a source of information and educational assistance.

"Having opened its doors to the public in March 1996, library membership has reached 700 and with most of these being school children."

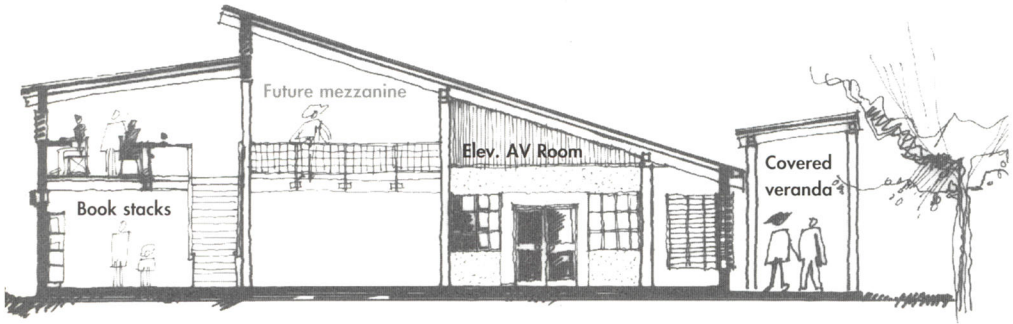
Durban's Chief Librarian, Heather Moran, who has helped to extend municipal library services in the Greater Durban area beyond its historical concentration in white urban areas, explains what Besters Camp Library will offer.

"A community-needs analysis revealed that the library was expected to support formal education, offer a wide variety of programs and a comprehensive educational service to children.

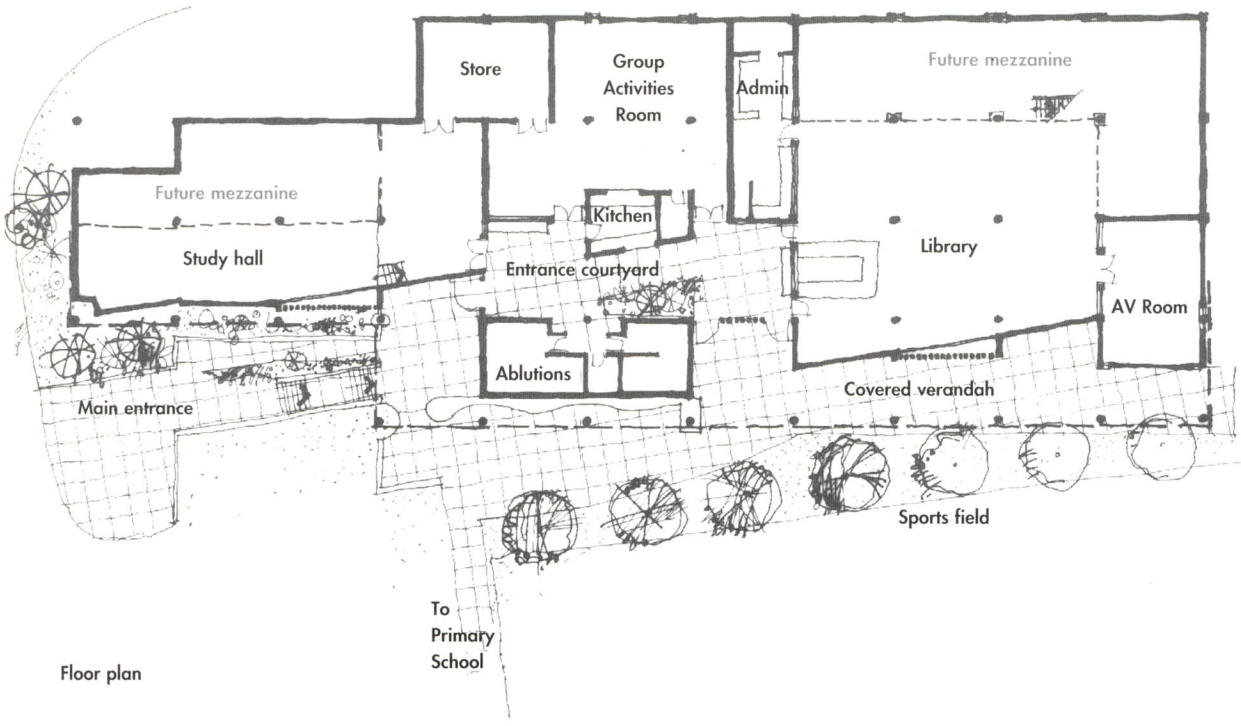
"Group study as well as individual study was anticipated. A seminar room equipped with video, overhead projector and a computer was included in the design, as well as a study hall and general activities room.

"Service will be very heavily geared towards the delivery of programs, lectures, seminars, workshops, video shows and educational support at all levels."

These commentators – designer, manager, and library advocate – have given an account of a development which in concept, design, and application is more than a library – it is a learning centre.



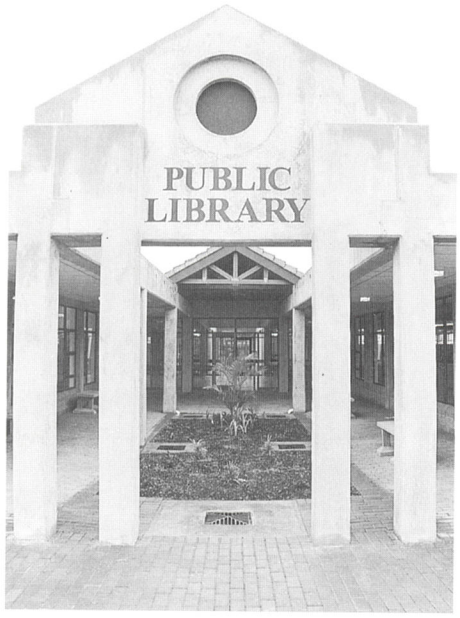
Section through courtyard



Floor plan

Learning Spaces: A New Generation Public Library

Vermeulen, Van der Westhuizen & Farrell Architects



The brief from the client was to design and develop a **Public Library for the Umlazi Community**. As this was the first such appointment – namely a fully fledged library in the township areas – the brief concerning accommodation and functioning was drawn up by means of site visits and liaison. After visits to various libraries built in other township areas in South Africa it became apparent that these libraries function not only as a place of book lending and reading, but also as a study centre for students outside their normal school hours.

After discussions with various members of the community and community educationalists we were able to formalise an appropriate brief, namely a building which would fulfil the immediate needs of the community and also one which will grow with the people as the need arises and as the community becomes more aware of the functioning of libraries.

It was therefore necessary to design a building with as much flexibility as possible providing the community with a multiple purpose structure which would initially be used mainly as a study centre where pupils could work after hours with the necessary educational resources.

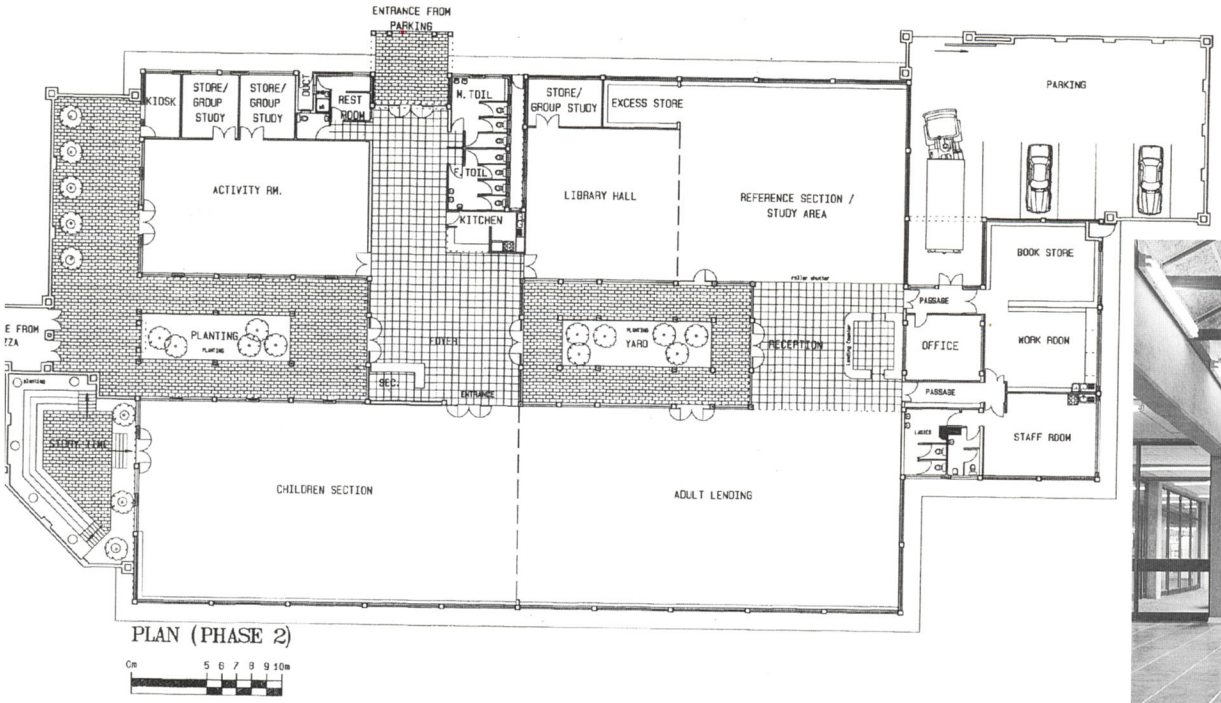
Phase 1 of the development provides two large rooms which can, as the need arises, be divided into either an all-hours study area or a lending section. A roller shutter closes off the one section from the other, providing the necessary security. All storerooms doubled up as group study areas with the only dedicated areas being the staff facilities in the north-west block.

As the users of this facility would dictate the internal functioning and the eventual partitioning of activities such as adult lending, children's section, library hall and reference section (Phase 2), control and supervision had to be flexible yet formal in nature.

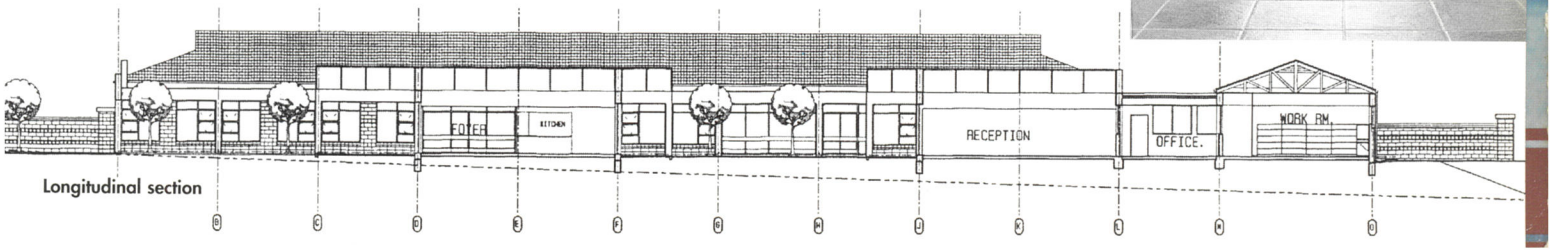
The building is designed around two open-air courtyards where students can sit and read or study. Glazing throughout the internal sections of the library provides the necessary light and ventilation and also visual control over the users.

Security being a major issue, the external facades were kept elementary, comprising concrete column and beam structures with concrete block panels incorporating smaller windows providing the necessary light and ventilation. Internally, full glazing was used with off-shutter concrete columns and beams with exposed saligna trusses to gain extra volume.

André Farrell



PLAN (PHASE 2)



Longitudinal section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